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Thematic Section:  
*Motion and Emotion*

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## **Introduction: Studying Junctures of Motion and Emotion**

By Ann Werner

This thematic section of *Culture Unbound* is concerned with two concepts. We argue that these two are indicating important empirical fields of study: practices of movement and feelings, their place and relevance in cultures and societies. The concepts in question – motion and emotion – are also representing theoretical stands in contemporary cultural research and they have been providing inspiration for developing methodology and performing research. As theory and method the concepts have been widely discussed and used over the past decades, in sociology as well as anthropology, gender studies and cultural studies, just to mention a few. Here the contributing scholars aim to bring motion and emotion together. The idea for the effort came out of the first plenary of *On the move*, the ACSIS conference in Norrköping 2013. Presently, in late 2014, when this work is in the editing phase the importance of considering what intersections of motion and emotion can tell us about power dimensions' roles in human lives is an important feature in all four articles. While power dimensions and subjectivity is addressed differently – affected by orders of age, nation, gender or class – the thematic section considers critical studies of contemporary society and culture. Since both movement and feeling have been understood as central for constellations of power and subjects (Ahmed 2004: 107; Cresswell 2011: 551) motion and emotion must be understood as connected to a global system of relations and injustice.

The thematic section about 'Motion and emotion' is accordingly based on a dialogue between these two concepts: a dialogue where all contributors through analysis of ethnographic material acknowledge the intersection of motion and emotion in mundane cultural practices. The contributors focus on mundane forms of mobility and emotionality that are easily overlooked, taken for granted or may seem hard to verbalize. To such undercurrents of what is perceived as ordinary the authors bring larger questions about contemporary culture. .

### **Mobility Studies and Affect Theory**

First, the contributors take their starting point in the rapidly expanding field of study called 'new mobility studies' (Cresswell & Merriman 2011) researching the processes of travel, physical movement and transportation from a cultural perspective. In new mobility studies physical movement can be transnational as well as local. Besides emphasizing the movement of people and things (Merriman

2011), mobility studies have also paid interest to interplay between movement and contemporary digital communication technologies that are making society increasingly mobile (Sheller & Urry 2006: 3). Movement has historically been charged with positive values: moving forward, making progress, or conquering new geographical areas. And even today travel continues to generally be seen as a positive and to be associated mainly with voluntary touristic travel – not movement of poor guest workers, or the displacement and incarceration of people by force. Therefore investigating travel broadly – not only voluntary travel – lead to questions about power imbalances, inequality and value.

Johan Urry (2002) has argued that travel as physical movement upholds importance in a time of advanced communication technology because of the material body's place in travel. Urry argues that modes of co-presence in bodily travel are emotional, in different ways (Urry 2002: 271), hereby connecting a certain kind of mobility to emotional experiences. Feelings, emotions and affects have been buzz words within the realm cultural studies for quite some time now. Affect theory is a broad conceptualization of the studies of human feelings in the body, in discourse and in social relations. Brian Massumi distinguishes between the affective sensation of feeling in the body – comprised of sensation and movement – and the discursive expression of emotion: that is symbolically charged by language (Massumi 2002: 28). This thematic section is mainly concerned with the latter: emotions, even though emotions are always charged with bodily affects. Thus, when I use the term affect theory I include interest in capturing fleeting feelings, changing atmospheres or emotional reactions (Brennan 2004) as well as the circulation of emotions in culture (Ahmed 2004). Within the affective turn scholars have argued that focusing on meaning – within discourse theory and other linguistic theories in the humanities – without considering feeling is a partial description of human life and culture. Affect theory can be understood as a turn away from the dominance of linguistics in cultural studies, but in the affective turn different theoretical stands co-exist (Koivunen 2010: 9). Koivunen argues that both individualistic and anti-individualistic frameworks for affect are present in feminist theorizing on affect and emotion. The work done on affect in feminist research has in many ways shaped the wider discussion in the affective turn. One of the more used and quoted feminist scholars, Sara Ahmed, asks what emotions do: how do they shape subjects and the world (Ahmed 2004: 4). By this take on emotions Ahmed is linking individual human feeling to structural questions of power and politics. This linking is also central for all contributors in this thematic section.

In order to understand motion and emotion together we are interested in the ways in which motion and emotion work together in people's lives. What moves us? And who is being moved by what? We are asking questions about what mobility does, for travelers as well as foreign nationals entering a country (Mountz 2010, 2011: 266), what ideas and objects emotions in movement orient

us toward (Ahmed 2010) and who/what our affects connect us to, or divide us from (Brennan 2004: 94). In order to bring questions of power and the meaning of movement and feelings to our attention the individual contributions discusses for example transnational drug trade and masculinity as well as feelings among children who commute between families. Emotions often work to energize actions and relations, where strong emotional reactions like boredom, anger or passion can be registered when something important is at stake. At times movement and travel induces strong feelings since movement can realize change. The opposite is also true: strong emotions may lead to movement, between continents as well as homes. The authors, therefore, together argue that choosing to combine the study of movement and feelings is a productive effort for contemporary cultural research.

## **Ethnographic Methods**

The individual articles all analyze movement, emotional and physical, in the mundane exemplified in practices like commuting, returning home, listening to music in public space and packing one's bag. All four authors are interested in what motion and emotions do - and all have based their articles on ethnographic field work. Method is thus another area bringing the authors together in this section and the methods used illustrate the diversity in contemporary ethnography. Ethnographic methodology is particularly suitable for researching cultural practices as it is a qualitative method shaped by reflexivity, situated-ness and an interest in peoples' experiences (Davies 1999). Methods of participant observation, interviews, autoethnographic field notes and memory work as well as screen shots, video recordings and films are all part of shaping the material and analysis in the four articles. The empirical material and the collection of it is consciously put to the forefront by the authors and is demonstrating to the reader how motion and emotion take shape and shapes our life and culture. By our methodological efforts we strive to not only theorize movement and feelings but empirically and analytically show its importance and consequences in peoples' lives.

## **The Contributions**

In the first article Orvar Löfgren considers two different types of travelers: tourists and commuters and their different moods. Using both ethnographic observations and examples from films depicting tourists and commuters he discusses how these two groups – while often overlapping – have come to be viewed so differently. He explores how affect and materiality work together as commuters and tourists organize their travels, experience the surroundings and fellow passengers. The focus is on the ways people learn to be travelers, often unconsciously establishing

routines and competences as well as perceptions of others. It is precisely this taken for granted nature of such skills and habits which may hide ideas of power and hierarchy in the seemingly trivial quotidian. Löfgren, furthermore, explores affects at work, in crowded commuter trains, busy stations or in the long waits for delayed connections, showing that affects not only always have a context but also a history.

The second article is concerned with mobile music listening in the age of streaming and Ann Werner discusses how listening to music while moving through public space orients the listener. The contribution is based on autoethnographic material collected by the author while commuting to work and going for walks and runs while listening to two music streaming apps: Spotify and VKontakte. Feminist theory on space and emotions is employed in order to understand how feelings and movement may orient the subject through mobile music listening. The apps' functions and structure are addressed while the main focus of the article is the emotions of mobile music streaming. Focusing on happiness and anger, the orientation of the subject, as well as the interplay between public space, music and technology the subject is studied. Werner argues that cultural consumption through mobile media always must be understood as situated in space and as co-constructor of subjectivities shaped by for example gender.

Children's perspectives have rarely been represented in new mobility studies, but in the third contribution Ida Wentzel Winther changes that. She researches children travelling between homes and have on 'field walks' followed and filmed her participants when they pack, travel and unpack in their different homes as a result of their parents' divorce. Winther describes how these children handle the condition that they commute between homes, parents and siblings. She discusses how they practically, emotionally and socially navigate in this changeable landscape, and focus on routines, coping strategies, gaps that occurs as well as the feeling of being dispensable and a guest. Over and over again the children have to re-arrive, re-establish and re-figure themselves and this is both time-consuming and laborious. Commuting, in Winther's article, becomes a mixture of attachment and fragmentations in a grid of more or less stable connection lines.

Henrik Vigh studies, in the fourth and final article, the return of deported young men to Guinea-Bissau. His article looks at the relation between social and physical movement in these men's lives. More specifically, he follows a handful of young men as they seek to escape their marginal position in Guinea-Bissau by migrating though connecting with the cocaine trade that currently ties Guinea-Bissau to the underbelly of European society. However, Vigh's article does not just look at the feeling of hope that arises by gaining mobility but equally investigate the despair produced by being unwillingly returned to Bissau as a deportee. In doing so the article shows how emotions may take a more enduring shape than what we commonly perceive, and how emotion come to be ingrained

in physical and collective bodies as a mood directly linked to a position of marginality and social un-substantiation.

**Ann Werner** is a senior lecturer in Gender Studies at Södertörn University in Sweden. She holds a Ph D in Culture Studies and has previously researched for example teenage girls' uses of music and dance videos on YouTube. Her current project is concerned with music consumption online and her work in the field of feminist cultural studies combines gender and media theory. E-mail: [ann.werner@sh.se](mailto:ann.werner@sh.se)

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## **Modes and Moods of Mobility: Tourists and Commuters**

By Orvar Löfgren

### **Abstract**

What can we learn from comparing different modes and moods of travel, among, for example, tourists and commuters? This paper contrasts these two very different kinds of mobility, and the ways in which they organise both motion and emotion. It is not only a question about how people interact with various systems of transport, but also how materialities and affects work together. An important topic is the question of how people acquire travelling skills. How do they learn to be a tourist or a commuter, to handle a train ride, navigate a transit space, or interact with strangers?

A good reason to contrast commuters and tourists is also because they have often been studied within very different research paradigms. How can these different research traditions be put into a dialogue with each other, and help to develop methods for capturing the often elusive ways in which motion and emotion work together?

**Keywords:** Tourism, commuting, mobility, affect, materiality, ethnography

## Itinerant Sensations

Reunions. Farewells. A smile. Tears. Anger. Irritation. Anxiety. Boredom. Stillness.  
Akhila sees them all. The train begins to move.

In Anita Nair's novel *Ladies Coupé* (2003:2), we meet Akhila, middle-aged and single, who dreams about travel as an escape. She keeps going down to the nearby busy Bangalore Cantonment station. She is fascinated by the station life and the strange mix of motions and emotions that make up its special atmosphere; the irritated and stressed commuters fighting for standing room in packed trains; resigned passengers waiting for the Mumbai Express that never arrives; holiday travellers in high spirits leaving the city for a spell by the sea; young European backpackers in search of adventure, clinging to their copies of the *Lonely Planet*.

Akhila feels a "queer itinerant sensation" in her body as she moves among the platform crowds. What kinds of "itinerant sensations" can we discover by comparing different modes and moods of travel – for example, among tourists and commuters? In the following, I will contrast these two different kinds of travel, and the ways in which they organise mobility. I am drawing here on an ongoing project about "travel fever"; a study of travel infrastructures, from suitcases and hotel rooms to airports (see Löfgren 2015a and c). My comparative framework is not only about contrasting two different kinds of mobility. I have chosen them because these two groups, the tourists and the commuters, have been studied within different research traditions, using differing theoretical and methodological tools. Two research traditions, each with their strengths and weaknesses when it comes to trying to analyze the moods and modes of travel. What kinds of analytical dialogues can come out of this?

My own background is in the tradition of cultural analysis in European Ethnology, an approach that, to some extent, has moved in parallel with the development of non-representational theory in British cultural geography (see Ehn et al 2015; Anderson & Harrison 2010; and Vannini 2014). This latter tradition combines several theoretical and ethnographic perspectives and should, rather, be termed "more than representational theory". Like much ethnological analysis during recent years, it focuses less on codes, representations and discourses and more on everyday practices and skills, as well as sensibilities and affect (drawing as it does theories of materiality, performance and affect). In many ways, it is grounded in the phenomenological interest in beginning an analysis with "the how" rather than "the why" of social action. It means focusing on the constant making and remaking of everyday life. Methodologically, it is very much a bricolage approach, inviting dialogues with art, popular culture and fiction. The result is a strong interweaving of theory and methodological experimentation, by finding new ways of doing ethnography and often learning from approaches outside academia; from artists, for example, who are experimenting with

destabilising or provoking everyday life (see the discussion in Thrift 2008). I will combine this bricolage technique with Doreen Massey's (2005) evocative concept of "throwntogetherness", the ways in which a situation or a setting is made through the mixes and confrontations of very different elements: animated by affects, bodies in movement, objects, fantasies and histories.

As a starting point for my discussion, I have chosen a setting in which tourists and commuters are constantly confronted with each other: the rail link between southern Sweden and Copenhagen in Denmark, a result of the long bridge that links the two nations across the Sound, or the Öresund strait. I have followed this commuting route since the bridge opened in 2000, comparing it with earlier travel patterns by ferry. (I have been involved in several interdisciplinary projects on the creation and development of this mega-project and the commuting life it has produced; for an overview of this, see Löfgren 2015b). The Öresund link is an example of a connection that mixes many functions and different kinds of passengers.

I draw here not only on existing studies and my own ethnographic work, but also on art projects, fiction and popular culture. Motion and emotion are strong themes in fiction and other media, especially if you are out to catch the elusive interweaving of modes and moods in travel, which are often hard to verbalise. A genre such as film may open new analytical insights; films can compress or stretch out time and space, they can distort, enlarge or miniaturise themes, and make material realities stand out as important props or mode-setters. Travel is attractive to filmmakers as it provides a narrative structure for capturing emotional conflicts and transformations. Motion carries the story forward; emotion energises it. It is, thus, no surprise that the world of film is crowded with travellers of all kinds: mysterious young ladies in the dining car, wild chases through railway stations, misty farewells at airports, people falling in love on commuter trains or fighting in the holiday car – an abundance of favourite tropes and well-established clichés.

There is an ongoing discussion on how film material may complement more traditional ethnography in, for example, capturing moods and local atmospheres (Blom Hansen & Verkaaik 2009; Adey et al 2012:170). In a discussion of trains in film, to give one example, Graham Fuller (2008:38) has pointed out how train scenes "are claustrophobic microcosms that intensify class conflicts, criminal urges and sexual tensions". Film also illustrates what aspects of travel are cinematic, or not. It is no accident that films about tourists or travellers outnumber films about commuters, probably at a rate of about fifty-to-one. How can a moving train, an airport lounge or a ride in a car be used as a co-actor? What happens when a boring commute is turned into a romance, or a holiday trip into a disaster?

There is another reason for bringing media material into the discussion. Travellers bring their own emotional luggage on a journey; in their travel

experiences, memories, media images, tunes or texts interact with the actual landscape, a special kind of throwntogetherness. Jenny Diski (2002) looks at the vistas of the Western USA from the train window, and is carried back to the matinées of westerns that she went to see in her childhood. Holidaymakers awestruck in front of a sunset are pre-staged through thousands of postcards, film scenes and advertisements. For the tourist, Manhattan looks so familiar, just like it does in the movies. There is a constant overlaying of images occurring here; and with the new infrastructure of mobile media, this mixing of experiences becomes even more marked, as the traveller's gaze moves between the smartphone screen and the travel environment.

## Two Research Traditions

The cultural analysis of tourist modes of travel has a long history with a strong focus on the sense of adventure, and the exciting sights and events – in contrast to the trivialities of everyday life at home. “Getting away from it all” has often been the framework for understanding tourist life. From a theoretical point of view, there has been a tradition of focusing on the semiotic and the symbolic, but by the late 1990s there was some critique of the research perspectives that saw tourists as passive consumers who were all eyes and no bodies (Franklin 2014). This led to a stronger emphasis on agency: on tourists as producers of their own experiences, which also brought a new emphasis on the role of the other senses, often with a phenomenological approach; an analytical shift that can be illustrated by comparing John Urry's classic study *The Tourist Gaze* from 1990 with the later, newer edition *The Tourist Gaze 3.0* (Urry & Larsen 2011). This shift led to studies of the ways in which bodies in motion shape a landscape, how a heritage sight is attuned by different affects or a fiesta is shared through Facebook. What kinds of tourist skills, competences and forms of multitasking have been developed in such processes?

There is a strong tradition of using a historical perspective in tourism studies, of mapping the ways in which sights and settings are institutionalised, from life at the beach or in the hotel to the staging of city walks and rural excursions. This kind of historical perspective has given us a fairly good understanding of how people learn to be tourists, how expectations are produced, and movements choreographed and emotions verbalised. Tourism studies is a very interdisciplinary world, so broad that it has often resulted in a somewhat inward-looking research community. There has been a clear risk of insularity, of tourism becoming a world of its own and not just one form of mobility among many. Studies of commuting have quite a different history. For a long time, the field was dominated by transport studies and logistics, the measuring and mapping of the movements of commuters in urban settings and the study of transport infrastructures. The focus was on flows rather than on commuting as an

experience. Some years ago the Danish sociologist Henrik Dahl (2008) complained that there were few studies of commuter life that explored the seemingly mundane and trivial commuter experiences. He argued that researchers still lacked a language and conceptual framework to capture activities and experiences such as sharing a train compartment, buying a ticket or waiting in line.

Today, this is no longer the case. In recent years, the development of the interdisciplinary tradition often labelled “the new mobility studies” has taken up precisely this challenge: how do we produce good and dense ethnographies of the daily commute? As Tim Cresswell and Peter Merriman (2012:5) have pointed out, the new mobility studies have looked very much at mobility as an embodied practice, but also at moorings – the infrastructures of railway stations, airports, highways (in a sense continuing the old interest, but in totally new ways). The recent *Handbook of Mobilities* (Adey et al 2014) illustrates this rapid expansion; such a handbook with its emphasis on the cultural and social organisation of mobility would have been unthinkable a decade earlier.

The new mobility studies also presents a changing theoretical landscape: it is mobility seen through new analytical lenses, from Actor Network Theory, to Post-Phenomenology and Non-Representational Theory. What unites them is an interest in the ethnography of the everyday, often with a focus on the dimensions of affect, materiality and sensibilities. A basic approach in the new mobility studies is mobility as practice (words such as craft, art of travel, skills, rhythms and competences are frequent). In a sense, what has been called “the material turn” and “the affective turn” have helped to create these foci. The challenge here has been to look for the details, to capture the ways in which routines are made, challenged or naturalised into invisibility. In the new commuter ethnographies, there is an eye for small details, body movements, micro-rituals and the constant interaction with the material surroundings, which tourism research could benefit from.

The new commuter studies may help to develop a focus on the things that are too often forgotten in tourist research – the trivialities of tourist travel, or as Johan Larsen (2008) put it: the need to de-exoticise tourist travel. Here, I am thinking about situations such as waiting in line, delayed flights, bad weather, wearing ill-fitting walking shoes, carrying an overloaded travel bag or being lost in a railway station (see Löfgren 2008b). How do such seemingly banal and insignificant objects as suitcases, train seats, iPhones, waiting rooms and malfunctioning ticket machines shape travel experiences, and what kinds of skills are needed to handle this material world?

Recent years have seen more exchanges between these two fields of research. A good example is the work of Tim Edensor and Adrian Franklin (see for example Edensor and Falconer 2011, Franklin 2014), but the dialogue needs to be evolved further. Unlike in tourism studies, there is still strikingly little historical

analysis of the making and remaking of different commuter worlds. Here, I mean not only cultural history but also the kind of analytical historical perspective for provoking or destabilising the present that is found in Michel Foucault's genealogical approach to objects "without history". (Foucault 1977). Such an analysis will assist in an understanding of how commuter skills – from moving in crowds, to understanding time tables or negotiating close encounters with strangers – now taken for granted but which were once open and undecided options, slowly turned into historically conditioned competences and conventions. In this process, they often become invisible.

## **Proximities**

One of us on that sliding subway train was clearly not heading for work. You could have known it immediately by the size of his bag. And you can always tell a fugitive by his vagrant expression of smugness; he seems to have a secret in his mouth...

These are the words of Paul Theroux (1989:1), surrounded by morning commuters in a Boston train. He is observing their commuter habits, the ways they don't look out of the window at the all too familiar landscape, or how they avoid glancing at their fellow passengers. But Theroux himself is not one of them, he is the fugitive with a secret. This is his first lap of a journey by train from Boston to Patagonia in southernmost South America. For him, this mundane commuter carriage is the starting point for an exciting adventure – everything looks different when you start a grand journey; even dreary old Boston is no longer the same.

Sitting on the Öresund train, squeezed in between tourists and daily commuters on their way to Copenhagen from Sweden, I am reminded of Theroux's opening lines. The route I will be using as a narrative structure runs from Helsingborg on the Swedish side, through a number of towns and cities, over the bridge to Copenhagen airport, on to Copenhagen Central Station and then along through the Copenhagen suburbs to the end of the line, the town of Elsinore. The journey takes about two hours, but most passengers only use part of it, which means that during these two hours the train presents rather different travelscapes with a changing mix of passengers. There are international travellers going to Copenhagen airport, tourists and day-trippers crossing the bridge for sightseeing or shopping in either Denmark or Sweden. Students commute between different campuses along the line, and commuters living or working on the other side of the bridge are on their way to or from work, while suburban commuters are just making the short trip into the nearby city centres. They all inhabit the same space, but bring along with them different modes and moods of travelling. There is a parallel here to Colin Syme's (2012) discussion of mobile choreographies in his study of rail commuters in Sydney, and also to Tom O'Dell's (2009) studies of commuting in this part of southern Sweden.

My stops on this journey will deal with different aspects of mobility. I will start with the making and unmaking of moods and atmospheres, move on to the social life in train carriages and then to railway stations as transit spaces. Along the journey, I will bring in a few Hollywood movies for some contrastive material.

## **Mood Work**

I am on the train bound from Lund to Copenhagen, happily reading. I love reading and writing on the train when I am commuting; there is something about the atmosphere, the rhythm, the sounds and the landscape gliding past that produces a creative mood. Ideas come to me in a sudden rush, but now something disturbs this state of meditative bliss. The train slows down suddenly and comes to a halt – in the middle of nowhere. The railway carriage turns silent, a moment of an almost meditative mood while people wait for an explanation from the loudspeaker system. “We are waiting for a green signal”, is the message that is repeated every so often as time moves on. Slowly the irritation inside the carriage builds up, people feel an urge to communicate their frustration to others, and begin to look at their fellow passengers and make wry faces, sighing or shrugging their shoulders, making some comments. Many turn to their mobile phones in a need to have an audience and complain loudly about being stuck on the train “again!” “I hate this train”, says a girl next to me into her phone. Some commuters start calling their office to say that they might be late. Tourists nervously check their flight departure times. I notice how I am influenced by the mounting atmosphere of irritation on the train; I try to stick to my book and hold on to the earlier feeling of bliss, but no, my body is invaded by the collective atmosphere. At first I feel a vague anxiety, then a lump in the stomach. I begin to stare at my watch; the book cannot hold my attention any longer, I keep thinking about what’s going to happen. Will I be late too?

At last the train starts to move. But now mine and the other passengers’ feelings of stress have grown and this becomes evident when we finally arrive at the station. Suddenly, things cannot move fast enough. Commuters sigh behind slow tourists who are blocking the gangway with all their luggage, there is a lot of pushing and squeezing to get off. I become aware that I am staring angrily at a man who is taking too much time getting his stuff organised. I am not the only one who now has a short fuse, the atmosphere is short-tempered, gone is the meditative mood of commuting. The delay lasted maybe 15 minutes, but I carry it around in my body for the rest of the day.

Over recent years there has been a growing interest in the study of atmosphere, often in urban settings, from the pioneer studies by Böhme (1993, 2006) and Brennan (2004) to more recent examples (Anderson 2009, Heibach 2012 and Borch 2014, to name a few). The interest in these topics is also marked in mobility studies, but it is striking that the old interest in mood-setting and mood

work in studies of tourism are rarely brought into the debate. There is much to be learned from studies on the making of tourist ways of sensing a setting, of experiencing a view or a beach.

Although the study of atmospheres has become a vibrant field, research still needs to pay more attention to actual ethnographies, emphasising the actual making and unmaking of moods. The anthropologist Kathleen Stewart has used the term “mood work” to research such complexities of movement and interplay. She points to the need for developing experimental ethnographies of how atmospheres are created, sustained and shared:

Mood is a contact zone for the strange and prolific coexistence of sense and world. An orientation alert to something already set in motion, it is a mundane register of labors to sense out what is actual and potential in an historical moment or a situation. Mood works, in other words, to articulate the labor of living. It marshals bodies, objects, technologies, sensations and flights of fancy into forms of partial coherence. Its legibilities are inchoate and yet pronounced in practices, socialities, scenes, social circles, events, and landscapes. (Carlsen & Stewart, 2014)

Mood work is a good example of throwntogetherness. The changing atmosphere in the delayed train described above was produced between travellers sharing the special infrastructure of a train carriage, an outside landscape of “nowhere”, but also activating past memories of delays. A new “itinerant sensation” spread along the seats, creeping under the skin, finding its way past defences such as earphones and newspapers.

There are other examples of such processes. In his train ethnographies, David Bissell (2009 and 2010) discusses the ways in which affective atmospheres are created in commuter settings. He looks at collective sharing and exchange (of glances, gestures, words) as well as passivity. Such temporary communities are shaped by the materialities of the train setting, but also, of course, by the kind of journeys being undertaken.

An ethnographic study of long-distance train commuters to Copenhagen by Louise Nielsen (2012, 2013) illustrates the ways in which both temporary and more stable forms of travelling “Gemeinschafts” develop. On the train line in question, veteran travellers reserve spaces for their commuting friends and create temporary social settings by sharing all kinds of things, from food and anecdotes to services like waking up sleeping fellow travellers when the station approaches. There are also many micro-technologies of inclusion and exclusion inside the train carriage, which makes it possible to withdraw from or decline contact. Some travellers devote a lot of energy into *not* being dragged into shared moods, trying to stay in their private bubble, closing their eyes, looking away, hiding behind the newspaper or keeping busy with other travel props they have brought along. They might be training the commuter skill of what Erving Goffman (1966) has termed “civil inattention”. Nielsen also discusses how the commuter community may also set itself apart from other travellers, such as the tourists, who do not know the local rules of the train. They are a nuisance.

In a study of British commuters, Laura Straw discusses the ways in which certain moods are created inside the train. She walks through the carriages and notes how the atmosphere changes from cool and detached to noisy and warm. In one carriage, working on laptops defines the mood as quiet and effective – “in here we work” is the silent message; in the next one, the atmosphere is different, social and chatty, while in a third there might be a feeling of sleepiness that makes time stand still (Straw 2008: 722).

I can recognise Straw’s descriptions in my own Öresund commutes between Sweden and Denmark, on a train with continuous mood changes. One of the stops is Copenhagen airport and there is usually a good number of tourists on the train, dragging their heavy suitcases along, checking their flight tickets and anxiously waiting for when they have to get off. They sit next to veteran commuters who could do this journey with their eyes closed; their body knows when it is time to get off. A part of the line unites three university campuses and here many carriages are turned into library spaces, the students are busy with their textbooks and laptops, sheltered from the surroundings by their earphones.

Rush hour situations, of course, change the mood. A tightly packed crowd turns into a swaying collective as the train lurches forward. I am reminded of the commuter footage in the Indian film, *The Lunch Box*, from 2013, with its silent and bored crowds packed inside the carriages. The train’s steady swaying and abrupt movements are transplanted into the bodies of the travellers, who swing back and forth in synchrony, like reeds moving in a breeze. In the Öresund crowds, privacy and personal boundaries are renegotiated in the cramped conditions. People stand back, squeeze past, trying to control their breath and their limbs in order to create a personal minimum distance. They will spend the next ten minutes looking at the hairline of a total stranger’s neck or being pressed into a rucksack, trying to avoid eye contact. There are several micro-rituals at work here.

Confrontations between tourist and commuter moods were, however, much more dramatic in the earlier era of ferry travel between Denmark and Sweden. At night there were unhappy clashes of the two moods, with the day tourists returning after a great trip to Copenhagen and enjoying the tax-free drinks during the 45 minute hydrofoil journey. Their party spirit did not fit with the tired commuters on their way home after a long day, who just wanted a quiet journey.

In his evocative ethnography of ferry travel in western Canada, Phillip Vannini (2012) has observed other conflicts on board between the tourists and local commuters. For example, the irritation among the latter when the captain slows down as the ferry passes some impressive tourist sights. Hey, is this is a commute or a sightseeing trip?

## **Intimacy and Anonymity**

On the train itself, questions of privacy and collectivity become a constant theme. As Adey and Bissell (2012:171) expressed it: “The passenger invites us to move away from imagining solitary individuals on the move towards considering the assemblages within which people on the move are sustained.” To talk about fellow passengers calls for a discussion of what kinds of togetherness this creates. How are people transformed into a temporary community? As a passenger, one has, to some extent, surrendered control and is confined to the platform or inside the train; mobility and activities are severely restrained. There is a tension between the active and inactive, restfulness and restlessness. Most of these tensions are taken for granted today, but this was not the case back in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

In the pioneer era of rail travel there were many complaints about being thrown together with total strangers in a compartment or on the platform, but there were also complaints about the dehumanising aspects of mass travel: about being turned into a mere package, and giving up one’s individuality.

A Swedish professor, travelling in Germany in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, complained in his diaries that the railway lumps everyone together: barons, servants, workers, luggage, oxen and pigs. Like many others, he also complained about the lack of freedom; one was now totally dependent upon chemical and mechanical forces. Even the staff, the driver and the conductor were slaves to the timetable – people had no space for initiative and were worn out by all this collective travel. “All peculiarities, all nationalities disappear like stones in a rushing stream, all acquire the same rounded and smooth form. One like the other.” (Quoted by Arvastson 2008.)

With the arrival of the railways, an entire etiquette of train travel had to be invented as people learnt how to handle the strangers next to them in the compartment. Like the stagecoach, the tiny rail compartment created a very special social space. Women felt particularly exposed (Letherby & Reynolds 2009). Gradually, conventions and routines for train travel developed (as well as handbooks). Thriller directors like Alfred Hitchcock, and mystery writers such as Agatha Christie, loved these settings, which offered perfect storylines of motion and emotion. Much of these tensions and confrontations with the narratives of strangers were based upon the earlier system of small train compartments: on the claustrophobia or intimacy of sharing a confined space with perfect strangers.

In the Öresund trains, there are open carriages, but two spaces are organised as smaller compartments, the first class section and “the silent compartment”, and both turn out to be more ridden with potential conflict than the rest of the train. Rush hour crowds tend to invade both these spaces and a common complaint of commuters is that many new travellers don’t know or respect the rules. There is a constant hushing, or silent sighs and shrugs going on... as tourist groups begin to

talk or use their cell phones. The train staff have a difficult job policing this. Outbursts of “train rage” occur, for example when a man who is dozing can’t take the conversations in the next row anymore and explodes: “Shut up, can’t you read the bloody sign!”

Commuting and tourist travel produce different sociabilities. Regular commuters may come to feel that they know their fellow travellers, although they don’t know their names and perhaps haven’t even exchanged a word with them. Gradually they become familiar faces with familiar habits. Long distance commuters may develop closer ties, as discussed earlier. The organisation of seating creates specific conditions for such socialising (see the discussion in Nielsen 2014 and Gilboa Runnvik 2014). In holiday travel, other kinds of social moods and contacts develop. Package tour travellers often find it easy to make new friends, but also that these new and warm friendships rarely survive after the vacation (see Löfgren 2000:260 ff); being on holiday creates a very particular platform of sociability.

### **Imagination at Work**

To a varying extent, tourists and commuters share a special condition for socialising and mood work. The French sociologist Jean-Didier Urbain (1998) called this the small secrets of the traveller – that is, to be on the move and away from well-known settings offers the possibilities of anonymity in new surroundings. On the road, one is often a stranger to fellow travellers and this creates some interesting room for manoeuvre; you have the possibility of inventing a new personality, pretending to be someone else, or daydreaming about the person next to you on the subway or the flight.

In a study of daydreaming (Ehn & Löfgren 2011), we found that commuting creates a perfect condition for setting the imagination to work. The swaying rhythm of the train, the passing landscape and the faces of fellow travellers produce a good platform for daydreaming. When we interviewed commuters, we were given answers such as, “It can be anything that sets me daydreaming. An interesting person in front of me, an advertisement, a big suitcase, a hat, or just a sound.” Helen Hunt, back in the 1870s, wrote about “the magnetism of every human” in the train carriage, while a New York commuter of today said she couldn’t understand why people read on the subway when it was so much more fun observing other travellers and reading fantastic stories into their faces.

The anonymity of the commute gives plenty of room for the imagination. I wonder who that man is across from me? A woman told us about watching a couple in a train slowly gliding past on the platform. Before they were out of sight, she had created a fictive love story about them (see Ehn & Löfgren 2011:147). In her interviews with commuters, Gilboa Runnvik (2014:171) found

the same focus; as one commuter put it: “It is exciting just to sit and look at everyone... who are they and where are they going?”

An artist that has tried to capture this potential of frozen moments is Adam Magyar in his Berlin subway film. With his special filming technique, one sees the anonymous crowd on the platform in a totally different light; it dissolves into unique individuals, frozen, statue-like, every person with a strange personality aura surrounding them, turning into individual stories (see [vimeo.com/83663312](https://vimeo.com/83663312)). Watching this inspiring piece of subway ethnography, one can understand the daydreaming potential through which a commuter draws her or his fellow passengers into imaginary worlds. Something as trivial as the commute is emotionalised, sometimes in surprising ways.

### **Copenhagen Central Station**

As it is for most of the other passengers, my stop is Copenhagen Central Station, where I have spent time registering mood changes around the clock (Löfgren 2015a). I begin late one morning by following a couple of tourists who are hesitantly dragging their luggage around, searching for information. Their body movements give them away as newcomers to this setting. They are equipped with both the tourist gait and gaze, as they scan the terrain for all kinds of signs, moving around slowly, often looking lost, but also admiring the decorative items in the building, sightseeing. Suddenly, the arrival hall fills up; a late commuter train has arrived and the atmosphere changes drastically. The commuters move swiftly like a military phalanx ploughing its way through the tourist travellers, who try to get out of the way but here and there they are surrounded like islands in the fast flow of commuters striding across the floor with their gazes fixed into the distance. Mentally, the commuters are probably already at work, they do not observe the station surroundings at all. There is no hesitation in their bodies – this is just the same old morning routine. They are the station veterans.

In just a few moments the stream of people ebbs out and the station returns to its atmosphere of lethargy. The tourists are in control again, together with the homeless and others who use the station as their temporary urban refuge or meeting place, surreptitiously checking for the guards or police that circle the station. The homeless are another kind of station veterans, viewing the setting with different eyes.

As I move among the rush hour crowds that are confidently hurrying through the station complex, I can feel in my own body what it is to be out of synch. I feel like a country bumpkin; I have lived too long in a small town, just visiting the metropolis, and I realise that I have lost some of the skills of manoeuvring in fast crowds. I can't read the signals, my body movements are indecisive. I am often about to bump into people, I'm not part of the flow.

Trying to record these rhythms and intensities, I felt the need for more inspiration and turned to a classic site so often depicted in movies: the bustling crowds at New York's Grand Central Station. In a study of space, Tony Hiss watches the crowds and reflects on the social skills you need to learn to handle this setting. He observes:

...the swirling, living motion of five hundred people walking, two and three abreast, from and toward the fourteen entrances and exits of the concourse. Moving silently, as it seemed, within that sound, I noticed again that no one was bumping into anyone else – that every time I thought I myself might be about to bump into people near me, both I and they were already accelerating slightly, or decelerating, or making a little side step, so that nobody ever collided. On top of this, the weightless sensation in my head gave me the feeling that I could look down on all this movement, in addition to looking out at it. I had a sense that the cooperation I was part of kept repeating itself throughout the vast room around me and the vaster city beyond it. (Hiss 1991:8)

How is this collective choreography made possible, with its coordination of hundreds of different styles of walking and moving? Here, a capability of quick glances, body signals and swift movements is needed.

In her study of commuters, Gilboa Runvik (2014: 165 ff) found that the commuters often complain about the behaviour of tourists. The tourists slow down the flow, block the way and have to be pushed aside. But commuters coming from small towns into a large city like Stockholm often found it hard to adjust to the faster pace of city crowds.

In Copenhagen, the morning rush hour gives the station a very special atmosphere. There is a feeling of expectancy in the air, the start of a fresh working day, a kind of positive stress. Later in the day the tempo slows down, the sounds and the mood are different, with the echoes of solitary travellers moving along the hall. As the tired commuters return later in the day to go home, the station has a different feel. Compare this to the festive mood of the station on a Friday or Saturday evening, when groups of people are leaving or arriving in search of a fun night out; a party feeling pervades the place – and then the mood changes drastically again as at night it becomes deserted.

Writing about her impressions of the Copenhagen station when waiting for the midnight train back to Sweden, Julia Svensson (2010) captured the mood of frustration and depression that takes over the station. The train is, as always, late. She is thrown out of McDonald's, the last place to close, and after that there is only the chill of the platforms and the arrival hall.

“Everything is closed”, all the closed shutters and locked doors help to produce an atmosphere of being left out. The passengers become a group of losers, marginalised, outside society. What are they doing here, in this godforsaken place? The general mood becomes slightly depressive, gone is all the morning energy. Now even the commuters begin to feel like “undesired elements” in an unwelcoming atmosphere. There is a striking throwntogetherness at work here,

both the physical and mental atmosphere start to feel chilly; the clattering sounds of shutters being pulled down, lights being turned off, the tired bodies – all work together to create this sensation.

The changing atmosphere of the station is also gendered. Women may feel much more exposed at certain hours and in certain spaces in a railway station. Who can claim space and feel secure? Who feels exposed or vulnerable and in what situations? At Copenhagen station back in the 1950s, young girls from the country were warned that the station was a dangerous territory, and a YWCA mission took it upon themselves to assist them. Observing stations at night, Frers (2006:257) noticed how many women took up a brisk pace and avoided eye contact at a time when there were few other people around.

At times, the station management have tried to deal with such problems by designing waiting spaces for women or families only, but historically it is class rather than gender that has organised segregation in rail travel. Above the entrance to *O’Leary’s Sportsbar* at Copenhagen, one can still read the message cut into the stone: Waiting room for 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Class. The railways introduced a class system, teaching people to think about what kind of travel class they belonged to. This still exists, in the business lounge at Copenhagen Central Station and in the two class systems on the trains, but there is a much more complex history behind this (see Löfgren 2008b).

At the station, it is possible to see how moods or atmospheres are produced and how they change, for example, among a group of passengers waiting for a delayed train. Jokes and complaints are exchanged, the stranger next to you now becomes a fellow sufferer. The crowd can create an atmosphere of resigned waiting, with sighs and shrugs, but the passenger collective can also be highly combustible as irritation and anger erupts. Bodies begin to fidget, people become less tolerant of others trying to make their way in the crowd, and suddenly the mood changes. (Cf. the discussion on commuter frictions on trains in Corvellec & O’Dell 2012.)

To what extent can an ethnography of stations benefit by watching films? Using stations as a mood-setting scene is a common choice for filmmakers. There are hundreds of films that use railway stations and trains as settings for comedies, dramas and thrillers.<sup>1</sup> For a station like Copenhagen Central, there are also all the amateur videos on YouTube. An American tourist, for example, disembarks from the train and records his first impressions by video with a running commentary as he moves through the station: “Hey, they even got a McDonalds here!”

A film I found helpful in understanding the many ways in which the station infrastructure becomes a co-creator of moods is the classic *Brief Encounter* from 1945, in which two unhappily married people meet by chance while waiting for their connections. Their relation develops into an illicit commuter romance in-between trains and the anonymity of the location shelters them. The director David Lean systematically uses the station as a tool for setting moods and emotions in motion: desolate and windblown platforms, dark passages, a drab

cafeteria. Sudden loudspeaker messages and the shrill whistle of a guard intensify and disturb the quiet emotional interaction between the couple. The uninviting, cold setting reflects their depressed home life and their guilt-ridden meetings. The express trains rushing by give a certain urgency to the forlorn couple on the platform; the inner and outer turbulences reinforce each other and the life of the station itself takes a leading role.

## The Infrastructures of Love

Leaving the Öresund commute for a more general discussion of emotions and affect, I would like to start with a question that David Picard (2013) poses in a study of German tourists on the island of Réunion, in the Indian ocean: “So what does it feel like to be a tourist?” Following groups on nature treks, he points out how central emotion is here and how tourists may be emotionally moved without being able to explain why. They feel at a loss for the right words to describe a breath-taking view or a fantastic event and tend to fall back on well-worn clichés from tourist guides and marketing texts. Picard does not aim to join the tired critique of the shallowness of the tourist experiences; instead he shows how tourists carry with them a heavy baggage of descriptions and possible ways of trying to verbalise strong emotions. He points out that they may talk of “the magic” of a site in trying to describe their personal experience and immediately become conscious that this sounds very much like a slogan. This feeling of having to fall back on existing formulas for expressing very personal experiences is typical of tourism and has a long history. Is my experience authentic enough? There are probably few social activities where this emotional luggage is as strongly present as among tourists. Let me discuss this by focusing on one historically conditioned emotion, that of romantic love and travel.

“It is so easy to fall in love here”, a young female tourist wrote home from a seaside resort in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. The holiday romance is a particular phenomenon, depicted in scores of films about tourist travel. The tourist journey has always been connected to ideas of emancipation from everyday demands and routines, of letting go. Ordinary everyday people are magically transformed into something else as they step off the charter flight, enter a village in Tuscany or find their paradise beach. They are entering a zone of carefree hedonism, ready to have a great time! It is this emotional transformation that can be witnessed in a large number of films with a tourist theme, which often depict people out to mend their broken hearts, as in *Under the Tuscan Sun* from 2003, or *The Tourist* from 2010. Here, as in many other cases, Italy is the tourist territory that will transform you. Holiday films often work from the basic understanding that a holiday trip makes you ready for love. It might be used as a remedy to rekindle a tired relationship, as in the 2013 *Le Weekend*, when an ageing British couple try to repeat their Paris honeymoon weekend of long ago. But there is no chance of a rerun, they quarrel

on the train and when they check into their old hotel, it just looks scruffy and small. The magic is gone. The journey starts off as a romantic weekend in Hell, but in the end the *ambiance* of Paris does the trick.

Tourist destinations such as these often play a central role in films, they are depicted as laboratories for emotional change, helped by the warm-hearted and carefree locals and the enchanting light over the landscape. Old bitterness, depression or everyday greyness simply melt away. This is, of course, a theme that is also taken up in tourism marketing: you will become a different person by visiting Paris or Tuscany. Such films also address an analytical theme: what kinds of affordances do certain destinations offer, which enable travellers to create new emotional landscapes? Again, there are certain forms of throwntogetherness at work here.

But what about passion and the tedium of the daily commute? In 2014, the BBC broadcast a two-part television drama about two commuters falling in love on a suburban train, *The 7.39* by Dave Nichols. Here the commuter train is full of pent up emotions, disenchantment with work and the hopeless boss, the tired marriage or the difficult teenage kids. For twelve years, the commuter train takes the hero back and forth between an unhappy home and a dreary job. A strange young woman, who has the cheek to occupy his favourite seat, opens up something new and romance is in the air. It also echoed another classic commuter film, *Falling in Love* from 1984, in which two total strangers and daily commuters (played by Meryl Steep and Robert de Niro) begin to notice and fantasise about each other, slowly developing a secret romance on the train to work. The film captures very well one of the basic conditions of the commute, the constant repetition. People gradually recognise their fellow travellers, a face becomes familiar and after a time one may choose to acknowledge this by a slight nod, maybe later passing some remarks about the weather or the delays. Over time, a regular commuter may turn into something of an acquaintance. *Falling in Love* follows this slow process. The couple surreptitiously glance at each other. Will she or he be waiting on the platform or getting on the train today and in what carriage? Can I sit down next to her? Could I find a trivial comment? “Excuse me, is this seat taken?” Slowly there is a build up of an emotional relation and a tedious commute turns into a passionate journey. Watching a film like this alerts you to the micro-physics of the daily commute, the repetitive rhythms and body movements, and the minor changes in seating arrangements, bodily proximities and delays. I am reminded of Walter Benjamin’s analysis of a poem by Charles Baudelaire (Benjamin 1969:45), in which the poet “in the deafening traffic of town” catches a glimpse of a woman, who gives him a swift glance:

Neither knows where the other goes or lives;  
We might have loved and you knew this might be!

This is, as Benjamin says, “love at last sight”.

The landscape of potential contacts is always gendered. The male gaze exists on the commuting train as well as on the holiday beach. When Gilboa Runvik (2014) interviewed female commuters, they talked about the feeling of having to perform. They often felt like an object to be scrutinised, judged or ranked as they got on to the platform or the train.

## **Emotional Luggage**

By using examples of tourists and commuters on the road, I have explored some ethnographic challenges for studying modes and moods of mobility, contrasting two research traditions. My focus has been on skills. We need to continue develop an understanding of how people learn to be a commuter or tourist and also how they change between the two roles. There are skills of handling rhythms, switching between different kinds of movements and standing still, synchronising one's movements to others. Some of these travelling skills are shared by both tourists and commuters – the art of waiting, for example, an activity that can produce very different kinds of feelings, a time for boredom, rising irritation or commuter's rage, but also for meditative bliss and a great opportunity for daydreaming (Bissell 2007; Ehn & Löfgren 2010: 9 ff).

Travel life is full of technologies. Buses, railway platforms, arrival halls and train carriages are containers, but they are not only physical containers, which separate and join objects, bodies and activities – they are also cultural containers, held together by cultural conventions, norms and learned behaviour. What do they do to the traveller – and vice versa?

I have argued that the concept of throwntogetherness is useful for exploring modes and moods of travel and that the bricolage approach of non-representational theory offers a tool chest for such analytic work. The station, the holiday resort or the bus may seem like very stable material infrastructures, but they are really constructed of all the comings and goings, as well as the very diverse tasks carried out in them. A station, for example, is a constant interweaving of the ebbs and flows of people and their heavy luggage, the malfunctioning ticket machines, shiny hard floors, the unintelligible loudspeaker calls, or the smell of hamburger fat – all of which create the atmosphere of a transit space. The ethnographic task is to explore how such elements work together – reinforcing, blocking, uniting, separating each other. The ways people are influenced by such throwntogetherness, consciously or unconsciously varies with their travel situation. At Copenhagen station, veteran commuters barely notice all the architectural details, which the visiting tourists examine so closely. At the same time there is an overlaying of pasts, presents and futures, which calls for a historical perspective. The building, for example, was originally constructed as a different kind of transit machine than it is today.

But it is not only the infrastructure that surrounds the visitors. People also drag all kinds of stuff into this setting – just check the very different contents of a commuter’s handbag and a tourist’s suitcase. Such micro-universes carry very different ideas of the necessities (and longings) of travel (Löfgren 2015c). And add to this the emotional luggage of memories, anticipations and imaginations, a reminder of the affective dimensions that are always at work in such processes of throwntogetherness. By talking of travel modes as platforms for affective opportunities (Hui 2013:174), we have to ask what kinds of “itinerant sensations” are facilitated by certain kinds of journeys. Looking at the new mobility studies of commuting and traditional tourism research, different foci emerge. With a somewhat grand oversimplification, one could start by saying that these are two traditions that have been studying experiences, experiences with a capital “E” (for tourism) and a small “e” (for commuting), and this has meant to some extent a focus on emotions on the one hand, and, on the other, on affects.

There is a long tradition of studying emotions in tourism (Picard & Robinson 2012), often of experiences with a capital “E”: the making and consumption of a great, a unique, an authentic experience. Tourist experiences are also organised by a considerable tradition of emotional anticipation and longing: a journey or vacation is not only planned but also played out in the imagination before it has begun. The investments in the future also shape the special mixed sensation of “travel fever”, which produces at least two kinds of excitement: anxiety and euphoria. Feeling footloose can be both a blessing and a threat. Anxiety is a vague nervous energy searching for an outlet. But travel fever also changes form and structure in different social and historical settings, and it has aspects of both class and gender.

There are many energising processes going on in the emotional life of tourists. The anticipations of happiness can also produce another common emotional state: disappointment – this is not the perfect beach, or the romantic weekend or the carefree life that one had hoped for. There is a strong normative element in tourism, but also a competitive one: what if my experiences are not as exciting or authentic as those of the travel writer, or my neighbours?

Studies of commuting have tended to explore more mundane experiences, with a small “e”, and affects, in the sense of bodily reactions, not usually consciously articulated, such as a mounting irritation or boredom, the reflex of a helping hand, pent up anger waiting for an outlet, a sudden smile or a shrug, a face turned away, a body tensing in stress or relaxing, a gaze that turns glassy and isn’t looking anywhere in particular. In the early years of the new commuter studies, there was an attempt to dismantle the common idea of commuting being wasted time. Instead of just seeing it as a hopeless in-between of intense boredom or tedium, the focus turned to the potential richness of the commuter experience and the many parallel activities it opened up for. On looking back, this turn was quite called for, but it was also sometimes overworked. Standing pressed up close to

other bodies in a warm commuter train can still be a pretty boring experience: “I just can’t wait to get off.” Tourist research, on the other hand, has tended to ignore those in-between aspects of the journey. It is the getting there – to the sight, the beach, the event – that counts, the rest is just mindless transport.

But the polarisation of tourist and commuter modes and moods of travelling can also be misleading, as I have pointed out. What if commuting is sometimes an adventure, and tourism just a routine? The commute can constantly open up surprises: close-ups of strangers (breathing down one’s neck), as in Baudelaire’s sudden pang for love. The journey can be dramatised by daydreaming, or a sense of meditative bliss, or the fierce battle with delays and rush hour crowds. The tourist adventure, meanwhile, can often become just mundane routines and trivial details.

A starting point for a comparison is the fact that many of us have learned to seamlessly switch between these two modes of travel. Alone in a European city I have never visited before, I have an extra day before my conference begins. Suddenly, I have the sense of myself turning into a tourist. As I begin to saunter aimlessly down the street, both my body and my mind are reprogrammed. I begin looking for “sights”, my eyes curiously exploring buildings and city life, my movements becoming slow and uncertain. Now I am unconsciously activating both the traditional tourist gaze (Urry & Larsen 2011) and gait (Österlund-Pötzsch 2010). I am surrounded by city commuters on their way to work, yet my movements are badly synchronised with theirs; I keep bumping into people, my pace is too slow, my movements unpredictable. It is quite clear: at this moment, I am one of those tourists!

**Orvar Löfgren** is professor emeritus of European Ethnology at the University of Lund, Sweden. His research is focused on the cultural analysis of everyday life and he has written on, among other things, consumption, media and travel. E-mail: [Orvar.Lofgren@kultur.lu.se](mailto:Orvar.Lofgren@kultur.lu.se)

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> See for example Richards & MacKenzie 1986:340 and for later examples: [movieclips.com/yRHE3-train-station-setting-videos/](http://movieclips.com/yRHE3-train-station-setting-videos/); [www.railserve.com/trainmovies/](http://www.railserve.com/trainmovies/)

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# Moving Forward: A Feminist Analysis of Mobile Music Streaming

Ann Werner

## Abstract

The importance of understanding gender, space and mobility as co-constructed in public space has been emphasized by feminist researchers (Massey 2005; Hanson 2010). And within feminist theory materiality, affect and emotions have been described as central for experienced subjectivity (Ahmed 2012). Music listening while moving through public space has previously been studied as a way of creating a private auditory bubble for the individual (Bull 2000; Cahir & Werner 2013) and in this article feminist theory on emotion (Ahmed 2010) and space (Massey 2005) is employed in order to understand mobile music streaming. More specifically it discusses what can happen when mobile media technology is used to listen to music in public space and it investigates the interconnectedness of bodies, music, technology and space. The article is based on autoethnographic material of mobile music streaming in public and concludes that a forward movement shaped by happiness is one desired result of mobile music streaming. The positive value of 'forward' is critically examined with feminist theory and the failed music listening moments are discussed in terms of emotion and space.

**Keywords:** Apps, music, mobile phones, gender, space, emotion, streaming

## Introduction

I am running up the escalators from the train station to my university, iPhone in my hand, my work bag is bouncing on my shoulder and through my white iPhone headphones Dorian Concept is playing. The song is called “Tropical hands” and it’s my favorite song this week. On my phone’s screen I can see the album cover; a colorful painting of cats, some of them smoking cigarettes, as it is presented with a black background, the interface of the Spotify app. Apart from the painting I can see how the 2 minutes and 6 seconds long song is proceeding. Will it last all the way to my office? I pick up the pace. When running up, my hips sway and my feet take the steps of the escalator in sync with the beats of the song, this song has ‘so very funky beats’ I am thinking. I am smiling at the strangers crowding the escalators, I feel unusually happy. It’s 8.11 am on a Monday morning.

Smartphones have since their introduction on the market increasingly occupied public space and can be said to be a commonplace cultural artifact today (Goggin 2011: 149). While some are using smartphones to listen to music while commuting to work or moving through public space for multiple reasons others are playing games, reading/writing e-mails and social media posts, uploading selfies and much more. Additionally people are still sending text messages and making phone calls. Smartphones combine and merge several previous media technologies (Bolter & Grusin 1999; Jenkins 2006) but are also devices in their own right with technology, design and functions shaping contemporary cultural patterns (Goggin 2011; Christensen & Prax 2012). This motivates researchers to ask questions about the online practices of mobile music streaming that smartphones provide. This article investigates the use of two smartphone applications (apps) for auditory music consumption, Spotify and VKontakte (VK), and how they function on a smartphone while the person listening is on the move in public space. Similarities between the apps are in focus, but some differences are also addressed.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, the article performs a feminist analysis of how mobile music listening is shaped by, and shapes, gender, space and emotions in a particular case and what this case says about the meaning of emotional music streaming on the move. This is done in order to explore how cultural and media practices are always related to discursive and material power imbalances and to emphasize that the user is always situated.

The empirical material drawn upon is autoethnographic in order to get inside how mobile music use moves and feels. This autoethnographic material is part of a larger qualitative research project studying the Internet’s impact on music use in two cities: Stockholm and Moscow, conducted by a group of four researchers (Goldenzwaig 2014; Werner & Johansson 2014).<sup>2</sup> Even though this article is based on autoethnographic material it relates to the larger project in terms of aim and problems. Results from a focus groups study displayed the popularity of mobile music listening, and an importance of emotions and space in music listening, the aim of this article is thus related to findings in the overall project. The article consists of four parts. In the first part feminist theoretical concepts and

methods are introduced. The apps' design, architecture, use, possibilities and problems are discussed in the second part. Drawing on experiences recorded in field notes as well as the apps' structure documented with screenshots, the gendered space and emotions of travelling through public space while listening to music is analyzed in the third section. Finally, in the last section, the article is summarized and conclusions are drawn.

### **Theoretical Starting Points: Subjects, Space and Emotions**

The analysis of mobile music listening, space and emotion performed here is inspired by research on mobile media mentioned above. But primarily it takes its' starting point in feminist cultural theory. Cultural practices, such as mobile music listening, are within contemporary feminist theory understood as significant for the time and place they are performed in, affected by technological affordances and as immanent parts of subjectification processes. Cultural practices can be analyzed as displaying the logics of power in society and culture, and as changing them (Berlant 2008; McRobbie 2009). Subjectification in mobile music streaming is here seen as both discursive, creating meaning through already existing systems of signification, and material, a sensory and physical experience. In order to understand the relation between discourse and materiality Rosi Braidotti (2003) suggests that subjectification, the process of "becoming-woman", involves material bodies as well as discursive ideas. Braidotti (2003: 60) argues that embodiment is an interconnected material process where encounters and relations with others are keys to its' becoming, while the process of becoming is also interconnected with symbolic forces. The symbolic dimension of culture frame how we feel in already existing but always changing signs, categories and ideas.

Common perception may be that mobile music listening with headphones is a withdrawal from surroundings - but arguably the listening body is still occupying space. Doreen Massey has developed a critical understanding of space where she proposes that space is a product of interrelations, that space is always multiplicity and always under construction (Massey 2005: 9). The first statement about space concludes that space is what it is because of interrelations between humans and non-humans and no space lie still waiting to be explored. When claiming that space is multiplicity Massey (2005: 12) argues that space has both multiple stories and trajectories, thus is temporally made by what has happened and what can come to happen. Trajectories implies the possible lines of flight in the space that is, not fantasies about the future. Claiming multiplicity is for Massey not an additive or developmental approach, space it not the sum of its stories or pointing toward development or progress, but rather Massey argues that space is open. It's an acknowledgment of the inherent difference in space and the potential there, for example for political change (Massey 2005: 59). Furthermore, space is temporal, since it is unfinished and always becoming. Drawing on Henri Bergson and Gilles

Deleuze Massey argues that space is a state of flux. Her three main definitions of space; as interrelations, multiplicity and becoming gives a radical anti-essentialist position with implications for how subjectivity can be understood. Subjectivity, for Massey like for Braidotti, is relational in the sense that one cannot become without relations to others – human and non-humans. Subjectivity is under construction when space takes form. In Massey's terms the space of a music streaming service provides human and non-human interrelations, plurality and constant change. Further, the interface mirrors stories about the user – for example who the user is friends with, what the user listens to or looks like.

By arguing that mobile music streaming is a cultural practice that shapes subjectivity through symbolic and material processes in space with human and non-human agents I have already hinted that it is not the same practice for everyone. When approaching music use experiences in focus group interviews with my colleagues and I found that enjoying music while moving in public space, and being emotional with music, were common and important experiences.<sup>3</sup> But variations were found in regards to what kind of music the participants listened to on the move and perceived as emotional, what activities of movement they thought called for music and what space they preferred for music use (online and in the physical world). Sara Ahmed (2010) proposes a way of theorizing differentiation of cultural tastes and practices in terms of emotions and power. One thing that unites music listeners is that music is enjoyed, whether it is sad music for rainy days, upbeat dance music when going for a run, or calm music for studying. Ahmed (2010: 13) argues that where we find happiness teaches us what we value rather than what is of value, the feelings we feel are what make some things good and others bad. The good is what music users orient themselves toward, and there may be overlapping patterns as well as differences between users.<sup>4</sup> Since happiness, as an emotion, shows us what we value, it also shows us how power operates affectively in culture and society (Ahmed 2010: 53). According to Ahmed desirable objects orient subjects toward certain femininities and masculinities, whiteness and middle class ideas. Questioning this happiness from a feminist critical perspective is to kill joy – and be a killjoy (Ahmed 2010: 20) and here I will proceed to question the joy and effects of mobile music streaming.

### **Autoethnography**

Empirical materials drawn upon here consist of field notes and screenshots collected in 2013 while streaming music on two apps: VKontakte (VK) and Spotify, on an iPhone 5. The methodological approaches used were online ethnography and autoethnography. Online ethnography, being a popular method for investigating cultural and social patterns on the internet, involves doing research online and regarding the space there, chat rooms, communities, social

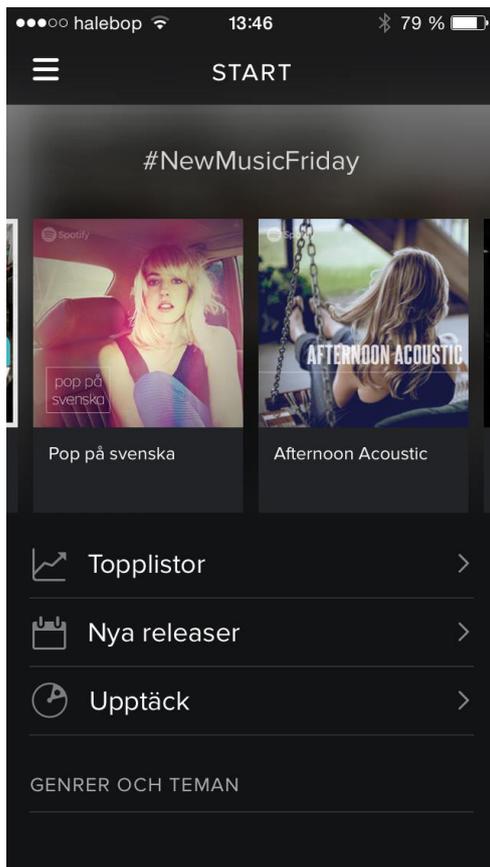
networks or other, as the field of ethnographic study (Hine 2000). Research typically involves other people than the researcher but not always subjects the researcher meets in real life: they can be encountered as online personas (ibid.). Though, research online can also be accompanied by off-line ethnographic work (Kendall 2002). Typically online ethnographers do not regard online subjectivity as less “real” but rather shaped by different cultural rules, technological and physical conditions. Doing research in online cultures emphasizes the question of the researcher’s position (Sundén 2012), a question important for any contemporary ethnographer. The online researcher may, however, shape the very conditions of the field by what the researcher does – especially in milieus controlled by generative algorithms. Autoethnography (Ellis 2004) therefore becomes relevant for online research, since the ethnographic study of one’s own practices and experiences in culture cannot be separated from the field of study. Being a woman-identified, white middleclass Swedish person in my 30s travelling most days on public transport to work at a university in Stockholm shapes my mobile music streaming. As a music researcher, and a devoted consumer of popular music, listening to music in public space was also not new to me. But I had not used the apps in this study prior to the start of the research project in 2012. Having a partner, colleagues and friends mostly in my own age group as my significant others online, as well as offline; shaped the space I listened to music in. So did the lack of children in my life. The time of day I streamed – often early mornings and afternoons – as well as the focus of my commuting – work – holds importance for the analysis made. While actively researching and using the apps of Spotify and VK my online behavior shaped not only my own playlists and folders but also the updates the platforms gave me, and the network patterns created by the user generated algorithms. As Lia Bryant and Mona Livholts (2013) have shown the emotional use of mobile technology is a research area where autoethnographic work is imperative since the feelings must be experienced in order for analytic work to be possible. I argue, like Bryant and Livholts, that autoethnography is a necessary method for music streaming research, like for their telephone research, since apps and phones adapt to the user and are experienced in a closed system hard to observe for an outsider. Memory work and field notes about one’s own experiences are also methods for gathering empirical material in feminist research on emotions offline, for example in Ahmed’s (2012: 2) studies of racism in academia.

### **The Apps’ Functions, Structure and Design**

The following sections of the article are based on my autoethnographic study of the two apps. First the Smartphone applications’ (apps’) functions and structure are described, and then space and emotions in experiences of using them are discussed as gendered. With this being a qualitative situated autoethnographic

study, no general claims are made, results are shaped by my position as well as by aim and questions. With that said I compare material and analysis with previous research in order to highlight similarities and map patterns that go beyond this article. I use selected quotes, examples and images to from my material.

The two app provided a number of similar functions for listening to streamed music.<sup>5</sup> The designs of the interfaces were structured by these functions and therefore they, also, had similarities. Gerard Goggin (2011: 151) has noted that apps have their provenance in other media formats, and the apps discussed here draw on social media, radio as well as the design of records and computer interfaces. In VK the user could make “folders”, name them and order their favorite songs in them. The interface showed the songs as a list and the name – folder – was clearly inspired by the organizing system in the interface of a computer. In Spotify a similar function was “playlists”, visually it reminded me of playlists in iTunes. Both apps allowed the user/me to listen to and view existing folders/playlists on my profile as well as adding to them while on the go. The folders/playlists functioned similarly to a mixtape and both VK and Spotify apps had inboxes that allowed other users to send songs as gifts. In Spotify the user could follow playlists made by other users and artists but only those that were



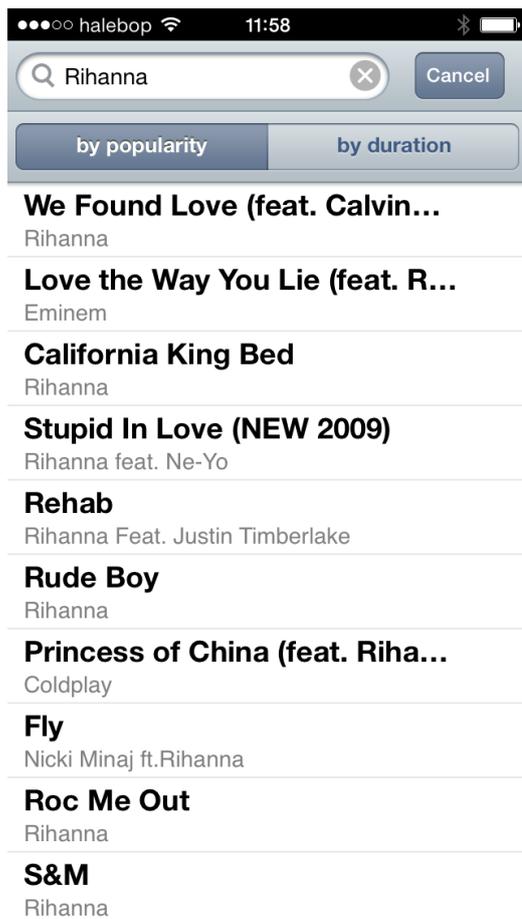
Two Spotify generated playlists as seen on my iPhone 5 a Friday afternoon.

openly shared. On Spotify and VK the users could add images to their profiles, when browsing I could see how other users choose to visually represent themselves, and musically through their folders/playlists. On Spotify the platform also generated its’ own playlists: named and visually represented with pictures. The names as well as the images were colored by gendered (and racialized) ideas about genres and places; for example the playlist “Pop på svenska” (Pop in Swedish) had an image of a young white blond girl in the backseat of a car while “Hot Alternative” was represented by a black and white photograph of a male white rock band on stage, the central figure, a man with a beard and an electric guitar. The examples gender pop as feminine and rock as masculine, both genres as white in line with popular music studies discussions on gender, race and genre (Railton 2001) VK’s app didnot have visual elements in the music folders

in 2013, nor any VK generated folders with music.

Both apps included search functions that allowed me to find new music and instantly listen to what I found. Spotify's search function divided searches by artist/album/track while VK divided searches by popularity/duration. In 2014 the search function on VK's app no longer allowed me to find new music, but only to listen to the music I had already saved on the computer version of VK. Spotify provided the possibility to find the whole production of one artist through a single search – at least the part of the artist's production that had been obtained by contract. As a user you may find your favorite album or artist missing if Spotify does not have a contract with the record company that owns the copyright, also music may disappear that was previously available due to change in legal agreements. The VK search engine worked through what the files had been named by the user that uploaded them, like a peer-to-peer network, how long and how popular the songs were.

VK did not have contracts with copyright owners since it is a user generated collection of music to stream, and therefore the service legal status is doubtful and VK is involved in court battles at the time of writing. The result of a VK-search



Searching for Rihanna, as seen on VK when "by popularity" is chosen.

could (in 2013) result in finding several files containing the same song due to this. Another issue was that a search for the artist Banks would give irrelevant results listed first: tracks from Lloyd Banks and Azealia Banks, because these songs were more popular and the sorting was done by popularity (or duration), not artist. However, Spotify's division of artists was ultimately based on naming too, though the software ordering the names was slightly more sophisticated. This became apparent when several different artists have the same name and Spotify failed to distinguish them from each other. A search for "Omar" in November 2013 provided me with a profile of the artist that included mainly the British based soul artist Omar, but also an album released by the Slovenian singer Omar Naber who participated in the Eurovision Song Contest 2005. The search functions did not seem to adapt

their results or ordering of results to the user like for example Google does (Pariser 2011) but the search function algorithms of both apps are, however, continuously being rewritten. Generally they can both be said to, during the time of study, premiere the the popular, which is shaped by ideas of a western popular music tradition. A popular music tradition where binaries like rock/pop and hip hop/R&B are gendered as well as racialized and valued differently (Perry 2004; Railton 2001; Whitley 1997). Less famous artists, artists with unclear genre affiliations or very new artists proved more difficult to locate.

The third and final function I want to address here is the suggestion function. Both apps (claimed to) provide the user with suggestions of what to listen to, suggestions that were based on what they had listened to before (in both apps), what was popular (in VK) and what their friends had listened to (in Spotify). The function seemed to personalize the app for the user, actively partaking in the users' subjectification process. Mobile music listening is a personalized practice (Avdeeff 2011: 20) and with the suggestions the apps can be understood as trying to meet the need of a personal music companion. In Spotify's app the suggestion function was called "discover" (the function has changed since 2013) and it suggested artists and tracks that Spotify deemed similar to artists and tracks I had already listened to. The interface suggested an artist with a text: "Like Bruno Mars and Lily Allen? Check out Katy Perry" accompanied by a picture of Perry and a link to her music. Spotify did already know that I had listened to Bruno Mars and Lily Allen – however, the algorithms have a hard time knowing if I liked what I listened to or will like the music that is deemed similar. Spotify also suggested artists/songs my friends had listened to, and artists/songs that I had listened to previously. VK's app had a function called "suggested music" but it did not work for me, and I was unsure if this was because it was a new function (it had recently been introduced in 2013) or if it was not working properly on my phone, or in my country. The function suggested music was on the other hand functional on the VK computer interface and suggested tracks (not artists) though a list with no pictures or motivations for why these particular songs had been chosen for you. When analyzing the selection it seemed to be a mix of artists that I had already listened to and new popular songs by random artists and from random genres. I am here assuming that this is how the function was supposed to work on the app as well. Both the discover function in Spotify and the suggested music function in VK can thus be understood as based on 1) same-ness and 2) popularity. The algorithms were written to generate suggested music that was considered similar to music I had already listened to. VK also suggested unrelated but popular music while Spotify did not, instead Spotify suggested the latest releases and top lists on the "browse" page. The algorithms of discover were at least in part user generated on Spotify – artists that were new and unknown were not suggested and artists that many listened to were often suggested. VK's

suggestion algorithms seemed to be based on artist names and also generate songs that were played a lot at the time of the study.

The function discover/suggested music assumed one user per account, if you share your account at home with for example a child the suggestions will become slightly schizophrenic. Other steaming services, like Netflix, have solved this dilemma by allowing several user profiles on the same account. The ideas of same-ness were primarily shaped around genres in Spotify, and around artists in VK. As noted before assumptions about genres include assumptions about gender and race, as well as decade or generation. In Spotify rock music produced by men in the 70s led me to more rock music produced by men in the 70s, to take one example. While using the functions my experience was that the functions were helpful precisely because I could find more of the same. This was also discussed in the focus group interviews in the larger study. While Spotify's discover function was more elaborate in its' design it did not take into account what was popular at the time, while VK's suggestions of new music could be less precise in terms of genre and artist. This illustrates the impact the algorithms have on the user's ability to move through large libraries of music, they could at the same time be a source of annoyance when perceived as inaccurate in terms of taste and subject position since they claimed to fitted for me.

I will conclude this section by discussing overall structure and design of the apps. While Spotify is a music streaming service, VK is a social network. They both had left hand side menus at the time. VK's menu had "music" as one choice and all the other alternatives were not focusing on music streaming, Spotify had "search", "discover" and several other music functions on the menu.<sup>6</sup> In Spotify's app the main colors were green and black and the interface contained many photos, of artists, albums and music related situations. VK's interface was in white and blue – similar to the colors used in Facebook's interface – and there were no images in the app's music functions. But if I for example visited the page of an artist on VK there were a lot of images as well as videos. The content and range of music was organized similarly between the apps through the functions described above, but Spotify had additional functions like "radio" that based a radio flow on a genre or artist by randomly selecting music deemed similar for the user. The music content differed, VK included artists and songs that were released by small independent record labels with no Spotify contract, also VK often had a song before it was released officially. On VK I could also find music videos; these are not included in the discussion in this article, and recordings from live performances. The opposite was also true: Spotify had music impossible to find on VK. VK often lacked music produced in Sweden, for example, but provided a lot of Russian and internationally popular music. Spotify has been nationally adapted to the countries it provides service in which means that the music popular in the country the user resides in is promoted through Spotify's interface for example on "top lists". While I found Spotify to be a colorful and intricately

designed network of links, where I could connect to so-called “related” artists from the page of an artist I favored, VK had a simpler system for music listening and functioned more like a p2p network. The VK interface provided less handholding but a wider a range of new music that was not part of the mainstream.

Significant for both apps was the absence of visible agents; the suggestions and network had no visible senders or editors. This can be compared with Wimp and Soundcloud, services that to a higher degree have named persons making the playlists and suggestions. VK and Spotify appear to be neutral engines of music, when in fact the selection, suggestion and search results depend on algorithms, friends and self-made folder/playlists as well as one’s user behavior. In this respect the apps are spaces shaped by historical subject positions of the users – myself and all the others that the algorithms generate information from – providing certain possibilities for future choices (Massey 2005). If I spend a lot of time listening to male singer-songwriters, maybe even following them, these will shape the future space in the apps for me. Some music is always shown and other is hidden. The interrelations of the space were shaped by me, the software technology and other users, in order to become future suggestions and listening. As the choices of music and representation of them are embedded in gendered and racialized genre classifications the becoming also shapes cultural patterns of power and difference.

## **The Happiness of Moving Forward**

When moving through public space and listening to music at the same time some experiences may be general, related to music listening in public space as an activity, and some may be specific for the app that is used, the subject position of the person listening, the public space in question or the music listened to. In my field notes from 2013 two emotional experiences from my music listening on the move stood out: happiness and anger. These emotions will be examined here, but they are not the only emotions relevant for music listening, or my only emotions while streaming music during a year. I felt sadness, love, hate and much more. Rather, these emotions deserve attention because they were prominent and they oriented me in this particular cultural practice.

Key to understanding music listening in public space is the experience of making public space your “own” space (Bull 2000; Weber 2009) by adding audio that is familiar to you. Mobile music streaming is an activity that contributes to the interrelations (Massey 2005) in space when used. Consider the introductory example from this article along with this quote from my field notes: “When moving through the train the loud music in my ears makes the motion effortless and enjoyable, I move, the train moves. The emotion of joy and the forward motion is seamless in the light of an early spring morning, the half empty train

and the song I love changes the space. A morning train may be dreary but with my music the train transforms. It is mine”. Not only the happiness and the familiarity mobile music streaming takes part in creating in space are worth noting here – the forward motion was an important feature in many field notes. Forward direction could for me be going to work, but also going home, or going for a run. Music listening provided a feeling of effortlessness when it made the commuter train and the trip “mine”, a push of a button brought on my prepared music and set the mood for commuting and moving forward. The emotions here were positive, and the space around me changed from mundane and dreary: it became my own movie scene with a soundtrack. The object of happiness in a situation like this can be understood as the song, the space is a train and the destination this morning is my work place, the university. What does this type of situation say about gendering music and emotions? Emotions and bodies are generally inscribed with associations to femininity and racial others (Ahmed 2004: 170) but even though I could argue that dancing through the commuter train in sync with the music is always a gendered practice – in affinity with femininity and low value – the morning commute deserves a more in-depth analysis.

The subject position moving forward to work is here that of a useful labor subject, happy to go and be productive. Angela McRobbie (2007) have argued that women today, particularly young women, are governed by a new sexual contract where career and meritocratic success is possible – but only under the condition that a feminist critique of patriarchy and other power imbalances are abandoned.<sup>7</sup> In post-feminist employment McRobbie (2007: 733) concludes, young women become subjects of capacity. Their capacity and success earns them/me access to neo-liberal logics and consumer culture. Following McRobbie, Rosalind Gill (2014: 17) has suggested that the work cultures of academic work is not only structured by gender, class and race inequalities, these are also often unspeakable because of a condition she calls “gender fatigue”. Moving forward with happiness, toward work in the university, can for a female early career researcher thus be seen as reinforcing a position as a subject of capacity. Through the use of apps for over a year this experience of getting ready, moving forward to perform at work, showed to be one of the most common tropes of my mobile music listening: music and sound changed the perceived space and direction and got me ready for work.

Space is mnemonic and sensory, rooted in embodiment (Massey 2005), it comprises possible futures, and by adding audio some futures could be brought forward. When repeated the experience of getting ready and moving forward with happiness was enforced. For example I discovered that I regularly picked an up-tempo song with a message I found strengthening for the last leg of my journey to work, Rihanna’s “Hard” was such a song for a while, Buraka Som Sistema’s “Stoopid”, and Kat Dehli’s “Gangsta” too. My lines of flight toward capable professional femininity were already embedded in commuter space and brought to

the forefront by combinations of music, space and embodied experience by these songs. The choices of music were similar when I went running – I made lists of solely up-tempo motivational songs like the ones I picked when going from the commuter train to my office. Material factors in public space and mobile technology affordance are relevant for emotions and streaming, as are wider cultural contexts. A crowded train was different from a half-empty one, and a crowd generally made me turn up the volume. Crowds were during the field work with music streaming apps perceived as troubling even with loud music on, because the emotion changed and the listening became less enjoyable when motion was hindered: when there were people standing in my way.

Some previous studies have considered music listening as a form of mood management (for example Skånland 2012), and thus placed the agency of managing one's feelings with the user as a subject separate from the interrelations of space and technology. While emotions are integral to listening, proposing that moods can be easily controlled and mapped is to underestimate the cultural complexity of music and emotions (DeNora 2000). While my field work proved that happiness could be induced, there were also examples of when the playlist no longer felt exciting. When no song gave me the right feeling – and my mood could not be managed. To experience happiness is understood as something good in culture and society, and in order to feel good I was oriented toward different songs and playlists. It may seem like the songs made me happy, and changed the space around me, but really my happiness made the songs happy songs (Ahmed 2010). And happiness through orientation, toward the song, toward the motion of the train, is marked by material and discursive power structures. Ahmed has argued that happiness and happy objects are not neutral but displays normative power relations. Fulfilling forward motion and feeling happy while streaming music thus says something about normative subjectivity: it is good to move forward, to be happy, to run and to work. When mobile music streaming changes public space into a happy space it is not displaying the user's individual management of moods, but what is valued.

### **Anger as Subversion**

The second emotional experience in mobile music streaming that I want to address here is anger, felt by me toward playlists, apps or artists, emotions common when the search for the perfect soundtrack comes up with nothing. I handled my need for variation in music by making new folders/playlists and rearranging the ones I already had. I found this practice time consuming and more easily done on the computer interfaces of both Spotify and VK. Because I did not always have a good new playlist/folder to stream there were many instances when I was on public transport, walking, running or waiting without enjoying my music, wanting something different. Once I found myself on a long walk bored

with my (previously favorite) folder in VK and frustrated because I had to interrupt my exercise in order to search for new music, thus standing still on the side of the road. Mobile music streaming created emotions of anger in me when the search for music to listen to took up time. This negative emotion allowed the other dimensions of public space to take over: other peoples' talk sounded louder, the run or walk seemed longer, the train dirtier and the weather worse. Space changed with the lack of good music, and sometimes when volume settings changed automatically or "bad" songs were played by mistake this affected my experience of space. Sometimes, as I just described, this anger, felt less intensely as frustration, was due to my own failure to manage the technology. But the apps also took part in inducing anger. The content, functions and design of both apps were updated several times during 2013, changing the results of searches, the design of the interface and the network paths. These continuous changes may have been improvements, but they still complicated the movement through the apps' spaces. Also, sometimes the apps did not function at all. VK required consistent internet connection and therefore a glitch in the connection stopped the music. Spotify had a more stable music flow even when the internet connection dipped; but a longer break in internet connection for example when moving from a building with wi fi to my regular mobile phone operator's internet service also affected Spotify streaming (unless the playlist I listened to had been saved for offline listening). Battery time was also a source of anger and negative emotions, the streaming required a lot of my battery time and it became a habit for me to always bring a charger. Technology could simply not be trusted; hardware nor software. In many studies of digital cultural consumption the devices and software are assumed to work. But failure is not an isolated event according to Peter Krapp (2011): but a significant structuring part of digital culture. He argues that all technology fail and instead of seeing these events as mistakes one should consider them as part of technology, affecting how humans and non-humans interact. Therefore shortened battery time and constant updates that make the apps hard to navigate are not issues separate from mobile music streaming, but part of what app technology is and does.

Anger can be a productive emotion in that it may motivate action (Ahmed 2012) and reflection, but I did not perceive the failures to find good music, or to play my music, that led up to anger and frustration in my material as productive. Failure was just slowing me down (I thought). However, if the positive valuing of forward orientation is understood as above, as among other things reinforcing neo-liberal and gendered ideas about forward-ness and labor, the failures of technology and the anger it caused could be pockets of time for reflection on my orientation and direction. As such, failure can critically call cultural practices into question. Failure as an important cultural event of meaning has been theorized by Jack/Judith Halberstam (2011) who argues that failure is common and therefore central to culture and that it produces "gaps" with potential for political change in

dominant discourses and ideas. The failure of effortless music streaming and forward motion, as frustrating as it was, could be such a gap where dominant discourses were made visible and change became possible. As such the anger felt in the failed space of music listening contained other possible futures that do not succumb to normative ideals of forward-ness.

Happiness as well as anger was an important emotional experience when moving in public space while using two music streaming apps. Even though other users also experience emotions while listening to music their emotions may not be the same as mine, their taste in music may not be the same. Emotion, music and technology interplay in creating space, and as Massey (2005) argues space is multiple. Here the comfortable music listening on the way to work has been explored critically and contrasted with the failure, of technology or in finding the right musical experience and the two emotional experiences have been analyzed as orientations. In the final section the analysis will be summed up and conclusions will be drawn.

### **Motional and Emotional Streaming**

I have here proposed understanding music streaming through apps as an emotional practice in public space: affecting the body's movement as well as subjects' being moved by feelings. In the analysis I used Sara Ahmed's (2010) definition of happiness as an orientation toward happy objects and her (2012) understanding of anger as a productive emotion together with Doreen Massey's (2005) theory of space in order to discuss the material at hand. The subjectivity achieved through happiness in mobile music streaming was here orienting me forward in space, and in achievement, when going to work, for a run or generally going somewhere. The anger was on the other hand induced by failure and made movement and achievements come to a halt. Emotions are thus understood here more broadly to be doing something with the listener's subjectivity: pushing me forward, to run faster, do better, get to work. Or stopping me, creating a space to reflect and be angry. Since subjectivity is always rendered in differences like those of gender and class to mention only two, the way of becoming in happy music listening is in my analysis to become an achiever. Happy mobile music streaming lead to embodiment of a known figure: the over-achieving young professional middle class woman, through music listening becoming a subject of capacity. The failed streaming experiences and the anger over them, on the other hand, halted this process, caused uncomfortable feelings and provided a possible space for reflection and alternative directions. The wider implications of this analysis is that the importance of mobile music streaming may not lie in the music chosen, or the software, or the listener, but in the practices and discourses shaping the lives of people streaming music. While these practices and discourses in play may vary, the idea of the music listener should be revisited by (feminist) cultural

studies researchers in order to understand the role of music and media technology for subjectivity today.

**Ann Werner** is a senior lecturer in Gender Studies at Södertörn University in Sweden. She holds a Ph D in Culture Studies and has previously researched for example teenage girls' uses of music and dance videos on YouTube. Her current project is concerned with music consumption online and her work in the field of feminist cultural studies combines gender and media theory. E-mail: [ann.werner@sh.se](mailto:ann.werner@sh.se)

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> VK is a social network with music streaming functions, while Spotify is a program entirely constructed for music streaming. The choice of these apps and their design will be addressed further on in the article.

<sup>2</sup> The project "Music use in the online media age: A qualitative study of music cultures among young people in Moscow and Stockholm" involved four researchers aiming to understand the role of the Internet in music use. It was financed by The Swedish foundation for humanities and social science, *Riksbankens Jubileumsfond*. The project consisted of two parts; a focus group study and a cultural analysis of the three platforms most popular among participants: VKontakte, Spotify and YouTube.

<sup>3</sup> The full project is presented and analyzed in a forthcoming book.

<sup>4</sup> The constructions of good taste are not neutral. This is not a topic discussed in-depth here but since Bourdieu taste is understood to be shaped by power and music considered 'bad' or 'tasteless' by the majority is often associated with (and enjoyed by) the power-less: children, feminine subjects, the poor and the racialized.

<sup>5</sup> All functions discussed in this article were in place in November 2013 and many of them were operating during all of 2013. Functions and interfaces of the apps were changing slightly with every program update during the research period and the changing character of the software will be addressed.

<sup>6</sup> The interface described here is the interface on an iPhone 5, the Samsung phones, tablets of different brands and other smartphones have interfaces that are different while the main functions are the same. It is also the interface of late 2013. Even though I acknowledge rapid change I find it useful to provide a picture of what the apps looked like and provided at the time.

<sup>7</sup> Analysis is, here, on the one hand very personal: situated in my position. On the other hand it could be understood to say something more general about femininity in commuting to work while listening to music and the gendered expectations of labor and professional femininity.

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## **To Practice Mobility – On a Small Scale**

By Ida Wentzel Winther

### **Abstract**

Children's perspectives are practically absent in new mobility studies. In this article, I wish to describe and analyse how a number of children handle having to move between homes, parents and siblings, and how they practically, emotionally and socially navigate in this changeable landscape. My aim is to explore mobility as an embodied and emotional practice in which children employ different strategies. I focus on bodily micropractices, routines and coping strategies, the intermediate space that occurs on their continual journeys, and the feeling of being dispensable. It is an ethnographic exploration of how mobile and domestic lives are intertwined – on a small scale.

**Keyword:** Mobility, children as commuters, everyday life, field walk, bodily micro-practices, coping strategies, social navigation, friction, motion and emotion.

## Introduction

‘I think that it’s been hard to ... having to be Juliane in two different places. And being part of a family, I mean, that’s very much about more or less taking each other for granted. Not in a negative way, I just don’t know how to put it. But where everybody belongs as much as everyone else in the family that you’re part of. And I certainly feel – and I don’t think it’s possible not to – but being the one who moves back and forth, you, just a little ... you belong just a little bit less.’ (Juliane, 18 years)

Juliana’s parents are divorced. She and many other children in Denmark spend one week with their mother and one week with their father. Some shared family arrangements are ordered along other intervals such as: 7-7, 9-5 days each place or 11-3 days each place. The children not only travel between two points; they travel between families, parents, siblings and homes – to other parents and siblings and second homes. They travel between the rules, logistics and routines at work in each household. And they travel between different kinds of experiences and perceptions of whom their family and siblingships include, and how family life is performed. They must navigate (socially and practically) and they implement different strategies to help them do just that, which becomes visible in how they pack and unpack; what they bring; how they arrange themselves with their stuff. They also orient and re-orient themselves as they commute, in relation to different ways of being a family and doing homes. These children share conditions with many other commuters who journey between several homes. Commuting is a common phenomenon. The development of industrial capitalism coupled with the fact that the majority of the world’s inhabitants live in urban centres mean that most of the world’s inhabitants are commuters, as their domestic activities are separated from their work, school, and other domains of involvement. But we commute to varying degrees: the most common journey undertaken by the majority of the world’s inhabitants is the very local trip to school or work in the morning and then back home in the late afternoon. It can be time consuming, but does not involve an overnight stay. Then there are commuters who leave home for a longer period and return to the same place (e.g., long-distance truck drivers, flight attendants, fishermen, oil rig workers, and children from divorced families). Furthermore, some people live in one part of the country but work in a different part of the country (or even in another country), where they stay in some kind of home during the week (three-four days) and return to their ‘real’ home at the weekends or when they are off duty. The reasons so many engage in commutes of this kind are many: work, lifestyle, and parents’ choices. Whichever the reason, they all have the continual and repetitive movements in common. To these people, living between destinations is an everyday, mundane condition. Plans, logistics, packing and unpacking, goodbyes and hellos become a central part of everyday living. They practice mobility, and

thus commuting becomes an everyday experience. Some of them travel locally, others overseas, and often they travel by the same routes to specific destinations. They are not migrants, tourists, backpackers, pilgrims, nomads; their lives are in between all these categories.

In this article I will explore mobility on a small scale, and investigate the universe of a handful of children (ages 6-20) who are part of families which some(one) commute(s) to and from. As I followed, talked with and filmed the informants, I was struck by how much they talk about emotions, something I did not focus on or question directly. But also by how their everyday lives are entangled in traveling plans as well as packing and unpacking. They are on the move, but they are also being moved (or emoved)<sup>1</sup> by emotions. My aim is to show how a number of children handle the condition of having to commute between homes, parents and siblings, and how they practically, socially and emotionally navigate in this changeable landscape. The article is structured as follows: following this introduction, I will frame the field of mobility studies as well as the concepts of motion and emotion, and briefly describe my theoretical and methodological approach. Next, I will turn to the universe of some children, and focus on routines and coping strategies, the intermediate space that occurs on their on-going travels, and the feeling of being dispensable. These themes are chosen because of their prominence throughout the material. It is an ethnographical study of intertwined mobile and domestic lives – on a small scale.

## **Mobility, Motion and Emotion**

Being on the move is often viewed as a condition for modern people. In late Modernity, commodities, money, ideas, knowledge, people and practises are being moved around the globe. Motility in space and time is one of the fundamental affordances of contemporary everyday life. At the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century this understanding has been a part of the ‘nomadic turn’, where parts of philosophy, anthropology, sociology and cultural studies have focused on mobility, flux, fluidity, transit, non-humanity and non-places (see e.g. Auge 1995; Bauman 1998; Rapport/Dawson 1998; Rushtie 1994, Urry 2007). In the macro sociological descriptions mobility sounds easy. Often it is described as a clean and frictionless move, where ‘the body is nothing more than a parcel in transit, a chess piece dropped on another square, it does not move but is moved’ (Solnitz 2001, quoted from Bendix/Löfgren 2007,7). Mobility has also been described as some sort of mental process rather than a physical process, which has had an impact on the way identity has been understood; from ‘being’ to ‘becoming’ (Deleuze 1987). Studies of commuting have been connected to and dominated by transport studies, focusing on urban transportation systems, transportation planning, logistics, time measurements, job-housing balance, and health or fitness after taking up active commuting (biking/walking to work). But

also sustainability and land use (Horner, 2004). During the last 10 years, mobility studies have become a research area, which to a great extent looks at the micro-processes of daily life and routines, and how we ‘do’, feel and practice mobility (Vannini 2010; Winther 2007a). In this perspective, daily challenges will necessarily play a part and take up space. Mobility and commuting is not described as a frictionless flow or as an on-going struggle, but as a matter of fact, involving not only opportunities, but also sweat, blood and tears. There has been a development of the interdisciplinary tradition often labelled ‘new mobility studies’, which have looked at mobility primarily as embodied practice and tried to produce dense ethnographies of the commuting life (see also Cresswell & Merriman 2011). The new mobility studies also present a new analytical lens and a new theoretical landscape as Orvar Löfgren writes in his chapter included in this book. The interdisciplinary field draws on several theoretical traditions and methodological approaches, from Actor-Network-Theory and Post-Phenomenology (here we find discussions about ontology, essentialism, agent networks, post-humanism and post-sociality (Latour 1993; Henare et al 2007; Vigh 2014)), Non-Representational Theory (Thrift 2008 Vannini 2012), to more slow and micro-orientated approaches to mobility as practice, where the foci include skills, rhythms, routines, stuff, way of walking, waiting and doing nothing (Löfgren 2008, Ehn & Löfgren 2010; Miller 2008; Ingold 2008). Let me unfold the latter scholars a little: in *Ways of Walking* (2008), Tim Ingold writes about how the sense of belonging and the way humans are anchored in landscape, fields and the ground, are intertwined. In the same book Kenneth Olwig discusses how we do and perform the landscape. According to Ingold and Olwig we make and leave footprints, and we walk (alone and together) in places as social beings (Ingold 2008: 2; Olwig 2008: 84). In 2012, Phillip Vannini opens his interactive book *Ferry Tales*, by zooming in on how mobility is done and performed through a multimodal view of social life. Inspired by Non-Representational Theory, he focused on ‘*the various scripted and unscripted “doings” of which everyday life is made, no matter how seemingly mundane or unimportant*’ (2012b, 8). In *The comfort of Things* (2008) Daniel Miller visits people in a London street, with a focus on possessions, senses, and how people experience their everyday lives through local understandings, everyday practices and ways of using materiality. Henrik Vigh uses the term ‘social navigation’ to show that we move in social environments, which engage and move us as we move along (Vigh 2009). According to Michel de Certeau, we have ways of operating (de Certeau 1984) – ways of using, doing, walking, cooking and living. And while doing these things, we practice home, meals, city and so on. de Certeau makes a distinction between strategies and tactics. Everyday practices, tactile doings and bodily movements can be understood as tactics, and these are often practiced more silently; dispersed, hidden and without a fixed focus. This can also be termed social navigation (Vigh 2009).

When motion and movement are understood as bodily practices where our bodies and minds are placed in a material world (where we feel, touch, and taste everyday life), elements such as friction and emotions turn up. The words motion and emotion, and move and emove are connected. The word emotion comes from Latin – *emovere*, which refers to the verb *move*, to move out. In Danish and Swedish, emotion is termed ‘*følelse*’ and ‘*rörelse*’. ‘*At føle*’ and ‘*at röre*’ is also something haptical: you can feel and touch materiality with the body, and commuting is wrapped in a lot of bodily micro-practices with more or less challenges (resistance, friction). In English and Danish encyclopedia, friction describes resistance and force when physical objects (bodies) move.<sup>2</sup> Friction comes from Latin: ‘*frictio*’, ‘*friction*’, ‘*rubbing*’ and ‘*to rub*’. It describes force and resistances, but also contrary elements. Moreover,

friction is connected to materially tactile and haptic elements (materials that touch each other, but it can also include people’s feelings, conflicts, clashes and touches). Monica Scheer conceptualizes emotions as a kind of practice: ‘*Emotional practices are habits, rituals, and everyday pastimes that aid us in achieving a certain emotional state. This includes the striving for a desired feeling as well as the modifying of one that is not desirable*’. (Scheer 2012: 209). According to Scheer, emotional practices emerge from bodily dispositions conditioned by a social context, which always has cultural and historical specificity. And they work in a continuum from wholly conscious to completely inadvertent. Emotions are not merely something we have; they are also something we do.

The intermediate relationship between motion and emotion seems hard to verbalize. I have developed ethnographic methods that involve small-scale research, traveling in the field and observing how people do these kinds of movement by way of following them and analysing how they embody these different places, how they move things along, are emoved, forget things, handle different kinds of problems, and place themselves in a continual waiting position to try to overcome the feeling of being one you can do without. In my work as an everyday life theorist and ethnographer of domestic lives, I have been particularly inspired by cultural analysis (the Swedish team Orvar Löfgren, Billy Ehn and Jonas Frykman), materiality (Daniel Miller) and micro-phenomenology (Michel de Certeau). This way of thinking and doing research enables the study of how the domestic life and mobile life is done, embodied, smelt and felt. But also of how things (stuff) and bodies come into play, how people and objects are combined and relate to one another without placing the social or object-orientated aspect at the forefront.

### **Field Walking: A Theoretical and Methodological Approach**

As a researcher of home, families and children it strikes me how rarely children’s perspectives are voiced in new mobility studies although it is often the children

who travel between home. Mobility studies (traditional as well as new) take its point of departure in the standpoint of parents (if it includes children at all). From the field of children's studies, critical voices have argued that children do not necessarily have the same experiences and conceptions as their parents. Divergence in perspectives, conflicts of interest, and differences in experience risk being lost in approaches that treat the family as a unit rather than a framework of individuals structured in power relations with various actions and relationships (Højholt et al 2012; Lidén 2005). It is necessary to investigate the various social processes taking place between family members, where relationships continuously change in nature and intensity and where adults and children move and are moved. Which is why I will describe and analyse how a number of children handle the condition of having to move between homes, parents and siblings, and how mobility, to them, is an embodied and emotional practice for which they employ different strategies. I want to grasp the very tangible and practical ways of living on the move, observe what sort of footprints the travellers leave, and where they experience and feel friction and use it as an mover. I want to get closer to how they talk about places they live in and some of the tactics they employ as they transfer and arrive. I have tried to develop research methodology, which can capture the spatial and emotional aspects of the inhabited place experienced by children (Winther 2006 2007, Pedersen et al 2010). I have, among other things, been interested in investigating how siblings' relationships are embedded in materiality and negotiated and experienced locally, but also how the gaps (in between places and in between spaces) that siblings move in together and separately are used and become parts of the modes and moods of mobility (Winther et al 2014, chapter 4). For several years, I have tried to find a suitable equivalent to this kind of on-going, movable fieldwork, where the field is spread out and the researcher follows both people and places, walking in the field together with the informants – I call it field walking (Winther 2006, 2009). As mentioned above, Tim Ingold's idea about 'walking in the field' have inspired me. And mostly de Certeau's keywords: 'ways of operating' have constituted a guideline.

I will draw on two empirical materials from studies conducted between 2008 and- 2013.<sup>3</sup> In 2008-2010, I was part of a large project called 'The Mobile Home Centre' (Petersen 2010; Lynggaard 2012). Firstly, I did on-line virtual fieldwork with 30 commuters, focusing on logistics and movement patterns. Then I chose to follow six of them on their journeys between domestic destinations, i.e. between homes. I arrived at the first home, watched them as they packed and I travelled with them. By doing this, I could pay attention to their day-to-day activities and their handling of stuff. In that way a lot of mundane little things one does without special attention, but also the annoying elements ('sweat, blood and tears') was placed in the foreground. When possible, I stayed with the commuters for some days, or I returned after some days and conducted new observations, interviews

and video recordings. Most of them were adults, but I also followed teenagers living in and traveling between two households, and include these in the following analyses. From 2011-2014, I have managed a research project on siblings. Along with three colleagues, Charlotte Palludan, Eva Gulløv and Mads M Rehder, I have tried to understand patterns, variations, contexts, dynamics and engagement in children's sibling relationships (Winther et al. 2014, Gulløv et al 2015). We interviewed 93 children between the ages of 6-20, all living in Denmark, and I followed (and filmed) some of them as they moved between homes (the same method as used in the first project). I observed them packing, leaving, traveling (alone or together with siblings), arriving, and unpacking. They showed me and told me about the differences in lifestyle, rules, and ways of being in their different homes, and how they cope with these changeable elements. And they told me about time wasted doing nothing; hours of in between time, of which I spent many with them; and intermediate spaces.

In the following sections, I want to analyse how a number of children handle the condition that they commute between homes, parents and siblings, and how they practically, emotionally and socially navigate in this changeable landscape. I focus on routines, coping strategies, gaps that occurs as well as the feeling of being dispensable and a guest.

## **Navigating in a Changeable Landscape**

### **A Condition**

Ditte is a teenager – just turned 14. For the last four years, she has travelled between her siblings and family. 46 % of all marriages end in divorce Denmark, and 24 % of children living in Denmark have two families (Nyt fra Danmarks Statistik 2013). Ditte is one of those children who live in a 'broken family', and for whom a different kind of commuting between her parents is part of her everyday life structure. I field walked with her: visited her at her father's place, watched her pack, left with her, walked with her and arrived at her mother's place, and unpacked with her. I observed her, filmed her, we talked, and I revisited her a few days later. She moves from one home to the other on foot. Either her father or her mother accompanies her and when they arrive at the other parent's home, they all eat together. Ditte packs her things just before leaving: she stands in her room with her bag, and looks around with what could be characterized as carelessness: 'I need this and that, and my Nintendo..., wow – the keys and the mobile phone'. She does not bring any clothes, just things for school, electrical cords and things for the computer, drawing equipment and so on. I ask her what she thinks about moving home:

Ditte: Hrm, often it's in the middle of the week. Then my mom starts to talk: soon you'll have to return to your dad's, I'll miss you, and so on..., and now and then she tries to force me to go for walks or on outings!

Ida: Please explain it a bit more, how come?

Ditte: If she ....She returns home from work and says: ok Ditte, how about going for a walk in the woods or to the Café? And I say 'maybe', 'perhaps' or 'no'. Sometimes she will argue 'Come on, soon you'll leave me, and stay with your dad. We can talk a bit before' or something like that.

Ida: She tries – as I understand it – to get a little bit more out of you. Is that so?

Ditte: Yes, she tries to use that I live in two places, and will soon leave to stay with dad.

Ida: When you say 'use', does that mean that she use it to pressure you?

Ditte: Yeah, like 'Won't you miss me?', and so on. She try to get a bit extra of me.

Ida: She talks about missing you. But you don't miss her?

Ditte: No, I just think: 'Okay', and then I'll go for a walk with her. It's very seldom I say no.

Ida: But you do not tell her: 'I'll miss you'?

Ditte: No

Ida: What do you think about having to travel between to homes?

Ditte: I don't know. I don't care. But my parents are 'urrg-ish'. They find it sad that I leave to go and stay with the other one.

Ida: They think it's sad?

Ditte: Yeah.

Ida: And you do not?

Ditte: No, I think it's ok. I need the breaks. But I would like to stay two weeks in both places instead of one. If I just stay one week, they will talk about moving all the time. Two weeks give me some peace.

The adults are sad. The mother makes an emotional speech. And Ditte becomes annoyed when her mother tries to install a sense of loss, attempting different strategies to get more time with her: going for a walk in the woods, going to a café, etc. Ditte dislikes it. The problem is not the café, but the mother's argument for going there. The mother articulates her feelings, tries to share her sadness with Ditte; she uses an emotional discourse, which makes Ditte feel bored and intimidated. Ditte gets tired and annoyed when the adults talk her into their emotional landscape and use sadness and feelings as a weapon in her movable daily life. To Ditte, commuting is a fact of life; she did not decide on the fragmentation of her family, and her resistance primarily shows when her mother starts talking about missing her and wanting to share feelings. The emotion comes from without (discoursed by the mother), and thus it becomes problematic and conflictual (full of friction) instead of mediating. The sadness can be understood as an attempt at repairing and re-creating a sense of community. The mother and Ditte do not share the condition 'Of having to move', while the mother stays, Ditte leaves again and again as part of her continual coming-and-going. Of course, Ditte can reject her mother and her exposed and outspoken wish for closeness, but it appears difficult for her (because of the (broken) family, her position as teenager, the mother's will, being the one who leaves and so on). The mother's outspoken emotional discourse can become contra-intentional. The mother becomes disappointed; and so does Ditte, and then it becomes difficult to find 'the right' feeling. Ditte moves and that it is all right. But it is tough when her mother emotionalizes the change. Then the friction becomes stronger. It is a kind of

‘emotional labour’ within the private sphere to use Arlie Hochschild’s concept (Hochschild 1983).

Ditte expresses no preference for either household, and she does not label either of them as her home, but as ‘Dad’s home’ or ‘Mum’s home’. Her home is in her body. She talks about the relocations as ‘breaks’. These breaks are: ‘Okay’, ‘it’s how it is’ and ‘I can’t change it’ – they are a practical fact, a reality, a condition. She wants to minimize the travelling, which is why she neither packs nor unpacks, she just throws her stuff together a few minutes before leaving. She carries the most important stuff with her. And if she forgets things, she will not go back to get them; she will wait until the next time she returns ‘home’. Her room at her mother’s place is messy. When she arrives, she throws her bag and school bag on the floor. When I revisit her a few days later, the bags are in exactly the same spot on the floor. She has not unpacked, but her stuff is spread out. She explains the mess thus: ‘*When all my stuff is spread out, they can see I’m here and they can’t get rid of me*’. With her mess she takes up space, and becomes part of the house. Moving between homes and siblings also gives Ditte a much-needed break from the others. When she talks about it, there is nothing to suggest that she thinks it should be otherwise. But it matters to her, and not least because it is difficult and laborious. Carelessness and a laid-back attitude characterise her micro moves. She does not want to spend time packing, she does not want to be on a journey, and she utilizes a strategy of spreading out her stuff to take up space, because by doing so, there can be no doubt that she is present.

## Routines

Annika, aged 11, moves between her two homes every Monday. It is a well thought out system, that takes into account the fact that she and her siblings have many parents and siblings, all of whom need to fit into an extensive logistics system that allows them to spend as many days as possible together in both places. Various systems are in place and they include the parents’ various siblings and their families, who all live apart. A large coordinated system of many people – especially small ones (children) – who ‘roll’ into and out of different households. All ‘rolls’ involves many actors. Like Ditte, Annika knows exactly what she needs to bring, and her moves follow a strict plan, of which she holds the grand overview and knows every little detail. Asbjørn, aged 15, is annoyed by the never-ending train travel. He drags all his stuff along, and his two sisters, Rigmor (17) and Frida (13), constantly rebuke him; he thinks their traveling is a sheer waste of time. Together, they have criss-crossed the country for the last six years, and they know exactly who is in charge of the tickets, food, chocolate, and water. It is all orchestrated from the moment they leave one home and until they arrive at the other end. They all agree that they do nothing together on all these trips, besides spending five hours each way, shoulder to shoulder. They spend hours and

hours of doing nothing, waiting and being in some sort of in between space. They want to visit their father, but find it annoying that they have to miss football matches and social events because their parents live at either end of the country. They consider these journeys a waste of time, and when I ask them what they do together on these trips Rigmor says: '*Absolutely nothing*'. They are evidently annoyed with one another. 10 minute into their journey, Rigmor puts her foot in Asbjørn's lap and he strokes it all the way across the country. A non-discursive density and intimacy occurs, a kind of emotional practice, which can be understood as a reaching out for each other.

Traveling between homes becomes routinized: how to pack and travel, how to say goodbye, who should and wants to sit where, how to arrive. Routines are characterized as something you do over and over again, which no longer requires attention, but has turned into actions that are part of one's bodily movement and heart rate (Ehn & Löfgren 2010). When the commuting children and youngsters travel together, they spend hours together in what one might call an intermediate stage. It becomes a limbo that might not be afforded any particular significance by the children, but rather is considered a waste of time. For the children who accompany each other, these trips, with all their coordination and practical tasks, can become continual events and points of reference for interaction. The move between homes results in quarrels and irritations, but in the intermediate time and spaces a relationship may arise, which builds on shared reflections on their mundane everyday life. Traveling together means sharing routes, tracks, emotional and embodied experiences, and they become partners in the interpretation of life in their common home(s). Routines are build up over time and become a kind of travel grid for the children – it organizes and frames the modes and moods in a manner that allows things to stay the same, with no need to recreate neither modes nor moods every time. They build up many bodily micro practices over time by doing them again and again. They have rituals and routines on the journey, but also when they leave one place and arrive at another.

Ditte changes her abode every two weeks. When she arrives at the new place for the first time, she has a routine of ringing the front doorbell. She has a key in her bag, but after being away for two weeks: '*It's nicer to announce my arrival*', she explains to me. In the transfer she is an in-betweenener. Her mother is always waiting for her and she opens the door to welcome her; they always have some sort of special dinner. After the initial arrival, Ditte will use her key. The arrival becomes a ritual that does not have to be invented every time and that also marks a transition. For Ditte, but also for the rest of the household, it works as an everyday 'rite de passage'. The in-between position returns when Ditte's mother starts talking about her leaving. The welcome ceremony can be understood as a practical stop sign in the ongoing change, and a marker or ritual that helps her in her emotional practice. At Annika's place there is no marker or ritual. She packs, moves and arrives at the next home. Her 'rolls' become an everyday phenomenon.

## Mind the Gap

Juliana is 17 years old and her sister Arendse is 15, they have travelled between their two homes since they were very young. Commuting was never their decision, but since their parents divorced 14 years ago, they have had to move 40 km every third week. When Juliana packs her things, she is fast; Arendse on the other hand is very slow, and Juliana is annoyed by this slowness and sedateness. The trip between their homes has always been filled with bickering about issues such as the pace to pack, whether to take the train or the bus, to walk fast or slow, and to arrive on time or late. On one journey, they reflect on their past travels:

Arendse: You know; if we walked three meters from each other, you set the pace.

Juliane: Yeah, yeah. I was in charge ... That's just the way it is.

Arendse: You really think so? ... It's not just something you're saying?

Juliane: With a hint of irony. No, I guess it's true.

Arendse: So we didn't walk at the same pace!

Juliane: No ... we ended up at the same pace.

Arendse: Yes, I followed YOUR pace.

Juliane: Instead of one of us falling in line with the other, one of us adjusted our pace...

Arendse: No... I started to walk slowly to see if you would keep up the pace or walk just as slowly as I did. ....

Juliane: And when you were three meters behind...

Arendse: Yeah ...then I had to try to keep up.

They restage one of the innumerable ways they have travelled together and remember negligible movement patterns as emotional, and significant to their relationship. To these girls commuting cannot be described as a frictionless move, but rather very friction full. Juliana is the eldest and seems to be the dominant one and she remembers this kind of strife with indulgence. Arendse's facial and body language reveal years of irritation. It seems that the re-staging reactivates some of the feelings in the interaction, but they do not stop, they continue to walk while some unspoken thing remain hanging in the air. The air is full of irritation and friction, balancing between engagement and disengagement.

In the article 'Motion and Emotion: Learning to be a Railway Traveller', Löfgren writes: *'The words we use to describe mental states are words of motion. Emotion literally means moving-out, and feeling comes from touching: they are words about exploring the world, reaching out'* (2008: 332). By retelling how they have travelled together, Arendse evoked the mood she had been in. It can be laborious and emotional to do these kinds of moves. The words motion and emotion, and move and emove are connected. Arendse and Juliana move very concretely and they leave many footprints. They behave, act and deal practically as well as verbally with their circumstances; they feel, touch and taste the movement – they 'rörer verden' (touch the world).

All these young commuters move between multiple rooms, between 'Mum's home' and 'Dad's home'. One can get the feeling that there are things floating

about, exchanged and transported. They commute not only between several places but they also exist in the gaps – in the in between spaces. But what are gaps? Among other things, a gap is a hole between something. ‘Mind the gap’ is a warning phrase issued to rail passengers in train stations. The gap is also a sign. A sentence is meaningless without spaces between words, and it is absolutely essential that such spaces are ‘empty’. It is a break, a time interval, a potentiality for something else, it marks an end and a new beginning. The composer John Cage wrote the music piece “4:33” (1952) as a long pause that lasted 4 minutes and 33 seconds. It was not the lack of music/audio that interested him, but all that happens while nothing happens. In this immediate vacuum – space – there is always something to see and hear. The in between space may be the break-out spaces, a space between rooms – a transition zone (a threshold), some sort of third space (a heterotopia in a Foucauldian sense), with the potential of becoming an important but more liquid space. The children are transiting between spaces, between homes and between logics. This transit can be understood as something that must be overcome, but can turn into an intermediate space, a floating in between zone. This transit is not just waiting time or useless time; it is also a space where they can do things, either alone or together, with some of their siblings. In this space something else can arise. It can become a space in which they rehearse their ability to handle routines and use the gap, and it can be both laborious and liberating.

## **To Be Dispensable and a Guest**

These children are top-trained as commuters and logisticians. They move between different family configurations, follow different patterns, routes, logics and routines. They are part of many types of families, have siblings and are choreographed in a way that requires attention and a commitment to change and flexibility. Contrary to those who live in one place, they must constantly be aware of whom they should be with; they orient and re-orient themselves in their commuting between different ways of doing homes. I quote Juliana again who explain her condition thus:

I think that it’s been hard to ... having to be Juliane in two different places. And being part of a family, I mean, that’s very much about more or less taking each other for granted. Not in a negative way, I just don’t know how to put it. But where everybody belongs as much as everyone else in the family that you’re part of. And I certainly feel – and I don’t think it’s possible not to – but being the one who moves back and forth, you, just a little ... you belong just a little bit less. (Juliane 18 years)

At home with her father and his wife, she will for example, ask permission before taking something from the fridge and she calls to let her father know, if she will be home sooner or later than originally agreed upon. In this home, she is not a co-constructor of the home rules – she behaves more like a guest. Her younger

siblings, who live permanently in each their own homes, are 100% part of the family, and if they are not at home, the family seems incomplete. But if Juliane is missing, which she often is, the family will still seem complete. She knows that they love her, but on an everyday level she is dispensable. She knows it is a condition that cannot be changed. One of her navigation strategies has been to get a sense of the current atmosphere and then fit her into the contexts that are now present. It requires a lot of attention, and still she has a feeling of not quite being a full member. At the same time, she puts the relationships she has left in brackets – on hold. As a strategy she connects, reconnects, and disconnects because she cannot be mentally and emotionally present in several places at once. The only person, whom she never puts in brackets, is her sister Arendse, with whom she commutes. And Arendse is the one person she always quarrels with and is annoyed by. They move together, and by having this emotional closeness they know exactly when and how to irritate each other in the in between spaces, but also how to take care of each other. They both use and ‘mind the gap’.

Cecilie is 20 years old and lives in London. When she is home for Christmas, she visits her father and his wife and her siblings and appears to be a treasured guest. Ditte rings the doorbell. Juliana feels that she belongs a bit less than all the others, who take each other for granted. Asbjørn, Rigmor and Freja enjoy visiting their father and feel that when they stay with him, it is like having a free weekend without tasks and requirements. The metaphor ‘guest’ may be used in order to understand what it means to belong less, not to be taken for granted, to be the person who comes and goes and therefore does not quite count, or to be the one welcomed by a committee at the door. Being a guest or a visitor means being someone who is invited in from the outside and then afforded hospitality by a host (Derrida 2000). One can be a welcome guest, a tolerated guest, or a frequent guest. The kind of guest you are depends on the kind of hospitality you are greeted with. The position as guest will be reduced the more you know about the home’s logic, space and family rhythms; whether you take part in the practical tasks, if you feel that you belong, and whether it is possible to feel at home and to be able ‘to home oneself’ (Winther 2009). Being a guest can also provide freedom. A guest does not have the same obligations and will soon move elsewhere, which can create a mental and physical space.<sup>4</sup> Departures, farewells and welcomes can become routine, but require, no matter how they are practiced, an emotional transition. Through welcome rituals the re-arrived is transformed from being an outsider to a full member. In the material, no one describes himself/herself as a stranger or unexpected. They all feel more like newcomers or as if they have re-arrived, as those who must adapt, and as those who know that they are not always expected and not always included in the everyday planning. They may hold an initial position as guests but through different homing strategies they become included among those who belong and inhabit the space – for a

while. Regardless of positions, it is time-consuming and laborious to re-arrive and re-establish oneself.

## **Exit**

In this article, I have investigated how a group of children move and commute between homes, families and siblings. The main finding is how their embodied and emotional practices take form on the move, and how they by way of routine, rituals and everyday pastimes achieve a certain emotional state. With this work, I wish to contribute to the research on mobile studies by including children's perspective, and small-scale ethnography on how they practically, emotionally and socially navigate in this changeable landscape.

All the young movers/commuters I have followed through my field walks and research live (ex)changeable lives. They are top-trained as commuters and logisticians, who move between places; they follow different patterns and routes. They have bags with things they bring along and they have routines or rituals for when they leave and when they arrive. They have coping strategies; they connect and disconnect; some of them put brackets around the places and people they leave; and they learn to clock in and out. Some of them have chosen a laid-back attitude in relation to their moves. They do not want to be on an ongoing journey and have found strategies to minimize this condition (packing very late, spreading their stuff around, and 'rolling' in and out of the households with a minimum of fuss). Some of these strategies are practiced in silence and without a fixed focus, others with the limelight switched on. Many of the children are part of different family configurations and may have siblings that they do not share parents with. Being a part of this choreography requires attention and a commitment to change and flexibility. These families may have various and conflicting expectations and employ different ways of doing and being. To be able to navigate in this kind of existence requires constant emotional labour.

A lot of bodily micro-practices are built up over time, done and performed over and again. These commuters cannot choose to stay in one place – moving and mobility are conditions, their reality. Some of them live with a feeling of counting for less and being dispensable, and the metaphor guest is used to understand what it means to belong less, not to be taken for granted, or to be the person who comes and goes and therefore does not quite count. Many of them travel together with siblings. Traveling together means sharing routes, tracks, emotional and embodied experiences, and they become partners in the interpretation of life in their common home(s). They use a lot of time in transit. It is not just waiting time or wasted time, it can also be an intermediate space where they do 'nothing' (alone and together). This space (gap) can cause a number of frictions, which can do the relations between the travellers even more fragile and/or strong. They move between places in a continual process of coming and going, and their everyday

life is rapped and cloaked in traveling plans, packing and unpacking. Over and again, they have to re-arrive, re-establish and re-figurate themselves and this is both time-consuming and laborious. They change places, they re-group, and they move, and commuting becomes a mixture of attachment and fragmentations in a grid of more or less stabile connection lines. I have showed that they are not parcels in transit, but subjects – mind and body – in transfer. For these continually coming-and-going-people, motion and emotion work together and emove them along.

**Ida Wentzel Winther** is Associate Professor at the Department of Education, University of Aarhus. Ida is trained as cultural sociologist, and has for many years worked with everyday life, mobility, home, family, social media and the importance of space and place. She focus on the ordinary and the obvious; small items, gaps, in-between time and in-between space She works both theoretical, methodological and practical with visual anthropology and culture phenomenology. E-mail: [idwi@edu.au.dk](mailto:idwi@edu.au.dk)

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> It is not a misspelling. It will be explained later on.

<sup>2</sup> Anne Tsing has worked with the concept friction (Tsing 2004), but my way of using friction is very concrete and not so sophisticated.

<sup>3</sup> Managed by Marianne Graves Pedersen. Department of Computer Science, University of Aarhus, Centre for Interactive Spaces. Avieja B Lynggaard and Peter Krogh did also participate.

<sup>4</sup> See also Palludan & Winther, where we analyze how children through their rooms get a territory, and how the battle for space and resources takes place in families where space is less because many children commute in and out.

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## Mobile Misfortune

By Henrik Vigh

### Abstract

This article examines how the emergent cocaine trade in Bissau, the capital of the West African country of Guinea-Bissau, has become entangled with and trickled into the life-worlds, hopes and fears of the city's many impoverished young men. The article is divided into two parts. While the first part looks at the predicament of youth and the hope of migration in Bissau, the second illuminates the anguish of deportation and the despair of being forcefully 'displaced back home'.<sup>1</sup> Following in the footsteps of the young men who navigate the cocaine trade in order to obtain better lives for themselves and their families, it shows how involvement in the cocaine trade is both a curse and a catalyst. Though trading the drug may facilitate migration and mobility, generating social being and worth in the process, it is an activity that is haunted by the threat of deportation and the termination of the mobility it enables. This article thus looks at the motives and manner in which young men in Bissau become caught up in transnational flows of cocaine. It shows how motion is emotionally anchored and affectively bound: tied to and directed toward a feeling of worth and realisation of being, and how migration from the global South may have negative potentiality as an end-point via the ascription of illegality and condition of deportability that shade it.

**Keywords:** Migration, nullification, deportation, illegality, cocaine

## Introduction: Equivocal Catalyst

Justinho had become an unwilling witness to his country's demise long before Guinea-Bissau became infamous for its role in the transnational cocaine trade. Born shortly after the war of independence ended in 1973, he initially grew up in a country characterised by post-independence optimism, full of imaginaries of better times and hopeful prospects (Vigh 2006b). Thirty-three years on, neither Justinho nor Guinea-Bissau had attained even a trace of the good life envisioned. Coming of age in one of the world's most impoverished and unstable countries, his life had been thrown onto socially and economically barren ground. 'This is what we have', Justinho said with resignation, spreading his arms toward the run-down urban scenery: 'a life of poverty' (*vida di pobresa*). The announcement was devoid of nostalgia or sentimentality; instead, it was a pragmatic proclamation of his 'thrownness' (Heidegger 1996: 252), merely stating the stark conditions underlying his being. Justinho and Bissau had developed in tandem, he becoming a disenfranchised young man barely scraping by whilst the country had become poor, globally disconnected and chronically stuck at the bottom of the world's various development indexes (Vigh 2014)

The cocaine connection kicked off in Guinea-Bissau around 2005. Following the many rumours of its presence it soon became clear that the influx of drugs into the small country was not a one-off event but a more concerted and organised development structured by the very top figures in the Guinea-Bissauan government and military elite. Over the following years, this elite transformed the country into a major drug hub (see Vigh 2012) leading the UN to designate Guinea-Bissau 'Africa's first narco state'.<sup>2</sup> The involvement of senior public figures in the trade and trafficking granted the cartels a high level of immunity in the country and the influx of cocaine and cartel members was evident in the everyday life of Bissau; noticeable in the sudden influx of well-off South Americans, as well as in the new-found wealth of some of the locals involved. Though the situation caused concern when seen from abroad, the young men I speak to embraced it as a medium of possible progress. In the context of disastrous poverty, broken post-colonial imaginaries, and sombre prospects, the cocaine connection was seen as a beacon of hope and interpreted as a long awaited end to the economic and geo-political abandonment of the country.<sup>3</sup>

Based on long-term ethnographic fieldwork with young men in Bissau, this article looks at the cocaine trade from within and below. Working in the space between criminology and anthropology, it investigates the cocaine connection from the point of view of some of the young urban men that have become caught up in it, and sheds light on the ways in which flows of cocaine through the small country have become tangled with social life and trickled into the hopes, fears, movement and emotions of the youth I research. The recent increase in the influx

of cocaine to the continent constitutes yet another story of ‘global Africa’ (Ferguson 2006) not merely as abjection but as what we might term ‘a margin in the middle’ (Vigh 2014) that connects three continents and a substantial part of their population in alternative international economic flows (cf. Mbembe 2001:66). When cornered or trapped, people look for available escapes and while transnational organised crime may be seen as a social and security risk by, for example, the Un and EU, it is, as we shall see, perceived as a possible enabler of migration and mobility, generating social being and worth, and imbued with the power to propel people from being ‘no one’ (*ninguin*) to becoming ‘someone’ (*alguin*), by many of the young men I talk to. By navigating the spaces that are undesired or rejected by official geopolitical figurations the trade may provide an escape from poverty, enable migration, and afford livelihoods. Yet the illegality of the substance carries with it a constant risk of termination of the positive emplacement that it is used to facilitate in the first place, making its negative potential stand as a curse via the threat of deportation that mars it as a possibility.

In this manner, the article looks at the intersection between motion and emotion by illuminating the way poverty is socially experienced, structures of power are felt, and the sentiments and actions they stirs up. Rather than merely investigating what emotions are, it investigates what they do (Ahmed 2012:4) and the way they emerge out of and feed into social life.

As a study of emotions this article does not as such take its point of departure in short-lived *sensations*, *moods*, or *affects*, but focuses instead on more prolonged everyday experiences of distress and vulnerability. Emotions are approached as lasting states accompanying social predicaments or conditions, as seen, for example, in the destitution of poverty or the embarrassment of stigma. Due to their protracted marginality young men in Bissau find it difficult to gain a positive position in life and become socially valued and substantiated, resulting in a feeling of worthlessness and incapacity. Yet, while my informants see Guinea-Bissau as a place void of positive social movement, as one coup has followed another and the economic situation has gone from bad to worse, the city has come to encompass alternative kinds of change. The influx of cocaine has generated a flow of migrants, livelihoods, and routes to social mobility that crosscuts the difficult continuities of life in Bissau with moments of hope and horizons of possibility. While the first part of the article looks at the predicament of youth, the anguish of marginality, and hopes of migration in Bissau, the second part thus ties the difficulty of being an impoverished young man in Bissau to the life chances that the cocaine trade represents and, finally, to the desolation of deportation and the despair of being forcefully ‘displaced’ back home due to one’s involvement in it (cf. Peutz 2006). Cocaine, then, is seen as an equivocal catalyst in Bissau. It encompasses the potential for change and escape from the dire poverty and low status that defines many lives in the city, yet it also incorporates the reversal of this positive potential via imprisonment and deportation.

## Struggling for Worth

For the young men I work with in Bissau, cocaine thus simultaneously has the potential to provide and terminate possibilities and life chances. However, in a space of negligible possibilities and few positive prospects, the pros outweigh the cons. As Leonido told me in an interview, navigating the cocaine trade was less a choice than a necessity:

You do what is needed (*precisa*). If you can go as a mule (*engolidur*), you go. Clearly! Ask anyone... who wouldn't go? If someone offers, who would refuse? If there is a possibility you go. You must go!  
And if you do not go. If you do not go, what happens?  
Nothing [he laughs]. Nothing happens, nothing, nothing, nothing! That is the problem. If I stay here, nothing, nothing changes. If you do not go, you will tire your head until you become sick with worry [*preocupasion*]. You must go! This way you can be something more. You can be someone good, someone respected. You understand? Here there is nothing, but if you go, if you succeed, you will see it all (*bu na odja tudo*).

Leonido positions the flow of cocaine in relation to the blockage of social mobility and the societal decline that defines his life in Bissau. The movement of the drug provides mobility and proximity to emotional states other than the abjection of poverty. Because of the difficult social and societal situation, Leonido is willing to do almost anything to get out of the city, including latching on to the cocaine trade that cuts through the small, dilapidated capital and connects it to the underbelly of the wider world. Like many of my other interlocutors he approaches the cocaine trade with cautious optimism, as a potential opening toward a brighter future. The trade provides a rare possibility of moving on positively in life, making it an offer not to be refused. 'Who would hide (*tudji*) from possibility,' he remarked later in the interview.

Leonido's idea of the cocaine trade being a purveyor of positive social emplacement is not uncommon among the young men I do fieldwork with in the city.<sup>4</sup> Social emplacement, in this perspective, refers to socio-affective embeddedness. Due to the many years of decline, and the collapse of both the state and the economy,<sup>5</sup> many urban youth in Bissau struggle to survive and positively position themselves in the city. Unable to support themselves, they are primarily seen as burdens, as drains on the already strained resources of social support systems. From this vista of dependency and increasing marginality, the cocaine trade stands out not so much as a criminal and dangerous enterprise but as an offer of mobility and livelihood enabling people to move toward a more valued and worthy social position. Rather than being a negative phenomenon it appears as a conditionally positive one, treasured for the chance it may grant people to actualise their social potential, allowing them to transform latent personhood into active social being. The cocaine trade is in this manner seen as a way of lifting oneself out of the mess one's life has been thrown into, and as a means of getting away from the city one is stuck in.

‘It does not allow you to be a man,’ (*i ka na desjau sedu homi*), Amadu said, as he explained what it is like for him to live in Bissau. ‘It,’ the strangely impersonal entity that he sees as restricting his movement into manhood, refers to the inhospitable social circumstances that his life is set in. ‘Bissau is fucked [*fudido*],’ he continued, ‘even if you struggle till you tire you will never succeed in being somebody.’ Amadu’s grievance at being unable to reach ‘proper’ manhood is not an unusual one in a West African context (see Bayart 1993; O’Brien 1996; Richards 1996; Abdullah 1997; Utas 2003; Vigh 2006 [2003]; 2008; Hoffman 2006; 2011). Africa may be *rising*, as it is currently popular to claim,<sup>6</sup> but it is *polarising*, with some regions and social categories becoming increasingly well-off while others are caught in a seemingly endless cycle of deterioration (Ferguson 1999). Such processes of decline have shown themselves to have a particularly forceful impact on the social position and well-being of young urban men who are ideally supposed to move toward self-sufficiency yet remain thoroughly unable to, because of the economic crisis, and so instead become stuck between social positions, and excluded from – or in a peripheral position to – the social support networks that otherwise constitute the alternative social security system in the country (cf. Mdahavan 2003). In a similar vein, the prolonged state of decline has halted the flow of resources between generations in Bissau and crippled the state’s ability to provide alternative routes to social mobility, leaving young people in a situation where they are desperately searching for opportunities and prospects in a city that provides none.

For many urban youth in Bissau the city is, as such, experienced as a space of stagnation and existential truncation (Vigh 2006a). They are forced by circumstance to live, as Amadu mentions above, in a city that nullifies them, in a place of little positive societal, social or personal development. This societal demise generates a barren social landscape where young people are commonly unable to gain social standing and worth. They are incapable of moving into a positive position from which they might play a constructive part in the unfolding of communal life, leaving them abject and ostracised – without valued social being. ‘I am someone good, I am not someone bad’, Bernardinho told me, as he tried to convince me that his social failings were not ascribable to his person but to the situation at hand. His description of himself as fundamentally ‘good’ took aim at the negative stereotype he faces as someone who not only finds it difficult to survive but is also unable to participate in social life in an acceptable and anticipated manner.

The terms “acceptable” and “anticipated” refer back to social norms and expectations, and the failure to live up to them generates an intense feeling of deficiency. The experience is one of being unsubstantiated and unrecognised. As a group of people who can barely support themselves, my interlocutors are additionally troubled by the fact that they are ideally supposed to move into a position from which they can tend to the needs of relatives and relations. As a

respectable man (*homi di respieto*) Seku told me, you must ‘work hard (*pega teso*) so that you can help your family.’ Failing to do so means that ‘people will not respect you. They will say that you have no worth (*ka bali*).’ Cultural expectations have not adjusted to social possibilities, leaving these young men in a situation where they survive by feeding off support networks that they ought ideally to be feeding into. For Seku the gendered and generational position of being an *homi di respieto*, a ‘proper’ man, is thus out of reach as it is defined relationally in terms of the ability to support others. ‘If you do not help your family, you are nothing,’ Abdulai similarly told me, as he explained the various ways that one was expected to provide for one’s kin in terms of food, medicine, and clothes. The obligation to give is not, however, limited to kin in Bissau, but is just as important in intimate relationships. Romance, for example, is maintained and communicated via *diniero par ferra*, ‘money for the market,’ an undefined amount given to a woman after sex. This is not to be confused with payment, which is given before sex and would foreclose the relationship by defining it as an act of prostitution. Rather, *dinhiero par ferra* is reciprocal, part of an exchange that serves to consolidate and sustain the connection. *Dinhiero par ferra* does not just direct our attention to the fact that sex is transactional in Bissau, but more generally to the fact that one’s social standing as a man is partly related to one’s generosity and ability to provide.

Not being able to give is a common cause of concern for many young men, just as giving too little will lead to ridicule. In general, the inability to provide resources, relegates men to the category of being poor (*um algin pobre*): to the belittling position of being a ‘boy’ or ‘youth,’ as someone junior, or to being stigmatised as someone who is *riso mon*, ‘hard handed,’ as being stingy is called. Common to all of the above is that they are signs of social incapacity. Being and worth can, as such, be seen as related to the nature of one’s engagement in the ‘economy of affection,’ defined by a cultural imperative of solidarity and provision in relation to the flow of resources. The difficulty of achieving adulthood and become a respected man is directly related to the fact of being unable to engage positively and constructively in social relations, as a capacity rather than a constraint, clarifying the very social and emotive embeddedness of mobility and economic aspirations. In this respect, engagement in the cocaine trade may be directly linked to ‘the ethics of illegality’ (Roitman 2006), where what is gained is not just individual status but the ability to support kith and kin, making the ‘illicit’ or ‘illegal’ a moral act in its own right. The people I talk to are aware of the risks involved in the cocaine trade but find themselves obliged to engage in it as it may generate better lives and futures for their family and friends and so position them as a valued node in a larger network.

Migration and concomitant remittances reveal the global reach of the economy of affection. Yet, the economy of affection (Hydén 1983) is not merely a redistribution of resources along lines of solidarity and care. It is tied, as seen above, to gendered and generational expectations. As a ‘man’ is obliged to

contribute to it in certain ways over time, the connection between affection and provision has a normative dimension to it. It is, in other words, not just an economy of affection but equally one of *obligation*, making it, at times, a burden of provision. In order to be considered a proper man, as Seku says in the above, one has to occupy a position from which it is possible to support relatives and connections. The quote emphasises his desire to gain social being and worth, yet it also clarifies the vulnerability of this type of masculinity, as the very weight of expectations placed upon young men causes everyday life be experienced as a burden, and one's failure to provide to be felt as an attack on one's manliness and gendered status (Cohen-Mor 2013:173).

### **'Who Wants you when you are Nothing'?**

Though normally approached as a warm and gentle alternative to the cold, mechanical dynamics of the market economy, the economy of affection can, as such, pack a nasty social punch. Being unable to meet expectations and obligations generates an everyday punctuated by nullification, the experience of being reduced to 'being nobody', a body without worth defined by its social 'hollowness' (cf. Berman 2006, 20). Nullification is, in this perspective, not to be understood as an analytical reduction, a bracketing out of the actual world in order to arrive at the phenomenological (cf. Husserl 1913/2012), but rather as an experience of being bracketed out, and having to temporally bracket out the social conventions that one is unable to fulfil. 'I walk between stoves [*fugon*],' Amadu said, as he was explaining how he survives on a daily basis. Walking between stoves was Amadu's way of trying to spread out the burden of his presence. He moves between his father's, aunts', uncles', and sisters' houses, asking for food in order not to be such a drain on any single household that they might be forced to deny him meals or favours. 'Even if you do not want to, you must beg for food (*pidi semoula*). You feel shame, but you have to,' he said.

As a person that ought ideally to be able to contribute to the *fugon*, Amadu encounters his lack of status in the very practicalities of surviving. The schism between being expected to fend for oneself, yet being stuck in a situation where one is dependent on hand-outs and donations in order to make it through the day results in an experience of social incapacity. It generates an inability to achieve worthy being within the economy of affection and a concomitant relegation to the category of youth as an unsubstantiated adult. Man longs for completion and is haunted by the lack of it, Sartre states (1956), yet this longing is, at times, merely directed at having positive presence rather than elevated goals and prominent positions. When I ask young men in Bissau about their imagined futures, and what they envisage themselves becoming, the answer often starts, as we saw above, with a default 'somebody' (*um align*), a concept which, in all its vagueness, is defined merely by being a valued part of the social body. When they further

clarify what ‘being somebody’ actually entails, they often qualify the term with adjectives such as ‘good’ or ‘respected,’ as positions that are described by their positive emplacement within a relational and normative landscape, defined by what one is able to be for others. The point may be banal, but it not only indicates an aspiration that guides my informants’ actions but also directs our attention to their current experience of being the opposite. ‘Who wants you when you are nothing,’ Seku asked me rhetorically, as an ironic comment on the endless boasting and description of sexual escapades that otherwise often characterises the conversation among the group of young men we would hang out with. For the young men I talk to in Bissau, their life situations are frequently defined by a sense of nullification, a feeling of being no one and nothing, as their marginality positions them as people ‘whose words and actions have no place in the life of the collectivity’ (Jackson 2012:172) and are unheard and unqualified.

It comes as no surprise that people, when their lives are thrown into such socially barren circumstances, attempt to escape their predicament and move into spaces of possibility from which they may further their lives in a constructive way. Though people may not always have a clear idea of where they are going most of us have very clear ideas of what we wish to escape or avoid, and the young men I talk to remain attentive to any change that might allow them to get away from their socio-generational impasse and gain momentum in life. I have, in my earlier work, focussed on how war can provide people with just such a possibility, as it opens up otherwise closed networks and political structures and enables youths to navigate networks and events (Vigh 2006). Yet, currently, as Bissau has settled into an anxious and insecure period of peace, the intersection between migration and cocaine connections has replaced mobilisation as the perceived primary catalyst of social being, granting motion and escape to the destitute and desperate.

### ***Ki Kussa di Cocaina***

‘All those people building houses. You see them? If you see a brutally big car (*bruta di carro*) then you know that the owner went and found his money there [in the cocaine business].’ Dario told me. Dario unapologetically admired people who had managed to make money through the cocaine trade. Living in a small annex, stuck on to his mother’s equally small adobe house, the sudden wealth of people who used to be as poor as him represented an almost mystical rise to fame. Dario’s house was a difficult place to visit and one I sometimes deliberately avoided. The household was poor, even by Bissauan standards, with excrement and old food littering the small dirt courtyard behind it, and his sister’s young child crawling around in the shit. Now in his thirties, Dario longed for another place to live, yet with no resources and no likely way of getting them, he had to make do with this shanty-like shelter. From his perspective, the cocaine connection offered a way out of poverty, visible in the new cars being imported

and houses built. Bissau is falling apart, *darna-darna tudo*, people say, yet the wider decline has, over the last ten years, been punctuated with newly built haciendas publicising the potential profits of the illegal trade.

Most of the cocaine that passes through Guinea-Bissau is strictly in transit, as the property of Columbian and Peruvian cartels. But not all of the cocaine that enters the country leaves it again straight away. The primary means of payment within the cocaine industry is, unsurprisingly, cocaine, and services provided to cartels, in relation to the large-scale movement of drugs, are paid in drugs rather than money. Local middlemen and influential facilitators of the trafficking in Guinea-Bissau are, as such, paid in minor quantities of the goods they protect or transport, creating a smaller yet substantial flow of cocaine into Guinea-Bissauan patrimonial networks. The larger shipments of cocaine that have been intercepted moving out from Bissau are not then cocaine that is in Guinean hands but belong to the cartels as goods *en route*. Conversely, the many instances of smaller amounts of cocaine, intercepted as mules seek to traffic them through airports and seaports, may very well stem from Guinea-Bissauan networks trying to move the rewards gained from facilitating the cartels' business into areas where cocaine can actually make a proper profit, as people are too poor to pay properly for it in Bissau. In short, the larger scale flows create a secondary flow of smaller quantities of cocaine, which travel through local networks and diasporas, connecting places, moving illicit and illegal goods through a dispersed and complex web of relationships, and along different routes and points of distribution. If we look more specifically at the movement of cocaine through the local networks in question, we see that they trickle through patrimonial networks and into the economy of affection in much the same way that resources generally move from big-men and patrons to clients. Entering into the exchange of resources and possibilities for loyalties and services, and into emotive ties. As such, the cocaine trade seems currently to be strengthening existing patrimonial networks in the city by supplying an input of goods into social arrangements that were otherwise running low.

Though the trade has caused alarm in the UN, and various international law-enforcement agencies, the people I spend my time with in Bissau have, as we have seen, met it with optimism. As Dario indicates, in the above quotation, the cocaine connection was seen as opening up closed horizons. Eliseu similarly mentioned the growing cocaine trade in Bissau as a possibility of obtaining a better life. When I interviewed him in 2006, he told me about the potentially positive prospects that cocaine could bring about:

People thought that it [i.e. the situation in Bissau] would get better. All of us we thought that it would get better, but nothing. Now, God willing, it will rise a bit.  
*What is going to rise?*  
Since the big-man [Nino Vieira] came back it will rise. Only he can build Bissau.  
*How will he do that? What will he do?*

If he puts this cocaine thing (*ki kussa di cocaina*)... If he puts it to use in building the country we can rise. He can build the land. People think; 'this big man he will help people. He will help us. If you have nothing he will give you something. Us, we look up to him, so he will help us. If you need a job he will give you one. Even if you want to go abroad it is possible.

The cocaine trade has not, of course, alleviated local poverty, yet it has had an interesting impact on the group of people I work with, as it has ensured a steady flow of income into the patrimonial networks that make up the political structures in the city, and thus made it possible for them to reconnect to the formations they would otherwise have been cut off from due to lack of resources.

Cocaine was seen as opening up an avenue of mobility as it is imagined as enabling a move toward brighter horizons. It offers, in this respect, both social becoming and livelihoods, locally as well as through the possibility of migration, and translates into life chances and future social being. It stands as a substance that holds the possibility of enabling young men to validate themselves socially, making the drug a possible stepping-stone to gaining social worth and recognition. The figure of the mule and migrant conflate, as do motion and emotion, as the possibility of remittances grants the cocaine migrant a positive presence within the social configurations he leaves behind.

## Momentum and Direction

That idea that cocaine provides the possibility of migration is not completely illusory. The ease with which one can gain social being by navigating the cocaine trade may be overstated – at least in relation to the limited number of people I know who have actually made it into Europe as mules – but it does happen and this spurs a potent mix of information and rumours. Similarly, in local and international news, an array of more or less reliable stories of organised trafficking, mixing both truth and fiction, have contributed to the idea. However, even if we leave the rumours aside, there actually has been couriers, and 'shotgun' trafficking with groups of mules being dispatched,<sup>7</sup> meaning that cocaine has acquired an almost mythical status as both fantasy and actual possibility of migration for marginal youths. It represents a chance of obtaining the documents, airfare and income that are otherwise inaccessible. In Iko's words:

Now there is cocaine everything is possible, everything. If you have cocaine you bring it to Europe and you will be rich, rich. You do not even need a lot. Here you can buy a kilo of cocaine for 7000 euro, 9000, 8000. You bring it to Spain and you see a lot [of money], really, a lot.

Or more realistically by Denilson, as he comments on the mules, *engolidurs*, that manage to make a trip to Europe by trafficking drugs:

When this cocaine thing started to come, many people went to Europe. You swallow (*engoli*) it you see, and when you come to Europe you go to the toilet [he laughs]. If

you are lucky, they give you a ticket, passport and send you to Dakar, then you take the plane again from there.

Denilson generally spoke of cocaine, and the possibility it brought with it, in pragmatic and factual ways. He did not emphasise or dwell on its illicitness but referred to it in terms of the life chances and social possibilities it encompassed. The trade, and the involvement of senior military and political figures, is, similarly, broadly accepted. The people I spend my time with see it as a necessary and understandable arrangement, when one takes the overall situation of the country into consideration. Instead of condemning the drugs, they see them as a means to an end: an opportunity rather than illegality.

*Kadakin na busca si caminho*, ‘everyone is looking for his road,’ people will often say when talking about attempts to smuggle cocaine into Europe. The word *caminho*, ‘road’, in itself indicates a practical rather than a normative evaluation. The concept is used as a metaphor for navigable connections and trajectories. It defines an opening or possible line of flight out of a difficult situation and is, thus, used to indicate directionality or opportunity. Interestingly, the concept is often used together with the concept of *trampoline di vida*, life’s trampoline, referring to points or positions from which one can gain momentum; that is, pick up the speed necessary to move socially and/or physically. Taken together the two concepts refer then to the ‘direction’ and ‘momentum’ needed to escape the negative circumstances that define the present.

In Bissau there is good weather, women, everything is good, [it is] just that there is no work. If there were work then everyone would stay here. No one would go anywhere...

*Where do people go?*

Mandjakos go to France. Fula, Mandinga go to Spain. They do not have a future here. If you do not have money who is going to help you? Most young people here wash cars. I wash cars sometimes – I am 36, but I wash cars too. In the beginning you do till 7<sup>th</sup> grade [in school], but then you just sit till you get tired, if you do not have someone to bring you... Here there are only two trampolines in life (*trampolina di vida*). The first trampoline is the drugs thing (*kussa di droga*). The second trampoline is sports, you see. (Denilson)

In other words, the Bissauan social environment is seen as offering so little in terms of social possibilities that cocaine connections have become one of the only ways of acquiring momentum in life and escaping the existential truncation that characterises the present. ‘This cocaine is just a life trampoline, just a life trampoline’ Kio told me, going on to state that in fact ‘it is the biggest trampoline there is (*ki la i trampolina mas garandi ki ten*). If you know someone who trusts you, you can see a ticket and all (*bu na odja billhete e tudo*)’. Due to their difficult social situation, the experience of nullification and the stigma of being a burden on the affective circuits in relation to which they are actually expected to be a resource, the trade is valued for the chance it can grant people to actualise latent personhood. As Bernardinho told me, directly addressing the social obligation to migrate in order to meet expectations of provision:

If she needs a thing where will he [her boyfriend] see [get] it? If you do not give her it, where will she see it? It is the same with marriage . . . That is why marriage has nearly stopped in Africa. You can know a woman ten years, but you will never have enough money to marry her. To be a respectable man you need to marry. If you are not married you will not have respect in society. It is the same thing with work. If you have work you can organize your life, you can get married, and afterwards you can start a family . . . But only someone who knows you . . . Only someone who knows you will give you a job . . . These days, young people are frustrated. It is this that makes young people want to leave, so you can have a standard of living. You go there [abroad] and then you can send money to your family . . . But it is sad, because you are far from each other. It is difficult. Africans have difficult lives.

The tragedy is that one needs to be physically distant in order to be socially present. To gain valued social being, young men, as Sarah Pink so poetically puts it, ‘strive to attain what is most treasured in Bissau, namely absence: the empty space left by migration’ (2001: 103). And cocaine currently provides both the *caminho* and *trampolina* enabling people to achieve this meta-state of absent presence.

Roads and trampolines, as such, refer not just to movement out of Bissau but equally to a move into place **in** Bissau through the status acquired by becoming a figure who is potentially able to support kin and friends via remittances (see Stark 1988; Taylor 1989; Adams 2003). This is not to imply that Bissau is seen as without value, but rather that social value is seen as dormant within the city. Just as the true value of cocaine is only realisable elsewhere, so the actual value of young men is currently dependent on moving out of Bissau for it to be actualised, making Bissau appear as a space of latency.

## Cocaine as Livelihood

However, because worthy social being is so difficult to attain in Bissau, cocaine connections also transform the hope of social becoming into fear of ‘social unbecoming.’ The possibility of losing one’s newly found positive social emplacement by being forcefully removed and sent back, is a constant underlying factor for the people I talk to who have actually made it to Europe. It is a fear of the social *déroute* that lies in being pulled back to a position of subordination and dormancy of being. Being deported is to be *déclassé*, to experience free fall through hierarchies of social value. Furthermore, as the deported migrant is often the sole – or primary – provider for a group of people, deportation can have dire consequences for whole networks within the configurations in question (see Lucht 2011; Drotbohm 2014).

The threat of deportation is made ever-present by the part cocaine plays as livelihood for some of the Guinea-Bissauan migrants who are currently in Europe. As the economic crisis has taken its toll and the level of unemployment has soared in Southern Europe, jobs are becoming increasingly hard to find for irregular or undocumented migrants: their illegal status blocks their possibilities of

employment. In other words, for those involved, the cocaine trade may provide both one of their only possibilities for migration out of Bissau, as well as one of the few ways of gaining an income when actually in Europe: for some, migration is made possible by smuggling the drug into Europe; for many more, cocaine currently makes life possible when actually there. Not as a choice but as a necessity.

‘It was the only job I could get’, Seku told me, as I was trying to interview him whilst he was working hard to push a few grams of cocaine in a *barrio* of Lisbon. Most of the young men I have followed from Bissau to Lisbon and Paris dream of getting good jobs, recognition and the ability to live a worthy life, but within their sphere of possibility cocaine is, similarly to Bissau, treated as a legitimate point of departure. In an almost neo-Clausewitzian mode, the trade is seen as a ‘continuation of business by other means’ (Williams 2002: 164). ‘I don’t force anyone to buy it’, Americano said, while we were standing in an alley from where he pushes cocaine to local and occasional tourists. ‘I don’t put my hand in your pocket, I don’t steal, I don’t hurt people’, he continued, explaining to me that selling cocaine was merely another form of ‘commerce’ (*commercio so*).

Similarly, Latino, another Bissauan pusher, situated his line of work with the words: ‘go over there (points to a bar) and you can buy beer, go over there and you can buy cigarettes; here you can buy cocaine’. In Latino’s opinion, he was working within the boundaries of a capitalist society rather than outside it. Furthermore, the current financial crisis is seen as so severe, in relation to West African migrants in Europe, that selling cocaine is understood as one of the few ways that you will be able to send back remittances. In fact, the trade, and involvement of Guinea-Bissauan networks,<sup>8</sup> is currently seen as so consolidated that even prospective migrants in Bissau now take the trafficking and pushing of cocaine into consideration if they should be successful in moving out of the city. ‘If you go to Spain’, Alou, a hopeful would-be migrant, explained to me in Bissau, ‘you can just as well tell your family you’re selling drugs straightaway’.

The problem is, of course, that the states my informants have made their way into, do not share this pragmatic attitude toward drugs, nor to their illegal entry, and so drug-related crime often leads to deportation. Where many EU states may take a pragmatic view of the illegal status of migrants, they take a quite different stance towards the illegality of their trade.

What happens if they catch you [as undocumented]?

It depends. They can take you or let you be.

If they take you?

They take you. You are there – and they ask you questions: ‘you are from where, you live where, what do you do?’ They beat you, they hit you (*dau ku*) with a fist (*suko*), or they slap you (*bofado*). They are bad. It is like this.

So they let you go?

Depends. If you did not do anything they beat you. But if they catch you, if you are selling things and they catch you, you end up with problems, they deport you. If you go to jail, you will be deported (Americano)

Being caught without papers may land you in detention while the authorities check your identity. It may also lead to abuse. But it normally means being released again a few hours or days later. Being caught with cocaine means going to jail and eventually being deported.

## Deportation as *Déroute*

For the migrants that are involved in the drugs trade, in some way or another, lives are thus lived ‘through a palpable sense of deportability’ (de Genova 2002: 439; cf. Reeves 2010; Mutsaers 2014). Having followed my informants to Europe since 2005, I am currently in the situation where I have started following them back again, and the group of people who has been forcefully removed seems to be growing at a rapid pace to the point where, currently, being a deportee, *deportado*, is becoming a social category in its own right in the city.

There are then increasing numbers of young men who have been sent back because of criminal behaviour, a great deal of which is related to the selling or trafficking of cocaine. Denilson was one of them. I interviewed him a couple of months after he had been deported back to Bissau and he described a process of migration and deportation that was similar to many other such histories that I was to hear:

I took the plane directly to London. I took a big risk. I went with someone else’s passport. He was [a] black [person like me] so I just went and I managed, it was another black. God helped me [to have a] life in London... I had money but I did not have documents. I went with someone else’s passport but he is black like me. In England I sold cocaine. I sold so much cocaine and ecstasy. I had many good customers. If you called me in the night I would get on my bike and go... and one gram (*ngalla*), two grams. No problem. In England there is a lot of cocaine. I was caught. I had cocaine and I had CF-gas in my pocket. They caught me and sent me straight to prison, Croyden Prison [?], and I came back to Bissau (Denilson)

Being caught with cocaine is a common deportee story. Together with violent behaviour it is the most common explanation for being forcefully returned home. As Garandi pointed out:

If they catch you and you have cocaine, then that is certain deportation (*deportason certo*). You go to the court and they put you on an airplane. Afterwards you will be in Bissau without anything. You go to build a palace (*kompū paliçio*) [build a house back home] and you come back with nothing (Garandi)

‘Coming back with nothing’ is deeply stigmatising; a sign of failure; of not having made it despite everything being laid out in front of you. As Dario told me, ‘a lot of the deported are ashamed. Everyone who migrates wants to come home with a good life. People will say [if someone is deported] “this one left but came back with nothing”’.

Though both Garandi and Denilson come across as somewhat blasé about their deportation, they are in fact struggling to find the money or an opportunity that

will enable them to leave again, as being deported is considered both regressive and embarrassing, once again not because of the illegal trade but because of the wasted possibility and *declassément* involved. Being deported most often means losing your ability to contribute positively to the affective circuit involved, and thus entails a move into an even more pronounced sense of nullification. Coming back to Bissau is fine, but only if one does not lose the possibility of providing.

If you are deported you will tell people: ‘no, I just came for holidays’, or you will say ‘no, I came doing business. You say: ‘I came to look for papers... family things’ but after a while, if you are still here people will know you are deported. Buba [a friend] he tells people, no [I am not]! But people know, everyone knows

The cocaine trade is, as such, as treacherous as it is tempting. The successful pusher or trafficker, who is able to send back remittances, is seen as a valuable social figure and a resource for his social network in Bissau. The migrant who has been deported due to involvement in the cocaine trade, is, however, seen as a failure – a social burden. The shadow side of the cocaine trade, for the young men involved is that deportation stands as a fracturing of possibility, a dissolution of provision, and negative social repositioning. Deportees are not just physically removed but existentially displaced – forced by circumstance to live in the ruins of their former potential and value within the economy of affection. It is a process of social dislocation.

## **Só André**

The stigma is one of losing the social being and position that people strive so hard to attain. I have known André since I first came to Bissau. Initially a poor militiaman he later became a leading figure among a group of inner city youth thanks to connections from his time in the Aguentas militia, and was considered a bright and trustworthy young man by the remnants of the ousted political network connected to the former President Nino Vieira. After his side lost the war in 1999 he transformed himself into a small patron – a little big man – in his own right, and in 2006 he had managed to amass a kilo (*um cabeça*) of cocaine by providing services to people higher up in the cocaine connected network (see Vigh 2009b; 2012). Yet as cocaine is too expensive a commodity for the average citizen in Bissau to be able to afford it, the drug – much as the young men I work with in the city – only has potential value in Bissau and, like them, it must be moved to Europe to truly realise its worth. For André, his kilo provided a chance to get out of Bissau and move into a space of actualisation, which meant that he boarded a plane, with a couple of others, seeking to smuggle his cocaine into Portugal. For ethical reasons, I cannot describe in detail the way he sought to get his hard earned commodity into Portugal, as his unusual way of going about it would reveal his identity, but what matters is that despite all his precautions, he was

caught going through customs and sentenced to jail for a handful of years, of which he served a few and was subsequently deported.

I tried to visit him in Lisbon when he was in jail, but he refused to talk to me. When I managed to meet up with him again in Bissau in 2010 he was welcoming, but a shadow of himself. Hanging out with him, and the group of people for whom he used to provide patronage, it was clear that his social standing was lost and his status deflated. ‘I am trying to get documents’, he told me, ‘that is the only thing you can do, just to get new documents’, he continued. As personal documents can be bought in Bissau, he was starting from scratch, literally, with a new birth certificate. Yet, the remaking of an identity through documents was homologous to the remaking of subjectivity that he had to do so in social terms. Instead of being a figure of respect, with social worth and value, André’s position as a deportee made him a figure of failure, someone to ridicule rather than respect. *Ba* André, *Só* André, Raul mockingly called him, using terms of respect to ironically highlight his *déroute*, *Ba* being the Mandinga prefix for a person of status and *Só* the Creole equivalent. Raul was, as such, mocking his deflated status and ridiculing the social unbecoming caused by his loss of positive presence in the economy of affection. Though André’s situation was evidently an undesirable one, he actually managed better than most of the other people I have met up with in Bissau after they were deported. Being back in Bissau he had to live in the ruins of the life he had sought to escape, yet his way of doing so was through a process of rebuilding that, at least, held out some hope. For others, it is clear that the estrangement involved in having to re-inhabit the remnants of a position they thought they had escaped can be a far more destructive experience (Peutz 2006; cf. Schustser & Majidi 2014).

I first met Justinho back in 2000. He was a constantly sick, skinny young man with a nasty cough. ‘He has the prostitutes disease’ (*douenza di putas*, i.e. AIDS), people said of him then, yet when we met up ten years later his affliction seemed mental rather than physical. As we spoke about the last ten years, he recounted a story of migration and deportation. During the interview he looked down, spoke in a low voice and in short sentences told me:

The police took me. I had cocaine and I was caught. It is like this.

*After [that] what happened?*

I went to the courtroom and I went to Bissau.

*What happened?*

I was cursed. Things from the earth, you know, Africans are powerful. I was cursed and I did not know what was happening. I did not sleep, nothing. They gave me medicine and put me on the plane. I did not know what was happening. When I came to Bissau my friend took me to the church of the Nigerians [Pentecostal church].

The story of losing one’s luck due to curses and the envy of others back home runs through a number of the interviews I conducted, as does the sense of

estrangement and of losing one's direction, perhaps most clearly noticeable in the following interview with Tó:

They put me in jail. They caught me and sent me to jail. I was there 2 years three years and I said; 'send me back this is no good'. When I came back... I did not want to go out. In the evening it was too dark. I was scared. When I ask after people of my generation half of them have died. The other half live in Europe. Half of them have died. Look at this. We live in shit. The place is dirty; peoples' toilets [?], rubbish everywhere, virus, bacteria. I am scared of living here, Honestly, I am scared. Hepatitis, bacteria. People die, and then when people die they call it things from the earth, things from the spirits (*problema di terra, kussa di iran*) and then they start buying things to make it better for the spirits (*iran*) but they just make it worse for themselves. Sometimes I smoke to control my nerves. I get nervous. This place it makes you angry, you understand (Tó)

Tó's statement communicates despair, yet it also tells a story of an estrangement of such force that it becomes almost crippling. Deportation, for Tó, means having become foreign to the place that is home. Though he is 'back home', his sudden deportation signalled a move not just into a place but also a social position that is no longer familiar to him.

I was on the plane with Tó to Lisbon just a few years before the above interview was conducted. Knowing that he was making his way into Europe with a false passport and illegal substances, I booked a return flight to Copenhagen, via Lisbon, on the same plane and stood in the queue watching as he made his way through customs in the Portuguese capital. As he was stood in line, going through customs, he turned increasingly grey and anaemic with every step he took. By the time he was about to hand his passport to the customs official he looked feeble, with his hand shaking so visibly that I was sure he would be taken aside for further questioning. The customs official hardly noticed him, looked briefly at his passport without looking up, and waved him through. As I cleared customs Tó was waiting in the baggage hall, his colour returned, he smilingly said goodbye and walked out of the airport. He was to make a name for himself among the Guinea-Bissauans in Europe as a person who knew his way around the shadier sides of European society. He had a mother and two siblings in Bissau, who were dependent on him, and though he made his money selling drugs, he was spoken of as a person of respect.

The estrangement that is so present in his narrative does not then relate to the time he has been away, but to the loss of place experienced in being sent back home. Being deported was an experience of displacement; an act of involuntary mobility with negative social, economic and existential implications. So, though he was ironically displaced back home, it was still an act of uprooting, the unfamiliarity of his new position in Bissau being evident in what he said. The irony of being socially and economically uprooted by being moved back home counters our ideas of dwelling and place, yet the very fact that deportation is akin to displacement clarifies the fact that emplacement itself is defined in relation to

notions of social being and worth, rather than place and recognisability, tied directly to motion and emotion in terms of mobility and the striving for relational substantiation.

## **Conclusion**

This article has looked at the way poverty is lived and power is felt in Bissau, Guinea-Bissau. It has shown how young men in the city are trapped in a social position of little worth and minor value, and has tried to clarify the emotions this evokes and the attempted motion it educes. Rather than dwelling on fleeting feelings of sensations or transient affects it has thus dwelled on the more persistent sentiments generated by precarity and political marginality and shown how these are tied to migration as an attempted escape and move towards a positive social emplacement. Marred by prolonged conflict and economic decline, the life situation has become desolate for many young men in Bissau. As a space of minimal resources and rampant decay, the city has come to offer very little in terms of life chances and social trajectories for the myriad young men that inhabit it. Negative economic development and recurring conflictual turmoil has rendered it impossible for them to contribute to social networks and figure positively within social relations. As the article has shown, the experience of being stuck in a position of poverty, within a landscape of decline, is countered by an attempt to gain motion, physical and/or social, by aligning oneself with cocaine connected contacts and networks. In order to gain positive social being, migration (cocaine driven or otherwise) stands as a move into a space of possibility. It is seen as the possibility of realising one's potential by being able to send back remittances and, thus, move from a position of reciprocal marginality to one of centrality: By migrating, young men may thus gain social worth and value. They become physically displaced in order to become socially emplaced, as being abroad grants social presence at home. In this perspective Europe does not constitute an end in itself. Instead of being the primary space for my informants' existence it appears to provide the social 'backstage' for their being in Bissau, enabling them to socially substantiate themselves and engage positively in the relations of affection that define them.

**Henrik Vigh** is Professor of Anthropology at the University of Copenhagen. He has researched issues of youth and conflict in both Europe and Africa and written extensively on issues of social crisis, militant organisations, trans-national organised crime, migration, and mobilisation. E-mail: [hv@anthro.ku.dk](mailto:hv@anthro.ku.dk).

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> The article builds on a conference paper, entitled 'displaced back home,' presented at the ECAS conference in Uppsala, Sweden 2012

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.un.org/ecosocdev/geninfo/afrec/newrels/organized-crime.html>

<sup>3</sup> From 2005 to 2009 alone, 46 tons of cocaine are said to have passed through Guinea-Bissau: <http://www.african-bulletin.com/watch/848-the-scourge-of-drug-trafficking-in-guinea-bissau.html>. The value of the drug trade in Bissau is currently higher than the country's GNP. For an economy in which 80% of the official revenue comes from development assistance, however, this may not be much. Yet, the point is that the cocaine business and the subsequent flows of money it feeds into the country have become primary sources of income for groups like the police, military and navy, who are otherwise paid irregularly if at all and feed off the country's population in order to gain an income.

<sup>4</sup> Bissau is the capital of the small, West African country of Guinea-Bissau.

<sup>5</sup> The last couple of decades in Guinea-Bissau have been economically catastrophic. The country had already seen a rapid decline in development assistance prior to the war in 1999, from 180 million US dollars in 1996 to 124 million in 1997, yet during the war this was further reduced: to 96 million in 1998 and a mere 52 million in 1999 (Einarsdottir 2007: 102). A cut in state budgets by more than two-thirds within three years is drastic in any circumstances. But the terrible effects of the cuts were heightened by the fact that 80% of the state budget stems from development assistance; the economic situation was further aggravated by a 50% drop in the international prices of the country's largest export crop, cashew nuts, in 2000, and subsequent negative fluctuations in the market over the last ten years

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2012/jan/19/africa-rising-above-aid-dependency>; <http://www.economist.com/node/21541015>

<sup>7</sup> [http://www.unodc.org/pdf/research/wdr07/WDR\\_2007.pdf](http://www.unodc.org/pdf/research/wdr07/WDR_2007.pdf);

[http://www.cfr.org/publication/13750/in\\_west\\_africa\\_threat\\_of\\_narcostates.html](http://www.cfr.org/publication/13750/in_west_africa_threat_of_narcostates.html)

<sup>8</sup> [http://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/Studies/West\\_Africa\\_Report\\_2009.pdf](http://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/Studies/West_Africa_Report_2009.pdf)

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