Laura Watts

The travel time use **experience**
with the **Travel Remedy Kit**

Created a travel remedy kit to validate our research findings.

Have a version of the cards we used in that research inside your box.

Travel Remedy Kit was a validation exercise of all the research. It specifically addressed the travel time use experience of passengers.

Compiled new concepts and key issues into a series of 33 cards (in your pack), which translated our theoretical and practical results into form for discussion.

We used the notion of a card game, with the cards laid out on the table to create a story of the journey (you can play this game yourselves later).

Using cards conducted structured interviews to talk through the everyday mundane details of a particular journey (including public transport part).

Through this we presented our ideas and helped participants to remedy their journeys using both concepts and artefacts, which we provided for them.

Edward Hopper, Room in Brooklyn

Ada (suggested here) will be playing the the card game. She is an amalgamation of all the participants in our research:

(as John Urry discussed this includes 25,000 rail passengers surveyed, six nationwide focus groups, over 120 hours of ethnography on trains, buses and coachs, and interviews with those inside the industry).

Going to be telling a story woven from all this evidence with the help of the travel remedy kit cards.

Through 'Ada' I will present some of the key concepts that emerged through all this research concerning the travel time use experience.

Crucially we start with a consideration of this place, home, for this is where discussion of the journey begins…
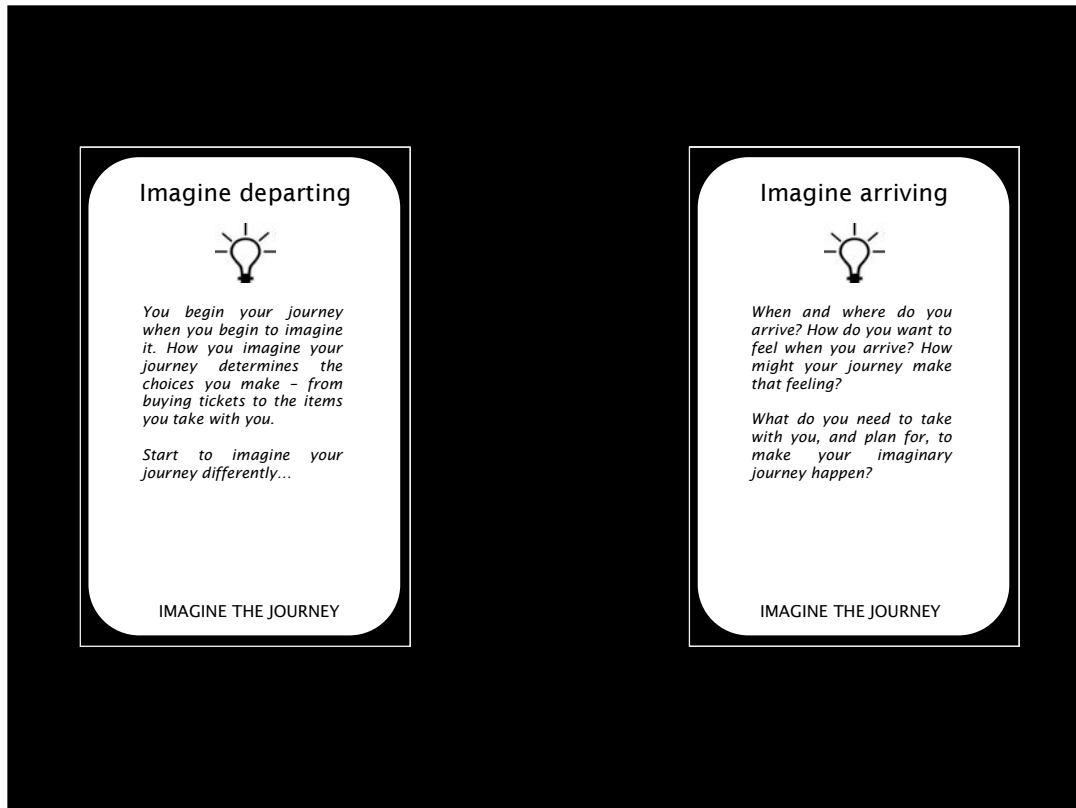
Began the travel remedy kit research with these two cards, which were laid on the table.

Journey does not beginning at the platform or station or stop

It beginnings with the work of imagineering the destination.

The journey is not completely unknown before you leave the house, even, but is made (in fits and starts) many days or even weeks before you leave.

Therefore you travel before you leave the house/office:

The work that passengers are doing is creating the moment of arrival (and the moment of depture) which involves:

Packing, booking tickets, expectations and myths of travel, organising meetings

e.g. pile of papers by the door only for reading on the train (from David Holley's work)

Departure and arrival is 'door to door' (for our participants)

But the journey is much more expansive.

How to prepare for the journey both the expected and the unexpected?

Experience matters (as Juliet and David have already discussed – practices become hardened over long periods of time).

According to our rail survey, the younger you are the more likely you are to be bored, and less likely to have planned in advance.

Not simply imagining the eventualities of unexpected delays but also what kind of journey you would prefer, how you would like to feel when you arrive.

All the moments and practices of travelling contribute to creating a moment of arrival.

Eduardo Paolozzi, Piscator (Euston Square)

Respondants talked about importance of different routes to stations and stops (popular bridges, rivers, parklands en route) –

experiences that would never appear on multimap or tom tom, because we do not experience maps, we walk through a world (eg. Ada always walks past this Paolozzi sculpture when she travels through Euston).

As one participants said:

"I'd really like to speed up the one from home to temple meads. That's the pain in the ass really. And yeah, that bit of boring time in the boring bit of England between London and you know, where-ever it is, so that would be good. The journey at the other end's fine really. The London end's fine because you know, you're not on the tube for longer than ten minutes at any time, anyway, so yeah." (travel remedy kit participant)

When we remedied their journey we did research in the area and provided maps and suggestions of scenic routes to the station and stop, past monuments, through parkland, countryside. Sometimes provided alternative bus connections, options for car parking.

Edward Hopper, Automat

Stations and stops or Waiting Places, alongside routes to these places, were consistently the most under-considered and most problematic locations for travellers, often more so than the place of the train or bus itself.

Passengers can be well equipped for waiting e.g. using a mobile phone or getting a tea/coffee (as here)

But are waiting places well equipped for waiting passengers? Ideas from participants included libraries, art galleries, cafes, meeting rooms

Rather than commuters (which assumes hom/work movement), we categorised 'hardened passengers; who were familiar with a route for many reasons but whose practices had 'hardened' over time. Not a hardening of space or time, but hardening of practice.

Frequently they did not take the same timetabled service every day, or even from the same train station, but they always made sure they had a coffee en route (and knew every café and its opening hours so that this was possible).

We thought of this as thixotropic – the property of cornflour which is a liquid that behaves under pressure as a solid. Hardened travellers were not solid but like cornflour were liquid and adaptable, shifting and flowing in space and time, but behaving as if they were solid and unchanging (e.g. always having a coffee).

Notice the attention here to practice, to materials and artefacts, as much as to time and space.

Onboard.

First, a discussion of the spatial experience of travel:

[A woman boards and] puts her handbag on the seat by the window – rummages in it for water, bottle, book… and keys – [which] go on to table – and finally a phone, which she uses to text someone. She pulls out a wad of paper, print-out of a website, and starts to make short tick marks on it as she reads…

(from ethnographic fieldnotes)

Passengers are not just bodies which occupy a designated seat.

Passengers are both person plus property. They can only be understood as both and body and belongings, which take more than a seat.

Passengers are 'embodied and embaggaged'

When speaking of passengers, when modelling passengers and counting passengers, have to take account of both parts – both the person and the property.

Understood as a single unit, which is both social and material and distributed in space (over seats, tables, under seats, across luggage racks etc.)
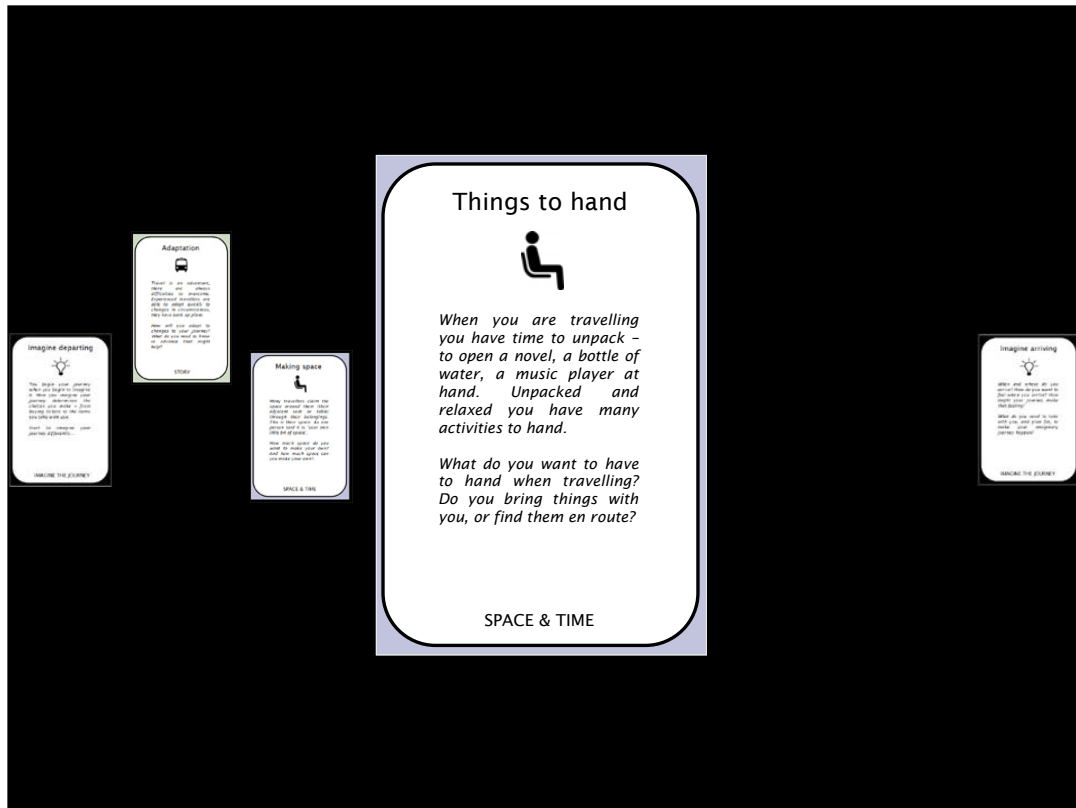
The distributed passenger has different configurations of their person and property: packed and unpacked.

This affects what artefacts they have to hand, and therefore what they can do with their time, and how they experience their travel time.

Two crucial configurations of distributed passenger:

Packed passengers are when everything is packed so that the passenger is highly mobile, ready to board or leave a train or bus.

But this configuration has little 'ready to hand' and therefore few activities are possible.

Packed passengers are much more likely to be bored (as evidenced by focus groups who regarded waiting moments as often the most frustrating).

Unpacked passengers are a configuration of the same person and property in to a shape, a species so to speak, well-adapted for travelling.

Coffee, phone, books, snacks, music player, are all to hand – often placed on the table or seat next to them.

They are relatively immobile, since they require fixed train seats and tables to unpack, and are therefore relatively fixed in place themselves.

May be no simple matter even to go to the toilet or buffet e.g. have to pack up any expensive items to some degree.

Takes time and space to unpack and pack – to alter configuration.

If there is not enough time to unpack (e.g. a short commute either by bus or train)

Or if there is not enough space to unpack (e.g. not enough space in front of you to setup a laptop, or no space to put your bag and take out your work, or (here) to stand and read a newspaper) then a passenger remains packed, or becomes adept at unpacking in very comfortable ways.

Even though they may have a seat and/or be travelling they are squashed and are unable to make any productive use of their time.

If productivity of time is important then what matters therefore, is not necessarily the time spent travelling, but the possibility for a passenger to unpack, to reconfigure themselves into an unpacked shape.

This is about attending to the materiality and places of travel (both moving and waiting places – how do they improve all the possibilities for activities)

Already discussed in Juliet Jain and David Holley's presentation, and in John Urry's. To clarify:

In focus groups we conducted a 'teleportation test' by asking participants when or if they would prefer to teleport instantly to their destination.

The answer is only parts of journeys, and rarely.

Travel time is valued. The preference for commute times averaged at 20minutes (not zero).

Transition time resonates with the classic anthropological concept of the 'liminal'.

The liminal is the space and time 'betwixt and between' different social roles such as parent and manager. It is an expansive place of possibility and uncertainty when you are neither parent nor manager, your responsibilities may also be in transit. It therefore seems to be a 'time for me' and a 'time to be me'. Important and necessary time to prepare.

e.g. (from travel remedy kit) Yeah, definitely, I like to have the time. I don't want to teleport. Cause also otherwise you end up going from meeting to meeting to meeting and you've not had time to think about the next meeting or just go ergh [rolls eyes] like that. So yeah I like the time.

e.g. (from travel remedy kit) I don't know if I can transport [teleport] myself from one place to another, I think you would miss something, miss that preparation time. Thinking about where you're going, who you're going to meet, so there's something, some preparation that goes on, I would say. I certainly would say I do like to be prepared for what I am doing. And so I can use some of this time. Some of the time I do that, but when it works well I would say, so, it can be a space in between things, where there's no other distractions – for reading, for things like that.

This requires a reconsideration of what counts as economically-productive work.

This is important work, but it might involve looking out the window or sleeping for 20 minutes, even calling a friend. It does not look like work, but cannot operate efficiently from meeting to meeting without this transition time.

Also relates to the importance of windows and views.

As John Urry showed, the second most popular activity when travelling by train was window-gazing (18%).

We are claiming that this is no mere idleness but a valued and valuable activity.

Interestingly, buses are better form of transport for scenic views, due to considerably more glass and a forward view.

(e.g. from ethnography fieldnotes)

Feels like an IMAX of the landscape. Can see the front, sides, and peripheral vision [of the hills]…

…Suddenly realise on this top deck that there is almost no grab rails or poles, that's what makes it so IMAX-like. Nothing to break the view and cut up the experience, no range poles except at stairwell.
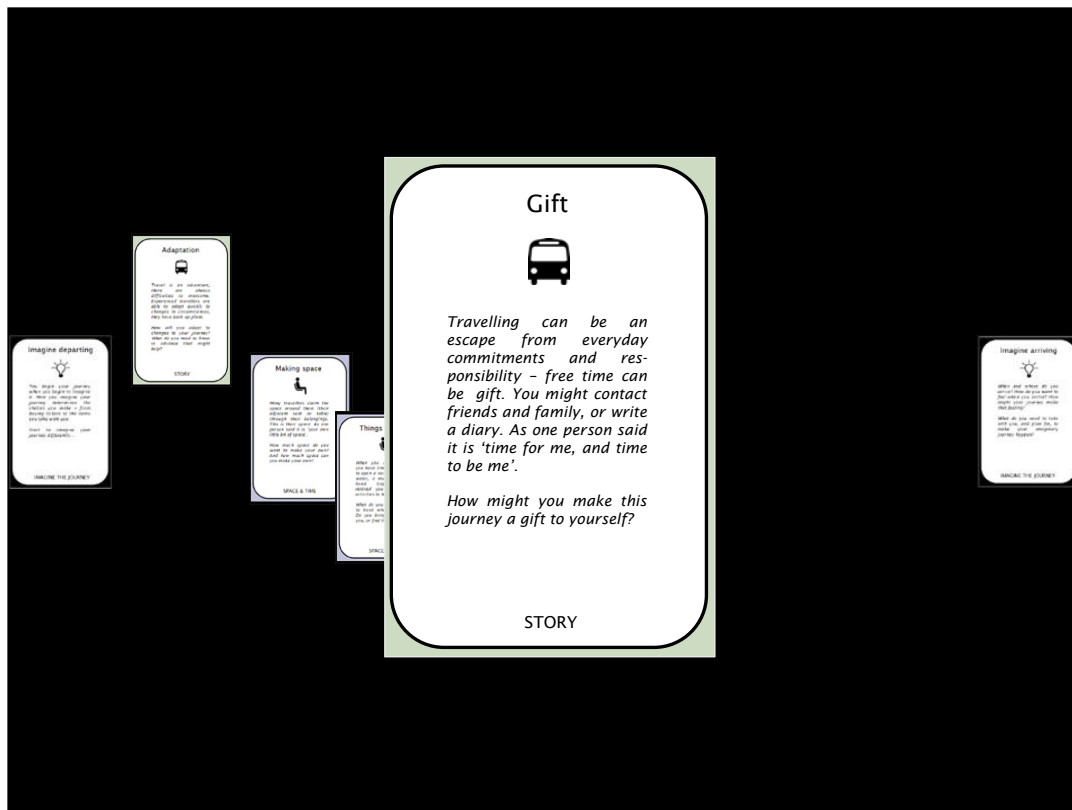
If travel time is transition time, then it is often regarded as free time and therefore a 'gift' by some.

e.g. (from travel remedy kit participant)

So I do sometimes… see it like that, when time when no one can get hold of me and I can just indulge myself

This is a direct affect of the industrial separation of work and leisure time, a hard boundary established by the whistle blown at the factory, for example.

But, as John Urry, and Juliet Jain and David Holley have discussed, work time-space and leisure time-space have become considerably more porous (with some tension).

Transition time is the time travelling between work and leisure, whether commuting or going on holiday or travelling to a lecture as a student (no simple whistle, start and stop).

Therefore possibility to use this time in many different ways – travel time is full of possibility and ambiguity.

Common items requested by participants in the travel remedy kit were:

Notebook and pen to create a diary, to sketch, to make notes of ideas for creative writing, to make notes of things to do. Like the transitional time of travel, notebook and pen has similar possibility and ambiguity.

Specific magazine or newspaper (the most common activity according to the rail survey)

Contrasting with ideas of the paperless office, the notebook and magazine/newspaper were common and much desired artefacts for travel.

Travel is not paperless but paper-full.

Since travel time is a gift, it should not be the intention to simply transform travel time into visibly economically-productive time, or travel spaces into mobile office spaces. This would prevent the important work of transition, and the possibility for 'gift'. It is about possibilities (plural) for activities, not simply one activity.

Given that passengers are person plus property

That they in transition.

Then they may be doing many different things, but what they do alters their experience of time, therefore it can feel stretched or compressed.

e.g. The fidgety woman continues to finger her thick leather strap and look anxiously down the aisles… The young woman has stopped playing with phone and is now filing her nails (claws) with a huge purple nail file… The man opposite me looks up from his book at the nail file. eek eek. He winces, looks slightly ill as the flakes fall… she stops filing, throws it into her bag…

Nothing. Seems to happen… the fidgety woman begins to sniffle, and sniffs up her catarrh… I am consumed by other people's bodily fluids… Everyone else's time seems to be running slower than me. I want to write that something happens. But nothing happens. A man reads a book, then reads a newspaper. A woman fidgets and sniffs. A man sleeps. A woman stares (at me). A man with a book looks up briefly (he does so every five minutes, and checks the world and carriage, then goes back to his book with a yawn)… Travelling makes individuals… people adapt differently, make their own time.

(fieldnotes taken from Lancaster to Penzance rail journey July 2005)

Time is situated in social and material practices of reading, writing, sleeping, note-taking, filing nails – they 'make their own time' stretched or compressed

Clock time is crucial to travel (indeed invention of national rather than regional time is an effect of travel in the nineteenth century and the rise of the railways)

Need timetables and watches to tell people, passengers, crews, trains, and everyone where to be and when.

But this is not the only time. Also have passenger time. Each passenger has a different experience of time.

Important to remember that we do no encounter time, we only encounter time in interaction with watches, clocks, forgetting to set alarms, timetables, loosing time whilst reading a good book. (If we encounter clock time we would not need watches, we would always know the time without checking)

As passengers do different things (dependent on how unpacked they are, what they have with them, and what they have planned) they make their time stretched or compressed compared to this clock time.

Whilst looking out of the window might loose track of time, it might go much quicker than we expected, time flies.

This means that improving journey time is no longer simply a matter of speed or reducing the clock time between stations or stops. It is about creating the possbility for compressing time. A faster journey is not necessarily faster in terms of clock time but faster in terms of passenger time (it could even be longer in clock time and still be experienced as faster!)

e.g. (from travel remedy kit)

For a such a short, it's actually quite a short journey when you're trying to draw pictures, look for landmarks… I went to buy some wine because there was some wine, even though I'd already got some. I saw the Lichfield cathedral with three spires, I saw that one. I was looking out for the others but by then it was getting dark and I couldn't really see very well. And I was trying to read the book as well. It was quite a lot, read the book, draw pictures, look at landmarks! … But to be honest once I've looked for my landmarks, read my book, drawn some pictures, made a few notes. We're there!

Compressing journey times is dependent on the configuration of the passenger. It requires attention to the social and material (not just measuring speed): is there enough well-designed space and enough time for the passenger unpack? What additional activities can be provided, if they are not experienced or well-organised travellers, especially the case for younger people?

Travel time is infectious between passengers through senses (views, scent, sounds…)

Proximity creates temporal contagion as scents and sounds spill out and infect others (hence mobile phone free carriages and popularity of music player in the travel remedy kit)

Passengers although distributed generally contained by the carriages and bus decks

So although there maybe one train carriage on the track, or one bus on the road, there are several communities of travellers – each carriage or deck is its own community.

On a long journey, it is the last part, the last hour, the last half where people become bored and tired.

e.g. (from travel remedy kit) As I said I can keep going for about two hours, interest myself. But after that I put the paper down and I'm bored of it and I don't want to read anymore. So there would the end of this journey might be about an hour, hour and a half that I sort of have to entertain myself somehow. So I am aware of that in particular on longer journeys. So I notice that I look at my watch more. Look around more. Is there anything else to read that I haven't read. So I'm very aware of that.


We also asked participants to draw or describe one thing they had never seen before (following John Ruskin's approach to travel, which required people to draw, to see and attend to passing landscape)

So, in a carriage with many people who are bored and/or tired travel time can become viscous, as they infect each other with their boredom. Time is stretching and stretching.

To counteract this common problem in our travel remedy kit we described differenet sets of activites for each hour of the journey, so perhaps the first hour was more work-based, the next hour, involved each and drinking, the final hour involved listening to some music. We also made strong use of the landmarks en route, so that particpants always had to stay alert to see them.
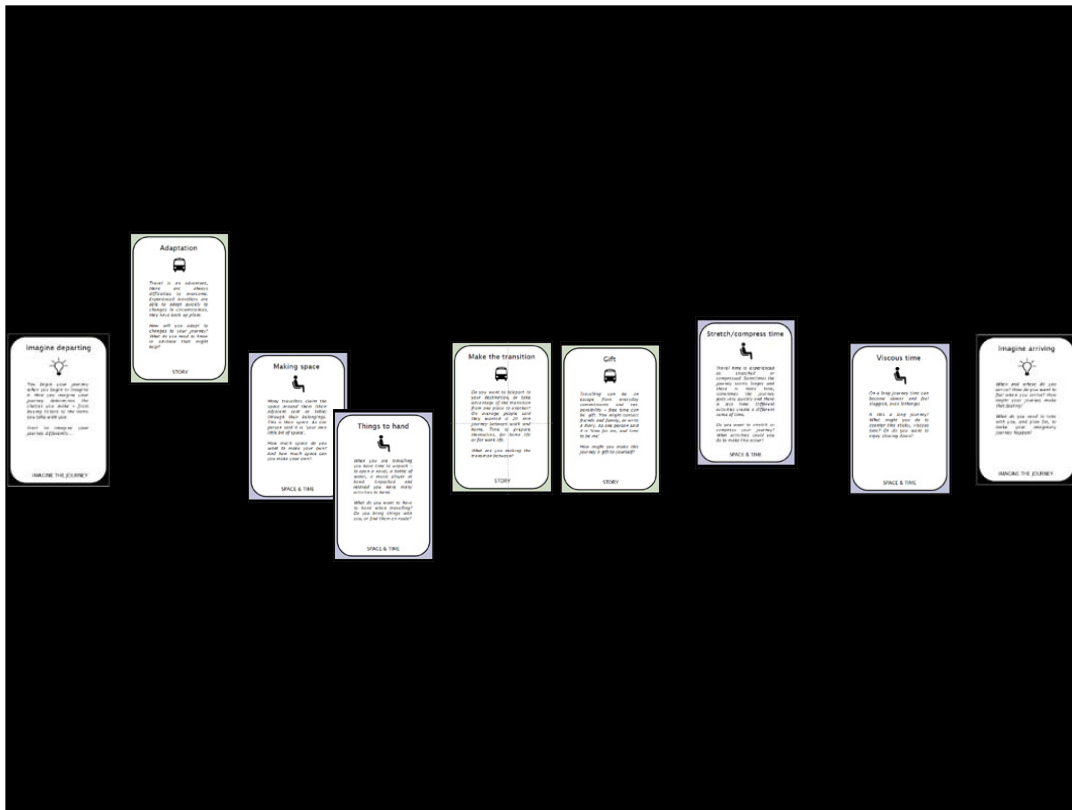
Destination:

The complete journey with all the issues laid out from depature to arrival.

As I said at the beginning this is ultimately about creating a moment of arrival. The journey creates the moment of arrival, but that may be some time after leaving the station or stop. Some time after reconfiguring from an unpacked into a packed passenger. And not the time that the clock suggests it took.

e.g. (from travel remedy kit research)

I probably feel like I arrive when I get to the hotel. And book in, and find out what the room is like, and typically go in and take clothes out and hang them up and decide whether I need anything to eat… go down to the bar or what…
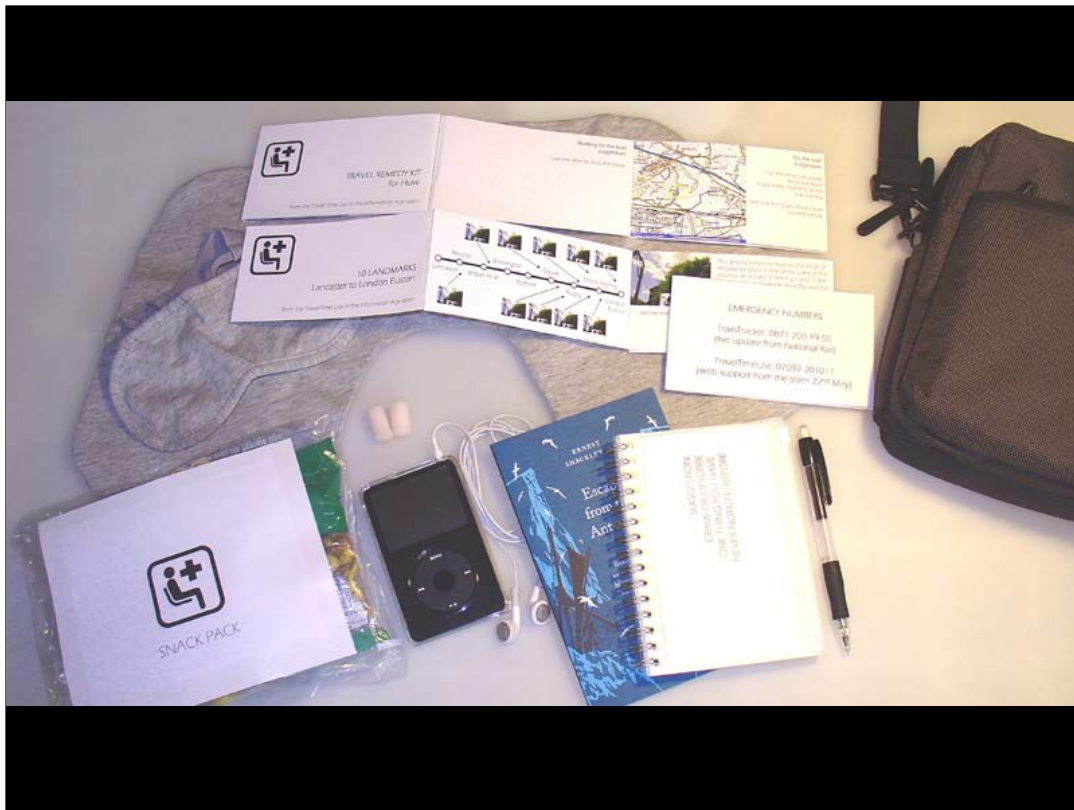
These are some of the items we included in our travel remedy kit to improve passengers' experience of travel time.

Notebook and pen, book, music player, earplugs, snack pack, pillow, and (crucially) a guidebook to suggest when to use each item, maps, timetables for the journey, an emergency number to call if there is a problem. And all this fitted into a small bag.

In summary of Ada's journey:

Need to attend to the materials, the artefacts, the design and facilities of waiting and moving places of travel-

 so that enable passengers to unpack with sufficient space and time.

 so that passengers are always considered not as bodies that move but as bodies and bags which are spatially distributed but move and reconfigure

 so that when packed, passengers have activities can participate in so they are not bored (reading, windowgazing, and some form of work are the 3 most popular)

Need to reconsider what counts as productive travel time

 productivity also includes transition time, and time as a gift, which may not look like economic work, but ultimately has economic benefits

Need to remember that it is not necessarily clock time that matters but passenger time.

 passenger travel time is an affect of travel time use, their configuration, the possibile activities. Travel time is made in travel time use.

 to make journeys quicker, involves attention to the social and material interaction of passengers, which create compressed time

 timetables, maps, and computer systems co-ordinate passengers but they do not understand and cannot include passenger time, or often the most crucial parts of a journey (such as a particular monument, view of the landscape, direction of the sunset, an all too brief journey across a bridge)