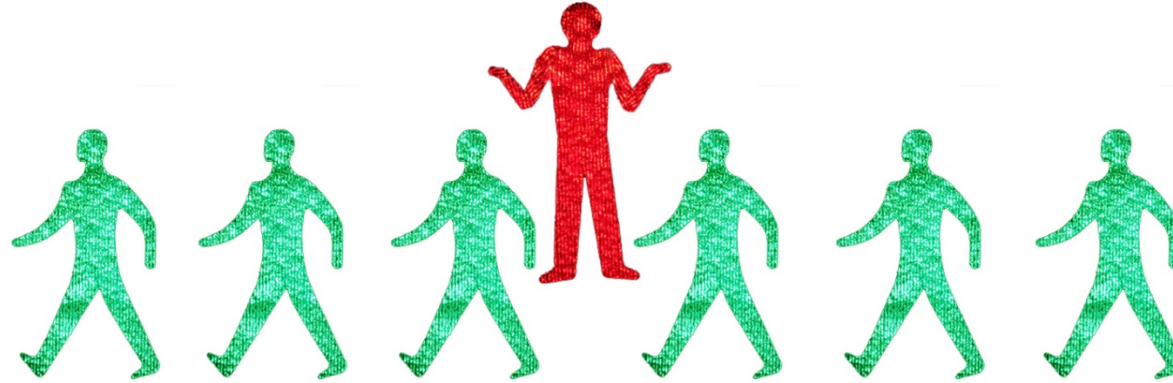# READING THE SIGNALS

Capturing the meanings of pedestrian crossing practice in Manchester

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Why pedestrian crossings?

Initial observations

- 'Normalised incoherence' discernible in UK pedestrian crossing practice
- Crossings can be sites of awkwardness, uncertainty, poor-judgement: interruptions of competence
- Crossing against the signals in the UK is not illegal or socially frowned-upon as it can be elsewhere – we can use our 'common sense'
- Is something about our 'common sense' behind the apparent incoherence?

Hypothesis

- 'Common Sense Neoliberalism' **(Hall 1979, 1985; Hall & O'Shea 2013)**
- 'Decline of the public' **(Marquand 2008)**
- Does lack of habituation to engaging with 'the public domain' affect our response to this public infrastructure
- Is it an interruption of 'publicness' to what have become individualised and 'responsiblised' modes of mobility?
- Does standing and waiting make less sense to us?

History -> Today -> ?

- Histories of pedestrian crossing infrastructure in the UK demonstrate ways broader political and social processes drove their development and gave meaning to their use

  - **Rooney (2018)** - Keeping favoured mobile subjects apart from those less favoured by power – pedestrians as a racialized, classed, aged and gendered abject group

  - **Hornsey (2010)** – Bureaucratic organisation for efficient, productive streets – a kind of 'Taylorism' applied to pedestrianism

  - **Moran (2006)** – Controversies about state interference in everyday life compromising individual freedom repeatedly arise, in decades where state presence in daily life is perhaps more routine and accepted than ever – this controversy begins to fade from the 70s

- History shows they're not just useful infrastructure, but are channelers of governing rationalities which people respond to, to some extent, expressively

- **Laisseze Faire > Maintenance of Order > Public Welfare > Responsiblisation > ?**

Fast lanes and slow lanes for people?

Separation of the fast and the slow – eliminating hindrance for favoured mobile subjects, by reducing necessity of interacting with people who have different needs or priorities?

Monday, 4 December, 2000, 11:52 GMT

Pedestrians: Get in lane

Oxford Street: Home to 200 million shoppers a year

Window shoppers are clogging up London's Oxford Street, making life difficult for those who want to walk at pace. Now plans are afoot to try and introduce a pedestrian fast lane.

It's enough to put you off going outside the front door forever.

Fast-walking pedestrians get their own sidewalk lanes in Liverpool

Liverpool's new 'fast-walking' lanes are prompting people around the world to ask for speedier sidewalks

Lauren O'Neil · CBC News · Posted: Nov 05, 2015 9:08 PM ET | Last Updated: November 6, 2015

A U.K. study found that dawdling pedestrians, pavement hoggers, and 'people checking their phones' are incredibly irritating to many shoppers. (Argos)

The Future of Pedestrian Crossings?

- Unreadability of human pedestrian behaviour vs. driverless vehicle A.I.
- Solvable through stricter adherence to pedestrian crossing rules?
- Such a change would require overcoming longstanding resistance to compliance
- What's the difference in the meaning of compliance with or resistance to crossing rules for a) public automated transport systems b) private, individualised ones?

Methodology

Possible ways of getting from practice to politics/micro to macro?

'Mobility as Dispositif'

Katharina Manderscheid (2014, 2016, 2018)

- Dispositif, from Foucault: a 'productive assemblage' – a dispersed solution to anxieties and desires of power

- Related discourses, practices, infrastructures, technologies can be conceived as part of the same apparatus

- Practices derive meaning from knowledges, discourses, infrastructures etc. of which they form a part

'Lay Morality'

Andrew Sayer (2004, 2005, 2009)

- Much of experience consists of ethical evaluations and judgements

- Evaluations of ours and others' practices relate to our sense of social competence, how we classify people and their behaviours

- We're concerned with how people 'ought' to conduct themselves – this goes beyond immediate experience to how we think society ought to work

- We judge people by according to certain principles we believe ought to generally apply

Combining Mobility as Dispositif with Lay Normativity

- Access people's 'evaluations of practice' at pedestrian crossings sites
- Note how people frame their ideas about what they and others do badly or well
- What sorts of principle or values do people invoke?
- How do these relate to hegemonic notions of mobility?
- How do these relate to legacy values of 'the public domain'?
- What sort of solutions do people imagine to things that go wrong – individual? Systemic?
- What authority, if any, is invoked?

Challenges to getting the data

- Pedestrianism takes concentration and skill
- There's durational performance/experience of flow
- Walking with/Go-Along interviewing would break concentration and interrupt experience
- I want to access feelings – competence, annoyance, hindrance, awkwardness
- Perhaps also subtle things that may not be noticed or remembered after the fact

Filming journeys?

- **Simpson** used video captured of cyclists journeys with follow-up interviews to get around some of these issues **(2014, 2018)**

- **Sujarmarto & Pink's** use of GoPros to capture an empathetic 'video trace' of cyclists' journeys – helped capture affective dimensions of their participants' experiences **(2017)**

- I also wanted a sense of 'dialogue' in the research – between researcher and participants' explanations for phenomena of interest

- I settled on a 2-phase ethnographic research plan

Phase 1: Participant-Observation

Devising and walking a route:

- 20 minute journey near Manchester city centre (going at a fair speed)

- Features three 'dangerous' pedestrian crossings as identified in DfT research, and plenty more along the way (not the danger but the likely 'intensity' of the sites I was interested in!)

- Walked 3 times a day, three times a week, for three weeks (27 journeys)

- Taking audio notes of witnessed incidents and reflections on the ideas behind the project - now hopefully more developed

The aim was to:

- Formalise observations of pedestrian crossing practices

- Develop familiarity with chosen locations

- Develop more awareness of 'phenomena of interest' to discuss with participants in phase 2

Piccadilly/Lever Street

Oxford Road/Hulme Street
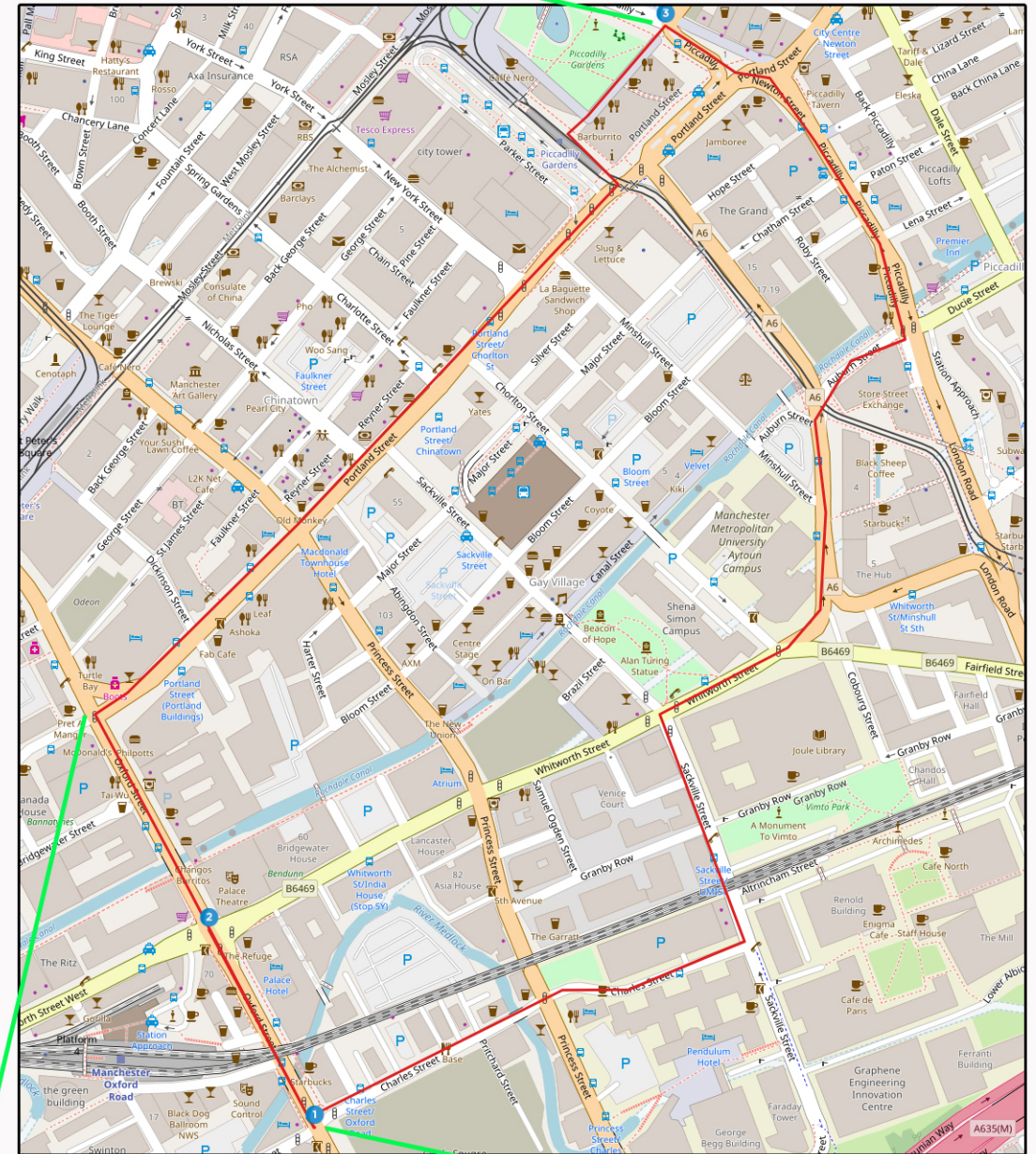
Oxford Road/Whitworth Street West

A few findings/reflections from Phase 1
Data, data everywhere!

- Bus drivers just keeping going as they turn into crowds flowing across a crossing on the red-man phase
- A front line of pedestrians which hesitates, somebody breaks and then the bulk of the group follow in a flow
- People waiting in the road, just ahead of the pavement
- People dutifully waiting, but with visibly ebbing patience
- People waiting at a junction with waiting cars, losing patience and then setting off, just as the light turns green for the traffic
- People believing they've adequately judged it's safe to cross and getting it dramatically wrong

- Cyclists crossing at speed on the green man phase
- Certain streets generate their own momentum and urge to flow through crossings regardless of the signal
- Pedestrians dominate the space when there's enough of them
- Looks and gestures publicly expressed which indicate that someone is a 'category of person' exhibiting a 'category of behaviour'
- People setting up an ad-hoc rule that instantly fails
- Communicating through tinted glass - exaggerated gestures of opprobrium
- Complex dynamics of class, vulnerability and speed at work between pedestrians, car drivers, bus drivers, cyclists etc.

Reflections from Phase 1 #2

- Great way to develop your thinking about your project

- Bit Flâneur-ey? i.e. Making an unsolicited sense of other people's actions from a privileged position? **(Coates, 2017; Rose 2015)**

- Good way of experiencing flow and interruption passing through, but were other patterns invisible to me?

Phase 2: Dual-Perspective GoPro Ethnography

- Participant and researcher wear GoPros
- The participant follows a route they regularly make through the city that includes at least one of the crossings I've been observing
- I follow them, recording a contextualising view of their trip
- I edit the footage so both perspectives can be viewed simultaneously
- We meet later to view and discuss the footage
- **This is the data - the film is the means of elicitation**
- Did this with 9 participants

Dual Perspective Screenshot 1

Participant's p.o.v. on the left, researcher's on the right

Dual Perspective Screenshot 2

Participant's p.o.v. on the left, researcher's on the right

Dual Perspective Screenshot 3

Participant's p.o.v. on the left, researcher's on the right

Reflections from Phase 2 #1

Being a 'Dalek' in public

- GoPros are about as small and discrete as you can get for a body/head worn camera, but that's still not very discrete
- Becoming familiar on cyclists, still unusual to see them on a pedestrian
- Did my best to prep participants – more time would permit more 'desensitisation'
- Fellow pedestrians do take a second glance, but passing tends to be quick so the impact of this is minimised
- Most participants reported losing self-consciousness fairly rapidly
- Some Participants 'performing' pedestrianism (even more than usual)
- All this could be helped with longer preparation/multiple journeys

Reflections from Phase 2 #2

Is it really necessary to have a second camera?

- Second perspective added context and detail
- Also facilitated a kind of 'walking with' or 'go-along' interview after-the-fact **(Evans and Jones, 2011)**
- 'Unfolding' sense of the journey was reflected in the conversations
- Felt important that the discussions were of a 'shared' experience

Reflections on Phase 2 #3

Sticking to the crossing point?

- Participants were *very* eager to discuss their routine walks
- People want to share much more about their journeys than what happened at the crossings
- 'Phenomena of interest' at pedestrian crossings didn't happen as abundantly as I'd have hoped
- Overcoming this issue:
  - Quantification-via-clicker of the frequency of certain phenomena at certain crossings
  - Multiple journeys with participants
- Nevertheless, there was enough data yielded to answer the research questions

Some Findings

Individual Judgement and 'The Ethic of Awareness'

- Most had learned to anticipate when they could cross opportunistically at certain crossings when the man was red
- People found waiting at crossings when not obviously necessary annoying or weird
- They mostly found using their own judgement at the crossings unproblematic, though some hazy guilt was expressed
- Avoiding causing annoyance or impedance was key to a sense of competence – a lack of 'awareness' the biggest crime
- People felt there were rules and ways people 'ought' to behave as pedestrians, but didn't like the idea of these being made 'official'

Annoyance, defiance, recognition & redistribution

- Participants reported angry 'inner narratives' about other road users
- Guy in suit overtakes participant: "*Ugh, what a wanker*"
- Participant catches up with him being delayed by a crossing: "*HAHA!*"
- Defiance/refusal of deferential gestures in the face of traffic - "*I refused to trot*"
- People want their equal right to space and momentum recognised – extant inequalities exacerbate how lack of this recognition is experienced
- Redistribution of unfair allocations of space and momentum occur through refusing to move or through being extra helpful

Getting ahead and the decline of public authority #1

- Cars transgressing crossing zones in the green man phase is common when traffic is queuing
- 'Getting ahead' trumps adhering to public systems of restraint – transgressing public boundaries is key to good 'getting ahead' practice
- Participants struggled to think of any sort of 'authority' that would be on their side if they were put in danger or their right to cross was impeded by traffic
- Participants were concerned to keep themselves safe, and to not be to blame for anything that went wrong

Getting ahead and the decline of public authority #2: Countdown!

- Countdown timers were seen as useful or even fun
- Participants recalled the rule that if you start crossing when the green man is still displayed, then you have the right to be in front of the traffic until you've completed crossing
- A person's right to be in front of the traffic is, without the timers, more a matter of public judgement
- Timers represent a loss of the practically applied idea of 'the official' as something which makes reasonable allowances for the variety of needs and priorities of the public as a whole, sometimes at the expense of someone else's desire to get ahead

Conclusions

Did it work?

- I was able to access people's reflections on pedestrian crossing practice which had relevance to the broader sociological themes I wanted to relate this to

- Discussions with participants definitely challenged what I'd thought and enriched my understanding of pedestrian practice in Manchester

- Research design tweaks could be used to focus the data more precisely on pedestrian crossing practice whilst still maintaining the important context of routine and duration that participants' journeys involve

- Definitely a great way to get people to discuss the rich experience that these routine walks consist of

THANKS!!!

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