

Using collaborative, embodied, sensory ethnography

Arrival Stories: using participatory, embodied, sensory ethnography to explore the making of an English city for newly arrived international students

Abstract

Places are more than mere locations indicated by coordinates on a map. They are sites invested with meaning that arises out of mobile, embodied, sensuous experience. The construction of place is explored here in the context of participatory, embodied, sensory ethnographic research. I curated a series of ethnographic engagements with international students who were newly arrived in the city of Manchester, England. A participatory, embodied, sensory ethnographic method was used to explore ways in which meaningful places are constructed through the body and senses. This paper reports on walking interviews with Tala (from Zambia), Ann (from Romania), Al (from Tunisia), Abbie (from Spain) and her guide dog Tori (from the U.S.), to explore their corporeal and sensuous engagements with their new city.

Keywords: arrival, walking, embodiment, senses, place, ethnography, participatory, blindness

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1. Introduction

1.1 The arrival context

Ethnographic fieldwork typically features arrival stories. As Evans-Pritchard's irascible tone testifies in reporting his arrival in Nyasaland to begin work on his monograph *The Nuer* (1940), arrival can be a disorientating experience

When I landed at Yoahuang the catholic mission there showed me much kindness. I waited for nine days on the riverbank for the carriers I had been promised. Next day was devoted to erecting my tent and persuading the Nuer to remove my abode to the vicinity of the shade and water, which they refused to do.

(E. E. Evans-Pritchard, 1940:5)

In her essay *Fieldwork in common places*, Pratt (2010) reviews some notable forays into the arrival story genre, mainly selected from the anthropological archive. She remarks on how many ethnographers eschew discourses of scientific reportage in favour of more personal, descriptive narratives, when conveying their sense of (arriving in a) place. Such a descriptive tone is used here by Firth (1936) to open *We, The Tikopia*, revealing first sight of Polynesia

In the cool of the early morning, just before sunrise, the bow of the Southern Cross headed towards the eastern horizon, on which a tiny dark blue outline was faintly visible (1936:1)

This semi-poetic narrative can be traced further back, to the early travel literature of

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Descriptive arrival narratives highlight the strangeness of novel places, exemplified here by Malinowski's first setting down in the Trobriand Islands

Imagine yourself suddenly set down surrounded by your gear, alone on a tropical beach close to a native village while the launch or dinghy, which has brought you, sails away out of sight (Malinowski, 1961:4)

Arrival though can be conceived of as more than just a physical act of getting somewhere new. It can also be an epistemological transition (Chawla, 2008). During the fieldwork that is presented in this paper, I found that doing justice to others' arrival stories demanded my own parallel arrival at alternate epistemological and methodological sites. I was obliged to develop an arrival story of my own. As a long-term resident of Manchester, as I worked alongside my participants, often physically walking alongside them, I traced routes from conventional ethnographic practice toward participatory, embodied, sensory ethnography (Pink, 2009).

For the international students whose stories are told here, sensory, embodied experiences of place reflect connections with elsewhere; places travelled from and to (Holton and Riley, 2014). The participants I worked with were implicated in a process of mobile place-construction (Cresswell, 2006), by virtue of walking the city, constructing it through the body and the senses. By virtue of their varied mobilities and changing intensities of habit (Bissell, 2015) their new city was routinely constructed out of movement and sensuous engagement. My work with four participants is presented in this paper.

1.2 Making places through mobile engagement

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Places are more than mere locations featured on a map. Experience infuses them with meanings and intentionality. Humans apprehend the world through perception and sensation (Cresswell, 2004). Through perceiving, sensing and experiencing, mere spaces are made into meaningful places. Spaces are not given, rigid containers of events (Deleuze, 2002). Rather, we chisel them out through embodied, subjective encounter.

The narratives we use to make our experiences of place cohere vary. Some are sedentary, with the emphasis on home, dwelling or being in a place (Relph, 1976). The field of environmental psychology has emphasized sedentary aspects of belonging to a single place, especially in its explorations of the concepts of place attachment and place dependence (Steg, 2013). Contrastingly, place based narratives from cultural geography have eschewed sedentary approaches in favour of those that focus on movement through landscapes and the generation of meaning through mobile practices (such as walking). For advocates of this more dynamic approach, the mundane, sometimes repetitive routines that punctuate our lives are mobile rituals that allow us to walk, ride or pedal ourselves into meaningful places. Conceived this way place making is wrought through movement (Thrift, 2000, Spinney, 2007); through doing, instead of simply being in a place; through the formation of routes, rather than the setting down of roots (Clifford and Markus, 2010). Mobile, rather than sedentary, approaches to place making resonate with the psycho-geographical phenomenon of the Parisian flâneur who writes (constructs) the city as he wanders (de Certeau, 1984), thrives on the scribbling down of the everyday, reminding us of the socially constructed, practice-based nature of space (Lefebvre, 1991).

Thus conceived, the city is a never complete environment that is continually being etched out through active, collaborative processes of dwelling (Ingold, 2000). They are

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collections of narratives, of 'a simultaneities of stories so far' (Massey, 2006, 131). Rather than paying attention to happenings that take place within (bounded) places, for mobile place makers, places are constituted by the routes that lead to/through them. The arrival stories that feature here bestow meaning following journeys from elsewhere.

2. Method

2.1 The heritage of participatory, embodied, sensory ethnography

The classic ethnographic method provides the methodological heritage for this paper. Ethnography traditionally involves observing and taking part in behaviours and experiences that are being studied; known as participant observation. As participants in the social life, ethnographers do not just observe life objectively. They interpret it with subjectivity. The ethnographic combination of participation, reportage and interpretation has been termed thick description (Geertz, 1973). Whilst acknowledging this methodological heritage, sensory approaches signal a departure from this classic form. Sensory ethnography acknowledges those who have criticized classic ethnographic work for dwelling too heavily on observational data (Pink, 2009) at the expense of multisensory engagements with experience. Thus, participatory, embodied sensory ethnography, a contemporary descendent of classic ethnography, strives to engage with the multisensory, overlapping experiences of researchers and participants. When this method is used to investigate place making, novel media, often selected by collaborators, are used to communicate multisensory experiences and to convey constructions of place (Stoller, 1997). Embodied practice incites researchers to regard sensuous enactment, not just observation, as a means of knowing.

To appreciate the defining aspirations of sensory ethnography, attention must be paid not only to the physical emplacement of the fieldworker (being there), but also to the

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multisensory nature of the work (Coffey, 1999). Knowledge deepens the more the senses, exertions and co-productive experiences of the ethnographer overlap with those of participants. Learning at their elbow, the ethnographer is a sensory apprentice (Lave & Wenger, 1991, Pink, 2010), not a mere observer.

2.2 Making sense of the city through participatory embodied, sensory ethnography

The methodological approaches proposed in this paper generate sensuous, practice-based accounts that arise from engagement with participants in situ, along their routes through the world. The relationship between the sensory, embodied ethnographer and those who participate in research is one of mutuality, wherein knowledge is constructed en route, conversationally (Shotter, 2008). Knowledge is co-created between researchers and participants, rather than transferred from one individual to another in existing, pristine form. This exemplifies a methodological approach involving ‘researching with, rather than simply about, people’ (Pink, 2012, 32). During the fieldwork for this project, place-making arrival stories arose from walking interviews (Pratt, 2010). These stories were less told face-to-face, more shoulder-to-shoulder.

In the early stages of fieldwork, participants were invited to consider how they habitually record and convey their experiences of arrival in a new city. Preliminary interviews established preferred sensory preferences and modes of participation (photography, walking, sound recording etc.). A central participatory objective was for the work to be led by participants’ preferred place making practice, favoured walking routes and sensory preferences. The participants who worked/walked with me during this project were fully informed that their work formed part of an exploration of meaningful attachments to a

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newly encountered city. The present research project was submitted to (and approved by) the University (name blinded for review) ethics committee. Consent has also been obtained to use participants' real names for the purpose of this paper.

2.3 Fieldwork practicalities: participants with overlapping proximities

The fieldwork for this piece of research took place over a twelve-month period. Participants were all international students who had recently arrived in the UK to study. They had all come to live in Manchester no more than two months prior to the beginning of our collaborations. They were recruited through the International Society of a university in Manchester, and were members of an existing university-run group of sixteen international students (known as *The International 16*) who met one evening per week to share their experiences of cultural difference and arrival in a new city. With their consent and the cooperation of the group leaders I was able to join this group as an observer for one academic year, attend weekly meetings and work extensively with six of them. These six, my participants (two undergraduates, two post-graduates), showed a particular interest in developing methods through which to tell their arrival stories. For the purposes of this paper, pseudonyms have been given to each participant whose, in order to ensure their anonymity.

Four of these arrival stories are presented in this paper. The four participants who feature here are all female. The decision to work with a female cohort was taken in the context of the historically disproportionate amount of walking based research in urban studies that has been based on the outlook of a solitary, male wanderer (Bassett et al, 2004). Tala, Ann, Al and Abbie (and her guide dog, Tori) met with me for preparatory conversations before embarking on walking interviews with me. As well as seeing each of my participants weekly at the group meetings, I typically met each one of them alone

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twice before our walking interviews and conducted one or two walking interviews with each of them, each of a period of two hours. Our mobile interviews were recorded on my MP3 recorder and these recordings were supplemented in some cases by photographs taken by my participants along the way (see Figure 1).

A contributing factor to establishing ethnographic collaborations is the degree of overlap between the experiences of researchers and researched. To varying extents, ethnographers have historically operated as outsiders (Malinowski, 1961) seeking to gain entry into participant groups. Others have operated as relative insiders, studying people with whom they already occupy common ground. This has been referred to as the native ethnography model (Rudolph, 1997). For this project there was a high degree of overlap between the life-spaces of myself and my participants. Familiarity with the academic context where preliminary meetings took place (the university campus), a shared city of residence familiarity with technologies participants used to engage with their surroundings (cameras, mobile phones, audio recording equipment), all constituted shared, overlapping life-worlds.

My overlapping experience with my participants arises from my own long-term residence in Manchester. I have lived, studied and worked in the city for twenty years. My own arrival story (a little distant now) unfolded as I discovered the city as an undergraduate student. Like my participants, I came here to study, with little idea of how long I would stay.

2.4 Sensing, walking, imagining

For an ethnographer for whom emplaced, parallel engagement (Moles, 2007) with participants is paramount, steps are taken (literally) to access others' worlds by sensuous,

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embodied, mobile means, such as walking (Stoller, 2007, Ingold and Vergunst, 2008, Hall, 2009, Edensor, 2010). The embodied, sensory researcher engages in place-constitutive practices, on-the-go with his or her participants (Pink, 2009).

Previous examples of practice based, sensory ethnography have focused on diverse activities such as gardening (Pink, 2012), listening (Adams and Bruce, 2008), yoga (Buckingham and Degen, 2008), cycling (Spinney, 2007), hanging around (Rhys-Taylor, 2010) and walking (Moles, 2008). In her research with Italian Alpine cattle masters (Grasseni, 2007), reported learning to see how the master saw, by engaging in visual cosmologies that were both developed through practice. Ricer (2005) reported learning to hear as doctors heard using a stethoscope. Downey (2005) explored the embodied world of Brazilian Capoeira practitioners. Throughout the fieldwork for the present project, sensory engagements extended to embodied, sensuous practices such as riding buses, making pictures, listening to music, hanging around, talking, eating, and above all, walking.

The value of walking as a shared embodied practice for staking out territories as meaningful places has long been recognized (Turnbull, 1961, Debord, 1977, Solnit, 2001, Wallace, 2012). When Clifford Geertz (1973) famously fled a police raid of a Balinese cockfight with informants, his relationship with them achieved an embodied statement of togetherness. In such cases, walking and running were stumbled upon as collaborative methods. Mobile, embodied methods appeal because they are democratic, widely available practices that can be shared with and instigated by participants' existing habits. Walking, riding and moving through Manchester and Salford, the making of the city emerged at the shoulders (and instigation) of my participants.

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As a researcher I drew close to the embodied, sensory experience of coming to a city for the first time. Mobility facilitated coming to know places as others knew them (Wenger, 1998). The exploration of this form of knowledge is inseparable from being there and moving along together (Harris, 2007). But imagination, as well as mobility, is central to this endeavor (Latham, 2004). The call for the place of imaginative practice in academic discourse, and for closer links between disciplines such as geography and art, is increasingly insistent (Hawkins, 2013, Warren, 2013). For the present project it was imperative to establish engagements that drew on the imaginations (and therefore the enthusiasms) of my participants. In order to come to know their stories at close proximity one not only had to be there; one had to come to understand how others brought places into being. This would require the establishment of proximate mobile engagements and dialogues through what the ethnographer and filmmaker Jean Rouch (Henley, 2009) refers to as empathetic dialogues; what Shotter (2008) has termed joint action. For my participants, this meant engaging imaginatively with various corporeal and sensory enthusiasms; predominantly walking (Tala), filming (Ann), eating (Al) and listening (Abbie).

2.5 A participatory approach: remaining open and reflexive

Gaining insights into research participants' preferred means of participation requires an open, reflexive approach. At a practical level this involved lengthy periods of moving together, hanging around and sharing stories. Research methods that dovetail with such approaches include photo or object-elicited interviews (Pink, 2004), on-the-go interviews (Holton and Riley, 2014), audio diaries and sound-walks (Butler, 2006). A mixture of these methods aligns bodies, quotidian rhythms, routes, tastes and places into mutually constitutive trajectories (Massey, 2005). They yield mobile reportage that amounts to participant led, creative correspondences (Okely, 1996).

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In the present project I sought to explore the development of emplaced knowledge in new arrivals as it was acquired through daily living. Predominantly using walking interviews, as well as excursions into eating, listening and photography, these situated accounts thrive on plurality of the senses and the aesthetic, practice based enthusiasms of my participants.

3. Arrival stories

As the following four accounts demonstrate, my work with Tala, Ann, Al and Abbie (and her guide dog Tori) yielded quite distinct sensory engagements with Manchester, formed along a diversity of routes.

3.1 Tala: first steps into Manchester

Tala came to know Manchester through her preference for walking. I conducted a preliminary interview with Tala in order to establish her preferred mode of participation. A liking for walking, as a means of getting around and becoming acquainted and informed about her new surroundings, emerged

Researcher: What kind of method do you think you might use?

Tala: I usually walk to many places actually. I love walking.

In exploring place making for Tala, an undergraduate international student, recent arrival to Manchester from Zambia and habitual urban walker, I drew on Ingold's (2000) dwelling perspective; wherein places gain their significance by dint of the life activity of those who inhabit them. The body, a technology for encountering places, contributes strenuously to our bringing places into being. Embodied ethnographers go out of their

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way to walk with research participants between static points, to reveal how mobility contributes to place making.

Walking often proved to be the most productive of ethnographic methods, providing spatial sources of elicitation during walking interviews (Rhys-Taylor, 2010, 28)

In view the number of times she had made one particular walk over the last three months, we decided that our second meeting should be a walking interview. Rather than staging a wilfully aimless *derivé* we decided to re-walk a specific route that Tala had used to appropriate Manchester-Salford as her new home city. The route itself is an indirect and, to me, novel wiggle from Salford to Manchester city centre. This two-mile walk played a prominent role in Tala's construction of Manchester. During our walk she told me that when she first arrived in Salford she felt isolated in her new location. These comments evoke a time before she had actively engaged with Manchester. As she explains here she had landed, come to rest, but was yet to become fully mobile

I was quite scared. I didn't know what to do. I had no friends. It was just me in my room. I arrived at around 4 o'clock then I stayed in and unpacked everything. Stayed in that night and the following day

Tala's first experience of mobility in her new city came courtesy of her involvement with her newly discovered colleagues at her church. The church, a community of practice (Wenger, 1998) acted as a mediator between Tala and the city on her arrival. Fincher (2011) highlights the role of churches and other agencies in the construction of places for international students.

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Through her involvement with the church she would come to learn new routes through the city on regular, weekly church walks. As we traced the route of these walks she told me stories of how she found her way through her slice of Manchester following her arrival. Amid the sound of passing traffic she related how she came to know her part of Manchester by doing the knowledge on foot in the company of her community of practice

Tala: I think the first time was when I went, when I came to church

Researcher: Alright, so you made the walk we just made?

T: Yes, with somebody

Traffic noise

and we walked down to the church

Researcher: So in a way the walk we've just done is the first walk you ever did

Tala: Yes. And after the service they have a

Traffic noise

student lunch in Manchester City

Researcher: Oh do they? So you went for lunch with people from the church

Tala: Yes

Researcher: And how did you get there?

Tala: We walked.

During a café stop Tala related how she came to know her part of Manchester by doing the knowledge on foot in the company of her community of practice. During this informal, weekly, walking induction, knowledge of the city accrued on a 'know-as-you-go' basis. It was accrued along the way, not by reading maps and guidebooks before

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setting out. Mapping of place came through continual dwelling. Embodied knowledge accumulated between footfall and landscape. The term process cartography (Rundstrom, 1991) has been coined to describe the mobile, never complete mapping exercise that intentional place-makers habitually indulge in. A little like speaking (though unlike writing) process cartography draws meaning from its performative context. It is not just the rolling out of pre-existing thought. It is the formulation of emplaced narratives, often through the re-telling of journeys previously made, or the re-walking of stories previously told. Life stories and long walks intermingle in forms of performative cartography that Ingold calls wayfinding; 'the life-historical process of getting around' (2000:232).

As a relative newcomer (though no longer a stranger) to the city, Tala gained the emplaced knowledge that is only available to those who actually experience a place for themselves. Other writers have noted the resonant value of knowledge that gains value from presence, embodiment and sensory engagement. Legat (2008) walked with Thcho hunter-gatherers in North West Canada and noted how this activity is more than just a way of getting around. It is a form of pensive (thoughtful) mobility. Simply hearing stories about a place is not enough is not enough. To fully comprehend them you have to travel the trails and visit the places they tell of. Ideally, this should happen in the company of the knowledgeable, who have trodden these paths before. Walking is the means by which experience is converted into knowledge (Legat, 2008). This dynamic resonates with the knowledge conveyed by Tala in her walk with me. Her stories of first arrival became knowledge through the physical effort and shared experience of walking. Emplaced knowledge emerges from co-productive journeys along which steps are traced/retraced, stories told/retold, places made/remade. In the case of our walk, new knowledge was generated for both parties.

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Our re-walking of a familiar route for Tala was less a re-enactment of a completed walk than just another chapter in its enactment. En route the mapping of her city was developing as more co-productive knowledge was being churned out between us. Using mobile narrative enactment Tala told and showed me how she made the first steps in her transition from stranger to inhabitant. She did this by walking me through her introductory route, all the time generating new knowledge by process cartography. As we walked, Tala's city was being further performed into being.

Going to church, going to town, walking the walk, were repetitive means by which place-based knowing was stamped in

So we kind of got up one Sunday and said we're going to church, and along the way we sort of look out for things that reminded us. So we did that for a few weeks and I was confident to go to church on my own

Our walking interview focused on Tala's increasingly outwardly mobile engagement with her new city. Our conversation was set along a route, selected and led by Tala. It was derived from episodes in her recent past as a newcomer to the city. After all, as Ingold argues, places do not have locations. They have histories. Through this process, strangers become inhabitants and places can be made.

3.2 Ann: corporeal images of Manchester

Ann arrived in Manchester from Romania to become a documentary filmmaking student. She engaged with her new city through the visual sense (amongst others). As a requirement of her studies she spent the first few weeks of her residence filming a

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documentary about older residents' uses of bus networks in the city, a project she devised with a group of her colleagues. She travelled the environs of Manchester on foot and bus, interviewing older people about the mobility afforded them by the concessionary travel bus pass. During the making of her film, Ann came to know Manchester by listening

I was recording the sound. When you have your headphones on and the microphone, you get to hear so many things that you generally don't hear. You get to know a place much more when you have this tool

By walking

Usually when I go to a new place, I like to just go for walks in the city. I just walked because first of all I didn't know which buses I had to take and second because I like walking around cities because that's a very good way of getting to know a place

And by observing

This bus pass gives them chance to go around the city and socialize basically, so we just decided to follow them even though we had not contributors yet. So we decided to go around the city and find bus stops and just observe people

As part of the fieldwork for the present project, Ann offered to lead me on a walking and (bus) riding tour of the locations she filmed during her introduction to the city. We conversed en (bus and walking) route. From our conversations it became clear that

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though based ostensibly on a film project, a notable feature of her place making was the embodied, multisensory nature of Ann's engagement with her new city. It was evident along our route that Ann's making of Manchester through a lens was a full-bodied, all-round sensuous practice. The notion that filmmaking is a corporeal practice has also been noted by MacDougall (2006).

Although working in a visual medium, Ann's construction of Manchester was incommensurate with the notion of vision as a sovereign sense, separate from embodied, multisensory engagement. This questions the primacy of vision in the sensorial pecking order. The anthropological archive is replete with examples of sensory engagements that do not subscribe to primacy of the ocular. Pink (2009) urges ethnographers to explore visual ethnography in relation to other senses, rather than as a singular mode of engagement. Arguably the senses are not distinct registers but are bound up with embodiment, movement through and engagement with the world:

My gaze, my touch, and all my other senses are together the powers of one and the same body integrated into one and the same action (Massey, 2005, 73)

As well as providing a route for our interview, our tour of Manchester's bus stops (Ann's living film set) yielded a series of photographs, taken by Ann with my camera (see figure 1). Participatory photography and Photo-Voice (Proudrier and Mac-Lan, 2009) have long-been recognized as vehicles for research participants to convey experiences of mobile place making. In a project that has particular resonances here, the photographer John Perivolaris (2005) presented visual accounts of migrants' recent arrivals in Spain. Photographing themselves and being photographed, his participants were simultaneously migrants, new arrivals and hosts in a novel environment. The participatory decision to

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give up my camera to Ann during our walk enhanced her status in the project, and her influence over the process of knowledge generation (Stedman, 2004, Barker, 2009)

INSERT FIGURE 1

The photographic assignment Ann embarked on during our mobile interview was to produce a ‘spatial discourse of place and self’ (Pink, 2007, 88). This strategy adhered to a common theme in this project, which is to encourage participants to model their contributions on their existing expertise. Here, Ann explains how visual elements and aesthetic considerations had a bearing on the images that made the final cut in her film

It’s geometries, lines in the frames, that mostly. I mean myself as a director I tell the cameraman what I’m interested in. I tell him I want to see that bus in the background with people waiting or I want to see people getting on and off

Whilst walking the streets, overhearing conversations and making pictures she made places whilst simultaneously searching for something to film. When we met on a bank holiday¹ afternoon in Piccadilly Gardens, fittingly Manchester’s busiest bus station, she explained to me that during those first few weeks the walking around, looking around and looking for a film, were inseparable. It is striking how entangled the film became in the routes, itineraries and mobilities that, for Ann, are habitually learned through practice

¹ We checked beforehand that the buses were still running, since they played a crucial part in our mobile interview

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Ann: I am always around Salford and Media City and Piccadilly because every time I go there I go to the city centre. I go to Piccadilly so somehow the film became embedded in my own personal itinerary.

Whilst shooting, Ann and her crew were doing the knowledge through film, though not merely through observation. They were not so much on location as *in* location, making places by doing, talking, riding, looking and learning on the go.

Being there as photographs were being taken, accompanying a filmmaker through familiar, filmed locations, took me close to Ann's construction of the city.

Accompanying a filmmaker through filmed locations revealed much about Ann's embodied, multisensory construction of place, enhancing our understanding of how she had constructed Manchester out of her corporeal practice as a filmmaker. Our walk also reminded us of the full-bodied, multisensory nature of visual engagements with place, and the intermingling of the senses.

3.3 Al: walking the simultaneous cities

Al, formerly a resident of Tunis, also engaged in a multisensory construction of her new city, Manchester, yet with a sensory preference for olfaction and taste. Al spoke fondly of Tunis, her previous home city. She recounted memories of Tunis, evoking a handful of sites in her new city that reminded her of her former home. She offered to walk me through these sites; a fruit market, a Mediterranean restaurant, a donut shop, and a retro clothes emporium were among the Mancunian locations we visited on our walking interview. Many of Al's evocations of Tunis were olfactory (Holtzman, 2008). As we wandered, smells and tastes brought memories of Tunis to the surface. En route she

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frequently noted similarities between specific personally meaningful sites in her two simultaneous cities.

Her comparisons emerged spontaneously in conversation and extended to various multisensory aspects of the sites she described. Such comparative constructions of two cities, based on recent and distant memories, suggest a relationship between heterogeneity and simultaneity in place making (Massey, 2005). Narratives of place are partial stories that are informed by experiences that emerge from trajectories between places we connect memorially and construct in simultaneity. We make connections between places both by physically traveling between them and by imaginatively and sensuously connecting our experiences in one evocative site (Nora, 1989) with those we have in another. Very often, these connections are sparked by embodied and multisensory encounters, as Al's were. This effect was brought home when the two of us visited one of her favourite haunts in Manchester; a Mediterranean restaurant

My flatmate is originally Greek. She was reminded of Tunis when she came here, because of the ambience and she smelt pitta when she first came in, so she took me here and that was my first reaction, I feel like I'm in the Mediterranean

As places are carved from lived, imagined experience, hegemonic (authorial) discourses of truth recede into multiple subjectivities. The heterogeneity of multiple narratives reminds us of the contemporaneity of place, of the 'simultaneous coexistence of others with their own trajectories and their own stories to tell' (Massey, 2006, 11). The places that emerge from relations and trajectories are not closed, static, ring-fenced wholes. They are unfinished stories with 'loose ends and missing links' (Massey, 2005, 13). For

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Massey place making narratives are always heard in the presence of other stories, space is always a sphere of contemporaneous multiplicities.

Amid the cacophony of simultaneous places, space, no longer a linear, smooth surface, is reconfigured as a 'sphere of coexistence of a multiple of trajectories' (Massey, 2005, 63). Al's stories of personally meaningful sites connecting two places established a trajectory. They were told from the ground, replete with connections that were evoked by sensuous experience integrating ambulation, olfaction, sight and sound. At a retro clothes emporium in Manchester's Northern Quarter, Al enlists an array of senses, and her own embodied experience, to evoke the byzantine feel of a Tunisian souk

Pop Boutique, which is, for the lack of a better word, an eclectic vintage shop in Manchester in the Northern Quarter, reminds me of the market place in Tunis. It's called the souk. They sell lots of leather bags here. And there's a specific shop in the medina that this reminds me of. There's a guy who sells camel leather, like camel leather bags, and shleekers, slippers. And there's that musty smell of old, cured leather and you smell that when you walk down these stairs, and it just sort of takes you back in time

Al led the walks whilst I accompanied, listened, inhaled, ate, talked and recorded. We visited places, memories and unfinished stories from her lives past, present, near and far, in Manchester and Tunis. A fruit market, a Mediterranean Restaurant, a donut café and a clothes emporium formed the Mancunian itinerary we joined up on foot, stopping along the way as emplaced, embodied, sensuous memories from Tunis established intercity connections.

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The term gustemology refers to ways in which emplaced knowledge, memory and cultural epistemologies relate to the tastes and smells of food. So many of Al's evocations of Tunisian experience in Manchester, her drawing of sensory simultaneities, had food, it's production, its consumption, it's everyday tastes and smells, at its heart. Again and again, food related visual, gustatory, olfactory memory forged connections.

Presiding over the restaurant menu, Al explained

They have a dish here called boquerones, which is a Spanish dish, but I think it's originally Moorish, because in Tunis you have it too, it's, essentially anchovies and oil. So a lot of these places have shared foods. And shared ways of eating those foods. It's quite a communal thing, you don't order one for yourself, you order for the table

At the Donut café the thought of eating Tunisian pastries was evoked as a messy, embodied experience

They don't really have doughnuts in Tunis. They're quite thin, almost like the size of like the big pretzels you get sometimes. And they're covered in sugar like the British ones are. They're very greasy and there's so much sugar that you actually have to dust it off you and you're sort of like wiping your hands for the next half hour.

As we wandered, Al's sensory engagement with aspects of her environment relating to food and its preparation literally brought home much of the simultaneity that evoked her

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previous home city of Tunis. Mancunian smells, tastes and sights of food prompted memories of Tunisia to surface again and again

At the fruit market connections were made between shopping habits, colours, fruits we could see - and those we couldn't

It's a bright yellow on the outside, like a saturated yellow. It's not as big as a watermelon, but it's much bigger than a British cantaloupe would be.

A restaurant menu provided food for thoughts about dishes that were served, plus some that weren't

The way they do the lamb, the skewered, marinated lamb, is quite similar to Tunis. They even have tagine here, which is sort of a Tunisian national dish. If it was written in French or Arabic it could almost be in Tunis

At the clothes emporium Tunisian olfaction hung in the air

There's that musty smell of old, cured leather and you smell that when you walk down these stairs, and it just sort of takes you back in time

In each example here, emplaced, embodied, sensuous memory is rendered active in the presence of the edible. This resonates with a recent surge in research into the sensory aspects of place, space, much of which has food as its centerpiece (Holtman, 2006, Pink, 2009).

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Embodiment, sensuousness and mobility harmonise the local, distant, past and present in a process of place making that is characterised by simultaneity and that supersedes mere observational powers. The memory walk method recruits the past in a reimagining of the present through emplaced, embodied, multisensory engagement. The perceptual apprehension of places by movement through them and sensory engagement with them is well documented. The emplaced nature of walking and remembering illustrates the integration of embodiment, senses, cognition and environments. Memory is activated through embodied engagement with multisensory environments.

3.4 Abbie and Tori: a reprioritization of the senses

The fourth arrival story to be included here offers an opportunity to consider the importance of sound as an integral part of place making, especially where the visual sense is compromised. Walking with Abbie, who is from Barcelona, and her guide dog, Labrador Tori, offered me another opportunity to explore the development of emplaced knowledge as it is embodied through sensory and corporeal practice. During our walking interviews along one of Abbie's preferred Mancunian routes, walking as a threesome, a reprioritization of sensory awareness was afforded to me.

Abbie and Tori were introduced to one another at a training centre for guide dogs in Michigan, U.S., seven years ago. Since then they have lived together in Barcelona, in India (during two years volunteering with visually impaired children), and now in Manchester. Each re-location has brought a new set of walks, new routes and places to be learned together. They have developed a transformative working relationship that is forged on engaged, mobile, multi-sensory experience and relationality, and, perhaps above all, trust. In such trusting, working relationships both parties act with the other in mind, hoping for reciprocation, with no intention of curbing their autonomy. Animals in

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trusting, companionable relationships do not act independently, but in relation with another. In return they are not dominated, but part of an ongoing mutuality. In working, trusting relationships, animal is empowered, human liberated, as Abbie explained here

She gave me all the freedom and it's because of her that I'm here, it's because of her that I moved out of my parents, everything

The level of trust that facilitates such autonomy depends upon developing knowledge of how the other will react, on sensitivity to tastes, moods and limits. Knowledge, not power, provides the means by which the world is opened up by the human-animal team. Accumulated knowledge and mutuality are written into the Abbie-Tori dog guide team. They know each other's limits

Abbie: You have to have rules and the dog has to know you

Researcher: Because you're looking after her as well aren't you?

Abbie: Of course yeah, you look after her, you have to make sure that she's fine

Researcher: Is she demanding?

Abbie: No

Researcher: Is that because of the way that you've trained her?

Abbie: Yeah, we adjust to each other so much. She knows when I need help I know when she needs help

Abbie and Tori walk as a six-legged assemblage for navigating and accruing emplaced knowledge. The practice of bringing one another into being and constituting places through mobile engagement is an ontological choreography (Haraway, 2003) that sees

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people/animals/technologies hook up to define each other and conjure worlds they move through. When they walk through places, they construct them together.

For one who habitually walks alone, being enlisted into a three-in-one meant that the visually compromised nature of our threesome heralded an alternate sensory order of things. Walking with Abbie and Tori I experienced first-hand what has been stated by several authors; that the primacy of the visual sense is not a universal given (Lee, 2004).

For one afternoon in Manchester, this threesome walked the walk of the Umeda forest dwellers of Papua New Guinea, whose vision is a secondarily important sense; sound occupying the primary place in their sensory hierarchy (Howes, 2005). As in the case of the Umeda, so dependent on sound, smell and proprioception for navigation and sense making, the experience of Mancunian place making thrived on an alternate sensory hierarchy; a reprioritization of the senses.

At the steps of Manchester University, a novel underfoot sensation availed itself in the form of corrugated paving slabs:

Researcher: Do you know the Student's Union?

Abbie: Yeah, I know because in front of the union there is the lines

Researcher: Ah yeah, so why are those lines there?

Abbie: To know that there are steps

Inside Abbie's former hall of residence the importance of a noisy wooden staircase was explained:

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I love the stairs in England because they're so noisy. I love to make as much noise as possible, especially going downstairs. In Spain we don't have this because it's really warm, so we have tiles

Outside a bakery, amid the smells of baked bread a mysterious rustling sound was explained:

Abbie: This is the Greggs, can you hear? Everybody loves this place, making this sound

Researcher: I guess it's because they put their food in a bag and by the time they get to the door they're making the rustling sound because they're starting to open the bag

Abbie: I do the same

At the traffic lights, by the small yellow box by the pedestrian crossing, I was afforded a revelatory tactile experience:

Abbie: Just touch here, down here. Touch it and wait

Underneath the small yellow box at the pedestrian crossing is a small cone (out of sight) protruding

Researcher: The cone, oh yeah, what is it?

Abbie: Now wait, until it goes green

The lights change, the traffic stops and the cone begins to revolve

Abbie: It's green right?

Researcher: Yeah, oh my god, how did you find out about that?

Abbie: The guide dogs people told me. It's the best system ever

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Our walk afforded a reprioritization of the senses and a first-hand experience of inter-subjectivity. Along the walk, time and time again, the multisensory, embodied nature of place making was demonstrated. This collaboration is a challenge to ocularcentric methods for researching place and space that have relied heavily on so-called participant observation, and have errantly placed vision atop the sensory hierarchy.

4. Reflections

4.1 On using participatory, embodied, sensory ethnography

The methods used during this project are diverse, rather than uniform. They have not been selected 'off the peg'. They emerged from, and were tailored from, the diverse forms of engagement that were favoured by my research participants. They were fashioned from, rather than applied to, practice in the research field.

Because of their origins in the sensory preferences, habits of mobility and expressive styles of my participants, the methods that emerged here were never going to be of a 'one size fits all' order. Rather, they were specific to the research question around which they crystallized. Nevertheless, as I hope to clarify in these closing paragraphs, during this project these participatory, embodied, sensory methods were held together in practical terms according to a small number of guiding principles. These few paragraphs offer some thoughts in regard to the defining characteristics of the assemblage of emergent methods that are gathered here under the umbrella term of participatory, embodied, sensory ethnography.

First, the senses themselves were treated as naturally entangled, rather than discrete, phenomena. Sensory ethnographic methods, by their nature, orient towards participants'

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sensory preferences. The work that emerges from encounters between researchers and participants draws upon the habitual modes of expression of those involved. Work with a picture maker is likely to yield images. Mixing with a musician is likely to produce sound. Yet we should not assume that preferences for a particular sensory mode are exclusive or discrete. As I found during this project, for example, for Ann filmmaking emerged as a corporeal practice that required an attuned ear and a willing body, as well as a keen eye for angles, frames and composition. Similarly, as Abbie demonstrated, a partially sighted place maker engages with body, ear and between bodies (for example with a canine companion) to engage with new places. For me, participatory, embodied, sensory ethnography eschews orientations towards the senses that essentialize participants as being primarily visual, auditory or embodied. Rather, sensory preferences are regarded as fluid and multiple, rather than static and singular.

Second, participatory, sensory, embodied ethnography pays attention to listening and following, rather than speaking and leading. The collaborations that emerged between myself, the ethnographer, and my participants for this project were fragile by nature, especially in its early stages. In the early stages, preliminary exchanges about how my participants might wish to engage, about what forms of work they might want to participate in, were not predicated on concrete examples or 'helpful' suggestions from me. Rather, a degree of ambiguity, vagueness, even awkward silence, provide fertile ground for the initiation of ideas in these nascent collaborative encounters. From these ambiguous moments, original ideas for routes towards knowledge, ideas for telling arrival stories, were allowed to emerge from the participant. For me it was important that the expressive essence of participatory sensory ethnography required participants to initiate the work based on their own expressive preferences and habitual modes of engagement with place, not on those of the researcher.

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Third, I am struck that participatory, embodied, sensory ethnography frequently results in the pursuit, on the part of the researcher, of unfamiliar embodied routes and practices. For me, abdicating responsibility for emergent place making projects carried with it the promise of unforeseen circumstances and unfamiliar embodied experience. The participatory, embodied, sensory ethnographer who expressly invites methods of engagement that are initiated by the other is committed to following him/her/them into the unfamiliar (if not the unknown). For example, during this project I was led into places (and place making practices) that required a reorientation of my own senses and extensions of my own habits. I came to listen, smell and feel my way around the city, along unfamiliar walking routes. Time and time again, I sampled tastes (donuts, harissa) and smells (leather, warm pitta) that I would not routinely seek out; I visited establishments (churches, fruit markets, retro clothes emporiums), traveled in ways (buses, walking) and shopped in places (*Greggs*) that would normally be beyond my habitual compass. Despite being a long time resident of the city of Manchester, I came to know it over again, on the shoulder and through the senses of my participants. As an embodied, sensory ethnographer I was obliged to construct knowledge and places through unfamiliar embodied practices that sometimes I did not relish. I was obliged to enter others' life-worlds in order to explore their diverse embodied constructions.

The preceding paragraphs are not meant as rules of engagement for other practitioners, but reflections on my own experience of establishing empathetic dialogues in participatory, sensory, embodied ethnographic practice. These reflections have emerged from the pursuit of walking routes and conversational trails that began in participants' corporeal experiences.

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4.2 On re-evaluating my own arrival story

I set out to explore arrival experiences in newcomers to a city. After walking at the shoulders of my participants for twelve months, learning their routes, hearing their stories, I underwent a process of re-familiarization with a city I had lived in for twenty years. Re-familiarization, or should I say re-orientation, visited me in my home city as I trailed along on walks through unfamiliar sensory (such as listening more than looking) and ontological worlds (such as walking as a three). I am not the first ethnographer to undergo feelings of disorientation in the field. Bewilderment goes with the fieldwork territory. Ethnography is an expression of an overt desire to get lost and feel out of place (Sontag, 1994). Yet in choosing to walk the routes of others and experience my city through their senses, I willfully staged my own re-orientation in a city I thought I knew. I came to know it in unfamiliar ways. The new sensations and routes I encountered had me reevaluating my assumptions about the sensory landscape of the city.

This reminded me that travel is not a prerequisite for the discovery of ethnographic otherness. The ethnographic landscape has changed somewhat since the days of Claude Levi-Strauss, E. E. Evans-Pritchard and Margaret Mead. There is no longer any need to up sticks in search of otherness. The search for diverse experience and otherness can, as Hartman (2007) points out, lead the contemporary ethnographer to the streets of his/her own city. During twelve months of rediscovering Salford-Manchester I repeatedly found myself arriving in an unfamiliar city.

4.3 Concluding

The research presented here has been deployed to illustrate the use of a participatory, embodied, sensory method in place-making research. The use of this method enabled

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me to gather insights about novel means of constructing a city through routine engagement in the place making narratives of five (including one canine) international new arrivals to Manchester.

For Tala, the embodied, sensory method showed how meaning was bestowed upon a city through routine ambulation (Dewsbury and Bissell, 2015) that was facilitated by a community of practice or support network (Wenger, 1998). For Ann, emplaced meaning accrued by dint of an ostensibly visual method (filmmaking) that was demonstrably both strenuously corporeal and multisensory. For Al, routes between two contemporaneous cities were built from olfactory and gustatory associations. For Abbie and Tori, the construction of Manchester evidenced a prioritization of the senses that questioned the primacy of vision in the sensorium. In each of these stories of place, knowledge is generated from embodied, sensory choices made by participants. The epistemology from which Manchester and Salford emerged during these arrival stories was itself arrived at through strenuous, persistent engagement with participants who led me to a new understanding of my own city.

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