

Queenie Clarke  
Brighton University  
Critical Readings Essay  
28.01.2020

Are elderly people the forgotten users in architectural  
and urban design?

*Site focus: Terminus Road, Eastbourne*

Word count: 3,189

## Introduction

In this essay I will use the redevelopment of Terminus Road in Eastbourne as context to my research question; are elderly people the forgotten users in architectural and urban design? I will present a review of the theoretical work of Michel De Certeau to provide an understanding of the significance of the user's performative role in an urban environment. Referring to the high percentage of elderly users in Terminus Road, I will argue why walking as a performative role should not be the core use of this space. I will compare Terminus Road to a similar 'shared space' in New Road, Brighton. By using the research study of New Road by Lesley Murray and Susan Robertson and my own observations, I will further discuss the unsuccessful aspects of urban design in Terminus Road leading to my understanding that the elderly user has become the forgotten user.

## Terminus Road, Eastbourne



*Fig 1* The Beacon, rendered image of redevelopment

Eastbourne is a town on the South Coast of England. Recently, it has had a redevelopment which has seen a new shopping centre built called "The Beacon" (Figure 1). It is situated in the town centre on Terminus Road, which has been built into a wide-open shared space.

Eastbourne is highly populated with older residents resulting in it being famously referred to as God's waiting room. The town made the headlines when it was revealed that Eastbourne "has the highest median age in England and Wales, with the typical resident [being] 71.5 years old, according to figures from the Office for National Statistics".<sup>1</sup> Although, with a closer look, this figure was taken from only a small area of the town. There are many articles online that discuss the demographic in Eastbourne. For example, Vice, a website that posts provocative articles and documentaries surrounding popular culture, wrote a piece titled "What It's Like to Be a Young Person in the Oldest Town in the UK"<sup>2</sup> which includes interviews from young people living in

---

<sup>1</sup> "Which parts of England and Wales have the oldest and youngest populations?," 2015, accessed 18th January, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2015/nov/25/england-wales-oldest-youngest-populations-eastbourne-bury>.

<sup>2</sup> "What It's Like to Be a Young Person in the Oldest Town in the UK," 2017, accessed 18th January, 2020, [https://www.vice.com/en\\_uk/article/nejmk7/what-its-like-to-be-a-young-person-in-the-oldest-town-in-the-uk](https://www.vice.com/en_uk/article/nejmk7/what-its-like-to-be-a-young-person-in-the-oldest-town-in-the-uk).

Eastbourne and their experiences living with a high percentage of older people. The interviewee answers are varied but a common sensitivity towards the elderly population of Eastbourne runs throughout the discussions. One response was, “being in Eastbourne has made me more considerate of old people in a weird kind of way”<sup>3</sup>. This provides an idea of other user’s perspectives, and the prominent role elderly people have in Eastbourne.

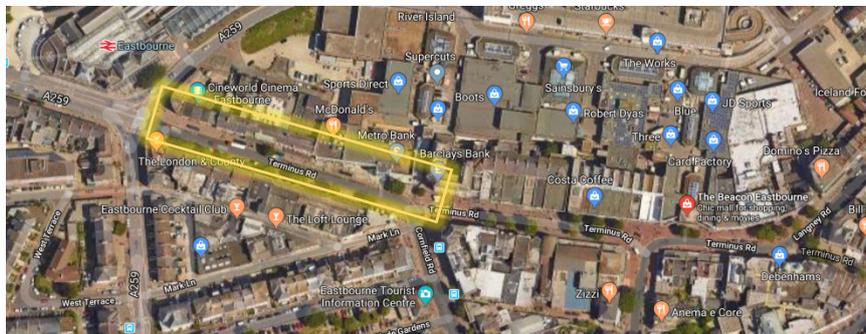


Fig 2 Highlighted area of focus on Terminus Road

Before	After

Fig 3 Table of before and after images of Terminus Road

<sup>3</sup> "What it's Like to Be a Young Person in the Oldest Town in the UK."

The “£85 million plan to transform Eastbourne Arndale Centre was approved in 2014”<sup>4</sup>, with the opening of the shopping centre in November 2018. My area of focus in this essay is a section of Terminus Road (Figure 2) that has been dramatically changed from a traditional bus lane, with bus shelters and arcades running along shop fronts to a place where the core activity is walking. Figure 3 shows before and after images of the redevelopment. The first image is starting from the west end of the focus area, followed by the center and lastly, the east end of the focus area.

### **Walking as a mode of ‘actualization’**

Considering urban design on a wider scale, there are multiple different modes of activation in public spaces that are practiced. These include running, skateboarding, cycling, driving, dancing, sitting and of course, walking. The philosopher Michel De Certeau introduces the idea that the urban environment is activated by the user through walking:

“First if it is true that a spatial order organizes an ensemble of possibilities (e.g., by a place in which one can move) and interdictions (e.g., by a wall that prevents one from going further), then the walker actualizes some of these possibilities.”<sup>5</sup>

In this paragraph, De Certeau recognises that although the built environment is not necessarily in the control of the user, only through use of the space it could become what it intended to be. This supports the comparison that architect Jonathan Hill makes when writing about literary theorist Roland Barthes:

“The architecture and user both produce architecture, the former by design, the latter by inhabitation. As architecture is designed and experienced, the user has creative a role as the architect [...] Barthes states that a text often contradicts the intentions of its author and each reader constructs a new text through the act of reading.”<sup>6</sup>

Both De Certeau and Hill acknowledge the importance of the user’s actions. Furthermore, Hill compares Barthes ideas to the way users perform in a space resulting in contradictions of the designer’s intentions. I find this idea of contradiction being an outcome from the use of a space interesting because it brings rise to questions of the designer’s perception versus reality. A prediction a designer may make of a user could be wrong or furthermore cause conflict between a space and a user. In Terminus Road, considering the types of users, it appears that the conflict is due to offering only one type of use for the space therefore limiting potential performative roles. De Certeau’s study of walking provides a basis to understand the importance of the user’s performative role within architectural and urban design.

---

<sup>4</sup> “Arndale Centre Extension,” 2014, accessed 18th January, 2020, <https://www.lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk/regeneration/arndale-centre-extension/>.

<sup>5</sup> Michel De Certeau, “Walking in the City,” in *The Practices of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), p.98.

<sup>6</sup> Jonathan Hill, “An Other Architect,” in *Occupying Architecture: Between the Architect and the User* (Oxfordshire: Routledge, 1998), p.140.

## What does walking represent, other than just function?

For De Certeau “the act of walking is to the urban system what the speech act is to language”<sup>7</sup>. By comparing these two acts, De Certeau is addressing the value of walking because without speech, what would language be and without walking what would become of the ‘urban system’? In the chapter *Walking in the City* he describes “the walking of passers-by [offering] a series of turns (tours) and detours that can be compared to “turns of phrase” or “stylistic figures.” There is a rhetoric<sup>8</sup> of walking.”<sup>9</sup> He refers to this as an “individual’s fundamental way of being in the world”<sup>10</sup>. This led me to question how this theory could be applied to an elderly user that finds it difficult to walk. If public space is where people can assert one’s identity within a wider community, then the elderly user may find this difficult in the Terminus Road redevelopment as the space’s main function is for the practice of walking.

When I start to examine walking as an act of the ‘everyday’ it amounts to the walker’s ability to have a choice within a built environment. De Certeau makes a clear connection between walking and power:

“The language of power is in itself “urbanizing,” but the city is left prey to contradictory movements that counter-balance and combine themselves outside the reach of panoptic power. The city becomes the dominant theme in political legends, but it is no longer a field of programmed and regulated operations.”<sup>11</sup>



Fig 4 Students on the youth climate strike in 2019, Terminus Road

Professor Brian Morris uses “city parks and their paths as ‘unofficial’ homosexual beats”<sup>12</sup> as an example of De Certeau’s ideas of “‘tactical’ appropriations of space [as] an instance of ‘resistance’ to an official order, [as] a

<sup>7</sup> De Certeau, "Walking in the City," p.97.

<sup>8</sup> Rhetoric: a way of speaking that conveys a style, sometimes this is to win a (political) argument. De Certeau uses this as a comparison of styles of walking. This strengthens the importance of the everyday practice; walking, and what the act can signify. De Certeau, "Walking in the City."

<sup>9</sup> De Certeau, "Walking in the City," p.100.

<sup>10</sup> De Certeau, "Walking in the City," p.100.

<sup>11</sup> De Certeau, "Walking in the City," p.95.

<sup>12</sup> "example of tactic ... would be the use of city parks and their paths as ‘unofficial’ homosexual beats, sites for cruising, a practice of walking (already an appropriation of an official style, namely the police on patrol) and use of a particular space that runs against its

victory of the weak over the strong.”<sup>13</sup> This presents walking as an act of defiance and could be compared to many practices of walking such as protest marches (Figure 4).

### Walking as an act of the ‘everyday’

The way in which people practice walking could look very similar but for the individual, feel very different. A woman walking on her own in a quiet area of a city at 11pm may feel very different to man on his own in the same position. In the case of my research question; a twenty-two-year-old person crossing the road to get to the grocery store may feel very different to an eighty-two-year-old person. As an urban designer these are significant factors that should be considered during the designing of a space because an ordinary act, such as walking, can represent a multitude of issues across generations. Professor Simon During refers to these issues and states:

“...it is important to remember the obvious point that everyday life is not everywhere the same, despite those modernizing effects of uniformity that Lefebvre was obsessed by”<sup>14</sup>

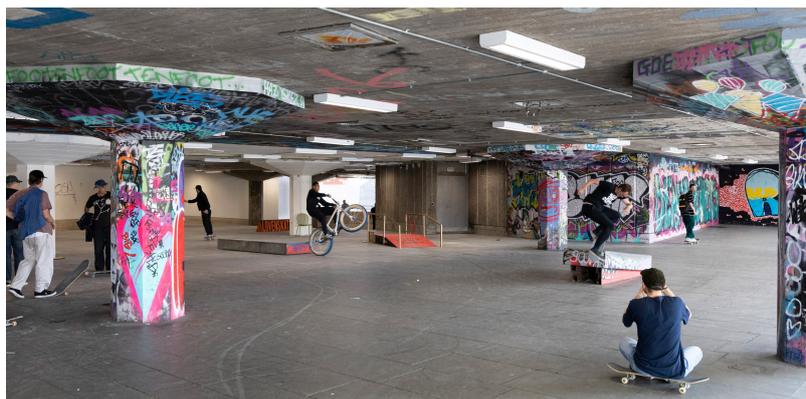


Fig 5 Undercroft skatepark alongside the Thames, London

The philosopher and sociologist Henri Lefebvre, similarly to De Certeau wrote about everyday life. He had a focus in “rhythmanalysis”<sup>15</sup> which linked to public space as he observed; “...social spaces are given rhythm by the gestures which are produced within them, and which produce them”<sup>16</sup>. The type of rhythm that is being enabled by a public space can have an impact on the users within the space. Furthermore, it can alter what type of user the space attracts. For example, Jonathan Hill refers to a space situated alongside the Thames in London where the nature of the space has attracted skateboarders to practice<sup>17</sup> (Figure 5). The rhythm is produced by

---

dominant and ‘proper’ heteronormative construction” Brian Morris, “What we talk about when we talk about ‘Walking in the City,’” *Cultural Studies*, no. 5 (2004): p.678.

<sup>13</sup> Morris, “What we talk about when we talk about ‘Walking in the City,’” p.678.

<sup>14</sup> Simon During, “Introduction,” in *The Cultural Studies Reader* (Routledge, 2017), p.21.

<sup>15</sup> Henri Lefebvre, *Rhythmanalysis: Space, Time and Everyday Life* (London: Continuum, 2004).

<sup>16</sup> Henri Lefebvre, *Critiques of Everyday Life*, vol. 1 (New York: Verso, 1991), p.40.

<sup>17</sup> “In London the concrete undercrofts to the cultural institutions alongside the Thames are cold, dark, uneven and seemingly useless. It is hard to imagine the purpose for which they were conceived. However, they are constantly occupied by skateboarders because the ramped forms and ready audience are so appropriate to the sport” Hill, “An Other Architect,” p.141.

the skateboarders in response to the space. However, a rhythm that is enticing for one user, may not be for another.

### Walking as an act of exclusionary design



Fig 6 bench on Terminus Road



Fig 7 Terminus Road

After looking closely at the 'rhetoric' of walking and how it activates the urban environment and emphasises the symbolism of walking within the urban environment, I have taken this into consideration within the context of Terminus Road. The road, with little comfortable street furniture (Figure 6) and no shelter (Figure 7), offers the users to simply walk through, therefore determining a particular rhythm to the road. I believe that By TP Bennett architects designing it this way, it has excluded the elderly user. There are different values in the practice of walking including giving a user a feeling of control, allowing flexibility and freedom when designing your own route through urban spaces and providing self-dependency. Therefore, Terminus road is at risk of only allowing people of certain ages and ability to have access to these values through walking.

A further way to consider the consequences of this space is not only the effects it has on elderly people, but on other people's perspectives. By the exclusion of elderly users in Terminus Road, there is less chance of these users being visible in the space. If they become less visible in the community, it could lead to the elderly user being forgotten across multiple contexts. For example, in future redevelopments or even simple social interactions. It is also important to acknowledge that throughout this essay I focus on the elderly user, but the exclusion of this user therefore excludes other users, such as disabled people.

### Comparing 'shared spaces': Terminus Road versus New Road

Sociology Professor Lesley Murray and Principle Lecturer in Urban Design Susan Robertson raise an important issue that "there appear[s] to be few programmes that attempt to address age segregation in public outdoor spaces."<sup>18</sup> Murray recognizes "certain spaces are assigned to specific generations"<sup>19</sup>. Instead of focusing on

---

<sup>18</sup> Lesley Murray and Susan Robertson, "Sharing mobile space across generations," in *Intergenerational Mobilities: relationality, age and lifecourse*, ed. Lesley Murray and Susan Robertson (Oxfordshire: Routledge, 2017), p.94.

what users are forgotten in the design of Terminus Road, another approach would be to understand what specific users the space is 'assigned' to. I would argue that the space is assigned to users with a commercial value given that it offers people the opportunity to walk past shops and window shop.



Fig 8 Public bench on New Road

Murray and Robertson carried out a 24-hour research project based on the bench in New Road, Brighton (Figure 8). This road is a shared space, designed by architect Jan Gehl<sup>20</sup>. Sharing a space means traffic can use the road, there are no traditional divides of pavement to road therefore allowing the collapse of the hierarchy of pedestrian and vehicle. Murray and Robertson described shared space as a "space in which movements are slowed, as automobile movements are slowed".<sup>21</sup> Through their study they wanted to question "what the slowing of movement in shared spaces reveals about the use of space by different generations".<sup>22</sup> They used the ideas of "rhythmanalysis"<sup>23</sup> introduced by Lefebvre as an approach to analyse and detect the connections between the rhythms of age with the rhythms of slowness and speed. This allowed them to study how the intersection overlapped in public space<sup>24</sup>.



Fig 9 Bench and café outside seating area, New Road



Fig 10 Pub outside seating area, New Road

<sup>19</sup> "As certain spaces are assigned to specific generations – spaces of education to children and young people and spaces of the home to older people – so too mobile spaces become marked by generation, from skate parks to vintage car rallies. It is the intersections within generations and between generation and space that produce particular conflicts and the potential for social transformation" Lesley Murray, "Introduction: conceptualising intergenerational mobilities," in *Intergenerational Mobilities: Relationality, Age and Lifecourse*, ed. Lesley Murray and Susan Robertson (Oxfordshire: Routledge, 2017), p.5.

<sup>20</sup> New Road was the first shared space in England designed by architect Jan Gehl opened to the public in 2010.

<sup>21</sup> Murray and Robertson, "Sharing mobile space across generations," p.94.

<sup>22</sup> Murray and Robertson, "Sharing mobile space across generations." p.94.

<sup>23</sup> Lefebvre, *Rhythmanalysis: Space, Time and Everyday Life*.

<sup>24</sup> Murray and Robertson, "Sharing mobile space across generations," p.92.

Through the documentation of the bench in New Road, Brighton, which “involved observing [...] and carrying out a small number of interviews with the bench’s settlers as well as observations of social interactions”<sup>25</sup> Robertson and Murray gained an insight into how people of different ages and backgrounds engaged with the space. Two elements of this project interested me the most, the first being the simplicity of the needs from a man named Sean who explained “Well because you get to my age, you need something to prop you up otherwise you fall over [...] But I would prefer a bench with a back to it because, you know it’s more comfortable to sit”.<sup>26</sup> Secondly, in contrast, are the more complex issues that the bench exposes. An interviewee named Shona said, “you can’t make the benches too comfortable because people like to sleep on them so it’s getting that balance right between functional and not a bed for a tramp”.<sup>27</sup>

This research study outlines issues further than the impact that the bench in New Road has on elderly people but also widens the context into other users and their potential impact on the space. The interviewee Shona makes a crucial point of why benches are not made extremely comfortable and for an area such as Terminus Road this could have been a reason not to add shelter and appropriate seating. This supports my argument that elderly people become a forgotten user, not necessarily by a direct choice from the designer but it can be a result of aiming to prevent other communities or behavior in the urban environment.



*Fig 11 Church steps being used for selling furniture, New Road*

The bench is not the only element of the shared space that offers rest points, places for shelter or spaces that provide opportunities for social interactions on New Road. The theatre and restaurant arcade, the cafés (Figure 9) and pub (Figure 11) outside seating areas and the church steps (Figure 11) all play a part in making this an active and multi-user friendly space. When comparing this to Terminus Road, it strikes me that there are not only physical differences, but other senses are also affected. Due to Terminus Road not having outside seating areas for cafes and restaurants there is little smell of food and drink. Also, due to small public seating there is a

<sup>25</sup> Murray and Robertson, "Sharing mobile space across generations," p.95.

<sup>26</sup> Murray and Robertson, "Sharing mobile space across generations," p.97.

<sup>27</sup> Murray and Robertson, "Sharing mobile space across generations," p.100.

lack in varied sounds, other than buses and passers-by. There is no murmur of conversations. This is not a place to stop and it is definitely not a place for people to spend time, especially for elderly users. It is a shared space, but I am not sure who is taking part in sharing it.

## Conclusion

I think the experiences we have within urban design can be seen as a projection of how we value different communities. Through the understanding of Michel De Certeau's ideas surrounding walking, I agree with the value of the practice within public spaces. I agree that ambiguous spaces, such as the Undercoft skatepark, have importance in our urban environment to allow for users to create their own purpose for a space. However, I do not see how an elderly person fits in to these types of ideas and designs and for Terminus Road that is a crucial demographic representation within the space that is missing. New Road is a shared space that demonstrates success for multi-generational users, but it would be inappropriate to suggest that a similar design should be introduced to Terminus Road. This would be because the locations of the roads are so different, for example, Terminus Road is in a suburban town whereas Brighton is in a dynamic city.

The issue of elderly users not being represented in communities goes beyond Terminus Road in Eastbourne. Projects such as "New Old"<sup>28</sup> which was presented at the Design Museum examined "design solutions for an ageing population"<sup>29</sup>. The exhibition had great examples of new technologies to help the elderly user however, as previously said "there appear[s] to be few programmes that attempt to address age segregation in public outdoor spaces."<sup>30</sup> There is a need for wider investigation into this so we can enable elderly users to have higher value, inclusivity and ownership in our public environment and not become forgotten in architectural and urban design.

---

<sup>28</sup> "Review - New Old: Designing for our Future Selves," 2017, accessed 16th December, 2019, <https://www.designweek.co.uk/issues/9-15-january-2017/review-new-old-designing-future-selves/>.

<sup>29</sup> "Review - New Old: Designing for our Future Selves."

<sup>30</sup> Murray and Robertson, "Sharing mobile space across generations," p.94.

## Bibliography

- "Arndale Centre Extension." 2014, accessed 18th January, 2020, <https://www.lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk/regeneration/arndale-centre-extension/>.
- De Certeau, Michel. "Walking in the City." In *The Practices of Everyday Life*, 91-110. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984.
- During, Simon. "Introduction." In *The Cultural Studies Reader*, 1-30: Routledge, 2017.
- "What It's Like to Be a Young Person in the Oldest Town in the Uk." 2017, accessed 18th January, 2020, [https://www.vice.com/en\\_uk/article/nejmk7/what-its-like-to-be-a-young-person-in-the-oldest-town-in-the-uk](https://www.vice.com/en_uk/article/nejmk7/what-its-like-to-be-a-young-person-in-the-oldest-town-in-the-uk).
- Hill, Jonathan. "An Other Architect." In *Occupying Architecture: Between the Architect and the User*, 136-59. Oxfordshire: Routledge, 1998.
- Lefebvre, Henri. *Critiques of Everyday Life*. Vol. 1, New York: Verso, 1991.
- . *Rhythmanalysis: Space, Time and Everyday Life*. London: Continuum, 2004.
- "Review - New Old: Designing for Our Future Selves." 2017, accessed 16th December, 2019, <https://www.designweek.co.uk/issues/9-15-january-2017/review-new-old-designing-future-selves/>.
- Morris, Brian. "What We Talk About When We Talk About 'Walking in the City'." *Cultural Studies*, no. 5 (2004): 675-97.
- Murray, Lesley. "Introduction: Conceptualising Intergenerational Mobilities." In *Intergenerational Mobilities: Relationality, Age and Lifecourse*, edited by Lesley Murray and Susan Robertson, 1-7. Oxfordshire: Routledge, 2017.
- Murray, Lesley, and Susan Robertson. "Sharing Mobile Space across Generations." In *Intergenerational Mobilities: Relationality, Age and Lifecourse*, edited by Lesley Murray and Susan Robertson, 91-104. Oxfordshire: Routledge, 2017.
- "Which Parts of England and Wales Have the Oldest and Youngest Populations?", 2015, accessed 18th January, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2015/nov/25/england-wales-oldest-youngest-populations-eastbourne-bury>.

## Image Sources

Figure 1: <https://tpbennett.com/projects/arndale-centre/>

Figure 2: <https://www.google.com/maps/@50.7682791,0.2836637,477m/data=!3m1!1e3>

Figure 3:

Before images (top to bottom):

1. <https://www.eastbourneherald.co.uk/news/more-pictures-eastbourne-pubs-which-are-no-more-991729>
2. <https://www.geograph.org.uk/photo/2633980>
3. <https://www.geograph.org.uk/photo/2633984>

After images (top to bottom):

1. Photographed by Author (Queenie Clarke)
2. Photographed by Author (Queenie Clarke)
3. Photographed by Author (Queenie Clarke)

Figure 4: <https://www.eastbourneherald.co.uk/news/eastbourne-youth-climate-strike-students-march-through-town-call-action-73230>

Figure 5: <https://www.dezeen.com/2019/08/08/undercroft-skatepark-southbank-centre-london-feilden-clegg-bradley-studios/>

Figure 6: Photographed by Author (Queenie Clarke)

Figure 7: <http://community.mildrenconstruction.co.uk/eastbourne-town-centre-newsletter-5/>

Figure 8: Photographed by Author (Queenie Clarke)

Figure 9: Photographed by Author (Queenie Clarke)

Figure 10: Photographed by Author (Queenie Clarke)

Figure 11: <https://danicainteriors.com/2016/08/26/upcycled-hour-live-brighton-july-2016/>