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The Everyday Usage of City-Centre Streets: Urban Behaviour in Provincial Britain ca. 1930–1970

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Résumé de l'article

Notre article examine l'expérience des usagers dans l'espace que constitue la rue du centre-ville en se concentrant sur trois grands thèmes : l'usage de l'espace; le comportement des usagers et l'intervention des pouvoirs publics pour diriger ce comportement; les expériences sensorielles et émotionnelles de la présence dans la rue. Nous insistons sur l'interaction des personnes avec le centre-ville et la perception qu'elles en ont. Ces interactions créent des perspectives multidimensionnelles associées à des caractéristiques sociodémographiques individuelles produisant des expériences spécifiquement liées au lieu. Notre article s'appuie sur des films, des photographies et des témoignages pour documenter l'usage de la rue. Tout en admettant l'importance fondamentale de la fonction du commerce dans le centre-ville, nous affirmons que ces espaces génèrent des expériences plus complexes que la simple acquisition de biens et de services au cours de transactions commerciales. Notre article conclut que l'expérience, le comportement et la relation des usagers avec la rue du centre-ville sont aussi importants que les investissements et l'urbanisme pour la compréhension de la fonction urbaine.

The Everyday Usage of City-Centre Streets: Urban Behaviour in Provincial Britain ca. 1930–1970

Lucy Faire and Denise McHugh

This article examines the user experience in the city-centre street space, focusing on three main themes: space usage; the behaviour of users and interventions to direct behaviour by urban authorities; and the sensory and emotional experiences of being on the street. The emphasis is on people's interaction with the city centre and their perceptions of it. These interactions generated multi-dimensional perspectives linked to individual socio-demographic characteristics producing place-specific experiences. The article uses film, photography and testimony to provide insights into street usage and, while acknowledging that the retail function of the city centre was fundamental, argues that this space generated wider experiences beyond the acquisition of goods and services in commercial transactions. The article concludes that the user experience, behaviour and relationship with the city-centre street are as important to understanding urban function as capital investment and city planning.

Notre article examine l'expérience des usagers dans l'espace que constitue la rue du centre-ville en se concentrant sur trois grands thèmes : l'usage de l'espace; le comportement des usagers et l'intervention des pouvoirs publics pour diriger ce comportement; les expériences sensorielles et émotionnelles de la présence dans la rue. Nous insistons sur l'interaction des personnes avec le centre-ville et la perception qu'elles en ont. Ces interactions créent des perspectives multidimensionnelles associées à des caractéristiques sociodémographiques individuelles produisant des expériences spécifiquement liées au lieu. Notre article s'appuie sur des films, des photographies et des témoignages pour documenter l'usage de la rue. Tout en admettant l'importance fondamentale de la fonction du commerce dans le centre-ville, nous affirmons que ces espaces génèrent des expériences plus complexes que la simple acquisition de biens et de services au cours de transactions commerciales. Notre article conclut que l'expérience, le comportement et la relation des usagers avec la rue du centre-ville sont aussi importants que les investissements et l'urbanisme pour la compréhension de la fonction urbaine.

Introduction

This article examines the everyday experiences and uses of provincial city-centre streets in the middle decades of the twentieth century in the UK. The period 1930 to 1970 saw increasing interventions in city centres as authorities responded to rapidly increasing motor transport, postwar reconstruction, innovative urban planning, and central legislation. Nottingham and Leicester, as dynamic centres of urban production and consumption, provide our core focus for their midland typicality, which offers a contrast with extant metropolitan street studies.[1]

The central aim is to examine the mundane activities and emotional experiences that took place in the spaces between the buildings and street frontage, on the pavement and on the road, from the perspective of the individual user. While Benjamin argued that the streets are the dwelling place of the collective, this is not our concern and we do not examine street activities such as communal celebrations or demonstrations. Rather, we focus on the individual user's experiences and the personal significance of the urban street space.[2] Within these limits we seek to relate these experiences to space, time, and life course. Other categories of analysis, such as gender and class, feature less prominently here but remain significant in understanding the nature of street usage and its experience.

Everyday experience of city centres contributes to the theory of urban experience and practice. Moving about the city, and most especially the practice of *walking*, has produced varied and complex possibilities for understanding the nature of being in an urban environment. The user relationship (particularly that of the pedestrian) with the urban space has been articulated as that of reader and text: for Roland Barthes, users "read" the text of the city and produce meaning as they move through it.[3] Michel de Certeau takes this idea further by regarding city walkers as "creating" the urban through footfall: "Their intertwined paths give their shape to spaces. They weave places together. In that respect, pedestrian movements form one of those 'real systems' whose existence in fact makes up the city."[4] In both of these visions the city is an "empty" space awaiting engagement with the individual. De Certeau, however, understands this space as a system of "strategies"; "official," formalized articulations of established power that the users "resist" and negotiate

through "tactics" including informal and "unofficial" behaviours. He argues, "The act of walking is to the urban system what the speech act is to language . . . it is a process of *appropriation* of the topographical system on the part of the pedestrian."[5] This understanding of the "resistance" of urban-space users to an authoritarian environment and their appropriation of place is important to this article, as is Henri Lefebvre's concept of the city as both a "force of production and an object of consumption."[6] While these significant concepts inform this research, they are also limiting. Urban space is not just constantly formed and reformed through capitalism; it is not necessarily functionalist or transgressive. Rather, as Ian Burkitt has argued, "the lived experience of everyday life is rich, complex and multidimensional: it is an experience of diverse and differentially produced and articulated forms, each combining time and space in a unique way."[7] Thus this article demonstrates the interactive, constructive, and meaningful uses of urban space, as well as the functionalist or transgressive.

Historiographies of youth culture, leisure, town planning, and sociological studies of the city centre inform this study.[8] City-centre research, influenced by histories of civic culture, urban development, and expansion of the regulating state, has produced a necessarily "top-down," city-wide perspective.[9] At street level, research on the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century town centre has been concerned largely with material improvement, social transgression, and public and civic cultures.[10] Twentieth-century studies of the city centre have been dominated by debates about planning and reconstruction in which street users are largely absent except in the role of shoppers.[11] Studies of high street shopping tend to focus on the shops rather than the movement between them.[12] However, we respond to Houlbrook's argument about the need to relate dominant discourses with the *actual* practices of different groups of people, Birchall's call for a "participant-based standpoint" and Pooley's claim that "more attention should be focussed on the role of the spatially active citizen and the ways in which urban space is used in everyday life."[13] Amin and Thrift emphasize "the city as a place of mobility, flow and everyday practices" and argue that "an everyday urbanism has to get into the intermesh between flesh and stone, humans and non-humans, fixtures and flows, emotions and practices."[14] It is this "intermesh" that we seek to explore in the context of the city centre in the pursuit of understanding the user experience of this vital urban space.

Accessing urban experience, especially from the emotional perspective of the individual, is often viewed as challenging, but a wealth of material is available. Our sources can be divided into two main types: reminiscences and photography. Oral history collections, autobiographies, and nostalgia websites provide the subjective experience of streets. Of these data we have asked what people did on city-centre streets and what their sensory and emotional experiences of them were. Seventeen different voices feature here. Photography gives a unique insight into individual behaviour and, in the case of film, captures the "spirit and vitality" of movement on the street.[15] Francis Frith collections for Nottingham and Leicester and published photographic collections have been a rich source for still images, while the Media Archive of Central England, especially its local news item archive, has provided moving images. Of the photographic evidence we have asked how people behaved on streets and, in the case of film, how they moved on them. In all, thirty-five films were analyzed. As with any sources, testimony and film have their drawbacks. Problems with testimony have been well-rehearsed.[16] Photographs are often "staged," while film of British cities tends to record "news" events rather than the routine Tuesday in the Midlands. Nevertheless, panoramic photographs and film frequently capture the unwitting, individual activity. Furthermore, there are films of the "average" day.[17] We have also used more traditional sources such as letters to local newspapers and official guides: together these varied sources reveal multi-layered experiences of city-centre streets and their sights, sounds, smells, movement, and emotions.

This research was not conceived within the framework of the current debate of the "history of emotions," but the source material has ensured it is concerned with emotions. This could be problematic: as Joanna Bourke argues, "Historians have been more comfortable analysing 'utilities' or 'moral economies' than studying the ebb and flow of anger, hatred and fear," and sometimes they find it difficult to define the emotions they encounter in sources.[18] This potential problem is overcome here by the use of testimony and by the focus on individual experience, which contrasts with recent studies of "emotional communities."[19] This article supports John Urry's assertion that "emotions are intimately tied into place," but, while Urry's focus is on the visitor, the leisured "outsider" (Benjamin's *flâneur*, in essence) and upon the novel experience (Niagara Falls, the seaside resort), ours is on the familiar and routine everyday environment.[20] It would be a mistake to assume, however, that this combination of the individual and subjective with the mundane and familiar would produce insignificant emotions. The evidence presented below reveals that everyday urban emotions of pleasure, wonder, fear, anxiety, grief, and nostalgia were intensely felt and long remembered. Here we find emotions that were highly personal, place- and time-specific, and yet provide the historian with new ways of accessing the history of changing city environments. In this respect, this work relates back to Theodore Zeldin's plea for a "personal history" of emotion, which "regards the individual as the atom of history"; our street users formed the atomic structure of their cities.[21]

Between 1930 and 1970 intense material transformation in provincial city centres was often associated with controversial planning decisions that changed distinctive characteristics of the city. More commonly associated with the 1960s, this was actually part of a long history of sanctioned city-centre "redevelopment" stretching back to eighteenth-century improvement acts. However, the process was accelerated by a decade in which British car ownership doubled from one million in 1930 to two million in 1939; two million 1949 to 10 million in 1970.[22] New thoroughfares, ring roads, and large-scale clearance and

redevelopment disrupted earlier tram, bus, and pedestrian routes. Working-class populations residing in cleared areas were displaced to fringe estates, which fundamentally altered their relationship with the city centre. After the Second World War, the city centre was increasingly viewed by central and local authorities as a malleable and abstract space in which "modern" society could be consciously constructed.[23] While more council estates were built near the city centre from the 1950s, increasing car ownership also took residents further out and threatened the traditional roles and multiple functions of the city centre.[24] Crucially, as car ownership increased, relationships with city streets and spaces changed, as driving through the city induced quite a different experience for walkers, cyclists, and all age groups.[25]

In terms of scale and development, Leicester and Nottingham could be considered almost unexceptional in mid-century.[26] However, both cities found themselves on the more affluent side of the British north-south divide throughout the period. They were regional rivals, second-tier, medium-sized cities. Between 1931 and 1971 the population of Nottingham rose by 12 per cent from 268,800 and Leicester's by 10 per cent from 257,000. They retained their late-nineteenth-century manufacturing industries while developing lighter industries such as electrical engineering, pharmaceuticals, and consumer goods, including cigarettes and bicycles. As with other midland towns, even before the Second World War, reconstruction was taking place. As early as 1929, Nottingham completed the redevelopment of its shambles and town hall, redefining the role of the traditional market square, while slum clearance in the 1930s city centre made way for commercial development.[27] While civic pride was behind the early grandiose public projects in Nottingham city centre, in Leicester the volume of north-south through traffic was the prime driver behind the widening and aggrandisement of central Charles Street by 1934.[28] Transport priorities were also shown in the construction of Leicester's central bus station, on land freed by slum clearance, which was under construction when war broke out in 1939.

Neither Nottingham nor Leicester was bombed severely during the Second World War, but both experienced the nationwide shortage in city-centre investment as a result of wartime conditions.[29] Each city centre was extensively reconstructed under Ministry of Planning requirements during the following three decades. The constant change brought about by reconstruction and postwar planning left both Nottingham and Leicester city centres with the appearance of a "blitzed city" as late as 1970.[30]

Within this context, we have divided the evidence into three major themes. The first considers the uses of city-centre streets, primarily the non-retail experience. The second theme is concerned with city-centre behaviour and its management by urban authorities. Finally, this article addresses the sensory and emotional user experiences of the city-centre streets. The evidence we present below is chosen to illustrate common everyday experiences and the meanings people assigned to their urban space.

Usages of the City Centre in the Mid-Twentieth Century

One of the key characteristics of the provincial city centre for the individual over the last three centuries has been its importance as a retail destination.[31] Nottingham, as the self-styled "Queen of the Midlands," acted as the shopping destination for a wide East Midlands industrial area; conversely, Leicester's hinterland extended only as far as Leicestershire and Rutland.[32] Visiting the city centre, however, offered far more than the acquisition of goods and services. Central streets were also places where routine transit, social interaction, and play took place. These, like shopping, helped build urban knowledge and relationships with the city centre, which were temporal and spatial.

Rhythms, structured around work and leisure patterns, were part of the weekly ritual for urban and rural populations for much of the twentieth century.[33] In the course of regular shopping, users from both the city and the surrounding area orientated themselves in the city-centre streets. Many people first experienced city-centre spaces as part of Saturday shopping trips with their mothers. As one Leicester woman commented, "Lewis's . . . was the first shop where we got off the bus in Humberstone Gate. Our shopping route started there, through to Marks & Spencer and then on to Gallowtree Gate and other shops."[34] These outings were frequently highly specialised and ritualized: "Every Saturday we went into town, and my mum would buy certain things from certain shops . . . she would buy certain things from certain shops on a Saturday. My mother was very much a town shopper and used to like to go into town, and really I used to go into town every Saturday with her right until I was married, and even after I was married, until I had my baby, in actual fact."[35]

These patterns of behaviour could be persistent and normally were disrupted only by major life changes, as the evidence above shows. The routines of shopping enabled people to build a relationship with the central streets that was part of their life and identity.

For both adults and children, the city centre was also a place of pleasure, leisure, and play, which often followed distinctive rhythms.[36] One Nottingham resident, born in 1913, recalled his early years at work in the 1930s when he had a well-paid job in a city-centre dispensary. On Tuesdays he would go straight from work to the Empire music hall for the 8.50 p.m. performance. He came out between 10.30 and 10.45 p.m. and went down Trinity Square to the Milton, where he dined for 1s 6d. Having located his car on a nearby street, he drove home.[37] This evidence shows the existence of a sophisticated leisure scene that retained young people in the city centre after work. It was a night-time, weekly routine experienced by a single man in a relatively well-paid job who had the luxury of a car. Furthermore, it demonstrated how parking was easy and unregulated in inter-war Nottingham and Leicester city centres.

This enjoyment was dependent upon access to the commercial pleasures and novelties of the city centre, but not all

experiences of play were as expensive or commodified. Keith Mason, who grew up in Leicester during the Second World War, described his usual Saturday afternoon visit to the town centre, which was not far from his home:

> Towards the end of the war . . . [a] typical Saturday morning would start with calling on my friend John and seeing if he wanted to come "uptown." If he did, fine. If not, I'd go alone, first catching the tram from the Groby Road terminus and travelling to the stop in the High Street near the Co-op department store.
>
> We always looked in "Sports" window first to see if they had any interesting toys . . . On then through the Silver Arcade into the market and past the fish market, where we would look at the live rabbits and day-old chicks on some of the stalls. Next stop was the Midland Educational . . . we went straight to look at any toys they might have, especially Meccano or Dinky toys. Back along Belvoir Street and in to Charles Street, which always impressed with its fine buildings. The Electricity offices were here, which had a fascinating window which curved in so it was invisible. Wonderful how we went every week just to look at it! Further on was a narrow lane which went to the back entrance of Lewis's . . . eventually we tired of it [Lewis's] and crossed into Marks and Spencer's [*sic*] through another back entrance.
>
> Marks and Spencer's never appealed very much to kids, so we passed straight through and turned left to Woolworth's . . . Aimlessly following a regular route, doing little but enjoying every minute. We never stole anything from the shops, rarely bought anything (there was little to buy), left when the assistants asked us to leave. It was all so innocent, and yet we got as much pleasure from our Saturdays "uptown" as any modern child gets from visiting Disney World.[38]

This recollection illustrates how, although the boys spent some time in the city centre, they rarely purchased anything. They were not there for functional or transactional reasons. Rather, they were using the city centre as a source of amusement and spectacle; for them it was a place for "play." Keith's usage of the 1940s city-centre space was a consequence of his age, gender, and possibly class, and the comments demonstrate how important these elements were in spatial relationships. This was also an experience that was located in time; it happened weekly basis on a Saturday afternoon towards the end of the war. Like the shopping example above, it was routine and ritualized. Finally, spatial aspects were important components of usage and experience here. This was not just in the boys' interaction with city space but also because their use of the back ways and main streets displayed their intimate knowledge of both "public" and "hidden" geographies of the urban space.

The relationship that provincial city children had with the central streets changed for many in the middle decades of the twentieth century as housing near the core was demolished from the 1920s.[39] Although new postwar council estates were built close to the centre, including St. Matthews in Leicester (1950s), and older inner suburbs like Nottingham's Sneinton remained, new road development began to act as a barrier between the homes and the centre. One Coventry experience became increasingly common in midland cities as ring roads were developed and completed, creating mental and physical barriers: "It's murder that great big ring road. I didn't know where to cross or anywhere, so of course I've never been that way."[40] The easy flow of pedestrian mobility offered by traditional thoroughfares became more challenging and had the greatest impact on those who could not afford cars. Domestic location was therefore an important variable in forming people's spatial relationships with the city centre, and this evolved continually throughout the century in response to urban expansion, planning legislation, and levels of car ownership.

City centres were important transport hubs. In both Nottingham and Leicester, in common with many cities, the concentration of services into larger urban centres throughout the period reinforced the importance of the city centre as place of transit. For many people, the city centre was not their final destination; for them, the city centre was a space to be crossed. Bus stations and tram terminals, particular streets and specific spaces and places in the city centre were identified as important transit hubs, such as the High Street and Charles Street in Leicester and Old Market Square in Nottingham. In the 1930s and 1940s there was "an absolute maze of tramlines" around the Clock Tower, while in the 1950s buses used to "criss-cross and circumnavigate Leicester's Clock Tower."[41] A 1951 documentary film about Nottingham's Old Market Square described "a ceaseless flow of traffic and people through and around the square." Between the hours of five and six p.m., 25,000 passengers were recorded as transiting this space.[42] A 1966 ATV news item about Leicester's pioneer bus traffic control system, which used CCTV and "walkie-talkies," estimated that 80,000 people used the city buses during a two-and-a-quarter-hour "rush hour."[43] This evidence indicates the distinctive daily and weekly rhythms of the twentieth-century city, with both traffic and people moving through the space in regular, predictable, and intense flows linked to work patterns. Such flows were increasingly monitored and directed by the urban authorities after 1950, using the latest technologies. At the same time, the rhythms meant the city-centre space exhibited different characteristics at different times of the day and night, and the user experience formed an integral part of them.[44]

Traversing the city centre was more than merely functional for the user. Transits created personal significance in street spaces; frontages, landmarks, and memorials became integral aspects of the transitory experience: "The Clock Towers are still there, in both Leicester and Coalville, and in good shape. The former was built to celebrate the upstanding and good of medieval and Tudor Leicester; the latter to commemorate the fallen and brave of Coalville in the twentieth century. My, those clocks weren't half useful for catching buses! If we had time to spare between buses, which wasn't often, we'd not miss the opportunity to go and see Uncle Jack's name engraved along with the rest of the dead of World War II."[45] The user experience while waiting for buses, despite being essentially functionalist, was also interactive. People assigned personal emotion and meaning to the material environment encountered while they crossed the city.

Transport hubs also created pedestrian traffic between hubs and terminals. As Rob Haywood commented: "Blimey, we did

walk some miles between buses in those days; everything was so far apart it, was well for us that the city centre was so flat. Transport and its links in Leicester always was a nightmare."[46]

A miner who worked at Desford Colliery, west of Leicester, in the 1940s described catching a bus from Desford village to Western Boulevard on the fringe of Leicester's central area. After pausing at the West End pub, he caught another bus, which took him down the High Street to the Clock Tower, where he and his father alighted. They then walked the rest of the way home, which was just east of the central area. Going to work, he and his father followed a different route, which took them through the marketplace on foot rather than past the Clock Tower by bus.[47] Complex strategies that were developed to compensate for transport inadequacies offered city-centre users opportunities for snatched moments of leisure and pleasure: the Leicester miners stopped for a well-earned pint, and the long queues in Nottingham's Old Market Square were a chance to read the evening news.[48] This indicates how experiences of the everyday commute, with its momentary pleasures, formed part of the "intermesh" of city-centre experience.

The above examples show transitional use of the city-centre space, and the resulting experience was influenced by the form of transport used. Table 1 shows the volume of motorized traffic and bikes on Leicester's main central streets in the late 1930s. While Belgrave Gate and Charles Street had been redesigned to funnel national north-south motorized traffic, local cyclists used the High Street and Granby Street, which were narrower but offered direct access across the centre. In this period, cycling was an everyday experience of the city centre for many people.

Car shortages after the Second World War ensured the necessity of cycling: "On the streets of Leicester that year [1946] there may not have been as many private cars about as now, but there were many more public vehicles on the roads, and many hundreds of cyclists. Dotted in amongst all this traffic flow were horse-drawn transports, and of course the wonderful trams."[49]

Until the late 1950s, bicycle traffic continued to be as common as motor traffic on streets like the High Street, and the experience of crossing the city by bicycle was an everyday one. A 1958 ATV *Midlands News* item about new traffic lights on Leicester's Charles Street featured five cyclists and two motor vehicles on one side of the road and four motor vehicles on the other, showing the relative cycle-to-motor traffic.[50] The importance of the bicycle to the working-class commuter was immortalized in the opening scenes of the Nottingham-set film *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* (1960).[51]

Crossing the city required particular knowledge of route and environment. The cyclist, for example, had to learn to negotiate the intersecting tramlines around Leicester's Clock Tower at the end of the High Street: "When you went round the Clock Tower on a push bike, you'd got to be very careful. The idea was you'd cut the tramlines at right angles. If you didn't, your wheels would drop into the slots and of course you'd come off, you see. And it was a proper art. There was a way of doing it. We used to get the knack of doing it."[52] Here we see the "intermesh between flesh and stone, humans and non-humans, fixtures and flows" and the complexity of everyday practice.[53] This detailed, intimate understanding of the physical space and materiality of the city centre, and how to negotiate it, echoes Keith Mason's knowledge of the alleys and shop back doors. In many ways this account can be seen as illustrative of de Certeau's "tactics" but also suggests a more meaningful engagement with the city. The cyclist had not only developed a method to negotiate the material space of the city but had real pride in his urban skills. This hard-won knowledge also produced a form of collective identity: "*We* used to get the knack."[54]

Table 1: Vehicles and bicycles passing per day: pre-war Leicester (1930s)

	Vehicles	Bicycles
Granby Street (leading to main road to south)	8,532	5,350
High Street (leading to main road west)	9,026	8,496
Belgrave Gate (adjoining Charles Street and road out to north)	12,053	7,314
Charles Street (redesigned in 1930s for through traffic	13,467	5,153

Source: *Leicester of the Future* (Leicester: Leicester Corporation, 1947), 58

Throughout the period, the city centre provided points of social interaction that were differentiated by period, user group, and season. Local landmarks, buildings, and geographical locations, such as steps or street corners, were widely known and often synonymous with the image of the city. In Nottingham the iconic lions outside the Council House (town hall) have continued to function as a meeting point, demonstrating their cross-generational significance to "Notties."[55] Vast material changes in provincial cities also necessitated the creation of new meeting points as older ones were demolished. In Leicester, W. A. Lea's clock on a corner of Humberstone Gate, a popular meeting place, was demolished to build the Haymarket Shopping Centre (1971–3).[56] The building of this shopping centre, however, enabled Leicester's iconic Clock Tower to come into its own as a meeting spot, as its isolation as a traffic roundabout ended.[57] In terms of user-type, young people were mostly likely to meet on the street, either as a prearranged date or as part of a youth promenade. Lacking resources (and legal requirements), interior meeting points were unusual. Mary Essinger worked in the central area of Leicester during the late 1940s and early 1950s. She remembers one particular spot of social importance: "Sunday night under Kemps [*sic*] clock . . . at seven was a typical meeting place. Of course the girl was never there first; we hid round the corner till we saw the boy, waited a few minutes, then ran up and apologized for being late."[58] She goes on to explain seasonality of the meeting spots. During summer months young people met at St. Margaret's Bus Station to take advantage of the light evenings and head out of town to Bradgate Park. As Amin and Thrift point out, "City rhythms can highlight neglected temporalities."[59] The arrival of the covered shopping centre provided a space for youth to meet undercover, though this use of space has continued to be contested by shopping centre staff.

Informal usage of the city centre remains under-researched, and there is no obvious evidence basis for examining it. This section has shown that it is possible to access individual experiences and to piece them together to gain greater understanding of city centre activity. Users built up intense local knowledge through repetition, quite literally through everyday practice, and by linking experiences to known city-centre landmarks and places.[60] This process often occurred through frequent and/or ritualized transits of the city centre or as part of social interaction. Routine usage of the city generated specific experiences that were spatial as well as temporal but were also influenced by age and life course: daily commutes, Saturday shopping, and youthful evening leisure in which Saturday and Sunday night each had distinctive patterns. All produced not only different user experiences but a city differentiated by use and time.

Directing City-Centre Behaviour

People's relationship in the mid-twentieth century with British city-centre street space and the other users was often the target of interventions by authorities, and public and voluntary bodies. Civic authorities and groups such as retailers and conservationists had long sought to direct and affirm behaviour and experiences in the city. In the interwar period, vehicular traffic began to be controlled and separated from pedestrians, who were also increasingly subject to instruction and control. After the war, the central area became a prime target for directed behaviour, from the material controls exercised by town planning to the peacetime return to civility, the city centre was at the forefront of societal "improvement."[61] From crossing the road and disposing of tickets to consuming alcohol and sitting down, codes of correct behaviour were made explicit and material in the high street space.

Research by Joe Moran suggests that formal and organized procedures for crossing the street space were, in fact, learned and directed behaviours, and users of the city-centre space took time and many resources before they were willing to cede "ownership" of the street to the motor vehicle.[62] This change is clearly exemplified by a Mitchell and Kenyon film of Plymouth from 1912, which shows pedestrians walking and meeting mainly on the road, despite the pavements on each side. No one appears to be taking much notice of any of the vehicles, either motor or horse drawn.[63] Similar chaos is shown in photographs of the period: carts are depicted moving on the right-hand side of the street, others are parked in the middle of the road or at right angles to the pavement, and pedestrians are all over the road.[64] Mona Lewis of Leicester (b. 1902) remembered, "You could step off the pavement. You needn't even look right and left. This business of looking right and left came in later years . . . The pavements were pretty clear."[65] As late as the 1930s, the same cavalier attitude to street use persisted: "You could park a car anywhere then. You see, there was no restriction on parking. You could leave it in Parliament Street if you wanted to all night, you could leave it in Trinity Square or anywhere, just leave it. In fact, when I look back and I think they used to park on both sides of Clumber Street, cars used to be parked on both sides of Clumber Street."[66]

However, motorized vehicles were the cause of much congestion in the central streets, and authorities invested increasing efforts to direct vehicles and pedestrian movement. Nationally, Belisha beacons and studs were introduced in the mid-1930s to denote pedestrian crossings. As Ishaque and Nolan have argued, these were not successful, and the more conspicuous markings of the zebra crossing were instigated in 1951. The Belisha beacons were retained but had become flashing lights by 1953. By 1968 several decades of experiments with crossing signals resulted in the "pelican" crossing.[67] Film and photographs of Nottingham's Long Row reflected this increased management of traffic and pedestrians. Between the 1890s and 1930s, pedestrian refuge islands were added in line with a national policy to separate traffic,[68] and these developments intensified postwar when a zebra crossing was added to Long Row in 1950s.[69] Illuminated signs, posts, and beacons enabled twenty-four-hour instruction and were signs of urban modernity following the blackout. For example, the film *Nottingham by Night* opens with a streetscape of illuminated bollards and flashing Belisha beacons, the latter only just introduced.[70] Leicester's first traffic lights arrived on Charles Street in 1958 and televised on *Midland News*, as did the new traffic wardens in 1965.[71] These relatively small material interventions were typical of the increasing micro-direction being exercised in city street spaces: by 1960, casual or disordered use of the high street roadway had largely disappeared in Britain's city centres. By the end of the period, streets were "littered" with signs directing traffic and pedestrians.[72] At a political or macro level, urban improvement and town plans were used to control the material space.[73]

Innovations, such as pedestrian refuge islands and an increasing number of signs, were used to direct new norms of ordered behaviour among drivers, cyclists, and pedestrians. Furthermore, existing structures were used in the pursuit of these new practices. Leicester's Clock Tower, although intended as an ornamental monument to civic achievement, acted as a roundabout as well as a tram terminus in the interwar period. With the removal of trams in 1949, the Clock Tower became a roundabout for vehicles and cyclists and was hung with arrows and "keep left signs."[74] During the Second World War the authorities had an increased need to direct behaviours. As in many places, Leicester deployed another kind of signage during the blackout when kerbs and lampposts and anything else near the road edge were painted with white stripes.[75] The existent urban material was assigned a new significance in user management.

Authorities, therefore, could affect the material environment and intervene in behaviour to the point of creating offences. However, our evidence suggests that there was a distinct gap between intention and result. Individuals tended to use "their" city centre autonomously, and their behaviour was frequently oblivious or personally significant rather than directed or enforced. Photographic evidence from both cities in this period shows an increased presence of authority figures such as police officers and traffic wardens, but at the same time and in the same photographs we can observe users flouting the rules of direction in the

central streets.[76] A *Picture Post* photograph from 1948 depicts a Leicester policeman on a box in front of a zebra crossing. A cyclist obediently waits while several women cross the road. One man, however, uses the road space to bypass a large crowd on the pavement by walking in the road outside the safety railings set on the edge of the kerb.[77] Other images show pedestrians crossing the road only metres from a zebra crossing.[78]

De Certeau's understandings of space usage, specifically the directed uses of space and the tactics, *are* relevant here, but the evidence also shows us how people behaved beyond simply being reactive and tactical. Behaviour in the city centre was not merely a response or a resistance to authority strategies. People interacted with the environment: they often ignored the signs around them and continued to cross the road when and where it suited them. They were active in constructing their own spatial knowledge of the city centre.[79] The gap between intention and result is crucial and demonstrates that it is important not only to examine plans and proposals for city redevelopment and their implementation, as many urban studies do, but also to examine how users interacted with these changes so that their "actual" impact can be understood.

Sensory and Emotional Experiences of the City Centre

The way that people moved around the city streets was only one level at which they experienced this space; while in the streets, they heard, saw, smelt, touched, and felt a host of sensations, some of which were not present in other environments. Cities had long been locations of visual stimulation, and in the mid-twentieth century new technologies in the print, illumination, and chemical industries made city centres vivid with advertising, lights, and colour.[80] The visual experience was an exciting and stimulating part of urban life, which we have discussed elsewhere.[81] This final section focuses on the sensory experiences of touch and smell, and the emotional responses of fear, anxiety, loss, and nostalgia.

Sarah Pink has argued that people create and engage with their domestic space through touch and smell.[82] Street users did not control the smells and sounds they experienced in public spaces, but these were fundamental to the identity and significance of particular locations. Nevertheless, the olfactory and emotional experiences of public spaces are under-researched, with a few notable exceptions.[83] Emily Cockayne has examined the negative side to these olfactory experiences, but we take a more positive view, seeing them as important to the identity and significance that particular places had for individuals.[84] Prominent in these olfactory memories that were associated with place are coffee shops and fish stalls. As one Leicester man emphasized, "One of my most enduring memories is the smell of Freshly Roasted [sic] coffee emanating from a shop in Cheapside in the Market Place [just at the back of Gallowtree gate]."[85] A Leicester woman recalled, "I used to stand outside the fish market while my mam went in to get fish etc. I couldn't stand the smell or the animals hang up on hooks dripping blood everywhere. YUK!!!"[86] One memory of interwar Nottingham described a wide variety of sensual experiences:

> I remember on market days in the Market Square when the old Exchange Building was there, and all the stalls. It was a very busy scene—hustle and bustle, and stall-holders shouting their wares and that sort of thing. And at night it was a very special occasion, because they were all lit by naphtha flares, and these used to burn quite brightly with a hissing sound, and it did give them quite a theatrical sort of appearance . . . Horse-drawn vehicles were still quite prominent and that used to give it quite an atmosphere, because you'd get horses at the side of the kerb waiting . . . and they'd all have their nosebags on eating the corn, and the chaff blowing everywhere.[87]

He goes on to describe the Corporation watering cart, which sprayed water on the roads to keep the dust and chaff down, and explains how "one of the things some boys used to do was to try and get behind it with no shoes and socks on, and get their feet wet."[88] Sensory experience in this testimony included the sounds of the markets and the lamps, the touch of spray and the damp road on one's feet, and the feel of the chaff from the horses.

Emotional responses often related to fear and anxiety. Walking around the town centre after the evening rush hour and at night was often frightening because of the lack of activity, or conversely rowdy groups. The potential for this anxiety increased over the period, as planning reduced the number of residents in British city centres. For example, in 1965, the *Nottingham Evening Post and News* carried complaints of rowdy behaviour and "Saturday night hooliganism" in the city centre.[89] Two girls, fed up with behaviour in Nottingham City, wrote noting the increase over the previous two years. "We often have cause to cross the city after 10 pm and we are constantly annoyed by suggestive behaviour, foul language and insults." One reported being "seized" by two "drunken louts." They had witnessed "several violent incidents" when bus conductors have been attacked by youths and asked, "How can a decent young woman enjoy an evening in the city if the present state of affairs continues?"[90] By the end of that same month, local buses were fitted with an emergency alarm for the use of late-night drivers, but the general ambiance of the late-night centre remained a cause for concern, with one correspondent identifying a moral decline in Nottingham as the problem.[91] The evidence suggests, therefore, that both the social interactions and the social problems of the late-night city centre were connected to its role as a transit hub as well as a place of leisure.

From the age-old anxiety created by the urban stranger we move to anxieties created by urban "strangeness": alienation and loss was felt by many in the remodelled town centres of the postwar period. In central city streets, centuries of piecemeal, market-led development gave way to centralized planning where "city centre redevelopment based on bold plans, with local authorities acting as ground landlords, was the demand of the day."[92] The scale and thoroughness of urban redevelopment in the city centre of this period may be encapsulated in Mark Girouard's experience: "In the 1950s and 1960s the consequent blowing up of cities by redevelopment caused at least as much destruction as the blowing up of cities by bombing in the preceding wars. I can remember visiting Belfast in the early

1970s and being appalled at the damage which the troubles there had apparently caused. Further investigation showed that bombed or burnt-out buildings were comparatively few and far between and most of the acres of devastation were due to the city's planning department."[93] In 1972, Leicester's city planning officer, W. K. Smigielski wrote, "A walk in the central area of the Leicester of today would give an impression that the city has undergone a recent bombardment by enemy action. Much demolition taking place on sites in the city centre, vacant shops, new construction work all give the appearance of a 'blitzed' city. These rapid changes are not signs of a decline but of vitality. The 'market town' is being transformed into a 'city.'"[94]

Local authorities and planners were often optimistic and excited by the possibilities for remoulding the city-centre environment, as shown in a 1964 ATV television news report about the proposed redevelopment of Nottingham. Arthur Swift, the architect and planner, said that the intended demolition of Nottingham's Victorian Railway Station and the adjacent Victoria Hotel was "leaving us with a hole in the ground of some fifteen acres, sixty foot deep at one end, thirty foot deep at the other . . . this has been a godsend, both from an economics point of view and so that we can give Nottingham a city centre, less than twenty acres, absolutely traffic free . . . This *must* be a new city centre because this is a complete entity."[95]

This wholesale restructuring and demolition could leave city-centre users feeling like strangers in their own towns as they lost their intimate "local knowledge" of the streetscape. The disappearance of entire streets upset personal city transits and commuter routines. As one Nottingham resident explained, "The city fathers did later say they had made a mistake in pulling down Drury Lane. This much-missed and lamented thoroughfare used to be part of my regular journey for me, as I worked at Chambers Bros in St Mary's Gate in the Lace market and my Clifton bus stopped at the terminus just below it."[96]

Oral testimony also records feelings of loss in relation to changes in the streetscape. Even when traditional streets remained, the removal of specific buildings generated an emotional response, as this memory of the Black Boy Hotel in Nottingham shows: "It was *the* meeting place. People who didn't know Nottingham that well but had visited would say they'd been to the Black Boy Hotel. Certainly the Forces in the war, they all met in the Black Boy. So it was the heart of social activity in the town . . . I felt very sad when it came down."[97] Even signs could produce forms of emotional attachment to the environment: "But for me, the saddest loss or disappearance of all was the huge, neon-illuminated 'B-O-V-R-I-L' sign that flashed on and off in a big curve of electric light over Timothy Whites."[98] Passing through a city space could generate a relationship with the material environment—a form of "knowing" described by Barthes and Benjamin in their considerations of cities.[99]

Material change in city centres often created a sense of communal loss. However, it was also a location in which to experience a more private and intimate grief. It was not unusual to see rolls of honour in public places, and Leicester had a Boer War Memorial in the Town Hall Square from 1909, and the temporary memorial for the First World War was also located there. First World War "rolls of honour" were also displayed by companies in public places. The central enquiry offices for Leicester City Transport Department had one that fronted onto Humberstone Gate where it could be seen by passers-by.[100] It was demolished to build the Haymarket Shopping Centre; modernism often removed community commemoration of the Great War.

Oral testimony shows that the emotions like anxiety, fear, loss, grief, and nostalgia had powerful connections to city-centre streets and were remembered intensely and articulated often long after the streets had vanished. Pooley has commented that "all too often the relationship between people and the city is portrayed as relatively passive.'[101] However, the examples of sensory and emotional experiences of city-centre streets show that people experienced them on a number of levels, often inhabiting real and remembered spaces simultaneously. As Cowan and Steward argue, sensory experiences are an important aspect of urban life, as are emotional experiences.[102] These experiences added to the richness of the relationship people had with city-centre spaces and give an extra dimension to our historical understanding.

Conclusion

The user relationship with the urban space was powerful, enduring, and real. Roland Barthes argued the city is "read" by an individual while walking through the space. De Certeau has used the terminology of "tactics" and "strategies" to explain engagement with urban space, implying a reactive and reductive experience. Our evidence shows that people's relationships with the city-centre streets were emotionally and imaginatively constructed while being simultaneously physical and sensory. Activity and use were personal and meaningful as well as functional.

The "intermesh" of urban knowledge and identity was created through mobility, repetition, routine, sensory responses, and emotional significance. While people's movements and experiences alone did not "make" the city, the evidence shows that people interacted with street space dynamically, and individuals frequently appropriated spaces, buildings, and landmarks for their own needs and desires. Strategic attempts by city authorities to manage behaviour demonstrated how users employed not only de Certeau's concept of "tactics" but also customary, unconscious behaviours. The experience of the city was moulded by crucial factors in individual users' lives. Time was key, as city-centre usage followed rhythmic timetables of work and leisure and daily, weekly, and annual urban rhythms. Social demographic factors, in particular age, class, and occupation, shaped the user experience as well at the spatial relationships between work and home.

This evidence is particularly compelling when we consider the historical context; these were decades when city-centre streets were often seen by authorities as simply malleable urban space

and liable to large-scale change, as the case-study towns of Nottingham and Leicester showed. The nature of material change in British city centres between 1930 and 1970 was not comparable to the evolution of town centres in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Four major factors meant that urban change was qualitatively different: the increase in the speed and levels of motorized traffic, powerful centralized planning authorities, large-scale redevelopment, and increasing intervention in people's behaviour. The evidence discussed here shows that while the scale and speed of city-centre change could alienate users, some more "strategic" interventions could be negotiated or ignored.

This research shows the value of marginal and embedded evidence, testimony, and film in understanding everyday user practice in the city. This type of evidence is not always as clear or as carefully archived as the official sources, which have frequently formed the basis of urban history, but digital technologies have increased both the availability and accessibility of this rich material. New types of evidence provide methodological challenges that require a flexible approach; it must be acknowledged that while this article is grounded in the "traditional" social and economic antecedents of urban history, the analysis of the evidence owes much to social theory and particularly to the open dialectical approach of Walter Benjamin. From neglected evidence we can uncover neglected experience. Time spent in city centres produced detailed, individual, and multi-sensory forms of knowing and belonging, which remain undervalued aspects of urban life. To understand the user experience of the city, we must learn to look and listen to the everyday and the mundane, as much as to the documented "historical" events and developments.

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