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# Talking the Walk: An Autoethnography of Pedestrianism in Chicagoland

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TALKING THE WALK: AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHY OF PEDESTRIANISM

IN CHICAGOLAND

ANDREW T. KUKA

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For over one million years walking was the primary way that people got around on an everyday basis. But, over the past one hundred years our long history with walking has been erased from both our collective memory and the physical landscape itself. Currently, automobility stands as the primary form of transportation in the United States and many other countries around the world. In many places in the U.S. it is difficult if not impossible to access food, work, or essential services without the use of a car. This begs the question: When we lose the ability to walk places, what else do we lose? In other words, what sensory, social, and emotional experiences are associated with pedestrianism, and what have become of these experiences today? This autoethnographic account of pedestrianism in Chicagoland aims to remind us of what sensory, social, and emotional experiences walking can provide us, as well as what kind of experiences walking tends to provide us within a built environment centered around the automobile.

#### WHY PEDESTRIANISM?

Prior to the 20<sup>th</sup> century, walking was the primary mode of transportation for essentially every person in the world. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> to early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Frederick Law Olmstead and other skilled architects designed beautiful public parks, cities were outfitted with electric lights and sidewalks, and the automobile had not yet been introduced in large numbers. This period is considered to be the golden age of pedestrianism; but while it was great, it was short-lived. Since that time, industrialism turned cities into smog filled concrete jungles; exploitative factory wages and surges in the demand for housing created impoverished slums; and neighborhoods were segregated as a result of highway construction as well as discriminatory realty and banking

practices. These changes contributed to the exodus of those residents who could afford to resettle in the surrounding suburbs (Hiss 1991; Kunstler 1998; Segrave 2006; Seiler 2008; Solnit 2000).

Parallel to city degradation was the rise of the automobile as the primary mode of transportation. Cars offered many whites a way to escape the city and live in the sprawling and sanitized suburban countryside. Cars offered women and people of color the ability to travel anonymously and insulate themselves from urban maladies and violence. But, despite its cocoon-like qualities, the automotive “solution” introduced new danger and pollution to urban environments and created new problems in the suburbs in the form of environmental degradation and social alienation (Kunstler 1998; Segrave 2006; Seiler 2008).

The shift away from walking and toward driving was especially strong in the later 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. According to data collected by the Oak Ridge National Laboratory, there were 286 vehicles for every 1,000 U.S. residents in 1950. That number has steadily grown to be 798 vehicles per 1,000 residents in 2013. Vehicle miles per capita have also increased from 3,017 miles in 1950, to 9,442 miles in 2013 (Oak Ridge National Laboratory). In 2013 only 7.8% of Americans walked or used public transportation as the primary means of getting to work, versus 85.8% who drove or carpooled (McKenzie 2015) . It is apparent then that over a mere century the primary way that people get around has undergone an extreme transformation with serious implications on the quality of our lives.

Driving and living in a car centered built environment is costly to individuals and society as a whole. Traffic is one of the most egregious contributors to noise pollution, which has been shown to increase levels of annoyance, stress, high blood pressure, and hypertension in people who live near busy roadways (Das, Parida and Katiyar 2015; Nivens 2012; Wang et al. 2015;

Foraster et al. 2014). Drivers themselves are prone to aggressive behavior, and increases in blood pressure and subsequent heart attacks, ulcers, and strokes when exposed to peak traffic or long commutes (Stokols et al. 1978; Naughton 2006; Gatersleben, Murtagh and White 2012).

Transportation tends to be the second largest household cost outside of housing itself. This is especially true for drivers, who spend an average of \$9,738 more than their public transit counterparts each year (American Public Transit Association 2017). Overall, a car centered transportation system produces massive environmental, infrastructure, medical, human, and social costs.

Drivers rationalize these costs with the belief that driving is convenient, speedy and practical, but there is reason to believe that the redeeming qualities of automobility are diminishing with each passing year. In *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, Jane Jacobs (1961) explains why the promise of high speed transportation through automobile use is self-defeating and paradoxical. The conception of the car as a means to freedom as well as expedient and convenient transportation, accompanied by mass availability of automobiles, leads to a great overpopulation of cars on the road and competition between drivers for the limited resource of space. To illustrate this point Jacobs gives the example of 1950's Los Angeles: When public transportation workers went on strike, the amount of cars entering the city on any given day exceeded the amount of parking spaces. This led to intense competition between drivers for parking spots, and sometimes physical altercations (1961:354). If the spatial demands and redundancy of cars is an issue today, it will certainly be an issue in the future as the world's population grows and becomes more and more urbanized (Dear and Lucero 2010). Since 1984 the share of Americans living in urban areas has grown from 74 to 82 percent, and similar trends

exist abroad (The World Bank 2016). While scientists contemplate technological transportation fixes, the successes of more walkable cities has already suggested that a return to pedestrianism can be part of the solution (Kunstler 1998). If we are headed toward a return to pedestrianism, it may be in our best interest to become as informed as we can about that lost art; and an inquiry into the pedestrian experience is an appropriate place to start.

#### WHY AUTOETHNOGRAPHY?

This study is concerned with three interrelated components of pedestrian experience: sensory experience (seeing, smelling, hearing, touching, between one person and their environment), social experience (interpersonal interactions), and emotional experience (the felt meanings of those senses and interactions). Every part of the pedestrian experience is mediated through our senses, whether we are hearing and feeling droplets of rain or seeing and negotiating around countless other people on a crowded sidewalk. Further, both our interactions with the environment and with other people have meaning, and impact us emotionally. Hearing birds chirping, smelling bread baking, and seeing works of public art can elicit feelings of enjoyment and stimulate us emotionally. Similarly, our interactions with other people in public space can make us feel, among other things, bonded, alienated, secure, fearful, free, or constrained. The most direct way to comprehend these three components of the pedestrian experience is through the pedestrian perspective; through an autoethnography of walking in public space.

“Autoethnography is an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze personal experience in order to understand cultural experience” (Ellis, Adams, and Bochner 2011:273). This is accomplished through writing “concrete stories about our lives because we think that the stories of a *particular* life can provide a useful way of



knowing about general human experience” (Ellis and Adams 2014:255). By connecting stories to relevant literature, and by analyzing our interactions sociologically, we aim to reveal the “patterned processes in our interactions and [the] constraints of social structures” (Ellis and Adams 2014:255). Additionally, the product of autoethnographic research is a text that is not a detached description of the research and findings, but an evocative retelling of the researcher’s experience that aims to empathetically pull the reader into the scene.

## GOALS

1. Illuminate the sensuous, social, and emotional experiences of pedestrians through participant observations.
2. Synthesize a broad range of literature for a more holistic perspective on pedestrianism.
3. Be reflexive in considering how my position as a young, white, able-bodied male affects my experience walking through public space, and consider how the experience might be similar or different for people of another race, gender, age or ability.
4. Present my findings in a way that is accessible to more people than a select, academically trained few.

## RESEARCH METHODS

There are three components to this study. First, I review literature pertaining to pedestrianism. Second, I make on-street observations when walking on three purposively selected routes. Third, notes from both the literature review and observations are coded separately and analyzed together. The analysis is then organized and presented as a composite retelling of the on-street observation process, supported by sociological insights. While earlier steps in this process necessarily preempt later steps, the entire process is fluid. By fluid I mean

that after making on-street observations or coding data (step 2 or 3), themes emerged and it was necessary to review more literature (step 1) in order to be more informed about these themes.

Thus, at some points steps 1, 2 and 3 progressed simultaneously or out of order.

### *Data Collection*

#### *Literature*

I initially reviewed literature surrounding the topics of pedestrianism, public space, and autoethnographic methodology in order to become informed enough to begin collecting data through the participant observation portion of this study. The observation portion then prompted me to review literature on related topics. In total, topics researched for this study include: sensory experience, understanding emotion, the recent history of walking, the history and culture of driving, stranger fear, components of enjoyable public space, civic participation, sensory overload, civil inattention, collective empowerment, and panoptic power relations.

#### *Observations*

*Downtown- Aurora, IL.* Aurora, Illinois is a sprawling city of about 200,661 people (United States Census Bureau 2015). The two routes that I describe in Aurora take place in and around the Near West Galena (NWG) neighborhood, an area that walkscore.com considers to be the second most walkable neighborhood in Aurora, with a walkscore of 67/100 (somewhat walkable) ([www.walkscore.com](http://www.walkscore.com) 2017). Most buildings in this area are detached single family homes, but apartment buildings of various sizes are interspersed between them. With two eastbound and two westbound lanes, and a speed limit of 35mph, West Galena Boulevard is the main roadway bisecting this neighborhood. Lake Street is another main artery that makes up the eastern border of NWG. Other roads that make up the grid design are residential two-way streets

with on-street parking on each side. Just two blocks east of Lake Street is the Fox River and Fox River Trail. The Fox River Trail is a pedestrian path that runs north and south through Aurora alongside the river. This trail is mainly used for recreation and links Aurora with Oswego, Montgomery, Batavia, Geneva, St. Charles, Elgin, West Dundee, Algonquin, and Crystal Lake, IL. The first route that I discuss begins in the middle of NWG at 518 West Galena Boulevard. It then proceeds east to the Fox River Trail, and north to Prisco Community Center located at the intersection of Lake Street and Illinois Avenue. The second route discussed begins at Prisco Community Center, and proceeds southwest through the residential streets before returning to 518 West Galena Boulevard.



(City of Aurora, Illinois 2005:8)

*The Loop- Chicago, IL.* Chicago's Loop is a central business district for the city of over two million people and the surrounding suburbs, and named for the CTA train routes that "loop" around downtown before diverging north, west, and south. Metra and Amtrak trains, CTA trains and buses, and a few major highways bring residents, commuters, students, and tourists of diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds in and out of The Loop each day. The Loop is a dense urban space comprised exclusively of high-rise buildings that tend to shade the street unless the sun is directly overhead. Walkscore.com considers it to be a "walker's paradise" with a score of 99/100 ([www.walkscore.com](http://www.walkscore.com) 2017). The Loop route that I describe takes place during rush hour on a weekday night. The route begins in the heart of The Loop at 11 East Adams street, moves west on Jackson Boulevard, and finally ends at Union Station, located directly west of the Willis Tower at the intersection of Jackson and Canal street. While The Loop is very busy during the work day (especially during the morning and evening rush hours), it can take on a more laid back character on the weekends and after the evening rush.



The three routes used in this study were chosen purposely for practicality and diversity. First for practicality, the routes that are included in this study do not pose any abnormal obstacles or features that would misrepresent the pedestrian experience, nor do they meander through the suburbs or industrial parks on the edge of town. The routes all exist in places where walking is indeed possible and practical. Secondly, the routes were chosen for their diversity. Route diversity is important in order to expand the scope of the study beyond one specific environment and to provide an opportunity for comparison between the routes that are observed. Possible points of comparison include interactions with other pedestrians, interactions with automobiles, and interactions with nature.

Altogether, I walked the routes described in this study over one hundred times. I walked the two routes in Aurora at least once per week, and the one route in Chicago four times per

week over a ten month period.

*Taking Notes.* My constant pacing is a feature of this study that complicates the observation and note-taking process. When walking, it is difficult to take detailed notes on what is happening around you when what is happening is rapidly changing; not to mention you also need to look where you are going. For this reason, photographs and short videos were taken while walking on the decided routes. After each walk, the videos and photos were consulted when writing the observation notes so the notes would reflect the walk as accurately as possible.

#### *Data Coding and Analysis*

The data collected through both the literature review and observations were organized along key concepts that emerged throughout the research process. Prior to the observation research, initial key concepts noted were: interactions with cars, conceptions of the built environment, multi-sensory experience, civic participation, sensory overload, and empty streets. Additionally, the analysis of observation notes gave rise to further literature research and a few more key concepts: stranger fear, darkness and light, civil inattention, and panoptic power relations. While each of these concepts are entangled with the others, they are each individually significant to the understanding of pedestrianism as a whole.

#### *Writing an Autoethnography*

The forthcoming section of this paper is a composite retelling of my experience walking three different routes in Aurora and Chicago. My intent is to boil down the hundreds of walks that I took over 10 months to a single walk for each of the routes. As a composite account, the timing and order of the events that I describe have been adapted to fit the narrative of a single walk for each route. For instance, when season is not of special importance, notes that I took

during walks in the fall, winter, and spring are all included in the composite retelling. Similarly, while I do not note the specific time of day in the composite accounts, and the walks that make up those accounts were taken around the same time of day, the exact times of the walks vary. No events or persons that appear in the autoethnography have been fabricated. Every person described is a real person, and every event that is described truly did happen on at least one occasion while walking on one of the three routes.

### *Ethical Issues*

The entire observational portion of the study was conducted in public places, and the data recorded is not at all sensitive in nature nor specific to any identifiable group or individual other than myself. Overall, no information is revealed that is not already publicly available to pedestrians on these routes.

### *Strengths*

This study has two strengths, data thickness and data specificity. I was able to collect especially thick data for these reasons: First, during the participant observation process, purposely directing my attention toward sensory and emotional experience while walking exposes phenomena that might otherwise be inattended, disattended, or written off as a normal and unremarkable occurrence by research subjects without specific sociological knowledge (Zerubavel 2015). Second, conducting the participant observation process over an extended period of 10 months, and doing so in conjunction with the literature allows obscured themes to emerge for analysis.

### *Limitations*

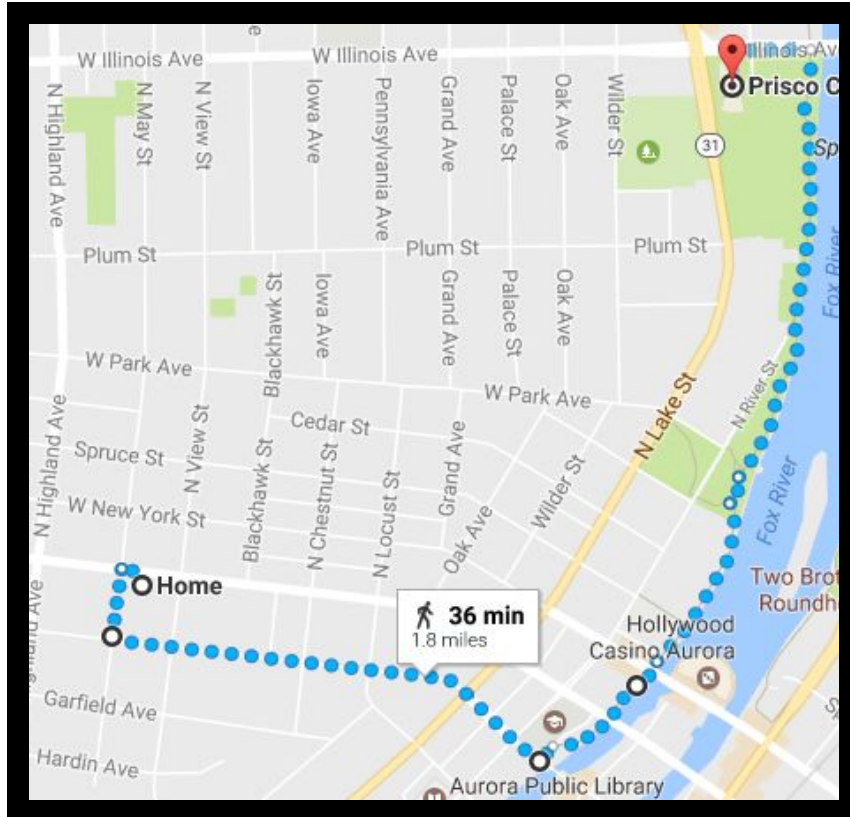
The story I relay in the following pages happened in a very specific time, place, and point of view. In some instances, if I had walked one block off of my route, or started my journey an hour earlier or later, my experience would have changed considerably. I might miss rush-hour traffic, or have to navigate another sort of intersection, or hear, smell, and see different things. Additionally, in every instance the pedestrian experience will differ for a different person based on their personal history and the cultural meanings that they symbolize to those around them. As Sharon Willis noted “the central point and problem that define the journey reside in embodiment and visibility, as all meanings tend to be organized by race, gender and sexuality... The meaning of the trip is inevitably understood through meanings the witnesses assign to the bodies of the travelers” (Seiler 2008:108). The near infinite possibilities for diversity in walking experience through changing time, place, and point of view makes the sociology of walking an extremely dynamic field of study. So, while I expect that many people will be able to relate to my experiences, my account of urban walking is certainly not an exhaustive one. The limitations of this study reflect the limitations of a specific person in specific places and times.



## NEAR WEST GALENA NEIGHBORHOOD- AURORA, IL

It is a cool morning. As I shovel Honey Nut Cheerios into my mouth and blankly stare at the dining room table, I'm trying to plan a walking route in my head that would make sense for the project. Walking down a quiet suburban street, on a busy road, or on a nature trail are unique in their own ways, and I want to include them all without having to skim over important details. I passively listen to the buzzing of rubber on pavement as cars zoom up and down West Galena Boulevard, about 30 feet outside my dining room window. *Shhheoooo, sheeeooo, shhheoo, VRRRRUMMmmm*. Ugh, I wish I had gotten up earlier; the quiet morning solitude has already transformed into the nonstop rhythm of midday traffic.

I got it. I'll walk East on Downer Avenue until I get into downtown Aurora, take the Fox River Trail North to the Prisco Community Center, and then.... well, I'll just wing it on my way back. I look up from my breakfast at the vehicles passing outside and the environment that I'm about to immerse myself in for the next hour or two, and take a few hard shallow breaths trying to psyche myself up. Feeling anxious, I force myself up from the table and get my things together. *"Okay. Let's go."*



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A number of studies have been published recently that link high automotive traffic areas to increased noise pollution, and therefore higher levels of annoyance, stress, high blood pressure and hypertension in people who live in those areas (Foraster et al. 2014; Nivens 2012; McAlexander, Gershon, and Neitzel 2015; Vianna, Cardoso, and Rodrigues 2015; Wang 2015; Das, Parida and Katiyar 2015). With all the other stressors in my life, I wonder how much I can blame on the fact that I am almost always within earshot of screeching tires, rumbling engines, and blaring horns. It's no use arguing against cars though. Their popularity as a transportation option has ballooned since they started being mass produced in 1913. According to data collected by the Oak Ridge National Laboratory, there were 286 vehicles for every 1,000 U.S. residents in 1950. That number has steadily grown to be 798 vehicles per 1,000 residents in

2013. Vehicle miles per capita have also increased from 3,017 miles in 1950, to 9,442 miles in 2013 (Oak Ridge National Laboratory 2015).

Some people contend that driving became by far the most popular form of travel because it is the form that people have chosen in the free market, but historians like Cotten Seiler (2008) suggest that there is more to the story. Seiler writes that early on, the road-building industry and auto and oil companies promoted road building as a public good, though they stood to profit the most (Seiler 2008:99). As more and more public space was designated for automobile use, places were *forced* to spread out in order to make room for the growing expanses of roadways and parking lots. They were also *able* to spread out to cheaper land because of widespread auto-mobility. This spreading out of places resulted in increased car dependence and car use, which prompted more congestion and subsequent road and parking construction, starting the cycle all over again (Seiler 2008; Jacobs 1961; Segrave 2006). Jane Jacobs (1961) called this cycle a negative feedback loop in which the effect amplifies the cause. So, while car use may technically be a choice, it is far from a free one. 100 years of U.S. road building, and its latent effect of car dependence, compels people to drive or forfeit a multitude of economic, social, and cultural opportunities.

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I step out onto the short staircase behind my apartment and take a moment to let my eyes adjust to the bright cloudless sky. The traffic out front sounds sharper without the walls to mute it. I step down onto the cracked and oil-stained cement driveway and make my way through my building's parking lot and into the adjoining building's parking lot toward May Street. A grey Mustang slowly pulls into the lot as I approach the sidewalk from the parking lot's center lane. I edge up against the back bumpers of the parked cars and cut across the grass before reaching the sidewalk. Walking south on May Street, I approach a few large branches that must have fallen from the tree overhead, and step over and between them. When I turn the corner onto Downer Place the sun nearly blinds me. I turn around, flinging off my backpack, and grope around inside to find my sunglasses. With my back to the sun, I slide my shades on and look up. An SUV is stopped in front of me, waiting to turn onto May Street. An old woman is peering at me through

the passenger-side window, expressionless. Her eyes stay on me as the SUV turns north on May Street. *Did she think I was up to something? I was just getting something out of my backpack.* I shrug and continue east on Downer Place. In the distance I can see the revered 22 story Leland tower; a building that stands so much higher than any of the surrounding ones that it serves as a sort of reference point for when you get lost.



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I feel a vague insecurity when walking in an environment that seems to be built for cars. Do people think that I'm poor, foolish, or even criminal? As I think about it more, it seems that these insecurities are interrelated, and a product of the environment and culture I find myself in. The belief that pedestrians are likely poor rests on two concepts. The first is that because of how transportation infrastructure has been built over the past hundred years, driving tends to be the fastest and most comfortable way to get around. The second concept is the fact that car

ownership can be prohibitively expensive. On average drivers spend \$9,738 more on transportation each year than their public transit counterparts (American Public Transit Association 2017). So, if a person uses a transit option other than driving, others have good reason to believe that they are unable, not unwilling, to cover the costs.

Walkers may be looked upon as foolish for contradicting the modernist ideals of high cost, high speed, and high tech transportation. As Rebecca Solnit notes in *Wanderlust* (2000) “Walking is no longer how people think”, and people who continue to think in “pedestrian” ways are considered outsiders in a modernist culture; vestiges of a slow and simple past. Journalist Edmund Pearson expands on this by writing about a concerned pedestrian: “If he were seen taking the stairs he feared he might be thought ignorant of ‘the blessings of science; it may appear that he does not know about elevators, or that he distrusts them; that he is, in short, guilty of the great American sin of not being up to date’.”(Segrave 2006:73).

The foolishness of pedestrians is confirmed for many drivers when they encounter people attempting to cross the street under dangerous, albeit everyday circumstances. Similar to the assumption that pedestrians are poor, this characterization too is dependent on qualities of the built environment. In 1994 “[j]ournalist Jay Walljasper argued that [...] drivers were helped by several generations of transportation planners ‘who single-mindedly focus on providing smooth and speedy flow of vehicles. Pedestrians and bicyclists rarely figure in their plans, except as nuisances who slow down traffic’”(Segrave 2006:145). Street design, then, has framed pedestrians as people who have no business on the street. But the reality that walkers too need to get from place to place, and need to cross roads to do so, contradicts that framing. This incongruence results in a gravely high-stakes situation for pedestrians: to avoid death, and an

unwanted burden for drivers: to avoid killing. Daniel C. Ross speaks to this burden on behalf of drivers in *Auto Trend* magazine: “pedestrians must begin to watch out for themselves. The quality of walking stupidity observable from behind a car steering wheel is astonishing, and it definitely isn't funny... you folks on foot just are not holding up your end.”(Ross 1987:116).

Criminality is a third characteristic that is implicit of pedestrians. As sociologist Jean Baudrillard contests, “if you get out of your car in th[e] centrifugal metropolis, you immediately become a delinquent; as soon as you start walking, you are a threat to public order, like a dog wandering in the road” (Bairner 2011:372). There are at least three factors that contribute to a pedestrian’s implication as a criminal: 1. Implicit criminality as a result of implicit poorness, 2. being part of an “out-group” in public, and 3. being on the short end of an unequal power relation. While the first two factors refer to the policing of pedestrians by others, the third refers to pedestrians' compulsion to police themselves when in an environment designed for cars.

Implicit criminality follows from the implicit poorness of pedestrians discussed above because of the moral value attributed to work within a capitalist society (Weber 2002). That virtue is then signified through wealth, which is generally thought to be earned only through hard work. So, a pedestrian who is implicitly poor is now implicitly immoral as well. Next, the implicit immorality of pedestrians contributes to their characterization as implicitly criminal. This is exemplified by the unconstitutional “stop-and-frisk” practices of police, in which an officer checks a person’s body for weapons or illegal substances on account of their perceived suspiciousness. In New York City, officers find that nearly nine out of ten people subjected to stop-and-frisk are completely innocent (New York Civil Liberties Union 2016). This suggests that the perception of pedestrians as criminals may be more stereotype than reliable fact. In sum,

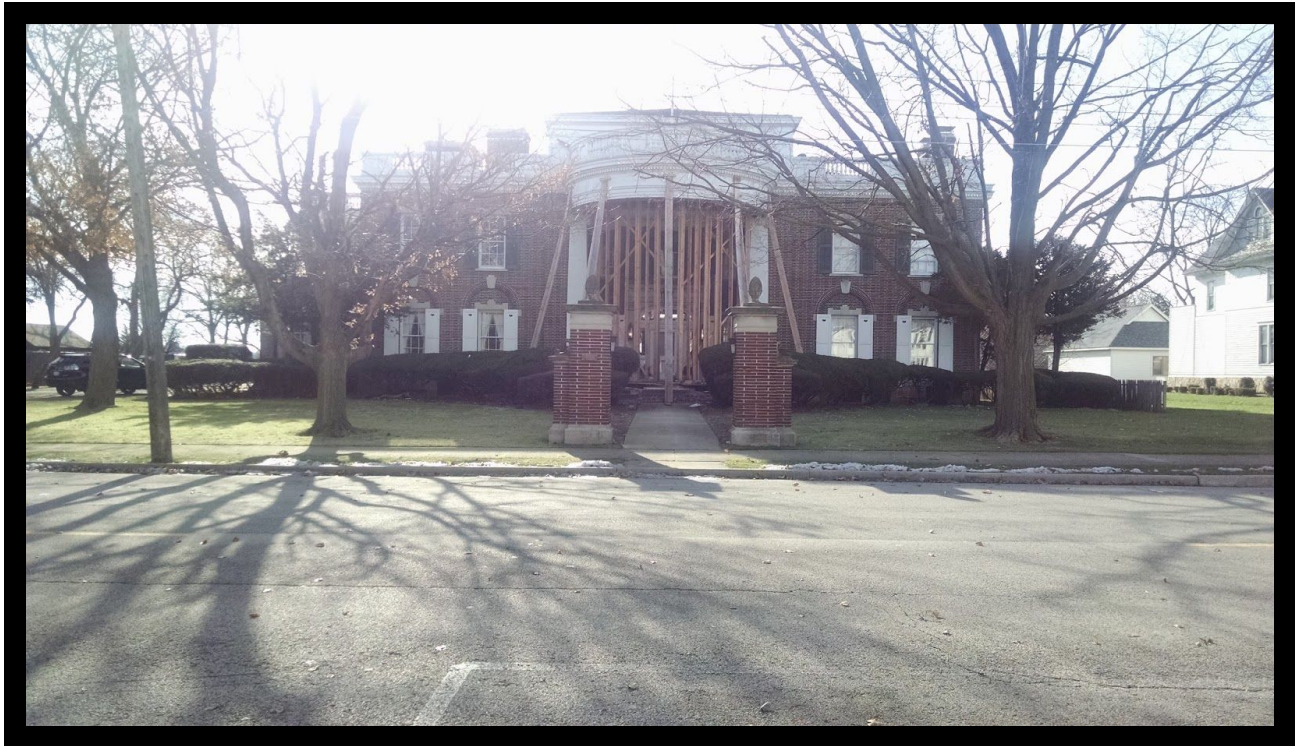
pedestrians are implicated as criminals through a triple leap of rationalist logic: From pedestrian to poor, from poor to immoral, and from immoral to criminal.

Being part of an “out-group” contributes even more to a pedestrian's implicit criminality. As Cotten Seiler puts it, “the capacity of individuals and groups to move freely serves as an index of their power; and hence mobility is an arena of contest and performative display”(2008:11). Historically, white men have been considered the public realm “in-group” and have demonstrated their power through their freedom to travel unimpeded, as well as their constraining of mobility for women, people of color, and others. In the 1800s, women walking alone in public were presumed to be prostitutes or “street walkers” and often arrested without any litigation (Solnit 2000). Similarly, today people of color are seen “as a criminal category when in public, so that the law often actively interferes with their freedom of movement” (Solnit 2000:242). While this interference may partly be an outcome of circumstantial social, economic, and political inequities, the constraining effect is undeniable.

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After walking about two blocks on Downer Place, I realize that I am the only person on the street. In the middle of the day, in this moderately dense neighborhood, in a city of about 200,000 people, not a single soul is within eyesight. But, despite being so alone, I feel a severe lack of privacy. I stick out like a sore thumb on this otherwise lifeless street, and there is a real possibility of eyes on me at every moment. As cars pass, I am on display to drivers and passengers behind tinted glass. I slow down to admire the Copley Mansion but don't stop. Stopping is suspicious.





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In 1975 sociologist Michel Foucault described an innovation in surveillance called the Panopticon. The Panopticon is a structural design that puts a single surveillance tower in the middle of a space that is then surrounded by rooms to be observed. Through the effect of backlighting, supervisors in the tower can see all the patients, prisoners, workers, or students at every moment while the subordinates themselves cannot see any of the supervisors within the tower. The subordinate “is seen, but he does not see; he is the object of information, never a subject in communication”(Foucault 1995:201). The purpose of this design is

to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures that automatic functioning of power. [...] It is an important mechanism, for it automatizes and disindividualizes power. Power has its principle not so much in a person as in a certain concerted distribution of bodies, surfaces, lights, gazes; in an arrangement whose internal mechanisms produce the relation in which individuals are caught up. [...] He who is subjected to a field of visibility, and who knows it, assumes responsibility for the constraints of power; he makes them play spontaneously upon himself; he inscribes in himself the power relation in which

he simultaneously plays both roles; he becomes the principle of his own subjection (Foucault 1995:201-202).

Foucault's description of the Panopticon leads one to imagine a defined, highly controlled area, and two groups who are occupying explicit supervisor and subordinate roles. However, this presumption is not necessary to the functioning of panoptic principles of power and control. We can see panoptic relations within America's streets. The ability of drivers to remain anonymous behind tinted glass and within speedy and private shells while having full view of pedestrians parallels the situation of the supervisor within a panoptic design. Similarly, the pedestrian's knowledge that they are fully visible to an unknown number of anonymous people who are constantly appearing and speeding by at every moment parallels the situation of subordinates within a panoptic design. The high amount of drivers may even intensify the panoptic effect because the "more numerous those anonymous and temporary observers are, the greater the risk for the inmate of being surprised and the greater his anxious awareness of being observed" (Foucault 1991:202).

It is certainly not the driver's or passenger's fault for staring at pedestrians. Whether a pedestrian is or is not in fact observed is not the issue. What matters is that pedestrians know that they are observed. This knowledge brings an "anxious awareness" which is normally reserved for prisoners, into a pedestrian's consciousness. When people use car-oriented streets as intended, pedestrians inevitably walk on eggshells, hoping not to be construed as criminals.

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Berries from the trees overhead are smeared on the sidewalk. They smell sort of sweet, and sort of rotten. The few that are still intact pop under my feet as I carefully advance through the aftermath. At the next intersection there is a large depression in the sidewalk filled with mud.

I swivel my head around, checking for cars in each of the four directions. I hop over the mud and into the crosswalk. Immediately, I hear the motor of an approaching car and break into a jog. When I reach the opposite side I look around and realize that the car that I thought was approaching is actually a block north of me on West Galena Boulevard.

As I walk down the hill that leads to downtown I approach a retaining wall that has a mural painted on it. The grey cement is covered in oversized green leaves that appear to be caught in a breeze blowing downhill. Between the leaves, if you stop and look real closely, you can make out a sketch of an elderly woman in a cap and pearls smiling at you with big knowing eyes. Further down the wall there are scattered unrelated doodles drawn in black: cat faces, stars, flowers, puppies, a single but extremely realistic eye, among other creations are represented in all kinds of artistic styles. Between the drawings are written notes, some more readable than others: “I learned it from the pizza man...”, “THE BEATLES”, “AUTOMOBEEEL!”, “Honk if you Love Peace and Quiet!”, “Cubs”, “BE THE CHANGE YOU WANT TO SEE IN THE WORLD”, “OH SNAP!”, “Art is my Life”, “Love your neighbor as yourself”, “Give Empathy”, “RIP”, and “AURORA!” are scrawled in various sizes and transparencies. You could inspect the work for half an hour without seeing all that was drawn and written.



As I approach the intersection of Downer Place and Lake Street, I catch up to a man waiting for the light to change. We both gaze across the street into the torrent of cars and trucks moving past us, waiting for the orange hand signal on the other side to turn into the white walking man. *WAAAAAAHHHHNNNNNNNNN*. My eyes widen and my heart beats hard in my chest. Wincing, I retreat backward. A Semi sounds its air horn five feet in front of us as a car turns right off of Downer and into its lane. I regain my bearings away from the curb until the signal changes. Standing on the corner of an intersection can be anxiety inducing, but this time it was downright terrifying. The trucker's horn was not intended for me, and I doubt they even noticed my reaction, no matter how loudly I yelped. All of a sudden a very real feeling of smallness, powerlessness, and insignificance comes over me, and I remind myself that I *have* to be more alert, *more* careful.

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Pedestrians tend to get the short end of the stick when it comes to land appropriation and right-of-way. Contrary to our usual condemnation of public expressions of physical dominance and violence, the prevalence, anonymity, and norm of fast-moving cars preserves a space where physical domination and violence is tolerated, if not accepted (Ellison et al. 1995). “Traffic signs addressed to pedestrians generally feature the words “prohibited,” “no,” “watch out for,” or “don’t”, making it clear that the onus is on them to avoid a collision (Whyte 1988:68). Additionally, the period of time when the “don’t walk” sign is flashing has been called “nervous time” because pedestrians know that they will be risking life and limb if they don’t make it across before the sign stops flashing (Whyte 1988:68).

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The signal finally changes. As I step off the curb I turn my head right and look at Downer’s left turn lane for my first three steps to make sure nobody is turning. As I continue west on Downer Place, I approach one of Aurora’s more architecturally recognized buildings that is now occupied by Old Second Bank. Near the middle of the block a large yellow traffic sign stands on the sidewalk right up against the building outside of a recessed doorway. It reads: “CAUTION PEDESTRIAN EXIT”. I’m perplexed as to what the purpose of this sign could be, being so from the street. Past the ominously dangerous exit is six low windows, each about eight feet across. They are recessed about a foot into the stone façade creating a built-in bench feature. Well, it would be a bench feature, but running across the top of each stone surface is a line of protruding inch-long metal spikes. As sociologist William H. Whyte discovered, the placement of spikes, jagged rocks, and railings that hit you in the small of the back are utilized to repel people from sitting or spending time in public space (Whyte 1980).



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Even though I have technically now entered the downtown, I still feel like i haven't arrived anywhere yet. There are at least two factors that combine to create this feeling of placelessness outside of the Old Second Bank between Lake and River Street. One factor is a cognitive mechanism called thigmotaxis. Thigmotaxis is the compulsion to stick to the borders of open spaces due to the anxiety of losing track of where you are in space, or of needing to escape to safety at a moment's notice (Sussman and Hollander 2015). On this block, Downer Place is five lanes wide (two lanes for parking, two lanes for traffic, and one for turning), and on the south side of the street lies a parking lot with about 120 parking spaces taking up about one and a half city blocks. Aside from the ugliness and purposelessness of that side of the street for me as a pedestrian, on a biological level, its wide-openness compels me to stay close to Old Second. That would not be so terrible if the bank's exterior was welcoming, but in addition to the spiked benches, the bank has what architect Jan Gehl calls a "closed façade". According to Gehl, open façades have many doors, transparent windows, and imagery that pedestrians can interact with. Conversely, closed façades are bare and seem to be telling pedestrians to "move along". In his study titled *Close Encounters with Buildings*, Gehl finds that "[i]n total, up to seven times as many activities could be seen before the open facades than in front of closed facades"(Gehl and Svarre 2013:104). Interestingly, many of these activities could physically be done in front of either type of façade, (tying one's shoe, checking one's reflection, etc.). The disparity in activities Gehl recorded between open and closed façades (and those in-between) suggest that buildings that have features that recognize the existence of pedestrians allow people the comfort required to pause for a moment. So, while my biology tells me to stick close to the bank, the

architecture of the bank tells me to go away - that this is a space to move through, not a place to be in.

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When I reach the brick driveway of Waubensee Community College, I turn north and cross at an angle onto the extra-wide Fox River Trail pedestrian path. The path curves away from the street and down to the Fox River below. I get that “I’ve made it” feeling and let out a sigh of relief, even though I am still about a mile away from Prisco. At the top of the path, the vista slows me. Cars are passing over the bridge on West Galena Boulevard; the water rushing over the manmade waterfall creates a welcome addition to the traffic noise; Leland Tower is standing 22 stories tall on the opposite riverbank; a man walks his dog in the plaza just south of the tower; and people are proceeding up and down the trail ahead of me.



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Tony Hiss calls the feeling that overcomes me when stepping onto the Fox River Trail “simultaneous perception”. Simultaneous perception refers to a feeling of connectedness with and understanding of the surrounding environment and people.

It broadens and diffuses the beam of attention evenhandedly across all the senses so we can take in whatever is around us [...]. With the help of this extra sense, the familiar hard-and-fast boundary between ourselves and our surroundings seems softened, expanding our sense of the space occupied by “here” and the time taken up by “now,” and un-covering normally ignored patterns of relationships that make us part of larger groups and events. [...] When this general kind of awareness occurs, I feel relaxed and alert at the same time. In addition, I notice a sort of unhurried feeling- a feeling that there’s time enough to savor all the sights and sounds and other sensations coming in (Hiss 1991:xii-1).

The feeling of simultaneous perception seems magical, and definitely not normal. This is because

[n]ormal waking consciousness and our sense of separateness from the world protect us from harm by allowing us to focus instantly on any source of danger. And we’re alerted to sources of danger by sudden and rapid movement or loud noises or strong smells. So, for simultaneous perception to emerge, we need a place that seems safe, where the information presented to each sense is complex but not overpowering (Hiss 1991:27).

While we may feel safe at home or inside our cars, complex stimulation to each sense is difficult to get when we are walled-off from the unpredictability, variation, and life of the public realm. We need to be out in public. Unfortunately, with speeding vehicles and blaring horns, the public realm in the U.S. has been designed without much regard for the feeling of safety. As a result, the pleasure of simultaneous perception is exceedingly hard to come by.

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Continuing north on the trail, I approach the New York Street underpass. As I walk into the shaded area under the bridge, the rushing water of the canoe chute amplifies and echoes until

I am completely enveloped in the sound, and time slows to a halt. As I walk back into the sunlight, the sound of rushing water fades behind me. I take a deep breath, satisfied in a way that is difficult to pinpoint. The darkness, coolness, loudness, and privacy under the bridge was a welcome treat to my senses.

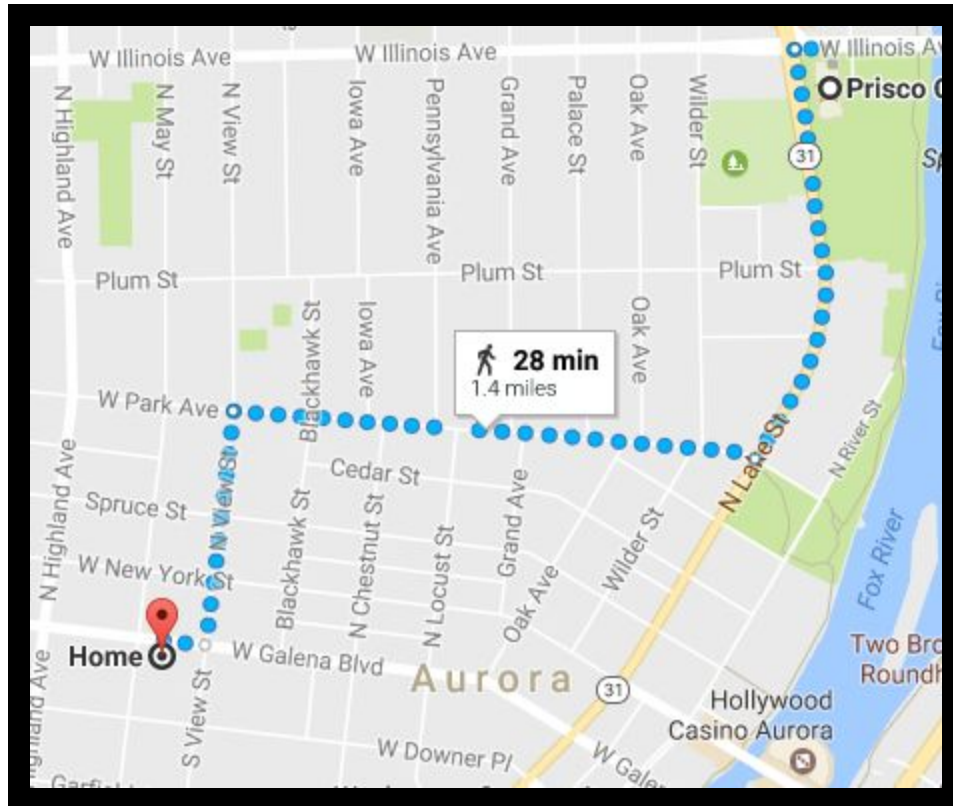


Proceeding up the trail, I try to turn my attention away from the parking lots and traffic noise on my left, and toward the river and wildlife on my right. I notice two Mallard ducks bobbing in the water near the shore at the bottom of the embankment on my right, and squat down to watch them for a moment. After a few minutes the ducks take their leave, and I return to my walk. A large family is gathered up ahead at a cluster of benches by the river. A small boy rides a tricycle up and down the path, turning around just before reaching me. As I pass the group I can see people of all ages, talking, sharing food, and taking photos of each other next to the trees and beside the river. Suddenly, brush along the embankment shifts and a rustles. I turn,

looking for a gopher or goose, but it seems to have only been the wind. This happens three more times before I reach Prisco. As I walk between the river and a large apartment building, I hear a multitude of songs being sung by birds that must be perched somewhere in the patches of trees along the trail. I isolate one song and then another, trying to locate the birds, but they are too well hidden. The path to Prisco is a little indirect so I decide to cut across the broad, hilly field on my left. In doing so I contend with a large gaggle of honking geese. Their group splits as I approach, and one goose keeps a vigilant eye on me as I pass. I try not to step in the pungent and ubiquitous goose droppings, but inevitably do as I approach the Prisco Community Center parking lot.



A few hours later, the sun has set and I realize that I should be getting home. Instead of taking the Fox River Trail all the way back downtown, I opt for a more direct route through the NWG neighborhood. I will cross Lake Street at the first light onto West Park Avenue, take a left onto View, and then I'm pretty much home.



As I walk up the unlit winding path leading from Prisco's parking lot to Lake Street, it is so dark that I am essentially walking blind. Lake Street is very busy at this time. As cars, buses, and semis are buzzing past me, I try to look down and away from the penetrating headlights. I finally reach the corner of Lake and West Park, but the push-to-walk button that I come to has an arrow that is only pointing across West Park. I realize that the crossing that I want is about 10 feet north of the corner. I hurry to hit the button before the light turns yellow, and wait for the

signal to change. The walk signal flashes on, and I wait for two more cars to make left turns from West Park to the northbound lane of Lake Street before stepping off of the curb. Four steps into the street, headlights bounce off the pavement in front of me and intensify as they center on me. An engine roars to my left. I turn to see a white Cadillac closing on me fast. I swing my arms out wide in hopes of being noticed. “*HEY!*” I plead, shuffling sideways out of the lane. “*HEY!*” The car zooms into the lane that I had just crossed. The driver’s face, illuminated by blue light, is expressionless as she seems to look past, or through me.

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Over 70,000 pedestrian traffic injuries were reported by police in the U.S. in 2015; that is more than one injury every 7.5 minutes. In the same year, 5,376 pedestrians were struck and killed, making up 15% of all traffic deaths (National Highway Traffic Safety Administration [NHTSA] 2016). With estimates of walking trips ranging between 9% and 10.9% of all trips, pedestrians are disproportionately at risk of injury and death when traveling (pedbikeinfo.org 2015; Hu and Reuscher 2004). The disparity is even greater when looking at the economic and ethnic makeup of the people who lost their lives.

In Fairfax County, Virginia [...] 23 percent of the walkers killed between 1993 and 1998 were Hispanics although they were just eight percent of the county's population. Reportedly, studies in California and other states had also shown that pedestrian deaths occurred disproportionately among Hispanics and the poor (Segrave 2006:148).

Despite these inequities, and despite surpassing the number of total fatal workplace injuries in the U.S. in 2015 (4,836), pedestrian injury and death is not a publicized fact (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2016). This may be because there is too much profit to lose from such bad press.

According to a 2002 article from the British Medical Journal,

the interest of pedestrians, cyclists and other vulnerable road users are pitted against the powers that stand to profit from increasing global motorization. [...] As in other wars, propaganda is an important weapon. It is not in the interest of those who sell road transport to allow the private trouble of road death and injury to become a public issue. [...] The idea that government and the motor manufacturing industry have a major responsibility is not for public consumption. It is much more acceptable that the victims are held responsible (Roberts 2002:1107).

Blaming the victim appears to be the only way to go since drivers who kill pedestrians are rarely held responsible. Nearly one of every five drivers who killed a pedestrian in 2015 simply drove away (NHTSA 2016). And, according to an analysis of area crash data by the Minneapolis Star Tribune, “The majority of drivers who killed pedestrians between 2010 and 2014 were not charged [...]. Those who were charged often faced misdemeanors- from speeding to careless driving- with minimal penalties [...]” (Roper 2016:np). The lack of consequences for murderously careless drivers, the lack of public awareness, and the lack of effective government action to improve safety collectively send one message to pedestrians: “We don't care if you die.”

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After it roars past me, I turn looking for consolation from some witness, but I can't see past the headlights of the cars in the southbound lanes. Bewildered, and with adrenaline pumping, I look down at the stripes to regain my bearings and finish crossing. It's a relief to be off of Lake Street. West Park Avenue is one of the busier residential roads, but quiet compared to Lake. It has a single worn yellow-dotted line separating the east and west bound lanes and street parking on both sides. There are eight foot high lamp posts lining the street at a staggered interval. Their orange light illuminates the glossy road surface, but becomes muted on the matte cement sidewalk. The street is lit-up by every lamp, but the sidewalk is illuminated only half as

much since the light from the lamps on the north side of the street doesn't make it to the south side and vice versa. Half the time I'm walking in the orange light, and half the time I'm walking in darkness. This is expected since "[c]ities were lit primarily to facilitate the movement of motor vehicles" (Jakle and Sculle 2002:255). About halfway down West Park Avenue I notice a dark figure walking in the same direction as me on the opposite side of the street. I keep my head pointing forward but try to size him up when I think he's not looking. I gauge his walk. Is it *too* casual? Is he out here looking for a target? Alone in the dark, I stick my right hand in my jacket pocket and wrap my fingers around my can of pepper spray.



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By being in public, pedestrians take on a vulnerability not present in the private spaces of automobiles. Any stranger has the ability to impose themselves on you, violently or otherwise

(Rundell 2014). Referring to a 1997 study by the Centre for Cultural Risk Research [CCRR], sociologist, Deborah Lupton writes that this stranger

is positioned as Other to Self: an individual who does not share one's own approach to life, one's principles and sensibilities. The participants' fear of the 'unpredictable stranger' was largely based on uncertainty: they did not know this individual and thus could not gauge how he might respond or act. They were more afraid of this figure when moving in spaces[, when they are more likely to encounter them,] than when in their own homes (1999:13).

While unwanted encounters with 'unpredictable strangers' are always *possible* in any public space, they feel less likely when places are well lit and when there are other people nearby. In fact, participants of the CCRR study felt more fearful about walking at night. Only 41 percent of participants said that they walked alone in their neighborhood at night, compared to 92 percent during the day (Lupton 1999:4).

Jane Jacobs proposed that the more people who use a street, and the greater the variety of people who use a street, the safer a street will be. These streets, "afford no opportunity to street barbarism" (1961:33). In support of this view one of Jacobs' interview respondents describe a famously safe street in Boston, MA in this way: "Half a dozen times or so in the past three decades [...], would-be molesters have made an attempt at luring a child or, late at night, attacking a woman. In every such case the try was thwarted by passers-by, by kibitzers from windows, or shopkeepers." (1961:33)

The presence of other people on the street creates a self-policing social force that helps to provide security in common. People are not only attracted by a street's reputation for safety, but also the sight of other people. These two observations by Jacobs (1961) point to a positive feedback loop involving safety and the presence of people. The more varied the street use (people getting groceries, going to/coming from work, sitting on stoops, watching, performing,



selling goods, etc.) and the more people who are present (to a limit), the safer a street will be. On the other side, the safer a street is, and the more action a street has, the more people are attracted to use that street. Results from a 2007 study “suggest that regardless of SES, neighborhood features that encouraged pedestrians, whilst minimizing vehicle traffic, were most conducive to parents perceiving a safer neighborhood (Foster et al. 2014:60). Unfortunately, for various reasons, many streets in the U.S. have been designed in a way that repels people rather than attract them. For pedestrians, this results in heightened vulnerability and stranger fear, causing even more “people, especially women [to] stay away from public spaces, especially at night” (Lofland 1998:170).

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My would-be attacker walks under a street lamp and I see that he is sure-footed, paying me no attention. I give up my anxiety and put my attention back on my side of the street. The slightly spicy smell of chorizo and fried tortillas fills the air, and I enjoy every breath of it until the smell is gone. I turn left and continue down View Street. Just then, a shadowy creature swiftly moves across a yard to my left and onto the sidewalk in front of me. Our eyes meet and we both freeze. After a long second my brain catches up, and I realize that I’m standing uncomfortably close to a raccoon. “*Oh Shit!*” I exclaim, more out of surprise than a fear of raccoons. It scampers back to where it had just come from. I look around, feeling a little embarrassed, before continuing down View. I check for cars and cross to the west side of the street. While approaching a victorian style house with huge windows, three dogs notice me and break into a barking tantrum. They run from window to window for a better view of me as I pass, barking all the while. I expect someone to calm them away from the windows, but no one does.

The barking finally stops as I reach the end of the block. I get to the corner of Galena and View and slap the button to cross. There is a break in the traffic, so I cross before the light changes.

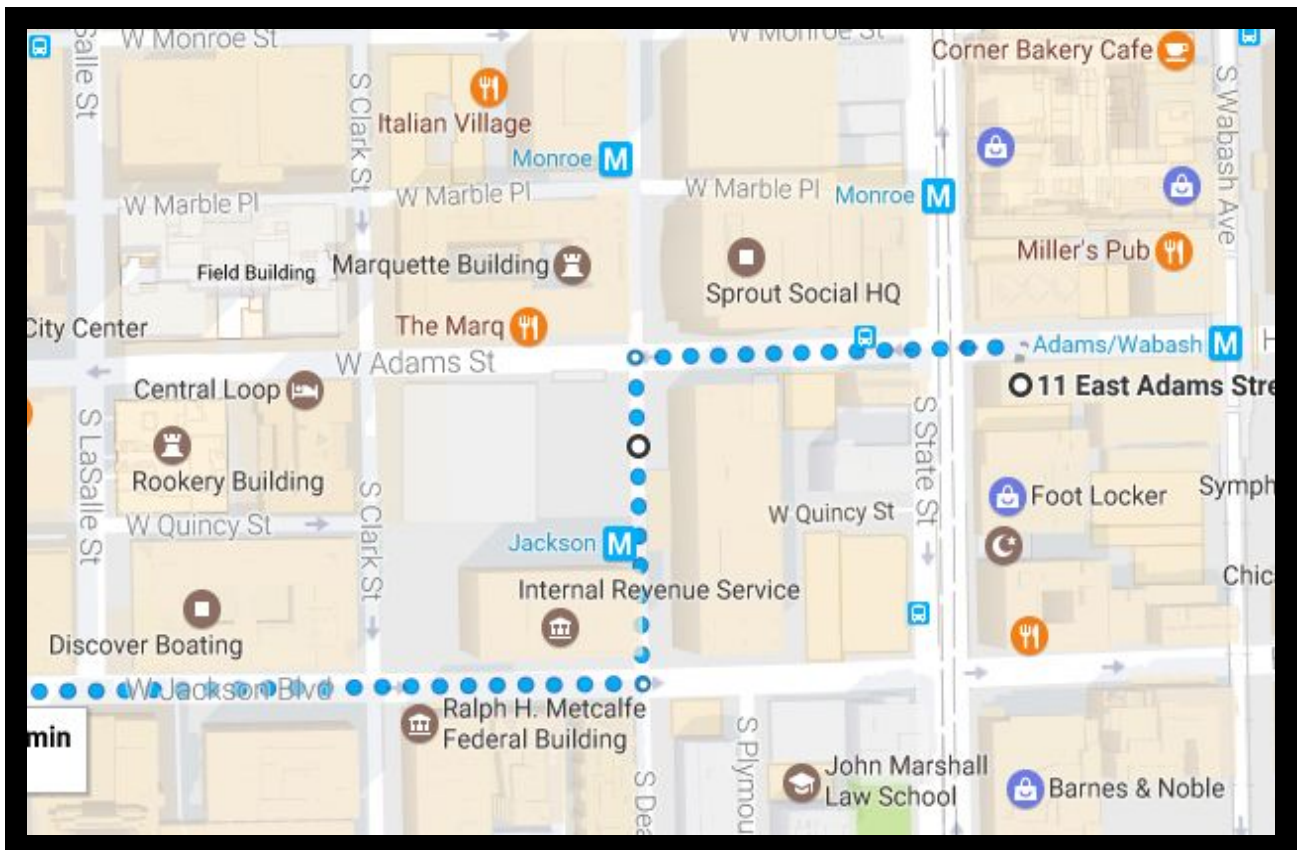
Keys in hand, I make my way up my building's chipped cement steps and through the front door.

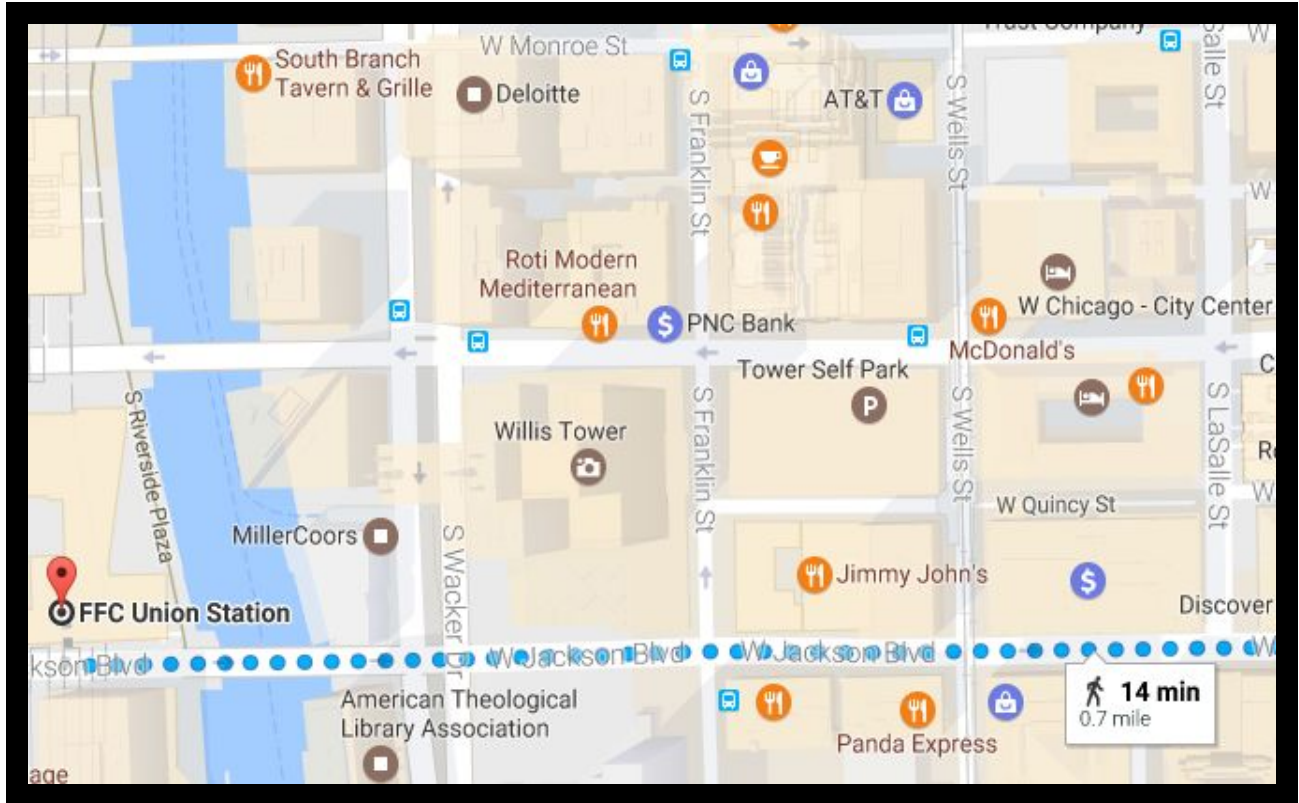
I let the heavy front door fall closed, leaving the outside world behind me.

## THE LOOP- CHICAGO, IL

*“Floor Sixteen. Going Down?”* the automated voice in the elevator drones. I step in, turn around, and tap the button for the first floor. Work is over for the day, and I’m looking forward to getting home. The journey back is long, but one that I have completed so many times that I hardly have to think about it anymore. I start off walking west on East Adams Street. After crossing Dearborn Street, I pass through Federal Plaza diagonally to Jackson Boulevard, and then it is a straight shot west across the Chicago River to Union Station. The walk takes around 20 minutes, putting me on the 5:02pm BNSF Metra train, express to Aurora.

*“Floor One. Going Up?”*





Once I pass through the revolving door, I exit the quiet office building into the cacophony of downtown Chicago. Stepping onto the sidewalk, I gauge the speed of those walking by me, wait a moment, and filter in behind them. In contrast to how out of place and vulnerable I felt as one of a few pedestrians walking in downtown Aurora, I am much more comfortable in Chicago's Loop. With everyone else also on their way home from work, out to dinner, or sightseeing, I have no trouble blending into the larger group. I am unremarkable considering all the people and things happening around me, allowing me the comfort of privacy through anonymity.

A spicy fried food smell is emanating from one of the nearby restaurants and makes me think of fish and onion rings. A chorus of horns and engines sound continually from all directions, at a distance and nearby. The buildings, the cars, the street and sidewalk are all wet

from a storm that had just passed, and are now shimmering under the street lights. Cars, buses, and bicyclists are moving past at intervals controlled by a stoplight every block, and the sidewalks are bustling with walkers. I get to the end of the block just as the light changes to “don’t walk”, fixing my gaze ahead and trying to ignore all that is going on around me. I feel as though I am looking at nothing in particular, but everything in general. I see those standing in front of me, to the sides, nearby and a block away all with what seems to be the same level of peripheral vision.



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“According to Simmel, [it is] impossible to take in, interpret, and respond to all of the stimuli one encounters” in an urban environment, and attempting to do so results in an over-stimulation or hypersensitivity known as “sensory overload” (Borer 2013:967; Chun 2015).

Sensory overload can induce hurried breathing, an increased pulse and blood pressure, anxiety, a feeling of panic or overwhelmingness, a distorted sense of time, and “a perceived reduction of the meaningfulness of the environment” (Lindenmuth, Breu, and Malooley 1980; Scheydt et al. 2017:115). This forces a person to either seek a low sensory stimulation refuge or filter and tune out incoming signals (Wohlwill 1974; Scheydt et al. 2017). In the city, the latter option is accomplished through the adoption of a blasé attitude in which we are indifferent to the distinction of things (Borer 2013; Chun 2015; Segrave 2006; Lofland 1998). So, rather than sensing, interpreting, and responding to the many *distinctive* sights, smells, and sounds in the foreground of our perception, we are compelled to let the majority of these sensations fall into a singular background, simplifying the matter of where to direct our attention (Zerubavel 2015). This adaptation to sensory overload comes with costs. It restricts our ability to perceive and respond to information that may be very important, like a friend calling out, or an oncoming car, and does not always completely eliminate the stress and fatigue of being in a high stimulation environment. Additionally, people with mental illnesses or intellectual disabilities, those who are carrying a high-level of mental stress or bodily fatigue, and those who are sleep deprived tend to have a diminished ability to filter out signals, making intense, diverse, and patterned sensory environments especially disorienting and difficult to cope with (Wohlwill 1974; Scheydt et al. 2017).

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As I proceed west on East Adams Street between State Street and Dearborn Street, I pass underneath a small antique “Berghoff Bar” sign, and then a two-story neon sign that spells out “The Berghoff Restaurant”. Dimly lit antique lamps hang between the windows which either

display bottles of beer and plastic pretzels, old wood carvings, or a view of patrons having drinks inside. The Berghoff is situated between an abandoned building to the east, and a federal office building to the west, making it stand out in even greater contrast as a point of interest and historical significance (Lofland 1998:85). As I pass a placard near the entrance that reads “Since 1898”, I feel a vague sense of awe. For over a hundred years people’s lives have been intersecting at this place, which seems to have been frozen in time as the world transforms around it. I can only imagine who has passed by this facade as I do, and what extraordinary things might have happened here (Solnit 2000; Segrave 2006; Benjamin 2010).



Just past the Berghoff, the sidewalk materials change from a matte cement to a polished grey granite. This material is made slick by the rain and I am a little more careful with my steps as I move toward the intersection of Adams and Dearborn. There are waist-high pillars called bollards lined up about three feet apart along the curb. I pick a lane between two of them. From here I can see that there are only a few seconds left before the signal turns to “don’t walk” and I

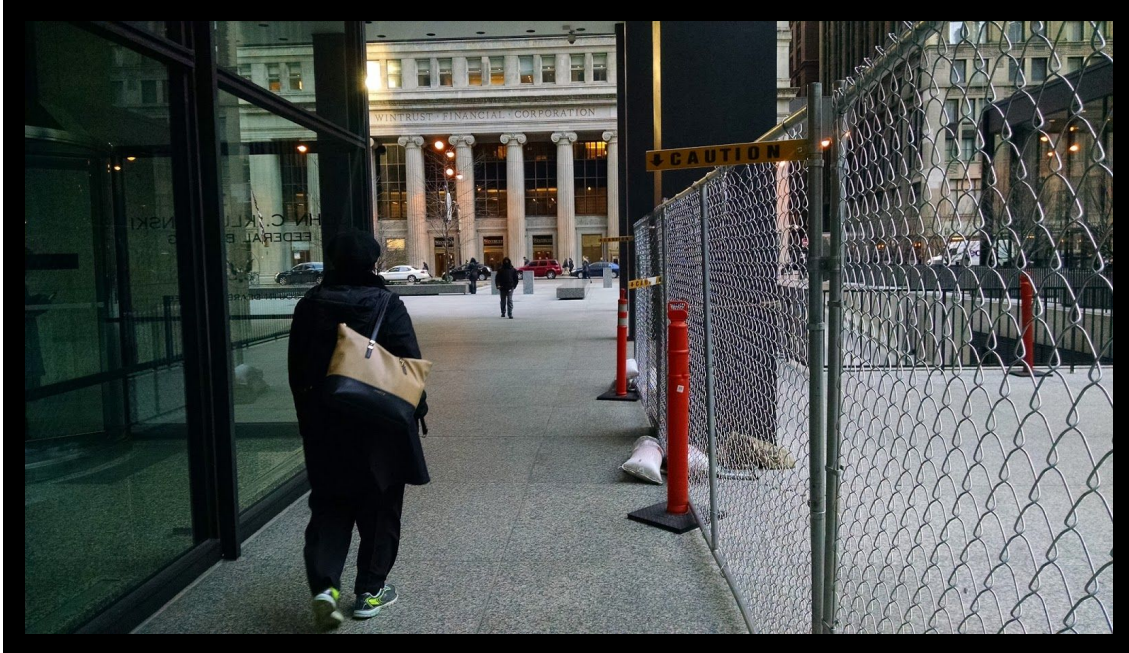
speed up my steps hoping to get to the intersection in time. A group of people walking toward me fill the gaps between the bollards flanking Dearborn and I give up on making it across, stepping behind a bollard to allow people through instead. For about a minute I look up at the oversized American flag flying high just ahead of me in Federal Plaza, the people waiting to cross on the opposite side, and the traffic trickling through the intersection. Drivers lay on their horns, urging those ahead of them to keep moving forward before they are stopped on the wrong side of the light. As the signal changes to “walk”, a driver hoping to turn finds themselves stuck halfway in the crosswalk. Nonetheless, when the traffic light turns yellow, pedestrians from both sides fill the crosswalk. As my westward group meets the eastward group at the misplaced vehicle, we slow, get closer to each other, taking shorter steps, and the path in each direction narrows to a single-file line in front of the car and partially into Adams Street. Each group sticks to their right, and a few people take the route around the back of the car. Once I reach the other side of the street I pick my spot to cut left across the eastward flow of foot traffic and into the relative emptiness of Federal Plaza.







There are a few people walking in different paths across Federal Plaza. I can tell that if I keep walking as I am, in a few seconds I will collide with a person who has been nearing in my periphery and crossing to the opposite side. Still looking ahead, I yield just enough to let them pass in front of me before picking up my pace again. The journey across Federal Plaza feels strangely drawn out. No longer am I passing doors, windows, and people with every few steps. Instead, I only have the huge red art piece and towering black building behind it as reference points for my progress. When I finally reach the south side of the plaza, construction fencing around the base of the federal building funnels me into a narrow corridor leading around the corner.



As I reach the intersection of Jackson and Clark, the walk sign appears, and I step off the curb and into the crosswalk with my fellow walkers without a glance up Clark Street. I relax a little after crossing Clark. All I have to do now is walk with the flowing river of commuters straight for 10 minutes, and I'll be at Union Station. *BEEEEEP*. A passing car sounds its horn and makes me jump. The sharpness of the horn cuts right through the background noise of the city. I look around, hoping no one saw me jump. No one seems to have noticed. I stick to the right, alongside the huge pillars and bay windows of the Wintrust building. Most of the bay windows are covered in paper or have an advertisement poster hanging up inside.

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Every so often my eyes meet with those of a person walking toward me. One of us will look away after a split second, focusing on some other object. In these instances, by neither signaling an openness for interaction, nor actively repelling others, we employ what Goffman called "civil inattention". This is "a display of disinterestedness without

disregard” , that prevents obligation based off past encounters, and preserves solitude (Hirschauer 2005:41,59). In other words, civil inattention politely allows people to remain strangers in close quarters situations. But regardless of our strangeness, we do still interact. In what is called “unfocused interaction”, subtle movements- the wave of a hand, the turning of one’s shoulders, the direction of a gaze, and the change of stride signal to those around you if you are speeding up, slowing down, letting someone pass, or squeezing between a gap, and they respond accordingly (Patterson and Webb 2002; Goffman 1966).

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As I come to the intersection of Jackson and LaSalle Street, I see an articulated (bendy) bus halfway turned onto LaSalle. I slow down, wanting it to just turn already, but also gauging what other walkers are doing. In this sort of situation, the window that a driver has between crossing pedestrians can be small, and a pedestrian waiting at the corner with an uncertain look on their face only adds to the feeling of unpredictability. A large group of people walking eastbound on Jackson stride into the intersection, staring straight past the bus, and I take that opportunity to cross. If the bus is going to wait for them to cross, I may as well go too.

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The relatively slow speeds of vehicles in the Loop and the advanced pedestrian signals at traffic lights are street features that empower the individual pedestrian in negotiations with vehicles at intersections. That individual empowerment turns into a collective empowerment when there are other people walking too. With greater foot traffic, crossing pedestrians are no longer burdened with the feeling that they are making a line of drivers wait for them to cross.

(Lavadinho and Winkin 2008). When drivers are waiting for pedestrians to cross, that opens up opportunities for more pedestrians to enter the crosswalk in a cyclical process that takes power away from drivers, and bestows it on pedestrians. The safety benefits of pedestrian collective empowerment can be illustrated by Walking School Bus (WSB) programs that are popular with schools around the world. WSBs ensure a higher level of safety for children walking to and from school by having them walk together in a supervised group rather than alone (Kearns and Collins 2003).

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Just as I pass the middle of the road I hear the bus's air brakes release and sense it roll behind me a little closer than I would like. On approaching Wells Street, I can hear a fire engine and pray that it is not coming my way. It does. The siren grows louder and louder, echoing off of the 20 story towers on each side of the street. I wince and brace myself as it comes closer. My goal of reaching Union Station has now turned into the goal of putting as much distance between my ears and that siren. The fire engine moves painfully slowly through the traffic on Jackson Boulevard before turning and joining the rest of the horns and sirens in the background.

By the time I regain my bearings, I am at the intersection of Jackson and Wells and the "don't walk" signal lights up. I stake out a waiting spot behind one of the waist-high bollards at the edge of the curb. One by one, pedestrians pass me to stand in the street where they have a better view of cars coming down the road. A few speed-walk across the road when a small window to cross opens. Once the light turns yellow, my westbound group and the eastbound group converge and pass through each other with an improvised organization. The CTA train rushes past on the tracks over our heads, and I am immersed in the sound of heavy sliding metal.

As I reach the other side, more eastbound, southbound, and northbound walkers arrive at the same corner, making me more careful not to bump into anyone. Someone steps out from a pack directly in front of me, stopping me awkwardly off balance. In slow motion, I wave my hands across my body to the right, signaling the other person to keep walking in that direction, and to create a buffer zone between us. “Sorry” I say under my breath. As she moves past, I regain control over my legs and slowly filter in behind a single file line of people headed west along the south wall of the Chase Bank.

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Even though most people have a masterful control of their bodies at walking speed, avoiding collisions takes concerted effort, especially in high traffic areas like street corners and near highrise buildings and transportation centers (Ryave and Schenkein 1974; Pushkarev and Zupan 1975). When quick maneuvers like the the one I had to perform are necessary to avoid collisions, it signals that more pedestrian space is needed in that area. In the nineteenth century, when most buildings were no taller than three stories high, street layouts allocated up to half of the urban street space to pedestrians (Pushkarev and Zupan 1975). Today, many buildings in downtown Chicago exceed twenty stories, and primary pedestrian routes that link transit hubs to downtown like Jackson Boulevard (between Michigan and Clinton Avenue), are required to have a minimum sidewalk width of 14 feet (Chicago Decoded 2017). However, when obstacles like light posts, utility boxes, bicycle racks, garbage and recycling cans, bollards, and elevated train supports take up that sidewalk space, as they do at the corner of Jackson Boulevard and Wells Street, the effective walking space is dramatically reduced. Planning and transportation experts Boris Pushkarev and Jeffery Zupan (1975) recommend that in urban areas and especially at

intersections, taller buildings need to be accompanied by wider sidewalks, and space designated for automotive traffic needs to be reduced in order to expand sidewalks and public transit.

Overall, the effects of these changes are

that the expansion of downtown pedestrian space at the expense of vehicles [...] causes only modest increases in vehicular traffic on parallel streets, that it does reduce noise and air pollution very significantly, at least in the areas immediately affected, [...] that it increases the sales by retail establishments fronting the improvement marginally to moderately, and that it increases outdoor leisure activities a great deal (1975:137).



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At the southwest corner of the Willis Tower I get a potent whiff of sewage that must be emanating from the vented manhole cover to my left. Luckily, the stench fades quickly. Past the huge blank polished walls that flank the sidewalk is the entrance for the Willis Tower's Skydeck. Tourists congregate around the doors, talking and taking pictures. Pedicab drivers straddle their bikes curbside talking into their phones. I continue up the sidewalk along the chained off empty

plaza area. Before I can reach South Wacker Drive a forceful gust of wind pushes me sideways toward Jackson Boulevard. I stop moving forward and just try to stay upright. After the five second struggle I regain my bearings and make it to the crosswalk. There is twenty seconds left on the walk timer, just enough to cross the seven lanes of South Wacker Drive plus the middle island. A man sitting against the center island traffic post holding a cardboard sign is pleading to passersby for spare money for a meal. My chest tightens and my breathing becomes shallow as I approach him, feeling unsure, under pressure, and guilty for wanting to ignore him so badly. *What do I do? I am hardly making ends meet myself. But then again, I am much better off than he looks to be right now. Will a few dollars even make a difference? Am I a bad person for not wanting to help those in need? Where do I draw the line?* I ultimately stay in lock-step with those around me and stride past. Once I make it to the other side of South Wacker Drive, I scramble to rationalize my passive decision for snubbing the man, and relax into my normal rhythm of breathing.



I am now fully part of a huge mass of people moving over the Chicago River. I am walking fairly quickly, worried that I might miss my train, but it is too crowded to make it around the slower walkers in front of me. Looking north up the river, I take in the view of the open water and sky, and the shining high rise buildings to each side. The Adams street bridge is a mirror image of the Jackson street bridge, with hundreds of people passing over it toward Union Station. The tapping of heels amplifies on the hollow bridge surface. Within two minutes I am down the Union Station escalators and on the BNSF 10/12 platform making my way to the front of the train. After passing three quarters of the train cars, the platform is no longer lit by skylights and I proceed in darkness, the train exhaust getting thicker and the reverberating sounds from the engines getting louder. I sidestep a tiny rainstorm pouring from the ceiling onto the platform and try to stay away from the idling train engine about 10 feet to my right. Reaching the car I want, I climb up the steps, tap the button to open the door and find an open seat. The



door slides closed behind me, muting the machines outside, and I settle in for an hour's train ride home.



Over this past year I have tried my best to put together a comprehensive account of what it was like for me walking in Aurora and Chicago, and break down my experience into a few intelligible categories. But how can I sum up such complex experiences? The best place to start might be the questions that I ask myself when deciding on a walking route. Wherever I am, once the simple question of “what’s the fastest route?” is answered, two questions remain: First, what are my chances of being harassed, attacked, or hit by a car? And second, will I be able to enjoy the walk? I would prefer to avoid dangerous situations whenever possible, and I would like to be as comfortable as I can in the process. Taking a closer look at the factors that comprise these concerns should give us a better idea of what kinds of things play significant roles in shaping the pedestrian experience.

## SIGNIFICANT ELEMENTS IN THE SHAPING OF THE PEDESTRIAN EXPERIENCE

### *Safety and Vulnerability in Traffic Collisions*

Not being hit by a car is a basic concern of every pedestrian. Pedestrians that are struck by vehicles travelling at only 23 mph have a 25% chance of severe injury and a 10% chance of death (Tefft 2011). This risk grows even larger with higher impact speed, and when the pedestrian involved is a child or elderly person. With this in mind, anytime that a pedestrian crosses the path of cars, they are putting themselves at the mercy of those behind the wheel, where it is easy to kill another person. Even the most magnanimous and patient driver can fail to see a pedestrian in a crosswalk or become distracted by any number of things at the wrong moment. Consequently, all intersections, curb-cuts, and crosswalks can be stress inducing danger-zones for pedestrians. This is especially true when walking near high traffic roadways, when there are few if any other pedestrians around for support, when there is poor visibility, and

when a pedestrian has to move more slowly for one reason or another. When crossing any street or curb cut near downtown Aurora my head was on a swivel, at once trying to see every spot that a car could rapidly appear from. When one did suddenly appear and courteously or impatiently linger beside me, I knew that my life was no longer in my own hands.

### *Safety and Vulnerability in Personal Assault*

Avoiding verbal and physical attack is another safety concern for pedestrians. As Alan Bairner notes, in addition to very real dangers, many people choose not to walk because of

a number of urban myths about the possibility of danger. Most women and many men are frightened to walk city streets at night. Even here, however, the potential dangers can be exaggerated (2011:379).

When walking home from the Prisco Community Center in Aurora, through a dark and silent neighborhood, my vulnerability made me terrified of the one other person I saw on the street, and made me jump at the sight of a small animal. Whether one walks in a high crime area or not, the pang of stranger fear is multiplied in the imagination of a pedestrian when they are made aware of their vulnerability alone on an empty street (Jacobs 1961; Lofland 1998; Lupton 1999; Rundell 2014; Foster et al. 2014). Despite residential streets having slower and less traffic, pedestrians may rightly feel unsafe because, without other people around, they are vulnerable to attack from passersby.

### *Social Obstructions to Walking*

The pedestrian experience will differ based on a person's personal history and the cultural meanings that they symbolize to those around them (Seiler 2008:108). Historically, young, white, able-bodied men like myself have been free of social obstacles to walking, and this paper reflects that. However, women, people of color, members of the LGBTQ+ community, and

people with disabilities are just a few of the groups who have been and continue to be targets of harassment and violence in public places. Feeling as though your identity makes it unsafe to walk in public is an additional obstacle that, while is sometimes overlooked or grouped as a separate issue, truly works to incite self consciousness if not fear, discouraging the use of public space.

### *Walking Comfortably*

Beyond one's sense of safety, there are at least four environmental factors that contribute to a comfortable or uncomfortable walking experience. Those factors are: 1. Alert Signals, 2. Sensory Stimulation, 3. The Presence of Others, and 4. Built Accommodations.

#### *1. Alert signals*

Alert signals like loud noises (sirens, horns, engines) or strong smells (exhaust, sewage, garbage) are like flashing emergency lights to the auditory and olfactory senses. These alert signals function to produce in the pedestrian a sense of separateness with the surrounding environment for their own safety, and consequently an uncomfortable and unenjoyable walking experience (Hiss 1991). Walking through Chicago's Loop at rush hour was nearly ideal. With so many other pedestrians around me, I was hardly concerned for my safety. But, when a driver laid on their horn just a few feet beside me, or when I walked past a vented manhole cover and was smacked in the face with the stench sewage, I was put on the defensive. Whatever I was thinking about was immediately interrupted by that call for attention.

#### *2. Sensory stimulation*

Provided they are not overpowering, unpredictable sensory stimulation can contribute to a unique walking experience. In Aurora I saw ducks floating and heard birds chirping along the

Fox River. Time felt slower as I passed under a cool, dark bridge and became immersed in the sound of the rushing water. In Chicago I admired fine architecture and was entertained by the variety of people around me in the freshly rained-on city. I was nearly pushed over by a gust of wind and smacked in the face with some intense smells. With no shell separating us from the public world, we are intimately embedded in the landscape and all that might happen at any given time. This opens us to both the enjoyable and unenjoyable experiences. While being surrounded by wildlife, murals, and pleasant landscapes can be calming, the hum of tires on the road, and the intermittent whining of horns and roaring of diesel engines can make for an inescapable anxiety soundtrack for a frequent walker (Foraster et al. 2014; McAlexander, Gershon, and Neitzel 2015; Vianna, Cardoso, and Rodrigues 2015; Wang 2015; Das, Parida and Katiyar 2015).

### *3. The presence of others*

Walking in public is a social activity that shapes the pedestrian experience in at least three different ways: First, walking in the presence of others empowers pedestrians to utilize public space collectively, which helps to even out the power dynamic between cars and pedestrians when their paths intersect. It is much harder for drivers to accidentally not see 10 people entering a crosswalk than it is to not see one; and even if walkers are dispersed, their presence reminds drivers to anticipate pedestrians, not just cars. With so many other pedestrians by my side in The Loop, I was completely unconcerned about being hit by a car at intersections. I felt so safe in The Loop that I stepped into intersections without looking for cars when I noticed that the light changed or that others had begun to cross.

Second, with others nearby, a walker can become part of the crowd, unremarkable and without scrutiny from outsiders. In this case both pedestrians and those passing in vehicles have some amount of anonymity. Antithetically, empty streets contribute to feelings of discomfort for pedestrians because of the imbalance of power between a lone walker and those who drive past in vehicles. Without that privacy, pedestrians are exposed to the gaze of the anonymous drivers who have full visual access to the walker while retaining their own privacy within their vehicles. I was much more comfortable walking in The Loop than I was walking near downtown Aurora because I was part of the crowd in The Loop.

Third, the presence of others suggests opportunity for social interaction. A walking experience can be made positive or negative just by the nature of interactions with those around us. Friendly interactions: saying hello, subtly acknowledging another's presence, or even engaging in conversation are possibilities when walking wherever there are other people, and can make a walk more engaging and enjoyable. On the flip-side, there is also the possibility for negative interactions: overly aggressive soliciting, offensive remarks, or growling dogs can make a person consider a longer walking route, just to avoid those negative interactions. I felt some guilt, uncertainty, and discomfort every time I passed a panhandler or canvasser in The Loop, and was annoyed by the dogs that would bark at me as I walked by their homes in Aurora. But, those walks also exposed me to pleasant strangers.

#### *4. Built accommodations*

Built accommodations is the final factor that shapes the pedestrian experience. The Aurora and Chicago routes that I walked possess the built accommodations of sidewalks, and sometimes lights and traffic barriers, but could do more to create a comfortable pedestrian

experience. Examples of built accommodations that make walking a more comfortable experience include: institutions that are walkable distances from residences; paved sidewalks; rails, foliage, or some other buffer zone between the street and sidewalk; traffic lights with advanced pedestrian signals; traffic calming design and measures; ample seating and lighting; and water fountains. When these sorts of features are present it feels obvious that a place was designed for walkers, and walkers are welcome there. When these features are absent, it is apparent that planners have decided that pedestrians should be left to their own devices; should cut through parking lots to reach the sidewalk; should try to determine if its okay to walk by looking at the lights meant for drivers because they arrived at the intersection too late to hit the button to cross; and should sit on the ground if they are tired.

The provision of built accommodations is a material way that municipal governments can improve their walking environment. Many of the accommodations mentioned above function to empower individual pedestrians by putting them in less vulnerable situations in relation to automobile traffic. As more people take to walking in places, that individual empowerment is replaced by an even stronger collective empowerment that multiplies feelings of safety and comfort (Lavadinho and Winkin 2016).

## CONCLUSION

I began this paper by posing the question: “what sensory, social, and emotional experiences are associated with pedestrianism, and what have become of these experiences today?” As we have seen, there is a wide variety of experiences open to pedestrians, and they differ from place to place. Generally speaking, a pedestrian’s embeddedness in the landscape and exposure to uncontrollable sights, sounds, smells and contact shape the pedestrian’s sensory,

social, and emotional experience all at once. A pedestrian's embeddedness in an uncontrolled environment is particular to walkers and is basic to the understanding of the pedestrian experience. We cannot understand pedestrians the same way we understand drivers, train and bus riders, or even bicyclists because those travelers are removed from embeddedness to varying degrees by the controlled private or semi-private spaces they occupy and/or the speed at which they move through space, making environmental features less relevant.

While a pedestrian is not in control of their environment, and therefore not in control of their experience, that does not mean that all hope for them is lost. Collective action can be utilized to shape an area's built environment and further shape the experience of those who move through it slowly. Community organizations throughout the U.S. advocate the need for pedestrian friendly "complete streets" through placemaking and traffic-calming demonstrations (with and without local government consent) (Street Plans Collaborative 2017). These demonstrations encourage government agencies and others involved in the design of public space to reconsider how they approach the built environment. Many planners and developers in the U.S. have recognized the profitability and safety associated with walkable environments, and are implementing them in what is called "Traditional Neighborhood Developments" (The Town Paper 2017); some transportation engineers have taken to the curving of roads and adding of obstacles to slow traffic in streets called woonerfs (Collarte 2012); cities like Barcelona have announced superblock projects, making a number of multi-block sections of the city free of traffic over 6 mph (Agencia d'Ecologia Urbana de Barcelona 2017); and municipalities across the U.S. are regularly reducing the number or width of travel lanes in what is called "road-diets" (Federal Highway Administration 2016).



These kind of projects not only make a place more enjoyable for individuals to walk through, but may also help satisfy larger societal goals. The wide range of social and sensory experiences available to walkers, and their ability to pause, express themselves, and collaborate with others promotes a sense of shared meaning (Lofland 1998; Demerath and Levinger 2003). Additionally, the informal interactions available to pedestrians in walkable places can advance a greater sense of community, cohesiveness, social capital, and community empowerment (Tsai 2014; Aiyer et al. 2015). Alongside other efforts, these effects can help to reduce crime and propel community investment and economic development (Aiyer et al. 2015). In sum, improvements to the walking environment can have many positive social outcomes. The first step in achieving those goals is for planners, engineers, policy makers, and citizens to make an effort to understand the experience of pedestrians in their community.

## APPENDIX - A FELLOWSHIP AT HOUSING ACTION ILLINOIS

In July 2016 I began a 11-month fellowship at Housing Action Illinois (HAI) based in Chicago, IL. HAI is a non-profit coalition that works to “increase and preserve the supply of decent, affordable, accessible housing in Illinois for low-and-moderate-income households” (Housing Action Illinois 2017). HAI staff does this by developing and organizing conferences and trainings for housing professionals in the region, providing technical assistance to member agencies, managing a HUD grant intermediary for 26 housing counseling agencies, and advocating for fair housing policy statewide.

While completing my fellowship at Housing Action I came to realize how intimately tied walkability is to the quality and affordability of an area’s housing stock. Walkability is a prized community asset that contributes to housing demand, market rate costs, home values, and consequently, issues like gentrification and NIMBYism that displace low and moderate income people. However, even publications that focus on issues of walkability and street design tend to take the experience of walking for granted, and reduce it down to a binary: what is good for walkability, and what is bad. Considering my position of not owning a car, living in Aurora, and working in downtown Chicago, I used this capstone project as an opportunity to personally investigate and communicate the sociological nuances of pedestrianism in hopes of spreading a deeper understanding of what it means to be a pedestrian in America today.

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