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UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON

FACULTY OF SOCIAL AND HUMAN SCIENCES

School of Geography and Environment

Walking and Well-being: Landscape, affect, rhythm

by

Karolina Sofia Erika Ronander Doughty

Thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON

ABSTRACT

FACULTY OF SOCIAL AND HUMAN SCIENCES

GEOGRAPHY AND ENVIRONMENT

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By Karolina Sofia Erika Ronander Doughty

This thesis is an ethnographic exploration of group walking practices in the Hampshire countryside, investigating the embodied, affective and social practice of the shared walk and its relation to the individual pursuit of wellness. Responding to the growing literature in qualitative health geography using ‘therapeutic landscape’ as a conceptual framework, group walking practices are approached in this thesis from a perspective of more-than-representational theories of social practice that aims to address group dynamics and the role of social relations for the establishment of therapeutic spaces. While also drawing attention to the embodied and affective nature of experience, this thesis opens a discussion between health geography and cultural geographies on the issues of the body, mobility and collective experience. Further, the thesis aims to place the study findings within the wider cultural phenomena of ‘walking for health’ through an exploration of practices of assemblage. Deleuzian assemblage theory, both as a pragmatic analytical tool and an ontological position, offers a new approach to thinking health and place relationally, arguing for a distribution of agencies and providing a framework for tracing their emergent effects across complex networks.

The thesis finds its empirical focus in ethnographic fieldwork with five walking groups as well as individual mobile interviews. The findings discussed in the thesis firstly pertain to the significance of social relations for well-being, exploring the kinds of socialities that are produced while walking together, and arguing that the shared walk has the potential to establish a place-specific social aesthetic that can be experienced as restorative. Secondly, the rural walkscape as a therapeutic landscape is analysed as a specific outcome of place-based rhythms, implicated in the performativity and mobility of the body in the creation of a restorative place/practice. It is found that the shared walk is characterised by specific rhythmic qualities and that walking as a health practice is subject to a range of norms, regulations and performative styles.

The findings and conceptual development in this thesis contribute to an interrogation of the complex processes through which therapeutic landscapes are established, practiced and experienced. The thesis also contributes to more-than-representational geographies of embodiment, affect and landscape, which are intimately tied up in the production and performance of both wellness and place.

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DECLARATION OF AUTHORSHIP

I, Karolina Sofia Erika Ronander Doughty

declare that the thesis entitled

Walking and Well-being: Landscape, affect, rhythm

and the work presented in the thesis are both my own, and have been generated by me as the result of my own original research. I confirm that:

- this work was done wholly or mainly while in candidature for a research degree at this University;
- where any part of this thesis has previously been submitted for a degree or any other qualification at this University or any other institution, this has been clearly stated;
- where I have consulted the published work of others, this is always clearly attributed;
- where I have quoted from the work of others, the source is always given. With the exception of such quotations, this thesis is entirely my own work;
- I have acknowledged all main sources of help;
- where the thesis is based on work done by myself jointly with others, I have made clear exactly what was done by others and what I have contributed myself;
- parts of this work have been published as:
K. Ronander (2010). The Restorative Dynamic of Walking Together. *The Qualitative Researcher*, 12: pp.3-5.

Signed:

Date:.....

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Chapter 1

Walking for Health: walking and Britain's 'new' public health

'Walking is set to play a bigger role in creating a healthier nation. Described by health experts as "almost perfect exercise", walking requires no equipment or expense and is the ideal way for most people to become more active' (WfH, about us, 2009).

Introduction

'What could be more natural than a stroll in the countryside?' Tim Edensor (2000: p.81) asks in his paper on the cultural practice of walking in the British countryside; 'the air is fresh, the body realizes its sensual capacities as it strains free from the chains of urban living, and our oversocialised identities are revealed as superficial in an epiphany of self-realization'. Exploring the material and social dimensions of countryside group walking, this is a thesis about walking as a therapeutic practice. Walking is a practice that is so natural and so close to the heart of what it is to be human that it is often taken for granted or thought analytically uninteresting, however, there is a significant and growing tradition in social science research that finds its focus in the everyday and reanimates the seemingly mundane (Anderson 2004; Harrison 2000; May and Thrift 2001). If we look closer, so many different stories and desires are embodied in the simple act of putting one foot in front of the other. As Solnit (2001: p.3) writes, it is 'the most obvious and the most obscure thing in the world, this walking that wanders so readily into religion, philosophy, landscape, urban policy, anatomy, allegory, and heartbreak'. Some of these individual stories and desires are reflected in this thesis, they have been told by participants, gleaned from observation, and slowly understood through walking many miles alongside more weathered walkers. This chapter aims to begin this story by outlining the bigger picture of walking and health in Britain today and introduce the purpose and research questions that form the basis of this thesis. This short introductory chapter aims to provide a wider context to the exploration of walking practices and subjective wellbeing that will follow, through looking at some of

the 'healthy walking' initiatives that in many ways have become emblematic of the recent public health agenda in Britain.

The first section below will serve as a brief introduction, firstly to what I will continue to refer to as the 'new' public health in Britain, and secondly to the position that walking has within this contemporary landscape of health governance. Following this, the chapter looks at a selection of contemporary governmental and non-governmental campaigns focused on 'healthy walking'. The chapter concludes by introducing the aims of the study and the outline of chapters to follow.

The 'new' public health in Britain

What has been referred to as the 'new' public health (e.g. Brown and Bell 2006) is largely a shift in public health policy which reflects a number of changes to the configuration of control and responsibility in relation to the maintenance of bodily health. The contemporary public health is characterised by a politics of risk (see Rose, 2001), which is organised around the realisation that the so-called 'Western lifestyle' of physical inactivity and fatty diets is a major cause of illness and premature death (Brown and Bell, 2006). Thus, 'the current health politics consists of a range of strategies that try to identify, treat and manage or administer those individuals or groups or localities where risk is seen to be high' (Rose, 2001: p.7). A key characteristic of this 'risk thinking' which is of interest in this chapter is the focus on preventative medicine which rests on the idea of informed choice: 'every citizen must now become an active partner in the drive for health, accepting their responsibility for securing their own well-being' (Rose, 2001: p.6). In the preface to the World Health Report in 2002, the then director-general of the World Health Organisation (WHO), Gro-Harlem Brundtland, wrote that 'the world is living dangerously, either because it has little choice or it is making the wrong choices' (quoted in Brown and Bell, 2006: p.1344). This 'will to health' is a key aspect of how the new public health manages the maintenance of bodily health, and as will become increasingly clear throughout this chapter this contemporary landscape of health is governed by a transferable agenda which brings together the interests of various groups:

This new "will to health" is increasingly capitalized by enterprises ranging from the pharmaceutical companies to food retailers. And a whole range of pressure groups, campaigning organizations, self-help groups have come to occupy the space of desires, anxieties, disappointments and ailments between the will to health and the experience of its absence. Within this complex network of forces and images, the health-related aspirations and conduct of individuals is governed "at a

distance”, by shaping the ways they understand and enact their own freedom (Rose, 2001: p.6).

The ‘healthy choice’ agenda is also reflected in national health policy, exemplified by a White Paper published in 2004 entitled *Choosing Health: Making Healthy Choices Easier*. Its purpose was to set out ‘principles for supporting the public to make healthier and more informed choices in regards to their health’ (Department of Health, 2004). The promotion of physical activity is a key element of this effort. A report by Sir Liam Donaldson, Chief Medical Officer, a few months before the publication of this White paper, warns of the health risks of Britain’s ‘couch potato culture’. His report, *At Least Five a Week*, states that ‘all adults should aim to take 30 minutes of at least moderate intensity physical activity on at least five days a week’ (Department of Health, 2004: p.24). According to the report, the most appropriate activities for public health benefit are those of moderate intensity, such as walking. Walking is presented as a flexible activity that is accessible and adaptable to individual levels of fitness and therefore an excellent form of exercise for sedentary groups. The report states that ‘the easiest and most acceptable forms of physical activity are those that can be incorporated into everyday life. Examples include walking or cycling instead of travelling by car’ (Department of Health, 2004: p.29).

Walking has taken on a key position in the ‘healthy living agenda’ of the new public health for a number of reasons. Over the last two centuries walking has shifted from what was primarily a basic mode of transport to a social practice undertaken for leisure, pleasure and exercise. The quote that opens this chapter indicates the key position that walking has been given within the preventative medicine of the new public health. According to a report by the Department of Transport, walking is ‘the main option for increasing physical activity in sedentary populations’ (HMSO report quoted in Edensor, 2000: p.81). One reason for its status as an ‘almost perfect exercise’ is that it is an almost uniquely accessible form of exercise for able-bodied people. The Ramblers’ Association, Britain’s most prominent walking charity, exclaim in their promotional literature ‘almost anyone can do it, anywhere and at any time, for free!’ (Ramblers, why walking, 2009). It has been identified as an accessible form of exercise for all age groups and abilities, and especially suitable for populations who live in economically disadvantaged neighbourhoods, which are associated with less physical activity and a greater risk for being overweight or obese (see Clark and Berry et. al., 2010). It is also an activity which is easily incorporated into daily life. Furthermore, it is in its capacity to bring together the interests of a range of stakeholders that make walking particularly interesting. Several agendas can meet around the promotion of walking as a facilitator of ‘behavioural change’, such as issues surrounding health, environment, urban planning and consumption (see Clark and Berry et. al. 2010).

The Policy Context

Government reports on the nation's health, such as *Saving Lives: Our Healthier Nation* (1999), *Choosing Health* (2004), the Chief Medical Officer's report *At Least Five a Week* (2004), *Healthy Weight, Healthy Lives* (2008), *Be Active, Be Healthy* (2009) and the *Marmot Review: Fair Society, Healthy Lives* (2010) have led the way in outlining the formula for a more active and thus healthier nation. Current health inequalities in England are said to cost the NHS more than 5.5 billion pounds per year and the cost of obesity related conditions is currently around 2 billion pounds per year, and is predicted to rise to 5 billion pounds per year in 2025 (the Marmot Review, 2010). The Department of Health's response to concerns around the great cost of inactivity related illness has been to invest in a number of initiatives that aim to increase physical activity levels in risky populations. National 'healthy walking' schemes are a key part of this drive and they are shown to be 'a low cost alternative that works' (WfH, 'the cost of doing nothing', 2010). The government currently sponsors three key national initiatives that are hoped to provide impetus for the government's 'Legacy Action Plan' (LAP) target of 2 million more adults active by 2012. The plan is designed to break new ground in delivering a health legacy for the 2012 Olympic Games (Marmot Review, 2010: p.5). These three initiatives are the Government's Free Swimming Programme – aimed at children and older adults – and Change4Life – a programme aimed at helping at-risk families eat well and move more – and Walking for Health (WfH) run in partnership with Natural England.

Promoting Walking

Walking has become a key tool in health promotion within the preventative agenda of the new public health. The Walking for Health campaign (WfH), presently run by Natural England backed by the Department of Health, exemplifies two major recent shifts; firstly, walking becomes a key resource for preventative health policy, and secondly, 'health walking' enables the linking of efforts to promote engagement with the natural environment with efforts to promote physical activity. Promoting open air recreation and access to the countryside is one of the key ways that Natural England encourages understanding and enjoyment of the natural environment ('The cost of doing nothing', WfH, 2010), and thereby their agenda can meet that of the Department of Health in healthy walking promotions that combine enjoyment of the countryside with increased physical activity. This clearly points towards what Brown and Bell (2006) has termed the 'medicalization of nature', through which nature is valorised as a healthy setting; 'a micro-locale, in which a largely sedentary population might be motivated to perform techniques of self-care' (Brown and Bell, 2006: p.1349).

WfH was set up by the Countryside Agency as a national body promoting and setting the standards for led health walks in 2000, and continued under Natural England from 2006 onwards. WfH aims to encourage people to take regular short health walks of between 30 minutes and an hour and a half in their local communities, particularly sedentary people and those in relatively poor health (WfH 2009). The scheme supports delivery of health walks by primary care trusts and local authorities across England and the training of volunteer walk leaders and the recruitment of participants (see figure 1.1).

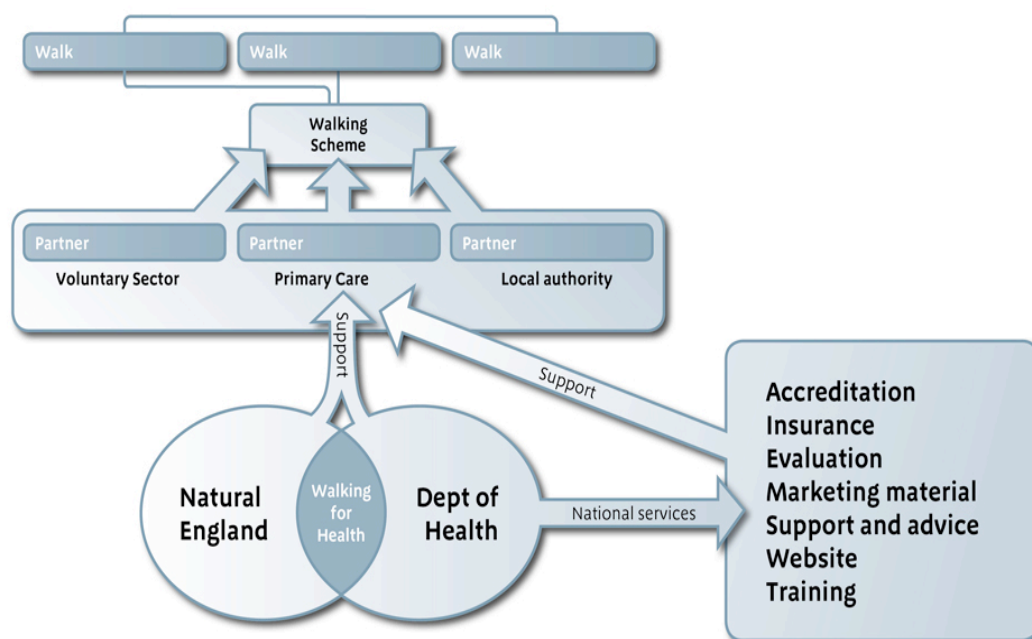


figure 1.1 The organisational structure of walking for health *source:* www.wfh.naturalengland.org.uk/resources/presentation-resource-promote-walking-for-health

Walkers are provided with a 10-week plan to help them get started in their walking practice. This strategy aims at encouraging individuals to incorporate walking into their everyday lives. The plan is set up around three motivational stages; Starting off, Getting going and Staying with it. These stages gradually move the walker towards the goal of regular brisk walking. As Brown and Bell (2006) point out, this is consistent with well-established motivational techniques. The developmental ethos is evident throughout the literatures surrounding the initiative. The introduction to the 10-week plan states ‘if you can only walk a couple of minutes to begin with before you need to rest that’s OK. Don’t overdo it on your first day. Where you have to start isn’t important - it’s where you’re going that counts!’ (WfH 2009, emphasis added). The WfH initiative clearly exemplifies the preventative medicine of the new public health, along with its ethos to support informed choices for better health.

The National Step-O-Meter Programme (NSP) is another project run by Natural England in partnership with the Department of Health, a so-called 'choosing health' project (WfH, NSP, 2009). The project aims to provide National Health Service patients who take little exercise with a 'step-o-meter' (pedometer) free of charge for a limited period. The project uses the step-o-meter as a motivational tool to increase activity levels in sedentary, hard to reach and 'at-risk' groups. The pedometer provides patients with an evidence-based technique of self-improvement and is a direct effort by the Department of Health to increase awareness of the Chief Medical Officer's recommendation of at least 30 minutes of moderate activity on at least five days a week (WfH, NSP, 2009). The programme makes step-o-meters available to patients through health care professionals, such as GPs, practice nurses and health visitors. The programme launched in 2005, when all 303 primary care trusts in England were invited to participate and each were offered 30 free Loan Packs containing 300 step-o-meters, along with a training session for 30 frontline healthcare professionals (Evaluation Report, 2009). Only 13 primary care trusts formally declined to take part, so the programme achieved a wide take-up rate.

The Department for Transport is also involved in promoting walking and funds a Walk to School or Work campaign in partnership with the charity Living Streets. This campaign encourages daily walking to work or school to 'discover more about an area, improve your fitness, protect the environment and save money' (Directgov, travel and transport, 2010). This campaign, along with the NSP initiative, encourages people to increase the amount of walking they do as part of everyday life, and suggests a short walk at lunchtime, to get off the bus or train one stop earlier and walk up flights of stairs instead of taking the lift (ibid.).

The 're-branding' of walking

The Ramblers Association is one of the major non-governmental actors involved in promoting walking and is the biggest and best known walking charity in Britain. The Ramblers Association has worked to promote walking and improve conditions for walkers for over 75 years. In early 2009, the charity announced its rebranding exercise, conceived to combat the public perception that it is an exclusive club for the so-called 'boots and thermos brigade' (The Independent, 2 March 2009). The image-change and rebranding of The Ramblers Association is part of a broader effort to shift its position in the national landscape of walking. The decision was made that the charity needed to align itself with two of the main issues du jour; 'combating obesity and reducing carbon emissions' (Ramblers, why rebrand?, 2009).

The charity has traditionally been closely associated with its campaigns for access to the countryside¹. In its early conception as the National Federation of Rambling Clubs, formed in 1905, rambling clubs enabled factory workers to venture out into the British countryside in order 'to regain good fellowship amidst the mountains and dales away from the antagonistic relations of the factory' (Hill quoted in Edensor, 2000: p.90). The activities of the rambling clubs were fuelled by a politics of common access and an inclusionary vision of a countryside that did not belong only to the 'shooting classes'. Despite these basic organisational aims still being the same, in the last twenty years or so the organisation has lost touch with its original working class target group and as a result has acquired a rather different public image, one that is more closely associated with middle-class conservatism. If asked to describe 'a rambler' most people would describe a middle-aged, middle-class man, donning a beard, a woollen hat, breeches and walking boots, and probably swinging a walking stick in one hand. Tom Franklin, who was chief executive of The Ramblers Association between 2007 and 2011 - and the driving force behind the rebranding efforts - says that this image 'is something we laugh about ourselves and are a bit embarrassed by' (Ramblers, 2009). With its recent rebranding and new logo the organisation is realigning itself with the interests of the new public health and capitalising on the newly identified central position of walking within the national health debate. Tom Franklin came to The Ramblers Association from having spent five years as chief executive for Living Streets, an urban walking charity. Previous to this, he was councillor for the London borough of Lambeth for 12 years. Therefore it is not entirely unexpected that Franklin's work with The Ramblers Association has involved an exercise in broadening the organisation's activities to include inner city initiatives like Get Walking, Keep Walking, and an active disassociation with the image that rambling is only for 'men with beards and bobble hats, marching through the countryside' (Ramblers, why rebrand?, 2009). Franklin says, 'we were set up for the walking masses, for ordinary people, and we want to be for ordinary people again' (Ramblers', rolling out the brand, 2009). These ordinary people, in Franklin's vision, are as much inhabitants of urban environments, as countryside environments, and thus the organisation needs to emphasise that walking can be enjoyed anywhere and by anyone.

¹ one of the biggest milestones in the Association's history was the passing of the Countryside Rights of Way Act in 2000, granting freedom to roam in open countryside in England and Wales. Scotland followed in 2003 with the Land Reform Act, which is one of the most progressive access regimes in Europe, granting statutory access rights to almost all land.

Get Walking, Keep Walking is a project run by The Ramblers Association in partnership with a number of City Councils across England. The project has been in place since 2006 and is aimed at sedentary populations in five deprived areas of England; Birmingham, East London, South London, Manchester and Sheffield. The scheme was piloted in South London in 2006 and 2007, and thereafter launched in Birmingham in 2007, and East London, Manchester and Sheffield in 2008. The initiative is part of the broader reconfiguration of the Ramblers' Association which led up to its image-change in March 2009, proclaiming that 'the world has changed. Walking has changed. We have changed' (Ramblers, 2009). The Get Walking, Keep Walking campaign is aimed at getting 90,000 people across the country to take up regular walking. The project is run by 12,000 volunteers across the five areas, who lead short and easy local walks. For those who do not live in one of the five areas, The Ramblers Association's website offers a 'D.I.Y pack', which includes promotional literature, a version of the 12-week walking plan, a log-book to track your progress, and a step counter. There is an explicit health objective behind the project, which is not solely aimed at promoting the core activities of The Ramblers Association but rather is designed to broaden its engagements and appeal beyond the traditional longer countryside ramble. The project tries to dismantle some of the common stereotypes of rambling and aims to encourage the sedentary populations of deprived inner city areas to start engaging in a new form of urban rambling, framed as 'the free, easy and fun way to get fit from your doorstep' (Floella Benjamin, President of The Ramblers Association, quoted in the Independent, 2 March, 2009). Much like the Walking for Health initiative, this project displays a developmental tone and contributes to a medicalisation and formalisation of walking through its four-week programme which is designed to get people walking in three steps; 1) education, 2) advocacy and 3) supported self-sufficiency.

The Ramblers are also currently developing a walking programme in partnership with the charity Action for Children, on request by the Department of Health, which specifically targets families. The Walk4Life programme works to get families walking together, engaging parents and carers as well as their children, 'making walking an integral part of family life' (Kelly and Foster, 2009: p.3). The project was piloted between May and August 2009 in Barrow-in-Furness, and a wider roll-out of the project is currently being planned.

However, despite this drive by the Ramblers to widen participation and target populations at-risk for ill-health, it is worth noting what will become clear in the methods chapter, that ethnic and socio-cultural diversity was rather lacking in these local walking groups and that during my year of fieldwork I only encountered one British Asian man and an Eastern European woman, neither of whom chose to take part in the study. Thus, the findings cannot be representative – or indeed seek to be – of

the Rambler's purported 'new landscape of walking' or the experiences of individuals who fall within the category of those at-risk of ill-health due to inactivity or obesity.

The aims of the study

The aim of the present study is to investigate the practice of led group walking in the Hampshire countryside in the context of the broad changes to the 'walking landscape' outlined in this chapter. The aims of this study are centred around three primary areas of concern; the interaction between walker and landscape, the physical practice itself, and how it is experienced by the walkers, complimented by a fourth conceptual concern with how to account for the complexity of these interactions. These areas of interest translate into the following four broad aims:

- to explore to what degree the rural Hampshire landscape is experienced by walkers as a 'therapeutic landscape' and thus if engaging with this landscape is experienced as beneficial for their subjective well-being;
- to investigate the affective dimension of group walking in order to understand how the walking group as a supportive social environment is created and maintained;
- to explore the kinds of spaces that are produced collectively by walking bodies, in order to understand the embodied dynamics of engaging with the countryside as a 'healthy space', and;
- to expand current health geography research in order to fully account for the complexity of relations between place and health

These four broad areas of investigation – landscape, sociality, movement and complexity – also provide an anchoring for the theoretical development in the thesis. Thus, the thesis also aims at providing new theoretical perspectives on engagements with so-called 'healthy settings' in order to fully account for the impact of landscape on health and the significance of bodily movement and feeling for creating spaces that support the pursuit of better health. This study is of relevance to engagements with spaces of health in human geography and related disciplines and creates a dialogue between work in health geography on the cultural dimensions of the pursuit of wellness and work in cultural geography (and beyond) on embodiment, mobility and affect. These conceptual paradigms have so far not been accounted for in any great detail in qualitative health geographies, thus this thesis aims to bridge this gap in the literature by addressing these areas explicitly in the aim to develop health geographical theory-

building and increase understanding of embodied engagements with spaces of health. Furthermore, the thesis draws on literatures outside of geography in the application of 'assemblage theory' to the conceptualisation of links in relational space. The walking group is approached as an assemblage; an emergent and open whole which includes both humans and the non-human environment.

Walking as therapeutic for whom?

In light of the aims outlined above and in the context of the current landscape of public health and how walking fits into this, it is also necessary to say something about how walking can be understood as a therapeutic practice for the particular group of participants who took part in this study. While acknowledging that walking in the countryside may not be experienced as therapeutic by other groups or individuals. The participants of the study, the recruitment process and fieldwork will be discussed in further detail in Chapter 3, but it is important to note, as I pointed out above, that although the Ramblers as an organisation is trying to shift their position to a more central one within the broader landscape of public health and environmental debate, outside of these specific campaigns to target at-risk groups in terms of both social exclusion and well-being, members who belong to these categories remain underrepresented in the main Rambler groups. In the Hampshire walking groups that I encountered and recruited my participants from, I would have been hard-pushed to challenge the middle-class, white and highly educated stereotype of the average Rambler. Why is this? Well, partly because campaigns to widen access and participation in walking have been concentrated to large urban areas and have focused on urban walking rather than the traditional countryside ramble. As such, the Hampshire groups have carried on much as before and have not attracted a wider membership than previously, in terms of ethnic or class background, or indeed reached those at-risk of ill health due to inactivity. As I will discuss later on in the thesis, there are various barriers to widening participation and the standard offering of led walks is not suited to those in very poor physical condition as the shortest walks in the standard programme are usually 5 or 6 miles long. However, the health-walk scheme, as also discussed above, specifically targets those in poorer physical health (as well as the elderly) with their programme of shorter walks. One such group was included in this study.

Access to walks

There are a number of constraints that dictate who can practically attend walks; such as access to transport, caring responsibilities, work and possibly income status. Walking in the countryside may well have the potential to be experienced as mentally and physically restorative and we can agree that walking has a positive impact on physical

health in most cases, but a crucial pre-requisite to enjoy these potential benefits is the ability to get there in the first place.

The Ramblers offer a number of walks on different days of the week, including on weekends and in the evenings during the lighter months. Many of the walk leaders take into consideration access with public transport, such as meeting at a train station. However, I found that the *20s and 30s* group in particular often organised walks which required car transport. This was also often the case for walks in the New Forest, organised by any of the groups, as getting to a location outside of a village often requires travelling by car or taking quite a long walk just to arrive at the meeting point. Bearing this in mind however, car sharing was encouraged between walking members, but this required members to get to know each other and exchange personal contact details to arrange transport. Not all members would have been comfortable to do so. One of my participants from the *20s and 30s* group did not have access to a car and therefore chose to come only to the walks that he could feasibly get to by public transport, and this was by no means every walk in the programme.

There are certainly also other things which may get in the way of attending walks, such as caring responsibilities. Another of my participants (Mary) told me a story about a group walk she had attended where one of the other walkers had made such a fuss about stopping at the pub for a quick drink half-way through the walk. It turned out that this walker was caring for a partner, who was waiting alone at home. This story highlights the difficulty for many in juggling their own well-being needs with those of others in their care, not always making a planned restorative activity a stress-free experience. Thus it is fair to say that those who were able to attend walks and participate in this research were both fortunate enough to have access to transport, in terms of both material and economic means, and in most cases did not have caring or work responsibilities that infringed on their ability to take time out for themselves.

The countryside, identity and the Rambler

Much of the 're-branding of walking' undertaken by the Ramblers meant embracing a new urban terrain for walking and de-emphasising the connection between the Ramblers as an organisation and the English countryside, as outlined above. Part of this drive is to distance the walking charity from out-dated conceptions of Englishness tied up with the construction of the countryside as a representation of nationalism (see Matless, 1998). Understanding landscape as a medium of cultural expression, meanings and values, geographers such as W.J.T. Mitchell (1994), David Matless (1998) and Stan Pickles (2004) have shown that landscape can provide a powerful setting for the construction of national identities and imaginaries. It is precisely within such a debate that the Ramblers have sought to distance themselves for troubling associations between the countryside landscape and white Englishness. However, it is

interesting to note that the focus on widening participation has been limited mainly to the urban context, and thus not really challenging the conception of the countryside as a predominantly white landscape.

My case study focused specifically on the countryside landscape in order to capture debates around 'green nature' and health within the analytic framework of therapeutic landscapes. The countryside as the setting for the case study also corresponded to an interest in exploring the place-specific health benefits of green nature espoused by current public health debates and policy.

Outline of Chapters

Following this introductory chapter, chapter 2 provides an in-depth literature review of scholarly work focused on health and place, landscape, mobility and movement and affect in human geography. The chapter outlines the research questions to be taken further in the study and broadly sets out how they will be approached. Chapter 3 introduces the case study, outlining the fieldwork that was undertaken for the project. The chapter further explores the methodological issues relevant to the project and discusses the significance of placing and context for interviews and explains the 'talking-whilst-walking' (Anderson, 2004) approach to conducting interviews which is adopted in the study. In chapter 4, the interaction between the material walkscape and the sociality of the walking group is investigated. The chapter takes an interest in exploring the social dynamics of walking together and the impact it has on the creation of the therapeutic. It draws together recent engagements with emotion, embodiment and affect with the notion of 'social aesthetics', in order to understand the relationship between the rural walkscape and the creation of 'supportive social relations' within the walking group. Carrying on the interest in the interaction between place and practice, Chapter 5 brings to attention the rhythm of movement to fully engage with the embodied interaction between walker and landscape. The chapter discusses the rhythmic characteristics of the rural walkscape and its experiential dimensions, in a discussion that draws on the work of Henri Lefebvre's notion of 'rhythmanalysis'. Finally, in chapter 6, I tie the exploration of the interaction between the material and the social together with a final chapter that explores the notion of assemblage (De Landa 2002, 2006a, 2006b), to elaborate the complexity of interactions between place and health. The chapter critiques the way that the notions of 'relationality' and 'ecology' have been invoked in recent health geographies to account for the wider contextuality of health practices and suggests that the figure of the assemblage provides a richer resource for future studies along the broad spectrum of place and health. The final chapter, 7, summarises the thesis as a whole and discusses the relevance and implications of the findings and arguments against recent work in health

geography and related disciplines. The chapter discusses future directions for research on place and health and areas which would benefit from further research.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have set out the key elements of the broader context of walking and health in Britain today, which provides a background for the study of walking practices in rural Hampshire and their impact on subjective well-being. The chapter shows that walking has become a practice surrounded by a multifunctional agenda which has captured the interests of both health and environmental interest groups. In this sense, I would like to suggest that walking has a particularly interesting position within the new landscape of health policy, as the promotion of 'walking for health' manages to become a bridge between various interest groups, such as population health and the protection of the natural environment. Walking is one of the key ways that people are encouraged to 'return to nature' as the setting for restorative practices, preventative medicine, education and community building. In the next chapter, I will outline how health geography and related disciplines have responded to what can be considered the 'healthy settings agenda' of the new public health, and discuss the ways that geographers have conceptualised the interaction between health, cultural practices and place in order to identify the ways that these understandings can be taken forward.

Chapter 2

Geographies of Health:

Exploring interactions between material and social conditions for well-being

Following on from the previous chapter which set out the broader context of walking and health in contemporary Britain, this chapter looks at the theory responses to issues of health and well-being in relation to walking practices. The chapter engages with debates on the 'placing' of health, for instance the ways that geographic scholarship has tried to make sense of the multiple outcomes and meanings that are embedded in the interactions between person and place. Such literatures include theorisations of 'sense of place' and the recent flourishing of health geographic literatures on so-called 'therapeutic landscapes' and these debates will be the focus of the first section below. The second section starts to engage with the first of what will become the three connecting themes of this thesis; landscape.

As a response to what I would suggest is an under-theorisation of landscape in health geography literatures at large, this section considers how the concept has been developed by cultural geographers, particularly from the perspective of *non-representational theory*. This section engages with the question of health only indirectly, but embraces the relevance of a thorough theorisation of the concept of landscape and place in order to investigate their impact on health.

The third section looks closer at issues of mobility. Up to this point in the chapter we will have dealt with work that theorises the therapeutic dimensions of group walking as well as the encounter between walker and the countryside landscape. This section deals with the mobile nature of that encounter, aiming to elaborate the importance placed in this thesis on understanding that movement styles interaction between walkers as well as with the landscape. Much of the discussion of movement, as a particular focus within a broader interest in mobility, draws on non-representational approaches. As we shall see, much of this thinking is aimed towards an anti-subjectivism which places its imperative towards action within a politics of *affect*. Thus the final section of this chapter engages briefly with the ways that geographers have understood the role of 'feeling' in human life.

The chapter as a whole brings together two related interests that are explored in this thesis. Firstly, an interest in how place and landscape interact with health and

secondly how embodied mobile practices (such as walking) interact with place in ways that matter for well-being. For the purposes of this chapter health is broadly defined in accordance with the World Health Organisation (WHO) definition², and as such the terms health and well-being will be used interchangeably. The thesis is in part an effort to bridge the gap between health and cultural geographies, in order to interrogate further concepts that sit at the heart of my analysis of group walking practice, such as landscape, movement and the affectual body.

Understanding the impact of place on health

This section provides a brief overview of the development of research in human geography which deals with the dynamic and multidimensional relationship between place and health. To begin with, I will outline in broad terms the emergence of health geography, as a sub-discipline which deals primarily with the *placing* of health in various ways, before moving on to a closer look at the development of the concept of 'therapeutic landscape'.

The emergence of Health Geography

Through a 're-centering' of place in concerns about public health, medical geography research has gone through something of a 'paradigm shift' since the 1980s, as it moved out of the 'shadow of medicine' and became 'reinvented as geographies of health and healing' (Kearns and Gesler cited in Smyth, 2005: p.488). Kearns (1993) argued for a cultural/humanistic refocusing of 'post-medical geographies of health', and posed that the new health geography would take as its main concern cultural geographies of wellness. A focus on 'the relationship between place and varied therapeutic processes' (Smyth, 2005: p.488) has thus been at the centre of the development of geographies of health, which has coexisted with the longer established field of medical geography. Kearns and Moon (2002: p.606) established that what is different about the 'new' health geography is 'the emergence of "place" as a framework for understanding health, the adoption of self-consciously sociocultural theoretical positions, and the quest to develop critical geographies of health'. In earlier years medical geography seemed to be of peripheral concern to the discipline at large – as famously expressed by Bentham et al. in 1991 when they wrote: '...medical geography is often a lonely discipline' (cited in Kearns and Moon, 2002: p.607) – and compromised by an internal divide between the 'twin streams' of disease ecology and

² The broadly accepted definition by the WHO (1946) states that health is 'a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity'.

health services research. However, it was increasingly recognised that important research concerns frequently defied this boundary (Moon, Gould and Jones, 1998) and connections were further made with research outside of the traditional framework of medical geography, and indeed outside the discipline altogether. These new trajectories converged under the reconceived heading of 'health geography' rather than medical geography. This did not mean, however, that research within the traditional 'twin streams' stopped, it endured alongside these 'new' concerns (Kearns and Moon, 2002).

With place as its new lead theme, medical/health geography has sought to elucidate the relations between place and wellness. Place, no longer the passive container for socio-cultural happenings, is now taken as an 'operational "living" construct which "matters"' (Kearns and Moon, 2002: p.609). Furthermore, what signified this change was a move away from a reliance on quantitative methods towards a plurality of methods including qualitative approaches, and a renewed emphasis on criticality in method and analysis. It could be argued, as Kearns and Moon (2002: p.609) do, that 'new geographies of health are, in part at least, medical geography's cultural turn'.

A series of publications marked the emergence of health geography during the decade between the mid-1980s and the mid-1990s. Two important early works, Eyles and Woods (1983) and Jones and Moon (1987), provided syntheses and developments of the contextual background that was to pave way for a health geography that was less interested in biomedical models of disease and moved closer to the concerns of mainstream geography and social science with health and healthcare. In a plea for a cultural/humanistic refocusing of 'post-medical geographies of health', Kearns (1993) posed that the new health geography would take as its main concern cultural geographies of wellness. The launching of the journal *Health and Place* in 1995 moreover confirmed the establishment of non-medicalised themes of wellness and its relationship to place. However, the apparent distancing from the concerns of Social Science and Medicine – earlier the primary journal for publications by medical geographers – did not mean that a clear divide opened up between scholarship taking place within the parallel streams of health and medical geography. In fact, Social Science and Medicine also opened up to less biomedical and more theorised work, while *Health and Place* had pronounced at the start that it planned to publish papers using traditional approaches alongside newer perspectives. This resulted in the fact that both journals became alternative outlets for similar work.

Place and Health

In developing a geography of health that emphasises the impact of the local environment on wellness, a conceptualisation of place is necessary. Geography is of

course a discipline broadly organised around an interest in spatial relationships of various kinds, so a review of theorisations of place more generally is outside of the scope of this chapter. However, it can be noted that there was a certain revival of interest in the qualitative aspects of place in the 1970s by a number of scholars (Relph 1976; Tuan 1974, 1977; Buttimer 1980; Seamon 1979) who sought to redress its reduction to mere location by geographers seeking to define the discipline as a spatial science (Relph, 2008). They took the view that

places are fusions of physical attributes, activities and significance, aspects of experience of the everyday world that can be explicated phenomenologically but are inherently inaccessible to statistical analyses (Relph, 2008: 35).

However, as humanistic approaches to human geography fell out of favour phenomenologically inspired interest in place seemed to fall into obscurity again. Until it was revived in the 1990s by, amongst others, economic geographer Doreen Massey, who proposed a large-scale view which was entirely different from the earlier humanistic conceptions of the subjective 'life-world' within which place was constructed. She argued that places 'are not so much bounded areas as open and porous networks of social relations' (Massey cited in Relph, 2008: p.35) with multiple unfixed and contested identities, and that operate across all spatial scales. Subsequent theorisations of place hint at the conceptual confusion and lack of clarity that has recently plagued the concept. Place has been defined as (cited in Relph, 2008: p.35):

'a concatenation of individuals connected through a set of contingent relationships' (Curry 1998: 48) ... 'like space and time, a social construct' (Harvey 1996: 293) ... 'as a site of "immediate agency"' (Oakes 1977) ... 'the locus of desire' (Lippard 1997: 4) ... 'proximal space' (Agarwal 2005: 109)

This confusion does not help when it comes to the task of relating health to place. Because, even though most geographers today agree that place 'matters', there is little consensus about how place should be conceptualised.

In efforts to relate place to qualitative aspects of the well-being of individuals and communities researchers have recently developed the concept of 'sense of place' to describe the varying impact that places have on subjective health. The term 'sense of place' is often used to describe the responses that individuals have to certain places, but it is not easy to define exactly what sense of place is, other than that it has something to do with the quality of the environment, a sensory immersion,

atmosphere, and attachment. Buttimer (1980) illustrates this view in a description of her childhood memories of Ireland.

... I recall the feel of grass on bare feet, the smells and sounds of various seasons, the places and times I meet friends on walks, the daily ebb and flow of milking time, meals, reading and thinking, sleeping and walking. Most of this experience is not consciously processed through my head – that is why words are so hard to find – for this place allows head and heart, body and spirit, imagination and will to become harmonized and creative (cited in DeMiglio and Williams, 2008: p.17).

Sense of place thus refers to a multisensory engagement with a place, and is considered important for emotional well-being because it speaks to the senses and our immediate feeling of wellness:

... what one can see, how it feels underfoot, the smell of the air, the sounds of bells and motorcycles, how patterns of these sensations make up the quality of places, and how that quality affects our immediate well-being, our actions, our feelings, and our understandings ... What is sensed has fundamental and pervasive effects on well-being (Lynch 1976 cited in DeMiglio and Williams, 2008: p.18).

A sense of place is at once individually perceived and a shared experience (Pred 1983). Places are of course experienced differently, and place meanings can vary widely, but nonetheless there are tenets of perceptions of place that depend on communally held values and experiences. According to The Dictionary of Human Geography (2000) sense of place is a multifaceted construct:

Originating in studies of the physical characteristics and qualities of geographical locations as appropriated in human experience and imagination, sense of place has increasingly been examined in human geography as an outcome of interconnected psychoanalytic, social and environmental processes, creating and manipulating quite flexible relations with physical place (Cosgrove cited in DeMiglio and Williams, 2008: p.19).

So how is a sense of place related to well-being more directly? Arguments vary on this account. Sense of place can be summarised as the product of the relationship between people and places, and is directly influenced by the quality of the environment. However, it is not dependent on the material aspects of the environment alone but emergent through an 'ecology of place' (Butz and Eyles 1997; Thrift 1999) where sense of place is created through a process of coming together of various environmental, social, cultural and historic factors. How this relates to subjective well-being has much to do with what a place has to offer in terms of amenities and opportunities, whether one feels safe and secure, but varies over time and in relation to societal and individual changes (Eyles, 1985; Fullilove, 2004). As Kearns and Gesler (1998, in response to Eyles 1985) point out 'place involves an interactive link between social status and material conditions and can be used to interpret a range of situated health effects that imply a link between mind, body, and society' (cited in DeMiglio and Williams, 2008: p.26).

In the response to what they argued was a lack of engagement with the variation in place meanings and their value for health outcomes, an edited volume on sense of place, health and quality of life was published in 2008 (Eyles and Williams, 2008). Scholarship in health geography (and beyond) broadly recognises that 'physical and social environments impact health, grounding risk in the complex mix of physical and social characteristics of places in and of themselves' (Eyles and Williams, 2008: p.1), but as Eyles and Williams (2008) point out, we still know little about how different aspects of these environments interact in influencing health. They argue that an examination of the subjective meanings and importance attached to place (i.e. 'sense of place') is missing from current studies of health effects of local environments. This problem partly rests on the still evident gap between health geographies and cultural geographies of person and place more broadly, but is also due to the enduring legacy of more quantitatively based research about population health which is not designed to capture the more intangible aspects of subjective well-being, such as sense of place. The lack of research that emphasises personal health practices and individualised interventions has been addressed in part by research that develops the importance of an understanding of sense of place for studies of health and quality of life (DeMiglio and Williams, 2008; Manzo, 2008; Williams and Patterson, 2008).

The enhanced mobility of recent generations and the process of globalisation means that the meaning of place has changed; 'place is and has always been a process and is, thereby, dynamic and changing' (Eyles and Williams, 2008: p.199). It is also recognised that in addition to material relations place can also be imagined and virtual. So, accounting for mobility, technology and globalisation as central drivers of change is a challenge for this literature, and how these dimensions of places interact with health is a future challenge for health geography. Efforts to understand place as a

health determinant also entails some methodological challenges, whether studies seek to examine physical health factors or dimensions of emotional or psychological health. There is scope here for both qualitative methods and quantitative instruments to capture different dimensions of health/place interaction.

One of the ways that health geographers have engaged with the direct ability of places (and the ecology of relations within them) to impact well-being is through the concept of 'therapeutic landscape'. These literatures primarily consider the varied ability of different landscapes to impact positive health outcomes, often through subjectively framed experiences of restoration and renewal. Below I will discuss this in more detail.

The concept of therapeutic landscape

Much of the work in health geography which 'recognizes sense of place as central to positive health experiences' (Eyles and Williams, 2008: p.6) has been concentrated around the concept of 'therapeutic landscape'. This section begins by exploring the early development of the concept of therapeutic landscape in the sub-discipline of health geography, exploring how geographic scholarship has dealt with questions about the potential of different environments to promote mental and physical well-being.

The concept has a considerable history in other disciplines, such as landscape architecture and more significantly environmental psychology, but Wil Gesler was the first to introduce the concept into geography in the early 1990s. Since then, therapeutic landscape has continued to be located at the centre of thinking in health geography (Williams, 2007a). Gesler's (1992; 1993) concept of the therapeutic landscape suggested that environmental, societal and individual factors could work together in certain natural or built environments to promote health and well-being. Through complex interactions between physical, mental, emotional, spiritual and environmental factors, certain landscapes can come to be understood and experienced as therapeutic. Two linked elements that underlie the therapeutic person-landscape dynamics are (following Milligan, 2003):

- a) the therapeutic effects of direct physical engagement with the environment (being in or on the landscape itself);
- b) the aesthetic and therapeutic benefits of mentally engaging with the environment (i.e. through sensory experiences and people's sense of place).

Work in environmental psychology has contributed to research on the interaction between health and place for more than two decades (e.g. Ulrich, 1979; Kaplan and Talbot, 1983; Kaplan and Kaplan, 1989; Korpela and Hartig, 1996; 2003; Cooper-

Marcus and Barnes 1999). Curiously, the recently published second volume on therapeutic landscapes edited by Alison Williams (2007) constitutes a first attempt in providing a multi-disciplinary forum for literatures on this topic, by inviting scholars working within medical anthropology and environmental psychology to contribute (e.g. Pranikoff and Low, 2007; Hoey, 2007; McLean 2007; Einwalter 2007; Collins 2007). One of the principal frameworks for researching therapeutic landscapes in environmental psychology was introduced by Stephen and Rachel Kaplan (1989). In a study of an Outward Bound-style programme they found that participants experienced 'a sense of well-being, of being renewed, of being restored' (quoted in Pranikoff and Low, 2007: p.292). Kaplan and Kaplan's theory was built around the notion that certain environments could induce the effect of *restoration*; what is known as 'attention restoration theory' is predicated on the idea that restoration occurs when people recover from 'directed attention fatigue' (Pranikoff and Low, 2007). Directed attention fatigue refers to the mental exhaustion one feels after concentrating on the same material for an extended period. Directed attention is a way for the brain to filter out unnecessary information in order to reduce confusion and aid concentration on a specific task. Thus, 'attention restoration theory' (Kaplan and Kaplan, 1989) posits that a restorative environment is one that contains four core elements: 1) being away; 2) fascination; 3) extent; and 4) compatibility. Such environments were deemed restorative because they offered a setting where the mind is liberated from the demands of everyday information flows, where self-reflection was easier and the mind was free to deal with those 'cognitive leftovers' that had not yet been dealt with (Pranikoff and Low, 2007). The work of environmental psychologists has often been quantitative in nature and has often sought to establish environmental *preferences* of individuals to determine the characteristics of the potentially therapeutic environment (e.g. van den Berg et al., 2003). Such work has included concerns about how to promote certain types of environments often experienced as restorative and has involved the practical aspects of engaging with policy-making, planning and development processes. In explorations of the therapeutic benefit of 'natural' landscapes, environmental psychologists have sought to determine variations in psycho-social stress recovery across urban and natural environments, concluding that promoting public health strategies that have a natural environment component to them may be of particular benefit to an increasingly urbanised population (Milligan and Bingley, 2007).

Whereas environmental psychologists have often produced simplistic interpretations of person-place interactions, focusing on the 'functional and visual components of the setting and have described various places merely in terms of their physical location and appearance' (Fredrickson and Anderson, 1999: p.22), in research on therapeutic landscape geographers (e.g. Gesler, 1992; 1993; Palka, 1999; Milligan

2002; Wilson, 2003; Andrews, 2004; Conradson, 2005; 2007; Milligan and Bingley 2007) have precisely sought to fully account for the role of the landscape in facilitating healing and restoration. Gesler's (1993; 1996; 1998) groundbreaking publications on the importance of landscape in promoting health and wellbeing provided a template for future research on therapeutic landscapes in geography (Williams, 2007). Gesler's research focused on traditional healing places, such as Epidauros in Greece (1993), Lourdes in France (1996) or Bath in England (1998), and through this ongoing investigation of how traditional sites of healing work to facilitate health and well-being, Gesler has informed our understanding of the attributes and characteristics that help create a healthful environment (Williams, 2007). Following Gesler's early publications, much of the literature has focused on extraordinary landscapes – places that are explicitly designed to promote care and healing (e.g. Gesler, 1993; 1996; 1998; Kearns and Barnett, 1999; Kearns and Collins, 2000; Conradson 2005; 2007). To date there have been two significant anthologies published on the subject, edited by Alison Williams (1999; 2007). Following these anthologies research on therapeutic landscape can be subdivided into three (overlapping) sections; traditional landscapes, applications for marginalized and special populations, and applications in health care sites. Explorations of what Williams characterises as traditional landscapes – in other words, landscapes that are traditionally regarded as healthful – have included historical healing sites (Gesler 1993; 1996; 1998), favourite places (Korpela and Ylen, 2007; 2009), and wilderness landscapes (Wilson 1992; Palka 1999). However, the strongest of these three themes has possibly been therapeutic sites for marginalized and special populations, where many significant publications have been made. Research has focused on various health promoting sites for different population groups, among them children's health camps (Kearns and Collins, 2000; Dunkley, 2008), gardens for the elderly (Milligan, Gatrell and Bingley, 2004), community based alcohol recovery programmes (Wilton and DeVerteuil, 2006; Wilton and DeVerteuil and Klassen, 2007), respite centres (Conradson 2005; 2007) and home for home-based caregivers (Williams 2002). Additionally there are accounts that straddle this artificial categorisation of the literature, such as impacts of woodland play for young adults (Milligan and Bingley 2007), and the health-denying effects of certain environments, like the Russian gulag (DeVerteuil and Andrews, 2007). A number of applications have taken as their focus different health care settings, such as hospital environments in the UK (Gesler, Bell and Curtis, 2004; Gesler and Curtis, 2007), long-term care facilities (Andrews and Peter 2006) and the home (Williams, 2002), including Gesler's more wide-ranging volume *Healing Places* (2003). Further, applications of the concept to cultural groups outside the West has helped expand the concept outside of its otherwise primarily anglocentric focus (Madge, 1998; Williams and Guilmette, 2001; Wilson, 2003; MacKian, 2008). There have also been contributions using literary analysis of fiction to further explore

the concept as an interpretative framework (Baer and Gesler, 2004; Tonellier and Curtis, 2005; Williams, 2007).

Recent thinking has emphasised the healing potential of everyday ordinary places, like the garden, the home and local urban landscapes (Gastaldo, Andrews and Khanlou, 2004; Wakefield and McMullan, 2005; Milligan and Bingley, 2007; Williams, 2002). Some of the recent critiques and developments of the concept have also pointed out that sites that are healing and healthful for one group of people can simultaneously be unpleasant, scary, or simply unmoving, for another group (Milligan and Bingley, 2007). This also works the other way around, in that stigmatised places that are widely regarded as 'unhealthy' can be the focus of positive images of place and hold strong affective value for residents (Wakefield and McMullan, 2005). Thus any specific place has a varied potential to be healing or therapeutic, as health-affirming and health-denying places exist in conjunction in a way that is highly dependent on local experience of place (Wakefield and McMullan, 2005). Thus, whether a place is experienced as therapeutic or not, is highly context dependent. As Conradson (2005) argues, rather than talking about therapeutic landscapes, we may be better placed to refer to therapeutic landscape *experiences*, and focus our attention on 'the key influences that affect people's perceptions of the therapeutic quality of landscapes' (Milligan and Bingley, 2007: p.809). Thus, in seeking to understand a particular therapeutic landscape experience, it is essential to pay attention to the wider relational configurations within which it occurs (Conradson, 2005). Such accounts should also give notice to both interpersonal relationship structures and the broader socio-cultural contexts within which therapeutic environments are valued and cultivated. It is not possible to give attention to the broader social networks within which individuals are embedded, without acknowledging that the therapeutic landscape experience is situated within a wider sociocultural context (Conradson, 2007). In their investigation of the potential restorative impact of woodland on young adults, Milligan and Bingley (2007) emphasise that commonly held 'healthy' environments such as forests, are differentially experienced by individuals. Milligan and Bingley (2007: p.809) make the noteworthy statement that 'we cannot accept uncritically the notion that the natural environment is therapeutic'. Indeed, this notion uncovers a distinct gap in the literature to date; the negative aspects of the 'non-therapeutic' landscape. Accounts of health-denying sites and experiences are only just beginning to be explored (e.g. DeVerteuil and Andrews, 2007). What Milligan and Bingley's (2007) findings point at, is the need to regard the therapeutic potential of nature recreation as a complex interaction of various socio-cultural and environmental factors.

This body of literature has made some important contributions to understandings of the significance of place for health. However, the therapeutic landscape experience is here considered primarily in subjective terms, and little

attention is paid to how it relates to a wider medicalised and institutionalised health discourse, and to the commercialisation of health. It is important to note that the potential health benefits of certain environments has not gone unnoticed by various interest groups including governmental and non-governmental health and environmental agencies, as we saw in chapter 1. As is becoming increasingly clear, there is a need for greater care in developing the terminology used by these literatures, as highly contested concepts such as landscape, place and space are used interchangeably without differentiation. There also seems to be little interrogation of what is meant by the 'therapeutic'. These literatures invariably situates the therapeutic as an effect of the landscape itself, dependent on subjective appropriation. Relph (1985) makes the valuable point that landscapes should not be conceived of as objects for interpretation, but as *contexts of experience*. Contexts which are complex outcomes of dimensions that are experiential, representational, imagined or emergent through embodied practice. The challenge for health geographies is to bring about an understanding of how health and well-being is emergent in and through these complex contexts of experience. These studies could also benefit on a theoretical level from complicating the conception of relationality that is becoming a dominant ontological foundation within these literatures. There has been little direct attention paid to group dynamics, even though many explorations of therapeutic landscape experiences have been based on group environments and practices. Further, they would benefit from asking more sophisticated questions about the nature of subjectivity within therapeutic encounters and how bodily interactions and engagements can be generative of therapeutic spaces. Until now there has not been much engagement by health geographers with the broad problematisation of landscape by recent cultural geography, and this is where I will turn next. The following section briefly discusses the contribution that cultural geographies can make to understandings of the mutual constitution of landscape and subjectivity.

Theories of Landscape

In this section I seek to explore how an interrogation of the concept of landscape can help health geographers extend an understanding of how certain experiences in and of landscape can come to be therapeutic. To begin I will briefly outline the broad conceptual history of landscape in human geography, before moving on to discuss the contribution by so called 'non-representational theory' which regards landscape as a set of (embodied, material, cultural and institutional) relations.

As I have already mentioned, there is a rich history of scholarship that deals with the concept of landscape, as a specific aspect of place, in human geography, and the way that landscape has been conceptualised in the discipline over the past century has shifted considerably. Much of these conceptual shifts have come from changing

conceptions of the relations between landscape and culture (Winchester, Kong and Dunn, 2003). Carl Sauer (1889-1975) cemented the concept of the 'cultural landscape' in his pioneering work *The Morphology of Landscape*, originally published in 1925. He became a key contributor to the growing understanding of landscape as 'a vast network of cultural codes' (Mitchell, 1994). For Sauer, landscape is a *cultural entity*, and he formulated what has become a classic definition of landscape as product of interactions between culture and nature; 'the cultural landscape is fashioned from a natural landscape by a cultural group. Culture is the agent, the natural area is the medium, the cultural landscape the result' (Sauer, 1938(1925): p.343). The Sauerian landscape was above all a rural landscape; where the 'morphology' of the land displayed a 'balance' between natural forms and cultural expression. The urban, built landscape seemed less important, less in harmony with notions of geography as a 'field science' with strong links to geology and botany, rather than the then emergent social sciences such as sociology and psychology (Wylie, 2007). Curiously, cultural geography at the time (or what is now sometimes referred to as 'old' or earlier cultural geography) lacked a pronounced interest in the 'inner workings' of culture, and efforts were concentrated on examining the imprint that (unique and bounded) cultures made on the land. Landscape as physical manifestation of culture made itself accessible for study as a surface space upon which cultural practices took place. Landscape was in many ways seen as the 'stage' (Darby, 2000; Cosgrove, 2003) where human dramas were played out; in other words what was witnessed was 'landscape-as-theatre' (Darby, 2000: p.14).

The emphasis Sauer placed on the role of culture in shaping the landscape – as he formulates it in a later essay 'the agency of man [*sic*] on the earth' (1956, quoted in Wylie, 2007: p.22) – later came under criticism. New conceptualisations of the relations between culture and landscape developed out of a critique of what was seen as a 'superorganic' understanding of culture implicit in the Sauerian tradition, implying that the meaning and uses of landscape was transferred from a cultural structure above and beyond the materiality of the land itself or the practices taking place upon it. The critique that Sauerian conceptions placed a deterministic force on culture in transforming nature was spearheaded by James Duncan (1980), in whose oft-cited words Sauer misguidedly afforded to culture 'ontological status and causative power' (Duncan, 1980: p.81). What Wylie (2007: p.9) calls the 'nature plus culture equals landscape' theorem in earlier cultural geography – or in other words that landscape was defined by geographers as being constituted through interactions between a set of natural conditions on one hand, and a set of cultural practices on the other – was being questioned. This critique emphasised that landscape as surface should not be conceived of as passive, but given a constitutive role in its capacity as stage and set for human life.

In the late 1970s and 1980s, many geographers started to question the dichotomous conceptualisation of culture and nature as two distinct realms of action, and argued that the distinction between the two was highly problematic (e.g. Duncan, 1980; Cosgrove and Jackson, 1987; Jackson, 1989). They opened up definitions of landscape to notions of how our understanding of nature is culturally constructed, and that the separation of culture and nature is fraught with political, ethical and moral dilemmas (Wylie, 2007: p.10). Critiques and new conceptualisations of the term 'culture' in cultural geography, eventually led to what is now sometimes referred to as the 'new cultural geography'. Cosgrove's landscape iconography, Jackson's 'cultural politics' and Duncan's literary post-structuralism all offered new directions for cultural geographers to take, but by no means presented a uniform new tradition. Yet, they did express some shared concerns. Informed by the broader 'cultural turn' in the social sciences, the work of Cosgrove, Duncan, Jackson and many others placed a much greater emphasis on power dynamics and aimed, among other things, to expose the uneven power relations underlying cultural practices. There was also a general shift in emphasis from culture as manifest through material artefacts towards a sensitivity to underlying *meanings*. Landscape was to be understood as an ideological vessel; never neutral but endowed with meanings informed by social, cultural, economic and political history, whether the landscape shows obvious signs of human manipulation or whether it is supposedly 'natural'. After the so-called 'cultural turn', when the Sauerian model of landscape as an ensemble of material forms expressive of a culture in a given geographical area was abandoned, landscape was primarily understood as a visual and representational phenomenon: as text or gaze (della Dora, 2007: pp.290-91; see also Cosgrove, 1984; Cosgrove and Daniels, 1988; Mitchell, 1994; Daniels and Cosgrove, 1989). Yet, even if landscape could be conceived of as an intensely visual concept, it is inescapably linked to its material referent, the *land-scape* (Olwig, 2002). As the argument goes, landscape is not purely an object to be observed or a text to be read, but a process and cultural practice, and perhaps even an agent of power 'that is (or frequently represents itself as) independent of human intentions' (Mitchell, 1994: p.2). In this sense, the term landscape can be thought of not only as a noun but also, and perhaps more importantly, as a verb (Mitchell, 1994; Darby, 2000). Landscape *performs* in that it is 'an instrument of cultural power', that informs cultural practice 'by which social and subjective identities are formed' (Mitchell 1994: 1-2). This notion eventually led a new generation of geographers such as Mitch Rose (2002; 2006), Hayden Lorimer (2005; 2006) and John Wylie (2002; 2006; 2007), amongst others, to explore embodied and haptic geographies of landscape and their performative aspects.

The rediscovery of landscape by the 'new cultural geography' aimed to expose the limits of previous attempts at theorising landscape as I have attempted to outline

above. In recent years a number of scholars working within the newly established tradition of *non-representational theory* have developed a neo-materialist (and perhaps 'post-constructionist') perspective on landscape which draws on the writings of philosophers such as Martin Heidegger, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, John Dewey, Gilles Deleuze and others. The work of thinkers such as Tim Ingold and Nigel Thrift inspired what may be termed a 'new generation' of geographers, such as Mitch Rose (2002; 2006), Hayden Lorimer (2005; 2006) and John Wylie (2002; 2006; 2007), Sarah Whatmore (2000; 2002), Tom Mels (1997; 1999; 2004; 2007) and Derek McCormack (2003; 2004; 2005) amongst others, to try to think the self-landscape encounter differently. Inspired by phenomenology, a number of geographers started to engage with the idea that landscape is a 'lived' phenomenon rather than a relationship that is guided by representations (Rose, 2002; Lorimer, 2005; Wylie, 2006). Notions of fusion between text, context and embodied practice is sought by these scholars, who regard the concept of 'landscape as text' as 'a limited perspectival expression of social constructivism' (Lorimer, 2005: p.85).

The critique of the constructivist paradigm was in no way limited to literatures re-thinking the concept of landscape, similar critiques have been articulated by a range of authors in the last couple of decades (e.g. Butler, 1993; Thrift, 1997; 2007 and Thrift and Dewsbury, 2000). Including critiques of constructivism and representational theories of culture in general (e.g. Agamben 1998; Ansell Pearson, 1999; Gil, 1998; Massumi, 2002). Actor Network Theory (ANT) has also contributed a great deal to reconceptualisations of subject-object relations, and the relational nature of subject formation (e.g. Latour, 1988; Latour and Porter, 1993; Law and Benchop, 1997; Law and Hassard, 1999; Whatmore, 2002).

This thesis takes theoretical inspiration from the broad tradition of *non-representational theory*, which can be regarded as an umbrella term for diverse works that seek to synthesise 'our self-evidently more-than-human, more-than-textual, multisensual worlds' (Lorimer, 2005: p.83) giving focus to performance and practice and not simply to the production of representations. Non-representational theory attends to how everyday life is practiced in a way that is open-ended and always in process, giving precedence to the nonintentional, nondiscursive, and elusive, that which is prior to cognitive thought and reflection and thus prior to any form of representation (Cadman, 2009). The contribution that non-representational theory has made in relation to the concept of landscape can be traced across three interrelated dimensions. Firstly, it has contributed to a critique of intentional subjectivity and refuted the idea that the human being, in encountering landscape, can only make it intelligible through forming a representation of it in the mind, as we have seen above. Secondly, it has provided a vocabulary of embodiment and emphasised the sensing body as the locus of experience in its union with the world, as I will outline in more

detail below. Thirdly, non-representational thinking has provided a critique, and at the same time an affirmation, of the nature of experience.

What the non-representational interpretation of experience does for our understanding of the encounter with landscape is to provide an ethics of immersive involvement, emphasising the process of becoming of both the subject and its relation to the world. To express this in a more pragmatic tones, what this means is that the landscape is not a physical entity which is apprehended by the subject from a distance, but the landscape emerges as a relation between self and world which is founded in the sensible materiality of experience. So, instead of regarding the experience of being in the landscape as founded on mental images and representations created by the mind and interpreted subjectively, experience *is* the interaction, it is not an event after the event, it does not rely on retrospective sense-making, as social constructionism would have it. This understanding of experience would mean for the notion of 'therapeutic landscape' that the experience of 'restoration' theorised by these literatures must be understood as arising from a non-cognitive, sensory engagement with the environment. Therapeutic outcomes must be seen as arising from a multiplicity of 'dynamic connections', following John Dewey, which involves all kinds of 'specific affinities, repulsions, and relative indifferencies [sic]' (Dewey cited in McCormack, 2010: p.204). Where Dewey uses the term connection, William James uses the term 'relational', a term which is perhaps more familiar to readers of recent publications in cultural geography. The notion of relationality is one of the areas where health geographies have drawn inspiration from cultural geography, and this term can be found in literatures on therapeutic landscape (e.g. Conradson, 2005).

Reconceptualising experience in this manner leaves us with questions about how to approach therapeutic experiences, conceptually and methodologically. Continuing on the discussion of non-representational approaches, I will review thinking around the concept of the body, affect and movement, as ways that cultural geographers have responded to questions about how to think experience differently, and the kinds of methodological challenges and opportunities that this entails.

The body, the subject

The body has been a popular focus for geographical research for a number of decades now. Over the last three decades in particular, cultural geographers have started to interrogate the relationship between the body and the landscape as two physical entities mutually informed through performance (della Dora, 2008). A similar concern with embodiment and performativity has been increasingly evident across the social sciences in recent years, however it is in cultural geography that the body's spatiality has been most clearly articulated. The human body has figured strongly in different areas of geographic scholarship, such as humanistic geography (Bale, 1996; Tuan,

1977, 1986), Marxist geography (Callard, 1998; Harvey, 1998), feminist geography (Longhurst, 2001; Rose, 1993) and in cultural geography (Cresswell, 2006; McCormack, 1999; Simonsen 2000). As McCormack (2008) points out, these diverse literatures have mapped, re-mapped, de-stabilised and besieged the identity and meaning of bodies. Bodies have been critically interrogated in various ways (Duncan, 1996; Nast and Pile, 1998). The importance of the presence and participation of bodies in the research encounter has also been a recurrent theme in geographical thinking around methodologies in particular (Dewsbury and Naylor, 2002; Longhurst, Ho and Johnston, 2008; Parr, 1998). Thinking around the body as a generative and expressive medium (Harrison, 2000) and of social life as layered by the perceptual, affective and kinaesthetic forces of the body (McCormack, 2007) has been a central contribution of recent non-representational theory. As we have seen, non-representational theory is a project concerned with 'practices through which we become "subjects" decentred, affective, but embodied, relational, expressive and involved with others and objects in a world continually in process' (Nash, 2000: p.655). This is what Nigel Thrift (1996; 1997; 1999) describes as a theory of practices. Indeed, as McCormack (2008) points out, the discipline has become more 'embodied' in the last two decades, and what was a topic at the extremities of the discipline is now part of its conceptual and methodological core.

Despite a considerable amount of research having been, and still being done, on bodies, as McCormack (2008) points out, there is still much we do not know about the relation between bodies and geographies. Non-representational approaches to understanding the body aims to undo the dualism of earlier conceptions, particularly those relatively recent theorisations that examine the processes through which bodies are materialised as political objects. This approach is most associated with feminist scholars such as Judith Butler. Non-representational approaches have criticised the idea of the body as a site of inscription, because as Harrison (2000: p.504) writes:

'When the body is considered as solely a site of social struggle and governance it remains something which stands in for and emanates from society; as something to be interpreted. Via the linked processes of reification and purification the configuring roles of the body have been excluded' (original emphasis).

Ignoring aspects of feeling, experience, action and performance fails to recognise the body as a 'generative and expressive medium' (Harrison, 2000: p.504, original emphasis). Regarding the body in and through performative embodiment, means that we need to ask the Spinozan question 'what can a body do?' rather than 'what does it mean?', or 'what does it stand for?', the body needs to be thought about in its

intersensory unity with a world. When Harrison (2000) writes of the body's configuring roles, he calls to attention another understanding of the body, one that regards the body not as an object, but as a medium for relations and as our human condition for action. We have learned from Merleau-Ponty's influential phenomenology of the flesh that the body is aimed at the world, directed towards it in its outreach, because as he writes, 'to move one's body is to aim at things through it; it is to allow oneself to respond to their call, which is made upon it independently of any representation' (Merleau-Ponty [1962] 2002: p.155).

John Wylie (2002; 2005; 2006) has explored themes of embodied self-landscape relations, through a reworking of Merleau-Ponty's conception of the fleshy body. In his article *Ascending Glastonbury Tor* (2002) his highly detailed narrative voice draws attention to the sensuous experience of ascending the Tor. The careful narration of the perceived changes in the landscape as he walks, as well as his own reactions to what unfolds, is an attempt to compensate for the difficulties of relaying a multi-sensual engagement in a traditionally defined discursive format. The account of his climb of the Tor aims to explore the way that our subjectivity relies on the landscape, and emerges with the bodily practices – in this case walking – that make up our experience of a particular place. He writes:

[T]he Tor does not exist merely as a 'point of view', it also is caught in the visible world, and exists within and through its depth. Those ascending the Tor do not perceive with a vision uniquely theirs the landscape unfolding around them. The landscape which sustains the Tor also sustains the climber. A double movement occurs, a folding within the landscape like the occlusion of two weather fronts, *from which* one emerges as a viewer, a seer caught up with the horizon. This reliant subjectivity emerges on the ascent and does not pre-suppose it (Wylie, 2002: p.451)

What Wylie draws attention to in this article, following Merleau-Ponty, is the non-subjective nature of vision, and what one might call the 'agency' of the landscape in seeing itself within us. He writes, '[o]n the summit vision is revealed as non-subjective, and we only recover 'ourselves' on the basis of an envelope of visibility whose dimensions exceed our subjectivities' (Wylie, 2002: p.451). Although the accounts of landscape 'as way of seeing' that were introduced above (e.g. Cosgrove, 1984; Cosgrove and Daniels, 1988; Daniels, 1993; Mitchell, 1994) contributed a useful critique of the cultural 'hegemony of the visual' through symbolic representations of landscape, what phenomenological theories offer is an alternative to conceiving the

visual as the primary 'filter' through which self-landscape relations are lived by the individual. It offers a systematic alternative based on 'an equation of landscape with human dwelling-in-the-world' (Wylie, 2007: p.153). However, Wylie takes issue with anthropologist Tim Ingold's famous 'dwelling perspective', arguing that Ingold's account shares some of the same problems as classical phenomenology; 'it shares the intentionalist sense that the lived body possesses "natural" capacities to synthesise, polarise, and organise the perceptual field' (Wylie, 2006: p.521). Thus, Wylie writes, 'there occurs in Ingold's work a partial reintroduction of the intentional subject that so much post-structural theory has sought to disassemble' (ibid.). In this sense, Ingold's work has not managed to escape the subject-centred ontology that was the hallmark of humanistic geography (and existential phenomenology), insofar as he replaces the detached 'cultural' mind with the active dwelling body assuming that 'experience is given to a pregiven subject' (Wylie, 2006: p.521).

For non-representational theory, subjectivity is much less stable, and certainly not foundational. However, there is neither a straightforward negation of the subject nor a simple re-assertment of it in non-representational thinking:

On one hand, non-representational theories [...] may be understood in terms of a much broader post-structural dislocation in which notions of subjectivity, agency and presence are untethered from their humanist anchorage within, and as the essence of, human individuality. On the other, even so, such notions do not cease to be problematic, howsoever they are questioned, dispersed and multiplied – for instance into the relational, into objects, into various subjects we might not traditionally have thought of *as* subjects (animals, machines, networks, 'natural phenomena') – and in this sense they cannot be finally resolved or somehow made to disappear completely (Wiley, 2010: p.102).

Wylie points out (2010: p.104) that non-representational theories in cultural geography were from the start decidedly Deleuzian in tone (e.g. Dewsbury, 2000; Thrift and Dewsbury, 2000; McCormack, 2002). Subjectivity in Deleuze's vitalist philosophy was closely intertwined with creativity, invention, experimentation, connectivity and vitality. As such, an understanding of subjectivity following Deleuze is one that emphasises becoming, transformation, of rhizomes, assemblages and folds (Wylie, 2010: p.104). This is a philosophy of:

incessant non-personal, pre-personal and trans-personal relations of becoming, currents of intensity and affectivities – a world which, in its ongoing creative evolution, refuses to ever really settle down into more familiar patterns of subject and object, animate and inanimate, cause and effect (Wylie, 2010: p.105).

There are a number of ways in which subjectivity has been dealt with by non-representational theories, all having in common the move away from the discursively constructed subject. One approach, which has echoes in broader cultural studies, has understood subjectivity as something that is practiced and performed in everyday life. Another approach has placed subjectivity within relations, networks and assemblages, finding its language in wider philosophical, anthropological and sociological debates, and being inspired by approaches such as Actor-Network-Theory. Another response influenced by Deleuzian theory has been to locate subjectivity and creativity within the circulation of affect (e.g. Bennett, 2001; Massumi, 2002; McCormack, 2002; Anderson and Harrison, 2006; Bissell, 2008, 2010). The affective ‘stance’ is clarified by Dewsbury et al. (cited in Wylie, 2010: p.105), stating that ‘affects ... are that through which subjects and objects emerge and become possible’. Subjectivity arises within relations with other subjects and objects which are communicated by bodily movement, sensation, and the emotional atmosphere. Wylie, in his work on walking the South West Coast Path (2005) drew on such a conception of the processual affectivity and transformative potential inherent in the emergence of subjectivities through the engagement of the body in the world.

There is another thread of scholarship emerging within non-representational theory, which contrasts with the ‘evental’ and emergent dimensions of the Deleuzian approach. This move towards absence, passivity and responsibility is summarised by Harrison’s (2007) critique of the relational; ‘in the proliferation of biophilosophy, the unstoppable materialisation of actor networks and constructivist totalisations of the social or the cultural, few have been asking about breaks and gaps, interruptions and intervals, ceasuras and tears’ (cited in Wylie, 2010: p.107). Other non-representational thinkers (e.g. Wylie, 2009) have likewise explored themes that re-engage with philosophies of being in ways which have become known as ‘postphenomenology’, drawing on amongst others, Jacques Derrida, Jean-Luc Nancy and Maurice Blanchot (Wylie, 2010), drawing out notions of absence, severance and erasure. Derrida famously places the category of being under erasure: ~~being~~. There is no complete, coherent or self-present subject who speaks, acts and senses (*ibid.* 105). Issues of presence/absence, haunting and erasure is present also in geographies of landscape, memory and materiality outside of the non-representational agenda (e.g. Till, 2005;

Edensor 2005; De Silvey, 2006). Even if these explorations have not taken Derrida's theory as far as Wylie (2010) does, in thinking the subject as *ghost*; our dwelling-in-the-world is displaced and haunted, our subjectivity is neither fully present or completely absent.

What this Derridean argument does, is complicate the tropes of connectivity which have been dominant in non-representational theory. It calls to attention that distance, rupture and absence is *also* simultaneously implicated in the process of the creation of the subject. A subject which is emergent, affective and ghostly.

To affect and be affected

One question that has been resurgent in critiques of non-representational approaches to the study of social life is 'how does one apprehend the body as a source of political thinking without placing primacy upon representation, when representation so often provides the political frame within which bodies are defined and contested – conceptually, aesthetically, and critically?' (McCormack, 2007: pp.816-17). To claim that bodies are more-than-representational (Lorimer, 2005) can appear to undermine much of the political purchase of theory, 'how can one apprehend the political force of bodies when the stuff of which they consist always threatens to exceed the capacities and categories of cognitive thinking?' (McCormack, 2007: p.817). These questions have been approached in a number of ways, but central to the most provocative and powerful arguments is a rethinking of political life through the concept of *affect*.

Affect, the way the term is commonly used in cultural geographies, refers to the pre-personal capacity for bodies to be affected by, and in turn affect, other bodies. The capacity for affecting and being affected is what determines what a body is and can do (Cadman, 2009: p.1). As Brian Massumi defines it (in Deleuze and Guattari 1988: xvi), affect is 'a pre-personal intensity corresponding to the passage from one experiential state to another and implying an augmentation or diminution of that body's capacity to act'. There has been a preference in non-representational approaches for the concept of affect rather than emotion, which has differentiated this literature from the recent establishment of the field of emotional geographies (see Davidson, Bondi and Smith, 2005). Emotional geographies have tended to focus on personal narratives of emotion, such as fear, depression, love and so on, whereas non-representational theories have focused on affect which is prior to any nameable emotional state (Cadman, 2009: p.3). This is not a strict difference, however, there are examples of work that crosses the boundary between emotions and pre-personal affects in work both from the perspective of emotional geographies and non-representational theory, and not all literatures make a careful distinction between the two. The first book published on emotional geographies (Davidson, Bondi and Smith 2005), however, focused almost exclusively on subjective narratives of emotions in

research related to health geographies (Morris and Thomas, 2005; Collis, 2005; Milligan and Bingley, 2005; Parr, Philo and Burns, 2005; Conradson 2005b), the one exception is a chapter on the affective power of therapeutic touch (Paterson, 2005).

The way that Nigel Thrift (2007) describes affect is perhaps exemplary of how it is approached by non-representational theory in general. He refers to affect as the 'roiling maelstrom' (2007: p.171) underlying all (social, material) relations and which gives life its vital energy. Rather than being concerned with individualised emotions, Thrift is interested in 'broad tendencies' and 'lines of force' (2007: p.175). His approach to thinking affect, along with most of the core non-representational thinkers in human geography today, is inspired firstly by Spinoza and secondly by Deleuze's ethological reinterpretation of Spinoza's philosophy. The Spinozan approach to affect is only one out of several in the human sciences over the last century (see Thrift, 2007 for a review), but perhaps the most commonly drawn upon by cultural geographers. Spinoza was a monist, which meant that he opposed the Cartesian separation of body and mind, and instead posed that both were part of the same substance. For Spinoza, thinking and doing were unfolding simultaneously, and they were the same thing expressed in different registers; 'this must mean that knowing proceeds in parallel with the body's physical encounters, out of interaction' (Thrift, 2007: 178). The notion of encounter is important for this approach, which sees affect as 'the property of the active outcome of an encounter' (Thrift 2008: 178). The way that affect is seen to manifest itself, or 'materialise' if you will, is through its capacity to affect the ability of the body and mind to act, either increasing or decreasing the ability for action. Spinoza (quoted in Thrift 2009: p.178) wrote:

By EMOTION (affectus) I understand the modifications of the body by which the power of action of the body is increased or diminished, aided or restrained, and at the same time the idea of these modifications.

Affect is attached to action and encounter with other humans or non-humans. The notion of relationality is important, as Thrift (2007: p.179) explains, '[affects] occur in an encounter between manifold beings, and the outcome of each encounter depends upon what forms of composition these beings are able to enter in to'. This notion of relationality has many echoes in contemporary social science, and regularly appears in work in human geography. This work is often influenced by Gilles Deleuze, and following him, Brian Massumi. Massumi (quoted in Thrift 2007: p.180) sets out the way that affect is always emergent and actualised in relationships;

Affect is autonomous to the degree to which it escapes confinement in the particular body whose vitality, or potential for interaction, it is. Formed, qualified, situated perceptions and cognitions fulfilling functions of actual connection or blockage are the capture and closure of affect. [...] Actually existing, structured things live in and through that which escapes them. Their autonomy is the autonomy of affect.

To return to the questions at the start of this section, affect has a particular bearing on how the political force of the body and its potential can be understood. The 'engineering of affect' can be traced through for example military trainings like drill that condition the body to overcome fear in battle, or the way that politicians perform emotions as an index of credibility (see for example Massumi 2002 on Ronald Reagan). Through what has been called the 'affective turn' (Clough and Halley, 2007) in critical and social theory in recent decades, writers have turned to the concept of affect in order to theorise the capacities of bodies to act, engage and connect, not only with other bodies but also in new configurations with objects and technologies. This 'turn' (if it can be conceived as such) broadly refers to a shift in social theory;

from psychoanalytically informed criticism of subject identity, representation, and trauma to an engagement with information and affect; from privileging the organic body to exploring nonorganic life; from the presumption of equilibrium-seeking closed systems to engaging the complexity of open systems under far-from-equilibrium conditions of metastability; from focusing on an economy of production and consumption to focusing on the economic circulation of preindividual bodily capacities or affects in the domain of biopolitical control (Clough and Halley, 2007: p.2).

The task for many non-representational theorists in recent years has been to show that non-representational theory was '*always already* political' (Wylie, 2010: p.100 original emphasis), and that beginning to pay attention to the transmission and generation of affect in different environments and situations can offer alternative explanations for social behaviour.

What does the notion of affect mean for the study of therapeutic landscapes or group practices that generate therapeutic spaces? Well, it uncovers complex dynamics and mechanisms that are emergent in relations between bodies and environment. It calls for an explanation of how affect 'leaks' (Stewart, 2007) from one body to another,

i.e. 'the emotions of two are not the same as the emotions of one plus one' (Brennan, 2007: p.51), and the impact of individual 'affective histories' that are brought into interpersonal relationships. It enables us to think differently the relationship between perception and sensation. As Paterson (2005) points out, affect often works antagonistically to our habituated mode of perception as we go about our everyday life; 'it allows something to stand apart, to obtrude, to reach out and touch us. It is to disrupt habituated perception through the force of altered juxtaposed or disordered sensations' (Paterson, 2005: p.164). The disruptive power of affect has implications for how we theorise the therapeutic encounter, as it forces us to try to capture the transfer of affectual energies that may play a part in jolting individuals to see and feel differently. After all, it is the 'transformative power' (Paterson, 2005: p.165) of the therapeutic encounter that is at the heart of what we seek to understand.

Moving bodies

Above, I briefly reviewed non-representational theory and its approaches to the body and the affective play between bodies that constitute their vitality and force. This section takes as its focus a related bodily register; movement. Brian Massumi opens his *Parables for the virtual* with the following oft-quoted paragraph;

When I think of my body and ask what it does to earn that name, two things stand out. It *moves*. It *feels*. In fact, it does both at the same time. It moves as it feels, and it feels itself moving. Can we think a body without this: an intrinsic connection between movement and sensation whereby each immediately summons the other? (2002: p.1).

This section explores briefly how movement, and in broad terms mobility, has been conceptualised in cultural geography and related disciplines, to consider in the end how movement as a necessarily inseparable dimension of sensate being is another area that has met inadequate attention in studies of therapeutic practices and spaces. The section will start by providing a broad review of the concept of mobility, and what has been termed social science's mobility turn (Cresswell, 2006: pp.ix-x). Thereafter focus on a non-representational approach to moving bodies, and finally explore the relevance of paying attention to movement for studies of health and well-being.

A critique that could be levied at earlier theorisations of landscape prior to non-representational approaches was that their conception of landscape was concerned primarily with cultures of identity (e.g. Mitchell 1994) and dwelling (Ingold 1999), which led issues of mobility to be ignored. Mobility was consigned to scholars who took the city, and modern industrial society, as their focal point (Oakes & Price

2008). It could be argued that there was a dichotomy in human geography research between 'mobility-modernity' and 'dwelling-tradition' (Oakes and Price, 2008), where scholars interested in the concept of landscape focused on the rural, the pre-industrial and often fixed in place; 'culture was seen as "growing", organically, out of the soil, like a plant ... The processes that uprooted people from these organic cultural regions could not help but be viewed, in this context, as disruptive' (Oakes and Price, 2008: p.307). However, increasingly, scholars in and beyond human geography have started to recognise that mobility and dwelling are not binary opposites, or distinct ways of being, but fundamentally intertwined. As a precursor to later debates, Edward Casey writes (1993: p.274), 'the inherent plasticity and porosity of place itself, its nonconfinement to precise spatial or temporal parameters, its continual capacity to overflow (and sometimes to undermine) these limits ... provide the changing but indispensable material medium of journeys, furnishing way stations as well as origins and destinations of these same journeys'. Mobility, it can be conceded, is an important part of dwelling. Since 1996, mobility has increasingly emerged as an important cross-disciplinary research agenda, often referred to as the 'mobility turn' or the 'new mobilities paradigm' (Cresswell 2006: pp.ix-x; Urry, 2007). This recent upswing in research that focuses on the mobile dimension of sociospatial life is a reaction to the 'a-mobile' (Sheller and Urry, 2006: p.208) tendencies of much of past social science, which tended to ignore or trivialise the role of movement in social, cultural and political manifestations. These issues were seen as explicable by other, more causally powerful, processes (Sheller and Urry *ibid.*). The new research agenda that has developed around the issue of mobility broadly emphasises that 'all places are tied into at least thin networks of connections that stretch beyond each such place and mean that nowhere can be an "island"' (Sheller and Urry, 2006: p.209).

An interest in issues of mobility has been evident for a couple of decades in a broad social science literature that deals with different types of global flows, such as flows of information networks (Castells, 1996), transnational dimensions of migration (Sassen, 1999) or in relation to proximity and difference (Appadurai, 1996). The 'mobility turn' in geography and related disciplines however, has meant that scholars are now interested in the *experience* of different mobilities. This focus has bridged a number of traditionally separate areas of research with social studies, such as, for example, transport research. There are now mobility scholars who engage with the ways that the body interacts with various technologies of transport, such as explorations of the 'passenger body' of train travel (Bissell, 2010), the 'aerial body' of air travel (Adey, 2010) and experiences of driving in the city (Thrift, 2004). As transport studies have been enriched by accounts that emphasise the qualitative dimension of travel and movement, the field has started to interrogate its traditional methods which were representationally and quantitatively oriented. A recently

published book on mobile methodologies emphasise qualitative and mixed methodologies as well as participatory reflexivity (Fincham, McGuinness and Murray 2010). Others engage with different spaces of movement, such as the construction of places through cultural practices of mobility (Barenholdt and Granås 2009), or in how movement is socially produced and made meaningful within certain historical and geographical contexts (e.g. Cresswell, 2006; Urry, 2000), or the different ways that bodies move which is generative of different kinds of spaces (McCormack, 2008). These latter approaches to mobility draw heavily on recent theoretical and empirical developments in cultural geography, especially non-representational theory. It is above all sets of literatures that engage with movement at the site of the body that is of interest here. The relevance of mobility studies for this thesis is focused around how different types of bodily movement can be understood within the wider geography of health and secondly how movement of the body affects the subjective experience of walking and interacting with the landscape, and others in it, in ways that can be considered therapeutic. The subsection below will focus on how the concept of mobility has been utilised by geographers and others who take the movement of the body and different spaces of movement as their primary object of analysis.

Spaces of movement

How is the moving body implicated and creative of different spaces? This is a central concern for geographers and others who seek to investigate different spatial practices and performances. If we ask the basic question ‘what do bodies do?’, the intuitive answer is that bodies move: they walk, crawl, run, stumble, reach, embrace, push, grab, gesture and so on. But as McCormack points out (2008: p.1823), they do not only move physically, they also move in other ways: affectively, kinaesthetically, imaginatively, collectively, aesthetically, socially, culturally and politically. In moving in all these ways, bodies can ‘produce’ or generate spaces (see also Lefebvre, [1974]1991; Gil, 2006). That is, ‘the quality of moving bodies contributes to the qualities of the spaces in which these bodies move’, or, put differently, ‘spaces *are* - at least in part - as moving bodies *do*’ (McCormack, 2008: p.1823, original emphasis). The presence of bodies in a space transforms the space physically, but also affectively, imaginatively, socially and sonically. For example, a forest trail without a group of walkers is a different space than *with* the group of walkers transforming the trail they are following and the forest that embraces them into the very ‘stuff’ of their practice and experience. In dialogue, the meeting of body and landscape transforms both. John Urry (2005) draws on Kevin Hetherington’s (1997) notion of place as a ‘place of movement’, in his argument that place is not ‘something that stays in one location but move around within networks of agents, humans and non-humans. Places are about relationships, about the placings of materials and the system of difference that they

perform', which means that places are not 'fixed only through subjects and their uniquely human meanings and interactions' (Urry, 2005: p.80). He argues that places depend upon movement, even the sleepiest English seaside resort shows the accumulated imprint of the countless journeys that constitute the everyday practices in this place. Urry (2005: p.81) here argues that 'the language of landscape is [...] a language of mobility'.

The generative relation between moving bodies and spaces is what drives my interest in mobility in this thesis. This has been explored in a range of contexts previously, for example in performance art (Abrahamsson and Abrahamsson 2007), consumption (Colls, 2004), driving (Thrift, 2004), disability (Hansen and Philo, 2007), mental health (Parr, 1998), sport and leisure (Andrew et al. 2005; McCormack 2008, 1999; Spinney, 2006), tourism (Saldanha, 2006) and work and employment (Crang, 1994). Closer to our current interest however, is the way that practices that engage the capacities of moving bodies in ways that make and remake spaces (Dewsbury, 2000; McCormack 2008; Wylie 2005).

Thrift (1997, 2000) used dance to investigate the process of thinking through the body and complicate questions of representation, however, his approach was criticised by a number of scholars who even though they were sympathetic to his effort were cautious about the ability of non-representational theory to adequately capture the social, cultural and spatial contexts of dance practices and dancers' bodies (Nash 2000; Gagen, 2004; Revill, 2004; Cresswell, 2006). However, those who follow Thrift argue, as McCormack (2008: p.1825) does, that the political context of dance and choreography 'does not foreclose the conceptual or political through which we might understand the spaces of which dancing or moving bodies are potentially generative'. McCormack (2008: p.1831) argues that to undertake geographical research into moving bodies is not only to think about these bodies, but to think with and through the spaces of which these bodies are creative. He points to the great potential in thinking with moving bodies and the need for further work to embrace the conceptual, empirical and political challenges and opportunities afforded by paying analytical attention to the ways that rhythms, movements and affects emerge and circulate in different environments.

Non-representational approaches to mobility emphasise the importance of mobility not only as a defining feature of contemporary everyday geographies but also in its capacity to transform social scientific thought. Massumi (2002) states at the start of *Parables* that we need to explore the implications for cultural theory of understanding movement and sensation as catalysts of change. Cultural theory has tended to bracket out the (unmediated) connection between movement/sensation and change and instead focused on ideological mechanisms and the role of culture as a 'mediator' of power and systemic structuring (Massumi, 2002). To complicate this

understanding of causality is to shake up some of the cornerstones of cultural and critical theory over a number of decades.

When it comes to issues of health and well-being, giving attention to active movement (in conjunction with affect and sensation) can highlight the kinaesthetic sense of movement (Paterson, 2005) which can provide insights in studies of therapeutic environments, relationships and exchanges.

The moving body and well-being

Health, as we have seen above, is increasingly investigated in relation to various geographic determinants which have a clear mobility dimension, such as access to health care, supermarkets, leisure centres, outdoor recreation areas and so on. Even if health geographers rarely frame their investigations directly in relation to the broader literature on mobility in the social sciences, concerns around health inequalities connect with issues of access to transport and mobility as transport-related social exclusion (see Ohnmacht, Maksim and Bergman 2010) has an impact on both health behaviours and access to health services. Issues around mobility have increasingly taken centre stage not only in academia, but also in many policy agendas. As Urry (2007: 6) points out:

Issues of movement, of too little movement for some or too much for others or of the wrong sort or at the wrong time, are it seems central to many people's lives and to the operations of many small and large public, private and non-governmental organizations. From SARS to plane crashes, from airport expansion controversies to SMS texting, from slave trading to global terrorism, from obesity caused by the "school run" to oil wars in the Middle East.

As we saw in the introduction, too little movement is a central concern for contemporary health policy. People's lack of active bodily movement is causing a so called 'obesity epidemic' that is threatening public health and costing the government billions of pounds. Mobility is important from a public health point of view because not only is the mobility of populations of concern but there is also a growing interest in how living conditions stimulate everyday movement as well as occasional travel. Stressful living conditions may lead to travel motivated by escape rather than attraction (Sager, 2008), for example, which is where public health intersects with planning debates. Personal mobilities surrounding various health practices may well be centrally motivated by escape from obligations, routines, distress, or tensions at home

or at work (Sager, 2008), this is something that ties in neatly with studies of the therapeutic benefit of retreat environments (e.g. Conradson, 2005).

Health geographic accounts have often referred to the mobile dimension of health inequality in particular as an issue of access to services. When it comes to literatures concerned with the qualitative spectrum of health, such as therapeutic landscape studies, mobility is often neglected as an analytical category, even if movement is often central to these studies in various ways. Investigations of therapeutic landscapes have often been place-specific, exploring questions such as 'how does this particular setting affect health in positive or negative ways?', and this approach has been applied to various places – such as traditional healing places, retreat centres, forests, hospitals, the home, the garden and so on – and the relations within them. The way that movement has been dealt with in these literatures is often indirect. A recent example is Cheryl Morse Dunkley, who argues in an ethnographic study of a therapeutic camping programme for troubled youth in Vermont that 'rather than searching for elements of health in a static landscape, we may do better to catch glimpses of health-giving interactions in a moving taskscape' (2008: p.95). Following Ingold's (1993) conception of the 'taskscape' she argues that therapeutic outcomes are not inspired by the landscape itself but by the relations and practices that are carried out there.

Another study that draws some attention to bodily movement, is Anne-Cecile Hoyes (2007) examination of the globalisation of yoga and the production of yogic spaces as therapeutic landscapes. She looks at both the mobility of yoga practices across the world and the mobility of Western yoga teachers, who are often trained in India. However, her focus is on the globalising of yoga practices and not on the therapeutic potential of movement itself. It must be said that her analysis of yoga practices misses the opportunity to develop an analysis of how bodily yoga techniques generate spaces of physical, mental and emotional healing. On the whole, there seems to be a serious lack of engagement with the qualitative dimensions of bodily movement in health geographical research.

Research Questions

This review chapter has investigated the various ways that geographers and others have conceptualised the rich 'fabric' of sociospatial life. Guided by an interest in walking practice and well-being, this review chapter has focused on how we can understand how the interaction between walking bodies and place can be creative of therapeutic geographies. The introductory chapter outlined broadly how walking is implicated in the contemporary rhetoric of health, and this chapter is a response to how we can make sense of this conceptually. After this review, we are better equipped to see which gaps need to be addressed in qualitative health research. For example,

health geographical research could be enriched by the recent work carried out in cultural geography and beyond on the embodied and affected nature of human life, as well as understanding the more-than-human networks that are imbricated in various health outcomes.

There has been little engagement with affective exchange in therapeutic encounters, and to boot there has been little direct exploration of group environments in therapeutic landscape studies. Furthermore, an understanding of how collectively moving bodies can collaboratively create therapeutic spaces would also enrich these studies' understanding of the complex relations between place and practice in constituting therapeutic geographies. Beginning to overcome some of these gaps is what will drive the conceptual and empirical approach in this thesis.

The basic objective of the thesis is to explore the potential of organised group walking to enhance subjective well-being. This overall objective has led, in light of previous research and identifying areas needing further investigation, to a number of specific research questions. These research questions, have been grouped according to three interrelated themes; landscape, affect and movement. These themes correspond to the intrinsic connection between place, sensation (Massumi, 2002) and movement which has arguably been inadequately theorised in studies of therapeutic landscapes to date. Firstly, under the theme of landscape, the project will investigate the following questions:

- To what degree does the countryside landscape become inscribed with desires of wellness and restoration?
- What role does the material landscape play in the creation of walking as a 'therapeutic' practice (in the widest sense of the word)?
- How does the materiality of the landscape interact with the sociality of the walking group?

Secondly, asking of the social dynamics of walking together:

- How is a supportive social environment created and maintained in the walking group?
- How are individual emotional needs managed and met in the group setting?
- What are the characteristics of the affective atmosphere of the walking group?

On the theme of bodily movement and rhythm as an outcome of the embodied encounter between walker and landscape, the study asks:

- How are walking bodies collectively generative and creative of 'therapeutic' spaces?
- How can we conceptualise the rhythmic dimension of walking together in the countryside?
- How is movement and rhythm styled and managed by the walkers themselves and by wider conventions surrounding walking for health?

In order to best answer these questions, a dialogue between health geography and cultural geography has to be created, where the multisensory, affectual and processual dimensions of practice can come to the fore.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have aimed to provide a brief review of literatures in human geography (and related fields) that deal with geographies of health in various ways. I started the chapter by looking at the emerging field of studies that examine a sense of place as a health determinant. These studies, Eyles and Williams (2008) suggest are initially best placed to explore negative impacts on health where a positive sense of place is missing. The studies in their edited volume however examined a range of scenarios where the health of individuals and populations is determined within multifaceted relationships to place. Secondly, I examined literatures in health geography around the concept of therapeutic landscape, which deal primarily with positive health outcomes through studies of how restoration is mobilised in a range of variously experienced 'healthy settings'. Thirdly, I discussed the contribution of recent cultural geographies of the relation between body and landscape, broadly characterised as 'non-representational theory'. This development is indicative of a broader interest in less unproblematic accounts of relations between the social and the material (e.g. Haraway, 2007; Harman, 2005; Ingold, 2007; Thrift 1999, 2008). These literatures have taken a number of different avenues and important work has been done on dimensions that have traditionally been subsumed in social science research, such as affect, movement and emotion. The task for scholarship within the therapeutic landscape theme is to fully account for the 'emotional topographies' that have been made visible through work that emphasises the affective and emotional in social-material and person-place relations (e.g. Milton, 2002; McCormack 2003; Bondi, 2005; Anderson, 2006; Harrison 2007, Stewart 2007). Conradson (2007) argues that the experience of stillness is facilitated by the therapeutic landscape may function as a

portal to new modalities of feeling. The challenge for future research is to develop a psychosocial model that gives focus to how particular environments may produce or support new affective states and how these impact on subjective well-being. The final section explored the 'new mobilities paradigm' and cultural geographical thinking around issues of movement. The section showed that bodily practices can extend geographical thinking by reminding us that 'ways of moving are ways of thinking' (Sklar cited in McCormack, 2008: p.1825). That the movement of bodies can be attended to in order to interrogate the 'lived' nature of space and to make sense of the fleshy, affective, experiential qualities of movement.

Non-representational accounts open up mutually constitutive worlds of engagement between landscape and self, which can inform research into the therapeutic potential of different landscapes. At the very least, health geographies can enrich their understanding of the landscape-encounter by addressing the problematisation of landscape in recent cultural geography. However, as I mentioned earlier, the conflation of landscape and place or space or environment, is a problem in therapeutic landscape literatures. There needs to be a more careful interrogation of the kinds of relationships between subject and world that may result in a restorative experience. Landscape is ultimately a relationship between subject and world that is not coterminous with place or space, and research into healing experiences may need to reconsider the use of the landscape term as its specificity is a challenge that otherwise needs to be met. Davidson and Parr (2007: p.97) use the term 'therapeutic geographies' instead, to better account for 'the range of spaces, places and localities which might be enrolled in the relational healing experience'. And perhaps it would be advisable if the field was renamed as therapeutic geographies, to escape the problematic of not distinguishing between the conceptually separate terms landscape and place. This would further allow literatures on therapeutic landscape and the emerging field studying the health dimensions of sense of place to contribute to the shared agenda of situating health.

Chapter 3

Walking Together:

A Methodology

the rhythm of walking generates a rhythm of thinking, and the passage through a landscape echoes or stimulates the passage through a series of thoughts. This creates an odd consonance between internal and external passage, one that suggests that the mind is also a landscape of sorts and that walking is one way to traverse it. A new thought often seems like a feature of the landscape that was there all along, as though thinking were travelling rather than making. (Solnit, 2000: p.5)

If the previous chapter was a review of how scholars ‘talk the talk’, this chapter takes an interest in how we can harness these interests in the field, how we can *walk* the talk, so to speak. I let a quote from Solnit (2000) open this chapter, because it points us nicely towards three interrelated concerns that constitute the focus of this chapter on methodology. These complementing interests are located within the triad of *place*, *embodiment* and *movement*. Solnit (2000), in the passage above, muses on the impossibility of drawing clear boundaries between the external and the internal, the material and the ethereal, the constant and the ephemeral; landscape, body and mind are in dialogue through movement, three notes coming together to make a chord (Solnit, 2000: p.5). This constant pull, inwards and outwards, and how we can make sense of the way we traverse inner landscapes as well as those around us, will guide my empirical approach to the study of group walking and well-being. As Brown (2003: p.1789) points out, following Flyvbjerg (2001), studying health and place relations requires *context dependence*, paying attention to ‘an open-ended, contingent relation between context and actions and interpretations’. This chapter is a discussion of how I aimed to achieve that context dependence in my case study.

Introduction

In the context of studies on health and well-being, the rising popularity of qualitative methods arrived together with the emergence of the sub-discipline of health geography alongside that of medical geography (see chapter 2). In the early to mid-1990s we can see a shift in medical geography towards studies that sought to

question the taken-for-granted assumptions about health and the body and explore the social and political nature of health and health care and the impact of place (e.g. Kearns, 1993). The theoretical advances that questioned the previously dominant biomedical discourse and argued for ways of researching health that 'make space for difference' (Kearns quoted in Wilton, 1999: p.254) signalled a growing interest in using qualitative techniques such as interviews rather than statistically oriented methods, and calls were made for renewed attention to the role of social theory in knowledge construction (see Dyck, 1999). As medical geography was increasingly reconceived as geographies of health, qualitative methods came 'into increasing use as a research strategy understood to be capable of producing place-sensitive and subject-centred analyses of the geographical dimensions of health and health care' (Dyck, 1999: p.243). Researchers engaging with qualitative methods sought to explore how in-depth interviews could enable a greater empirical sensitivity to how health and ill health are *lived and made sense of by* participants in their everyday lives. This new focus stood in contrast to medical geography's core interest in the provision and access to health care resources, issues which were primarily explored using spatial statistics, mapping and GIS technologies (Jones and Moon, 1993). However, despite this growing interest in using qualitative techniques in research on health and place, there is still a wealth of work that relies on census-based data or other 'off-the-shelf' measures, although qualitative methods have become increasingly prevalent in the last decade or so. My effort to carry out a qualitative study contributes to recent health geographical research and stands in contrast to the quantitative tradition in the sub-discipline. Furthermore, my approach to research methods aims at bringing some of the latest discussions on qualitative methods to health geography. Not just in health geography, but in the wider application of qualitative methods, there has been a distinct lack of engagement with place, embodiment and mobility. These three interrelated concerns which were introduced above – and which are arguably at the forefront of much of the theorising currently taking place in human geography – need to become the focus of my practical methodology to bridge this gap between theory and method.

This chapter firstly introduces the empirical case study that is the basis for this thesis and secondly outlines the argument of why it is important to bring place, embodiment and mobility into the centre of the research encounter. I will briefly review interviewing and ethnographic approaches in relation to an interest in how these methodological traditions have dealt with the placed and embodied nature of cultural practice, in order to see how this needs to be moved forward to respond to current theoretical discussions. The argument for an embodied and placed engagement with participants and field data is grounded in the concern that much qualitative research fails to acknowledge the significance of place and the moving body for the formation of social and embodied knowledges. The chapter is concluded with a brief discussion

of two approaches that combine participant observation and interviewing in an attempt to harness these concerns. First, however, let me outline the empirical context for this discussion.

The empirical data collection

The empirical basis for the present research is found in a qualitative exploration of led group walks in Hampshire, England. The qualitative data collected was never intended to be representative in any capacity, instead the objective was to give the exploration of the concept of 'therapeutic landscape' an empirical foundation. Thus, during a one year period, between April 2009 and April 2010, I attended led group walks in the Hampshire countryside to carry out participant observation and to recruit and interview individual participants for the case study. During this time I walked with 5 different local walking groups and carried out recorded semi-structured qualitative interviews with 40 participants, alongside participant observation and many informal conversations about walking with fellow walkers.

The objective of the empirical data collection was to investigate 'restorative' experiences of walking in the context of group walking practices. I decided that the Ramblers Association would give me access to a wealth of local group walks as well as giving me the opportunity to walk with individuals of different ages and bodily capacities and who would have a range of different motivations for their walking practice. I wanted to explore the needs and desires and experiences of regular walkers, who had come to walking for a wide variety of individual reasons. I wanted to find out if there was an overarching motivation or desire for wellness which united these walking individuals, beyond their particular individual circumstances. Or indeed, if they shared similar life circumstances which had led them towards their walking practice. I did not necessarily wish to focus this study on those who walked for explicit health reasons or who had been recruited for 'health walks' through various health-service related initiatives, or perhaps had been prescribed the practice by their GPs. This was my reasoning behind not focusing this study on the council-led 'walking-for-health' groups that exist across the county. However, these groups certainly do provide an interesting and valuable comparative study for future research.

The group walks

As the country's largest and oldest walking charity, the Ramblers Association seemed a natural starting point for an investigation of organised walking practices. In the Hampshire area there are 16 local groups which belong to the network. I decided to join the Ramblers in order to attend regular group walks to give myself the experience of being a member of a walking group, to carry out participant observation, and as a

way to recruit participants for qualitative interviews. Thus I became a member of the Ramblers Association, choosing the Winchester group as my 'home group', with the awareness that my membership entitled me to join walks with any of the Hampshire groups. My first walk was a 5 mile walk on a sunny Thursday morning, jointly organised between two local groups, Winchester and Waltham. I had found it advertised on the Ramblers national web page, which lists some of the local walks. It was an encouraging experience, I had a number of casual conversations with active walkers and I felt welcomed into the 'walking community'. As I had been registered as a new member of the Winchester group, their membership secretary soon sent me their walking schedule, which then provided me with a large choice of weekday and weekend walks of varying distances.

The Winchester group, like all local groups, hosts several walks per week. In practice several sub-groups are formed under the umbrella of a local group, as people often choose to attend on a particular day of the week. During my year of fieldwork I walked with three sub-groups within the Winchester area group. As the sub-groups are named after the common distance they cover, these were the *10 mile group*, the *5 mile group* and the *3 mile group*. These groups, like the others, are kept going by regular members who take turns to lead walks. The *5 mile group* is by far the most popular, it regularly attracts over forty walkers each time. Evidently because 5 miles is a distance that many walkers of different capacities feel comfortable with, it is also the group that attracts the most newcomers. The *10 mile group* and the *3 mile group* were quite different, both of these sub-groups consisted of a relatively small number of regular members (around 12 and 10 respectively, although numbers of course fluctuate slightly over time). Like the *5 mile group*, the *10 mile group* met for walks weekly, but the *3 mile group* convened once per fortnight for a leisurely walk and unlike the other two sub-groups did not advertise their walks in the group walking schedule which is posted out to members, but preferred to organise themselves through an informal e-mail list instead.

Alongside walks with the Winchester group I also walked with the *20s and 30s group*. This group is especially for walkers in their twenties and thirties, as the name betrays, but in practice also includes a few members in their forties. I also walked with one group which was not affiliated with the Ramblers Association, *Walking Friends*. This group is founded and chaired by a retired council worker, and has its base in the city of Portsmouth. *Walking Friends* was the only group I attended that is formally accredited by Natural England as a 'walking for health organisation'. *Walking Friends* offered four led group walks per week, starting at different local community centres located within the Portsmouth city area. Their accreditation as a 'walking for health organisation' meant that they were required to provide shorter walks (40 minutes) for beginners to encourage inactive people to take up exercise and a slightly longer walk

(55 minutes) for those who have started regular walks. They did this by having two walk leaders present on every walk, and according to demand one walk leader would break off and return with those who opted for the shorter walk.

On average I attended a group walk twice per month, alongside walks one-on-one with participants for the first half of the fieldwork period. The number of walks I attended per month varied over the year, with periods of heavier attendance when I actively recruited participants, and periods of lower attendance on group walks while I was undertaking 'interview walks' with individual participants. Because of my changing approach to the interview element of the empirical work, the group I attended most frequently was the *20s and 30s group*. I will explain the reason for this in more detail below.

The recruitment of participants

Participants for the study were recruited from active group walkers in the Hampshire area. It was decided that the study would focus on the restorative potential of group walks across different life-stages and thus participants were recruited both from the 'regular' Ramblers groups, which have a membership that is largely of retirement age, and the *20s and 30s group*, which is the only local group that caters for younger walkers. The reasoning for this was to explore the different needs that people may have in regards to restorative practices at different stages in their lives. Other than focusing the recruitment across the 'regular' groups and the *20s and 30s group*, and seeking to have a somewhat even gender balance, participants were self-selective and no particular criteria was formed in regards to socio-economic background on the grounds that these walking groups tend to be fairly homogenous when it comes to ethnicity and socio-economic background (see chapter 1). No participant that elected to be part of the study was declined participation, recruitment simply stopped when the quota of 20 participants from each broad age group had been achieved.

The recruitment of participants for the study included a number of different elements. At the start of the fieldwork period I took part in group walks with the 5 mile group, the 3 mile group and the *20s and 30s group* and used the group walking events to hand out a business card to other walkers, especially designed for the study, and encouraging walkers to get in touch with me for a short one-on-one walk and informal interview. This method was overall not particularly successful and did not lead to any participants from the regular Ramblers groups but it did lead to three interviews with members of the *20s and 30s group*. I also put out a call for participants in some of the local walking newsletters. The Winchester group allowed me to include a printed flyer with their newsletter, which was posted to around 200 members in May 2009. I also published a short informational article about my research in the Hampshire-wide newsletter *The Hampshire Rambler*, which is posted out to all Ramblers members in

Hampshire, as well as the newsletter for the *20s and 30s group*, which is circulated to over 200 members³. These calls for participants resulted in a total of fourteen interviews, all with members of 'regular' Ramblers groups. I also created a Facebook profile specifically for the project and posted a call for participants on the 20s and 30s group's Facebook page, which resulted in the recruitment of one participant. The remainder of the participants were recruited and interviewed during group walks (see figure 3.1), I will explain this process in further detail in the section below.

Recording and analysing data

The empirical data collected for the project took the form of recorded interviews, sounds recordings, observation and field notes. The walking interviews were recorded using a digital Dictaphone with a small clip-on microphone attachment. The microphone was clipped to the lapel of the participant and then I let them keep the recording device in their own pocket, or hold it in their hand, this was done in order to make sure that the recording device picked up the voice of the participant clearly without me having to hold the Dictaphone to their face or be attached to them by the lead of the microphone, which would have been difficult while walking. The microphone also picked up my voice asking the questions while walking next to the participant, thus this way of recording the interviews worked well. Further, the recording device was occasionally used to record the sound environment in order to later aid my memory of the walk when taking down field notes. The soundscape played a part in my analysis of the rhythm of the place and of the walk itself, and separate sound recordings as well as listening to the backdrop of interview recordings facilitated this analysis. In addition to interview and sound recordings, I also took down field notes based on my own observations during group walks, the notes were auto-ethnographic and detailed both my own experience of the walks and noted details of the walk such as the behaviour of walkers; how the group moved as a whole, whether there were many newcomers, regular walkers that I had met before, if the group broke up into smaller groups, if walkers regularly re-coupled or stayed with the same 'walking partner' throughout, and so on.

The interview data was transcribed in full, thematically coded and analysed. The codes were allowed to emerge from the interview material itself and resulted in a number of common themes such as; trauma, well-being, friendship/connection, communication, aesthetic enjoyment, pace, place. The interview material was analysed

³ It should be noted that these membership numbers do include a percentage of inactive members who pay the yearly membership fee but do not attend walks, or attend walks infrequently. The chairman of the Winchester group estimated that only around half of their membership attended walks on a regular basis, meaning at least two walks per month. However, this was a casual estimation.

Study Participants

Pseudonym	Group membership	Age range	Employment status	Recruitment type
<i>One-on-one walking interviews</i>				
Peter	Inactive member	60-65	Retired	Newsletter
Mary	Inactive member	60-65	Retired	Newsletter
Claire	20s and 30s group	25-30	Full-time work	Group walk
James	20s and 30s group	30-35	Full-time work	Facebook page
Anna	20s and 30s group	25-30	Full-time work	Group walk
Christine	20s and 30s group	35-40	Full-time work	Group walk
Lisa	20s and 30s group	30-35	Full-time work	Magazine
Daniel	3 mile group	30-35	Full-time work	Group walk
Julie	5 mile group	60-65	Retired	Newsletter
Howard	3 mile group	65-70	Retired	Newsletter
Richard	5 mile group	60-65	Retired	Newsletter
David	3 mile group	60-65	Retired	Newsletter
Eddie	5 mile group	60-65	Part-time work	Newsletter
Lilian	5 mile group	65-70	Retired	Magazine
Nigel	5 mile group	65-70	Retired	Magazine
<i>Group walk interviews</i>				
Ellie	20s and 30s group	25-30	student	Group walk
Sally	20s and 30s group	35-40	Full-time work	Group walk
Frank	20s and 30s group	30-35	Full-time work	Group walk
Aaron	20s and 30s group	35-40	Self-employed	Group walk
Laura	20s and 30s group	25-30	Full-time work	Group walk
Anna	20s and 30s group	25-30	Full-time work	Group walk
Sandra	20s and 30s group	35-40	Full-time work	Group walk
Milly	20s and 30s group	25-30	Full-time work	Group walk
Ben	20s and 30s group	30-35	Full-time work	Group walk
Shaun	20s and 30s group	40-45	Full-time work	Group walk
Helena	20s and 30s group	25-30	Full-time work	Group walk
Jody	20s and 30s group	25-30	Full-time work	Group walk
Mark	20s and 30s group	25-30	Full-time work	Group walk
Andy	20s and 30s group	30-35	Full-time work	Group walk
Fran	10 mile group	50-55	Part-time work	Group walk
Gill	10 mile group	65-70	retired	Group walk
Marianne	10 mile group	55-60	Part-time work	Group walk
Margaret	10 mile group	70-75	Part-time work	Magazine
Nigel	5 mile group	60-65	Retired	Group walk
Barry	Walking Friends	65-70	Retired	Group walk
Alan	Walking Friends	65-70	Retired	Group walk
Margaret	Walking Friends	60-65	Retired	Group walk
Alison	Walking Friends	65-70	Retired	Group walk
John	Walking Friends	65-70	Retired	Group walk
Rachel	Walking Friends	60-65	Retired	Group walk

Figure 3.1 Study participants.

by identifying these overarching themes and collecting quotes from the participants under each theme. In Word documents, the themes were colour-coded and the quotes in the interview transcripts were highlighted in accordance.

The sound recordings and the sound-backdrop in interview recordings were not transcribed and transformed into text but rather analysed directly while listening to them several times and noting down the characteristics of the soundscape.

The field notes were typed up in a Word document and became a resource for reflexivity and details on walking behaviour in the groups. Similarly to the interview transcripts, the field notes were broadly thematically coded. The themes of walking behaviour, soundscape, embodied experience and affective atmosphere were highlighted. Excerpts from the field notes are used in the empirical chapters to set the scene, in an autoethnographic manner, for the further analysis of interview and observational data. The excerpts from field notes used in the thesis are somewhat edited, above all to improve the language, as the field notes were not originally written for publication and I did not always take great care over how I expressed myself in these – at the time – private notes.

In the remainder of the chapter I will turn to outlining the development of qualitative interview techniques in health geography and related areas of research, to make the case for an interview technique that is sensitive to place, embodiment and movement. Following this methodological discussion I return to discuss the changing interview approach during my fieldwork period to show how I applied and adapted the methodological ideas to my field. There is also a section dealing with the importance of ethics and finally a section reflecting on the process of carrying out the fieldwork and the methodology used.

The qualitative interview

Interest in using interviewing as a research technique rests on the aim of being sensitive to subjective experience and allowing participants to narrate their experiences in their own words. The qualitative interview seeks to explore issues in-depth, allowing participants to ‘explain the complexities and contradictions of their experiences and [...] describe the mundane details of their everyday lives’ (Valentine, 2005: p.111). The qualitative interview thus goes further to produce a ‘deeper picture’ compared to the questionnaire survey. The aim is not to be representative, but to understand how meaning is attributed to events or situations and how different processes operate in particular social contexts (Valentine, 2005).

Wilton’s (1999) interview study of people living with AIDS/HIV is an example of a growing body of work in the newly formed ‘health geography’ that engaged with their topic of research qualitatively and with a new theoretical vigour, drawing on critical social theory. This new strain of work championed a more holistic and contextual conception of health and health care (Litva and Eyles, 1994), as well as the social and spatial constructions of illness and disability and situating them within broader social relations of power (e.g. Butler, 1993; Choutinard and Grant, 1995). As well as a related growth in work around the body and embodied knowledges (Dorn and Laws 1994; Chouinard and Grant, 1995; Moss and Dyck, 1996; see Wilton, 1999: pp.255-6).

These shifts in the sub-discipline of health geography mirrored the growing interest in intensive qualitative research in the discipline at large (Eyles and Smith, 1988). The growing interest in interviewing as a core qualitative research technique caused new reinvigorated debates about ethics (Winchester, 1996) and the positionality and reflexivity of the researcher in the field (England, 1994; Katz, 1994; Nast, 1994).

Although the rationale for geographers in turning towards qualitative research techniques was to use methods that adequately captured the complexity and dynamic nature of various spatial relations, there is little reflection about the spatial context within which the interview itself takes place.

The 'placing' of the interview

Curiously, for a discipline that is focused around spatial relations of different kinds, there has been little debate about the spatial dimension of the research encounter. In addition to being reflexive about the presence of the researcher in the interview and all the complexities of positionality, the impact of the placing of the interview is equally important. By interview place, setting, site, or location, I mean the specific place where the interview is conducted. That the placing of the interview can make a difference was acknowledged early on in the development of qualitative interview methods (e.g. Denzin, 1970), however, core texts on research methods for human geography students (e.g. Aitken and Valentine, 2006; Flowerdew and Martin 2005; Hay, 2005) do not engage in any critical depth with the issue of the spatial context of interviews. Geographical literatures on qualitative research methods have primarily framed their discussions of locational considerations around issues of convenience or safety (Flowerdew and Martin, 2005; Hay, 2005). Morton-Williams (1985) alludes to the importance of social relations and interactions in particular places, 'noting that participants may feel uncomfortable speaking freely about some issues in places where other people are present and might over-hear the conversation' (Elwood and Martin 2000: p.651). Valentine (2005) reflects on a similar point in the textbook edited by Flowerdew and Martin, writing that conducting interviews in the participant's own home may facilitate a more relaxed conversation and offer the opportunity to observe the participant in their own environment.

That there are locations that are 'better' or 'worse' for conducting an interview can be largely agreed upon. As Valentine (2005) points out above, there are advantages to choosing a location that is familiar to the participant. Formal settings such as an office, business or university space may impose an air of formality on the interview encounter and increase social distance by emphasising professional identities or relations of power. Certain interview locations are also 'better' than others from the perspective of the researcher in terms of practicality, personal safety, and

possibilities for recording or documenting the interview with technology such as a Dictaphone, camera or video equipment. However, such pragmatic considerations are not exhaustive of what makes place an important element in the research process. Feminist geographers have contributed concerns about power relations between participants and researchers in terms of how different locations constitute different implications for power and positionality (e.g. Elwood and Martin, 2000). Reflecting on the research site and situation provides some contextual details about the social geographies of the field site in question, as well as the various social relations, identities and power struggles that intersect there (Elwood and Martin, 2000: p.650). There is a relative wealth of literatures across the social sciences that reflect critically on issues of power in the research process, and specifically in relations between participant and researcher, but few that go beyond seeing place as a mere location, or stage, where hierarchies of power can be made explicit through actual spatial divisions or where interactions with place hints at implicit dimensions of social differentiation. Some geographers have reflected on the ways that power relations between researcher and participant are shaped by the spaces in which the interview is conducted (Elwood and Martin, 2000). These examinations often focus on interviews carried out in private homes (e.g. Longhurst, 1996) and how the home setting can facilitate a more reciprocal relationship and encourage sharing of personal information. Other geographers (e.g. Nagar 1997; McDowell, 1998) have expanded somewhat on this theme and considered how other spaces besides homes shapes interactions and relationships with participants. The concluding understanding is that 'social interactions have inherent power dynamics that operate or are simultaneously manifest at different spatial scales' (Elwood and Martin, 2000: p.652). However, in these accounts spatial considerations are limited to their impact on the identity and positionality of the researcher and participant. The locations considered are often fixed, such as the home, office or other community space. Elwood and Martin argue that the interview location 'produces "micro-geographies" of spatial relations and meaning, where multiple scales of social relations intersect in the research interview' (2000: p.649). They argue that paying attention to the setting for the interview can extend the researcher's understanding of the participant in their own environment, for example observing material artefacts in the home that reveal certain priorities or commitments, and observing the participant's interactions with others in this space. Further, they argue that microgeographies of interview locations situate a participant with respect to other actors and to his or her multiple identities and roles, affecting information that is communicated in the interview as well as power dynamics of the interview itself' (2000: p.652). Further, they found that the locations for interview that their participants made gave them important clues about community histories and

values that are often difficult to access through other more formal sources of information.

However, these methodological discussions are limited to a static conception of place, where the setting for the interview is viewed as a fixed representation of a socio-cultural context, and analyses take a relatively descriptive approach. In these mobile times, many scholars recognise that place is not static, and some go as far as arguing that the increasingly mobile nature of contemporary life has brought about an erosion of the meaning of place altogether (e.g. Relph, 1976; Augé, 1995; Thrift, 1996). Although I (like many others) take a less extreme view of the relationship between place and mobility (see chapter 2), there is a need to open up the consideration of place in interviews to account for the complexity and flow of place. Methodological literatures on place all seem to consider the interview setting from a perspective of specificity. The setting is concrete and ideographic, and does not adequately theorise how social processes both shape and are shaped by places. Further, the methodological literature on interviews rarely stray from the idea that the interview itself is a 'static event', carried out in one place. Thus, more mobile conceptions of place and the significance of mobile bodies in place are under-theorised in methodological literatures, and especially in relation to the qualitative interview.

I regard place (along with Simonsen, 2003, 2008) as encounter. Place from this point of view is understood as 'a locus of encounters, the outcome of multiple becomings' (Simonsen, 2008: p.22):

Places are meeting points, moments or conjunctures, where social practices and trajectories, spatial narratives and moving or fixed materialities meet up and form configurations that are continuously under transformation and negotiation. Such space-time configurations are never bounded, but the succession of meetings and returns, the accumulation of relations and encounters, build up a history that lends continuity and identity to place. Places are encounters marked by openness and change but not without material, social and cultural duration.

This conception of place is relational, but it also recognises a sense of fluidity, flow and movement as integral to the making of place. Thrift (1996) goes as far as suggesting that place is constructed in and through *passings*, in other words that place takes shape only in its passing. So what happens to our understanding of the significance of place in interviews if we take onboard this relational and mobile understanding of place?

Mobility and interviewing

In recent years, social scientists have increasingly been seeking analytical purchase on the mobile nature of everyday life (Buscher, Urry and Witchger, 2010, Buscher and Urry 2009; Ek and Hultman, 2008; Ross, Renold, Holland and Hillman 2011) and the performativity of social action (Crang, 2005; Lorimer, 2005; Thrift and Dewsbury 2000). It could be argued that the social sciences has seen a 'mobility turn' in the last ten years or so (Sheller and Urry, 2006). In the case of researching group walking practices, movement becomes a central ingredient in the 'ecology of place' (Thrift, 1999) that constitutes the group walking event. Movement is central to the practice of walking, so issues of 'correct' movement, not too little or too much, too slow or too fast, at the right time and in the right place are central to understanding collective walking practice. So what does this mean for methods?

De Certeau (1984: pp.115-116) writes that 'every story is a travel story – a spatial practice'. In other words, narratives can be viewed as spatial trajectories. This goes for all forms of narrative practice, the cultural narratives about walking as a way towards health, or the personal narratives of participants during the qualitative interview (and of course the intersection of both). Listening to stories and seeking to understand the embodiment of narratives is part of the qualitative research process. These multiscalar narratives and narrative practices are illustrative of Lefebvre's (2004) notion of rhythms (which will be discussed in chapter 5). Different practices are characterised by different rhythms 'between which there are dynamic relations and interferences' (Simonsen, 2008: p.22). Research that takes mobility and place seriously often emphasises copresence in place. It is concerned with observing patterns of movement – in this case bodies walking together – and how people affect relations with places (see Sheller and Urry, 2006). From this perspective 'walking with' (see Morris 2004) participants forms the basis for the methodological approach, a form of 'participation-while-interviewing' (see Baerenholdt et al., 2004). Baerenholdt et al.'s (2004) approach was to first participate in forms of movement, and subsequently interview participants about their diverse mobilities and how they constitute the patterning of their everyday lives. There seems to be a missed opportunity in not conducting their interviews in place and in movement.

Moving together in and through place styles interaction in important ways. The way that we communicate is heavily dependent on context. This will become clearer in chapter 5 when I discuss the social dynamics of the group walk in relation to bodily movement, but for now we can note that the context, or relational ecology, of the group walk encounter is not merely an aggregate of material and social factors, but an interpretive framework. Within this framework it is not only the story told by words that is important, but the story of the feet. De Certeau (1984, cited in Simonsen, 2008:

p.20) writes that spatial practices are part of the everyday 'storied' environment of narratives that are constructed by news reports, legends and fictional stories:

These narrated adventures, simultaneously producing geographies of actions and drifting into the commonplaces of an order, do not merely constitute a 'supplement' to pedestrian enunciation and rhetorics. They are not satisfied with displacing the latter and transposing them into the field of language. In reality, they organize walks. They make the journey, before or during the time the feet perform it.

What De Certeau is talking about is that narrative produces a cognitive map, but not only that, narratives as particular speech acts are related to spatial practices at different scales. Such spatial trajectories shape and are shaped by place and make places meaningful and habitable (see Simonsen, 2008). Narrative figures such as maps, tours, boundaries and bridges are integral to the organisation of space and place. Place is thus constructed both through embodied practices and relations and through narratives at different scales. The mobile interview is one possibility for capturing these encounters, rhythms and stories. Massey (2005: p.130) writes:

If space is [...] a simultaneity of stories-so-far, then places are collections of those stories, articulations within the wider power-geometries of space. Their character will be a product of these intersections within the wider setting, and of what is made of them. And, too, of the non-meetings-up, the disconnections, and the relations not established, the exclusions. All this contributes to the specificity of place.

Interviews as the capturing of particular stories should not be removed from their context and approached analytically in isolation from the environment in which they took place. The mobile interview is clearly more than just recording the words of participants, it is a multisensual engagement with the participant's environment, practices and narratives. This form of interviewing needs to be sensitive to how the context itself is mobilised, how narratives are performed, how rhythms are styled and how multiscalar relations give meaning to place.

In the following section, I will elaborate on ethnography as a research technique and framework within which the qualitative (mobile) interview can be carried out.

Ethnography

Doing ethnography is about striving for an approach to the object of study that is holistic, contextual and reflexive (Boyle, 1994). Ethnography is one of the perspectives subsumed under the label of qualitative methodology, but should not be thought synonymous with interview studies, although ethnographies typically include the use of interviews. Ethnography as a research method evolved in cultural anthropology, and was typically an approach designed to study small-scale societies (see Boyle, 1994). Two classic accounts of ethnography are Bronislaw Malinowski's *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* (1961) and Franz Boas's *The Kwakiutl Ethnography* (1966). As these two titles betray, the early days of ethnography were focused on the exotic and 'other'. Ethnographers frequently spent extended periods of time in foreign lands to immerse themselves in the culture and traditions, and often learning the local language (Prasad, 2005). However, the variation and ambiguity in the usage of this term and the lack of clear-cut guidelines mean that it can be difficult to narrow down a precise definition of what ethnography is about. The starting point for ethnographic methods, most would agree, is a postpositivistic orientation, rejecting positivist assumptions about social reality and knowledge production. Although this is the intellectual stance embraced by most qualitative perspectives, this does not mean that all qualitative methods take a similar approach to the researcher's relationship to participants and to the field. Ethnography developed, as is evident from the early titles above, as an approach to obtaining the 'native point of view'. The underlying focus is on culture: 'Ethnography ... is intent on understanding cultural practices such as rituals, ceremonies, legends, myths, and taboos that pervade everyday social action and interaction' (Prasad, 2005: p.80). Classical ethnographies tended to observe collective and public cultural practices, and could frequently be criticised for regarding culture as a bounded and fixed phenomenon. However, more recent ethnographic studies have employed the concept of culture in specific contexts, for example a business organisation (Kunda, 1992), presenting it as a cultural system where ritual processes can be observed.

Ethnography is about generating insights from 'being there', and participant observation is the technique through which ethnographers get to know their field. As Ley (cited in Herbert, 2000: p.551) puts it, ethnographic research 'is concerned to make sense of the actions and intentions of people as knowledgeable agents; indeed, more properly it attempts to make sense of the events and opportunities confronting them in everyday life'. Through immersing themselves in the practices of the group they study, the ethnographer seeks to reveal knowledge and meaning structures that underlie social practice. Classically, this is done through close observation of daily activities, which meant that the ethnographer lived, worked and socialised within their study population for a number of months, or even years. As Goffman (quoted in Herbert, 2000: pp.551-52) argued:

Any group of persons – prisoners, primitives, pilots or patients – develops a life of their own that becomes meaningful, reasonable, and normal once you get close to it, and a good way to learn about any of these worlds is to submit oneself in the company of the members to the daily round of petty contingencies to which they are subject.

Although classical ethnography has occupied centre stage, at the margins of anthropology more experimental approaches developed. For example, ethnographers actually immersing themselves in the field to the extent of ‘becoming’ native and thus being able to understand the culture from within. A famous example of this tradition is Frank Hamilton Cushing’s work with the Zuni, during which he became a Zuni shaman and war priest. More contemporary ethnographers include Liza Dalby (1983) who became a geisha in Japan and Hunter Thompson (1994) who joined the Hells Angels in order to study their culture (see Prasad, 2005: p.83).

However, as a reaction against the tradition of ‘going native’, others problematised the role of the ethnographer in the field and in relation to participants. These ethnographic ‘memoirs’ are frequently autobiographical in nature and portray the researcher as just a fellow human, vulnerable, making mistakes and blundering through the research process (Prasad, 2005). Examples of this are Paul Rabinow’s (1977) highly reflective autobiographical description of an ethnography in Morocco and Nigel Barley’s (1983) story of an ethnography in Africa, where he frequently is portrayed as endearingly incompetent. These tales reinsert the researcher into the text, in contrast with the classical ethnographic accounts.

Most ethnographies, however, involve an active negotiation between these two extremes (Herbert, 2000). Researchers set out to study a group or practice on its own terms, but also apply a theoretically informed framework within which they can explain what is going on more generally. Ethnography involves an ongoing, reflexive conversation between knowledge built from the ground up, and analytical categories applied top-down. Generally, though, ethnographers enter the field interested in exploring a particular social phenomenon, rather than having a specific hypothesis in place. Ethnography is thus distinguishable from other forms of qualitative enquiry such as surveys or tightly structured interviews or focus groups which often approach participants with a predetermined set of questions. Order should emerge *from* the field, rather than be imposed on it (Silverman, 1985). However, as I stated earlier, ethnographers do not enter the field as blank slates, but engage in an ongoing negotiation between what they observe and what they theorise (see Herbert, 2000). Additionally, ethnography sets itself apart from other qualitative methods such as

interviews, because the ethnographer is interested in what people *do* as well as what they say. Geertz (1973) introduced the term 'thick description' to describe the kind of narrative that attentive ethnographers should produce in the field. Thick description refers to a particular technique of taking field notes being aware of the 'symbolic intertextuality present in any social situation' and are possible only when researchers 'attend to the multiple and frequently contradictory levels of local meanings in the field' (Prasad, 2005: p.81). This implies that the researcher does not take actions or speech at face value.

Ethnography in human geography

Outside of anthropology the term ethnography is frequently used to describe qualitative studies which involve some degree of participant observation or time spent in the field. It has to be said that few geographers could live up to the ideals of classical ethnography. Extended ethnographies are rarely (if ever) encountered in disciplines other than anthropology. This may be because current funding structures scarcely allow for long periods of field research. It is also likely to be due to the fact that the focus of ethnography has widened considerably from researching the exotic and foreign and a broad range of social science disciplines have adapted ethnographic practices to speak to their own disciplinary interests. Social scientists are now using ethnographic approaches to study a wide range of issues, including health (see Boyle 1994 about the use of ethnography in nursing).

Turning to the area of health, ethnographic studies in the health professions have usually focused on exploring health beliefs and practices and how these are related to other social factors (Boyle, 1994: p.160). Health geographers have utilised ethnographic approaches following a similar interest in broader social models of health (Kearns and Moon, 2002). As I have already mentioned above (and in chapter 2), the process of change within the sub-discipline of medical geography in the 1990s that lead to an interest in developing cultural geographies of wellness (Kearns, 1993), rather than medical geography's focus on disease ecology (Kearns and Moon, 2002), brought about a wider engagement with qualitative styles of enquiry. Central to this development was the conviction that 'place matters' in regards to health and that the new health geography should seek to develop perspectives that emphasised the culturally constructed and experiential aspects of place (Kearns and Joseph, 1993). This new focus called for theoretical and methodological approaches that avoided seeking universal truths, but were rather characterised by a post-positivist perspective which 'attempts to account for the position and partial perspective of the researcher' (Berg cited in Kearns and Moon, 2002: p.613). Ethnographic approaches seem especially well suited to exploring the processes and meanings that underlie experiences and perceptions of health or ill-health. Arguably, however, there has been

somewhat of a lack of health geographical research that has taken an ethnographic approach. Even so, there are some important early exceptions (e.g. Dyck, 1993; Parr, 1998). In fact, as Herbert (2000) points out, there has been a lack of ethnographic research in human geography in general. However, a recent growing interest in practice, performance, the everyday, the body, as well as poststructural approaches to theory and knowledge production, have arguably brought about a slight increase in participatory and observational methods in the field (e.g. Lorimer, 2006; Spinney, 2006; McCormack, 2002) that could be considered within the wider ethnographic tradition. Despite this, ethnography does seem to remain at the periphery of human geography research. This may be due to a number of inhibiting factors such as financial and time constraints and pressures to publish results quickly. The time commitment that is necessary for ethnographic research is not always an option in today's academic climate. However, small scale and especially nearby ethnographies, as opposed to 'exotic' ones, are still perfectly viable.

Herbert (2000: p.550) makes a call for the expanded vitality of ethnography in human geography as he argues ethnography is uniquely useful for uncovering processes and meanings that underlie sociospatial life:

Humans create their social and spatial worlds through processes that are symbolically encoded and thus made meaningful. Through enacting these meaningful processes, human agents reproduce and challenge macrological structures in the everyday of place-bound action. Because ethnography provides singular insight into these processes and meanings, it can most brightly illuminate the relationships between structure, agency and geographic context.

Ethnography, Herbert (2000: p.552) argues, is also distinguishable from other styles of qualitative methods because it actively involves an engagement with the researcher's senses and emotions: 'To engage a group's lived experience is to engage its full sensuality – the sights, sounds, smells, tastes and tactile sensations that bring a way of life to life'. He argues this is especially relevant in geographic research, as attachment to place is created through 'various symbolic markers and activities that involve members' senses' (*ibid*: p.553). This is important, as he rightly points out, because the tissue of social life is not always directly observable: 'The meanings of objects and events are often revealed through practices, reactions, cursory comments and facial expressions' (*ibid*: p.553). The researcher's understanding of the field of study emerges gradually through participation and observation. The importance of the process of developing understanding has become clear in my year of participating in

group walks, as I will explain below.

This is also the point that Crang (2003) makes in his progress report on qualitative methods in human geography. Crang criticises the dominance of verbal approaches in qualitative research in geography, such as interviews, focus groups and surveys. However, he notes that the discursive turn in the social sciences has been followed by a growing number of works that shift the interpretative focus from text to action and performance. For example, Rose (cited in Crang, 2003: p.499) talks of performative landscapes with 'everyday agents calling the landscape into being as they make it relevant for their own lives, strategies and projects'. The focus thus shifts onto what is *done* rather than what is *represented*. This has led to a return to ethnographies of the everyday in some corners of geography, such as research on booksellers (Duneier and Carter, 2001) or African immigrant traders (Stoller, 2002).

In studies of health and illness issues around bodily experience has been a catalyst for ethnographically flavoured research, such as Parr (2001) who used overt and covert ethnographic approaches to observe bodily comportment in relation to illness. Issues of bodily experience developed significantly in studies around health, not just as objects of knowledge but as part of doing research (e.g. Moss and Dyck, 1996; Dyck, 1999; MacKian, 2000). Attention to embodiment, rhythm and movement is something that has emerged as important in my own research with walking groups. Indeed, as McHugh (2000: p.72) writes, 'ethnographic studies capture varying tempos and rhythms of movement and connection, illuminating implications for both people and places'. In my discussion of interview methods above, I argued that an awareness of place and mobility is essential for the development of interview methods that are responsive to the spatiality of social life. Ethnography as a field method is inevitably place-specific and reveal the lived experience that is embedded in sociocultural contexts.

Ethnography and embodied space

Ethnography has been richly debated in the discipline of anthropology, but was rarely discussed in relation to *place* in specific terms. However, along with other social science disciplines anthropology demonstrated a renewed interest in issues of space and place throughout the 1990s (Low and Lawrence-Zuniga, 2003). However, even if classical ethnographies did not discuss place in geographical terms, description of landscapes and material conditions of the everyday were central forms of contextualisation in the resulting literatures. However, place was more often than not treated as a backdrop to cultural practices. In a 1988 special issue of *Cultural Anthropology*, Appadurai criticised anthropologists for using specific locales to identify particular cultural groups and associate these with specific research topics that profoundly limit and narrow the understanding of place. He writes, 'Ethnography thus

reflects the circumstantial encounter of the voluntarily displaced anthropologist and the involuntarily localized “other” (cited in Low and Lawrence-Zuniga, 2003: p.15). In the last twenty years though, classical ethnographies have been challenged by the focus on spatial issues and liberated ‘anthropologists to examine cultural phenomena that are not fixed in a faraway, isolated, location, but surround us in the cities and countries in which we live’ (Low and Lawrence-Zuniga, 2003: p.2).

My interest in using ethnography in my research with walking groups is centred around wanting to examine how both spatial (or perhaps *patial*) and embodied aspects of organised walking relate to experiences of wellness. In recent anthropological literatures the issue of *embodied space* has gained purchase, defined as ‘the location where human experience and consciousness take on material and spatial form’ (Low and Lawrence-Zuniga, 2003: p.2). Low and Lawrence-Zuniga (2003: p.2) present the concept of ‘embodied space’ as the model for understanding the creation of place ‘through spatial orientation, movement and language’.

Familiarly, there is a wealth of definitions of the body, body space and embodied experience across the social sciences. Regretfully there is not space to discuss this intellectual history here (see chapter 2 for a discussion of embodiment). However, it is worth noting that in relation to ethnographic practices social science literatures from the late 1980s (e.g. Scheper-Hughes and Lock 1987; Jackson 1989) started to reconceive the body in terms of an ‘experiencing agent’ rather than a biological object. Literatures on the body started to discern a body that is ambiguous in its boundaries (Feher, Neddaff and Tazi, 1989; Haraway 1991). For example, Haraway (1991: p.10) argues that ‘Neither our personal bodies nor our social bodies may be seen as natural, in the sense of existing outside the self-creating process called human labour’. This is a move away from the kind of body that earlier scholarly work portrayed (not to mention popular thought) as a ‘fixed material entity, existing prior to the mutability and flux of cultural change and diversity and characterized by unchangeable inner necessities’ (Csordas, 1994: p.1).

This reconception of embodied experience had important methodological implications. The methodological opportunity borne from conceiving the body as the analytical starting point, as having both intentionality and intersubjectivity, adds a notion of materiality, sentience and sensibility to our conception of culture and history (Csordas, 1994). Rather than conceiving of the body as an object or theme of analysis, taking embodiment for granted, new theorisations emerged from an array of scholars who questioned the bounds of representation (e.g. Kristeva, 1986; McNay, 1991; Ricoeur, 1991). A precursor to the later ‘crisis of representation’ in cultural geography following the work of, amongst others, Nigel Thrift (1996).

In anthropology, the critique of representation largely took the form of a critique of ethnographic writing (see Csordas, 1994: p.9). Tyler (1987) argues from the

perspective of postmodernism for the rejection of 'othering' dualisms such as mind and body, thought and language, words and things, and posits that ethnographic discourse 'is not to make a better representation, but to avoid representation', arguing that ethnography would do better to 'evoke' than to 'represent' (cited in Csordas, 1994: p.10). Csordas (1994: p.10) argues that an ethnography that seeks to go beyond representation needs to be responsive to 'existential immediacy', in the double sense of the word; 'not as a synchronic moment of the ethnographic present but as a temporally/historically informed sensory presence and engagement; and not unmediated in the sense of a precultural universalism but in the sense of the preobjective reservoir of meaning'. He chooses the Heideggerian term 'being-in-the-world' to signify the rejection of representation, and argues that this difference is methodologically critical, because it is the difference between understanding culture in terms of objectified abstraction or as existential immediacy (see Csordas, 1994: pp.9-12). Thus presenting a phenomenological and existential approach to embodied space, emphasising the sensory dimensions that make places come alive.

Above in my discussion of interview methods, I spoke of the importance of bodily movement for the creation of place. Anthropologists working within the ethnographic tradition have made similar arguments conceptualising place as movement rather than as a container (e.g. Pandya, 1990; Munn, 1996, 2004). Munn (2004: p.93) considers space-time 'as a symbolic nexus of relations produced out of interactions between bodily actors and terrestrial spaces'. She draws in part on Lefebvre's notion of 'fields of action' and 'basis of action' and constructs the concept of a 'mobile spatial field'. Lefebvre referred to the 'basic duality' of social space, since 'spatial prohibitions limit a person's presence at a particular place' (Munn, 1996: p.450) and at the same time place functions as a basis for action and constitutes a field towards which action is directed. Munn (1996: p.451) elaborates on this to form what she calls the mobile spatial field, which extends from the actor, 'it can also be understood as a culturally defined, corporeal-sensual field of significant distances stretching out from the body in a particular stance or action at a given locale or as it moves through locales'. She summarises, 'The body is thus understood as a spatial field (and the spatial field as a bodily field)' (*ibid.* 1996: p.451). Munn (2004) goes beyond the phenomenological conception of 'being-in-the-world' by seeing the person 'as a truly embodied space, in which the body, conceived as a moving spatial field makes its own place in the world' (Low and Lawrence-Zuniga, 2003: p.6).

It is curious to note that much theorising in geography around embodiment and 'non-representational' stances have so far not engaged to any great extent with empirical data. For some reason, those who 'do theory' seem not to take their theory far beyond the confines of their offices, at best these theorisations have been focused around auto-ethnographies (e.g. Wylie, 2005). This lack of engagement with

ethnographic or participatory methods in general in cultural geography can be argued is a missed opportunity. The analytical move from the social body of representation to the socially informed body of practice (Csordas, 2002) is an opportunity to ground the discussion of 'non-representational theories' (Thrift, 1996) in methodological practice.

In the next section I discuss emerging approaches to the field that combine attentiveness to mobile conceptions of place and embodiment.

Go-along method and talking-whilst-walking

Ethnography, as we have seen above, can roughly be divided into *participating* in and *observing* social settings and *interviewing* participants, but these two aspects are rarely combined. In this section I will briefly introduce two emerging methods that do just that. Through combining observation, participation and interviewing there is an opportunity for qualitative method to embrace the importance of place, embodiment and mobility for participants' lived experiences and interpretations of health and well-being.

The go-along interview

In an extensive discussion of so-called 'go-along' method, sociologist Margarethe Kusenbach (2003) argues for its potential to remedy or bridge the gap in traditional ethnographic method between observation and interviewing. As a hybrid between observation and interviewing, the go-along involves the researcher accompanying the participant as they go about their daily activities in their familiar environments, in this way researchers are 'walked through' people's lived experiences of the neighbourhood (Carpiano, 2009: p.264). Accompanying participants on foot (a 'walk-along') or in a vehicle (a 'drive-along' or 'ride-along') depending on context and participant needs, the researcher observes and asks questions in order to examine participants' experiences, practices and interpretations of a specific environment. In contrast to classical ethnographies that often set out to examine participants' lives at one or two specific locations – such as home, community, or work – the go-along is more limited and focused, paying attention to spatial practices in participants' everyday experiences (Kusenbach, 2003). It takes an active stance regarding participants' activities and interpretations. What sets the go-along interview apart from other ethnographic approaches or qualitative interviews in general is that it seeks to 'establish a coherent set of data by spending a particular, comparable, slice of ordinary life with possibly all subjects (winning in breadth and variety what might get lost in intensity)' and what makes the go-along unique is that researchers using this technique 'examine their informants' spatial practices *in situ*, while accessing their subjects' interpretations of these places at the same time' (Kusenbach, 2003: p.457). Go-alongs, as Kusenbach (2003) conceives them, are premised on 'authentic experience', that researchers

accompany participants on so-called 'natural' go-alongs that follow participants into their familiar environments on activities that they would have carried out anyway. Focusing on practices that are participants' 'own' allow researchers to understand how participants interpret their everyday practices and environments. However, go-alongs do not stand in opposition to other styles of ethnography. Kusenbach (2003) argues that the greatest strength of ethnographic methods is that they can be used to complement each other, in other words aspects of observation, interviews and go-alongs can be utilised to respond to particular research interests. The particular areas where go-alongs offer unique access, according to Kusenbach (2003: p.260) is (1) *perception*, i.e. how personal sets of relevances guide participants' perceptions of the social and physical environment in practical everyday life. (2) *spatial practices*, i.e. revealing participants' engagements in and with the environment. (3) *biographies*, i.e. they highlight links between places and life histories, uncovering how individuals manage to transcend current situations in their mundane everyday lives. (4) *social architecture*, i.e. they make visible the complex web of relations between people, networks, and hierarchies, and illuminate how participants situate themselves within the overall social landscape. (5) *social realms*, i.e. the prevalent patterns of interaction in various spheres of everyday reality. The go-along thus enables an intimate and familiar vantage point to the dynamics of interaction within a particular sociospatial context.

Carpiano (2009) makes a well-considered case for the go-along method for health researchers interested in studying the effects of place on health. He suggests that a go-along style of interviewing is uniquely able to meet the challenges posed within the health and place literature 'regarding the need to examine how physical, social and mental dimensions of place and space interact within and across time for individuals' (Carpiano 2009: p.264). Go-along methods as discussed by Kusenbach (2003) and Carpiano (2009) are devised primarily to explore how participants interpret certain aspects of their everyday environment. Kusenbach (2003) used this method to examine how participants in a neighbourhood in California perceived local problems, and Carpiano (2009) used a walk-along method to explore dynamics of social capital in Milwaukee, Wisconsin neighbourhoods. In Carpiano's work there is an overall focus on health and well-being, but in contrast to my own study of walking groups his work explores everyday engagements with neighbourhood spaces, rather than a particular health-related practice. So how can a go-along method be utilised in research on health-related practices?

Carpiano (2009) suggests that the go-along can be a beneficial 'hybrid' method for studying place and health. Due to its flexibility, the go-along can be tailored to meet the interests of a range of research topics. The way that interviews fit into the go-along can be structured according to the needs of the project, for example, Kusenbach

(2003) uses an open-ended technique where participants are given little direction on what to talk about and conversation is allowed to happen naturally, apart from occasionally pointing out a feature of the environment to examine the participant's thoughts on that particular feature. Alternatively, semi-structured interviews could be used to focus the go-along interview around a specific interest. Carpiano (2009) used this approach, setting out with a prepared set of questions. In my case, I used an interview format somewhere in the middle of the two. I made my participants aware that I was interested in their experiences relating to walking and well-being, thus the topic of the conversation was clear from the outset, and I made sure that certain issues were covered in the discussions, such as topics related to group sociality, perceptions of the countryside and sense of place. Further, from walking with the same groups over a period of time, the group members knew who I was and why I was there, thus participants would approach me wanting to share a particular story or impart their experience and knowledge on the topic. However, participants have different needs and preferences when it comes to interviews, thus I sometimes asked more questions to prompt or direct the discussion than at other times.

The go-along is a method that utilises ethnographic and interview techniques to form a hybrid format of engagement with the field. The go-along is beneficial for harnessing some of the contextual insights of ethnographic method, without necessarily relying on the long time-scales and resources associated with traditional ethnographies (Carpiano 2009). By fusing techniques of observation and interviewing, go-along method takes advantage of the strengths of both, while compensating for their respective limitations by being employed in combination with each other. Carpiano (2009: pp.265-266) poses;

‘because of its ability to examine a participant’s interpretations of their contexts *while experiencing these contexts*, the go-along offers a number of potential benefits for studying how place may matter for people’s health and well-being – benefits that emerge in part from the method’s capacity for assessing what Lynch (1960) describes as “environmental image”, that is, “the generalized mental picture of the exterior physical [and social] world” held by an individual that is “the product both of immediate sensation and of the memory of past experience and... [that] is used to interpret information and to guide action”’

Further, Carpiano (2009) points to similar concerns about the sit-down interview that I have mentioned above, that the stationary interview poses limitations for ‘thinking

situationally' (2009: p.267) about people and their experiences of place. Carpiano describes the limitations he experienced when he was forced to conduct sit-down interviews indoors with his participants, due to schedule constraints or other problems, instead of go-alongs:

due to the interview being conducted indoors and removed from the experience of the location, it was difficult for me as a researcher to gain an adequate appreciation of these people's experiences with respect to the nature, severity, locations, or even potential ramifications of these dangers. For example, what strategies and navigation were used by one resident who walks his dog every day? (Carpiano, 2009: p.267).

However, he also reflects that field observation alone is not sufficient in understanding how residents interpret or make use of their environment, as researchers may rely too heavily on their own interpretations as an 'outsider' in the space. The benefit of the go-along then is that when both methods are combined their respective limitations are compensated for.

Go-alongs have primarily been used to explore participants' interactions and interpretations of their local environment, usually their residential neighbourhood (e.g. Kusenbach, 2003; Carpiano, 2009). However, there are some important insights from this method that can be adapted to suit other types of research, including studies of organised group practices such as walking. In my own research, participating in group walks and interviewing participants while walking can be considered a type of walk-along method. This approach had a number of benefits that correspond to those outlined by Carpiano (2009) in relation to community-based research. For example, the go-along is advantageous for examining interactions between people, and offers a unique opportunity for recruiting participants as the researcher often encounters other potential participants along the way. This was certainly the case for me, as regular walk-alongs with the same walking groups gave me the opportunity to become a 'familiar face' and build rapport with many members of the group, who in turn introduced me to other members. Further, some of the limitations and safety concerns that may be relevant in community-based research were not applicable in my study. However, a significant consideration when conducting go-along interviews is the recording equipment used. In concurrence with Carpiano (2009), I found that an inexpensive voice recorder with an attached microphone which was fastened to the participant's jacket worked well in most cases, but became less useful in situations when there was too much background noise. Some of my recordings turned out to be

indecipherable due to excessive wind-noise or the noise of walking across a pebbled beach. Thus, access to high-quality equipment is certainly an advantage.

The go-along (walk-along, drive-along, ride-along and so on) offers an opportunity for combining participant observation and interviews in a manner which is sensitive to the concerns I have outlined above, namely paying attention to placed and embodied action. However, in these discussions of go-along method (e.g. Kusenbach 2003; Carpiano 2009), the authors do not consider in any great detail the impact of movement in and through place for the interview itself.

Talking-whilst-walking

Another adaption of ethnographic method which bears a resemblance to the go-along method, by placing its focus on the significance of bodily movement in place, is the 'talking-whilst-walking' approach to collecting field data (Anderson 2004; Anderson and Moles, 2008). Talking-whilst-walking is an extension of the traditional approach to participant observation with a spatial emphasis. More specifically, this approach involves an investment in the potential of the moving body. Through walking together (Anderson, 2004) the researcher is present to harness those elements of social knowledge that are unstated, or recalled prompted by the practice of moving ones body through place. Anderson (2004), following Casey (2000, 2001), suggests that relations between people and place, what Casey refers to as the 'constitutive co-ingredience', can be harnessed to access deeper insights into human constructions of the world. What Anderson calls 'walking-whilst-talking' is a method for 'harnessing the inherently socio-spatial character of human knowledge' (Anderson, 2004: p.254). This approach is built on 'conversations in place', and is one response to the lack of attention to place in interview studies. As Elwood and Martin (2000) noted, there has been little explicit attention to how place influences knowledge construction. Anderson's argument for talking-whilst-walking methods is an attempt to address the absence of methods that attempt to elicit this knowledge in practice. As I argued above, attention to place in qualitative research methods is usually limited to finding places that make participants feel at ease during the interview process and that facilitates sharing of information. There is a lack of methodological tools that are formulated to pay attention to how place *impacts* on the knowledge produced in the research process. Anderson (2004) builds this methodological approach around a phenomenological understanding of the relationship between person and place. Following Casey (2001) he sees place as integral to the development of human identities and constitutive of the creation of the 'life-world' in the Heideggerian sense. He quotes Casey:

The relationship between self and place is not just once of

reciprocal influence . . . but also, more radically, of constitutive coingredience: each is essential to the being of the other. In effect, there is no place without self and no self without place. (Casey cited in Anderson, 2004: p.255).

This view rejects the conception of place as backdrop to cultural practices and instead views place as integral to human existence and as both a medium and an outcome of action.

Anderson's (2004) focus is on the insinuation of place into social constructions of knowledge and individual constructions of identity. His theorisation of talking-whilst-walking does not delve deeply into issues of embodiment or mobility per se, but acknowledges the 'key routines, habits and practices through which people inscribe their knowledges into places' (2004: p.257). Anderson presents 'bimbling' – meaning walking aimlessly – together with participants as a central technique for evoking placed memories:

The relaxing relatively aimless purpose of the exercise could open up the senses to allow the re-calling of incidents, feelings and experiences that were constitutive of that individual's understanding of the life world. It was possible therefore to harness not only the 'conditions, qualities and rhythms of the body in motion' (Jarvis 1997, IX), but also the associations created by these individuals in this place, to excavate levels of meanings both the researcher and researched may theretofore have been unaware of (2004: p.258).

Anderson (2004) found the practice of 'bimbling' with his participants as uniquely facilitating of a bond between researcher and participant that went beyond the researcher/researched power dichotomy into something more collaborative. He refers to 'talking-whilst-walking' after de Botton (2002) as a 'midwife of thought'. He writes:

Thoughts, 'pangs of memory' (after Harrison 1991) and emotive connections would come to us through conversation, prompted not only by questions, but also by the interconnections between the individuals and the place itself.

Thus walking together with the participant through a 'co-ingredient' environment – in other words a place that holds significance for individual identity formation – can aid the researcher in harnessing the power of place. Anderson (2004) places emphasis in

his own research on radical environmentalism on places of activism, places invested with strong emotional agendas, memories and desires. His account opens up a debate around the importance of paying heed to place, the body and mobility in qualitative methodologies.

He argues that through keeping a focus on person-place relationships, the researcher can 'step into' or recreate practices in order to form a better understanding of participants' relations to place. Further, keeping the place aspect in mind, researchers can direct their questions and observational attention towards transforming social understanding into socio-spatial understanding. In other words, researchers need to ask the question, how are these practices placed? What difference does place make for these knowledges?

Anderson specifically speaks about walking aimlessly, so called bimbbling, however I would argue that walking a trail or a set route can offer similar opportunities. The Ramblers walk, which involves following a leader on a planned route, offers less opportunities for stopping, or diverging from the path, thus the physical movement becomes all the more important for how knowledge is recalled. Anderson's (2004) research into radical environmentalism further means that he inhabited places of activism with his participants, places that due to their status as threatened took on a highly emotional significance for his participants. Rambling with my participants through the Hampshire countryside does not call forth the same kind of reaction, but arguably houses an individual and cultural desire for wellness. Furthermore, many of my participants were relative newcomers to Hampshire, and therefore the landscape itself did not hold the same kind of emotive power. However, as I will develop further in coming chapters, place always matters, and in cases where the place itself is unfamiliar, it becomes perhaps more interesting to note how it interacts with the moving body to form a placed event that is specific and emergent. As Long comments (quoted in Anderson 2004: p.258), the bodily movement of walking invokes a 'rhythmic relaxation' of body and mind that 'frees the imagination'. Solnit (2001: 5) also puts this point across beautifully, 'Walking, ideally, is a state in which mind, the body, and the world are aligned, as though they were three characters finally in conversation together, three notes suddenly making a chord'.

Reflections

In this section I reflect on the process of fieldwork, my approach to interviewing and my positionality as a researcher. As well as discussing some of the ethical considerations around carrying out qualitative research such as this. Reflecting back on the methodology chosen for the research, I am confident in my choice to use qualitative 'walking interviews', for all the reasons discussed above, and I have achieved a rich data set which addresses the research questions and has inspired new

insights. However, as with most fieldwork – and perhaps especially so in doctoral research – the benefit of hindsight means you may do things slightly differently were you to carry out similar research again. Two things that I would do differently, if I were to replicate this study, would be firstly choosing the most appropriate setting and style of interviewing from the outset and secondly to make sure that I have an appropriate procedure in place to ensure I have a record of my participants giving their informed consent to take part in the research. My changing approach to interviewing whilst walking and reflections on ethics and consent will be discussed in further detail below.

The changing interview approach

Initially, I attended the group walks for participant observational purposes and as a way to recruit participants for walks with me one-on-one, for the purpose of carrying out semi-structured qualitative interviews whilst walking. At the start of the fieldwork period I had decided that I would ask participants to take me on a local walk of about one hour and during our walk I would interview them. Hoping that ‘talking whilst walking’ (Anderson, 2004) would give rise to a different interviewing experience, where the active interaction with the landscape and the movement of the body would prompt memories, feelings or experiences that a seated, stationary interview would not. It also seemed highly appropriate that a study about walking should engage with the walking body both as a tool of research and an object of study. The following sections of the chapter will make the case for such an approach in further detail.

My initial approach, thus, was to carry out the interview one-on-one and not in the group walk setting. The reasoning for this was that I supposed that carrying out an interview in a group walk setting would interfere with the walking experience and compromise the restorative potential of the group walk. Further I also assumed that an interview during a group walk would compromise confidentiality and privacy in the interview encounter as the conversation may be over-heard. However, half way through my year of fieldwork I questioned that my approach of carrying out individual walking interviews one-on-one was unnecessarily time-consuming. At this point, a total of 19 interviews had been carried out using the one-on-one walking interview approach.

It had proved difficult at times to organise the interview walks as I had to find a place and time that worked with both the participant’s and my own schedule. This often meant that I had to schedule interview walks several weeks in advance, which on a couple of occasions led to cancellations by participants. The time lapse between contact and actually meeting up was too significant. It became even more difficult to schedule one-on-one walks with the younger participants from the *20s and 30s group* as they were working full-time and had to meet either on evenings or at weekends. This became even more difficult when evenings grew darker as autumn approached.

I then made the decision that I would interview walkers during group walks. I had

often had casual conversations with fellow walkers during group walks about my research and they often had interesting stories to share about their walking experiences, thus I felt it would be fruitful to record these conversations and move the interview situation into the group environment. I had initially feared that carrying out recorded interviews during group walks would be too invasive, or disruptive of the experience, however after walking with several groups I realised that the social atmosphere of the walks would allow me to carry out semi-structured recorded interviews with willing participants without this being experienced as invasive either for the participant or for the group as a whole. The structure of the walks commonly consisted of many more or less temporary 'couplings' where walkers would walk alongside each other and chat for a while and at natural breaks in the walk (at a stile, or as the group gathered to wait for stragglers or at a bend in the path or similar) when their path crossed another walker they would move on and new temporary congregations would form. This allowed me both the opportunity and privacy to speak to several participants during a group walk. Thus, after 15 one-on-one interview walks, I revised my interview strategy and moved the interview into the group walk setting.

The two different settings for the walking interview – the one-on-one walk and the group walk – I found provided me with slightly different interview responses. My study was primarily about the potential therapeutic experience of led group walks, as opposed to lone walks, which offer a very different kind of experience, thus I found that the interviews carried out during group walks were slightly more 'grounded' in the experience as it was unfolding. The one-on-one walks also provided good quality interview data and some very interesting responses about the restorative quality of walking with others, but since these interviews were carried out in a setting that was somewhat different from the group walking experience that we were exploring in the interview, the embodied 'presence' within the narrative was to some degree compromised. Of course, the one-on-one interview walks were not lone walks as they were carried out together with the participant and the interview took place while walking, but they could not replicate the particulars of walking with a larger group. I found that the interview during group walks allowed participants to draw on their immediate experience of being within the group walk setting in a way that they were not able to do on the one-on-one walks with me, where they rather had to draw on past experiences. However, both types of interview allowed the participant to 'embody the narrative' of their walking story, which enriched the interview data regardless of whether it was a walk where only I was present or whether it was a group walk. However, with the benefit of having the experience of carrying out both types of interviews, I would in the future go straight to the group walk context, perhaps giving participants who I interviewed during a group walk the option to meet up for a further one-on-one interview walk if they wanted to discuss their experiences further in a more

private setting. A smaller number of participants would make this approach more feasible.

My role as a researcher

The excerpts from my field notes and my use of participant observation provide a 'personal experience narrative' (Denzin, 1989) of my positioning both as a researcher in the field and as a socially situated walker-subject. The empirical foundation of this thesis is in part an autoethnography. There is – as with most broad terminology – no definitive consensus about what an autoethnography is, indeed it has been said that whether a work is called an autoethnography or just an ethnography depends on the claims made by those who write it and those who write about it (Butz, 2004). A generic definition of autoethnography, which encompasses a range of approaches, describes the practice as 'a form of self-narrative that places the self within a social context' (Reed-Danahay cited in Butz, 2004: p. 138). My autoethnography is one which both reflects on my experience as a researcher and as a fellow walker in order to gain a broader understanding of the practice of group walking and in particular the sociality of walking together. Although I joined the walking groups specifically for the purpose of carrying out research about walking and well-being, in the course of carrying out my fieldwork I also became a regular walker. Part of my motivation for including autoethnographic elements in the form of field notes and other observations was to incorporate affect and emotion into the description of the walk setting. However, I did not engage in an analysis or study of my own life or walking practice per se, other than my experience of the group walks. The autoethnographic *sensibility* of the thesis is not a methodological approach, rather it is an epistemological position in relation to experience, knowledge and representation that has methodological implications (see Butz, 2004). This thesis, as a whole, takes direction from non-representational theory in being critical of the production of scholarly knowledge through representation of a researched 'other'. The excerpts from my fieldnotes aim at – in the words of Butz (2004, p. 140) – collapsing 'the distinction between representing and performing experience' and the place of the researcher-self in the production of knowledge. The so-called 'crisis of representation' provoked on a broader scale by postmodernism posed a challenge to assumptions about the production of scientific knowledge and 'truth' and collapsed the faith placed in language to communicate a rich social world permeated by affects which often defy textualisation. Autoethnography can, in the words of Carolyn Ellis (1997, p. 117), add 'blood and tissue to the abstract bones of theoretical discourse'. It is also often an orientation to narrative writing that finds its origin in a love for literature and story-telling. This love can be identified strongly in the work of Carolyn Ellis (e.g. 1997; 2004), but also in the work of cultural geographers such as John Wylie (2010) and Hayden Lorimer (2008) who have both

explained their literary motivations for writing more affectively evocative accounts of the research context.

In terms of assessing the 'truth value' of the analysis put forth in this thesis, some of the findings were reflected on with participants and others in the process of carrying out the fieldwork. As a researcher-walker I received many questions about what I was finding out in my research from other walkers. They were curious about my findings and were able to reflect in response about their own experiences. For example, I spoke to walkers about the nature of communication whilst walking together and they were able to confirm my understanding of walking sociality and strategies to manage social interaction, such as stopping to tie ones shoe laces in order to 'get rid' of an undesirable conversational partner, as well as the positive aspects of communication whilst walking. Similarly, I was able to talk to walkers about the positive benefits of walking for general well-being, both physical and mental and was able to find general agreement around my findings that for many walking constituted a journey towards self-improvement in some respect.

Ethical considerations

The process of ethnographic research has been referred to in anthropological literature as a 'forest of ethics' (Castañeda, 2006). Although ethical tensions are a part of doing any kind of research, being co-present as a participant/researcher in ethnographic fieldwork throws up a certain set of ethical questions. What Guillemin and Gillam (2004) term 'ethically important moments' are those situations – 'often subtle, and usually unpredictable' (2004: p.262)– that arise in research, when our ethical principles and frameworks come to be tested. Guillemin and Gillam (2004) identify two dimensions of ethics in qualitative research, which they term 'procedural ethics' and 'ethics in practice'. The first involves seeking approval from an ethics committee to undertake the research and the second refers to those everyday ethical issues that arise in the process of carrying out research. At the time of undertaking this project there was no ethics procedure in place for doctoral research. The responsibility for ensuring that the research was carried out in an ethical fashion was down to me, thus the ethical framework was developed in practice, as the project progressed. The starting point for any research with humans is to be attentive to the basic obligation the researcher has toward their participant, to interact with them in a humane, nonexploitative way while at the same time being mindful of one's role as a researcher (Guillemin and Gillam, 2004: p. 264). My research was carried out within the framework of qualitative social science research and thus adopted an ethical approach which is commonly agreed upon within this type of research. This ethical framework emphasises informed consent, which means participants should clearly understand what the research is about, what the information they impart will be used

for, what is expected of them as participants and that they have the right to withdraw their participation at any stage of the research. It is also important that the researcher ensures anonymity and confidentiality of research data and that participants know how the data will be handled.

That the research was carried out responsibly and ethically was important, as a significant proportion of my interviews handled intimate, personal and potentially sensitive issues, such as issues around mental well-being. It was therefore important to me that the walkers who took part in the research by talking to me about their lives and experiences in relation to walking, but also generally, were confident that the information that they imparted was going to be treated with care and professionalism. I started the fieldwork period having a written consent form which explained what the research was about and what was expected from someone who participated in it and their rights as participants, as well as what would happen with the data and that they would be able to read the results. This consent form explained that the information gathered in interviews would be anonymised and treated as confidential. This written consent form was used for all my one-on-one interview walks, however when it came to carrying out interviews during group walks the use of a written consent form was no longer practical or desirable under the circumstances. Conducting a written consent procedure for each participant and each recorded conversation became a problem in the group walk context where stopping to read and sign a piece of paper would have been difficult. In order not to forego the opportunity for data collection that the group walks offered, I decided at this point to use verbal consent instead. The procedure I undertook was much the same as the written consent form, except I explained its content verbally and asked the individual if they were happy to take part by doing a recorded interview, upon a yes I would then start the voice recorder. This is an example of 'ethics in practice', where the field sometimes dictates the necessity to come up with flexible solutions. In hindsight, it may have been better to *record* the verbal consent procedure, but at the time – with all the naiveté of a new researcher – it seemed most natural to ask permission before starting to record. With hindsight, it is important not only to protect the rights of the participant but to protect the researcher too, through having a record that proves the research was carried out ethically.

On the absolute majority of my group walks during this second phase of the interviewing, I introduced myself to the whole group at the start of the walk and explained to them that I was there as a researcher and that I would be grateful if anyone would like to talk to me about their walking experiences and how it had impacted on their well-being. I explained that it of course was completely voluntary whether they chose to be interviewed or not, but if they wanted to they were more than welcome to come up to me during the course of the walk. Introducing myself in this way meant that the walkers knew why I was there and that I was a researcher

wanting to interview them. As the months went by, many of the regular walkers knew who I was and the news that there was a researcher attending walks sometimes preceded me. The members of the walking groups I attended should have been aware of my name, university affiliation and contact details, which I had made available in a range of ways in addition to the official membership list and the attendance list that was taken at the start of each walk; such as the newsletter articles, the flyer, business cards and project descriptions handed out, and the 20s and 30s Facebook group. Participants or other group members should not have had any trouble getting in contact with me had they wished to. I made sure that if they had any questions or concerns about the research or their participation in it, they knew where to find me to raise them. No one got in contact with me about any questions or concerns arising from the interview experience.

It was important that the participants did not suffer as a result of taking part in the research. As interviews sometimes brought up memories of difficult times and struggles with various aspects of life, there was the possibility that participants left the interview context in an emotionally vulnerable state. I took care never to push participants to talk about sensitive issues around their well-being, but let them choose how much to share with me. My questions were open questions such as 'please tell me a bit about your walking and what it means to you', which allowed participants to choose the level of emotional depth, however, sensitive information sometimes came up in interviews and I will discuss in some more detail below how I handled this.

The following sub-section discusses two specific 'moments' of ethical importance in the course of the fieldwork, one in relation to an overheard conversation and the other in relation to sensitive information.

Two ethically important moments

Borrowing Guillemin and Gillam's (2004) term, I would like to draw attention to two 'ethically important moments' that occurred during the course of the fieldwork. An ethically important moment, in Guillemin and Gillam's definition, is 'where the approach taken or the decision made has important ethical ramifications, but where the researcher does not necessarily feel himself or herself to be on the horns of a dilemma. In fact, in some cases it might be relatively clear how the researcher should respond or proceed, and yet there is something ethically important at stake' (2004, p. 265). The first ethically important moment in my research that I will discuss is drawing on an overheard conversation as data. In chapter 5, I refer briefly to an overheard conversation between a participant, who is a regular walker, and two newcomers to the group. The participant has been a member of the group for a couple of years and imparts some of his knowledge to the newcomers, in order to reassure them about the pacing of the walk. As my concern at the time of overhearing this conversation was

with the rhythm and pace of the walk, this overheard conversation constituted very good and relevant data, although it did not take place during a formal interview. This is an issue that can arise in ethnographic research that focuses on understanding a relational space where social interactions are a key element. The ethical dilemma arises when consent for quoting from overheard speech is not achieved or sought. One response to this is an approach termed 'hearsay ethnography' (Watkins and Swidler, 2009), which utilises conversational journals kept by cultural insiders 'that permit access to the multiple and ongoing discourses through which meaning is made *in situ*' (pp. 162-3, original emphasis). This approach transfers the descriptive practices of ethnographic work onto the participants themselves, asking them to record not only their own conversations but also those they overhear between others, including gossip and rumours. However, conducting ethnographic fieldwork as a researcher does arguably include documenting practices of meaning-making, converting experiences and observations of the interactional context into text (Watkins and Swidler, 2009). When social interaction is a central part of what is studied, and as long as anonymity of the members of the community under study is ensured, recording social interactions within the field can arguably be done with ethical legitimacy. However, questions about where to draw the line, ethically speaking, between what constitutes acceptable data and what does not, and when informed consent from the 'observed' is necessary and when not, do arise. The conversation that I overheard between the long-term member and the newcomers to the group provided insight into collective meaning-making and the sharing of practical 'insider' knowledge within the group. The ethical questions it raised in regards to consent did not occur to me until later, confirming that ethically important moments may not always appear as such when they take place (Guillemin and Gillam, 2004).

Secondly, as I have already mentioned, my interviews often revealed highly personal stories about individual participant's 'paths to well-being'. One such story is mentioned in chapter 4, it is the story of Mary. My interview with Mary took place near her home and she took me on a route that she often follows on lone walks or walks with her extended group of walker-friends. The path took us alongside a narrow river surrounded by greenery and trees. Walking along this particular path while talking about Mary's own walking history brought up a range of memories for Mary. She reflected on her path to her current level of well-being, which she described as good, and this path was by no means an easy or straightforward one. By walking both the physical and metaphorical path of her story, her narrative was mobilised and materialised. About halfway through our walk, Mary spontaneously started to tell me a very personal story of a particular event that took place on this very path around 20 years earlier. She explained to me how she had been very unhappy in her life at that point and that one day she had just left the house without telling anyone where she

was going and she had followed this path for several hours, battling with thoughts of drowning herself in the river. Mary told me this story, I think, to illustrate her connection with this particular path and place, and how her walking practice was intimately entwined with her well-being. Walking had both led her towards the depths of her depression and out of it again. This intimate revelation was no doubt an 'ethically important moment' in the course of my interview with Mary. At this point in the interview, when Mary reveals past suicidal thoughts, even if this was 20 years previously, I had the option to either carry on with the interview as if nothing had happened or stop and somehow respond to what she had told me (Guillemin and Gillam, 2004). However, I took an approach to interviewing that allowed for a significant level of flexibility in the moment, this was not a structured interview but an approach which aimed to tease out embodied narratives, responsive to place and time and thus I would argue that I did neither stop nor carry on as if nothing had happened. I allowed Mary to speak and showed empathy and understanding with her story and did not at this point ask her any follow-up questions to pursue the topic but let her recount her story. Mary told me her story and then moved naturally on to talking about joining a walking group shortly after this event and how it had helped her out of this depression. What was most important for me in this process was to trust in my own empathetic abilities and perception of the participant's emotional state. When Mary revealed this intimate narrative, it was within the context of telling me about her particular journey to wellness, and the role of walking within it, and she wanted me to understand that this journey included some dark places. There was no point during this interview at which I considered stopping the interview because of concerns for Mary's well-being, during or after the interview. However, this decision was based on being attentive to her emotional state at the time of narrating these events, and on her account of her current level of well-being. If the story she told me was about an event that took place just a week earlier, not 20 years earlier, my reaction would no doubt have been very different.

A note on photographs in the thesis

A short note is necessary to explain the use of photographs in the thesis. During the fieldwork period I took a few photographs of group walks and walk settings, these were taken primarily to aid my memory and as a form of visual field notes. Some photographs have been included in the thesis to provide the reader with exactly that, visual illustrations of what a walk setting could look like. The photographs are not used for analytical purposes beyond this and are not included as representative of all walks or walk settings that constituted the fieldwork and data for the thesis.

Conclusion: place, embodiment, mobility

Research into health and well-being is increasingly turning towards qualitative methods to understand how health and illness are experienced by individuals and communities (Brown, 2003; Kearns and Moon, 2002). The partial review of qualitative methods in this chapter has focused on three particular aspects that have not received much attention in the development of qualitative methodologies so far; place, embodiment and mobility. The first section showed that interview studies, the central technique used in qualitative research, have commonly neglected the significance of the interview setting and the difference that interviewing in place and during activity can make. The second section which focused on ethnographic methods showed that historically ethnographies conceived of place as an inert background to cultural practices and that ethnographic methods have only recently been opened up to harness relations in 'embodied space'. My own approach to my field have been a combination of using open-ended and semi-structured interviews and an ethnographic style of participant observation. An approach that draws on the advantages and insights from go-along interviews and talking-whilst-walking. I would argue that the mobile interview, used within a wider framework of ethnographic participation and observation can further an understanding of placed embodied practices.

de Botton in his book *The Art of Travel* (2002) refers to journeys as 'midwives of thought', he writes:

There is almost a quaint correlation between what is in front of our eyes and the thoughts we are able to have in our head: large thoughts at times requiring large views, new thoughts new places (cited in Watts and Urry, 2008: p.860).

It is in this vein that I argue for mobile interviews in place; place and movement together becoming so-called 'midwives of thought'. The mutuality of place, body and movement giving birth to a particular experience or calling forth thoughts or feelings that were theretofore hidden. As Watts and Urry (2008) make clear in their discussion of 'moving methods', mobility as a category of connection, distance, and motion, poses a particular challenge to social science methods. Health and cultural geographies can learn something from the emerging field of 'mobility studies' across the social sciences, perhaps examining health and ill-health from a perspective of movement and immobility, widening the concept of mobility from the areas of transportation and tourism. Furthermore mobility seems a particularly valuable concept through which to explore particular geographies of health.

Mobility means more than just a movement from A to B, as I have tried to allude to above. As Cresswell (2006: p.3) puts it, 'If movement is the dynamic

equivalent of location then mobility is the dynamic equivalent of *place*'. Following Cresswell (2006), embracing movement, methodologically and analytically, is one way to combine an interest in embodied practice on one hand, and narratives about health and place on the other. Human mobility is an irreducibly embodied experience, and at the same time the meanings we give to mobility are connected to wider cultural narratives. David Delaney wrote (quoted in Cresswell, 2006: p.3), 'human mobility implicates *both* physical bodies moving through material landscapes *and* categorical figures moving through representational spaces'. There is a special constituent relationship between place, movement and narrative, and as I have attempted to argue through the review of methods above it makes a difference for how social knowledges are made. There is an excellent opportunity here to develop methods that are responsive to place, body and movement and this seems to me an important starting point in an effort to understand placed embodied practices, such as walking, and their relationships to cultural as well as individual narratives of wellness.

Chapter 4

Walking a shared path towards wellness: The sociality of walking together

What emerged strongly in my ethnography with group walkers in the Hampshire countryside was that their walking practice in relation to their pursuit of wellness was intertwined with various desires and ideas about sociality. Their walking practice was significant for their well-being not only because it involved physical exercise and being in 'the outdoors' but because it provided an opportunity for social congregation. It emerged as highly important to understand that group walking is about walking *together*; a shared experience, a social experience. Understanding the affective processes involved in establishing connections with other walkers; the ways that the walking group becomes an affective unit (see Venn, 2010), stood out as an integral part of what makes shared walking significant for well-being. As one of my participants pointed out; '*not many people come just for walking, most of them come for the social side*' (Andy, on a walk in the New Forest, November 2009). Thus, this chapter investigates the sociality of walking; how individual walkers negotiate the sociality of walking with others and how the social atmosphere of the shared walk is significant for their journey towards better well-being. It is a chapter interested in subjective negotiations of needs and desires within the walking group setting and the processes of relationality and affect through which the sociality of the group is established and maintained. Despite the fact that therapeutic landscapes are often places where human beings come into contact with other human beings – whether in active congregation or in contemplative silence – few health geographers have focused their analyses on the sociality of health practices in these places. This chapter seeks to right this lack of engagement with social relations grounded in place.

The entries below are (edited) extracts from my field diary and describe walks that I undertook with the *20s and 30s group* between August 2009 and April 2010. They are examples of the kind of experiences that led me to an interest in the relationship between the materiality of the environment and the social relations performed within it; I wondered to what degree the social relations played out within

the walking group were responsive to their material surrounding and indeed to what degree they were shaped by it.

It's horribly muddy. I'm caked in mud almost up to my knees and my boots are completely soaked. We're nearly at the pub for a mid-walk stop. Okay, so today hasn't been great because it's windy and cold and I'm getting tired from sinking into the gloop and jumping over puddles. But everyone is joking about it. Ben – a gregarious and keen walker – is asking me to rate walks we've been on together. How does this one compare to that one along the beach when it was really sunny? He weirdly prefers this one. I can't for my life understand why, but I suppose there's a nice upbeat feeling among us today despite the weather.

*

We've come across something weird on the path. A mannequin hand is reaching up from the ground, the arm seems to be buried in the soil. When I listen to the recording later (I was recording an interview at the time we came across it), it is like something has gone off. Before, there are quiet murmurs of conversation in front and behind as people walked in twos, and then all of a sudden it's like something explodes, there are loud laughs, jokes, talk as people gather together to look. After a few minutes we move on and fall back in line two and two and the temporary excitement settles down again.

*

We're sitting on a grassy bank, most of us chose to sit here in the shade because it's such a hot day. My bare forearms have gone red, so has the guy's who's sitting next to me. Because of the ways the trees stand we are sitting in two lines facing each other with our backs toward rows of trees. There are trickles of conversation back and forth. We're grouped close, so it's a time for group talk. It's mostly about walking, because it tends to be when there's a group of us. It's somehow tentative and relaxed at the same time. A little searching; being glad we have things in common to fall back on.

*

I have a new backpack, it's small and sleek and sporty looking. It has one of those water tanks that sits inside the backpack

and a tube that comes out the top and over my shoulder so that I can drink through it while I'm walking, I think it's made for cyclists. It attracts a few comments. 'I could tell you weren't new to this' a new girl tells me, signalling at my backpack. Walking up a steep hill someone jokingly asks if I've brought an oxygen tube. I quickly realise this contraption is rubbish, I can't get any water to come out of the tube, there are probably air bubbles caught in it. At break time I become a bit of a spectacle as a group forms around me trying to work out why no water comes out of the tube. I'm really thirsty! One woman holds the bag up high over my head as I crouch on the ground, a guy squeezes along the tube, someone else shouts 'suck! Suck!'. Others are sitting in the grass around us eating their packed lunches, looking on. Out of the corner of my eye I notice the new girl taking a photo on her mobile phone, laughing. I have never met any of them before, but sometimes things align in a way that brings people together.

My auto-ethnographic notes from these walks illustrate my attempts to describe the affective atmosphere of walking group sociality, which I understood to be emergent, evolving and unpredictable. I wanted to relay how the material circumstances of our interactions and encounters often could set something in motion; how the material stirred an affective response. I became interested in how affect in this sense permeates place and provides anchoring and location for the desire for wellness nurtured by individual walkers. This chapter is thus the result of this interest in understanding the complex relations between landscape, walking and sociality. And in turn the implication of walking socialities in the establishment of a therapeutic landscape of walking.

Though there is little research in this area in human geography, research on recovery from mental illness in other disciplines has started to develop a social perspective on recovery, identifying social relationships as a core dimension to recovery (Schön, Denhov and Topor, 2009). Of course, no process of recovery or restoration can be achieved in isolation, either from fellow humans or the non-human environment within which we are always embroiled. Even though most of my participants did not suffer with diagnosed severe mental illness (except in the case of one), some did suffer with some degree of social anxiety – which ranged from negatively affecting the person's social relationships and ability to make friends to just a complaint of being shy in the company of strangers – whereas many suffered with feelings of loneliness, often brought on by a relocation from another area or a change in circumstances, such as a relationship break-up. Those who found social

relationships in their everyday environments troublesome, seemed to benefit from the particular form of sociality established while walking, the sociality of the shared walk was often found both supportive and restorative, for reasons that I will elaborate on in more detail below.

Just as the social relations between walkers are important for understanding the interaction between walking and well-being, so is remembering that humans are a part of, and always stand in relation to, the non-human environment (Latour, 1993), thus the walking landscape itself becomes part of the analysis as the frame for action and interaction. Sociality is not understood as an exclusively human, or discursive, phenomenon. In order to signal the coming together of the complex configurations of bodies, objects and technologies in rural group walking, I will use the term *walkscape* to capture the way that walking in the Hampshire countryside is a symbolic aesthetic act that transforms the landscape both materially and experientially (see Careri, 2002). I am using this term to signal that I am referring to the rich texture of landscape as it is traversed, negotiated, experienced, (re)constructed and manipulated by foot, and how it in turn affects us.

Studies of the relationship between walking, health and the environment are often focused around providing public health recommendations relating to facilities for walking, such as pavements and trails, accessibility of destinations, aesthetic qualities and perceptions about the environment such as the busyness of roads, and so on (e.g. Owen, Humpel, Leslie and Bauman, 2004). However, there is a growing literature in geography and related disciplines on walking focused around the self-landscape encounter, and of particular note are more-than-representational accounts (e.g. Carolan, 2008; Wylie, 2005), and accounts of walking as a way to create new embodied knowledges of place and performative practice (e.g. Myers, 2010; O'Neill and Hubbard 2010; Pink, Hubbard, O'Neill and Radley, 2010), phenomenological approaches and ethnographies of walking (e.g. Ingold and Vergunst, 2008), and methodological developments that take the embodied encounter with place into account (Anderson, 2004; Hall, 2009). This chapter draws on this rich literature in order to build on an understanding of the relations between walking sociality and landscape, as a specific aspect of the embodied encounter with landscape through the practice of the shared walk. I argue that the social dynamic of the shared walk becomes place-specific and can be considered a specific social aesthetic that is produced through walking together. As Lucas (2008: p.169) points out, walking has long been regarded as offering the potential for aesthetic practice and experience, and this chapter takes this notion onboard by considering how the concept of social aesthetics can help further our understanding of walking sociality.

Walking sociality: the key findings

‘Not only, then, do we walk because we are social beings, we are also social beings because we walk’. Lee and Ingold (2008: 2).

The walking body is a social body. This is what Tim Ingold and Jo Lee Vergunst conclude in their edited volume on walking ethnographies, opened with the following assertion;

our principal contention is that walking is a profoundly sociable activity: that in their timings, rhythms and inflections, the feet respond as much as does the voice to the presence and activity of others. Social relations, we maintain, are not enacted in situ but are paced out along the ground (2008: p.1).

That walking together is a social activity may seem obvious, yet, apart from Ingold and Vergunst’s (2008) recent anthology, very little attention has been paid to the sociality of walking. When it comes to health geographical work, a focus on walking socialities in relation to well-being is entirely absent. This chapter aims to address this curious lack of engagement, focusing on the finding that the social dimension of walking emerged as a core aspect of what made walking significant for my participants’ well-being. There are a number of aspects to the way that walkers interact and negotiate their social space that are specific to the impact that shared walking has on social relations. The impact that the social experience of shared walking had for well-being varied, and it was not always a positive or straightforward relationship, but it was consistently brought up by participants as important.

Temporary connections

The first aspect of walking group sociality was a marked tendency for walking group members to nurture their social relationships within the group context but not take them outside the group and meet up privately for other activities. One participant, a longstanding member of the 10 mile group, describes the familiarity and support that has developed between the walkers in the course of walking together in their relatively small group:

you get to meet lots of people and have a chat to people and you know, become part of their lives,

and I feel that they're there for you as well, if you're feeling a bit sort of down, you know, they seem like a family, I think, to me. (Liz; October 2009, walk in the New Forest)

Along with most other walkers I interviewed, this particular participant had not pursued the friendships with her fellow group members outside of the walk setting. The walking group, for her, was a social sphere that sustains her whilst she is within its fold, but which does not encompass her life outside of walking, and this was true for the majority of my participants. These temporary connections between walkers has even been described by some participants as central to what they find restorative about group walking. The following conversation illustrates this:

H: Walking de-stresses me, and I also think that it has something to do with chatting to people. I'm very busy and it's quite stressful, and here you can meet new people and talk to them about other things

Me: so it takes you out of your normal social environment?

H: Yeah, yeah exactly. They're not people I see normally, and you can talk about completely different things [than you normally do].

(Helen; February 2010, on a walk from Holly Hill)

However, the restorative aspect of either sustained or fleeting 'walking friendships' should not be presumed unproblematic, as a number of researchers have pointed out that the restorative potential of a given place or practice is highly context dependent and experienced differently by different people or at different times (e.g. Conradson 2005; Milligan & Bingley 2007; Wakefield & McMullan 2005). The social dimension of group walking is by no means unproblematic, and it varies greatly between different groups. Within my local Ramblers' network, the 5 mile group is the most popular, it attracts between 30 to 40 walkers per walk and the few members that turn up every week are outnumbered by those who turn up less frequently and thus need to re-establish social relationships each time. Whereas the 3 mile group and the 10 mile group both have between ten and twelve members who devotedly come most weeks and get to know each other well, often over several years of attendance. One

participant, in his mid-sixties, who occasionally joins the 5 mile group but prefers to organise walks independently with his extended circle of friends, comments:

if you're walking with friends you'd be talking about different things, because by and large most people know each other... when you join a group of thirty, forty, you sort of see people intermittently and so it's a much slower process [of getting to know people] than if you were, you know, at work or in another institution. (Peter; November 2009, on a walk in the Winchester Water Meadows).

Establishing walking friendships are not effortless or necessarily always easy. However there needs to be a distinction made between establishing friendships per se, as we normally understand them, and walking sociability. Forging a friendship, in any context, depends on regular meeting and communication and nurturing a gradually deepening bond through entering increasingly personal registers of communication and sharing of experiences. However, the term 'walking friendship' is used here to refer to the specific phenomenon of walking sociability, which depends on establishing often fleeting social connections, although there is always the possibility that walkers will meet again and can continue to build a relationship. The therapeutic potentiality of these fleeting social connections should not be underestimated.

The politics of talk

Secondly, my participants experienced walking sociality as inclusive and supportive because it relaxed social norms around the style and amount of communication one was expected to engage in. Walkers found that whilst walking they could more easily negotiate the social politics around talking and being quiet; a key concern for anyone suffering from shyness or any form of social anxiety. As one participant commented;

it's quite acceptable to have a little bit of time when you're not attached to people [when you are walking], whereas in another environment it's a bit strange to sit quietly and not talk, if you're walking its quite acceptable. (Andy; April 2010, on a walk in the New Forest).

The participant quote above is an example of what was a recurring theme in interviews; the ability to talk or be quiet in the company of others. For some participants, the ability to share quiet contemplative time with others was a powerfully restorative experience. For others, the group walk was an outlet for social curiosity,

giving them the opportunity to speak to a number of strangers from different walks of life. Many participants, particularly from the younger group (i.e. of working age), found walking sociability to be easier to negotiate than social relations in other contexts. Several participants, including Andy quoted above, contrasted walking with other social group situations, such as the pub, where it is deemed more important to engage in talk and not be quiet; or the sports team where sociality is confined to pockets of physical inactivity, such as post-game drinks. In both cases, participants found talking whilst walking afforded them a wider social register of talk or quiet contemplative moments in the company of others. Thus, the social atmosphere of the shared walk is experienced as socially supportive in its capacity to relax some of the cultural conventions around social interaction, such as how, when and how much to share about oneself with others.

Communicative bodies

Thirdly, aside from talking, walkers communicate with each other through body language and in the flow or interruption of movement. Slowing down or speeding up ones walk in order to walk next to somebody signals a willingness to communicate. Simultaneously, slowing down or speeding up ones walk in order *not* to walk alongside somebody signals an unwillingness to communicate. An unwillingness to enter into conversation can also be signalled by eye contact, or rather the lack thereof. I have walked alongside others who have signalled their wish to walk in silence by maintaining a purposeful gaze into the distance, or to the opposite side. Similarly, in the periphery of ones visual field one can see if somebody walking alongside oneself is seeking eye contact by looking over; searching for signals that you are willing to converse. It was also somewhat of a joke going around the walking groups, that if you find yourself in an undesirable conversation with someone, just stop and tie your shoe laces. More than one participant jokingly suggested this manoeuvre as a way to 'get rid of' an undesirable walking partner; 'please carry on, I'm just going to tie my laces'. These bodily communicative acts are part of ways in which walkers can negotiate the social relations of group walking in subtle ways that do not disrupt the overall social unity of the group by causing offense to others.

Place and sociality

Two related findings emerged regarding the interaction between the body, the landscape and social relations while walking. These were that; a). physical movement influences social interaction, and; b). the material characteristics of the walkscape has a highly important role in shaping walking sociality. Social interaction whilst walking is styled both through movement and through an engagement and immersion in the landscape and thus these two dimensions are co-continuous. The particular socio-

material context of the rural walkscape styles interaction and communication and the moving body is receptive and engaged in constant non-verbal communication. Spaces of communality are created through collective choreographies of interaction, rest and congregation. Walking together generates knowledge of places through conversational and convivial activity (Myers 2010). The communicative nature of walking is not necessarily dependent on actually conversing with another person, but can be understood through a more expansive notion of language, one which is 'not confined to rational, verbal, articulation, but taken as the whole of embodied comportment, responsiveness and communicability' (Heim cited in Myers, 2010: p.59).

One of the main differences between walking sociality and social relations in more static environments – such as a café, pub or a dinner party – is that walking allows for fewer non-verbal signals to pass between individuals than if they were seated opposite each other for instance. While walking, eye contact is infrequent and brief while attention is focused ahead and in front. Due to often narrow foot paths, walkers often walk in a single file, or walk in pairs, thus making eye contact requires the walker to cast glances behind them or turn their head to the side, which is often awkward as they often need to pay attention to the terrain underfoot to negotiate such things as mud, puddles, protruding tree roots and rocks. Eye contact is a significant element of social encounters and is considered by some social psychologists (e.g. Ellsworth and Ludwig 2008) to vary as a function of the affective tone of interaction. Low levels of eye contact have been shown to indicate social distance and facilitate sharing of more personal, potentially embarrassing information (e.g. Modigliani, 1971). In this case, the social interaction that takes place whilst walking is experienced as low in emotional intensity because walkers make less eye-contact. Arguably, this may help to facilitate more emotional depth in conversations between walkers, or possibly even remove the perceived need to share anything significant about oneself at all. The landscape one traverses at times offers natural pauses in the conversation, or indeed encourages interaction between walkers as low-hanging branches are held aside, warnings passed on about a hole in the path/stinging nettles/a puddle/mud/slippery rocks or a whispers sent back about a deer/rare bird up ahead or something else of note or interest being pointed out.

Although emotive distancing may be taking place due to the lack of eye-contact, physical proximity is not diminished as a result of walking, so there is no literal distancing happening. Sometimes it may even increase such as helping each other across a stile, or ditch, or when sharing a fallen tree trunk as a seat during break time, just to relate a few typical instances when walkers share physical proximity with each other. However, walking in a group context most often means that the group disperses and walkers congregate in twos or threes, sometimes with significant distance between them. Walking sociality is thus also tempered by the dispersing of

the group, limiting social contact to one or two others at a time. This is another aspect of group walking which benefits those who suffer from social anxieties; often such anxieties are focused around group interaction, but here people have the opportunity to interact one-on-one or in very small groups at a time. As one participant pointed out:

I mean, like, you and I can talk, but [add] a couple of other people and you spread out (Peter, November 2009, on a walk in the Winchester Water Meadows).

This is also a reason why break-times are important for the sociality of the group; walkers can gather together and talk as a group, or indeed form new connections and find a new walking partner for the rest of the walk.

During my time of walking with these different groups I observed that walkers did not often share much personal information with each other, communication was primarily what one might call 'small talk'; conversations I took part in and those I heard others engage in were often about the weather, walking and ones experiences of walking, work, travels, gardening, food and restaurants, wild life one had spotted, books one had read, the history of the area we were walking through, and so on. Nothing too emotive or personal. Although emotionally 'safe', such impersonal chat also had the potential to frustrate and bore an unwilling conversation partner, as one participant remarked:

I came across this one woman, and she just insisted on talking about her bloody garden, I mean I don't know your garden, I can't see it, why why, why spend this time describing it to me? I'm sorry, I'm no botanist! (James, January 2009, on a walk in the Winchester Water Meadows).

Interestingly, I noticed a tension between this impersonal form of communication - all this small talk - and the underlying motivations that people had for joining the walking group and what they wished to get out of their group membership. Being a researcher, I had the privilege of being able to ask questions which would have probably been deemed too personal had I been just another group member. Through asking my participants about what led them to join the group, what they hoped to find when they joined and what their walking practice meant for their personal desire to be well, I gained access to registers of communication that were not commonly entered into between group members. The interesting insight that I gained was that all of my 40 participants shared one aspect of their motivation for joining the group; they were

seeking social contact. However, despite the shared desire for social communication and the establishment of new relationships, few members seem to take their new social alliances outside of group activities. Of course there are exceptions, such as (still rare) romantic relationships forming (even a marriage in the 20s and 30s group), and the odd friendship which defies this trend, but as ever the exceptions prove the rule. During my year of fieldwork I only came across one such friendship, it was between two elderly men in the *Walking Friends* group, who had found solace in each others' company after both their wives passed away in the same year. Perhaps this coincidence of personal trauma encouraged a more intimate connection. In general however, most regular walkers I came across nurtured their relationships to their fellow walkers *within* the group context.

Even though group members may not share intimate details of their lives very often with their fellow walkers, when they do they often find that talking *whilst* walking allows for easier communication. One participant comments:

it might be easier to talk about difficult things, you know, because you're looking ahead, you're not giving eye contact, you've got time haven't you to have gaps in the conversation or go slowly (Mary; September 2009, on a walk in Twyford)

However, the participant quoted above, Mary, was speaking of walking and talking with someone she knew socially *before* they started walking together. She told me that walking together had lent their friendship a new depth, as they had been able to share on a more intimate level. Mary, along with several other participants, also commented on how walking facilitates getting to know people, how it is easier to get to know someone while walking together than in a 'static' environment. Communication flows easier, or rather, if it does not flow it is not such a big deal, there is time to have gaps in the conversation or to go slowly, as Mary says.



Fig. 4.1. Walking in twos: Walking Friends, February 2010.

Lee and Ingold's (2006) study of the social encounter offered by a 'shared walk' has shown that movement in relation to another human being generates a particular social arena (see figure 4.1 for an illustration from the fieldwork). My findings above agree with their argument that shared walking is less confrontational and more companionable as it offers a shared viewpoint and the movement of walkers bodies converge with each other to become similar (Lee and Ingold, 2006: p.81).

I have found that the social particularities of the group walk benefit the relationship not only between regular group members but between my participants and myself too. Unlike a traditional seated interview where researcher and participant are typically seated opposite each other with direct eye contact, the walking interview can be experienced by participants as less invasive and encourage sharing. This is illustrated by this brief excerpt from my field diary:

It was a bright, warm afternoon and we walked a bit further than planned through some woods near his home. The interview took a different turn than I expected, when I first spoke to him on the group walk I took him for a very matter of fact sort of person, but the conversation quickly turned to his very personal thoughts and his struggle with depression. I sensed that he didn't want to go back at the end of the walk, and he commented how he was glad to have been able to talk about things that he wouldn't normally speak about. (September 2009, walk near Titchfield Common, Fareham).

The difference that walking makes for the interview encounter is perhaps greatest when researcher and participant walk alone, as in the walk I describe above, but I have found that most group walking events allow for enough privacy for this difference to still be relevant.

Below, I elaborate further on the social dynamics of some of the different walking groups in my study.

The 20s and 30s group: Well-being and community

At the start of any walk there is a tentativeness in the air as we assemble in the car park. Looks and smiles are exchanged. Relief when there is a familiar face and then greetings. You can spot the newcomers, the ones that stand fidgeting on their own, look a little lost, the ones that look around and seek eye contact to work out who seems friendly, who will speak to them, probably wondering if everyone else know each other. There is a list going around, where everyone ticks off their name, or newcomers add their names at the bottom, this is for health and safety reasons, but it helps to break silences. After a few minutes contacts are made, people comment on the weather, ask each other 'how long have you walked with the group?' and it suddenly feels like it will be a nice day because everyone is making an effort to make connections. This is why we are here. Suddenly there is expectation and motivation in the air. Then the leader says a few words, warning us if it is going to be muddy, telling us that there is a pub stop at the end (or sometimes mid-way through), and when they expect us to be back (usually the walks are somewhere between eight and fourteen miles). Then we set off, usually all grouped together, seemingly unorganised and scrambled at first, but soon settle into a line of twos, or sometimes more depending on the width of the path. Sometimes you have started a conversation in the car park and your first walking partner is established, other times you fall in line and start up a conversation. Often I ask the leader beforehand if I can introduce myself to the group before we set off. This way, they all know I am a researcher and that I am interested in interviewing them, and this saves any awkwardness or misunderstanding because my identity as researcher is known from the outset. It often means that I am approached by different people throughout the walk who want to ask me questions about my research, which gives me the opportunity to ask them questions about their walking experiences in turn. Of course, it also means a small number of walkers purposely avoid me as well, presumably not wanting to be 'questioned'. However I cannot escape being just a fellow walker too, as over the course of a day's walking I am drawn into a multitude of conversations, encounters, sightings and connections. At the same time, I am mindful of what happens, I take mental notes, and most ostensibly of all, I record relevant conversations on my voice recorder.

The *20s and 30s* walking group in particular seems to attract those who have recently moved to Hampshire from another part of the country, many are in addition single and living alone. One memorable conversation between four or five walkers ahead of me on one group walk confirmed this; they all marvelled at the fact that none of them were originally from Hampshire and continued to recount the original home towns of most of the core group of regular walkers, very few were local. The walking group thus functions as a way to meet people, to get to know the area, and to fill often lonely weekends in a new town. This group fulfills a similar purpose to the other groups in that it is comprised of people seeking contact, wanting a break from routine, and the fact that most people are united in their appreciation for the countryside, nature and wildlife. However, it is different from the other groups I participated in because its members have different needs which correspond to their age group. In the next section I will talk in detail about another walking group, the 'ten mile group' as it is known to local Ramblers members. The ten mile group is an example of a group which functions as a supportive environment for its members – we could consider it an embodied therapeutic space. The 20s and 30s group, however, functions differently, it is organised around a desire for community and lasting relationships. This group aims at establishing friendships and connections. Pub evenings, barbecues and trips away are offered regularly in its programme, alongside the weekend daytime walks (and weekday evening walks in the summer months). There is an emphasis on fostering an inclusive social atmosphere. There is always a stop at a pub, usually at the end of a walk, where the heretofore style of socialising enters a new arena and instead of twos and threes coming together, the whole group gathers (as much as is possible, depending on numbers) around a table. The pub stop is an important part of group sociality, however it is also a site of contestation and difficulty for some. As ever, after a while of attending walks group politics and allegiances start to emerge. There is a discernable 'hierarchy of relations' within the group, where the most active members, and especially those who regularly lead group walks, inevitably set the tone.

As several members commented, 'it takes dedication' to make lasting social connections. You have to turn up to walks most weekends and you should preferably go on a few weekend trips away in order to establish a firm presence in the group. In addition, if you want to boost your social standing, you should take on the responsibility of leading a few of the walks. You can also get voted in to sit on the council and volunteer to take on one of the administrative tasks, such as membership secretary, or trip organiser, or newsletter editor. This group is about establishing social networks, as much as it is about the practice of walking. Walking is a catalyst for the socialising, it styles the type of socialising that is done, and for some who find social situations difficult it is a social space that accommodates their needs in a way that most other social situations do not. The 20s and 30s group is propelled by a will

to community and a desire for connection in a setting where some social pressures are relaxed. Although there are certainly members who make an effort to establish relationships through dedicated attendance and volunteering, there are plenty of members who use the group as a 'social outlet' and do not aim primarily at establishing lasting relations, but rather use the group as a temporary social 'boost'. For example, one female participant in her early thirties, who lives alone, comments about the significance of the sociality of a group walk:

Sometimes it's the only socialising I do on a weekend, but after a few hours of chatting to random people I've sort of had my fill, I'm all chatted out, and I'm happy even if I don't talk to anyone else for the rest of the weekend. (Lisa: September 2009 on a walk in the Winchester Water Meadows).

Let me introduce some of the other members of the 20s and 30s group, to illustrate the different motivations that propel people towards it and how it affects them. Andy is in his late twenties and one of the core group of members who attend walks frequently. In fact, he is probably the keenest member of the group as he often joins both the Saturday and Sunday walk on a given weekend. He tells me about his first walk with the group, three years ago:

Yeah it was a lovely walk, a summer evening, around April, its like when you go for the first time it's a bit difficult when you don't know anyone but they were so welcoming and everyone's got similar interests you know around walking and yeah I really enjoyed it

Andy enjoys the social element of the group, but he struggles with social situations outside of the walking environment. Andy is one of the members who do not enjoy when the group stops at a pub mid-way through a walk, and when they go to the pub after the walk he prefers to just go home without joining in. He explains to me that he finds social situations in static environments difficult, but says that he likes to interact with others while walking; 'I can move around a lot and I find I'm much more relaxed'.

Me: do you find it [walking] makes social interaction easier?

Andy: certainly yeah, because you continue talking to different people, its more fluid and you don't walk in the same order in one line, you're

moving between different people and its much, much easier I find, and its quite acceptable to have a little bit of time when you're not attached to people, whereas in another environment it's a bit strange to sit quietly and not talk, if you're walking its quite acceptable.

For Andy, the group walk is a social occasion that does not challenge his social anxieties in the way that other social environments do. He says that he particularly likes the chance to talk to several different people about different things:

Like today for example, I was talking to someone about politics and current affairs, and I talked to people about the weather and things, and scientific conversations, I've talked about work and where I work and where others work, and the dogs I used to have, and you know its extremely varied, because you can talk to lots of different people for relatively short periods of time ... and if there's someone I don't get on with, that I find it hard work to talk to, I can just move on and talk to other people.

Like Andy, group members often tell me they appreciate that they have the opportunity to speak with many different individuals about a range of topics. For some it is an exercise in making small talk with strangers, for some it is an opportunity to be curious about people they might not ordinarily meet. The walking group could be seen as an unpredictable social environment, full of opportunities to make unexpected, and often fleeting, social connections. In some ways it is full of different people with different careers and interests. In other ways, though, it is full of the same sort of people with similar interests; white, middle-class, highly educated, outdoor types. This is an element of reassuring difference – different but similar. In the last few decades, the Ramblers as an organisation has attracted an image of white middle-classness, which the new board of directors is actively trying to combat with various promotions that target lower socio-economic classes and ethnic minorities (see chapter 4). However, the new ideal has not yet made a real difference in the Hampshire based walking groups that I participated in. In fact, as far as I could tell the 20s and 30s group only had one member who was not of a white European heritage, a British-Asian man. However, this did not seem to limit the group members themselves from regarding the membership as socially broader than most social environments they occupied outside of walking. As one fellow walker – let us call her Rachel, a corporate lawyer by profession - once spontaneously exclaimed:

I just love the people I meet on these walks! There are so many interesting people, it's brilliant!

Rachel had just moved to Hampshire from Manchester and most of her time is taken up by her work, the weekend walks with the group provide her with a social outlet outside of her working environment and the opportunity to make 'situational' social contacts; her 'walking friends'.

Returning once again to Andy, he also does regular walking on his own, as well as running, squash and going to the gym. The walks with the 20s and 30s group he says is not about exercise, as he does not feel that these walks challenge him at his fitness level, rather the group walks are a chance to socialise, relax and enjoy the surroundings. Like other participants who also walk on their own, he contrasts the experience of solitary walking with group walking.

walking on my own ... I do a lot of thinking, about things, even about issues around work, I get my best ideas when I'm out walking, everything seems much clearer, and not just work but things in life in general (Andy, on a walk in the New Forest, November 2009).

This was the sort of response that I expected to receive in my field work, partly from my own experience of solitary walking and having spoken to other walkers who do not join groups, however, this contemplative element is not as strong – or indeed seen as important or desirable – in a group context. The group walk appeals to different needs, things like companionship and community. Asking Andy about the relationships he has with people in the group, he says that he is cautious of using the term friendship, but that there are certainly people in the group that he gets on with very well and enjoys talking to on walks. He confirms that people join the group seeking a social outlet:

everybody generally wants to talk because that's why we're here, not many people come just for walking, most of them come for the social side (Andy, on a walk in the New Forest, November 2009).

For Andy, the walking group is a social space where he feels comfortable, in contrast with other social environments which make him feel uneasy. He can make temporary connections without having to feel pressured to keep the conversation going if it flounders. The walking group meets his individual needs and desires for connection

and community. He experiences resonance between what he wants and what the walking group offers him. The connections that he makes, knowingly and unknowingly, propels him towards feelings of inclusiveness. However, this is not always the case. Things are not always this easy. Sometimes spaces that are relaxing for some can be fraught with tensions for others. As an example of this, I will tell you briefly about Daniel.

Daniel is in his mid-thirties and joined the 20s and 30s walking group three years ago. Before joining this group he walked sporadically for a couple of years with his local regular Ramblers group. This he found difficult. He says that he found it hard to start conversations and he experienced the other walkers as unfriendly and unwelcoming:

They weren't talkative, it was impossible to talk to them
(Daniel, on a walk in Fareham, September 2009).

At the time, he also suffered with mental health problems, which undoubtedly made his social interactions more difficult. After a couple of years of persevering with occasional walks with the local walking group, he came across the 20s and 30s group on the internet. He found it easier to talk to the younger members in this group, but he still did not 'enjoy himself in the group'. After initially going on a few walks he then stopped attending. He had just rejoined the group after a two year break when I met him on a beautifully sunny walk from Queen Victoria Country Park in Southampton in September 2009. We decided to meet up on a separate occasion to take a walk and do an interview. My interview with Daniel was carried out on a walk through a woodland near his home in Fareham. This is a place where he walks regularly on his own and which is invested with his desire for an increased sense of personal wellness. Walking here for Daniel is about entering a different space, the openness of the countryside makes him feel free and relaxed. He tells me about a specific walking experience that was significant for him.

Daniel: A walk that definitely springs to mind was one I did on my own about a couple of miles to the east of where we are now, in the open spaces, it was a Sunday when I didn't have anything to do for the afternoon. I went out for a walk on my own. It stands out because I had such a feeling of happiness on one part of the walk by a canal and then in the open fields, and this experience sticks in my memory, the feeling and the landscape that I associate with it

Me: What do you think made you feel happy like that?

Daniel: There's a big difference between what I experience in my daily life and my work and what I experienced then. And then it was walking by the water, it makes a lot of people happy, it makes me calm and relaxed, and there's something about me and the way I perceive open spaces, which are quiet but you can hear faint noises from all directions, it's something that makes me happy.

So, walking in countryside spaces has a therapeutic dimension for Daniel, and he says that he has got 'milder versions' of that feeling of happiness on walks with the group, but that he cannot let his feelings 'sink in' as much as when he walks on his own. The group experience is about something else. Daniel's motivation for re-joining the group is focused around establishing social contacts again, after a period of isolating himself from others outside of his work environment. He says that he still does not enjoy it as much as he wishes he did, he finds the socialising tiring. Towards the end of the walk he feels exhausted and does not want to make conversation any longer, but he says that he makes a concerted effort not to give in to feelings of wanting to withdraw, as he is there to socialise. It seems like Daniel uses the group as a way to 'train' himself in managing interactions with others, a way to force himself out of isolation by not being able to escape social contact. A group walk can seem very daunting for a person who finds social situations difficult, because once you are there you are committed to around five hours of social interaction, with no easy escape route – bar walking away from the group and risking getting lost. Of course, some walkers do take breaks in talking to others and walk by themselves for a while, but the tensions experienced by those who struggle with social anxieties can be significant.

What Daniel's story illustrates is an example of when the restorative benefit of walking becomes a complex and multifaceted experience. The group walks in some ways meet his need for contact with others, they provide him with an opportunity to interact with a group of strangers in a constructive way, in a safe social environment. The group experience for Daniel may not be straightforwardly restorative, but it gives him a sense of satisfaction and personal progress, and moments of happiness triggered by finding himself in surroundings he appreciates. What is therapeutic is not always straightforwardly pleasurable, right then and there. It is not the case that the therapeutic potential of the group walk is unrealised for Daniel, but his enjoyment of the group environment is tempered by the tensions that he brings to it.

These two participants are able to shape the experience in a way that resonates with their own desires. The group is open enough to encompass a multitude of experiences and a number of individual purposes. This is how we must analyse therapeutic environments; their ability to speak to a range of disparate needs.

The 10 mile group: walking through change

All groups I walked with consisted of members with varying needs. For some, the walking group provided emotional support and nourishment in times of life change, not always through sharing intimate information, but through creating a space where members could just 'be', an environment free from the various demands and pressures of everyday life. To illustrate this, I will tell you about one particular walking group and a selection of its members. It is a walking group that belongs to the Hampshire Ramblers network and it is known to its members as the 'ten mile group' and their weekly Sunday walks range between 8 - 12 miles. The members have an unusually wide age range with the youngest in her mid-forties and the oldest in her mid-seventies. The group has twelve core members that walk regularly as well as one formerly active member who is currently ill and has not been able to walk for the past year, and one member who has just re-joined the group after a successful battle with cancer. The following is a narrative based on my field notes from a Sunday in late September 2009 when I joined this group for a twelve mile walk through the New Forest.

I was invited to join the walk by one of the long-standing group members, Margaret, who also arranged for me to get a lift, alongside herself, from Winchester to the meeting point in the New Forest by the walk leader, Martin. When we arrive at the car park six other walkers are waiting for us. One couple, three women and one man. There are excited greetings (the two women have been on a walking holiday in the Pyrenees and weren't on the walk the previous week), and introductions. I introduce myself to the group and explain why I am there, someone makes one of the jokes that I have by now come to expect; 'we'll have to watch what we say then!', and as always it helps break the ice a little. Another woman says she is also new to the group. She belongs to another local group, but decided to come along on this particular walk, the others nod and smile at her and ask if she is a regular walker and she says that yes she is. Then Martin says that perhaps we should wait a bit for a man called Leonard. He is not sure if Leonard will make it today, because he remembers him saying something about going to see his mother. The group members discuss where his mother lives and how long it might take him to make a round-trip there and back in the morning. After about fifteen minutes the group decides

that Leonard is probably not coming and that we should start without him.

What makes this group interesting is that it illustrates very clearly some of the elements of care that constitute the walking group as a supportive environment. Waiting for a regular member who may just be running late, for example. This may seem like a mundane or insignificant detail, but in fact it is indicative of a caring environment where individual members are valued. Some larger walking groups make a point of starting the walk promptly at the advertised time, to the consternation of those who may be running a few minutes late for one reason or another. Also, making sure that the group is regarded as open and inclusive despite its small number of established members is significant in itself. Creating a welcoming atmosphere is central to the walking group functioning as a potentially therapeutic environment. Fran, one of the members of the ten mile group explains:

you try to make them feel welcome, if they want to come back or not,
you just make them feel at home

She gives an example of when this sort of welcome was extended to her, when she and another of the group members turned up at the wrong location for a walk, and instead happened upon another local walking group. As they could not find their own group they were invited to join with them instead:

They were just so “just come and join us” and I just think that’s so sweet

The overriding impression based on my experience as a researcher in these groups is the emphasis placed on creating a welcoming and nurturing environment. Group members, whether they were younger or older, prided themselves in this particular aspect of the group’s identity, it being a welcoming space and a safe environment for people seeking contact. Even if all newcomers to the group do not experience it as such, it emerged as an important identity marker for all the groups I participated in, and many participants commented that they saw extending a warm welcome to newcomers as a way to ‘give back’ to the group, which had welcomed and sustained them. Let us return to the story of this particular walk.

It’s an unusually warm late September day and the walk is beautiful and sunlit. At one point of the walk we come across some red deer. A female and a couple of young cross the path

ahead of us, and others can be glimpsed in the trees on either side of the path. The atmosphere is almost reverent and it quiets our voices for a few minutes so as not to frighten them.

The walk is interspersed with brief stops when John tells the group about local history. He has researched the area online before the walk. Everyone seems appreciative of his special effort. When it feels like lunchtime we find some fallen tree trunks that are perfect for sitting on. We sit gathered together. After eating our packed lunches one man pulls out a bottle of red wine from his backpack. He says he had it left after a dinner party yesterday and thought why not bring it along. He also has little mini plastic cups which he serves it up in. This is the man who is in remission from cancer and has recently returned to the group (Margaret tells me it's incredible that he's back to walking twelve miles without problem). We get a few sips of wine each and spirits are high. I share a branch with Liz and Marianne, they are talking about organising a tea morning for the member who is currently ill and can't attend walks. Fran keeps offering me grapes and asks if I will come back again to walk with them, I say I hope so because today has been lovely.

The aspect of care is important in this group. However, despite the level of care that is extended and the friendly atmosphere that is nurtured in the group, it became clear to me that members did not usually see each other outside of the Sunday walk, with the exception of occasional walking events outside of the programme or organising to go on the same walking holiday (like the trip to the Pyrenees which three group members went on). The tea morning that they were planning for the absent member, was an unusual exception to this. The Sunday walk is what the group is about, and they nurture this particular time and space where the shared understanding seems to be that they treat it as a break from their everyday lives. Perhaps this is why socialising outside of the walk setting is unusual, that would mean crossing a boundary into a different social sphere, the everyday, perhaps the more personal. The walking group functions as a disjuncture. This has become clear throughout my experience of participating in groups. To stay with this particular group though, I will let some of their individual stories illustrate the creation of community and inclusiveness.

First, let me introduce Fran. She is in her mid-forties and joined the group around six months after her divorce. This was four years ago now. She suffers from

depression and anxiety and the walking group is very important for her subjective well-being. She says:

after my marriage broke down I cant- I have to sort of do something, and I hated Sundays by myself and you know and that's why I decided- and they sort of like- if you come- we went to the Pyrenees together, and we look out for one another, and I think that's what I like about the walk as well, you know we look out for one another and it's lovely

Fran doesn't find it easy to talk to me about what is clearly a sensitive issue for her, which is evident in the way she hesitates and the number of false starts when she speaks. My interview with her was done in stages throughout the walk, as it was interrupted first by a short break, then by lunch and finally by someone else coming up and starting a conversation. Perhaps the broken up interview helped her to open up without feeling overwhelmed. She carries on:

I just feel so good after I've walked, you know if you feel a bit down or a bit fed up and you come out for a walk- my sister phoned me up- because we're very close because we're twins, and said "how do you feel?" I didn't feel very good yesterday, and I said I feel better today and she said "oh because you're going walking" and I said "yes we're going out to the New Forest", I said it's one of the days I look forward to.

Walking, for Fran, is an important part of how she takes control of her own well-being. She tells me she has been 'shy' of going on group walking holidays in the past, but she enjoyed her recent holiday to the Pyrenees with some of the members of this group, because she says 'you know them and you feel comfortable with them'. She tells me about some of the other group members who are not there on this particular walk, Dorothy and Jenny. Together the three of them are known as the keenest walkers of the group, they like 'getting their boots on' as Fran puts it. Her and Jenny recently put on a fifteen mile walk together outside of the regular Sunday programme. Fran explains:

Jenny and I, she's not here today, she likes getting her boots on, and we organised a walk on the bank holiday Monday, so we did fifteen miles [laughs], we said we're gonna do fifteen miles, and of course I think it puts people off, I think they can manage ten or twelve, but

we like to sort of get our boots on. Three guys turned up, and it was Jenny and I. [Before the walk] she said to me “would you like to do your pre-walk?”, because I like to do the pre-walk with her and she gets the map, and we work it out together and you know, that’s nice.

The relationship that Fran has with Jenny is what I have called a ‘walking friendship’, this is a relationship contained within a walk setting and which does not practically or physically reach outside of walking, although this does not mean that it feels less important or less intimate, it just means it is nurtured within a particular framework, which is walking. I say it does not reach outside of walking in a practical way, as of course emotionally and psychologically we cannot draw such boundaries, an event-based relationship, in this case a ‘walking friendship’, of course radiates its presence and makes itself felt beyond its material context. As I have suggested, the kind of relationship that evolves through walking together, may facilitate a level of intimacy that takes longer to establish in other types of relationships (potentially) due to the way that synchronized bodily movement impacts on styles of communication. I will come back to this in the next chapter in more detail. For now, I want to return to my walk with the ten mile group and introduce some of the other members in order to explore further the particular affective atmosphere that makes this group successful as a therapeutic environment for its members.

Marianne and I walk together when the path takes a turn up a hill. We walk through a leafy forest which in the breeze reflects sunlight onto the path in fluttering patches. Marianne is originally from Malta, she is one of the very few foreign-born walkers I have come across during my fieldwork. She tells me about her childhood in Malta and her relationship to the sea, rather than the forest. She didn’t know forests until she moved to England, now she says she feels really lucky and has developed what she describes as a passion for the countryside. Yes, it is beautiful, particularly on a day like this when the sun makes everything brighter and the breeze stroking my bare arms has just the right feel to invigorate my steps. On days like this it’s okay to walk in silence for a while and just listen to the trees and our footsteps on the path. Appreciating the green and the light.

As we enter that last hour and our legs and feet start to make themselves felt, we get increasingly spread out. Quick

steppers at the front, among them Liz and the leader John (who used to do running but got tired of being overtaken by twenty-somethings). The couple is at the back, they have not strayed from each other during the walk, which is unusual as these occasions seem to call for 'mingling' (but they have certainly chatted to the rest of the walkers, together). I am somewhere in the middle until I press on to reach the front in order to speak to John. We have hit open fields and walk past the customary New Forest ponies grazing here and there. John spots an ice cream van at the far side of the field and suggests we all get an ice cream. We are nearly back at the car park and the end of our walk, so why not make a little detour for an ice cream? We veer off our path and cross the field. We stroll past a family having a picnic and they ask how far we've walked, John answers nonchalantly 'twelve miles' and they exclaim admiration. Later we get the same question from a couple of early retirement age sitting on deck chairs just a few feet from the car park. When we are out of ear shot a few members shake their heads at these two who have only taken a few steps from the car and then sat down.

What I observed during my time with this group was a sense of cohesiveness. Despite being an obvious outsider, due to my younger age and my role as researcher, I felt instantly included. The group seemed to have an affective atmosphere of ease and comfort, there did not seem to be any discernable elements of discord within it. Other groups I have participated in, which have a less stable group of members, do not develop a sense of cohesiveness because attendance is slippery, members come and go, there is always someone you have not met before. This is particularly true of the younger group. In my eight months of walking with them, there were certainly a group of core members, but each walk brought new faces. The atmosphere of care was not there. The ten mile group however, which is one of the groups that I deemed as successful in establishing a supportive environment was characterised by a stable group of members with a high level of attendance.

Walking in a group styles interaction in specific ways. The way that walkers socialise during a walk is through a pattern of more or less brief encounters. As the group crosses the landscape in a linear fashion, usually two or sometimes three walkers wide, social interaction within the group is fragmented and fluid. Group members move up and down the line of walkers over the course of the walk, making conversation here and there. Temporary couplings and groupings are made, dissolve

and reform. Thus, someone with a private dislike of someone else within a group can easily avoid contact with that particular person, and if stuck in an undesired conversation can without too much awkwardness move on before too long. This means that unlike other social group scenarios, a walking group is a fluid landscape, where a continuous flow of connections are made and broken.

Marianne is a woman in her early fifties. Similarly to Fran, she joined the walking group after her marriage broke down, three years previously. She explains:

my husband of 33 years buggered off, and what I used to find hardest was weekends, because during the week I was working so it wasn't too bad, but the weekends were pretty miserable, so I looked around and thought "hmm, I enjoy walking", not that I had done much walking before, so anyway, joined the Ramblers, one for the exercise, two for the social part of it which I really do enjoy.

Initially, Marianne prefers to talk to me about the physical benefits she gets from walking, that it has increased her stamina and that she feels much fitter than she used to, even though she always did some exercise at the gym. She also tells me that she has made some good friends and discovered a real love for the countryside which she did not have before. I wonder, though, based on her story of being abandoned by her husband, if the walking group has given her companionship and support through tough times. I ask her if she has experienced any benefits in terms of her mental well-being. She answers:

Marianne: Mental wellbeing? Uhm [pause] hmm, I don't know the answer to that, because the last few years I've gone through a- well I still am going through a really difficult patch in my life, when I'm here, yes it's nice because you're trying to forget about everything and you just enjoy the walk, but then is that long lasting? Not really, because when I get back home all the troubles are there again, but it has helped me in getting better mentally as well, because I was in a real- you know, I was in a really bad place three years ago, and although that took a long time, I'm sure this has helped me to get where I am now, even though there is a long way to go, but I'm much better than I was three years ago, obviously. And I'm sure this has helped, I'm not saying this is the whole thing, but it has definitely helped.

Me: Yeah. You think it can give a sort of mental retreat from everyday troubles?

Marianne: yeah, yeah that's precisely what I meant when I said when you're here you can forget other things, because it's so beautiful, and you think "come on, concentrate on this, you know it's so beautiful, you're so lucky, you're healthy, you can be here" so it's a retreat, it's a form of escapism in a way isn't it? But then it's like watching a really funny movie when you're feeling sad, while you're watching the movie you're laughing and what have you, but when the movie ends all your troubles come flooding back, but it is- while we're here, it's definitely a retreat from it all, yes.

Marianne raises a good point, perhaps it would be overplaying it to take the therapeutic potential of the walking group too seriously in the context of all the other worries and cares that make up everyday life. At the same time, however, she says that it acts as a temporary retreat from her troubles and that it has played a part in helping her increase her level of emotional well-being. The temporary effect of mental renewal that she experiences is contrasted with the way she refers to the sustained effect of increased physical well-being. However, temporary 'pockets' of retreat may well over time contribute to a happier mental state, which indeed she says the walking group has done. Remember that Liz said that the Sunday walk was something she looks forward to and which makes her feel good. The temporary nature of the sense of retreat then spills over into a longing for the next time, memory and anticipation merge and affects a presence that connects walking events. Temporary retreat perhaps, but as a regular practice it makes itself known beyond those boundaries, seeps into the cracks of everyday life as it were. There must be a value to such a thing.

Walking for Marianne has been a revelation. She says it has 'opened up the countryside' to her and she speaks about it passionately, even if she cannot really put into words what it is about the countryside she feels so strongly about. It seems to be the emergence of a sense of belonging, a newfound rootedness and a thankfulness about being where she is. Perhaps Marianne finally dwells in her local landscape, lives *with* it. She tells me 'it took a lot' for her to join the group, she had heard negative comments about the Ramblers – that they were 'those sorts of people in anoraks, you know' – and her former husband had not enjoyed the countryside, 'he was more of a London man', so she did not have an association with the countryside and its leisure

practices. Perhaps this former unfamiliarity prevails in her saying that she would be scared to walk on her own, but 'doing it with other people is lovely'.

Let me introduce a third member of this group, Margaret, the woman who invited me to join the group after reading an article I wrote for the *Hampshire Rambler*, the local Ramblers magazine which goes out quarterly to all members in the county. Margaret called me up and said that I was welcome to join them on their upcoming walk in the New Forest, and I gladly did. Margaret is a gutsy and determined woman in her mid-seventies who has been coping with several significant life changes over the last ten years. She tells me she comes from a privileged background, married a successful business man and for many years lived an affluent lifestyle as part of the expatriate community in the Caribbean. They returned to Britain in the late eighties to retire, but an unfortunate crash in the stock market meant they lost all their wealth in one fell swoop. Her husband struggled to re-establish some of his business success, but his various ventures never got off the ground. Eight years ago he fell ill and past away, leaving Margaret with mounting debts and an unhappy former business partner. Margaret had to sell everything and take a full-time job for the first time in her life, as a receptionist, to make ends meet. Her current lifestyle contrasts starkly with a past of leisure and luxury in the Caribbean, and a status which she describes as 'extremely wealthy'. Margaret again stresses what I have come to understand as an unspoken agreement in many walking groups, the sense that this is a space of exception, a space of difference which functions as a disjuncture from the everyday. This is illustrated in the following extract from my interview with Margaret.

Me: How would you say that walking is related to your well-being?

Margaret: A lot, because in times of enormous stress you can walk mindlessly and I suppose it's the endorphins or something, but you don't necessarily have to think about your problems, it does give you a chance to catch your breath [...] it's been stressful [losing her wealth and then her husband]

Me: Yeah of course. Have these walks been a way for you to relax from that?

Margaret: Absolutely, it's been a lifeline, a lifeline, and one doesn't have to talk about it or- you just walk. Lovely!

These three women have similar stories of loss and life change. These stories are not unusual in the walking group context, many participants have similar motivations for seeking out the walking group. It is in these cases that walking becomes a therapeutic practice. The unspoken understanding that these people are here because they are dealing with something difficult, that they are 'walking through' some kind of change in their circumstances, is important. This is not a therapy session, they do not have to talk about their woes, they are there to walk and *forget*. Temporarily. Thus, this is a retreat from *all that* everydayness. That is not to say that people do not share intimate stories, or that the members of the group do not know what is going on in each other's lives. In the ten mile group they do, they are not strangers to each other, but they do not come here to talk about their problems, they come to walk together through whatever life changes or personal traumas they are facing, because just walking and talking can sometimes be enough, or at least it offers a moment of respite.

A place-specific social aesthetic

Gesler (2003 cited in Curtis, 2010: p.36) proposes an interpretation of the therapeutic landscape concept which defines a 'healing place' as:

... a place that is conducive to physical, mental, spiritual, emotional and social healing... [and which is seen to] achieve a healing sense of place because several... related types of environments have been created there.

Gesler's conception of a therapeutic landscape thus includes ideas about healing and health promoting aspects of material landscapes. He emphasizes the importance of the social and symbolic aspects of material places and the multiple processes which are involved in producing places that are both practiced and experienced as healthful. A discussion of the material aspects of therapeutic landscapes can take several directions; there is a growing literature which focuses on the *absence* of 'healing' elements in certain landscapes which draws attention to health inequalities and 'landscapes of risk' for mental and physical health. Or indeed one could focus on the present material features which pose a risk to physical or mental health. Furthermore, there is also ample discussion in human geography as well as environmental psychology around concepts such as 'biophilia', 'biophobia' and restoration theory (see chapter 2), these theories aim to explain psychological responses to different aspects of the 'natural' environment (see Curtis, 2010 for a summary of this literature). What I want to capture here, however, is the intimate interaction between the material landscape, our aesthetic appreciation of it, our embodied and sensorial immersion in it

and the kind of social relations that are played out within in. In other words, not so much how we interpret different landscape features and the socio-cultural or genetic processes that underlie such interpretations, but how the material walkscape is intimately implicated in the creation of a particular social space. This is a focus which has not been explored in the otherwise broad area of therapeutic landscape studies and which can help explain the importance of the material dimensions of therapeutic environments for the creation of social and symbolic space which is experienced as 'healing'. Recently, more-than-representational theorising around individuation and subjectivity has grappled with phenomena involving embodiment and individual-group relations, trying to cross the anthropocentric divide between the human and the non-human and the subject and the object, realising that reductive models are inadequate and inappropriate for understanding the complex processes guiding collective behaviours in place. As Venn (2010: 134) points out, the speed and unexpectedness of collective behaviour, the way the mood can change suddenly in a crowd, or attitudes shift from, say tolerating strangers to their criminalisation, suggests that human conduct involves processes of knowing and sensing that we have yet to fully understand. If conscious cognition, or a recourse to instinct and genes, cannot provide an explanation;

'can we try to imagine other ways communication takes place, in addition to or coupled to conscious calculations, that involves body-to-body co-enactment and mechanisms outside of consciousness – or rather relating to paraconscious or else an auto-noetic consciousness (relating to the retrieval of episodic memory) – mechanisms we neglect because they are invisible or remain below the threshold of the kind of knowing we are familiar with or pay attention to? (Venn, 2010: p.134).

The embodied co-enactment of shared walking and the affective processes involved in establishing walking sociality stand out as crucial mechanisms to understand in order to further explore the way that the walkscape becomes a therapeutic landscape.

Geographers writing about landscape have been somewhat reluctant to engage with the notion of aesthetics in recent years, aesthetic theories have perhaps not been part of the latest 'theoretical moment' in human geography. However, a return to a aesthetics could prove helpful for therapeutic landscape studies in theorising the affective processes that unfold in spaces culturally constructed as healing. Aesthetic elements have been explored before in relation to health outcomes in specific environments, especially in environmental psychology, but this interest has been much more prescriptive in nature. Here I am not interested in identifying particular aesthetic

characteristics that are experienced as more or less appealing or restorative by participants, but rather observe how the Hampshire walkscape affects – directs, enables or at times hinders – social relations, and the establishment of mutuality and social unity in the walking group. We can do well to take inspiration from the conception of aesthetics espoused by eighteenth century philosophy, which conceived of aesthetics as ‘a level of cognition that one receives from immediate sense experience prior to the intellectual abstraction which organises general knowledge’ (Korsmeyer 2004 cited in Wunderlich 2010: 46). This conception of aesthetic experience is closely related to the meaning of the Greek word *aesthesis* which means feeling or sensation and the word *aisthestai* meaning to perceive (Wunderlich *ibid.*) Thus, this conception of aesthetics implies more than just the appreciation of the beautiful or sublime, contrasting with the modernist interpretation of high art aesthetics, which privileges the neo-kantian emphasis on the visual sense and the ‘contemplative distance between audience and the artwork’ (Korsmeyer, 2004 cited in Wunderlich, *ibid.*). The aesthetic experience of the countryside walkscape, following this interpretation, involves ‘a feeling and the very act of perception through which meaningful (sensual and affective) accounts of the aesthetic object (as temporal event) arises’ (Wunderlich, 2010: p.46). Emphasising the senses, and in particular the aural, the visual and the haptic, the aesthetic experience of the rural walkscape is intimately tied up with an awareness of the temporal qualities of place, its sounds and motions. This becomes even more clear in the following chapter, focusing on sensing place-specific rhythms. The aesthetic ‘object’ in this case is the event of the countryside walk and involves the bodily involvement of the walker with the temporal, sensual and affective qualities of nature and place, including other humans. It is crucial that we recognise that the aesthetics of place are experienced affectively, and intersubjectively.

In order to fully engage an embodied notion of aesthetics with our understanding of walking group sociality, I turn to the work of philosopher Arnold Berleant. He is most famed for his work on ‘environmental aesthetics’, a notion he uses to argue the way that the environment is fully integrated and continuous with us as human beings, not merely a setting for our actions (Berleant, 1992). This is an argument already familiar to cultural geographers, chiefly perhaps via the phenomenology of Edward Casey, who introduced the notion of the ‘constituent co-ingredience’ of people and place. However, Berleant has extended this understanding of the co-continuous nature of person and place to theorise its social registers. He has pioneered the combination of the study of aesthetic experience with social thought. The theory of aesthetics has long been the province of the arts, and more recently of nature and other man-made environments. During the history of scholarship on aesthetics, the aesthetic experience has been regarded as intensely personal (Berleant,

2005). This also bears true in human geographical writing about the aesthetic appreciation of nature or other landscapes. The therapeutic encounter with a specific place, however relational it is conceived to be, is thought to realise itself within the bounds of subjective perception and sense-making. The therapeutic outcome is not surprisingly conceived to be intensely subjective. However, I would suggest that it would be fruitful for studies of therapeutic landscape experiences to consider the possibility that a therapeutic landscape is an embodied aesthetic engagement with place which is essentially social and, at least at one level, experienced and created intersubjectively, resulting in a place-specific social aesthetic.

Social aesthetics, according to Berleant (2005: p.154), is an aesthetics of the situation, which like every aesthetic situation is contextual. Secondly, it is highly perceptual, dependent on intense perceptual awareness of the environment:

While there is no artist, as such, creative processes are at work in its participants, who emphasize and shape the perceptual features, and supply meaning and interpretation. There is certainly no art object here, but the situation itself becomes the focus of perceptual attention, as it does in conceptual sculpture or in environments. And at the same time as its participants contribute to creating the aesthetic character of the situation, they may recognize with appreciative delight its special qualities, and perhaps work, as a performer would, at increasing and enhancing them. In such ways, a social situation, embodying human relationships, may become aesthetic (Berleant, 2005: p.154).

A social aesthetic, then, is full integration of the personal, social and environmental. Berleant does not argue that every social situation is aesthetic, but rather that it displays aesthetic characteristics when its perceptual and other characteristics predominate: 'full acceptance of the other(s), heightened perception, particularly of sensuous qualities, the freshness and excitement of discovery, recognition of the uniqueness of the person and the situation, mutual responsiveness, an occasion experienced as connected and integrated, abandonment of separateness for full personal involvement, and the relinquishing of any restrictions and exclusivity that obstruct appreciation' (Berleant, 2005: p.154). In Berleant's conceptualisation, any situation can turn into an aesthetic situation, social or religious rituals, celebrations and festivals are used as examples, in instances where genuine human content is introduced to what is otherwise associated with the sterile formalism of ritual and etiquette. Other examples of aesthetic situations that Berleant explores are the love

between a parent and child, a close friendship or a love relationship, or any situation where individuals share a sense of:

‘dynamic progression, perhaps a sense of dramatic development, the awareness of a rare human situation, a feeling of empathy or kinship. In both art and love we have a sense of being in place, of a dissolution of barriers and boundaries, of communion. And in both an intimate connection can develop. Such connectedness, such continuity, such engagement lie at the very centre of the aesthetic, occurring with great intensity on the most notable occasions, and paler on the lesser, more usual ones. (Berleant, 2005: p.156).

There has been the sense of such an aesthetic developing on a few group walks. I sensed it during walks with the 20s and 30s group, longer walks of 10 miles or more. Two walks stand out in my memory, one on a beautifully sunny day in early April, a walk which included a range of landscape features from coastline and beach to green fields and forest. The walk stands out in my memory because it combined beautifully pleasant weather, inspiring vistas and enjoyable personal connections, but above all a sense that we came together as a group over the course of this walk; that we all enjoyed it just as much. Another walk that similarly stands out in my memory is with the same group, but on a cold and drizzly November day, when the path was annoyingly muddy, the wind blistering, drizzle chilling you to the bone, but a feeling of overcoming the elements and sticking it out *together*, of making it an enjoyable event despite the obstacles. These are occasions when a sense of connectedness and communion develop. I can think of similar experiences in other parts of my life, other events that stand out as significant because of a shared intent, a shared will to create something. These social situations carry transformative potential.

This notion of aesthetics as relational, participatory, collective, contextual and situational, can help us explain some aspects of the social dynamics of the countryside group walk. The concept of social aesthetic can be successfully applied to the social event of the group walk, where – as I illustrated above – some aspects of social conventions are suspended and sensory perception of the environment is heightened. Important for such experiences is establishment of mutuality, reciprocity and a sense of equality (Berleant, 2005), and as illustrated in this chapter, the social environment nurtured by walking together is characterised by a cooperation to establish a place-specific sociality that displays all these qualities.

The sensual and affective qualities of the countryside group walk arise from the entangled temporalities of moving bodies and landscape. For my participants, the 'aesthetic' appreciation of the countryside walk was reported significant both as motivation for walking and for the restorative quality of their walking practice. However, the aesthetic relationship to the walkscape is not a straightforward one, and in any case not the relationship of the detached observer to the landscape as a canvas. Several participants commented that while walking with the group they often 'forget to look' at the countryside and forget to pay attention to where they are. The walk becomes instead dominated by making conversation with other members and the walkers find themselves distracted from taking in every detail of the scenery. In fact, several participants commented that sometimes at the end of a walk they cannot recall where they have been, because they did not really pay attention. In some cases it is the end goal that becomes most important:

sometimes the whole walk just becomes a race for the pub
[laughs] (Nigel: April 2009, on a walk in Upham with the 6 mile group).

Walking is 90% about the social and 10% about the exercise!
(June 2009, comment made by a regular member of the 20s and 30s group, on a walk in the New Forest).

The experience of the walk becomes an integrated aesthetic experience; individual landscape features may not always stand out to be recalled later, sometimes the details become blurred and unimportant. Another exchange with a participant frames the question of 'paying attention' to where you are going as one of effort and trust:

E - if you're working in the week you find it easier to go out and join a group and not have to think about it too much, I think that's part of the appeal not have to think about it [i.e. where to walk], that sounds really lazy [laughs], I wouldn't make a good group leader. [Pause] I don't know where we are

me - I have no idea either to be honest

E - you're just trusting these people you've never met before not to get you lost!

(Ellie: March 2010 on a walk in New Forest with the 20s and 30s group).

In contrast to previous studies that have focused on the significance of interaction and appreciation of 'nature' and green space (e.g. Palka, 1999), the rural Hampshire walkscape is not experienced by group walkers as detached from 'society', or as an area of quietness, solitude and escape. The walkscape rather represents a sense of community, trust and congregation. In much of the therapeutic landscape literature geographers are interested in determining the impact of different environments on the individual's sense of well-being, but the significance of group practices in various environments has been overlooked. The material walkscape is highly significant for how walkers relate to each other in this space and its impact is not primarily visual, or in the first instance cognitive, but rather embodied, sensual and relational. It is when 'our judgement is suspended and perception becomes heightened by a special delight in sensory qualities' (Berleant, 2005: p.32) that an aesthetically integrated social situation can be established. The notion that the social situation of the group walk can be seen as 'an aesthetic', I would argue, is helpful in emphasising the creative and transformative potential of social relations in place. Therapeutic landscape experiences, as Conradson (2005: p.341) point out, often involve temporary movement away from the everyday domestic environment, and 'we can interpret the physiological and emotional effects of this relocation as the outcome of an individual becoming enmeshed within a different set of place relations'. My findings suggest that in the case of group walking, this includes the establishment of a place-specific social aesthetic. As Basso (1996: p.56) argues, 'it is simply not the case ... that relationships to places are lived exclusively or predominantly in contemplative moments of social isolation'.

While participants commented on the primacy of the sociality of group walking at the expense of 'noticing' the countryside, group walking practice is highly responsive to the landscape and is not just performed over the top of it. The restorative value of the rural walkscape lies in the combination of sensual and perceptual experience of the landscape; the body's movements through it, the sensual experience of being immersed in it and the relationships established and maintained there. The walkscape is constitutive of the relations formed within it, as much as walking sociality transforms the landscape itself, both symbolically, affectively and physically. Consider for example how the landscape directs our movements; the narrow footpath which forces us to walk in pairs or even in single file for parts of the walk and how the open fields allow for several walkers to walk alongside each other and enter into group conversations. Group sociality is directed by the features of the landscape as much as those features are the result of human practices in the area. Examples from my fieldwork include break-times when walkers share a tree trunk as a

seat, or huddle in the shade of a few trees, or join each other in a line along a cliff edge to contemplate a view out to sea.

Many walkers that I spoke to also walked both with the group and on their own; their solo walks gave them time to appreciate the countryside in a different way. It is also worth remembering that most of the regular walkers I came across were people who nurtured an active interest in 'nature' and while walking the flora and fauna encountered was often a source of conversation and debate in the group. Such as the time we came across a group of deer in the New Forest, or a couple of herons in the Water Meadows in Winchester, or the time we picked blackberries, or that time we could not figure out what kind of flower we had spotted at the side of the path (an orchid-like thing). Such encounters with the surrounding environment is an important ingredient in group sociality as well. In my experience of walking with the walking groups, the material walkscape served both as facilitator of social interaction and gave it a focus, it also provided us with the physical parameters for communication, for proximity, respite, congregation, rest and invigoration. The landscape both provokes and reflects our actions.

The rural Hampshire walkscape offers a range of landscapes with different material features and aesthetic characteristics, from the open heathland of parts of the New Forest, to leafy forests, to open grassy fields and farm land, to coastal strips and beaches and hills. Walking here is not particularly physically challenging in comparison to other areas of Britain, as the landscape is fairly flat, with plenty of foot paths available for walkers, and few areas where walking would be treacherous or outright dangerous. The rural Hampshire walkscape is certainly not the dramatic landscape of other parts of Britain and perhaps this is why regular group walking in this area lends itself very well to a particular performance of what could be termed 'supportive sociality'. As illustrated by the following ethnographic quotes, the material walkscape as the setting for walking group sociality was important. The first quote is taken from an interview with a woman in her early fifties who is relatively new to walking:

[...] thankfully the first few times when I came on a walk as it was September the weather was lovely, it was just like this, if not warmer, so my introduction to it was really good. Uhm, so yeah.. I really really do enjoy it, and I love the countryside. Absolutely love it. I think we're very lucky in England to have this sort of- I know it rains a lot, but look at what we have [gestures to the leafy forest we are walking through] (Marianne: September 2009, on a walk in the New Forest with the 10 mile group).

Later, in the same interview, the same participant says 'I've become really passionate about the countryside in fact, whereas before I wasn't at all'. Her walking practice had opened up an appreciation for the countryside which now has become a significant aspect of what she finds restorative about walking. Similar themes emerged in many of the interviews. Another participant, Mary, spoke of a deep longing to be in the outdoors:

I used to meet friends for coffee, I never do that now, never. [...] if it's time for a chat we go for a walk, and for some people it's a very gentle stroll because the way they walk, but it gets you out doesn't it. Look at it! God, it's so beautiful here. (Mary: September 2009, on a walk in Twyford).

A younger participant, Ben, told of one of his favourite walks which highlights the aesthetic enjoyment of the countryside:

[...] there was one that was a fourteen and a half mile one, that was over in Sussex, that was quite a long day, but it was a very pretty walk, it was uphill and downhill and through woods and out of woods and along the coast, and it was just all different aspects really (Ben: February 2010 on a walk from Holly Hill with the 20s and 30s group).

Another participant from the 20s and 30s group emphasised the restorative aspect of his appreciation of certain aesthetic elements of the rural landscape:

[I] was walking by the water, it makes a lot of people happy, it makes me calm and relaxed and there's something about me and the way I perceive open spaces which are quiet but you can hear faint noises from all directions, it's something that makes me happy (Daniel: September 2009 on a walk in Fareham).

The aesthetic qualities of place have been explored in phenomenological studies, particularly in the work of John Dewey, who defined an aesthetic of routine and everyday experiences and theorised the connectivity between art and ordinary experience (Highmore, 2004). Dewey's conception of 'experience as art' and arising from sensorial and corporeal involvement has led to an understanding of aesthetic experience as surfacing through everyday practices. Dewey develops two different types of aesthetic experience; 'ceaseless flow experiences' and 'experience events'

(Wunderlich, 2010: p.48). The first refers to continuous and repetitious everyday routines that are experienced largely subconsciously, and the second category are those experiences that stand out from the everyday and are subsequently vividly remembered (Wunderlich, 2010). Both types of experiences are aesthetically significant and contribute to our everyday state of well-being in different ways. Walking constitutes at least some part of most people's everyday mobility. Group walking events, however, tended to be experienced by participants as interruptions to the everyday rather than a continuation of it. This is not walking as a means to an end but walking as an end in itself, which distinctly sets it apart from most everyday forms of walking. Certain group walks were remembered more vividly than others by individual participants of course, but in general rural group walking provided the participants with an opportunity to walk towards their own particular understanding of wellness in a setting which lends itself to a particular supportive sociality, a social aesthetic specific to the shared countryside walk.

Conclusion

This chapter explores the social dimension of group walking practices, as the sociality of shared walking emerged as key for the restorative potential of walking. Participating in group walks has meant that I have been able to witness and be a part of the social aesthetics of the group, and walking with my participants - 'where "with" implies not a face-to-face confrontation, but heading the same way, sharing the same vistas' (Lee and Ingold, 2006: p.67) - has meant that my understanding of their practice goes beyond a reliance on interview data alone. My observations have pointed me towards an understanding of the social and affective atmosphere of the group walk as an 'aesthetic situation', following Berleant (2005). The foundations of the particular social aesthetic of group walking are focused around the temporary congregation of individuals who share a desire for connection and community. The social aesthetic of the Hampshire walkscape has shown itself to support a collective walking practice that emphasises support and a temporary sense of friendship and community where walking together is the vehicle for communication.

In this chapter I have sought to address an aspect of therapeutic landscapes and practices that has not been developed in sufficient depth by existing research, namely the social dimension of therapeutic practice and the way that sociality is grounded in place and responsive to the particularities of place. Also, the significance of social relations for the therapeutic landscape experience. Other geographers have argued for a relational and context-dependent conception of therapeutic landscape, and it has been suggested that rather than talking about a therapeutic landscape as a material entity which holds a certain value for well-being, we should talk about therapeutic landscape *experiences* (see Conradson, 2005) recognising that these are

varied and sometimes contradictory. There have been calls for a stronger focus on ‘the key influences that affect people’s perceptions of the therapeutic quality of landscapes’ (Milligan and Bingley, 2007: p.809), such as socio-cultural and economic contexts as well as relations to wider medical discourses and the commercialisation of health. However, there has not been any significant attention paid to how the environment influences social relations and how that in turn impacts on the therapeutic experience in a particular place. As I pointed out in chapter 2, it is problematic to attribute the therapeutic as a direct effect of the environment itself. Despite the fact that many studies within this research tradition are focused around group practices or at least environments where individuals come into contact with other humans, there has been little interest in explaining the relation between group dynamics and environment. Research is needed both to help explain how the environment impacts on human relations in a positive way and how certain environments hinder the establishment of a supportive social aesthetic by limiting communication, congregation or movement and the effect that has for human health and well-being.

Chapter 5

Walking rhythms:

Sensing the rural walkscape

An autumnal morning breeze, full of sunshine. The scent of molten leaves covered in a thin blanket of frost. Smiles and hellos, 'gorgeous day, isn't it?'. Thirty pairs of legs swinging in time, more or less, two and two we fall in line. Tarmac is quickly abandoned for rich brown earth and a blanket of leaves, soft thuds of feet on footpath and tentative introductions. After a while - soft grass and the swish swish of wind-proofs. But before too long we are on the beach and time is accompanied by the beat of the crunch-crunch, crunch-crunch of boots across pebbles. Slipping and sliding with heavy pebble-legs towards lunch break. Welcome rest and talk and sitting in semi-circles on a grass verge, facing the water. Beauty demands its pauses. Hours later - I imagine my legs are wheels rotating from the hip, this seems to make sense of the feeling of effortless repetition mixed with a slight nagging pain in the wheel axis. It felt like I could carry on forever, because my body had found its stride (description of an ethnographic walk from Royal Victoria Country Park with the 20s and 30s group, November 2009).

My ethnography with walking groups showed me that walkers valued the shared walk as time away from everyday concerns and a chance to focus on the sensory perception of the moment. Walkers in my study said they enjoyed walking because they valued spending time in the countryside, in the company of others, and that this enabled a sense of distancing from other parts of their lives. As one of my participants, a member of the 3 mile group, puts it:

I think you just get out and you can forget your cares and woes and get out in the fresh air and... enjoy the countryside (Julie, July 2009, on a walk in the Winchester Water Meadows).

As Conradson (2005) have pointed out, physical movement between different landscapes often leads to an imbrication in a different set of relations. The previous chapter focused on the social relations that are part of the restorative walkscape dynamic, in the present chapter I want to focus on the *rhythmic*.

The previous chapter, in an analysis of walking sociality, touched on how bodies that move collectively can be generative of supportive social spaces. This chapter takes this concern forward by considering in closer detail the significance of movement and rhythm in the generation of a therapeutic practice; unfolding the particular rhythms of the rural walkscape. Because walking is an activity which is intimately involved with place and relations with other beings who find themselves there. While walking, 'one is not cut off, as one is in an aeroplane or when too busy or going too fast or not paying attention to one's surroundings' (Legat, 2008: p.47). When walking, even if thoughts fly elsewhere or talking with other walkers distract from forming a visual memory of the surroundings, to walk is to pay close attention to one's surroundings through inhabiting an embodied present.

Walking bodies in the countryside are imbued with cultural meanings and imagined geographies. The various cultural meanings that are attributed to group walking in the countryside are circulated partly through representation and discourse, an example being the policy discourse surrounding 'walking for health' that I touched on in chapter 1. However, closer to my concern in this chapter, cultural meanings surrounding the countryside walkscape are also performed through the body. This chapter builds on the so-called 'performative turn' in cultural geography, which includes an approach to bodies and the spaces they inhabit as inseparable and engaged in a mutual becoming (Thrift, 2000). This chapter sets out to demonstrate that paying closer attention to the rhythmic relations between bodies and places, can help locate the significance of movement and mobility for the generation of therapeutic geographies. Through an awareness of the kind of rhythmicities generated in different spaces we can build a deeper understanding of the production, experience, and sometimes deliberate manipulation, of different spaces of health.

Sensing rhythm

Between the so-called 'spatial turn' and the 'new mobilities paradigm' (see chapter 2) in the social sciences, place as location has sometimes been left behind in privilege of the plurality of space and movement. However, an interest in sense of place does not foreclose a disinterest in issues of mobility, as I aim to show in this section. As Hall (2009) points out, there is a growing need for qualitative inquiries, while remaining local and site-specific, to be brought together with movement. Place can be understood as 'what happens when humans occupy and apply meaning to space' (Hall, 2009: p.575). This chapter is the result of efforts to combine an interest in meanings

attached to place with an interest in bodily movement to consider how an analysis of rhythms can elucidate the relationship between place, movement and meaning related to well-being.

For this purpose, movement is not a neutral category of transportation, but intimately implicated in the creation of sense of place and the attachment of meaning to place. Local movement is not merely movement across a terrain, but landscape is created within this reciprocal engagement, in the interplay between walker and terrain. The landscape is, following Ingold (2000: p.193), the embodiment of cycles of movement; a terrain to move with rather than across. In this case study of rural group walking, the relationship between movement and place - resulting in rhythm - emerges as central for an understanding of how place (as walkscape) becomes meaningful for restoration and well-being.

Walking, though seemingly natural and effortless, is a multifaceted and complex practice, subject to various norms, regulations and performative styles. Walking is an embodied practice with specific rhythmic qualities, a mode of experiencing place. The way we 'walk' different places vary in purpose, pace and rhythm. Walking in the countryside can be experienced as a way to distance oneself from the busyness of modern everyday life through an encounter with a different temporality. Countryside walksapes are often experienced to nurture a sense of stillness, a different rhythm and temporality than the hustle and bustle of urban life. The walking group can be seen to foster a shared experience of stillness, a slower temporality, which is embodied in the way we move when we walk together.

Walking, in different circumstances, is characterised by different rhythms, Edensor (2010: p.74) notes the 'rhythmic distinctions between a purposive stride to work and a meandering stroll through a park, or a cocky teenage walk through a high street and the deliberate plod of the police on the beat'. Walking rhythms vary according to place and context and a quick inventory of terms used to describe walking reveals their rhythmic variations, consider for example: ambling, rambling, sauntering, sashaying, tip-toeing, foot-slogging, stomping, marching and so on. Wunderlich (2008) distinguishes between three styles of walking in the city. She describes 'purposive walking', as characterised by a constant rhythm and rapid pace, exemplified by walking to work where the goal is more important than the journey. 'Discursive walking' is characterised by more varied and spontaneous rhythms and associated with exploring and getting to know an area. 'Conceptual walking' is a more critical form of walking mobilised by situationists and psychogeographers and aims at transforming the city and encountering it in new ways (2008: p.37-8). Rural walking may at first seem more uniform in style and rhythm than the forms of walking just described, but on closer inspection this is not the case. Kay and Moxham (1996) maintain that 'recreational walking is so diverse and dynamic that it merits careful

classification of its many different forms' (cited in Edensor, 2010: p.74). They distinguish between two broad forms of walking practices, the first being non-competitive and focused on sociality and communication and the second being strenuous, competitive forms of walking that are associated with walking as a sport. The former styles of walking are classified as 'sauntering', 'ambling', 'strolling', 'plodding', 'promenading', 'wandering' and 'roaming', the latter modes of walking are described as 'marching', 'trail-walking', 'trekking', 'hiking', 'hill-walking', 'yomping' and 'peak-bagging' (Edensor, 2010: p.74). The present ethnography of walking groups is concentrated around walking styles of the non-competitive category.

A new way to analyse movement

It is only recently that geographers have started to engage with the concept of rhythm, and it is likewise only recently that attention has been focused on the 'ordinary' movements of the body in everyday spaces and environments. As of yet, however, this analytical focus has not been applied to geographies of health. Although the concept of mobility already had a strong analytical presence in human geographies, the growing interest in *rhythm*, as a specific way to analyse movement, was arguably prompted by the English language translation of Henri Lefebvre's work *Rhythmanalysis* in 2004. Therefore, this chapter is inspired by a Lefebvrian analysis of walking rhythms.

The publication of *Rhythmanalysis: Space, Time and Everyday Life* in 2004 coincided with an upswing of interest in a broad range of issues connected to mobility and bodily movement, especially in non-representational circles of cultural geography and has led to increased interest in Lefebvre's work amongst English-speaking geographers. The rising interest in aspects of rhythm in the last few years is further signalled by the first publication of a coherent collection of essays on the topic, which draw heavily on Lefebvre's work (Edensor, 2010).

Another reason for Lefebvre's rising appeal, in general, is that his thought places the body at the centre of analysis, which speaks to the growing interest in issues of the body and embodiment which has increasingly come to the fore over recent decades. Lefebvre's thought is particularly helpful when it comes to conceptualising the body as generative and creative of spaces (Simonsen, 2005). His later writings on rhythm were how he sought to develop further a conceptualisation of moving and creative bodies with the body's capacity to sense and produce rhythm the point of contact between the social and the material.

Lefebvre was more of a philosopher of the city and urban life than of the rural, but as is demonstrated in the recently published collection on geographies of rhythm (Edensor, 2010), his concept of *rhythmanalysis* can be just as fruitfully extended to other 'rhythmscapes'. Examples of analyses that go beyond the urban landscape

include the rhythmic and affective time-spaces of UK tidal landscapes (Jones, 2010), rhythmic flow and harmony between horses and riders (Evans and Franklin, 2010) and the intimate rhythms of the self in struggles with insomnia (Meadows, 2010) or the construction of national identity through dance (Hensley, 2010).

Uncovering rhythms

Rhythm is one of those concepts which we readily understand on a common-sensical level, but whose meaning as an analytical concept remains obscure. Lefebvre's definition of rhythm starts from the premise that 'everywhere where there is interaction between a place, a time and an expenditure of energy, there is rhythm' (2004: p.15, original emphasis). Through an analysis of rhythms - biological, psychological and social - Lefebvre draws our attention to the interrelation between space and time in everyday life. (Elden, 2004). He shows how space and time need to be thought together, rather than separately, through a range of examples - such as music, the commodity, measurement, the media, political discipline and the city.

Lefebvre identifies a set of concepts that are indispensable for thinking rhythm; time, space, the cyclical, the linear, repetition and measurement. Rhythm is constituted through a relation between space, time and energy, and the rhythmic is produced through (Lefebvre, 2004: p.15);

- a) repetition (of movements, gestures, action, situations, differences);
- b) interferences of linear processes and cyclical processes;
- c) birth, growth, peak, then decline and end

The analysis of rhythms is approached from a position of the dialectical, where contradiction lies at the heart of each concept, much as rhythm itself is constituted as a relation between contradictions. For example, rhythm is at one hand associated with logical categories and mathematical calculations (the counting of beats, precise repetitions in music, poetry etc.) and on the other associated with the visceral and vital body (Lefebvre, 2004: p.14). Rhythm in this sense, could be understood as propelled by tensions and energies that arise through relations between oppositions.

Thus, Lefebvre's concept of rhythm makes room for difference. For example, there is no rhythm without repetition; however, Lefebvre points out that there is no identical repetition indefinitely. not only does repetition not exclude difference, it gives birth to it, produces it (Lefebvre, 2004). A sequence of things or movements gives rise to a series, or event as Lefebvre terms it, and thus through repetition difference is produced (the event). The sense of repetition with which we associate rhythm should

thus not be confused with rigidity or sameness indefinitely. The repetitiveness of the cyclical rhythms of nature may seem indefinite; each dawn is followed by day which turns into dusk then night and finally another dawn. Winter is followed by spring, summer and autumn, then winter again. These cyclical rhythms form a bedrock for everyday experience, and the trust in their repetition forms the basis of what we understand as the natural order of things. The rhythms of human history, however, we (in the West) understand as a linear progression. Decades follow decades in a forward motion, cultural epochs follow on from each other like links in a chain, while human life progresses through birth, childhood, adolescence, adulthood into old age and death. Yet, Lefebvre points out that cyclical rhythms and linear rhythms necessarily intersect, causes the need for compromises or sometimes effecting disturbances. At the most concrete level, he uses the example of the traditional clock; the cyclical movement of the hands around the clock-face is accompanied by the linear sound of the tick-tock and it is through the relation between the two that time is measured - and the measure of time is simultaneously the measure of rhythms (Lefebvre, 2004: p.8). This is perhaps not the most helpful example, the reciprocal action of different rhythms is even clearer if we turn to nature. Just consider the necessary and reciprocal relation between the cyclical movement of the seasons and the linear development of the life-course of the flora from fecundity to decay. Here, the cyclical and the linear work together to produce the progression of time. Not stopping there, consider the greater cyclicity at the macro scale that envelops the linearity of life at the micro scale; how the decay of one species of plant or animal becomes the condition for life of another.

Thus, rhythm for Lefebvre is a concept that enables the coming together of a number of categories that appear in opposition to each other, such as repetition and difference, mechanical and organic, discovery and creation, cyclical and linear, continuous and discontinuous, quantitative and qualitative (Lefebvre, 2004: p.9). Through the notion of rhythm, Lefebvre arrives at a philosophical goal, 'the relation of the logical (logic) and the dialectical (dialectic), which is to say of the identical and the contradictory' (ibid.: p.11). This ontology is one that corresponds well with that of non-representational theory and conceptual frameworks that emphasise complexity, multiplicity and the infinity of the possible.

The rhythmanalytic task

Lefebvre uses rhythms as a tool of analysis, rather than just an object of it, which is why he refers to rhythmanalysis, rather than an analysis of rhythms. He writes that the rhythmanalyst is 'capable of listening to a house, a street, a town as one listens to a symphony, an opera' (2004: p.87). Crucially, the rhythmanalyst must take help from their body in sensing the rhythms they are studying. Lefebvre notes that 'at no point

has the analysis of rhythms or the rhythmanalytical project lost sight of the body' (2004: p.67). The task for the rhythmanalyst is not only to analyse the body as a subject, but use the body as the first point of analysis, as the tool of analysis (Elden, 2004). The rhythmanalytic project depends on the researcher to listen to their body; 'he [sic] learns rhythm from it, in order consequently to appreciate external rhythms. His body serves him as a metronome' (2004: p.19). The body is always at the centre of rhythmanalysis. Lefebvre writes;

The body consists of a bundle of rhythms, different but in tune.
It is not only in music that one produces perfect harmonies.
The body produces a garland of rhythms, one could say a bouquet (2004: p.20).

The rhythmanalyst needs to cultivate an awareness of the interaction of different rhythms, in order to analyse the 'bundles, bouquets, garlands of rhythms' of natural or produced ensembles (2004: p.20). In this task, Lefebvre encourages us to pay attention to the context and collective organisation of rhythms - to view observed bodies as a *whole*. For the researcher, he notes:

Nothing is immobile. He hears the wind, the rain, storms; but if he considers a stone, a wall, a trunk, he understands their slowness, their interminable rhythm. This object is not inert; time is not set aside for the subject. It is only slow in relation to our time, to our body, the measure of rhythms. An apparently immobile object, the forest, moves in multiple ways: the combined movements of the soil, the earth, the sun. Or the movements of the molecules and atoms that compose it (the object, the forest). The object resists a thousand aggressions but breaks up in humidity or conditions of vitality, the profusion of miniscule life. To the attentive ear, it makes a noise like a seashell (2004: p.20, original emphasis).

In conclusion, the task of being sensitive to rhythm is to call on ones senses, to immerse oneself in place and context, to stay aware in the present. Lefebvre calls on us to embrace all our senses in the research encounter. Smell: marking out scents as traces of rhythms - noting the odours that characterise place, season, hours of sunlight, darkness, exertion and rest. Sound: noting the soundscape and its rhythmic qualities - is it busy or quiet, erratic or repetitive? Sight: tracing rhythms as visual artefacts - rhythmic patterns evident in the landscape, roads, paths, obstacles. And so

on. The purpose, the intent behind rhythmanalysis, for Lefebvre is to establish an approach to conceptualising and analysing temporalities and their relations within wholes, distinct rhythms within multiplicities of rhythms. Although Lefebvre concedes that he cannot yet say much about the therapeutic potential of rhythm, he anticipates that the rhythmanalyst in the future very well may look after patients, where the analysis of rhythm will complement data from other sciences such as psychology, sociology, ethnology, biology, even physics and mathematics (2004: p.22). This chapter hopes to open to a new discussion of the relationship between rhythm and well-being.

Walking and well-being: A rhythmic relationship

The following sub-sections outline some of the key rhythmic elements that emerged related to the restorative potential of shared walking in the countryside, when approached from the perspective of a 'rhythmanalysis' of both practice and place.

Discursive walking

Group practices such as rambling have a distinct similarity to the 'discursive' style of walking described by Wunderlich (2008), in that exploring and getting to know the Hampshire countryside was something many of my participants identified as an important part of what they enjoyed about shared walk. As one participant commented:

[walking has] meant that I have got to know Hampshire a lot better than I ever knew it, we lived here nearly twenty years while I was working, I was driving up the motorway to Heathrow or to my office in Basingstoke everyday but off the main road I knew nothing [laughs] and Winchester Ramblers has been a sort of way of me getting to know big areas of the countryside that I never knew before ... I think what I enjoy most is the fact that I get to know some parts of the county, and we go outside the county as well, some areas that I wouldn't find on my own, so it's a low effort way of getting to know [laughs] different areas. (Peter, June 2009, on a walk in Upham).

There is also an element of discovery and a delight in the unexpected embodied in the guided group walk; the walk leader knows where the path leads, but not the rest of the group, for them it is walking a path of discovery:

we do like to stop and stare, it's not just walking for the sake of walking, it's to see what's going on... isn't it? (Richard, July 2009, on a walk in the Winchester Water Meadows).

The unexpected element of course also comes from the fact that in the countryside there are a wide range of beings and things that have the potential to surprise and delight, as participant Richard comments:

yes sometimes you sit down and have a break and something will happen, you know a bird of prey will fly over or- [on] the coast path down in Dorset, you see air-see rescue suddenly happen in front of you, something totally unexpected (Richard, July 2009, on a walk in the Winchester Water Meadows).

I am on a walk with Richard and his wife Julie near their home in Winchester, and just a few minutes after Richard's comments above, a real life example unfolds:

Julie - oh look! Heron! ... two! [laughs] Wow, God...
 Me - oh! Yeah, wow
 Richard- flying up there!
 [we all stop and look until they are out of sight, making as little noise as possible]
 (July 2009, in the Winchester Water Meadows).

Discursive walking is characterised by varying pace and rhythm: 'it is discursive because its pace and rhythm are synchronized with the walker's own internal bodily rhythms (biological and psychological) whilst experiencing and swinging along with the places' own moving rhythms, and being sensitive to external paces and temporalities' (Wunderlich, 2008: p.132) in space. While walking discursively, we are intensely aware of our surroundings and participate in the unfolding of placed events, such as the sudden flight of a heron. It is a participatory form of walking, which Wunderlich (2008: p.132) argues deepens our familiarity with the environment; 'we half-consciously explore the landscape while sensorially experiencing it passing by'. The discursive walk is a walk where the journey is more important than the destination, what has previously been referred to in the urban context as 'urban roaming' (Rendell, 2003: p.230) or the practice of the literary *flâneur*, strolling the city (e.g. Baudrillard, 1995; Benjamin, 1999). In the case of rural group rambling, it is a mode of walking that encourages encounter and discovery as well as a congruence between the inner rhythms of the body and mind and the external rhythms of the landscape. This, as I

shall elaborate further below, is crucial to the restorative experience of walking. Walking can have many purposes and vary in style in response, but it is arguably the discursive mode of walking that holds greatest potential for being experienced as restorative and a form of movement that is both restful and invigorating, physically and mentally. In contrast, the other rhythmic forms of walking do not encourage this restorative dimension of congruence between the internal and external; 'purposive walking' which is characterised by necessity and aiming for a destination can often be physically rushed and experienced as stressful and tiring or, on the opposite end of the scale, mundane and uneventful. 'Conceptual walking', which is characterised by a reflective mode and an intent to 'heighten awareness by rendering places strange' (Rendell, 2006: p.151), also does not aim for harmony and congruence as much as to shake things up and make things new.

The importance of pace

The style of walking differed slightly between groups and the rhythms of walking were different in group interview scenarios and one-on-one situations. The younger walkers in the 20s and 30s group and the regular Ramblers groups that walked further, such as the 10 mile group and the 5 mile group, had on average the fastest pace, but even here the pace was adjusted to those present and differed between different walks depending on who was leading the walk and the group of walkers who gathered up front (see figure 5.1 of walk-leader slowing down to make sure two newcomers are keeping up). Rather expectedly, the groups that covered a shorter distance also fostered a slower pace, such as the 3 mile group, and Walking Friends outside of the Ramblers network, which also covered around 3 miles per walk.

Walkers quickly learn the preferred tempo of the group and the differences in pace between different walk leaders. An individual walker must be able to join in with the average pre-set tempo of the walking group they join. This is the case even though it was important in all walking groups I attended to make sure that the slower walkers were waited in regularly and that the group kept to a tempo which was, as far as possible, inclusive.

I found that different groups and walks also had a perceived tempo, which did not always correspond to the tempo which was actually kept. I attended many group walks of differing lengths with walkers of different ages and physical capabilities and often found that walkers would talk to me about the perceived pace of their group walk as well as others. For example, many members of the groups which took shorter walks of around 3 miles voiced concerns about the perceived faster pace of the groups which covered longer distances. A woman in her early sixties who is a member of Walking Friends, a 'walking for health' group, commented:

I tried walking with the Ramblers once, but it was too fast for me. Too serious you know, don't you find? Stomping. I like this group because it's more relaxed, I couldn't keep up with the Ramblers (Rachel: January 2010 on a walk in Portsmouth harbour).

For her, the perceived up-beat tempo of the Ramblers network at large represented a form of walking that she associated with walking as a sport. Whereas Walking Friends represented a less 'serious' attitude to walking, more akin to 'strolling' than 'rambling'. Even though this particular participant was a regular walker in good physical shape, her perception of the Ramblers had her worried that she was not fit enough to join them. However, within the Ramblers network similar perceptions about tempo exist between the different groups. Members of the 3 mile group constructed their identity in relation to the pace of the 5 mile group, who did not 'take their time' and were less likely to 'stop and look' along the way. The 5 mile group in turn saw themselves as more 'relaxed' than the 10 mile group, who humbly compared themselves to the 20s and 30s group, which was assumed to be more up-tempo than them. Members of the 20s and 30s group however in general spoke of the elderly Ramblers with joint admiration and humour, describing them as hardy and no-nonsense 'bobble-hat wearers', with an imagined lifetime of devotion to walking behind them. Telling members of the 20s and 30s group about my long walks with elderly walkers was therefore seldom met with much surprise - the popular representation of the elderly Rambler is precisely such. In my experience however, there was only a slight qualitative difference between the walking pace of the different groups, with the 10 mile group keeping the fastest pace, perhaps owing to the fact that they were a small group with regular members who all had a similar fitness level and had established a tempo which suited them as a group. Less homogenous groups, such as the 5 mile group and the 20s and 30s group, which also had a larger number of members and a larger percentage of members who attended infrequently, tended to be more rhythmically varied and due to the large numbers slower walkers were catered for towards the back of the group whereas those who wanted to walk faster gathered at the front. A common complaint of those who walked a little slower, however, was that they did not get to rest as much as the faster walkers. The faster walkers at the helm of the group regularly stopped to wait for those lagging behind, but as soon as the stragglers catch up they often immediately started walking again and consequently the slower walkers did not get a break.



Fig. 5.1. “Are you keeping up?”: The walk leader checking in with a couple of newcomers at the back of the group, on a walk with the 20s & 30s group, June 2009.

The pace of walks often came up in my conversations with walkers and was noted in conversations overheard between other members. On one particular walk I heard one of the regular members (and a participant in the study) explaining to a first-timer that the walk leader of the day was known in the group as one of the faster walkers, but not to worry in case the pace was too fast because other leaders keep a slower pace, it is just a case of getting to know their different walking styles.

On another walk with the 20s and 30s group I interviewed a couple in their late twenties who had joined the group for the first time that day, their comments highlight common hesitations and worries that in many cases stop people from joining group walks:

Jody: Well I’ve been talking about this for years, haven’t I? [joining a walking group] But its almost embarrassing because you think people our age don’t do it, I think that’s why it took us a really long time [to come].

Me: There’s definitely a lot of preconceptions about the Ramblers

Jody: But its probably really wrong to think those things, I don’t know, you don’t know what it’s going to be like

Me: No, exactly

Mark: or embarrassing because you’ll be tired and they’re still going

[laughter]. I've had that experience with running before and you get this eighty year old man who passes you [laughter]

Apart from the worry that younger people had about walking groups being for the elderly, the most common worry that participants had before joining a walking group was that they were not going to be able to keep up the pace. Even though walking for a few hours is something that most able-bodied people are confident that they can do, being unsure about the pace at which they would have to do so was a significant worry for newcomers. Even though, as in the case above, the individual was already undertaking a form of exercise that was more strenuous than walking.

The pace of place

The emphasis on a slow pace of place is a clear selling point in promotional materials for the New Forest national park in Hampshire, where many of my group walks took place (see figure 5.2). For example, the official visitor website for the New Forest⁴ uses the slogan 'relax, explore, enjoy' and on the home page a promotional video shows a young couple with two children playing and exploring together in the forest, emphasising that this is a place where one has time for each other. The idea that different places in general have a different experiential sense of pace is not an unfamiliar one. Consider for example that people often base their choices of where to holiday, bring up children or retire around a desired 'pace of life'. Somewhere with a 'slower pace of life' often appeal to us at these junctures in our lives (see for example Griffith, 1995). The city is often described as fast paced and hurried, whereas small market towns or villages are described as 'sleepy'. There is also a considerable tourist economy built around the idea that certain places offer a more relaxed pace of life (Shaw, 2001).

Another website published by the New Forest National Park Authority⁵ invokes the association of an area where time has stood still with the tag line 'historic, unspoilt', and describes the New Forest as 'one of Britain's breathing spaces'. The temporal character of the New Forest thus is thought to offer a better quality of life, a place where one can relax, enjoy time with others, encounter nature and 'breathe'. The reference to breathing is an interesting one, when thinking about rhythm, because breathing is perhaps one of the most externally noticeable ways that the body reacts to pace and place. Respiration could be considered one way in which place 'invades' and affects the body. Enjoying 'the fresh air' of the countryside is an aspect that is mentioned time and again by participants when talking about their motivations for

⁴ www.newforest.co.uk [accessed 5 October 2010]

⁵ www.newforestnpa.gov.uk [accessed 5 October 2010]

walking; they literally 'breathe in' place, and with place. The expression 'breathing space' is of course also a figurative way to refer to a place where one can relax from the pressures and demands on one's time that are associated with everyday life.

The way we relate to and manage pace of place is also something that changes over the life course. Managing time pressures and one's own passage through the life course often means that different places take on particular significance in terms of providing spaces where life can be 'managed well'. Shaw (2001: p.121) writes,

'The "doing" of family life or retirement does not just depend upon individuals assuming appropriate social identities but also on it being done in the right place. At certain stages in the life cycle, it is the pace of a place which would appear to render particular places more appropriate for such identity maintenance than others as place itself becomes one of the "props" through which identities are made and maintained'.

People often think about pace and place together, one makes the other more tangible. Although the examples in this section so far have touched on what is essentially a discourse about place and rhythm, the perception of places as faster or slower is by no means imaginary or constructed only at the level of discourse (Shaw 2001: p.121). For example, there have been studies that have shown that walking speeds differ between urban and rural areas (Bornstein, 1979) and Levine (1989) calls the tempo of a place its 'heartbeat' (cited in Shaw 2001: p.121). Walking in the countryside is a way of practicing the 'slow life', where time for contemplation and restoration is the focus. A slower pace is also often associated with a certain cultural and historical stability, as in the promotional tag-line for the New Forest referred to above; historic, unspoilt. One participant draws attention to this sense of going back in time during a walk through a small village in the Hampshire countryside:

[...] there are some lovely little villages like this one, nice little villages tucked away [...] you can imagine not much has changed here for the last hundred years, well I imagine they've all got satellite television and things like that, but very rural, very rural (Howard; April 2009, in response to walking through the village of Upham).

Shaw (2001) points out that there is a qualitative difference attributed to different notions of time. Family time is often experienced as vivid and suspended, whereas work time is understood as linear and progressive. These notions of time are mapped

onto place, although the platial differentiation between work and home (public and private) is increasingly undermined as people are increasingly expected to stay 'connected' to work outside of office hours. The encroaching nature of work time has led to increased attempts to identify suitable coping strategies (Shaw 2001), which often clearly identify a sense of time with a place. Places that are associated with stability and nostalgia for the pre-industrial idyll are often connected to associations with feeling safe and secure and such places are often valued by families with young children or retired people (Shaw, 2001).



Fig. 5.2 Walking in the New Forest: June 2009.

The way we often describe the life course is riddled with metaphors of space and movement. We embark upon a life course; we may at times reconsider our path or direction in life; we take steps towards our goals; and when we are not keeping up with the latest developments we are out of step; at times of change in our lives we enter new terrain; we build bridges and navigate life's ups and downs, and so on. These metaphors of movements in figurative space stand in for our movements in social space (Hall, 2009). Indeed, as Ingold and Vergunst (2008: p.1) write: 'Life itself is as much a long walk as it is a long conversation, and the ways along which we walk are those along which we live'. But more than just metaphors, these geographical references indicate that our lives are lived through movement in and with the movements of place itself. Edward Casey (2001: p.684) refers to the 'constitutive coingredience' of person and place, to indicate the way that places and identities develop in constant dialogue with each other. The following interview excerpt is an

example of the way that place worked as a coingredient in my walking interviews with participants, giving shape to our conversations and prompting memories embodied in the landscape.

[...] the only times I go for a walk is when I'm sort of really melancholy- I mean on my own, I did- I remember going for a walk when- you know.. we've all got our lives and our baggage haven't we, I went for a walk when the children were little and I'd just had enough, I think I was very depressed and I walked from here right through to Eastleigh, and I remember sliding on the water's edge and thinking "ah If I go in it doesn't matter", I got to the end and it was getting dark and then all of a sudden logic came, "oh I don't think I want to walk back in the dark". On the way there I thought I was going to drown myself, so I go along there, in the end I got a taxi back, had no money, walked in when I got home and went up to my husband "can I have some money", he gave me some money, he hadn't even noticed I'd gone! I had made this great gesture through the whole of the afternoon walking out and about to drown myself and came back and no-one even knew, which summed it up really (Mary: September 2009, memory prompted by walking along a riverbank near her home in Twyford)

In this interview passage Mary's memory of this difficult time in her life, twenty or so years earlier, surfaced in our conversation prompted by walking along the same riverbank that she had followed many years earlier. This is a clear example of the way that our lives are lived out spatially, with our memories being literally embodied in the landscape. At the most productive, the walkscape, during our walks, became 'an active, present participant in the conversation, able to prompt and interject' (Hall 2009: p.482). And the perceived pace of the landscape where most of our walks took place, either the New Forest or surrounding rural areas, came to embody a sense of relaxation, of attentiveness to the present moment, the body's movements and feelings.

Place-temporality

In the case of the rural walkscape itself, it has a specific sense of temporality associated with it, and sense of time is intimately tied to a sense of pace and rhythm. For the walking participants, the group walk in the Hampshire countryside often offered a 'time-out' from other concerns. Walking as relaxation, as space for oneself,

as sociable physical exercise is mapped onto the landscape and associated with a slower temporality where a sense of presence, a mindfulness of the present moment, can be achieved. I am borrowing the term place-temporality from Filipa Matos Wunderlich (2008, 2010) to conceptualise the interdependent relationship between place and temporality. It refers to the way that temporality is place-specific, and therefore also intersubjective. She argues that temporality is produced in places and experienced collectively. Her own research is focused on sense of temporality in urban places, specifically Fitzroy Square in London, but this way of conceptualising temporality as tied into place is easily transferrable to other places, spaces and contexts, such as the countryside walkscape. Temporality, in Wunderlich's conception is highly sensual and often associated with sense of pace, and flow - whether perceived as slow or fast, static or dynamic, continuous or intermittent. Secondly it is also affective - perceived as calm, agitated, social or intimate (2010: p.45). Place-temporality thus is rhythmically expressive; 'places are temporal milieus within which repetitive everyday activities, spatial patterns and cycles of nature interweave and orchestrate into bundles of expressive rhythms' (Wunderlich, 2010: p.45). These rhythms are characteristic to particular places and they structure and affect a sense of time and place simultaneously.

Place-temporality is practiced and perceived collectively (Wunderlich, 2008, 2010) and can be explored in a number of ways. Locating place-temporality can be achieved either by focusing on its affective and sensual dimensions, or the performativity of it, or by viewing it as a process, or sequence of unfolding processes, by focusing on structure and rhythmic patterns (Wunderlich, 2010: p.46). It can be gleaned as a representation of time in specific places, evident in bodily gestures and movements. In my case study, the place-temporality of the rural Hampshire walkscape is approached through observation of the rhythmic processes of a group walk, witnessed and experienced through participant observation - in some small ways a form of auto-ethnography - indicated by the extract from my field-diary at the start of the chapter. It is also gleaned from interviews with participants, where themes related to sense of time and place often emerge.

Wunderlich suggests that place-temporality is representational because its structure is evident but require reflection in order to be fully perceived, in that it is 'an expressive object that can be consciously performed and observed, and may incite care, enjoyment and imagination' (2010: 46). However, place-temporality is also non-representational, as it involves and defines our affective experience of place, it is thus 'a distinctive temporal experience of place that is sensually valued and affectively remembered; an aesthetic experience' (Wunderlich, 2010: p.46). The aesthetic dimension of the walkscape which was discussed in the previous chapter is again evident here as a significant ingredient in the creation of a therapeutic walkscape.

There are a number of attributes that make up the place-temporality of the Hampshire countryside walkscape. Firstly, it is important to note the localised sense of time, and tempo. This temporality is one of slowness, as I have already pointed out, a sense of calm and restfulness, a sense of encounter with nature that is healing and aesthetically pleasing. Such themes surface in my interviews with participants about the Hampshire countryside, much as expected. The countryside is often temporally distinct in comparison to my participant's home and/or work environments and it is often a significant social space, as we have seen in the previous chapter.

The New Forest is particularly known for its animals. The most iconic are of course the New Forest ponies, which roam the area freely, alongside donkeys, cows and pigs (for part of the year). As these animals roam the area freely it is a common occurrence when driving through the New Forest to have to stop ones car to wait for a group of cows who have decided to cross the road, or to drive slowly past a couple of ponies grazing at the roadside. These elements add to the temporal and rhythmic characteristics of the New Forest as a place that cannot be rushed.

On a broad level, there are two dimensions to the rhythmicity of place. On one hand there are those rhythms we perceive to belong to the place itself, the rhythms of local life - both human and non-human. Such as the repetitious rhythms associated with farming the landscape and animal husbandry and the daily routines of village life, as well as the natural rhythms of the seasons and the associated rhythms of the flora and fauna. On the other hand, there are the rhythms we bring to the place and that are created through our embodied encounter with it. The rhythm of the rural walkscape is an intersection of the more permanent rhythms of place and those created and maintained through the practice of walking. The sense of a slower temporality is connected to the perceived slowness of daily life in the country and the slower rate of change to the natural and built environment, as well as the natural cycles that govern the farming of crops and the rearing of animals. A recurring comment that participants made was that they enjoyed 'watching the seasons change', and that this was something that was more visible in the countryside, where they could see a more tangible process of change in the farming of the fields, wild flowers growing and wilting, the changing colours of foliage, the different birds and animals and insects that come and go with the seasons. Interestingly, however, this perception of slowness stood in contrast to the fact that for many (if not all) of my participants the group walk in actuality meant a heightened tempo of bodily movement. The perception of the countryside as relaxed and 'sleepy' stands in stark contrast to the upbeat tempo of the countryside as a space for physical exercise. However, on an experiential level, bodily movement can be relatively upbeat but as long as the rhythm of thoughts and interactions is relatively relaxed it is still experienced as restorative and restful.

In conclusion, walking can be seen as a practice through which people engage actively and sensually with a particular temporality and sense of pace of a place, but also that place-rhythms are connected to various imaginaries of place and are performed and maintained through physical practices. Though slightly hyperbolic, Csordas draws attention to the performative dimensions of walking when he describes the body in the city as 'primarily a performing self of appearance, display and impression management' (cited in Edensor, 2010: p.74). By extension the body in the countryside is commonly portrayed as one relaxed from such 'superficial' demands, perhaps even capable of a more 'authentic' expression of self.

The sonic dimension of rhythm

Wunderlich (2010) argues that places have an aesthetic quality which is affectively experienced. Staying with the conception of aesthetics that I elaborated in the previous chapter, as formed through immediate sense experience, we can see that the rhythmic characteristics of the walkscape feeds into a more general embodied experience of place. If we break down our aesthetic impression of a place, we can see that it is an aesthetic made up of a particular set of sights, sounds, movements and sensory experiences. One way that we can access the aesthetic dimension of the rhythmicity of the rural Hampshire walkscape is through focusing on *sound*.

The term soundscape refers to 'what is perceptible as an aesthetic unit in a sound milieu' (Augoyard and Torgue 2005 cited in Wunderlich, 2010: p.51). Sound is both obviously spatial and temporal, 'it necessarily occurs within a place, and gives meaning to that place according to the recognizable cultural associations it provokes' (Saldanha, 2009: p.236). It is only from the mid-1990s that a scattered number of researchers have started to explore the spatial aspects of sound and music (Saldanha, 2009). This burgeoning interest is tied to the critique that emerged in feminist and cultural geography about the privileging of the visual sense in geographical scholarship. However, the recent stream of work on various sensory geographies have still to fully engage with a 'sonic sense of place'. As work in human geography on rurality and spatialities of life and practices in the countryside has progressed from interests in representations and discourses of rurality to an interest in the dynamic and multi-experiential nature of human engagements with the countryside, work on rurality and the countryside has started to engage with a wider range of methodologies (Yarwood and Charlton, 2009). However, not much work has been done on the sonic environment of the countryside. There is an increasing interest in geographies of sound and music in recent years (Anderson et al. 2005; Connell and Gibson 2003; Leyshon, Mattless and Revill, 1995; Rawding, 2007; Smith, 1997, 2000) as well as studies that specifically focus on connections between particular rural places and musical styles (Gold and Revill, 2006; Gold, 1998; Johnston 2006; Matless 2005).

However, these studies have focused largely on music as representational of different places and its role in the social construction of identities. For instance, Mattless (2005) identifies three initial themes for investigation: (1) how a place is 'defined and contested through sound'; (2) 'which styles of voice belong in the landscape'; and (3) a place's 'particular voice' and 'sounds deemed out of place', which signals the potential for what could be termed 'sonic exclusion' (cited in Boland, 2010: p.4). Although the primary interest for these studies is focused around identity production and management, investigation of such themes could very well provide insight into various geographies of health, where the performativity of identity and belonging is a dimension that has not been much explored in health geographical studies. The interest in sound in cultural geographies of walking have so far tended to be focused around recorded 'soundwalks' as a research tool (e.g. Myers, 2010). These are guided walks during which participants listen to a pre-recorded soundtrack, usually consisting of spoken words, interviews or soundscape recordings. This technique is designed to invite participants to perceive places from multiple vantage points, "earpoints" as much as "viewpoints" (Myers, 2010: p.61). However, this kind of practice is qualitatively different from perceiving an unmediated soundscape. In the existing literature, few scholars are investigating soundscapes from the perspective of sense of place or well-being, an exception being Ben Anderson's (2006) exploration of the role of music in everyday experiences of hope. The role of sound in healing spaces has been only briefly touched upon, for example by Andrews, Wiles and Miller (2004) who noted that background sounds often were used as part of complementary/alternative therapies, commonly recordings of water and ocean soundscapes, which are thought particularly soothing, were played during treatment. Andrews, Wiles and Miller (2004) found that a constant background soundtrack was used to contribute to the overall ambiance and feel of clinics offering alternative/complementary therapies. However, the sonic aspect of these therapeutic geographies are not explored in any depth, and only identified as lucrative for further investigation.

However, in recent publications on geographies of rhythm (e.g. Edensor, 2010; Wunderlich, 2010), the aural environment has been invoked as a dimension of rhythmicity which contributes intimately to the experiential aesthetic of place. Edensor (2010: p.6) draws attention to the sonic rhythmicity of walking, which varies with styles of walking;

The recent fashion for walking poles produces a particular sonic and bodily rhythm at variance to that where the hands swing by the side, as does the kind of clothing worn – whether it is loose or tight, the weight of backpack and the qualities of footwear.

Walking, Ingold and Vergunst (2008: p.2) argue, is 'rhythmically resonant' with the movements of walkers around us. This was particularly evident in the walk that I recall at the start of the chapter, where we were walking across a pebbly beach. The crunching beat of walking boots on pebbles drowned out most other sounds and this became the beat to which we walked, collectively. I was recording an interview with a participant at the time when our path led us onto the beach and so I have a sound recording of this part of our walk. Unfortunately the crunching of our footsteps drowned out most of our conversation, but interestingly, our conversation ebbed out naturally during this part of the walk, as our concentration was taken up by negotiating the pebbles, listening to the sound our footfalls made, and looking at the sea. The sound recording reveal that our footfalls fell in time with each other, the group of about thirty walkers spread out along the beach is walking almost in unison, creating a clear sonic rhythm. Literally providing the place with a heartbeat.

Turning to the significance of the aural aesthetics of the rural walkscape, consider the difference between this soundscape and that of the city. The rural Hampshire walkscape is characterised by various sounds of nature and countryside life; the following short excerpt highlights the affective quality of the rural soundscape, it is taken from a walking interview undertaken on a footpath starting from the small village of Upham:

[we are talking about the maintenance of the stiles and hedgerows along the footpath when there is suddenly a loud cackling noise coming from the other side of the hedge]

H - oh it's geese isn't it! [laughs]

Me - yeah! [...] Apart from knowing this walk quite well is it a sort of favourite walk of yours or a special area for you?

H - it's a- I like it because it's very tranquil, I mean if you want to get out and have a nice quiet walk it's nice out here, it's not very strenuous, there are no great views, uhm, but [...] yeah the other reason that I like it around here, if you went up that lane that you talked about, although we don't usually like road walking it's a very quiet lane, there's virtually no traffic on it, that leads you up to the South Downs Way which is one of the long distance footpaths that we use a lot, I mean we are very lucky around here, we've got the downs, we've got the open

countryside, we've got the coast not far away, it's a super super area for walking in (Howard, June 2009, on a walk near Upham).

There is a delight in the perceived 'natural' sounds of the countryside; the relatively noisy cackling of geese was not experienced as a disturbance, but as a natural part of the sonic environment. The 'natural' rural soundscape includes the various cackling, squawking, trilling, whinnying, bleating and mooing of various animals and birds that live in the countryside, along with other sounds associated with the wheather, such as the rustling, whining, whistling or howling of the wind, for example. Unwelcome sounds - more commonly described with the negatively coloured word 'noise' - are those associated with the 'busyness' of human society, such as the distant hum of a motorway, the revving, brumming, squeaking and clacking of cars travelling through country lanes or queuing through small villages. A possible exception would be the chugging of the odd tractor or perhaps the seasonal threshing of a combine harvester, which are sounds that are associated with countryside life and thus considered to 'belong' in the rural soundscape, at least to a relative degree.

Returning again to an ethnographic quote cited in the previous chapter, consider the significance for this participant of the affective quality of the soundscape:

[...] theres something about me and the way I perceive open spaces which are quiet but you can hear faint noises from all directions, it's something that makes me happy (Daniel: September 2009, on a walk in Fareham).

The rural soundscape is affectively different from the everyday environment of most of my participants. The soundscape of my own home, in comparison, is busy with the sounds of everyday life in British suburbia: I switch off the music playing softly on my laptop, and close my eyes to focus on listening - the refrigerator is humming (the steady hum suddenly strikes me as invasive); there is the trilling of running water from the cat's drinking fountain; now and then the faint brum of a car on the nearby road; suddenly the boiler springs to life with a whirling hiss; there is a police siren in the distance for a second or two. This sonic environment remains largely unconscious on a normal everyday basis, compared with the sonic environment of the rural walkscape which makes itself present in a different way.

Fraser (2010) explores the emotional soundscapes of the Basque country. He argues for a direct link between emotion, sound and motor activity, owing to the fact that not all neurological connections between the ear and the brain run to the auditory cortex but some run directly to the cerebellum (2010: p.1). He cites popular neuroscience author Levitin (2006): 'The cerebellum is central to something about

emotion - startle, fear, rage, calm, gregariousness [and is] now implicated in auditory processing', thus he writes, 'the connection between emotion and music [is] not merely a surface disturbance of human experience but rather a fundamental relation impacting both thought and action' (Fraser, 2010: p.1-2). The soundscape is only one dimension of the sensory impressions we experience. If we compare the soundscape to that of visual impressions with the help of Georg Simmel's 1903 essay 'The Metropolis and Mental Life', we can see the parallels between different sensory stimuli:

Lasting impressions, impressions which differ only slightly from one another, impressions which take a regular and habitual course and show regular and habitual contrasts - all these use up, so to speak, less consciousness than does the rapid crowding of changing images, the sharp discontinuity in the grasp of a single glance, and the unexpectedness of onrushing impressions. These are the psychological conditions which the metropolis creates (cited in Fraser, 2010: p.4)

Thus, the urban experience can be said to consist of the 'intensification of nervous stimulation' (ibid., original emphasis), whereas the countryside walkscape offers an environment typically slower and where various sense impressions are gradual and lasting. This is also the case when considering the sonic environment of the rural walkscape, it too is characterised by less unexpected disruptions and the different elements of the soundscape on the whole are characterised by a sense of harmony, in comparison to the urban landscape whose polyphonic chorus is often seemingly erratic, even if it too has a harmony of sorts - alluded to by Lefebvre (2004) in his description of flows of traffic and pedestrians in central Paris over the course of the day.

Pete Stollery, academic, composer and performer, recently made a number of sound recordings of the natural soundscape of the former Gordon district of Aberdeen. The Gordon Soundscape project includes sound recordings of the varied and rich sonic environment of Aberdeen, examples being such recordings as 'cows in a field beside A90; distant traffic ...' and 'stream in forest at foot of Bennachie. Children playing, one gets hurt, dog running about ...' and the evocative 'cracking twigs in a forest. Shortly after this recording was made the forest was cut down and its acoustic environment lost. Children playing, a stream ...'⁶. This project aimed at capturing different soundscapes and evoke some of the meanings and memories of place that are

⁶ Available from the project website at www.gordonsoundscape.net [accessed 30 October 2010].

attached to sound. There is much opportunity here for future social science research into the affectively evocative power of sound - from the significance of different sonic environments for well-being to the therapeutic potential of music and different types of audio stimulation. As well as explorations of the politics of sound in producing 'soothing' environments, such as the use of water fountains in gardens or hospital 'contemplation rooms'.

Dressage: the rhythms of 'healthy' bodies and places

'Proudly walking. Whom were you trying to walk like? Forget: a dispossessed' (Birrell, 2004)

That walking is styled and performed in various ways in different contexts has been established throughout this chapter. Lefebvre offers us a useful conceptual tool to analyse the regulation and disciplining of bodily rhythms through the concept of dressage. With a term borrowed from the training of animals, Lefebvre identifies how the body is trained to conform to particular rhythms of walking within different environments. He refers to urban walking as a key example of the 'breaking-in' of the individual to (re)produce what he calls 'an automatism of repetitions (2004: p.40). Humans are trained (or train themselves) through ritualised repetition, through the memorisation of gestures and rhythms, examples are military knowledge, rites of politeness, business - dressage 'determines the majority of rhythms' (2004: p.40, original emphasis), witnessed in the city, because: 'In the street, people can turn right or left, but their walk, the rhythm of their walking, their movements [gestes] do not change for all that' (ibid.: p.40-41). Barbara Adam (1995) draws attention to how the 'when, how often, how long, in what order and at what speed' of walking is governed by 'norms, habits and conventions' about temporality (cited in Edensor, 2010: p.71). The concept of rhythm inspires a perspective on the embodiment of the new public health as an assemblage of intersecting rhythms; the rhythmic ordering of the group walk intersects with individual and internal corporeal and rhythms belonging to the walkscape. As mentioned in chapter 1, the promotion of a particular form of 'health walking' informs individuals of 'appropriate' modes of walking based on embodied norms and repertoires of movement and their physiological responses.

What are the rhythms connected to 'healthy' places and practices? If we consider the convergence of healthy settings (or therapeutic landscapes) with the physical activity discourse of the new public health (see chapter 1), there are two contrasting rhythms at work. Different spatio-temporal qualities are evident in the experiential stillness of green spaces and the increased intensity of the body's movements in 'green exercise' such as rural rambling. The rural walk is designed to

create an intensification of the body's rhythms, the rapid beating of the pulse and the quickening of the breath, while at the same time affecting a slowing of mental processes, as everyday concerns pale at the sensory appreciation of the aesthetic qualities of the environment. The regulation of the rural walkscape in Britain is clearly evident on closer inspection. There are multiple restrictions about where one can walk as well as conventions guiding the kind of walking that one should be doing in the countryside. Edensor (2010: p.72) cites Williams (1979) about how rural walkers should comport themselves to 'acquire an easy effortless walk':

The body should lean slightly forward to offset the weight of the rucksack. There is little movement of the arms and the hands are kept free. The legs are allowed to swing forward in a comfortable stride. High knee movements and over-striding are to be avoided as they are very fatiguing... the pace should be steady and rhythmical and the feet placed down with a deliberate step. As each stride is made the whole of the foot comes into contact with the ground, rolling from the heel to the sole.

As I elaborated in chapter 1, the new public health discourse around 'health walking' transforms everyday mobilities into health-related performances. Walkers are encouraged by a multitude of 'health walking' schemes to move on from low impact mundane forms of walking to the purposeful and brisk health walk (Natural England, WfH, walking and you, 2009). Like Williams' (1979) instructions above, walking campaigns have established guidelines for the movement of the body to optimise the benefit of walking:

stand up straight but relaxed, with your eyes ahead.
Swing your arms in time to your strides. Breathe deeply,
in rhythm with your steps if you can (Ramblers, Get
Walking, Keep Walking, 2009).

Instructions such as these discipline the movements of the body and transform the mundane act of walking into something which embodies new potentials of wellness (if performed correctly). Other calculative techniques are also encouraged, which help walkers gauge their performance, one such technique is the 'how it feels' scale designed by the Walk for Health scheme to help participants establish if they are doing the right kind of walking. Participants can check that they are achieving the appropriate level of exertion that they are walking sufficiently fast to feel warmer,

breathe a little faster and raise their heartbeat (WfH 2009). The conventions surrounding the walking body also extend to technologies of clothing and footwear. As with all social practices there are identity markers which signal belonging and 'insiderness'; there are plenty of opportunities for the image-conscious to spend money on clothing, footwear and accessories designed to enhance or facilitate the body's movements while walking (see Michael's (2000) account of walking boots).

Walkers must fit into the rhythmic ordering of the group walk, but even so there is continual tension between conforming to 'the regulations which are imposed upon the walking body, and the incipient tendency to wander off score' (Edensor 2010: 71). Walking as a group means that the ordering of collective rhythms is frequently disturbed or interrupted as the group has to allow for those who cannot keep up. A certain institutionalised rhythmic performative consistency is undoubtedly present in the health walk, evident in its set duration, route and tempo. However, the consistency of these rhythms is constantly compromised through the multiple assemblages of involuntary rhythmic affects of bodies that are not used to exercise. One may grow tired, feet or legs may ache, there could be difficulty at getting over a stile or up an incline. The group walk is a series of human and non-human forces and agencies that connect/disconnect with bodily sensations in different rhythmmed ways (see Edensor and Holloway, 2008: p.496, who made a similar argument about the coach tour). Yet, as Edensor (2010: p.72) writes, where the disciplining of walking bodies is successful, they may also be understood as facilitating a heightened walking experience:

for the highly trained body, devoid of the conscious self-management required to continually monitor practice and progress, can produce an easy, unreflexive disposition that may allow moments of eurythmy to emerge, wherein the body is open to external stimuli and thoughts may turn to fantasy and conjecture.

Several of my walking participants mentioned that walking gave them time to think. The following ethnographic quote is from an interview with a man in his early thirties, a member of the 20s and 30s group. He was a keen walker and regularly attended two group walks per week and sometimes experienced frustration at the slower pace of less experienced walkers:

some people like to appreciate their surroundings and stop, and see a ramble differently from a hike, where a hike is almost like military style, a ramble is a gentle walk along, that does even differ in the group, our preferences, there are- I'm

probably in the minority of liking the harder walks, the hillier walks, longer walks and faster walks [...] I do a lot of thinking, about things, even about issues around work, I get my best ideas when I'm out walking [...] that's more part of what I like about walking on my own and then it's quite nice that you can go at your own pace, the problem with group walking is that it's always got to be a compromise, when you stop and things, and I'm not that keen on being sat still, I'm not that keen on being sat at lunch, I tend to go at quite a pace and not stop that much [...] I think it's a combination of having time to think and being away from all the business and chaos that occur in life, but that physical movement and energy use actually helps me to do that (Andy: April 2009, on a walk in the New Forest).

However, Hallam and Ingold (2007) disagree with Lefebvre's assessment of the repetitiveness of walking, they argue instead that walking is 'successional rather than processional' (p. 12). Each step being its own entity. A similar understanding is highlighted by Wylie (2005) in his description of the affective imbrication of the walking body with place, producing a 'shifting mood, tenor, colour or intensity of paces and situation' in which 'self and world overlap in a ductile and incessant enfolding and unfolding' (cited in Edensor 2010: 72).

Rather than assuming that disciplined normative rhythms 'possess an overarching force that compels individuals to march to their beat', walkers 'attune themselves to the rhythmicity of the moment through breathing, gestures, pace of movement and speech' (Edensor, 2010: p.72). Walking rhythms are continuously formed in a dialogue between walker and landscape, where the walking body has to adapt to its environment as much as fellow walkers. As the participant Andy mentions above, group walking has always got to be a compromise. Any technique of walking championed by health walking campaigns or those who consider themselves advocates of ideal forms of walking in the countryside, are always likely to be thwarted (Edensor, 2000). Far from the repetitious beat of identical footsteps, walking is informed by a responsiveness to the environment (Edensor, 2010), which includes the continuous negotiation between the regulatory rhythms of walking and their transgression.

Conclusion: Therapeutic Rhythms

Above, I have outlined some of the rhythmic dimensions of rural group walking, emphasising the experiential rhythmicity of the countryside walkscape, its aesthetic aspects and its regulatory and contested rhythms, which all contribute to the production of therapeutic geographies through embodied mobile performances. The

chapter has outlined some of the ways in which emotions are mapped onto place and how their association with a particular sense of time and tempo allow places to be practiced therapeutically. Rhythm is an embodied effect of our interaction with place and sensing the rhythms of place through the body signals to us how to relate and behave in particular spaces. As we enter a particular place we know pretty much instantly on an affective level how it makes us feel, and much of this sense-information is related to the rhythmicity of that place - whether it is experienced as fast-paced and stressful or slow and relaxing. The body's capacity to sense rhythm regulates our physical responses to places and at the same time produces spaces, it is an affective mechanism and part of how we experience places affectively. Various common everyday practices - for example distancing oneself from the hustle and bustle of the urban environment by listening to an mp3 player - attempt to filter out the impact on the body of unwanted rhythmic 'noise'. We could draw parallels here between various body practices that aim to focus awareness of bodily rhythms (breathing, heart rate, mental processes etc.) such as meditation, yoga, tai-chi, or types of dance. Walking in the countryside could also be understood as a practice that focuses the awareness of the body's rhythms and reduces the impact of external rhythms that interfere with the affective state of the body.

Lefebvre (2004: p.95) reminds us that there are multiple transitions and imbrications between 'rhythms of representation' and 'rhythms of the self', that any place or practice at close consideration betrays these 'complex transitions and reciprocities between the public and the private'. The rhythmanalytic project, in Lefebvre's words, can glimpse the interaction between these different spheres through the body:

the living body can and must consider itself as an interaction of organs situated inside it, where each organ has its own rhythm but is subject to a spatio-temporal whole [globalité]. Furthermore, this human body is the site and place of interaction between the biological, the physiological (nature) and the social (often called the cultural), where each of these levels, each of these dimensions, has its own specificity, therefore its space-time: its rhythm (2004: p.81)

Thus being attentive to the complex 'bundles, bouquets, garlands of rhythms' (Lefebvre, 2004: p.20) present at all levels of social practice, can help relate a discussion of the discursive articulation of various social phenomena back to the site

of the body and further an understanding of the embodied production of therapeutic geographies and practices such as rural walking.

Chapter 6

The walkscape as a therapeutic assemblage

‘Walking for health’ is the result of both a specific public health discourse, which has fully emerged in the last decade, and an embodied practice which has grown in popularity in the UK since people started turning to the countryside for rest and recreation at the end of the 19th century. ‘Walking for health’ is a complex amalgamation of a number of different agents – policy makers, charities, scientists, campaigners, volunteers, walkers – and objectives – economic, career-building, public health management, desire for health, making friends, enjoying nature, and so on. Alongside these disparate agents and objectives are also broader discourses relating to the benefit of nature for health and knowledge claims about the relation between health and place and walking and health. All these elements are assembled together to form what I refer to as ‘walking for health’ in Britain. It is this process of coming together of multiple disparate elements and agents that is my focus in this chapter.

In the previous two chapters I have focused on both the social, affective and emotional as well as the embodied and physiological dimensions of therapeutic group walking experiences. This chapter aims to tie these approaches together, incorporating the material, embodied, performative and metaphorical elements of walking practices into a specific ‘therapeutic assemblage’ (Foley, 2011).

This thesis, much as the discipline at large, has been trying to get to grips with the relationship between humans and the non-human environment, exploring issues of practice, materiality, mobility and relational space, considering what such a reading of the world means for geographies of well-being. This chapter sets out to take some steps towards a new ‘model’ of studying health practices in their socio-material contexts, drawing on the Deleuzian notion of the assemblage.

Difference, wholes

So far in this thesis I have broadly framed the case study of rural group walking around the interplay between the social and the material; relations between people, their bodies and their movements in space. Chapter 4 conceptualised the rural walkscape as an affective and relational space, and chapter 5 drew inspiration from Lefebvre’s concept of *rhythmanalysis* to theorise the capacities of bodies to generate affectively experienced space through movement, and through the capacity of the body to sense rhythm. In these two chapters, I have negotiated the terrain between the individual and the group, the human and the non-human environment; theorising their material

relations and their affective dealings. In this chapter, I will consider group walking practice from a perspective of Deleuzian vitalism and an ontology of social complexity; seeing the world as unstable and in a constant state of becoming. For Deleuze, differentiation does not happen along the lines of human/non-human, subject/object, self/other, but it is infinitesimal and emergent (Lorimer, 2009). Cultural geographers who are working from a nonrepresentational perspective have sought to undo the 'linguistic excesses and anti-ontological stances' (Lorimer, 2009: p.348) of much cultural geography in recent years, where identities, difference and meanings are reduced to social constructions. Instead, nonrepresentational geographers:

seek to document the skills, senses, and emotions that underpin human social interactions ... [drawing] attention to the vast array of precognitive forms of knowledge that frame our engagement with the world and the open-ended and contingent nature of any interaction. Epistemologically, they trace how the processes of representation involve learning to be affected by the material world (Lorimer, 2009: p.348).

From such a perspective, this chapter takes as its starting point something that is only hinted at in Lefebvre's work on rhythm, but nonetheless crucial to understand it fully; the relationship between individuals and wholes. In other words, my key focus in this chapter is the whole; the *assemblage*, of the therapeutic walkscape. The walking group assemblage is an emergent and open whole which includes both humans and the non-human environment; the *walkscape*. Consider the way that Lefebvre describes the relationship between rhythm and interpersonal groupings in terms which point towards an understanding of rhythmic ensembles as complex and open wholes:

Every more or less animate body and *a fortiori* every gathering of bodies is consequently polyrhythmic, which is to say composed of diverse rhythms, with each part, each organ or function having its own in a perpetual interaction that constitutes a set [*ensemble*] or a whole [*un tout*]. This last word does not signify a closed totality, but on the contrary an open totality. Such sets are always in a 'metastable' equilibrium, which is to say always compromised and most often recovered, except of course in cases of serious disruption or catastrophe (Lefebvre, 2004: p.89).

Sadly, Lefebvre did not live to finish developing his work in this direction and so I will take direction from philosopher Gilles Deleuze (and his work with Felix Guattari), and the later re-workings of assemblage theory by Manuel De Landa, in order to devise a new model for studying therapeutic landscapes; the therapeutic assemblage. In order to clarify this argument, this chapter will be more theoretically driven than the previous two, drawing together the findings of the previous chapters and placing them within an assemblage framework. At times, the conceptual discussion will be mobilised by ethnographic exemplars, in order to relate these ideas to the walking groups in my study, and on a broader level to the state of 'walking for health' in Britain.

Health geography and relational approaches

Health geography partly developed out of an increased awareness of the importance of space and place in forming an effective understanding of health and its geographical variations (see Moon, 2009: p.39). Place-awareness in health geography has sought inspiration both from within the discipline, such as from humanistic, cultural and economic geography, and beyond. A range of theoretical perspectives have been drawn on to interpret emotional and psychological processes connected to space and place, such as the significance of places for sense of identity and wellbeing (Curtis, 2010).

Cummins, Curtis, Diez-Roux and Macintyre (2007) recently reviewed work in health geography that reflects a relational approach to the production and maintenance of health variation. As I explained in chapter 2, the idea that place matters for health has been central to health geographical research since the early 1990s (e.g. Jones and Moon, 1993; Kearns, 1993; Kearns and Joseph, 1993). However, it is chiefly in recent years that arguments about 'relationality' have emerged in health geography and elsewhere (e.g. Massey, 2005; Castree, 2004; Conradson 2005). Figure 6.1 summarises broadly the differences between a 'conventional' geographical interpretation of spatial relationships and the more recent relational view. Relational conceptions of space and place widely regard places as constructed from 'within' according to the views and attributes of local inhabitants, but also from 'without' by perceptions of its 'healthiness' or 'unhealthiness' based on images in the media and other public discourses (Curtis, 2010: p.10). We can clearly see how this is the case when it comes to the New Forest walkscape; where we can imagine that the sense of place associated with it differs somewhat between permanent residents and urbanites who seek out the area for recreation. Both sets of people develop a sense of place which is grounded both in their physical and material relation with the place and on wider discourses surrounding it as a prime setting for healthy recreational activities such as walking.

A relational perspective on space and place also require them to be seen as

actively constructed and dynamic, evolving in a temporal perspective due to individuals moving through space following different trajectories. Massey (2005) describes space as ‘always in the process of being made. It is never finished, never closed’ (cited in Curtis, 2010: p.11).

‘Conventional’ view	‘Relational’ view
Spaces with geographical boundaries drawn at a specific scale	Nodes in networks, multi-scale
Separated by physical distance	Separated by socio-relational distance
Resident local communities	Populations of individuals who are mobile daily and over their life course
Services described in terms of fixed locations often providing for territorial jurisdictions, distance decay models describe varying utility in ‘space’	‘layers’ of assets available to populations via varying paths in time and space. Euclidean distance may not be relevant to utility.
area definitions relatively static and fixed	Area definitions relatively dynamic and fluid
Characteristics at fixed time points, e.g. ‘deprived’ versus ‘affluent’	Dynamic, ‘emergent’ characteristics, e.g. ‘declining’ versus ‘advancing’
Culturally neutral territorial divisions, infrastructure and services	Territorial divisions, services and infrastructure imbued with social power and relations and cultural meaning
Contextual features described systematically and consistently by different individuals and groups	Contextual features described variably by different individuals and groups

Figure 6.1 ‘Conventional’ and ‘relational’ understandings of ‘place’.

Source: Steven Cummins, Sarah Curtis, Ana V. Diez-Roux and Sally Macintyre (2007) Understanding and representing ‘place’ in health research: a relational approach. *Social Science and Medicine* 65 (9): pp.1825-38.

Several geographers, such as Massey (2005), Graham and Healy (1999), Watts (1999, 2000) and Castree (2004) have argued that places are more usefully understood as unstructured, unbounded and freely connected, they argue that human practice forms ‘constellations of connections’ which extend beyond the conventional understanding of bounded spatial relationships (Cummins, Diez-Roux and Macintyre, 2007). But how has this conception of *connection* between the social and the material dimensions of space been theorised in health geography? There are broadly two interdisciplinary conceptual frameworks that have inspired health geographers’ concern with relationality. These are *actor network theories* (ANT), developed chiefly from the

writings of Bruno Latour (1979, 1993, 1996). ANT espouses a 'flat' ontology, which highlights relationships between the various elements and spaces that make up social and physical environments. The second conceptual perspective is that of *complexity theory*. This is an eclectic set of literatures which are broadly concerned with the ways that human-environments develop and evolve in time and space, as well as how complex systems operate at different geographical scales (Curtis, 2010: p.8). Braun (2008: pp.3-4), like others who work with an ontology of social complexity, argue that relational thought, in human geography, by and large, does not go *far enough* in accounting for the inventiveness of life and the unexpected and emergent elements arising from different kinds of social or material groupings.

Practices of Assemblage

The notion of assemblage makes a difference for how we think relationality. Assemblage theory is increasingly used in socio-spatial theory to challenge and take further the relational metaphor, alongside partially connected terms such as network, milieu and apparatus (Anderson & MacFarlane 2011). Rather than being just another way to describe the relations between actors and their environment, assemblage as a concept carries with it a different set of implications. As I will discuss further below, the figure of the assemblage helps us to account for the ways in which the formation of 'walking for health' is continuously transformed *and* stabilised, it fosters a focus on the 'material, actual and assembled, but also on the emergent, the processual and the multiple' (Farias cited in Edensor, 2011: p.2). Assemblages cut across the false nature/culture divide.

The concept has a broad heritage in the social sciences and humanities, not to mention its long-term specialist use in archaeology, ecology and art history (see Anderson and McFarlane, 2011). Needless to say the term has been used with considerable diversity across the disciplines. However, the definition of assemblage that I will work with here has its root in the writing of Gilles Deleuze (often in cooperation with Felix Guattari). For Deleuze and Guattari, an assemblage (*agencement*) is defined as 'a "constellation" of elements that have been selected from a milieu, organised and stratified' (Anderson and MacFarlane, 2011: p.125), a 'multiplicity of heterogeneous terms [...] which establish liaisons, relations between them' (Deleuze and Parnet, 2006: p.69). Assemblage theory lays the basis for a critique of the idea of the organic totality, by regarding network relationships as synthetic processes and emergent properties without recourse to reductionism:

The minimum real unit is not the work, the idea, the concept or the signifier, but the assemblage... which is always collective, which brings into play within us and outside us populations,

multiplicities, territories, becomings, affects, events (Deleuze & Parnet, 2006: 52).

Deleuze introduced the concept of assemblage to help 'disassemble bordered thinking in terms of, at least, desire, territory, philosophy, bodies and movement' (Legg, 2011: 128). As such, the notion of assemblage can help us to think of 'walking for health' as an assemblage of policies, myths, desires and 'therapeutic places' (taking inspiration from Legg 2009), an assemblage of things which both strive towards order and stability and which is continuously being disassembled and reassembled by the tensions of its heterogeneous parts. The concept of assemblage refers to 'wholes characterized by *relations of exteriority*' (DeLanda, 2006a: p.10), meaning that heterogeneous parts are not fully determined by their position within the relational configuration in question. This definition in itself highlights a critique of much work on relationality which holds that, for example, the walker and the landscape are mutually constituted and fused into a seamless whole. Instead, according to assemblage theory, the walking group would be an assemblage comprised of a number of different components, ranging from the biological, organic, technological, spatial and informational and configured into and modified by a range of socio-cultural assemblages, such as public health, medicine, cultural ideals pertaining to the body and its capacities, community and consumption. These assemblages are in turn part of larger assemblages, from organisations to nation states and global events.

Although relational theories as they are developed in recent health geography are more sophisticated than the earlier 'organismic' metaphors in functional theories of sociology which De Landa refers to, there is still a critique to be levelled at the implicit nature of unity, or generalised symmetry (Lorimer, 2009) of many relational approaches to specific environments. These approaches often argue for a reciprocal determination between different parts, for instance between the landscape and the individual. This view of relationality, owing much to Actor-Network theory, is based around the idea that the world is constituted by a continuous flow of actions, encounters and paths which Bruno Latour describes as 'fibrous, thread-like, wiry, stringy, ropy, capillary' (cited in Thrift, 1999: p.302). However, following Deleuze's ontology of vitalist posthumanism sees instead groupings and networks and assemblages, which are open and stand in relation to one another and unlike organic parts, the components of an assemblage are simultaneously parts of several other assemblages. Relations of exteriority refers to the fact that a component part of an assemblage can be detached from that assemblage and 'plugged' into another assemblage in which its interactions are different. Another aspect of exteriority is that it implies that 'the properties of the component parts can never explain the relations which constitute a whole' (DeLanda, 2006a: p.11).

Assemblage theory, unlike related concepts such as network and complexity, has evolved with 'a clear purpose and directed towards a specific problematic within a unified philosophical scheme' (Haynes, 2011: p.423), it describes a specific ontological landscape. This landscape is, at least in my application of the concept, Deleuzian. Primarily following De Landa's (2002) interpretation and reconstruction of Deleuze's ontology. This ontology is based on 'objective processes of assembly', consisting of 'a wide range of social entities, from persons to nation-states, [which] will be treated as assemblages constructed through very specific historical processes, processes in which language plays an important but not a constitutive role'. In an assemblage the components have a degree of autonomy and can be disconnected to form parts of other assemblages. The hierarchical metaphor which is used to describe assemblages also does not infer linear causation, but instead effects are emergent. Scale in assemblage theory is approached as a shifting point of focus, as such, determining the scale, components and assemblages to be included in a specific investigation is not prior determined by a particular unit of analysis but forms part of the investigation itself and recognises the impact of using these, rather than other components, in framing the analysis (Haynes, 2011: p.423). As Li (2007: p.265) puts it, 'elements [of assemblages] are drawn together at a particular conjuncture only to disperse or realign, and the shape shifts according to the terrain and the angle of vision'. The specific components that are included in an analysis enable particular narratives to develop.

The walking assemblage

Geographers who have recently turned to the notion of assemblage often use the term to signal 'emergence, multiplicity and indeterminacy' in attempts to redefine the socio-spatial in terms of 'the composition of diverse elements into some form of provisional socio-spatial formation' (Anderson and MacFarlane, 2011: p.124). Arguably, the recent surge of interest in assemblage theory points to dissatisfaction with the ability of relational approaches to fully explain or clarify the formation of a range of socio-spatial formations. Assemblage thinking also helps in exploring socio-material practices that stretch over time and space; it 'involves an orientation to assembling and disassembling, as relations form, take hold and endure, but they also may change and be disrupted' (Anderson and MacFarlane, 2011: p.125). Thinking through assemblage theory enables thinking through groups, collectives and calls to attention the distribution of agencies in such gatherings.

Along with the exteriority of relations, assemblages are defined by Deleuze along two dimensions. The first dimension, or axis, refers to the role that components may play in the assemblage. These roles vary between purely *material* on one end of the axis to purely *expressive* at the other. This helps elucidate relations between

material and expressive components of the rural walkscape. The physical bodies of individual walkers, oriented towards each other in group walking practices perform the most immediate material dimensions of the group walk as an assemblage, referred to as *co-presence* (De Landa 2006a). Along with the physical features of the landscape, the soil, stones, trees, grass and so on, which provide the material context of the walk. But De Landa (2006a) also categorises organisations and interpersonal networks as playing a material role in assemblages, so the organisational structure of The Ramblers would also serve as an example, including things like members' newsletters and walk schedules. In this chapter, I want to draw attention to how diverse non-human agencies participate in the transformation of matter into something meaningful, and how these non-human agencies together with a diverse set of human agents and objectives are intertwined through the walking assemblage.

Assembling place and practice

The New Forest area, where the majority of walks took place, lies mainly in southwest Hampshire – from east of the Avon Valley to Southampton Water and from the Solent coast to the edge of the Wiltshire chalk downs – and was made a National Park in March 2005 (see figure 6.2 and 6.3 for illustrations of New Forest walksapes). The National Park designation combines the dual objectives of conservation and promotion. The New Forest National Park Authority, which came to power in 2006, work to (Welcome to the New Forest National Park, 2011):

- Conserve and enhance the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of the Park;
- Promote opportunities for understanding and enjoyment of its special qualities;
- Seek to foster the social and economic well-being of local communities within the Park

The figure of the assemblage links directly to a practice; to assemble (Li, 2007). In the New Forest National Park, a number of heterogeneous elements, including 'discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral, philanthropic propositions' (Foucault cited in Li, 2007: p.264). are pulled together in a practice of assemblage. The New Forest National Park itself is an assemblage consisting of 'majestic woodlands, rare heath land and a spectacular coastline' and conservation is closely allied with the economic benefits of tourism and recreation, intimately tied up with various therapeutic narratives about place. The New Forest National Park Authority claims the area provides 'fabulous opportunities for quiet recreation, enjoyment and discovery'. The

New Forest, where the majority of walks took place, is a place which is itself a continuous reproduction of a particular set of cultural values and discourses around history, governance, conservation, leisure and traditional ways of life. The landscape itself is varied and includes areas of open heath land, often with New Forest ponies and cows roaming free, to forests and coastline. Here walkers mingle with day-visitors, holiday-makers, exclusive hotels, spas and restaurants, cottages, retirees who have withdrawn from urban living, longer established residents, farmers, workers, traders, roaming horses, cows and pigs and various wildlife. They all contribute to the (re)production of the New Forest as a place of 'situated multiplicity' (Amin, 2008); quaint market towns, farms, forest, a 'green gym', a family day out, a place to 'get away from it all'. Ongoing attempts to stabilise the New Forest as a destination for leisure and relaxation – 'Relax. Explore. Enjoy' as the official tagline reads – do not prevent that as a place it is always being 'assembled and reassembled in changing configurations' (Sheller and Urry, 2006: p.216). A range of personal experiences, affective beliefs, narratives and embodiments connected to place and self-health also interact with these culturally produced external elements of place.

As Edensor points out, while 'the constituent elements of a heterogeneous assemblage are enrolled to stabilise and order space and materiality, they are susceptible to entropy and disordering' (2011: 2). The structural quality of the 'walking for health' assemblage is also always in a process of becoming; 'an *emergence*, and surrounded by so many relationalities and potentialities that it can never constitute a seamless whole' (Edensor, 2011: p.2, original emphasis).



Fig. 6.2 The New Forest National Park: A path through heath land. November 2009.



Fig. 6.3 The New Forest National Park: A path through trees, November 2009.

Thus, in the New Forest, public health interests converge with nature conservation and park management, wildlife protection and the economic and social interests of local communities, as well as all the walking charities and clubs that operate in the area, from Walking for Health schemes supported by Natural England to Ramblers groups and independent walking clubs like Walking Friends (see figure 6.4 and 6.5 for illustration of number of groups in the south-west). Thus the New Forest as a therapeutic walking assemblage has emerged in the space of the interactions between all of these heterogeneous elements.



Fig. 6.4 Map showing the number of Walking for Health schemes in the southwest. *Source:* www.wfh.naturalengland.org.uk



Fig. 6.5 Map showing local Ramblers groups in the southwest. *Source:* www.ramblers.co.uk/groups

The walk schedule

There is a material structure surrounding the practice of group walking. One key aspect of this is the walk schedule; making the decision to attend a walk means that one has to consult the walk schedule to find a suitable walking event. The decision to attend a particular walk may be influenced by the place and distance of the walk, and for established members may be affected by the knowledge of the walking style of the walk leader, if one has a particular preference for fast-paced or slower walking. As such, the material dimensions of the walking assemblage provide the parameters for the practice and also, to a degree, have a territorialising tendency (more on that below).

The walk schedule is usually decided at an open group meeting every three or four months, during which members can offer to lead a walk which then becomes advertised in the walk schedule which is either posted or emailed out to members, or in the case of the 20s and 30s group posted online on their website. Thus, the 20s and 30s group have the most publicly accessible walk schedule as non-members can easily look up upcoming walks and join the group. The Ramblers' policy is that the first walk is free, and if one decides to join walks on a more regular basis, you need to pay for a membership and register with your local group, which in the case of the five and ten mile groups means that you will be sent a printed walk schedule and a list of members and contact numbers. The Ramblers also lists walks on their webpage, where local groups can enter information about upcoming walks, however, in my experience this was rarely done, with the exception of a joint walk organised between two different local 5 mile groups.

Thus, the walk schedule means that members have the opportunity to pick and choose walks they would like to attend over the coming weeks and months, based on

the type of walk, the distance and the location. An excerpt from an interview with a member of the 20s and 30s group highlights the importance of the material setting of the walk for her decision to attend:

H - I particularly like country walks, and when I choose walks to come to I do pay attention to where they are

Me – okay, the sorts of landscapes they're set in?

H - yeah, it's important. Generally I think people should do it [walking] more than they do, lots of people I don't think really get out into their surroundings much at all, and I feel fortunate that this is something I enjoy doing, it's a vehicle for seeing other things, natural things.

(Helena: September 2009, on a walk from Holly Hill).

However, although this may seem as a straightforward sequence of events – become a member; receive the walk schedule; go on a walk, in some cases it was not as simple as that. In some cases this approach did not work seamlessly. Upon becoming a member of the Ramblers one has to choose a local group which then becomes ones 'home group', one then gets sent that group's walk schedule. However, some participants wanted to have the option to attend walks with other nearby groups, if a particular walk offered a more suitable location or distance than their home group. It is not impossible to receive walk schedules from groups one has not been registered with, it is indeed possible to contact the group membership secretary and ask for a schedule, often against a small fee. However, some may be loath to do so just for the occasional walk and thus the accessibility of the wide range of group walks in the area is somewhat diminished. I also came across a number of walkers who were new to walking and had not yet become members of the Ramblers. For them, it is not always easy to find information about the walks, the meeting points and the contact details of the walk leader in case one should get lost trying to find the right place. In the case of sub-groups, such as the 3 mile group, the walk schedule is emailed out to sub-group members only, thus I would not have known that the 3 mile group existed unless I had been approached and invited to join them by one of its founding members. In the case of the 20s and 30s group, the walk schedule was published online, making it much easier for new walkers to find a walk and join the group. This is partly because the Ramblers is targeting a younger membership and seeking to make itself more accessible to younger walkers. However, this also led to a range of tenuous forms of membership, where some participants had regularly walked with the group for up to a

year and a half without formal membership. There is no inspection of your membership on a walk and thus paying the membership fee to the Ramblers becomes almost nominal (although officially it is not, of course).

Clothing

Other elements that have significance for the material role in walking assemblages are things like walking boots (see Michael, 2000) and other clothing and accessories for walking, such as wind and rain-proof trousers and jackets and backpacks, thermoses and so on (see figure 6.6 which illustrates the common 'look' of a Rambler). Clothing can also be a source of embarrassment and the butt of jokes about stereotypes of 'the typical Rambler'. James comments about his view of rambles before he joined the 20s and 30s group:

knee socks, sticks, dated caps, boring people, tedious people, no-go area basically [laughs], oh sorry, I forgot the woolly hat. (James, January 2010, on a walk in the Winchester Water Meadows).

He further comments about his first walk with the group:

It was embarrassing really because we met up at Winchester station and the first bit of the walk was through the city [laughs] forty people with rucksacks on, it didn't really feel right you know, felt a bit out of place. (James, January 2010, on a walk in the Winchester Water Meadows).

But clothing can also be a source of enjoyment and a medium for the performance of group identity. Consider for example this excerpt from an interview with a member of the ten-mile group who tells me about his walking boots:

D - I only started wearing proper boots since I joined The Ramblers, I asked what they'd got and they tell you what they're wearing, the first boots I got you see, someone said you want to get two pairs of socks in, and I thought oh that's a bit silly to slip around, a size bigger you know, with two pairs of socks, but it works very well and I've done it ever since, that's the sort of thing you learn from other Ramblers

Me - yeah, so is that to stop you getting blisters?

D - uhm, well I suppose so.. I mean it's very important how you look after your feet, I know that [...] with two socks you've got more padding, cos you get all sorts of problems with your feet, can't you. I'm going to clean my boots in this puddle here [he swishes his boots around in the water].

[David: November 2009, on a walk in Fareham]



Fig. 6.6 Clothing for walking: on a walk in the New Forest with the 20s & 30s group, April 2010.

Another member of the ten-mile group also comments about her enjoyment of outdoor clothing:

I'm also very interested in the techy clothes that they all wear [laugh] and I have been very interested in that aspect of it [...] I like the construction and the work that goes into making a water-proof jacket, just your old anorak, into something that works. It does repel water, it does help you keep cool or hot, and the same with the boots, I love the work that they do on the boots.

(Gill: September 2009, on a walk in the New Forest).

Though many items of clothing worn by the walkers in my study were designed specifically for walking, the most important aspect of clothing was that it was loose enough to enable comfortable movement while walking. According to walking campaigns, the walking body should comport itself with ease and purpose and

clothing and walking boots should support the body's movements while walking without interfering with or disrupting the restorative experience. As Michael (2000: p.110) writes, walking boots mediate the 'sublime' experience of nature by 'obviating, screening out, the little discomforts that arise in the moment-by-moment contact between bodies and local nature, so that grander connections between human mind and sublime nature can be uninterruptedly accomplished'. Michael (2000: p.115) considers four different ways that mundane technologies such as walking boots intervene and influence the (heterogeneous) messages that pass between human and nature and back again whilst walking:

1. the role of walking boots as mechanical technologies that can cause pain and dissolve identity and the relation between humans and nature;
2. the role of boots as signifying style and identity;
3. the role of boots as embodiments of procedures of standardisation and objectification;
4. the role of boots as technological means of physical and ecological damage to nature

These aspects of walking boots necessarily overlap and 'recapitulate' one another in various ways (Michael, 2000: p.115). Walking boots should, in ideal circumstances, serve as conductors between the walking body and nature, without being noticed. However, often they do not work this way; pain is a common part of the walking experience. As Michael (2000, p.115) point out, when they cause pain, the boots become parasites, 'they materially intervene in what should be a smooth flow of communication between nature and body; they disrupt, abbreviate, curtail the signals, or materials, that pass between these two entities'. However, pain does not only constrain material flows between walker and environment, sometimes a low level of pain becomes an expected part of the experience. As one of my participants commented:

I always know when we get to the five-mile point, because I can feel it in my feet (Alison: June 2009, on a walk with the 5 mile group).

Clothing items such as trousers, jackets, fleeces and walking boots simultaneously display material and expressive dimensions within the walking assemblage; they signal identity – being a Rambler, being 'serious' about walking – they are embodiments of standardisation of walking practices – facilitating purposeful and brisk walking as a health practice – and they mediate, disrupt or translate the affordances of the rural walkscape.

Expressive dimensions

The expressive aspect of assemblages, according to Deleuze, refers to more than just talk and symbols. It refers of course to the content of the talk, but also the bodily expression that illustrates it, such as body language, posture, dress, and facial expressions. The visual metaphor of the axis also helps to illustrate the way that there is no clear-cut distinctions between material and expressive roles, which means that some elements can exert both simultaneously. I have just considered walk schedules and clothing as playing material dimensions in the walking assemblage, but they clearly also display expressive, communicative dimensions. In chapter 4 I discussed in detail the sociality of walking together and we may note, then, that sociality as an expressive dimension of walking is a key aspect of the therapeutic assemblage of the walkscape. Expressivity is present in the choice of topics that are deemed appropriate for walking conversations, how, when and how much people share about themselves and how intimate revelations are dealt with. All of this constitutes non-linguistic social expressions which matter just as much as the linguistic content of the interaction (De Landa, 2006a). Expressions of solidarity are important in any social grouping, and so also in the walking group. These expressions of solidarity are made as much, if not more, through behaviour as they are through linguistic means.

One aspect of expressivity in the walking group is the 'supportive' atmosphere that is fostered and which I discussed in more detail in chapter 4. I found increasingly that the walking groups I participated in seemed to display properties that I could not attribute to particular members of the group. In fact, they seemed to breathe some sort of 'spirit of walking', which seemed to be present in all the different walking groups I walked with. This 'spirit', in want of a better word, I identified as a deliberately inclusive social dynamic, an unspoken rule that 'everyone is welcome here'. This may sound like a highly subjective interpretation – and of course at one level it is – but it was more than this, it was also a guiding principle for social relations within the group. A dynamic which was not straightforward, as social relations never are, and which meant that certain norms of behaviour developed in order that members could negotiate this social dynamic without openly compromising it. I have discussed aspects of the social dynamics in the previous two chapters as well, but for the purposes of this chapter it is interesting to note the way that the social code of the walking groups was embodied by the members as a property of the group itself, rather than any individual member.

In order to explain this, I will partly revisit some interview material that I discussed in chapter 4. This inclusive and supportive social dynamic which was actively maintained across the groups may have been established in accordance with the founding ethos of The Ramblers; namely free access for all to the British countryside.

The Ramblers is thus grounded on egalitarian principles. This ethos is embraced and emphasised in the organisational culture in the local groups which I participated in. This particular dynamic was identifiable in the way that new members – including myself – were greeted by the established members of the groups as well as in the attitude taken to potential displays of ‘eccentricity’ by individual members (new or old).

Consider, for example, the way that group members of both the 10-mile and 20s and 30s group spoke about being welcoming to newcomers:

you try to make them [new members] feel welcome, if they want to come back or- and, you just make them feel at home.
(Liz: September 2009, on a walk in the New Forest with the 10-mile group).

From the perspective of a new member of the 20s and 30s group, the social atmosphere of the walks were a welcome alternative to more socially demanding environments. James here tells of his first experience of walking with the group:

I expected it to be intimidating but actually it wasn't, it was fine, because you can- you can do what you want, you don't have to talk to anybody and if you don't it's not deemed odd, you know? Because if you go into a social environment it is odd if you just sit there and don't talk to people, and that intimidates other people as well, if you just sit there, it makes other people feel uncomfortable [sighs].
(James: January 2010, on a walk in the Winchester Water Meadows).

As I have already pointed out in earlier chapters, feelings of loneliness or isolation – brought on for example by the loss of a long-term partner or a move to a new area, or individual difficulties in the area of socialising – were strong motivators for individuals to join the walking groups. James is a good example of an individual who is attracted to the form of sociability that the walking group offers; relations with others that allow him to relax some of the anxiety he experiences in other social contexts when he does not know people well. He has also recently moved to Winchester from a northern county and after a move prompted by a new job he lacks a social network and joined the 20s and 30s group in order to, as he says, ‘meet new people’. However, when asked about his experience of social relations on the walks he talks more about the acceptability of *not* talking:

I think it's- it's good in a way, because you can go out for the day and you don't necessarily have to talk to anybody, or you can talk to somebody, the option's always there, and it's good thinking time, the way I look at it.

(James: January 2010, on a walk in the Winchester Water Meadows).

The element of walking group sociality that allowed for times of silence and lessened the pressure of talking was more frequently commented on by members of the 20s and 30s group, as opposed to the older members of the other groups. There may be several reasons for this, but we may speculate that social anxieties are more prevalent in younger people than the elderly, or perhaps that different social needs are more common at different life stages. The elderly members of the three, five and ten mile groups as well as Walking Friends, commented more frequently about support and establishing social contacts, especially since joining the group was often motivated by the loss of a long-term partner through divorce or death.

However, the collective pride the walking groups fostered in portraying themselves as inclusive and welcoming was compromised by the fact that the overwhelming majority of newcomers reportedly never made it back for a second walk⁷, which is hinted at in the quote from Liz above. Knowledge that newcomers rarely make it back does have an adverse effect on members' willingness to make an effort to welcome new walkers. Several participants commented that they had grown tired of having to invest time in 'small talk' about themselves with someone who they were never going to see again. These comments were made by members of the 20s and 30s group who were both dedicated walkers in the group and regularly attended the same weekly walk. The following excerpt is from my interview with Ben, a regular member of the 20s and 30s group. He tells me about his experience of joining the group:

I went on a walk with Carl, do you know him? Near Romsey, and nobody spoke to me for the first hour at all... but gradually I got chatting and they were all surprised that I came back, 'oh

⁷ That most newcomers never came back again after their first walk was mentioned to me by several participants of the 20s and 30s group and seemed to be somewhat of an 'established fact' in the group, it was also mentioned by members of other groups. I got the impression that smaller groups such as the three and ten mile group as well as Walking Friends tended to have a much more consistent membership, where newcomers were relatively rare and those who did join were more likely to stay with the group.

you made it back!', quite a high proportion who come on their first walk never make it back... and it was five people there, first-timers like me, and I haven't seen any of them since on a walk.

(Ben: October 2009, on a walk from Farley Mount).

Thus, whatever it is that make first-time walkers unlikely to return to the group, knowledge of this fact complicates the self-image of the group as welcoming and friendly. We can see clearly the tension between competing motives. Despite the low return rate of first-timers though, the walkers who do make it back find the social dynamic to be supportive of their needs. We can only speculate that those who do not return have not had their needs met, whether this is in terms of the social dynamic of the group or the physical aspects of the walk itself.

These conflicting elements within the social dynamic of the walking group could be analysed from the perspective of emergence and process. Manson and O'Sullivan (2006) argue that understanding emergence is key in adapting complexity thinking to research in the social sciences. Emergence, in the language of complexity theory, refers to system-wide characteristics which cannot be reduced to an additive effect of the characteristics of individual components in the system. For complexity theorists like De Landa (see 2002), causality involves a tipping from one domain to another and thus emergent properties are irreducible, interdependent and mobile between social and material dimensions of assemblages. A conversation, for example, possesses components playing both material and expressive roles (De Landa, 2006a). Links within a social network such as the walking group need to be constantly maintained and the labour involved in this constitute one of the material components of the assemblage. Whereas the variety of expressions of *solidarity* and *trust* which emerge within the social network of the group are examples of its expressive components. These expressions of solidarity and trust are evident in gestures which range from small routine acts such as walking alongside somebody and engaging in a gentle conversation for a while, to the sharing of personal struggles which have led members to seek out the group, as well as the displayed willingness in the group to accept individual differences and 'eccentricities' by members who struggle with social interaction (De Landa, 2006b).

Processes of territorialisation and deterritorialisation

The other axis along which assemblages are identified is that of processes of *territorialisation* and *deterritorialisation* (De Landa, 2006a). A conversation between two walkers may be said to be territorialising in its behavioural processes which define its borders in space and time. The territorialising tendency of walking group

interaction is partly due to the requirement of co-presence in the place and time of the walk event, but often also due to the material particularities of the rural walkscape, for example walking on a narrow path where only two individuals can comfortably walk alongside each other. Other territorialising behaviour can include what Irving Goffman refers to as 'the process of reciprocal ratification' (cited in De Landa, 2006a: p.54), which means the process by which conversation partners ratify each other as legitimate interactors and exclude nearby individuals from their 'state of talk'. Conversations during group walks also necessarily have boundaries in time, as they are limited to the length of the walk. But more than this, walking sociality has its own rules of behaviour when it comes to terminating conversations with other walkers. The group walk is in some ways an exceptional social setting and walkers develop particular behaviours to regulate social interactions, which may not be acceptable in other social environments. For example, social interactions during a group walk can take different expressions. Some walkers may prefer to converse only with a small number of other walkers or even just one or two others, in some cases these would be walkers they have met on previous walks and have developed a 'walking friendship' with. Other walkers may prefer to maximise their socialising and frequently change conversation partners. As we have already seen in chapter 4, the sociality of the group walk is characterised by a number of temporary congregations. The particular aspect of walking group sociality is the ability to 'just move on' to someone else if your conversational partner is not to your liking. As we saw in the data from participant Andy, first quoted in chapter 4:

if there's someone I don't get on with, that I find it hard work
to talk to, I can just move on and talk to other people.
(Andy: November 2009, on a walk in the New Forest).

On a group walk opportunities to move on to a different conversation partner occurs frequently when *destabilising* events occur in the 'choreography' of the walk. This happens for example when you have to climb over a stile, or come across a muddy patch in the path, or at times when the leader stops and waits for members at the back of the group to catch up. These destabilising events become part of the particular process of walking sociality, and they can be considered one form of *detritorialisation*, on the small scale, within the sociality of the group.

There is a strong territorialising tendency which can be identified as part of walking group sociality. The walking group seen as an assemblage also opens up the potential to analyse the group as a social network. When repeated social encounters occur with the same or overlapping members in the group, the walking group emerges as a longer-lasting social entity (DeLanda, 2006). Studying social networks from the

perspective of complexity theory is about looking at '*the pattern of recurring links*' (DeLanda, 2006: p.56, original emphasis), and the properties of these links, rather than the attributes of the individuals occupying positions in this network. The overall network has properties of its own. It then becomes important to analyse the density and stability of the relations in the network to see, for example, if attitudes within the social network causes psychological tensions or increases stability. Stability and density also increases the *solidarity* of a social network, which in itself is an emergent property in that 'the same degree of solidarity may be compatible with a variety of combinations of personal reasons and motives' (DeLanda, 2006a: p.57).

The territorialising tendency of walking group sociality expresses itself perhaps most clearly in that social relations within the group very rarely extend outside of the group setting. Many participants talked about joining the group to 'meet new people' and establish a new social network at a particular juncture in their lives when they may have become displaced from their previous social network due to a move, the loss of a partner or retirement. However, the territorialising tendencies of walking group sociality created a difficulty in taking friendships further or outside of the group. This was true of the overwhelming majority of walkers I interviewed, across all of the different groups. Not all walking group members may desire to establish friendships with other walking group members outside of the group, but where I could identify a desire to do so, they had still not managed to do it. An interesting exception to this were instances where romantic relationships had developed between two members of the group. However, in my months of walking with these different groups I only ever came across two couples who had met through the walking group, one couple belonging to the 20s and 30s group and one to Walking Friends. Not surprisingly, pairings seemed to occur now and then in the 20s and 30s group, but as one participant commented, after a relationship had been established these members tended to stop attending walks. I can only speculate about the reasons behind this perceived trend, but it may have something to do with changes in their social circumstances with being part of a couple resulting in more social engagements or wanting to spend more quality time together at the weekend, or perhaps the 'need' for what the walking group offers diminishes.

When the topic of friendships came up in interviews, it often seemed to embarrass the participant and formerly enthusiastic descriptions of the friendliness of other members of the group were quickly exchanged for hushed tones and a sense of embarrassment that they had not managed to cultivate their in-group relationships beyond the confines of the walk setting or group activities. One member of the 20s and 30s group comments on the 'investment' needed in order to establish lasting social relations even within the group:

I didn't invest enough time on a regular basis to make that kind of connection except with a few people [...] this forties group⁸ I'm hoping is a fresh attempt to make it- to make an investment in it.

(Shaun: October 2009, on a walk in Twyford).

DeLanda (2006a) points out that interpersonal networks are subject to a number of centripetal and centrifugal forces that are the main sources of territorialisation and deterritorialisation.

Assembling a new health geography

Health geographies, by and large, have yet to realise the analytical and explanatory potential of the Deleuzian concept of the assemblage as a model for studying health. However, a recent exception is an article published by Ronan Foley (2010) on the site of the holy well as a performance of a particular therapeutic assemblage, where material dimensions of place alongside inhabited aspects of 'being in' place emphasise an experiential and embodied imbrication within a therapeutic environment. He also draws attention to the metaphoric dimension of therapeutic landscapes, expressed in cultural narratives, reputations and beliefs.

Material settings and bodies hold within them a range of potential energies, those energies have symbolic healing associations and it is through energetic performances of health in place that productive aspects of the assemblage, wherein affect becomes performance, are expressed (Foley, 2011: p.472).

The notion of the assemblage, 'as a set of productive connections' (Foley, 2010: p.471), is extended to an empirical setting with a specific therapeutic identity. Foley aims to adapt the figure of the assemblage to the therapeutic setting of the holy well by focusing on three sets of three interconnected themes (see figure 6.7).

⁸ This refers to talks within the 20s and 30s group of creating a sister group for members who have crossed into their forties.

Structures	Material	Metaphorical	Inhabited
Theoretical terms	Embodiment	Affect	Performance
Health and well-being	Body	Mind	Spirit

Figure 6.7 Theoretical model of the therapeutic assemblage. *Source:* Foley, Ronan (2011). 'Performing Health in Place: The Holy Well as a Therapeutic Assemblage'. *Health & Place* 17: pp. 470-479.

Foley's conception of the 'therapeutic assemblage' remains inadequately developed and ostensibly does not offer anything new in comparison to earlier relational conceptions of therapeutic landscapes (e.g. Conradson, 2005). He draws on the broad 'performative turn' in geography as an interpretative lens and the reader is left wondering why the figure of the assemblage was invoked at all, if not only as a metaphor for relationality, in which case it is not clear why this term was not used instead.

So, what kind of promise does assemblage theory hold for health geography, if adequately adapted? De Landa holds that every sort of entity is an assemblage, thus no object is a seamless whole that fully absorbs its components (Harman, 2008: p.3). Assemblage theory also refutes any kind of reductionism, as De Landa's ontology is an explicitly realist one, arguing that all assemblages are equally real, from a quark or neutron to a nation state or a multinational corporation. As Harman (2008, p.3) clarifies, 'at whatever point we fix our gaze, entities are assembled from other entities: they can be viewed as unified things when seen from the outside, yet they are always pieced together from a vast armada of autonomous components'. Relations within these assemblages are seen as *emergent*; it is not possible to reduce the behaviour of larger entities to their smallest component parts. Assemblages are wholes whose properties emerge from 'the combination of recurrence of the same assembly processes at any one spatial scale, and the recurrence of the same kind of assembly processes (territorialisation and coding) at successive scales' (De Landa, 2006a: p.17). The way that assemblage theory deals with scale is through the conception of interlinked, overlapping, assemblages of different sizes, growing, changing and evolving in a non-linear fashion. We can talk of 'populations of assemblages'. In assemblages consisting of both inorganic and organic entities, mechanisms are largely causal but do not necessarily involve linear causality. Social assemblages also involve mechanisms of reasons and motives, as I have illustrated above in relation to walking for health.

As Rose and Wylie (2006: p.475) point out, much contemporary geographical theory rests either explicitly or implicitly on topological axioms and metaphors. Space and spatial relations are at the heart of the world that geographers are trying to build a better understanding of. Relational theories in particular have sought to understand

the world as emerging through a multiplicity of relations in any particular time and place. De Landa's conception of assemblage however, is not strictly relational in the way that the term is usually understood in contemporary geography.

Assemblage theory necessitates to some degree that questions are asked about scale. In order to overcome the rigidity of hierarchical versions of scale, geographers have turned to network models of *horizontally* networked relations (see Marston, Jones and Woodward, 2005: p.417). In contrast to vertical or horizontal conceptions of scale, both involving a semiotics of spatial *reach*, assemblage theory offers an alternative vision. Although De Landa has argued for a 'flat' ontology (De Landa, 2002), the way it is developed through assemblage theory is not the flat ontology of 'a single immanent plane where all is continuum' (Harman, 2008). The 'flatness' of his ontology has much in common with that of Latour, by placing all assemblages, regardless of size, on the same footing. However, having said this, assemblage theory still speaks of scale and levels. De Landa (cited in Haynes, 2010: p.9) identifies four key features of assemblages, which help to emphasise its emergent nature and that it is driven by a multiplicity of heterogeneous interests, which evolve as the assemblage itself evolves:

1. Each individual entity is comprised of component entities at the immediate lower scale, i.e. scale relations are parts of wholes;
2. The component entities on each scale are interacting, and processes generated through these interactions are the source of the emergence of entities on a higher scale, as unintended consequences;
3. On emerging, a larger scale entity becomes a source of resources, but also sets limits, for its components, i.e. the whole both facilitates and restricts the interaction of components;
4. At each scale there is a concrete singular entity and, as such there is no general entity or category as an absolute referent.

The assemblage thus displays *both* structural and transient resources as actual features of the emerging network, the structure of the assemblage is present in the components that are included in the assemblage, i.e. the walkers, while the connectionist dimension dictates the pattern that the assemblage imposes on the components, i.e. organisational dynamics of the Ramblers and relations to wider public health policies. The concept as developed by Deleuze and Guattari (1988) and later refined by De Landa (2006a, 2006b) was designed to provide a non-reductionist and non-essentialist description for the properties of entities, 'enabling different

intermediate scales to be represented in terms of appropriate units of analysis rather than epiphenomena' (Haynes, 2011: p.423).

Relations between micro and macro scales are important for assemblage thinking. For example, the assemblage itself is necessarily an outcome of micro-macro mechanisms; the process of assembling involves a number of heterogeneous components and the assemblage itself emerges out of the interactions between the components. However once emerged, an assemblage tends to have retroactive effects on its parts, i.e:

'although a whole emerges from the interactions among its parts, once it comes into existence it can affect those parts... In other words... we need to elucidate... the micro-macro mechanisms through which a whole provides its component parts with *constraints and resources* placing limitations on what they can do while enabling novel performances' (De Landa cited in Harman, 2008: p.19).

If we use the walking group assemblage as an example here, it becomes easier to see how this works. The whole, which we can see has emerged from complex interactions between individual walkers and their personal motivations and desires for physical and mental well-being, as well as material components of landscape and place, and the motivations and goals of the Ramblers as a national walking charity and its relations to public health debates and governmental initiatives related to preventative health measures. The individual components in this assemblage then also become affected by the larger-scale entity; certain norms and regulations emerge about the correct way to walk for health and the optimisation of physical and mental health benefits from the correct comportment of the body, including dressing it in a way that supports correct movement, and ways to interact socially with fellow walkers. These are tendencies that Li (2007) have termed 'rendering technical' and 'authorizing knowledge'. Rendering technical involves establishing an arena in which calculated interventions will produce beneficial results; walking, such a commonsensical practice for a human, has been rendered technical in that the movement of the human body can be optimised and there is a whole science surrounding supporting technologies such as walking boots, sticks and clothing. Knowledge about walking and its effect on health is further authorised by being assimilated into walking campaigns and promotions and takes on the status of accepted truth in the walking community about the effect of walking on health. Contested theories such as the biophilia hypothesis, which proposes that humans are genetically predisposed to a deep affiliation with nature, are used in promotional materials to support the benefit of walking for all-round greater sense of

well-being, thus assimilating scientific theory as direct knowledge. Social and medical scientists have been prominent in the assemblage of walking for health, mostly in the role of confirming the great benefit of walking for a wide range of health issues, including mental health. Walking groups and clubs also have their own accumulated knowledge and experience when it comes to the effect walking has on health, which overlaps with, but may not be identical with scientific claims.

An emergent assemblage also has the potential to generate new parts. De Landa writes (cited in Harman, 2008: p.20):

While some parts must pre-exist the whole, others may be generated by the maintenance processes of an already existing whole: while cities are composed of populations of interpersonal networks and organizations, it is simply not the case that these populations had to be there prior to the emergence of a city. In fact, most networks and organizations come into being as parts of already existing cities.

Using the walking group as a more relevant example, this argument can be illustrated by the emergence of sub-groups and splinter groups which emerge partly as forms of resistance to an established order. Clear examples from my fieldwork includes the 3 mile group which was a splinter group which formed partly out of members of the 5 mile group and some members of the Winchester Ramblers group who had not attended any walks, despite their paid-up membership, because they regarded the 5 mile walks – which are the shortest available – to be too demanding. The 20s and 30s group was in the midst of splintering into two groups while I was walking with them, there were competing viewpoints about what to do with the ageing membership and what should happen to members who crossed into their forties, whether they should be allowed to stay in the group, should join the regular local ramblers groups or whether a '40-plus' group should be created. The independent walking club Walking Friends – which is also affiliated with the Walking for Health scheme – also emerged as a result of personal differences between prominent members of local Ramblers groups who disagreed about the number of activities that the walking group should advertise as part of its activities. The founding member of Walking Friends had a strong belief that walking could be successfully combined with other physical activities such as dancing and should also offer opportunities for social gatherings outside of walking, such as evenings out or low-impact sports such as Skittles. Such a viewpoint did not chime with that of the Ramblers organisation which is exclusively focused on walking, and thus a splinter group emerged.

As Harman (2008) points out, De Landa does not say too much about the effects of assemblages on the world around them; and this is perhaps where adaptations in geography could enrich assemblage theory by studying relations between specific assemblages and places and cultural practices. For example, the walking for health assemblage in Hampshire must have a traceable effect on resident communities in rural areas, on the landscape itself, through for example the maintenance of walking paths, stiles and hedgerows – these are features of landscape maintenance that Ramblers often involve themselves in and see as part of their ‘duty’, for example as a walk leader. Any problems get referred on to the council, so there, again, is a link that could be followed up.

In summary, the reason the assemblage is a powerful analytical category is because the qualities of the whole exceeds its parts; the therapeutic landscape concept becomes interesting because we need to understand how heterogeneous elements such as discourses, institutions, laws, scientific knowledge, material interests, economic objectives and personal desires are assembled to constitute a place that has the potential to heal, along with all the other objectives it also strives to fulfil. In an attempt to address the coming together of disparate elements, geographers have in the past drawn on theories of relationality, however these approaches do not allow for an analysis of a therapeutic practice as a *whole*. Relational approaches tend to acknowledge the connectivity of different elements, or conceive of the world as a web of connections, but does little with them. Assemblage theory enables geographers to ask what a collectivity *does*, how it behaves as a whole, how disparate elements are drawn together, what practices hold an assemblage together and how it is changing, contested and compromised by tensions. Assemblages are not immune to failure and can collapse.

For health geography, assemblage theory holds great promise as it can foreground a number of practices and processes relating to health behaviours. For example, the public health is more than the sum of individual disease profiles. The challenge that assemblage theory poses to health geography (and social science in general) is the need to rethink the idea that things are best understood if taken apart, or deconstructed.

Conclusion

This chapter takes some initial steps in applying assemblage theory to a qualitative study of group walking in order to explore the potential that the concept holds for studies which focus on affective relations, sociability and sense of place as well as the contextuality of the individual pursuit of wellness. The chapter has shown that the Hampshire walkscape is a site which is constantly in a process of assembling; a place where a wide range of narratives pertaining to the restorative properties of nature are

mobilised and interact with a number of other agents and objectives. It is also a site where walkers negotiate their own personal restorative performances within the larger networks of health prevention and 'green exercise' promotion.

As the different roles of components in the walking assemblage become identified we can start to consider the relationship between them and whether there are tensions present that counteract the larger objectives of the assemblage. Questions emerge, such as does the way that the walking schedules are distributed encourage new membership in the groups, and is there a conflict between the boundary-making tendencies of the group and its ability to retain new members, and to what extent does the therapeutic value of group walking rely on the establishment of solidarity and trust or clear boundaries between home-life and walking practice? These are questions which still need consideration and this chapter has started to answer them and opened up new routes for further investigations. Moreover, what the concept of assemblage does is to highlight a diffusion of agency; it elaborates how the material content of bodies walking, walking gear, landscape features, wildlife, weather (and so on) and the enunciations of public health policy, governmental and non-governmental campaigns and discourses around walking and nature (and so on) are linked 'not in linear fashion but rhizomatically as "reciprocal presuppositions and mutual insertions play themselves out"' (Li, 2007: p.265). In other words, we are still talking about relations, but conceived differently, emphasising the 'reciprocal presuppositions' between material content (what social bodies do, what they want) and prescriptions issued from above (what they should do, what they should want) (see Li, 2007: p.265) while not conceptualising these relations as defining of any single element within them. Assemblage thinking allows for the distribution of agencies between non-humans and humans without considering the connections between them as constituent of their identity. 'Walking for health', as a term used to describe not only individual walking practice and a personal desire for health but the collection of walking charities, governmental and non-governmental walking initiatives, governmental debates and policies pertaining to walking and preventative health measures, can be considered an assemblage by virtue of being – as Li (2007: p.266) puts it – 'an identifiable terrain of action and debate'.

In this case, a focus on the interaction between walker and landscape which produced a particular social aesthetic and rhythmic engagement with place has brought into focus material and expressive components of walkers and landscape as well as the territorialising/deterritorialising tendencies of relations within the group. Furthermore it has also brought an awareness of relations to larger networks of 'walking for health' encompassing the organisational structure of The Ramblers and the interaction between this organisation and public health in Britain. A description of the components of an assemblage enables a mapping of interactions and the

assemblage becomes apparent through the evolving interdependencies of objectives and actions at different scales of the assemblage. A key problematic is how best to identify the transformative potential of these scalar links and the emergent nature of relations in both directions. What an assemblage reading of walking for health can achieve better than other models is to identify questions about what brings different components of the network together, which discourses and narratives influence how walking activities are coordinated and delivered and the kinds of structures that both enable and limit its effectiveness, and particular problems it is facing at different levels. Combined with existing analytical units such as embodiment, mobilities and affect, the concept of assemblage can help us analyse how the 'therapeutic' is mobilised in specific places, as well as understand emergent links between regional, national and global geographies of health.

Recent publications by geographers on the concept of assemblage (such as Anderson and MacFarlane 2011; Dewsbury 2011; Edensor 2011; Legg 2011; McCann 2011) show that the concept holds promise for a range of research agendas in human geography and beyond. Since the adoption of assemblage theory by geographers the term 'assemblage geographies' has been developed (Robbins and Marks, 2009), it is no wonder that geographers have an interest in the concept as it lays out a world of spatial flows, a constant coming together and moving apart of heterogeneous elements in space and time; a thoroughly geographical concept.

Research in health geography can advance assemblage theory by applying it to concrete, empirical investigations in place-based studies of desires, practices, institutions, directives and laws. This chapter has taken the first steps towards considering how assemblage theory can help us understand how the disparate actors and objectives of a particular contemporary health practice come together and to identify some of the tensions and forces which compromise the assemblage, such as the difficulty to retain newcomers; the territorialising elements within the walking group which simultaneously create an environment of trust and make it difficult for newcomers to access the group, thus threatening its continued existence. At the same time, the evolving membership of the groups and the fact that each walking event attracts a different part of the membership means that the groups are constantly assembled and re-assembled in slightly different configurations, highlighting ongoing 'processes of decoupling and modifying relations and positions' (Sheller & Urry cited in Edensor, 2010: p.8). Moreover, the enduring nature of walking practices in the New Forest area are subject to the 'multiple networked mobilities of capital, persons, objects, signs and information' (Urry cited in Edensor, 2010: p.7), making for a complex mix of people and their desires for wellness entangled with contemporary imperatives to 'walk for health'.

Chapter 7

Conclusion

Contemporary Western lifestyles are often analysed to be 'increasingly characterised by sedentary behaviour, obesity problems, stress, mental ill-health and disconnection from nature' (Barton, Hine and Pretty, 2009: p.261). Increasingly, the health status of the British population has become a pressing governmental concern and the promotion of physical activity as a preventative health measure has become a public health priority in recent years (ibid. 2009). The natural environment, or 'greenspace' as it is often referred to in policy literatures, has become increasingly valued as a space which can afford physical, social and mental health benefits through activities such as walking. The distance walked per year by the average individual in the UK has fallen from 410 km per year in 1975-76 to 323 km per year in 2006 (Department for Transport, 2006). Figures like these provide the context for the recent governmental interest in promoting walking; 'walking is the most preferred outdoor recreational activity for reaching recommended physical activity targets' (Barton, Hine and Pretty, 2009: p.262). Far from being just a taken for granted, mundane activity or the most primitive form of transport available to us, walking has taken on the status of 'perfect exercise', set to play an integral role in creating a healthier nation.

Although walking in itself, in any context, has been proven to be highly beneficial for physical health, in combination with regular contact with the natural environment, it has been strongly linked with increased mental well-being (Frumkin, 2003; St Leger, 2003; Pretty, 2004; Maas et al., 2006; Pretty et al. 2006; Van den Berg et al. 2007). It is within this broader public health context that this study has been carried out. The research focused on led group walks in the Hampshire countryside and provided a qualitative exploration of walking as an embodied activity, focusing on group sociality and the encounter with the countryside landscape. The research questions which guided the study were focused around investigating relationships between the social and the material in the walk setting, as an effort to further understandings of how so-called therapeutic geographies are created and maintained.

Before discussing the findings, I will briefly recount the research questions below, as originally set out in chapter 2. The research questions responded to a lack of engagement with both group dynamics and affective exchange in health geographies to date. Further, they also aimed to open a discussion between health geographies and

cultural geographies of embodiment, mobility and the complex links between place and practice. The specific research questions were focused around three interrelated themes: landscape, affect and movement. Asking, firstly, about the relationship between walkers' desire for wellness and the encounter with the Hampshire countryside:

- To what degree does the countryside landscape become inscribed with desires of wellness and restoration?
- What role does the material landscape play in the creation of walking as a 'therapeutic' experience (in the widest sense of the word)?
- How does the materiality of the landscape interact with the sociality of the walking group?

Secondly, asking of the social dynamics of walking together:

- How is a supportive social environment created and maintained in the walking group?
- How are individual emotional needs managed and met in the group setting?
- What are the characteristics of the affective atmosphere of the walking group?

Thirdly, the research engaged with bodily movement and rhythm as an outcome of the embodied encounter between walker and landscape:

- How are walking bodies collectively generative and creative of 'therapeutic' spaces?
- How can we conceptualise the rhythmic dimension of walking together in the countryside?
- How is movement and rhythm styled and managed by the walkers themselves and by wider conventions surrounding walking for health?

The section and sub-sections below discusses the specific contributions of the thesis as a whole and its strengths and weaknesses in the context of its areas of contribution.

The thesis in context: making a contribution

The research in this thesis is situated within the qualitative tradition in health geography, concerned with the exploration of relations between spatial and social aspects of health. Health geography, since it broke away from medical geography in the early 1990s, has placed much of its focus around issues of well-being, defined in accordance with the WHO as 'a state of complete physical, mental and social wellbeing

and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity' (WHO 1948: 100). As Fleuret and Atkinson write (2007: p.107), the 'broader lens that wellbeing brings to considerations of health opens up further arenas for geographers of health to explore in terms of the processes that promote, remedy or regenerate health and ill-health'. One of the ways that well-being has been approached geographically is through a concern with 'how the healing process works itself out in places (or situations, locales, settings and milieus)' (Gesler, 1992: p.743). This stream of research in health geography has been focused around qualitative explorations of the dynamic processes through which therapeutic spaces are constructed, emphasising the relationship between aspects of health and ill-health and processes within certain material settings. Regarding therapeutic landscape formation as a dynamic, constantly evolving process, 'molded by the interplay, the negotiation between, physical, individual, and social factors' (Gesler, 1992: p.743). Therapeutic Landscapes is one of the few conceptual frameworks developed exclusively by qualitative health geographers (Andrews and Moon, 2005), and as such this literature has inspired much of this project. The concept was developed to explore people's complex health experiences in a range of different environments, from the natural to the man-made, and as such it is a highly useful analytical framework. However, there has been a theoretical gap between health geographers working with the therapeutic landscape metaphor and the way that cultural geographers working with 'more-than-representational' theories conceptualise spatial formations of different kinds (see chapter 2). Qualitative health geography as a whole has not been perceived to be at the forefront of geographical theory-building in recent years. Something which the work in this thesis has sought to address.

The empirical discussions were carried out in three separate chapters, building up to a discussion in the final empirical chapter about the practice of assembling walking for health, suggesting that assemblage theory may offer a new theoretical model for understanding health practices. The empirical engagement as a whole has attempted to address areas that have received less attention in health geographies to date and engaged with areas of theorising that I view as holding much potential for future directions in qualitative health geography, especially that which is focused on therapeutic landscapes. The contributions made by the thesis as a whole to the understanding and conceptualisation of the therapeutic landscape can be grouped around two key concepts; mobility and relationality. The discussion below pulls the different strands of the thesis together to consider how they contribute to 'mobilising' understandings of the therapeutic landscape concept, and advancing relational conceptions of well-being.

Mobilising the therapeutic landscape

Emphasising the relationship between material and social aspects of the walkscape was a guiding principle in selecting the methodological approach for the research. It was important that both the mobile nature of walking and the performativity of walking as a social practice was allowed to come to the fore to address what I considered the lack of explicit engagement with mobility in research around the therapeutic landscape concept. The approach that was adopted drew on what Jon Anderson (2004) terms 'talking-whilst-walking', a method conceived to bridge the gap between interviewing and observing by allowing the researcher both to observe the participant's interactions with their environment and interview them about their interpretation of those interactions. Anderson's 'talking-whilst-walking' approach is part of a broader interest in forms of 'go-along' ethnography (Kusenbach, 2003) in the social sciences, as discussed in chapter 3. Applied to the study of group walking practices in the Hampshire countryside, the method of interviewing participants while walking together proved to be beneficial for a number of reasons. Firstly, an investigation of group walking lends itself especially well to an adaption of go-along ethnography combined with both open-ended and semi-structured interviewing techniques. Attending a walk with the walking group offered not only an opportunity to observe relations within the group and the way that the group performed their practice of walking together in the countryside, but also offered a 'natural' setting for talk about walking. While walking, participants could reflect on their walking practice in a way that was more immediately embodied and lived than should they have talked about it in a seated interview elsewhere. Further, the landscape itself often served as a prompt for the participant to recall an experience relevant to the topic of the interview. While interviewing one participant, the muddy path that we were walking on prompted him to remember and tell a story about a particular group walk when the leader got lost and the mixture of worry, excitement and group bonding as they had walked aimlessly in the dark before they eventually found their path again. This story stood as an example of how the landscape itself became an active participant in the research encounter. Also, as Anderson (2004) points out, the physiological aspect of walking helps to prompt reminiscent behaviour. Alongside these aspects, this method also allowed me to adapt it in response to a concern with the rhythmic dimension of walking. It allowed me to observe and record the collective movements of the walking group, the management of individual rhythms and the rhythms of place. The rhythmic element became tangible not only through observation but also through listening back at recordings, focusing specifically on the rhythms present in the sonic environment, as opposed to solely focusing on the content of the talk. Thus, sound recordings proved to be a valuable tool for analysing the rhythms of the walkscape, one that

would be a fruitful avenue for further development, as rhythms of place is a growing interest in contemporary human geographies.

Chapter 5 contributes to the mobile conceptualisation of the therapeutic landscape by focusing on the moving body and its interactions with place in the establishment of a therapeutic rhythmscape. The walkscape was analysed as a specific outcome of place-based rhythms, which guides the collective movement of walkers and their interactions with each other and the environment. Following on from the previous chapter, rhythm was brought in as another analytical device which can help clarify relations between the sociable walking body and the materialities of the countryside landscape. Analysing rhythms is a specific way to engage with both performativity and mobility, both theoretical concepts whose growing presence in geographical scholarship over the last decade has had the force of a theoretical 'turn'. Arguably, both performativity theories and the concern with mobilities and movement emerged from an understanding that the human body, in '*the force of [its] material, visceral, and sensual embodiment*' (Dewsbury, 2000: p.474 original emphasis), produces space and that it is through our bodies that we experience place and make place meaningful. The analysis of rhythms adds to this broader project by exploring how the affective particularities of place registers in and through sensing bodies to create the rhythms of place. The concept of rhythm has not received much attention in human geography (or in the social sciences in general) until very recently. An early exception was Anne Buttimer's writing in the late 1970s on the rhythms of time-space which has since served as inspiration for work on rhythm by geographers writing within the humanistic tradition (e.g. Mels, 2004). Though publications on rhythmic dimensions of places are still few, there has been a notable increase in interest in this area since the 2004 publication of an English translation of Lefebvre's work *Éléments de rythmanalyse*, originally published in 1992. An anthology on geographies of rhythm published in 2010 (Edensor ed.) points towards a growing literature on rhythm in human geography. The different geographical contexts which receive attention in the book show the varied potential of a 'rhythmanalysis' to enrich research in areas that lie close to the heart of current geographical scholarship, such as nature, everyday life, mobility and the body.

Walking, in different environments and circumstances, is characterised by different rhythms. The analysis in chapter 5 showed that the rhythmicity of the rural walkscape was experienced affectively and played an important part in the creation of therapeutic walksapes. The pace, both actual and perceived, of the group walk showed itself to be of great importance for the individual experience and played a significant part in preconceptions about walking with different groups. In some cases the perceived set pace of a certain walking group would stop an individual from attending the group. In other cases the tempo set by an established group became a

source of comfort and signalled shared values about walking; whether the emphasis was placed on physical performance or on taking in the pleasures of the landscape and regularly 'stop and look'. Further, I suggest that the temporality of the rural Hampshire walkscape is both place-specific and experienced affectively and inter-subjectively. Because place-temporality (Wunderlich, 2010) is perceived and practiced collectively, it emerges as an important focus for analysis in studies of group practices, such as walking. Place-temporality and the rhythms of place are also connected to various imaginaries of place and are informed by broader discourses around places and practices and their effect on health. Attention to the rhythms of place could thus greatly enrich health geographical studies of different environments and practices with claims to promote health.

The use of a mobile methodology and the interest in movement and rhythm in this thesis can be situated within a broader context of growing interest in mobile research methods in the social sciences, as a response to the so-called 'mobilities turn' (Cresswell, 2006; Sheller and Urry, 2006; Urry, 2007). Through investigations of movement, and the lack thereof, the mobilities turn has emphasised how social and material realities are made and performed through movement, or the blocking of movement, or potential movement (Buscher and Urry, 2009). Mobility here is conceptualised as more than just movement through physical space, it is understood in broader terms as 'the overcoming of any type of distance between a here and a there' (Ziegler and Schwanen, 2011). This distance can be situated in any type of space; physical, electronic, social or psychological. In the context of this thesis, mobility can be conceived of as the interrelationship between the physical movement on the walking path and the metaphorical movement towards a state of heightened well-being. The mobility of my participants involved an emotional and psychological journey, in many cases from a place of emotional crisis to a place of 'doing well enough' (Taylor, 2011). This journey should be understood as an ongoing, evolving, process rather than a linear progression from a starting point to a particular destination. Further, a 'mobility of the self', in terms of openness and willingness to engage with the world and others in it, has been shown to be a crucial driver of the relation between mobility and well-being (Ziegler and Schwanen, 2011). The Hampshire countryside walkscape, that constituted the research site, is a site made up of multiple dynamic interactions where temporary or more lasting connections can be made, and where the mobile practice of walking is performed within a relational space.

The relation between mobility and well-being, particularly in connection to ageing and older people, is one that has received some attention in recent years (e.g. Spinney, Scott and Newbold, 2009; Ziegler and Schwanen, 2011), and out-of-home mobility is widely believed and has been shown to be positively correlated to wellbeing in old age (Ziegler and Schwanen, 2011). There is furthermore widespread attention

afforded to the relationship between mobility and well-being in policy-oriented literatures and together the increased attention paid to mobility in older age is embedded within the discourse of so-called 'active ageing' (e.g. Department of Health 2005; Lowe and Speakman, 2006). Although a significant number of participants in this research were older people, the thesis did not engage as explicitly as it could have done with issues surrounding mobility, sociality and well-being in older age. There is further an argument to be had around distinctions being made between different age groups within the broad category of 'older age', as priorities, needs and capabilities in regards to well-being and their relationship to physical or psychological mobility are highly dependent on the stage in the life course.

A relational conception of well-being

The emphasis on relationality in the thesis responds to the recent upswing in relational conceptualisations of well-being in health geography and beyond. Well-being, as it has been conceptualised in psychological terms has been criticised for its concern with a hypothetically asocial individual, framing individual well-being (particularly mental well-being) in biochemical terms, leading the psychological processes of well-being to be considered in abstraction from their social context (Stenner and Taylor, 2008). Even though this thesis does not engage directly with psychological theories of well-being, nonetheless it problematises the broad tendency to think the psychic and the social separately and thus makes a contribution to a reconceptualisation of well-being as a relational process of being well, or as it has more helpfully been termed, 'doing well enough' (Taylor, 2011). A dynamic and relational conceptualisation of well-being is something that could have been developed further in the thesis and there is certainly a great amount of discussion still to be had in regards to how well-being should be understood, especially in relation to the life course. The sociality of the shared countryside walk is emphasised in the first empirical chapter. The social aspect of walking emerged as crucial for the restorative experience of walking with others, but the sociality produced on a shared walk was far from straightforward. Firstly, I found that group walking was characterised by temporary connections, fleeting intersections between fellow walkers. Walking sociality was found to relax cultural norms around talking; how much to talk and how much to share about oneself. Walkers could spend quiet contemplative time in the company of others, or they could choose to engage in informal social interaction with low expectations of the relationship going any further than the walk. I also found that the material setting of the walk and the way that walkers comport themselves while walking had an impact on social interactions. Congregations could be encouraged or avoided by different ways of walking.

It is specifically to help understand the sociability of the walking body that the concept of 'social aesthetics' is brought into the analysis in chapter 4. In the efforts to theorise the embodied, the affective, the material and the performative, geographers have neglected to talk about aesthetics. In geographies of landscape, the concept of aesthetics has been invoked only to discuss 'aesthetic politics' (e.g. Benediktsson, 2007) around the appearance of certain landscapes, or in health geographies of therapeutic landscapes aesthetics have only been discussed in terms of the visual appreciation of waiting room wall art (Evans, Crooks and Kingsbury, 2009), precisely failing to relate aesthetics with embodiment and affective life. The conception of aesthetics that I would like to make useful for this project is an embodied aesthetic that involves not just the visual sense and scenic appreciation but includes our perception of sounds, smell and touch as well as sight. What contemporary American philosopher Arnold Berleant calls an 'aesthetic of engagement', which demands the participation of both subject and object in a mutual relation. The aesthetic appreciation of the rural walkscape entails an affective engagement with the place and the event of the walk, including the other walkers. This is a conception of aesthetics that does away with Kantian judgment and disinterested interest – this is an understanding of aesthetic experience that never regards the individual as a detached subject making a judgment of an object which is wholly outside of itself. The kind of aesthetics that I want to apply to the therapeutic experience is taking inspiration from John Dewey's 'aesthetics of experience' and Deleuzian affects generated through aesthetic experience which signal moments of ethical potential where new sensibilities for thinking, feeling, seeing, and being with others might be imagined and practiced. There is further work possible here in drawing on Ranciere's (2004) 'distribution of the sensible' whereby the ordering of bodies, roles, and shares stabilizes in consensual frames of perceptual reference. This conception of the aesthetic conceives of the body as a locus of sensory-aesthetic appreciation. But not only this, it also emphasises relationality and the *shared* creation of the aesthetic experience. The thesis opens up for a much needed discussion here of the role of a relational aesthetics in the constitution of therapeutic landscapes, and further research would do well to elaborate on the links between aesthetic experience and well-being.

Studies of health practices and environments renowned for being, or constructed as, health affirming by geographers often (though not always) focus on *group* settings of different kinds. Yet, the complex relational dynamics of therapeutic practices and settings are curiously under-studied. Studies of physical practices such as group walking, invariably need to engage with the fact that this is also a social practice and that the social element is often crucial for the restorative experience. In my field work the social dynamics of group walking emerged very strongly and thus chapter 4 takes steps towards an understanding of how the therapeutic walkscape is constitutive of the

relations that are formed and performed within it. Thus, the thesis makes a strong contribution to research on therapeutic landscapes around the importance of social relations in the pursuit of better health and how social relations are affected by and grounded in the specificities of place. There is also an important argument that emerges here in relation to how we can understand and theorise these socio-material relations that sit at the heart of the restorative (walking) experience. This thesis suggests that taking an assemblage approach to understanding therapeutic landscapes can open up to both the complexity and the integrated effects of different elements within the therapeutic setting.

The interest in the concept of the assemblage, both as a pragmatic analytical tool and an ontological position, has arguably grown out of an increased acknowledgement across the social sciences that socio-material phenomena are inherently complex in nature. Alongside other so-called theoretical 'turns', it is possible to discern a so-called 'complexity turn' (Urry 2005; Gatrell 2005) across the social and cultural sciences since the late 1990s.

In health geography, Sarah Curtis has recently argued for the application of complexity approaches in the study of human health. She points out that as globalisation, mobility and urbanisation is becoming more prominent features of life, complex aspects of relational space seem increasingly important and significant for health geography (Curtis, 2010). Cummins, Curtis, Diez-Roux and Macintyre (2007) identify some of the new research agendas that have emerged in health geography in recent times as a result of thinking around relational spaces, coupled with advances in research methods which are responsive to individual expressions of perceptions and feelings, including various approaches using photo-diaries, participatory video, drama and so on (e.g. Pain, 2004). Recent research agendas have moreover displayed an increasing emphasis on interactions between people and the context in which they live. Rather than exploring the *independent* effects of different contextual attributes on an individual's health, recent studies are exploring *relational* and integrated effects, seeking to understand mutual connections between individuals and their environment (Curtis, 2010: pp.11-12). However, as I argued in chapter 6, many of these interventions do not go far enough in theorising the complexity of health and place relations.

Partly due to the nature of large complex systems and perhaps partly due to systems theory's history in the mathematical, computing and engineering sciences, applications of complexity theory in health geography most often employ quantitative techniques, focusing on technologies which track people and other mobile features of the environment such as Global Positioning Systems (GPS), analysing these kinds of data with Geographical Information Systems (GIS) and multilevel modelling (MLM) for example. However, drawing inspiration from complexity theory can be very rewarding

for qualitative health geographies, beyond just acknowledging that various health systems are complex and depend on the interaction of various networks over space and time. Some of the therapeutic landscape literature (e.g. Gesler, 1998; Andrews and Kearns, 2005) has focused on a historical perspective of the development of particular healthy/healing settings and the connections between their reputation as healthy and the social and economic development of the places as destinations for a certain type of 'health tourism'. In this sense, therapeutic landscape literature has to some degree responded to issues of spatiotemporal complexity when it comes to the spacing/placing of health. These research agendas that focus on interactions between individual and environmental factors aim to 'collapse the false dualism of context and composition by recognizing that there is a mutually reinforcing and reciprocal relationships between people and place' (Cummins et al. cited in Curtis and Riva, 2009: p.218). However, I would argue, what has been missing is a clear conceptualization of how to account for these reciprocal relationships and how to incorporate them into a coherent model for understanding geographies of health. This is where assemblage theory has a great deal to offer. The challenge that assemblage theory poses to health geography (and social science in general) is the need to rethink the idea that things are best understood if taken apart, or deconstructed. Instead, the figure of the assemblage enables an analysis of the different components that are brought together, as in the case of 'walking for health', and how these components interact with each other – their 'reciprocal presuppositions and mutual insertions' (Deleuze and Guattari cited in Li, 2007: p.265) – and tensions can be identified and analysed. Assemblage theory provides an analytical model for the exploration of relations between the material, the social and the political, it allows for a distribution of agencies and provides a framework for how to trace their emergent effects.

Walking and well-being: considerations for policy and practice

Policy and campaigning around walking in Britain reflect both a public health strategy in regards to combating ill-health due to inactivity and obesity and an environmental agenda in relation to reducing carbon emissions from the transport sector. These interests intersect within most policies and campaigns that promote walking, whether they principally focus on walking as a health practice or as a sustainable mode of transport. In the opening chapter, I identified these cross-cutting agendas within walking policy in general in Britain, but also specifically illustrated by the re-branding exercise of the Ramblers, which begun in 2009. Arguably, since appointing their new Chief Executive in February 2012, Benedict Southworth, who is a former Greenpeace and Friends of the Earth employee, the charity may align itself even more with an environmentalist agenda and return to what some may say are their campaigning

roots. The position of the Ramblers, as Britain's largest walking charity, has afforded them a considerable amount of input into national governmental policies in relation to walking. Text on the Ramblers website further illustrates the cross-cutting agendas now evident within Ramblers walking strategy;

Public transport is the natural partner for walking, and more people using public transport would reduce vehicle congestion, improving the walking environment. We encourage all walkers to use public transport or walk from their doorstep rather than drive in order to go on a leisure walk, and we encourage our volunteers to run led walks that are accessible by public transport (Ramblers, *transport*, 2012).

What is seen as the key problem in promoting walking in Britain is that so far policy and strategies to promote walking have not 'delivered the necessary investment, commitment and joined-up thinking necessary to reverse the decline in walking levels' (Ramblers, *transport*, 2012). The difficult task for walking strategies is to challenge a car-dependent society to re-consider the use of the car and as much as possible take to walking instead, or switch to public transport when walking is not an option. A key element of this is the promotion of green space as an ideal location for walking, but also promoting the enjoyment of the environment in general, including urban environments. In the context of my case study, the Ramblers policy in regards to planning walks in locations accessible by public transport was visible but sometimes problematic. I attended quite a few walks over my year of fieldwork which were not accessible by public transport. This was particularly the case when it came to walks in the New Forest, which often convened in locations far from the nearest train or bus stop. More effort in providing the opportunities for group members to car-share to locations not accessible by public transport would improve the accessibility of walks for those who are not able or willing to drive themselves. As many walk members do not already know each other or know who will attend a specific walk, publishing a walk schedule and providing a member's discussion forum on the local group's website would enable members to organise shared transport for future walks. Some local groups provide members with a membership list, including names and phone numbers, but many walkers I spoke to were reluctant to contact other members they had not met by phone to make possible travel arrangements.

Another issue which is most often neglected by policy and walking strategies, perhaps because it offers less direct economic or environmental impact, is the social benefits of the shared walk. What can be termed 'psychosocial well-being' (Taylor, 2011) has not been a strong focus in walking promotions, instead walking strategies –

such as the Walking for Health campaign – have focused strongly on the physical health benefits of walking and less so on the benefits of social contact and shared movement. My findings in relation to the sociality of walking together were strong; the shared walk provided an opportunity for conviviality and shared movement influenced communication in ways that enabled those who were less socially confident to benefit from positive social interactions. Overall, the social context of the group walk had a significant impact on the benefits participants experienced in relation to their subjective well-being. Even though the Ramblers' website currently relates their conception of walking as a 'multi-purpose activity', walking policy and strategy on a national level often do not reflect this view. The Ramblers state in relation to 'policy and research' that;

Walking is a complex multi-purpose activity that can be undertaken for a variety of reasons – transport, leisure, healthy exercise, exploration – sometimes simultaneously in the same trip. We believe walking policies and projects should reflect this complexity and not be limited to a transport-focused modal shift approach (Ramblers, *transport*, 2012).

The texts available on the Ramblers' website in relation to research and policy do not mention the benefit of walking for psychosocial well-being, which I would argue based on the findings in this thesis are as important as the physical health benefits, and even more important if we consider the motivational factor that the social benefits provide, encouraging people to keep walking and enjoying the benefits to their physical health from continued engagement. It is foremost the social experience of the group walk that either encourages people to continue attending led walks, or in some cases not come back at all. Therefore, walking groups would do well to really understand the significance of walking sociality and the importance it has for individual well-being. Practices that encourage and facilitate social relationships to form during and around walks could improve the social experience of attending led walks. A web-based forum or perhaps a Facebook group, would facilitate establishing social relationships and for members to arrange with each other to attend the same walks if they wished to. Although many walks were followed by a stop at a pub, which would seem to enhance sociality, this study found that some participants were not comfortable in this social setting. Thus, an understanding of the social implications of different settings would be beneficial in order to provide occasional alternatives. The findings also suggest that a pub stop at the end of the walk, rather than at mid-point, is a better idea as it enables those who do not want to socialise in the pub to opt out. Further, in relation to the setting of walks, the social benefits of walking are not necessarily dependent on

walking in green space, so introducing more urban walks or walks in built environments to complement the rural walks could improve accessibility and take-up by different groups. However, the amount and nature of rhythmic intersections that characterise the setting of the walk was found to have an impact on the degree to which the walk is experienced as restorative. That the rhythmic character of the walk setting allowed the walker to feel 'in tune' with the environment by not being subjected to any significant 'rhythmic interference' was found to be a significant element of 'discursive walking', characterised by the synchronisation of external (social, spatial) and internal (psychological, biological) rhythms. Thus, although urban walking is likely to be beneficial for well-being and health, discursive walking may become compromised by the large number of intersecting and interfering rhythms of urban places, especially the major cities where the Ramblers are currently concentrating much of their campaigns. This is not to say that urban walking does not have its own delights, but it could also be balanced by making sure that walking routes take walkers through places that embody a slower pace, at least for part of the walk, such as choosing quieter streets or places in the city and directing walks through urban parks or greenspace, if possible.

In terms of accessibility and broadening of participation, the Ramblers have focused their campaigns on larger cities, and teamed up with the Walking for Health campaign to promote walking across the country. However, there are still possibilities for local Ramblers groups to engage with strategies aimed at widening participation at the local level, where I believe very little is being done. The walking groups I attended did not show much diversity in the membership in ethnic and socio-economic terms, and if reaching 'at-risk' groups in terms of health are a central driving force behind recent walking policy, then there is a big improvement needed in this area. Clearer advertising of their 'try before you buy' policy – i.e. that you can attend one walk for free before paying the membership fee – could be a big help. This would also necessitate that walking schedules are made easily accessible to the public, as non-members need to be able to choose a walk to attend. In some cases the walking schedules of groups I attended were not publically accessible for non-members.

Since the pacing of the walks was something that emerged as a significant deterrent in joining the Ramblers, it would be beneficial to include information about the pace on local group websites and in printed materials. As walk leaders generally adapted the pace to accommodate for everyone in the group, it needs to be clear to non-members and first-timers that pacing will probably not pose a problem. It would further be useful to highlight the numbers likely to attend walks as this also has a significant impact on the pace and on the social experience. Some walks are very well attended and thus cater for a broader range in abilities and others attract only a small membership – largely depending on the length of the walk – and this is something that

seemed to be fairly consistent, therefore this information could be made available on the website to help inform non-members about which walk might suit them. Local groups could also offer ‘taster-walks’, specifically aimed at non-members, advertised locally and targeting at-risk populations, as there are no such direct strategies to widen participation in place at the moment.

Concluding remarks

Work in health geography, especially on therapeutic landscapes, have emphasised the potential of using place as a lens through which to critically examine contemporary health practices (Watson et al., 2010), from provisions in health care institutions to the individual pursuit of well-being and restoration. This thesis has built on two decades of work in health geography on the concept of therapeutic landscape. The early work on therapeutic landscapes already recognised the importance of context, both physical and socio-cultural (e.g. Kearns 1993). Gesler (1992) originally introduced the concept to medical geographers in order to argue the contribution that cultural geographical themes could make to studies of health and healing. A healing landscape, he argued, is a landscape imbued with symbolic and cultural values (Watson et al., 2010). Above all, he emphasised the meanings that people attach to place and which have an important impact on well-being. The emphasis on context and the ‘setting’ of health practices and interventions arguably signalled the general shift from medical to health geographies (see Brown and Duncan, 2002). Recent work on the therapeutic landscape concept has pushed this shift even further towards post-structural scholarship in other areas of geography by emphasising relationality and interactions between different elements present in a particular therapeutic landscape, including commercial and economic motives (e.g. Conradson, 2005), however a particular strength of this thesis is emphasising a relational understanding of the well-being concept itself. Conradson’s (2005: p.338) critique of how the concept had tended to equate ‘physical presence within a landscape with the unproblematic receipt of its therapeutic influence’, has led to a heightened awareness in these literatures, that:

individuals clearly experience even scenic environments in different ways, in terms ranging from enjoyment through to ambivalence and even anxiety (Conradson, 2005: p.338).

This acknowledgement of the complexity of therapeutic landscape *experiences* led to work that emphasised the wide range of meanings that are ascribed by people to a wide range of landscapes, not traditionally considered positive for human health. Or indeed negative experiences in places which *are* traditionally considered healing (see chapter 2). However, the emphasis on the complexity of personal experiences in place

often came at the expense of an interest in group relations that play out in place, and how place affects those relations, arguably these literatures still conceived of well-being, or restoration, in highly individual terms.

Considering the prominent focus on walking in recent public health interventions, surprisingly little attention has been paid to rural group walking in health geographical literatures working with the therapeutic landscape concept, something which is addressed by this thesis. Areas of nature or wilderness have similarly been given scant attention in therapeutic landscape literatures (for exceptions see Lea, 2008; Milligan and Bingley 2007; Palka, 1999). This is surprising, as in the last century areas of rural green space 'have achieved lasting reputations for healing' (Gesler, 2003: p.2). It is also surprising since green space, both rural and urban, has been increasingly valorised as health-giving over the last century and implicated in what Brown and Bell (2007) term the 'medicalization of nature'. This thesis has sought to address this by focusing on group walking in the countryside, approaching the rural Hampshire walkscape as;

- an affective social space where social relations are grounded in place;
- an embodied mobile engagement with place which is experienced rhythmically through the body, and;
- as an active practice of assemblage which emerges through the interactions between a large number of disparate elements, agents and objectives.

The therapeutic landscape which emerges in this thesis is one that is assembled from a range of material, symbolic and social elements, emphasising the relational constitution of both the therapeutic landscape itself and possible well-being benefits. It is a collective space, where human bodies, oriented towards each other in the cultural practice of walking, are responsive to the environment, socially, physically, affectively and emotionally. The focus of the analysis aims to engage with rural group walking as a collective practice, it aims to look for the *wholes* rather than exclusively focus on individual narratives. Where individual experiences are narrated, it tries to see how these personal experiences emerge within the group environment, which is place-specific, affectively experienced (and thus inter-subjective) and the result of interactions between place and practice. The therapeutic walking experience that results is one that emphasises relationality; it approaches the shared walk as a communicative practice and seeks to show how the sociality of walking together is place-specific, both in the way that people communicate with each other verbally and non-verbally and the way that place communicates through the movements of the walking body. In focusing on these themes of embodiment, affect, rhythm and

movement and practices of assembling, a particular strength of the thesis lies in its ability to create a dialogue between health geography and cultural geography.

The thesis contributes to a growing concern with the complexity and interconnectivity of life in human geography at large. At a broad level the thesis engages with debates about society/nature relations in posthuman, hybrid and more-than-human social geographies (Panelli, 2009). However, at the same time the thesis affects a tentative return to the human – ‘the *emergence* of the human as project and practice, the body as an outcome of the ‘infecting’ of the world’ (Braun cited in Panelli, 2009: p.82) – as she stands embroiled in more-than-human networks of relations, arguing along with Head and Muir (2006: p.522) that ‘the social dimensions of these networks need as much attention as the biological ones’. But always recognising that these social dimensions are never detached from the material conditions of their emergence.

In summary, the way that the thesis conceptualises the Hampshire walkscape, highlights the connections between bodily and affective spaces, wider curative metaphors and the complex coming together of a range of disparate elements to produce therapeutic practices. The notion of assemblage highlights the dynamic nature of relationships between culture, health and place and offers a new model for the study of how the pursuit of wellness plays itself out in different places, a model which holds much promise for future investigations.

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