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Key Figure of Mobility: The Pedestrian

Abstract:
De Certeau's writings of the act of walking have spoken to anthropologists and other scholars in different ways since its publication. In the field of mobility studies, his emphasis on practice provides the foundation for a range of work on everyday experience in the constitution of urban life. 'The pedestrian' appears as a person who enunciates tactics in resistance to the gazing strategies of the planner. Yet for de Certeau the action of being is more important than the categorical identification of a type of actor. I read his use of 'pedestrian' in an adjectival sense, in that figures (including figures of speech) may have pedestrian qualities. From this perspective, walking speaks through its gestures. I explore these themes by drawing on a collaborative fieldwork project of walking along small urban rivers in Scotland, where the river environments provide a relief from merging of seeing and reading that occupies the walker along the street. Working with a poet also allowed us to consider the generative capacity of language and gesture beyond de Certeau's sense of the enunciative.

Key words:
Cities, de Certeau, gesture, pedestrianism, Scotland

Introduction

The opportunity in this special issue to consider 'the pedestrian' as a key figure of mobility opens up some interesting avenues of research. Playing on the dual implication of urban travel on foot and of ordinariness, an account of mobility can be grounded in the gestures, habits and ways of knowing that make up everyday life. The focus is not on the large-scale mobilities of transnationalism that the migrant, the exile and some of this issue's other key figures deal with, but with the close-at-hand places through which their movements unfold. These are forms of embodied place-making, as Sen and Silverman (2014) put it. In the context of transnational migration, however, Schiller and Salazar (2013) note that we need to avoid assuming the normality of either fixed relations between people and territories or the freedom and universality of globalised mobility. Their term 'regimes of mobility' identifies a more relational perspective with which to engage structures of power through subjective experience, where the freedom not to move may be as important as the mobility itself (Sagar 2006). Cities, of course, are made up of migrants as well as locals, passers-through as well as passers-by, all of whom inhabit the city as they become familiar with and respond to the organisation of space.

Everyday urban life entails tactile contact with the material aspects of the city – its roads, buildings and flows of traffic. The history of the pedestrian, indeed, mirrors material changes to city streets. As geographer Nicholas Blomley writes, it was not until the mid-18th century, with the onset of industrialisation and rural-urban migration, that those on foot in European cities began to be separated from other road users by means of pavements (Blomley 2011: 57). This is the point at which the word pedestrian as a walker enters the English language, derived from the Latin *pedester*, 'on foot' (Oxford English Dictionary, pedestrian). 'Pedestrian' is therefore a relatively recent word in English, and its use as an adjective seems

to have come a few decades before it was a noun (OED's first recorded usage is from 1716). The OED provides an adjectival definition of pedestrian: 'Of writing: prosaic, dull; uninspired, undistinguished. Also, of people and things: commonplace, ordinary.' The sense in English of pedestrian as ordinary or prosaic is also implied in the Latin. It is a contrast to the 'equestrian', one who goes on horseback. There is an insinuation of functionality or purpose, in that the pedestrian has somewhere to walk to: they do not drift or wander through the city like the flâneur/se. The pedestrian as a figure would then be a purposeful but ordinary urban walker.

In his history of walking, Joseph Amato provides an archetypal outline of 'the pedestrian' as a figure, together with what is becoming of them.

> The modern city – be it London, Paris, Berlin, Rome, or New York – has produced the quintessential city walker: the pedestrian. The pedestrian moves as a part of traffic, walking among crowds and strangers, traversing a kaleidoscopic and mutating landscape. Over time, pedestrians collectively were taken off their feet as they travelled a growing distance between home and work and increasingly relied on urban transit systems. At some point in the last decade of the nineteenth century or first decades of the twentieth century, the city pedestrian— who still may walk to and from transit— evolved to become first and foremost the riding commuter. (Amato 2004: 167)

Although I am not so sure about the end of the pedestrian described by Amato, the sense of the pedestrian moving as a part of traffic, within the purposeful flow of urban life, is important. But I want to deconstruct the idea of a 'figure of the pedestrian', both in the sense of figuration *per se* and the insinuation of a discrete individual, implicitly gendered as masculine through an association with rational economic purpose. While the value of exploring different sorts of movement and mobility through their figures is very real, pedestrians might be not so amenable to identification in an abstracted, singular way. 'The pedestrian', with the definite article, often comes into being through the very processes of regulating urban space, from which the activity of walking – or whatever people in the streets actually do – cannot easily be separated.

In social science and cultural studies, 'the figure of the pedestrian' is associated with Michel de Certeau's *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984). Through a partial re-reading, however, I want to relate walking, speaking and language in somewhat different ways. Rather than just deconstructing the figure of the pedestrian, my aim is to rebuild a concept of generative urban walking, by which I mean walking which does not merely express or enunciate spatial relations but actively creates the possibility of new ones. To do so I discuss some collaborative fieldwork along `and around some small urban rivers in Scotland. Having previously considered the embodied politics of movement in the rural landscapes of Scotland (Vergunst 2013), here I lay out some grounds for researching connected issues in its cities.

Pedestrianism and the regulation of urban space

In my home city of Aberdeen, Scotland, an Act of Parliament in 1795 provided for the laying of 'foot pavements' by the Council rather than on private initiative:

> And whereas from the great inconveniency which has been found to arise from the want of Foot Pavements along the Publick streets of the said city, many of the inhabitants have already been induced at their own private expense to cause Foot Pavements to be made and laid down opposite to their Houses and Shops; and that it will be of great convenience and utility that the whole of the said streets (…) were laid. (Aberdeen Police Act, 1795, section 21)

The Act at once provided for the urban walker and regulated the newly formed spaces. In Aberdeen, for example, it was not allowed:

> 'to block foot pavements or carry, run, drive, draw – any Bier, sedan Chair, Burden, Barrel, or Cask, or any Wheel, Wheels, Sledge, Wheelbarrow or other Carriage (…) or wilfully ride, lead, or drive any horse, Ass, Mule or other Cattle upon any of the said foot pavements except across them directly, to or from shops, cellars, warehouses or stables, or shall set down (…) any casks or barrels of any kind.' (Aberdeen Police Act, 1795, section 33)

The list suggests, of course, the kind of activities that made up everyday life on the streets. In London in 1767, the Commission for Sewers and Pavements also lamented the fact that streets, even with pavements demarcated on them, were still obstructed, used as middens, and were liable to be overflowed with mud from the road (Amato 2004: 159). The Police Commissioners of Aberdeen tried to introduce a 'keep to the left' rule to facilitate movement along pavements, and Nicholas Blomley quotes research on the history of Melbourne showing a similar, vain, regulatory attempt (Vergunst 2010: 383, Blomley 2011: 70).

Blomley unpacks the idea of 'pedestrianism', which does not refer to a kind of person or figure but to a mode of rationality. Urban administrators and planners envisage the sidewalk as a space of pedestrian flow, and the smooth circulation of pedestrian traffic is for them 'an uncontested and obvious higher-order good' (Blomley 2011: 31-32).

> 'Pedestrianism understands the sidewalk as a finite public resource that is always threatened by multiple, competing interests and uses. The role of the authorities, using law as needed, is to arrange these bodies and objects to ensure that the primary function of the sidewalk is sustained; that being the orderly movement of pedestrians from point a to point b.' (Blomley 2011: 4).

The values of pedestrianism are invoked in regulations which define and proscribe blockages, and in urban plans that, in Blomley's Vancouver case, identify separate zones of landscaping (such as street furniture), pedestrian, and frontage space along the sidewalk. The pedestrian zone, needless to say, is to be kept for the free movement, in other words circulation rather than the freedom not to move or to carry out other activities in public space. Blomley's point is that the rationality of pedestrianism is about valuing movement along the sidewalk in itself, and to understand it, recourse to other logics of capitalism or even civic democracy is not necessary. It is 'hidden in plain view': pedestrian flow and circulation are maintained above other uses of sidewalk and street space by city administrators, engineers and the judiciary, but as a 'common sense' rationality it is rarely reflected upon or made subject to scrutiny (Blomley 2011: 106).

Pedestrianism is relevant to this paper, because conceiving of 'the pedestrian' in historical terms or scholarly theorising entails consideration of the political and material processes within which such a figure must be enmeshed. This is to emphasise the embeddedness of ways of moving within fields of discourse and power, but also to explore how such fields can be created – as a regime of mobility in Schiller and Salazar's terms – through the activities of everyday life and inhabitation. So this is my first substantive point: the pedestrian is not isolated, and not 'naturally' an individualised, often implicitly male figure. These characteristics are brought into being through engineered material changes to the urban environment and political and judicial processes that value the production, flow and circulation of citizens.

Diverting urban flows

The desire to question contemporary urban flows has underlain an open-ended collaborative research endeavour that I have been part of. Taking a collection of small urban rivers in Scotland as our subject – the Denburn in Aberdeen, the Dighty Water in Dundee and the Water of Leith in Edinburgh, each just a few metres or less wide – we sought diversions (or indeed contraflows) to the normal circulation of urban traffic. The work initially involved myself and geographer and hydromorphologist Rebecca Wade of Abertay University, and we later joined with poet Lesley Harrison.[1] For many of our walks we invited informants along, such as an artist and a community worker, and we took opportunities to socialise with others along the way. As practice-led research, we explored forms of sociable movement that contrasted with the individuality of 'the pedestrian' (Vergunst and Vermehren 2012).

Our walks reflected on urban history, planning and the possibility of contact with nature in contemporary cities. A further theme was regeneration, referencing recent attention in planning to watercourses through for example the EU Water Framework Directive (2000), and we noted efforts to improve the riverine environments in different ways. Of our cases, the Water of Leith in Edinburgh has been most 'regenerated' in economic terms, especially in Leith itself where the river has been used as a focal point for housing and office development. Yet regeneration has its winners and losers, both in terms of economics and access to urban space. On one walk along the Water of Leith there was a sign advertising new-build housing that was meant to be read from the path: 'Riverbank. Currently Edinburgh's most exclusive development', almost suggesting to potential owners that they might gain private access to the river. In reality, as McClanahan (2014: 209-210) shows, the regeneration of post-industrial Edinburgh has been distinctly piecemeal following the 2008 financial crash.

Following the Denburn through Aberdeen also shows up the tension between public and private ownership of land in the city. Where the river disappears into the first of its culverts, under the dual carriageway of Anderson Drive, to find it again requires a good deal of persistence. It runs through the backs of large granite houses and then into Rubislaw Den, a small wooded area surrounded by more well-heeled streets. A natural history of Aberdeen published in 1982 described what was then clearly an accessible small wood around the river, with native plants such as heather, blaeberry and moschatel (Marren 1982). Now there is a high and locked gate with barbed wire along the top. On one of our walks Rebecca and I approached a resident and managed to get invited (as we were 'doing research') through his garden to walk along the river bank towards the wood for a minute or two. It has become a private and enclosed space, held in common only by those lucky enough to live next to it. The gate at the downstream end secures the area against intruders, of any sort – burglars, youths, pedestrians.

The enclosure of riverine space jarred with the contact with nature we found elsewhere. Tied on a bridge over the Water of Leith in Saughton Park, and on some stretches further downstream, were plastic bags that had contained bread. They were left behind by people feeding the birds who wanted neither to throw the bags away nor take them to a bin. At Saughton a few pairs of goosander as well as mallard were the recipients. An older couple around Murrayfield told us enthusiastically about a dipper nearby, a bird normally found further out in the countryside, as well as the coots we were looking at together. We walked with a community worker in Aberdeen who told us how he saw local people's appreciation of nature even in the city, as we admired the tall chicory with blue flowers growing along the Denburn before it disappeared into the culverts. In Dundee we spent a day with the Dighty Environmental Group, who volunteer their time cleaning up the Dighty Water. And more reflectively: a man along the Water of Leith spoke of how being near the river somehow helped him remember his home back in Greece. On the edge of Aberdeen we met a man who

recently moved to Aberdeen from Dundee after his wife died and found a kind of solace in the walks with his dog in the open land through which the Denburn runs.

These small examples, taken from many in our fieldwork, speak to the significance of urban river environments that enable people to have contact with nature, while recognising the historical circumstances that have led to the rivers being as they are today. Nature became for us not an essential quality or character, but that which enables life and growth – a generative capacity of the environment (Williams 1976: 219). The small rivers provide a close-up encounter with nature as organic growth and flow in the midst of what are often totally built-up and enclosed urban environments.

Walking, politics and resistance
These ordinary encounters along the rivers may not appear as overtly political or politicised. Yet the everyday intermingling of politics and walking was very much a concern of Michel de Certeau, who has become a touchstone for theorists and other scholars of urban walking and mobilities generally, especially with his book *The Practice of Everyday Life*. It is from de Certeau above all that 'the figure of the pedestrian' has entered scholarly theory in social science and the humanities. In a discussion of everyday 'resistance', walking for de Certeau is one of 'the innumerable practices by means of which users reappropriate the space organized by techniques of sociocultural production' (De Certeau 1984, xiv). As Ben Highmore points out, however, resistance for de Certeau is not the explicit political action we might commonly think of.

> 'We need (...) to give it a less heroic connotation. Here "resistance" is more productively associated with its use by engineers and electricians (and psychoanalysts): it limits flows and dissipates energies. If everyday life is resistant it is because it is never fully assimilated to the rhythms that want to govern and orchestrate modern life: perpetual modernization, market economics and discursive regimes.' (Highmore 2006: 105)

Resistance is apparent in and even intrinsic to the process of flow, in that a flow must always happen through tactile contact between substances. De Certeau's pedestrian examples are not of revolutionary marches or occupations, but of ordinary habits and decisions made through the process of inhabitation. This is the beginning of how we might connect with the politics of the river environments, in the ways people habitually choose to move through these alternative, usually non-economic urban spaces.

In the well-known set piece in the chapter 'Walking in the City', de Certeau argues that the view from a Manhattan skyscraper is akin to the urban planner's powerful optical mode of understanding the city. It 'continues to construct the fiction that creates readers, makes the complexity of the city readable, and immobilizes its opaque mobility in a transparent text' (1984: 96). Drawing an analogy between walking in the city and the speech act, in contrast with visual tools and analogies of the planner, he argues that walking 'affirms, suspects, tries out, transgresses, respects, etc., the trajectories it "speaks"' (1984: 99). De Certeau's word is 'enunciate' (Fr. *enoncer*), to give expression to something. In an immediate sense, what is being enunciated is the relation to the possible routes around the city and their multiple openings or limitations. These acts of walking as expression, de Certeau notes, are absent in the medium of maps: 'surveys of routes miss what was: the act itself of passing by' (1984: 97). Pedestrian expression has to do instead with the act of walking itself – and more widely, acts of inhabitation – and what happens along the way. Walking along the rivers, sharing an appreciation of nature seemed to speak as an act of ordinary inhabitation contrary to that normally possible in the city.

Despite this, de Certeau was not writing primarily about walking for its own sake. His was a broader theorisation, or indeed 'theology' of resistance (theology referring to how he invokes human spirituality and plurality as the location of agency), as Mitchell (2007) has noted. De Certeau works with the distinction of 'strategies', which are the actions of the powerful that are oriented towards the realisation of abstract models, from 'tactics', which are 'the arts of the weak', being the opportunistic and spontaneous utilisation of places produced by others (de Certeau 1984: 38). Mitchell notes the contrast between de Certeau and Foucault's more universalising model of modernity, in which the theme of resistance figures less, and it is here that de Certeau's description of urban walking has been so influential to anthropological and other scholarly theorising: the identification of an expressed *response* to modernity, rather than merely submission to it. De Certeau himself writes: 'This pathway could be inscribed as a consequence, but also as the reciprocal, of Foucault's analysis of the structures of power' (de Certeau 1984: 96).

For Blomley (2011: 101) de Certeau is significant again for showing how walking can be a 'radical and transgressive act' opposed to movement as an end in itself within pedestrianism. The special issue of *Social Anthropology* on de Certeau that hosted Mitchell's article also picks up on his analysis of walking specifically, although most of the contributors situate their work within the broader concepts of strategy and tactics. To illustrate the range of other recent work drawing on de Certeau, we have an analysis of place-making through rural-urban mobility in the Andes (Odegaard 2011) and discussions of walking as a 'tactical' urban research methodology (Kuntz and Presnall 2012, Mitchell and Kelly 2011). In a range of work Jennie Middleton also explores the embodied geographies of urban walking. As she puts it, de Certeau 'frames walking as a form of urban emancipation that opens up a range of democratic possibilities' (Middleton 2010: 579; cf Olwig 2006). There is common ground with the fieldwork presented in this paper, especially in regard to the sense of the tactical in everyday life, yet *contra* Blomley I would emphasise again the significance of the ordinary rather than the radical in the politics of walking. People we met along the rivers wove their walks so closely into their lives that they could not be seen as transgressive for their sense of self, and yet, in the spaces where it was possible to do so, inhabitation of the rivers (by plants and animals as well as people) presents in itself an alternative to the highly planned and strategised city. This is an everyday rather than an instrumentally radical politics.

Pedestrian speech and language

Despite the broader significance of de Certeau's description of resistance there is an argument that he lacks an empirical account of the actual routines and habits of pedestrians. Jennie Middleton writes: 'Such work that situates walking in the context of everyday urban practices can be argued as presenting highly abstract renderings of pedestrian movement, where the actual practice of walking is often obscured' (Middleton 2010: 579). Perhaps *The Practice of Everyday Life* is diminished somewhat because of its abstraction and its lack of an empirical description of movement and walking in specific localities. The emphasis is certainly on the concepts rather than an account of a specific walking practice. Yet we should see the book not as a final statement in itself, but part of a broader thread of scholarship that, while heterogenous, serves to synthesise embodied and grounded walking with a heuristic account of spatial practice and everyday life in modernity (and indeed was extended in the more 'empirical' *The Practice of Everyday Life: Volume 2: Living and Cooking* (1980))

Middleton's critique about the abstraction of the first volume of *The Practice of Everyday Life* could also be rejoined with Mitchell's assertion of de Certeau's 'theological' rather than theoretical or empirical intent. De Certeau draws strongly on his own experience and feelings rather than just seeking out those of others. He does not present a 'theory of resistance' but instead a 'theology of the human spirit as redemptive counterpoint to the

moral bankruptcy of modernity' (Mitchell 2007: 103). What we are reaching for is not an account of the objective world but, in de Certeau's memorable phrase, a 'science of singularity' (De Certeau 1984: ix) that might locate agency in the person themselves and their tactical *arts de faire*, rather than in a notion of culture that is dispersed through interpretive webs of significance (Geertz 1973: 5, Mitchell 2007: 91). But, through all of this, there is something significant about the specific ways in which de Certeau invokes 'pedestrian' or 'the pedestrian' in relation to a sense of the empirical.

For de Certeau, the action of being is more important than the categorical identification or abstraction of a type of actor, regardless of the amount of 'empirical' material from a social-science perspective. I read his use of the word 'pedestrian' as being an adjective more often than a noun – describing the ways or manners of inhabiting a city rather than a boundary around a particular group of the city's inhabitants. To briefly survey the chapter 'Walking in the city': 'the pedestrian' makes an explicit appearance on page 92 (up on Floor 110!) and p97, but other mentions are adjectival: 'pedestrian movements' (p97), 'pedestrian speech acts' (p97-98), 'modalities of pedestrian enunciation' (p99), 'pedestrian [use]' (p100), 'pedestrian figures' (p101), 'pedestrian rhetoric' (p102, 107), 'pedestrian practices' (p102), 'pedestrian processes' (p103), 'pedestrian traffic' (p103), and finally 'the pedestrian unfolding of the stories accumulated in a place' (p110). 'Pedestrian' for de Certeau is primarily a quality, not a person, and still less a type of person. The qualities he refers to are of everydayness and ordinariness (as in pedestrian compared to equestrian movement). 'The walker' is, admittedly, used around p98-99 and perhaps this is where the embodied person-figure comes most alive for de Certeau – notably not described as 'the pedestrian' even so. In the French original, de Certeau uses *marcheur* as the noun form ('walker') and 'pedestrian' appears as the adjective *piétonnière*, rather than the noun *piéton*, for example as *l'énonciation piétonnière* ('pedestrian enunciation').

We need to engage here with de Certeau's focus on language and speaking in order to appreciate the relevance of his work for understanding the politics of walking and mobility. Walking styles, or ways of walking, are for de Certeau analogous to figures of speech: they express and enunciate in personal and idiosyncratic ways, and pedestrian walking enunciates space in the city. De Certeau draws on Jean-François Augoyard's *Step By Step*, which describes daily walking in a housing estate in Grenoble. Augoyard explores 'inhabitant rhetoric' that strays from a literal rendition of the planner's instrumental notion of movement – across grass rather than a path, through a vacant lot, around a building (Augoyard 2007, 23-27). De Certeau's 'figures of pedestrian rhetoric' are partly from Augoyard: two key ones include synecdoche – expanding a spatial element such as a bicycle to stand for a neighbourhood, and asyndeton – a space transformed into 'enlarged singularities' and separate islands, a walk that leaps, hops and fragments a space (de Certeau 1984: 101). For Augoyard, 'all ambulatory figures border on synechdoche – which, thanks to the absences and breaks made by asyndeton in planned space, make the part stand for the whole.' (Augoyard 2007: 156). There are others: digression, where 'the process of swerving away is carried out a little at a time' – a housing estate resident describes to Augoyard their route through a small gap in the wall (ibid.: 37) – and other forms of avoidance, for example. The idiosyncratic practice of a walk may cut up the intended spatial narrative and fracture a scripted story into episodes and segments, any one of which might turn out to be a twist in the plot, or a cul-de-sac. Our own diversions along the rivers were often broken up by culverts, fences, or paths that simply led back to the road, where the river often feels like a series of leaps and hops through the city.

From this starting point we can create a more complex and interesting rendering of the significance of walking in the city, and one less reliant on the abstraction of a 'figure'. Presenting a series of ambulatory accounts of self and movement, Katrín Lund (2012) works

through the co-constitution of landscape and narrative by drawing on de Certeau's invocation of inhabitant rhetorics. Asyndeton and synechdoche for her serve to narrate both the absence and presence created through walking – the leaving as well as arriving – and the 'constant shift between being connected and disconnected to the self and surroundings' (Lund 2012, 236). For Lund, there is no single figure of the pedestrian, but rather a series of 'compositions' that interweave narratives. We might connect this with Cresswell's descriptions of walks in London made by two American suffrage campaigners in 1911, for whom walking shifted between the 'humdrum and banal' and then opening up a 'whole new experience of the city' (Cresswell 2006: 212). Yet Cresswell goes on to invoke the city walker explicitly as a figure: 'De Certeau's walker is a universal figure – a virtual figure – and the pedestrian in the city has been made to play similarly universal roles elsewhere' (ibid., 213). In contrast, I am working towards de Certeau's original use of 'pedestrian' as a modifier, or a way in which rhetoric, expression and gesture are directed along a path, rather than as a noun form that creates the notion of 'the figure'. While the politics of presence (indeed co-presence) was strong in our river walks, it was generated through specific 'pedestrian' forms of gesture and expressions of sociability that walkers found to be possible there.

There is a relationship between self and landscape or place here that 'pedestrian' as modifier opens up. To de-universalise 'the pedestrian' as a figure, we need to lose our reckoning of 'the city' as a singular category too, and this is where anthropological fieldwork has of course much to contribute. Setha Low's close observations and reflections on people in the Parque Central and subsequent Plaza de la Cultura of San José, Costa Rica also explore movement on foot with reference to other gestural activities (Low 2000, 2014). Her mappings of movement through the square by gender and of group activities in it show how such public spaces change through the day. Flows of people moving for work and leisure at different times of the day, and with marked gender differences, create very different senses of the space. These are partly reflections of different urban design values, with the new Plaza de la Cultura encouraging outward looking and movement between groups in contrast to the privacy and seclusion of the Parque Central. Low (2014: 31) writes however: 'the differences observed in the interaction and movement patterns express more than just the design of the space; here is an example of the landscape architecture and the embodied spaces reinforcing each [other], and it is difficult to segment out the extent to which each plays a determinant role.' Elyachar's (2010) account of identity amongst Sha-abi popular classes in Cairo also traces the spoken and unspoken forms of gestural communication, across heavy traffic and in other arenas of everyday life, where architecture and movement bring each other into being.

In sum, the emphasis on the 'speech act' of walking also provides an important counterpoint to the visuality of pedestrianism as formulated by Blomley and in the broader terms of modernity by Foucault. Yet it is possible to continue the critique that anthropologists have brought to the neat dichotomies of vision and speech that can be mapped on to tropes of domination and resistance. For Sarah Pink, 'separating out "sensory modalities" situates them in disembodied "culture" and is incompatible with an anthropology that understands learning and knowing as situated in embodied practice and movement' (Pink 2010: 331). How might we understand combinations of seeing and hearing or speaking in pedestrian terms? And how more generally might we generate, and recognise, the new possibilities apparent in 'open' encounters with the ordinary that de Certeau inspires us towards?

From enunciating to generating, along the river bank
To pursue these new possibilities, I want to shift the figures of this paper back again to our urban rivers. I am seeking a way of thinking beyond just the expression or enunciation of space, which seem to imply that there is a kind of pre-existing message ready to be spoken,

formulated in the body or the landscape. Perhaps pedestrian walking can be generative as well as enunciative: creating new forms of language or rediscovering nearly-lost places and ways of speaking.

If the practice of everyday life is in part a practice of politics in the way the relations between public, private and personal space are acted out, then our explorations of urban access along the riverbanks put these relations into stark relief. We asked ourselves whether we could walk in a particular way by attempting to find routes other than those of what are often grid patterned roads and streets, by following the course of the rivers as closely as possible, along the riverbanks sometimes, through alleys, paths, pavements, gardens. The routes were 'other' to the architecture of the city, and they spoke with a different voice to that of the street.

Working and walking with poet Lesley Harrison made us consider the kinds of language that are present during a normal walk along a street. On one of my walks, on the spur of the moment, I counted all the items of written language that directly caught my attention along a few Edinburgh streets between Haymarket station and the Water of Leith at Slateford. I got to around 250 instances of my eyes alighting on something to be read during the three quarters of hour that the walk took. This was not actively looking for things to read, but attempting to count what I simply could not help noticing: street signs, shop signs, notices, billboards, bus stops, parking signs, all of which were more numerous in shopping areas but by no means absent anywhere along the route. We're open. Haymarket Interchange. X. Cut here. Tattoo Piercing. Recycling. New Road Layout Ahead. The street has its own concrete poetry, perhaps, most of it seeking our attention but going unnoticed. Dipping down off the street and on to the Water of Leith emphasised the sheer amount of linguistic information we cannot help but read on city streets. Along the street, more than ever it seems, seeing and reading become almost indivisible. Wherever we look, we read: seeing merges with messaging (SMS or otherwise), and there is virtually no room to come up with our own language, other than clipped responses. From this perspective, the city 'speaks' constantly, and it is no wonder some attempt to block it out with headphones (Bull 2005).

The small rivers provide a shelter from this inundation of language already-written. Along the *rus in urbs* of the watercourses, we noted the significance of small, sometimes gestural, encounters with nature, such as feeding bread to the ducks, or an informal path opened through or around a fence that led directly to the water. We found the possibility of being sociable with others, whereby the flow of the water itself seemed to generate a distinctive social interaction (noted also along a large river bank in Trento, Italy, by Brighenti and Mattiucci (2012)). Striking up conversation with others is allowed, socially, along these rivers in a way that is usually avoided up on the streets.

Lesley the poet's interest was not merely in the sociability of walking the rivers for its own sake, but in recording local dialect and exploring how it creates and confirms a sense of place. Her poems have a real appreciation of local rhythms of speech and place names, although they are more than just linguistic exercises. They explore the links between landscape and language. 'Upstream' (Figure 1) is not a map of the watershed of the Dighty, but a linking up of places with water-related names converging on the city of Dundee – reflecting for Lesley the rural migration flow to the industrialising city in the 19th century. 'A Dichty rhyme' (Figure 2) uses the names of the once-numerous water-powered mills along the river. Lesley's idea was that the poem would be a rhythmical playground game for clapping or bouncing a ball, recreating a journey along the river again. Indeed, both poems use place names as asyndeton, jumping us through the landscape without conjunctions in a way that demonstrates its coherence and scale. 'Swale' (Figure 3) comments on a modern housing scheme with an area of land designed to hold excess water rather than running it straight into the drains that would be liable to flood. The poem speaks firstly from the

perspective of the well-to-do commuter driving home, and secondly using the voice of the swale itself imagined in dialect. The yellow flag irises become a synechdoche for the swale landscape, speaking both to the possibility of a better managed urban water system and to past generations of people who would have enjoyed the flowers and water while out for a walk.

Conclusion: from the figure of the pedestrian to new pedestrian figures
The issue I wish to pursue is the generative capacities of movement and language: not so much to do with enunciation in the sense of giving expression to something that already exists, but generation in the sense of finding a new *means* of expression. Specifically, the urban rivers seemed to help generate new, or regenerate previously lost, forms of sociality, gesture and language. This is the aspect of De Certeau's work that is often overlooked by researchers of walking and urbanism. Walking collectively and collaboratively can be an intentional contrast to how 'the figure of the walker' is constructed as an individual, often male, heroic aspect as Heddon and Turner (2012) discuss in relation to contemporary walking art.

There is an implication here for how we can talk about 'figures' through fieldwork and writing. Key figures can be powerful metaphors, but how should we conceive of their relation to the empirical? Highmore discusses de Certeau's distinction between an ethnological text (relating to objectivity) and an ethnographic one.

> 'While the ethnological text offers a particular view of the other, and in so doing inscribes its "will to power", it also leaves traces, remainders that point to an excess, an overflow, out of which the ethnographic text is fashioned. So alongside the analysis of the inscription of power and desire, comes another job: to recover such traces as the signs of an excess, as the seepage of the real.' (Highmore 2006: 17)

The 'seepage of the real', a suitably fluid formulation, will always provide a counterpoint to the abstraction of the figure in a totalising 'ethnological' account. If the ability to inscribe is a tool of the powerful to mark their desires into the city (Highmore 2006: 73), while ordinary life on the other hand cannot be circumscribed in a text (De Certeau 1984: 102), we need to seek alternative forms of research practice. These might even take us beyond the narrowly ethnographic (Ingold 2014). In shifting this paper from an initial ethnographic reading of people's relations with urban rivers to a more gestural and generative one, much inspired by the practice of poetry, some steps in this direction have been taken. An anthropology that incorporates poetry (Maynard and Cahnmann-Taylor 2010) could explore themes of gesture and expression, although little work has been done in this field compared with the range of anthropological collaborations with contemporary visual art. What might emerge is a more humble key figure, as a heuristic form open to the generation of new opportunities and experience in a typically 'pedestrian' adjectival manner. Less the figure of the pedestrian, than the possibility of new pedestrian figures.

As well as movement the particular kinds of embodied places conceived by these means might also be re-thought. Setha Low writes that walking research has at times had 'too much reliance on walking and linear movement', suggesting instead a focus on the interaction between paths and locales that her maps of movement and behaviour explore (Low 2014: 31). I would to a large extent concede the point, although I also concur with Ingold (with whom I have researched walking) on the foundational basis of movement rather than stasis, and locomotion rather than cognition, for human sociality and perception (Ingold 2004). This suggests that the distinction between movement and behaviour might not be easy to make either. However, making walks along the urban rivers brought out an environment in which it

is simply easier to pause and engage in other kinds of small gestural activity (a conversation, feeding birds, just watching the water) than on most surrounding city streets. There is a freedom *not* to move that allows one do other things, as in the plaza for Low. These not-moving pauses are just as 'pedestrian', and just as significant for the constitution of urban space, as the walks within the flow of traffic along streets, even though they might be contrary to the regime of mobility that is pedestrianism.

Footnote

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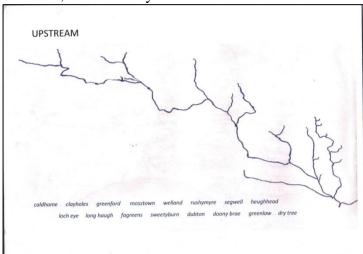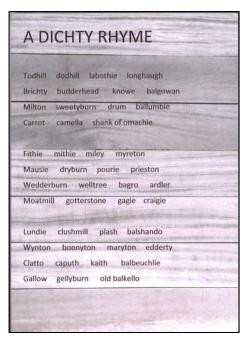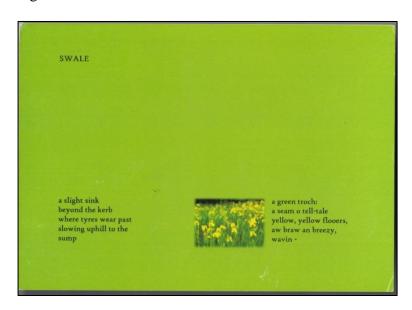
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Figure 1

A DICHTY RHYME

Todhill   dodhill   labothie   longhaugh

Brichty   budderhead   knowe   balgowan

Milton   sweetyburn   drum   ballumbie

Carrot   camella   shank of omachie

Fithie   mithie   miley   myreton

Mausie   dryburn   pourie   prieston

Wedderburn   welltree   bagro   ardler

Moatmill   gotterstone   gagie   craigie

Lundie   clushmill   plash   balshando

Wynton   bonnyton   maryton   edderty

Clatto   caputh   kaith   balbeuchlie

Gallow   gellyburn   old balkello

Figure 2

SWALE

a slight sink
beyond the kerb
where tyres wear past
slowing uphill to the
sump

a green troch:
a seam o tell-tale
yellow, yellow flooers,
aw braw an breezy,
wavin -

Figure 3