Seeing the need: urban outreach as sensory walking

in Bates, C. and Rhys-Taylor, A., (eds.) 2016. *Walking Through Social Research.* Routledge. (Forthcoming)

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What does looking for something look like? Perhaps looking *at* something, holding something as the object of an unwavering attention, requires an immobility; and perhaps we too readily take this as a model for what it is to see more generally. Certainly, this is a conceptualisation of what it is to attend to something that has held good for much of social scientific inquiry over the past one hundred years or so. An object, the ontology of which is assumed fixed, *a priori*, is isolated and abstracted from context, held in (ideally) unwavering focus whilst various inquiries are made. This is what we commonly construe as intelligence. Whether we are talking here about inquiries in to social organisation or social phenomena or persons, for some time the social scientific preference has been for this static, rather than mobile or relational, mode of inquiry (Buscher *et al*, 2010). In practice, of course, the notion that observer and observed are best aligned in immobility if things are to be properly examined is a straw target and easily recognised as such. *All* perception involves movement and interaction; in the absence of movement (of any kind) perception itself is stalled (see Noë, 2006). In addition, movement relates to a particular formation of reality and knowledge. As Henri Bergson has it, '[i]ntelligence starts ordinarily from the immobile and reconstructs movement as best it can with immobilities in juxtaposition. Intuition starts from movement, posits it, or rather perceives it as reality itself, and sees in immobility only an abstract moment, a snapshot taken by our mind, of a mobility' (2007: 22). And, of course, the chapters gathered in this collection variously examine and illustrate the relationship between motion, the senses and knowing. Retaining the inextricable relation of mobility and perception, we draw out a distinction between how this is differently configured in the act of looking *at* something as opposed looking *for* something. Regardless of the degree of movement involved in the actual business of seeing, to look *at* something is always to have it located already, as co-present, to hand, or available for viewing through some mediated means. Looking *for* something, on the other hand, is more obviously, always and unavoidably, to move; to be engaged in a search for an object or person is to be directed by the idea of something sought but not as yet to hand.

In the context of this collection, and of our research more generally, we are interested in the confluence of movement and perception in relation to knowledge of place and the city. We do not, however, intend to look at this relation held still, isolated and analysed through formal sociological method but instead to 'go out' (Molotch, 1994) and look *for* it in action in the work of our key informants. At this point it will help to introduce these individuals, if briefly: we are concerned with a team of council workers based in Cardiff whose job it is to make repeated tours through the centre of the city, day and night, looking to establish contact with, and minister to, 'vulnerable' adults who may otherwise struggle, on their own, to access mainstream health and social services; rough sleepers make up a significant proportion of this population, but take their place alongside assorted others, all of whom outreach workers aim to enrol and assist as clients. In due course we will consider the working practice of this outreach team in some detail; it provides our case study. But first we want to consider movement, and particularly walking, as a method employed to various ends not least by social researchers – but also, and crucially, by almost everybody else.

Moving and method

Like other researchers with an interest in knowledge, perception and place (including all of those collected in this volume), we take walking to be an essential method through which to access and analyse these intertwined phenomena. Increasing numbers of social scientists have appropriated walking as a professional method in recent years to better access or 'reveal' whatever it is that a

given informant or setting is presumed to hold for their inquiries. Such work has taken on a variety of forms of 'go-along' (Kusenbach, 2003) and other such guided walks, variously contrived for the purposes of professional inquiry in and through which the act of walking together is said to 'produce an affinity between personal narratives and the movement through place' (Moles, 2008). And such work has undoubtedly added much to the ways in which such researchers get at and gain understanding of the everyday experiences of their informants. Yet, two points remain. The first is that despite the seemingly overwhelming theoretical complexity of everyday life for the analyst, members experience only practical difficulties in methodically organising movement, perception, and knowledge. The second is that, quite outside of any professional research design, walking is an already established practice, accomplished by members in step with other tasks such as talking or guiding or asking for directions, and a whole range of stuff getting done involving knowledge and perception (e.g. Ryave and Schenkein, 1974; Psathas, 1992; Mondada, 2009; Laurier et al., 2016). Indeed, people routinely engage in their own pedestrian projects, both ordinarily and on occasion as part of some professional remit. The point being, whatever it is that walking might be argued to bring to social scientific inquiry, whatever it might 'open up', people are in any case already doing it: strolling around the city centre to see what is going on, perhaps for fun, perhaps as participants in a guided tour, perhaps as a dog walker or street cleaner; walking with a colleague outside of the workplace to talk privately and freely about a sensitive matter; showing a visitor around your home town, taking in the sights. Despite the availability of other means of achieving something like the same purpose – one could use maps, or talk on the phone, or browse a set of postcards, or recruit some more enhanced technological mediation – there would appear to be something in the immediacy and intimacy of walking that finds it consistently enrolled by people in their lives and work.[1]

Importantly then, and in keeping with the above, the walking that we want to consider and reflect on in this chapter is not recommended or applied as *our own* method.[2] Our informants – Cardiff's city centre outreach workers – have already settled on walking as *their* method. We will explain and show why so below, but suffice to say here that there are other options available to them – they could ride bikes, or spend far more time than they do using their works minivan – but their routine *modus operandi* is to go out and walk the streets of the city centre, on the look-out *for* something. In the remainder of this chapter, we aim to outline something of this practice, the use of walking as a means by which to reach out to the rough sleeping homeless: vulnerable adults available to view – in public distress or difficulty – but not always to hand and needing first of all to be found. We proceed by thinking about mobility and perception in relation to differently formatted search practices.

Patrol and perception

Persons with a professional remit for the tracing and location of objects or persons, lost or unknown, may at any one time, be engaged in one or another of a number of search formats. Police officers, for example, may be dispatched to search for a suspect at his or her place of work, or last known address. They may be provided with a description or picture – a mugshot or artist's impression – of a suspect whose location is unknown, so that they may, rather more loosely, keep an eye out for them. Setting out from the police station and into the city to look for one person, whereabouts unknown, would be a chancy undertaking and very likely a waste of time; but being alive to the possibility of their discovery whilst moving through the city on other business is efficient. (On other occasions, police officers will simply be out patrolling, not looking out for anyone in particular, just keeping an eye on things generally and letting members of the public see them doing so.) Outreach workers are not police officers, but we make mention of the police here to permit reference to Egon Bittner's (1967) classic article on policing and peacekeeping on skid row. The article is directed to a great many of the practical methods US police officers employ in their work with the homeless outside of situations requiring actual law enforcement – where action might be taken in consequence of a crime (already) committed. These practical and peacekeeping skills are various but a common initial difficulty faced by the police in a great many cases has to do with the fact that the very people they aim to encounter

[1] Moreover, the result would not be the same. Knowledge of place produced from maps or mediations is not only of a different order to that gained from walking, but produces a different place (Hall and Smith, 2012).

[2] Our methodological recommendation, if we were to make one, would be to take heed of 'Sacks' Gloss' (see Garfinkel, 2002) and try to find some 'work gang' who are already engaged in handling whatever the phenomena happens to be that the project is interested in.

and somehow manage – for whatever purpose – are *homeless*. The word glosses over an array of miseries and sufferings but is also a category of membership that indicates the lack of a series of stable and tied locations such as might belong to other categories of person such as 'employee' or 'home owner'. Members of skid row are unreliably located and lead lives that lack a readily available structure and predictability. On occasion, this presents police officers with an immediate problem:

> That a man has no 'address' in the future that could be in some way inferred from where he is and what he does makes him a person of *radically reduced visibility*. If he disappears from sight and one wishes to locate him, it is virtually impossible to systematize the search. All one can know with relative certainty is that he will be somewhere on some skid-row and the only thing one can do is to trace the factual contiguities of his whereabouts.
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> (Bittner, 1967: 706)

The US vernacular aside, this is a challenge that any outreach worker dealing with the rough sleeping homeless in a UK city centre would unhesitatingly recognise. Working with the homeless starts out, every day and repeatedly, as a job of work that looks like *searching*. Having held off thus far from describing the practice of outreach in any detail, we will now make good and provide a detailed account of just what this business of tracing the factual contiguities of another's whereabouts looks like in the middle of Cardiff:

Half past six on a sunny afternoon, now turning to evening, in the centre of Cardiff. Jeff, an outreach worker, is stood in the foyer of Marland House waiting for his colleague Dennis and in the meantime talking to a security guard about the (derelict) Central Hotel, around the corner, which has been secured behind plywood hoarding over the last couple of days in preparation for demolition. Jeff wonders if anyone might still be 'in' there. This will be worth making sure of, before the bulldozers get to work.

Dennis arrives, carrying a box of one-cup sachets of powdered hot chocolate. Together, Dennis and Jeff leave the building turning left towards the train station and then left again on to Great Western Lane where Dennis' car is parked. Dennis opens the boot, puts the box inside and shuts it again. Leaning against the passenger side door, smoking a cigarette, Jeff brief Dennis on the day's news, which includes the (provisional) good news that Barry O. has been moved into a flat on Salisbury Road and the sad news that Ryan G. is dead; an unsuspicious death, his health just gave out says Jeff. Other clients will want to know, if they don't already.

Leaving the car where it is and returning to Central Square, Jeff and Dennis spend ten minutes with a group of street drinkers sat on benches opposite the train station, shouting and hooting at passers-by (at least one of the drinkers was a good friend of Ryan G. and none of them seem to have heard the news; but Jeff and Dennis make no mention, given how drunk everyone is – saving this task this for a quieter time, perhaps later tonight, or tomorrow morning). Next, they turn their backs on the train station and walk over to the bus terminus where they spend ten minutes slowly walking up and down each of the stands, stopping at one point to speak to a man sat on his own on a bench – he doesn't answer back (this is Bernard W; he doesn't often answer back, or say anything at all). Jeff spots Suzie B. at a payphone by the public toilets, trying to make a call but dropping money on the floor. She is heavily made up, and not wearing much. She staggers over to Dennis and asks to borrow his phone. Dennis gives her 30p instead, to try again at the phone box.

Jeff and Dennis walk off together towards St. Mary Street, but Suzie follows. She wants to talk and needs to sit down. She has some things she wants to tell Jeff, with whom she has always got on well. Back on Great Western Lane the three of them share a low wall, as seating, and Sarah rehearses the events of the last few days, an account which includes details of an assault, arrest, collapse and her being 'back on the gear'. This last item is not news at all, in the sense that it was already apparent. Suzie asks for some condoms, and Jeff gives her a handful. Suddenly purposeful, she heads off towards Wood Street, weaving along the pavement.

The two outreach workers stand up and start walking, turning right and then left to cross St. Mary Street onto Mill Lane, then left onto The Hayes and along Working Street, and then right onto Queen Street. At various points they come across people they know, and entangle themselves in conversation for a minute or two: Brian N., who used to be a client but has been housed and off the drink for over a year; Sarah A. who wants £1 to buy a tray of chips (with whom Dennis has a stern word about seeing the doctor, as agreed); and then Ian D., sat on a bench opposite the Oxford Arcade. Ian detains Jeff and Dennis a little longer than either of them would have wished, but won't take the cue that they are ready to move along. (Talking with Ian requires a degree of patience as there is an odd and slightly obsessive, sometimes paranoid, pattern to his conversation.)

All the way along The Hayes and Working Street and now Queen Street the pace has been slow. Jeff zig-zags from one side of the (pedestrianised) street to the other, as if window shopping. Dennis pauses here and there, then catches up. The two of them confer at various points. There is a seemingly offhand character to their movement, a moseying quality; they appear unfocused – not really going anywhere, not in any sort of a hurry, and (again, seemingly) repeatedly distracted by this or that. Jeff makes a call on his mobile to check on the availability of bed-spaces at a local hostel.

Passing a short blind alley running alongside JD Sports, Dennis pauses again. A pile of something – blankets? – has caught his eye. He turns off Queen Street and down the alley to take a closer look, turning the pile over with the toe of his boot. Nothing of any further interest, it seems; but as Dennis is poking about two boys emerge from the dog-leg end of the alley, looking guilty and protesting they were doing no more than collecting discarded JD Sports carrier bags. Dennis doesn't ask any further questions – he knows at least one of the boys – Roy G. – (and his mother). Roy has been sleeping rough in the Wood Street car park the last few nights, in the stairwell behind the fire door, by the ramp at the back. Jeff recognises the other boy from somewhere, but can't think of his name. The two boys are gone, quickly. Jeff and Dennis turn back onto Queen Street, walking steadily up towards the Capitol Centre where they turn left onto Park Lane. Here the pace slows even more, as the two of them rummage around, peering into the backyards and rear parking spaces of the buildings either side. A pile of rubbish, a discarded shoe, sheets of cardboard, bottles. They double back and turn left and then right, then double back again to turn left and right again – Windsor Place and Windsor Lane; and then back onto Queen Street with the Capitol Centre now behind them.

A left turn onto Charles Street where, up ahead, a crowd is assembled awaiting the arrival of the evening 'soup run' (hot drinks and sandwiches distributed by volunteers from local church congregations). No sign, as yet, of the teenage crowd that has taken to hanging out here in the evenings, causing difficulties on occasion. Keith L. is here, talking, talking, talking. Also deaf Colin. Someone new, with two dogs on ropes, and a rucksack on his back – Dennis goes across to have a word. Jeff works the crowd a little, asking questions, gathering up the news and gossip. Quite a few people are asking about Ryan. There are some donated clothes available this evening, and a scrum quickly develops as people crowd around, holding up tracksuit trousers and sweatshirts for closer inspection then setting them aside or stuffing them into carrier bags. There must be more than thirty people jostling around a single trestle table . 'Spot the homeless person,' says Jeff, shaking his head.

By half past eight the two outreach workers are retracing their steps, back along The Hayes and then Caroline Street, crossing St. Mary Street and then Great Western Lane. This short distance, easily covered in under ten minutes at a brisk pace, takes them half an hour. Back at the car Jeff recalls the other boy's name, from by JD Sports: he is Darren W., and is (supposed to be) resident at a local authority children's home. Jeff places a call, and is told that Darren has not been 'home' for three days now and has been reported missing. Jeff and Dennis' sighting will now be passed along to the police.

Back on Great Western Lane Dennis opens the boot of his car and checks the contents: hot chocolate sachets, also crisps and a large box of condoms. He opens the driver's-side door and gets in; Jeff walks around the car and gets in the passenger seat. They drive off together, under the railway bridge and onto Callaghan Square and Herbert Street, looking out for Suzie who will have started work now – others too.

What we have here is an instance not of police patrol but outreach patrol in the city centre of Cardiff. Jeff and Dennis are street-based care workers employed by the local authority to attend to the rough sleeping homeless (and yes, as such their duties do include a degree of peacekeeping and what could be called soft policing). Their principal task, and the way in which they themselves would describe the work they do, is to be available – there, out on the streets – regularly and routinely enough as to make reliable and repeated contact with vulnerable adults who lives have somehow come unstuck in the middle of the city; persons who are considered 'hard-to-reach' by institutions that would offer them the various services that would cater to their multiple, intersecting and complex needs. However, in the context of our discussion here, these individuals are to be considered hard-to-reach in a more literal sense – geographically; they are hard-to reach because precariously located, because in constant mobility, because sometimes squirrelled away out of sight and hoping to escape attention and hence not always so easy to find.

The work of outreach as assistance is beyond our remit in this chapter. Outreach workers seek out clients in order to then intervene in their lives in some way, offering remedial measures, support and advocacy. This is hard work; some clients are hard to win over – unsurprisingly surely, to anyone who has given more than a moment's thought as to why some people are homeless and seem to be stuck that way ('hard to reach' here stands for something other than not to hand). But we provide no account, here, of this inter-personal and therapeutic work. Outreach workers are there to help, certainly; but we are not setting out to ask 'How do they do that?' Instead our question is: 'If

outreach workers are there to help, how do they get *there*?' Getting there is a job of work in itself, and has to get done (repeatedly) before an outreach worker can even begin to try to help anyone.[3]

Ways of walking

What can we say about whatever it is that outreach workers are up to in the passage above? Whatever else they are doing they are surely walking. Stepping out of their office at Marland House and onto the street, about to begin an evening's outreach patrol, outreach workers may pause to light a cigarette or button a coat (and in doing so may also have a quick look around, taking in their immediate surrounds and the things and people in it that matter or might do so), but then they are off, moving through the city. It would make no sense to do anything else. 'Doing outreach' means taking a look around, on foot; it comes before and is complementary to any of the work that might get done with a client once found, or back at the office following that encounter – data entry, waiting lists, phone calls made to local hostels, GPs clinics, treatment programmes and court officers.

So outreach workers walk, and must do so in order to see what is going on. Most of the places in which they spend most of their time are close enough to hand to make this practicable, and in another sense it is only ever walking that is going to get you where you really need to be, as an outreach worker; you couldn't drive a car to or through all the places that an outreach worker might want to go, nor could you poke around and circle in the ways that outreach practice seems to require. There are of course a number of ways of walking. Outreach workers out and about in the middle of Cardiff are not the only ones doing it; almost everybody walks in the course of any given day. But people walk in any number of different ways: they stroll, stride, prowl; they trip along, or trudge (see Tilley, 2008: 267). What we are concerned with here, however, are ways of walking associated with varieties of purpose. How a person walks depends to a considerable degree on what they are up to, perhaps where they are going but more importantly what they are doing. And in this outreach workers are somewhat distinctive in their movements, set apart from many of the other pedestrians with whom they share pavement space. They are most obviously distinct from the 'commuter', a category of pedestrian on his or her way from one location to another and aiming to get there directly in order to get on with whatever it is they can only accomplish once they arrive. These are people with places to be. Outreach workers have places to be too, and things to do; but the locations and activities that matter to outreach can only be arrived at by a close attention paid in the meantime to where an outreach worker is already and through which he or she is moving. Outreach workers on patrol are *searching*, are looking for something or someone: a client, or if nothing so definite then at least some sign or indication that one might be to hand. As such, their walking practices are apt to be more environmentally engaged than those of someone in a hurry to reach a point of arrival. Outreach workers dawdle; there is no rush nor can there be, because where they want to be is where they are already, out and about, looking around. They also seem, at times, uncertain, moving in ways that give them the appearance of someone not altogether sure of their location; they meander and branch off then double back; they complicate what might have seemed a simple enough task; they appear easily distracted. All of which gives outreach patrols a distinctive look and choreography, available to view at different scales: traced out as a line of movement on a map an outreach patrol takes the form of a visual log of what looks like rummaging around (see Hall and Smith, 2014).

To rummage is to search, and to search is always to search for something. But there are different ways in which one might set out to search, depending on whether the something one is trying to find is something known to be lost in the first place, is something for which one is looking. Sometimes we search for things without knowing with absolute certainty what it is that we are after, even at the same time as we can be sure that we will recognise them for what they are if and when we come across them. This distinction – between an object or person sought and a more general casting about in pursuit of *the sort of thing of person one might be after* – is one we will now elaborate.

Searching, and streetcombing

We are concerned with searching, as an activity realised in movement and particularly, in our case, in the practice of walking. Of course, searches can be enhanced by technological means and mediated in

[3] The possibility that these two tasks – looking for someone and looking after them – might not be so wholly distinct, the one separate from and preceding the other, is explored by Hall (2016).

a number of ways – consider the mountain rescue team aboard a helicopter employing a thermal imaging camera; but walking is our concern. To search is to move, in order to see (what can be found); and this is significant for the understanding of the relationship of the task at hand (Schutz, 1962) to perception. All searches, in one way or another, are bound up with perception of an environment but, importantly, the way in which that environment is perceived, and thus accomplished, is shaped in and through the practice of searching; the phenomenal field 'changes its arrangement through the course of the search' (Laurier, 2005: 3). Which is also to say that searches do not simply take place within an area or territory but are a constitutive element of the setting itself. Someone engaged in a search is not 'perceiving the environment' in some general sense but is seeing in and through the practical purposes they are about – looking to find that which they are after. And we can note here that perception stands, or can do, for a fuller array of sensory engagements than that of sight alone; and we can note, further, that walking as a relatively unmediated mobility practice more fully allows for the deployment of such an array than do other ways of moving around (a mountain rescue crew aboard a helicopter cannot touch or too easily smell the environment they nonetheless see below them; outreach workers, on foot, can and do).

To search for something is to see an environment according to what one is looking for, what is absent; and sometimes very specifically so. Perhaps, in searching for an object known to be missing we hold an idea or image of that object in our head, in advance of the movements we might then undertake to locate it. This would be to act as the police officer (see above), issued with a suspect's description; we organise our perception of the environment according to that specified object we already know to be missing, perhaps looking to 'match' some aspect of what is available to view with the image we hold of what it is we are after and have mislaid. The practice is in no way the preserve of uniformed officials. Everyone knows what it is like to have lost and then to look for something – car keys, a pair of glasses. Where are they? We begin with likely last places, followed by immediate surrounds and then out further to trace pathways between more distant sites. (Given time and no results, the search may then turn to increasingly unlikely and exotic locations for the given object to have been placed –the bread-bin, the fridge. Sometimes, it turns out, the object has been in plain sight for the whole time, right under your nose but somehow invisible to the search.)

One of the difficulties with finding one's glasses or car keys is that these objects are small and portable enough to have been relocated – perhaps innocently, perhaps mischievously – by a third party. Even so, the objects themselves are inert, and one can hope they are still wherever it was you lost or left them. Other problems – nice for the analyst and much less nice for searcher – are introduced if the lost or sought object can itself move during the process of the search. Objects in the environment that move (themselves) are that much harder to find. They won't keep still, or can't be relied on to do so, are not reliably *anywhere*, and may even act in ways intended to frustrate being found – ducking out of sight, slipping round a corner, squirrelling themselves away. We are back with the street homeless and the work of outreach, also Bittner and persons of *radically reduced visibility*. Jeff and Dennis and their colleagues are often enough engaged in just this sort of challenging search, looking out for a known individual, a client of the team, out there somewhere in the city this evening, no one knows quite where – almost certainly not exactly where last seen – but who must be found. The urgency of the situation will vary. Perhaps they have a letter to deliver, a tribunal decision in relation to benefit entitlement. Perhaps there is news regarding a long-awaited room at a local hostel. Perhaps things are very much more urgent than that, an emergency even; a client has been reported seriously injured and collapsed outside the shopping centre, only on arrival at the scene he is gone – where? Searching for a client under any such circumstance, more or less mundane or serious, is business as usual for an outreach worker, a repeated task. Not a week goes by that they aren't called out to conduct a search of this sort. If the situation is genuinely urgent the search will have that character too, an impatient and hurried quality – but any such hurry held in tension with the imperative not to rush and risk missing things. More haste less speed. Searching is distinctive in this, as a mobility practice; if you know the location of the thing you are looking for you can run there directly or jump in a taxi, but if you are searching for it you would be better to move carefully, however urgent your business. And searching under these circumstances – looking for a homeless client somewhere in the city, quite possibly on the move themselves, quite possibly keeping a low profile – cannot be systematised, as Bittner has it. You cannot hold the territory still, prohibit interruption, banish other parties, subdivide the ground and methodically attend to every square meter in sequence. Instead, as described already, Jeff and Dennis cast about. But who are they looking for?

Spot the homeless person, says Jeff – a joke; the point being that a great many more people gather to take advantage of the food distribution on Charles Street in the early evening than are actually sleeping rough or likely to be doing so that night. But spotting the homeless person is also a job of work for any outreach worker; and the task is not always particular, directed to this or that person, known to be homeless and sought as an *individual*. Notwithstanding the occasions on which outreach workers set out on foot to search for a particular 'missing' client, the greater part of their walking practice – outreach patrol – is not geared to any such specific objective. The aim, instead, is to have a more general look about and scout the territory, not searching for any one person any more than for any one indication that such a person might be to hand. Outreach workers don't leave their office in the early evening to look for a certain blanket (blue, stained, ragged) in a particular doorway (red, recessed, littered) any more than they might look for a specific (brand of) discarded syringe or any other single indicator that might be taken to signify in the context of their employment. They look for blankets, for doorways, for syringes and any number of other *unspecified* signs that they might be onto something. They don't look for Darren W. or JD Sports carrier bags so much as for persons and objects that might somehow – in their appearance and in combination and in context – match the more general tenor and drift of inquiry that provides the baseline rationale for outreach work. All of which is to say that they don't know what they are after exactly or what they might find, not because they lack purpose but because their searching is non-specific and liable to be that much more productive as such. This distinction, between, on the one hand, searches directed to the location of a particular object and, on the other, to wider indefinite inquiries, can be found in Jakob von Uexküll's classic study of the perceptual worlds of animals and humans (2010; originally 1934). Looking for some particular thing or person we move ourselves so as to secure a match for a search image held in the head; casting about more generally, we operate with no such determinate image but instead with what von Uexküll's refers to as a search 'tone'. Operating according to tone '[w]e do not look around for one particular chair, but for any kind of seating' (Uexküll, 2010: 117). These observations holds good for outreach workers, who are not looking for somewhere to sit down but for an opportunity to assist. Walking the city streets of Cardiff in the early evening, Jeff and Dennis are not determined in their movements by a single search image they hope to match to things observed – this person, that object – instead they are looking around for the sorts of need out of which an outreach worker might make something. We can call this practice, in this instance, *streetcombing*. In ideal type, this is a sort of search and walking set apart from inquiries directed to the seeking out and finding of anything in particular; streetcombing looks different being done; it looks inexact and unhurried, abstracted, even at the same time as it is keenly interested.[4]

We should note, of course, that ideal types are just that. In practice things are muddier, certainly so with outreach patrol, which folds into itself at the same time *both* specific inquiries and a more open, inquisitive dispensation; the two cross tracks. Called out in relation to some or other incident and looking for one client in particular, outreach workers are nonetheless – to varying degrees, depending on the urgency of the primary task – open to other discoveries. Similarly, out on patrol and casting about for anything that might snag their attention they may very well also have it in mind to keep an eye out for this or that client in particular, not seen for the last three days and consequently a source of mild but growing concern.[5]

Conclusion: Seeing the need

[4] As Anne Brewster has it 'to beachcomb is to become entangled with things incidentally, to become curious, to recollect' (2009: 126). So too with streetcombing. Note also that searches of this sort do not come to a conclusion in anything like the way that specified searches do. When you find your car keys you are done searching. But an indefinite search can continue … indefinitely; that is, until time is in some way 'up' or it is felt that the area or territory under inspection is exhausted of possibility (for today). This gives indefinite searches a cumulative nature: the beachcomber discovers a relation between their finds and the tides and adjusts his or her practice accordingly; the browser in the bookshop discovers a new favourite author but remains open to new discoveries – perhaps prompted by the varied endorsements on the back of the book they now hold; the woodland forager may discover a good patch for mushrooms and make it their business to revisit. And so on. So too with outreach in the city.

[5] This crossing of tracks is more widely characteristic of searching as an undertaking or accomplishment. Searching for a lost cat, for example (see Laurier, *et al*., 2002), may be initiated as a very specific activity at first – going looking, enrolling other people, placing posters on lampposts – but this cannot be kept up indefinitely. If initial searches prove unsuccessful one's inquiries transform into a more diffuse and partial attentiveness to the possibility of seeing the cat in the course of doing other things.

As we've indicated above, outreach workers are engaged in an exploratory movement, a purposeful wandering (Yarwood, 2010), alive to the possibility of discovery of vulnerability, damage and need. Outreach workers do not and cannot systematise their patrols, 'walking the grid' as others do – for example, crime scene officers (Ludwig et al, 2012), archaeologists (Goodwin, 1994), and surveyors. Sometimes the team might be on the look-out for a particular person, but more often than not they are engaged in an act of diagnosis both of the city's appearedly vulnerable adults and the spaces that may provide for need and vulnerability: public spaces, not as squares and streets and plazas but as a space of retreat, shelter and seclusion (see Lagae et al, 2004:34). Beginning to see *to* need is reliant upon being able to see need and vulnerability and damage for what it is, in the many forms that it might take. This cannot be done at a distance, or in a hurry, or systematically. And it is also about the observer or searcher being open and available to contact too, for all the risks and trouble that that might entail. As we've suggested, this involves a good deal of patience and care and time spent not looking at something, or even systematically for something precisely defined, but rather an open attentiveness.

We anticipate that readers of this collection will have recognised something of a relationship between outreach work and ethnography. Outreach workers, in part, operate in a manner akin to what we (ethnographers, generally) like to call an ethnographic sensibility (Atkinson, 2014). They are ostensibly outsiders, operating on turf that is not their own in becoming experts in the lives of others. Indeed, the team themselves will talk (in introducing a novice to the work, for example) about 'entering the world' of rough sleepers, and of being 'privileged' to be able to spend time talking with and listening to their clients. They are good at it and take pride in the various sneaky means[6] of gaining access to this world and maintaining and managing field relationships. Outreach workers, in and through their fieldwork, develop empathy and insight through bodies that are 'tuned up' to the crap that their informants are taking (Goffman, 1989: 125). They learn to take the perspective of the rough sleepers and see the city accordingly: Would I sleep there or not? Too busy? Too isolated? Too open? Will I be seen? Does the rain get in under that stairwell? No? Good. Seems dry; and an air vent too. Perfect.

Outreach workers do what they do partly because they believe in it and want to make a difference, but partly for reasons external to the immediate encounter. They have ulterior motives, sometimes, not always fully disclosed to those they spend time with. Information gained is documented and recorded in various ways, and extracted from the site for another audience. And sometimes outreach workers bring unwanted attention to the lives and presence of their clients that might have otherwise remained under the radar. In this way, both outreach work and ethnography can be described as Janus-faced (Rowe, 1999) and the work of 'finks' (Goffman (1989).

We have, then, come to share a sensibility and method with the team, walking along beside them, learning to see with 'outreach eyes' – a turn of phrase Jeff is fond of using; gaining competency in the 'unique adequacy' (Garfinkel, 2002) of the team's practical skills. And we think that there might be much to learn from this case in terms of how it is that social research might better search out, see, and see to social problems. In addition to demonstrating something about searching and seeing and walking in the urban context, we suggest that our case might also be read as a lesson in humility for social science methodology, perhaps adding weight to the call for 'slow methods' (see, for example, Grandia, 2015). Rather than developing ways of isolating social phenomena in order to hold them still, as objects of attention, we might better think about developing practical skills through which to recover something of the 'open, exploratory, spirit' (Faris, 1967: 130) first practised by the Chicago ethnographers but subsequently pressured by the rise of structuralism and statistics, specialisation, and the contemporary demands and priorities of funding regimes and narrowing definitions of 'impact'. We might do more to recognise that engaging with the world 'is not an automatic faculty but a skill that needs to be trained' (Back, 2007: 7). As noted by Shilling (2012: 4), there is much worth in returning here to C. Wright Mills' reminder that it is the 'imagination . . . that sets off the social scientist from the mere technician' (2000 [1959]: 211), an imagination that goes beyond arid technical programmes of training in methods, requiring its own apprenticeship in learning and understanding. It is in this sense that we make a case here, in closing, for a practical sociological imagination, exercised as a tenor and drift of inquiry directed towards everyday mobile situated encounters. As we have aimed to make visible in the description of outreach work, moving slowly and carefully, and

[6] These words are taken from Goffman's (1989) only statement on methodology.

going out without a fixed image of what it is you might be looking for, can be the best way not to miss what is really there.

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