
Moving methods, travelling times

Laura Watts, John Urry

Department of Sociology, Lancaster University, Lancaster LA1 4YD, England;
e-mail: l.j.watts@lancaster.ac.uk, j.urry@lancaster.ac.uk

Received 5 August 2007; in revised form 18 December 2007; published online 9 May 2008

Abstract. In this paper, we consider the passenger experience of travel time, and its translation into a transport model of travel time, which is of great significance in the potential funding and construction of infrastructural projects. In the economic appraisals of such projects, which are often of massive scale and impact, it is presumed that travel time is wasted, dead, or empty, and therefore should be minimised. However, in this paper we show how travel time is filled with activities and fantasies. We show that there are multiple travel times and places, and not just a single measured clock time that has to be minimised in getting from point A to point B. Travel time is situated in the sociomaterial practices of travel, which include engaging with other passengers, interacting with wireless networks, views out of the window, things packed in one's bag, and so on. We describe and evaluate various 'moving methods' for researching places on-the-move, from survey to ethnography. Finally, we consider how to disrupt the assumption in transport appraisal that such time is empty and should be minimised, and suggest new approaches for presencing the richness of passenger travel time in transport modelling.

"Journeys are the midwives of thought ... There is almost a quaint correlation between what is in front of our eyes and the thoughts we are able to have in our head: large thoughts at times requiring large views, new thoughts new places."

The Art of Travel, Alain de Botton (2002, page 57)

"I would like to take you on a journey, a collage of the many journeys recorded as part of the research. A journey on trains, buses, and foot, but also through this thing we call 'travel time'. To reconsider what travel time is, and most crucially, how it is made and experienced."

Journeys with Ada, an audio-visual performance by Laura Watts
for the UK government, Department for Transport (Watts, 2006)

In 2000 the UK government announced plans to invest £180 billion in transport infrastructure over a ten-year period in order to "increase productivity and cut business costs by making journeys quicker and more reliable" (DETR, 2000, page 79; various subsequent plans have since been developed). It has been calculated that this massive expenditure, principally aimed at reducing road congestion, might result in motorists saving on average a minute per day of their travel time (Goodwin, 2001). The notion that a minute of extra work a day would measurably increase an individual's productive output is an effect of transport appraisal methods, which involve the economic modelling of travel time as wasted time and the aggregation of thousands of millions of individual minutes.

However, there seems to be a disparity between travel-time use as valued and experienced by transport strategists and policy makers in the UK, and travel-time use as valued and experienced by passengers on-the-move. Since 2004 we have been part of an interdisciplinary project involving transport studies and mobilities (Cresswell, 2006; Sheller and Urry, 2006; Urry, 2007; and the new journal *Mobilities*), which addresses the seeming incommensurability between different versions of travel time.

In this paper we explore and evaluate the wide variety of methods developed during the project, and how they make passenger travel time ‘visible’ in various ways.

Valuations of travel time within transport appraisal are highly influenced by car travel, which constitutes the largest proportion of travel time (Lyons and Urry, 2005). However, we are interested in the still significant evaluation of travel time within public transport (noting, of course, that in these neoliberal times much ‘public’ transport is in fact ‘private’), where passengers are not drivers and may be engaged in a much wider array of activities. In our research we address travel-time use across train, bus, and coach journeys in the UK, by contrast with car travel, to understand how it is made and valued in sociomaterial practices, from gazing out of a steamed-up bus window to writing e-mail via a train wi-fi network.

We are also attempting to make an interference into the transport strategy account of travel-time use, to suggest how it might be imagined and made differently (Haraway, 1997; Latour, 2004). To this end, we explore how diverse social and cultural research methods, across transport studies, mobilities, and science studies, might contribute to understanding and translating the inchoate, ephemeral, and transitory worlds of those venturing forth into those shifting landscapes of buses, coaches, and trains.

Travelling times

Socially and culturally, travel time has long been seen to have distinct value, from the importance of pilgrimage and nomadism (eg Turner, 1996), to the romanticism of walking, climbing, and experiencing the ‘sublime’ (Lewis, 2000; Michael, 2000; Urry, 2007, chapter 4), or to the car deployed as a moving office (Laurier, 2004; Laurier and Philo, 2003).

In the 19th century the value of rail travel was often articulated as democratic. Rail passengers found themselves in the company of strangers within the novel, enclosed spaces of train carriages, leading commentators to believe there was something newly democratic about rail travel (Schivelbusch, 1987). These new places developed new sociabilities such as ‘civil inattention’—being in public but minimising attention paid to others (Goffman, 1963)—and new travel-time uses. For example, Goffman highlights how books, newspapers, and magazines allow us: “to carry around a screen that can be raised at any time to give ourselves or others an excuse for not initiating contact” (1963, page 139).

Across these many forms of travel, accounts of time shift: from cyclical time often associated with nomadic life, to leisure time frequently articulated in hill walking, to the importance of the railway timetable in the development of clock time during the 19th century (Urry, 2007, chapter 5). Travel time is not simply the counting of minutes but is embedded in tasks (Ingold, 1995).

This project to investigate travel-time use brings ongoing sociocultural research concerned with mobilities together with debates in transport studies concerned with travel time as a matter of economic calculation (see Lyons and Urry, 2005). Transport appraisal calculations involve translating individual lumpy, fragile, embodied, and ‘embaggaged’ travellers into utility-maximising passengers. In this process, individual passengers are transformed into an aggregate; the individual is not what matters but, rather, the bodiless, massless sum. Through this appraisal process, the effect of potential new infrastructures and policies on aggregated model passengers can be calculated, and decisions made based on the economic calculation of imputed costs versus benefits. Thus, a new bypass is built, a railway line is upgraded for high-speed trains, a new runway is agreed. These economic models are highly elaborate, but involve assumptions concerning how and why people travel and the nature of their travel time. In particular, it is normally presumed that (for details see Lyons and Urry, 2005):

- the average amount of travel time *per person* remains stable at a little over one hour per day (Schafer, 1998, page 459);
- time spent travelling is economically unproductive and is therefore to be regarded as wasted time;
- passengers will trade time for money, so that ideally the individual traveller would forego travelling to the destination if this were at all possible;
- passengers who ‘productively’ contribute to the economy have higher ‘revealed preferences’ and hence higher value, and thus their travel-time savings are viewed as more significant;
- travel time saved as a result of new transport spending can be justified since this allows more time for activities involving paid work.

‘Moving’ time and place are thus broadly understood as valueless—they take time away from economically valuable work. ‘Stationary’ time, by contrast, is viewed as valuable and the site of (economically measurable) work, except for the strange and notably absent times and places of ‘waiting’. Even tiny reductions in passenger travel time are highly valued, since at an aggregate level this equates to many millions ‘saved’. The UK Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions (DETR) states that: “travel time savings are the single most important component in the measured transport benefits/disbenefits of most schemes and policies. Hence the methods of valuing them critically affect the measurement of the economic impacts of schemes” (DETR, 1999, page 183). It is into this highly consequential model of travel time as essentially ‘valueless’ that we seek to make our intervention, which is developed in the context of UK policy and debates.

Moving methods

The analysis of *mobilities* as a wide-ranging category of connection, distance, and motion transforms social science and its research methods (Sheller and Urry, 2006; Urry, 2007). Mobilities methods need to address the many and interdependent forms of intermittent movement of people, images, information, and objects (see recent studies: Bærenholdt et al, 2004; Cresswell, 2006). In order to address our twin concerns of the passenger experience of travel-time use and how to communicate that experience to transport modellers, we deployed various methods to capture and translate something as inchoate and fleeting as travel-time use within ‘public’ transport in the UK.

Large-scale survey

Large-scale surveys of passengers are common in transport strategy for gathering statistically significant data concerning passenger movement. In the UK there is a National Rail Passenger Survey (Passenger Focus, 2006) and a National Travel Survey (Department for Transport UK, 2005). Such surveys translate individual journey experiences into aggregate categories such as leisure and business travel, peak and off-peak services, outward and return journeys. Aggregation provides empirical grounds for policy making and a clarity of quantification that belies the absences made through its production. For example, categories of ‘business’ and ‘leisure’ make absent those passengers who travel for unpaid work, voluntary work, students, and those engaged in other forms of work not directly subject to economic calculation even if they have important value in other ways [see Sayer (2004) on such contested moral economies]. This is particularly relevant in consideration of the gendering of transport models: feminist research has highlighted how the pauses provided by travel are valuable sites for switching between different forms of work, including informal and emotional work that is not economically visible (see discussions in Davies, 2001; Glucksmann, 2000; Letherby and Reynolds, 2005). However, the numbers that result

from these absences provide a trustworthy basis for policy decisions and public witnessing of those decisions, a trust that derives from the long heritage of scientific forms of communication (Porter, 1995; Shapin, 1994).

In practice, we could identify little reflexivity in the large-scale surveys that play a crucial role in making transport policy.⁽¹⁾ Yet, as a method that reduces divergent experiences into commensurate and comparable numbers, surveys are extremely successful in communicating empirical materials, particularly between social research and the makers of transport strategy (Mokhtarian and Salomon, 2001; Salomon and Mokhtarian, 1997). Therefore a large-scale survey was central to our methodology.

As part of the Autumn 2004 Strategic Rail Authority (now disbanded) self-completion survey of UK rail passengers, 26 221 people completed various multichoice questions concerning their travel-time use. In particular, passengers were asked to choose categories of activities they had conducted en route, and to select particular artefacts they carried with them (for more detail see Lyons et al, 2007).

Overall, the most popular activities on the train were (see figure 1): reading for leisure (34%); window gazing/people watching (18%); and working/studying (13%). Moreover, more than a third of passengers were equipped with a book; over three quarters carried a newspaper; a third had paperwork; over two thirds carried a mobile phone; and business travellers were much more likely to have a laptop, PDA/handheld computer, or to have paperwork with them (see figure 2). These significant figures support research elsewhere that suggests passengers in the UK are frequently well-equipped for travel and for making positive use of their travel (and waiting) time (Gasparini, 1995).

More importantly for our intervention into travel time as a waste of time, around 70% of passengers considered their travel time *of some use*, although the younger the person the more likely he or she was to consider such time as wasted. To explore this

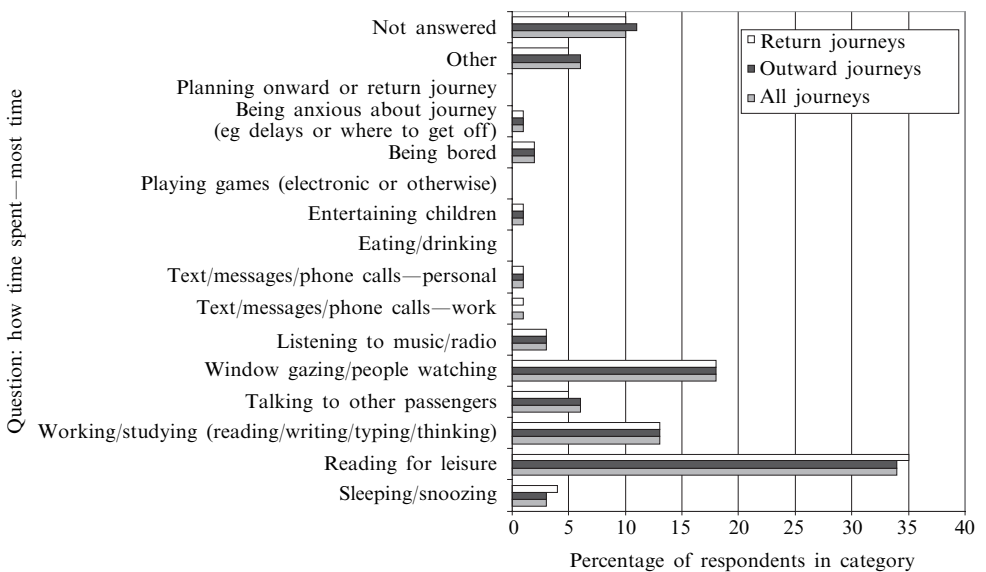


Figure 1. Categories of activities conducted while on the train, grouped by outward and return journeys (from Lyons et al, 2007).

⁽¹⁾ This statement is based on discussions during workshops with transport economists at the UK Department of Transport, as well as on experience in the Centre for Transport and Society (part of the team) of transport policy making over the last decade.

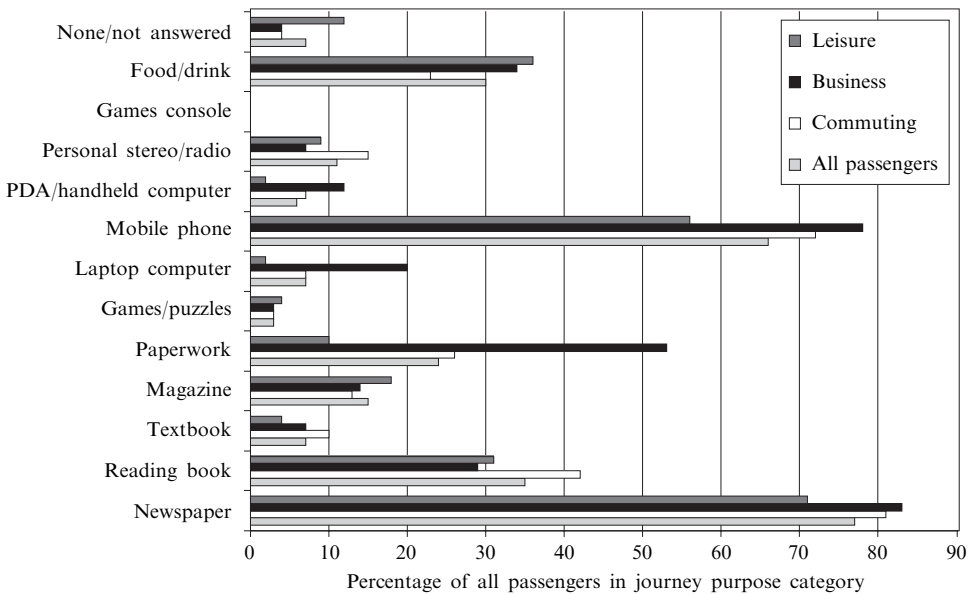


Figure 2. Items passengers have to hand when they travel by rail, grouped by the purpose of their journey (from Lyons et al, 2007).

we also asked whether passengers planned for their journey: those passengers who considered their travel time to have been wasted were more than twice as likely to have done no advance planning (70%), compared with those who considered their travel time very worthwhile (31%).

In short, many UK rail passengers regarded their travel time as of ‘use’, there were various and divergent ‘uses’, and they were partially equipped to make it ‘useful’. These results communicate the need to reassess calculations of travel time within transport appraisal [see also our activities in promoting these findings to the transport industry: (ATOC, 2007; Lyons, 2006)]. However, these survey results have limitations in developing a full understanding of travel time. They do not reflect the enormous variability in the quality and experience of travel time, they assume that activities are discrete, separable, and comparable, and they do not capture anything of the changing places in which travel is located and time passes. In order to move forward in understanding travel-time use, we explored different experiences, temporalities, and places of travel through further research methods.

Focus-group interviews

We conducted six focus groups, three sets of male-only and female-only groups in the South West, North West, and London. Participants were selected on the basis that they had some experience of public transport. We focused discussions on travel-time use across different travel modes and journey purposes, although participants said less about walking, cycling, and interchanges between different transport networks.

A key question put to all groups was that of instantaneous transportation or *teleportation*. A San Francisco Bay Area survey conducted a ‘teleportation test’ based on the assumption that if travel time is undesired then passengers should prefer to teleport instantly to their destination (Mokhtarian and Salomon, 2001). Their survey found that 70% of respondents agreed that *travel is desired for its own sake* over travel as *undesired* or *neutral*—that is, the majority did not want to teleport instantly to

their destination. The following is illustrative of the general reaction to teleportation in the focus groups.

Amy: “I’d use it. More time in bed ...”

Dawn: “... If you’re driving there [to work] it, sort of, gives you time for your brain to wake up and for your head to get into gear. I know I, sort of, start thinking about: I’ve got to do this, I’ve got to do that. So you’ve planning time and then, when you’re coming home, it’s like your de-stressing time. I know, speaking to quite a few people that I work with that commute further than what we do, ... by the time they’ve got home they’re quite chilled out When the journey’s too short they don’t get that opportunity. They’re all wound up when they get home.”

Mary: “If it’s from one thing, bang, to the next thing, you don’t have time to sort things out in your head, really, before you’ve got to go to the next appointment.”

Amy: “I never thought about that. Yes, you’re right.”

The immediate reaction to teleportation was often positive, particularly when reflecting on long-haul flights or the desire for more social time with friends and family. However, as discussions developed, the notion of teleportation as a travel ideal was generally challenged and a different response developed; occasionally (as with Amy) a person completely reversed their initial reaction as they reflected on the implications of losing their travel time. The following extract expands on this more nuanced approach to teleportation.

Jamie: “... If I was on a flight to Australia that would be boring for me. But if I was in Australia and I had a three day drive across the middle of the country, which took days and days and days, and you didn’t see anything different, but you’re experiencing it all, and you’re experiencing the vastness, then there’s no way I would teleport myself. I’d want to get all of that, soak it all up.”

Bert: “Do you not think if you could teleport yourself instantly [to Australia] you’d lose a lot of the scale of things ...?”

Rich: “I’d pick the teleporter because the bus service doesn’t run after six o’clock. If you go out with friends or anything you’ve got to walk. It’s five miles between each village and I live a mile out, so it takes hours just to go and visit people.”

Paul: “There are times when travelling is important and enjoyable in itself.”

Overall, the initial eulogising of teleportation changed into distinguishing between particular moments and parts of journeys that were a waste of time, or boring, or particularly arduous, and those parts of journeys where the experience of travelling was important or desirable. Waiting time—at stations and stops, in queues and traffic—was frequently talked of as problematic and frustrating (see Bissell, 2007). There was no other general agreement over the categories of this separation of wasted versus valuable travel: travel was intensively specific; the season, time of day and week, weather, and prior expectations all altered the potential value of a journey.

For many participants, travelling formed an essential part of the experience of a given place—it was integral to constituting both the journey as a moving place and the destination as a place (see De Botton, 2002). In many discussions, the surrounding landscape formed a crucial part of the journey; the positive effect of views through the window from the car, train, or bus was mentioned. Choosing a scenic route that might be slower, even for business trips, was quite common. This important role of landscape as actant resonates with the large-scale rail passenger survey results, which reported that the second most popular activity was window gazing; it is also in tension with other research that records the trend in newer train carriages towards smaller windows, and seats without windows [where no ‘tourist gaze’ is possible (Urry, 2002)].

Crucially, time spent on business and commuter journeys was thought to be very valuable and rarely was teleportation viewed as acceptable. When asked the ideal travel

time to work, the average was 20–30 minutes, with the range being between 10–60 minutes. However, delays, stopping, or a sense of moving slowly were often frustrating, and not viewed as part of that ideal. Clearly, travel time is important and has its own particular forms of timing and practice.

Considered vital to business and commuter journeys was the process of gathering and ‘soaking up’ the scenery (both inside and outside the vehicle), ‘planning’, ‘de-stressing’, and ‘sorting things out in your head’. These appeared to be components of a *transition time* between different social relations and sets of practices, especially between work life and home life. The transition time of travel was for many people, and particularly for many women in our focus groups, articulated as the only time they had to themselves during the day, the only time to contemplate and reflect, the only time that was *time for me*, which parallels feminist research on the importance of travel as a pause, as discussed earlier.

The value of travel time thus lay in its liminality, its status as a place in between, neither here nor there, a time and place of transition between different sets of social practices located in different kinds of place (Turner, 1986). We are not suggesting a direct analogy with Turner’s structural account of the liminal as a ritualised location ‘betwixt and between’ nor do we suggest that moving places are marginal. We suggest that travelling locations have a sociomaterial specificity for passengers (this may not be true for those who live and work on-the-move) that creates a sense of ambiguity and possibility.⁽²⁾ The value of travel time lies in its rich possibility for experience and practice, both imagined and enacted, possibilities for use that are markedly different to other places. Travel is not valueless space; it is a landscape that includes what is inside and outside of the carriage or coach, and it has a specific sociomateriality and temporality (Ingold, 2000) which creates a uniquely changing place in between arrival and destination. Passengers are neither at home nor at work, acting neither as parent nor as manager, but transiting between responsibilities and social practices.

Yet, was the value of such transition time present in the transport industry? How were journeys understood by those in the wider transport industry?

Stakeholder discourses

Open-ended interviews were conducted with ten representatives of the UK public and private transport industry, including a train designer, rail rolling-stock manager, passenger group representative, and a bus marketing manager.

Despite many organisations employing extensive market research into the passenger experience, there was frequently the assumption that travel involved ‘dead time’ (automobile industry marketing manager):

“Train journeys, certainly intercity train journeys, are boring. They are dead boring. And whether you realise it consciously or not everyone plans for the boredom. They either take work or they sleep or [buy] stuff they don’t really want, because you can only look out of the window for about twenty minutes before you’re bored in your head” (rail rolling-stock operator manager).

Rather than travel as valuable transition time, or travel as inherently of value, travel-time use was considered a superfluous antidote to the ‘boring’ nature of travel. Newspapers and books were ‘de-stress purchases’ made because “there is nothing else they can do” (transport users’ group representative). Boredom was a given, an assumption that resonates with transport appraisal’s perpetuation of travel time as wasted. Travel-time use and the sociomaterial practices of passengers were separable from what was regarded as the essential and very necessary ‘obvious nuts and bolts’

⁽²⁾ The notion of travel as a liminal place has been discussed in the literature on tourism (for a summary see Urry, 2002), and also with respect to diasporas (Cwerner, 2001).

of the passenger experience: having a seat, punctuality, cleanliness, and information provision. Travel time was consistently understood as a single temporality: the timetable clock time that measures punctuality and efficiency. As one stakeholder said:

“You want people to behave in ways that may oblige them to spend a bit more of their time travelling ... You can sugar the pill by making the travel experience more rewarding in other ways. Difficult trick to pull off, but if you can do it, I wish you well” (transport users’ group representative).

The emphasis here is on travel as a bitter pill, a matter of endurance and duration. Travel time always includes waiting times, parking times, as much as times where one is on the move [for a discussion of waiting time see Anderson (2004) and Bissell (2007)], and it was these waiting times that were often the most problematic according to the focus group respondents. But these frustrating, often undesirable, waiting places were the least important sorts of places for many of the transport industry representatives. Often stationary train stations and bus stops were embedded within different organisations, with different interests and politics. Rail stations and bus stops existed at the edge of what was discursively articulated as the ‘transport industry’, and in many respects these bricks and mortar lampposts, and stop signs established the boundary of the transport industry in our research. But these boundary places were in turn seen as an opportunity by some:

“You could do a lot of interesting things [with stations] because suddenly the railway, rather than being a cast-off, becomes an important hub. And key to that is putting some retail into railway stations that people really want ... Some of the train operators have already talked about designing stations of the future. Things like, you may not all travel on the train, some of you may just go to the station for a meeting and others come in on the train ... that networking and pulling people” (industrial design manager for transport sector).

Mobile ethnography

Movement between locations is inherent to ethnography, although it has perhaps only recently become a site for fieldwork. Clifford defined ethnographic fieldwork as: “*travel encounters ... spatial practices of moving to and from, in and out, passing through*” (1997, page 67, italics in original). This is an approach to ethnographic fieldwork as a movement back and forth between desk and field, and as an ongoing translation between social and spatial locations (Gupta and Ferguson, 1997). Much ethnography in mobilities has been located at sites of passage, transfer points, where populations and things are temporarily contained and arranged within stations, waiting rooms, baggage systems (Adey, 2004; Augé, 1995; Bechmann, 2004; Merriman, 2004). By contrast, a *mobile ethnography* involves travelling *with* people and things, participating in their continual shift through time, place and relations with others [and is less common, but see Laurier (2004) and Lee and Ingold, 2006)].

Public transport places on-the-move are themselves transient. People, artefacts, landscapes, and vehicles are constantly shifting social, material, and spatial relations. This is by contrast with private cars, where people and their vehicles retain a more stable relationship and together form a clear site for research. Constituting the location for our ethnographic study was thus difficult. Should it be of an operator, with a given crew, by route, by timetabled service, of a particular vehicle, or alongside a particular passenger? Mindful of our engagement with UK transport strategy, we decided to conduct a thin ethnography of twelve timetabled train and bus journeys throughout the UK including: high-speed train lines, rural and urban buses, and express coach services. One of two ethnographers travelled on the same timetabled journey five times (either on sequential days or on the same day every week), creating notes, photographs,

and short videos during more than 260 hours of travel time. The timetable, including the door-to-door journey, was the field site. In essence, by repeating the same journey, the ethnographers constituted their location as commuters, and experienced similar concerns to any commuter attempting to reach his or her destination: they had to manage their tickets, their things, and the physical demands of travel. They also had to constantly negotiate their position as partial-passengers through introducing themselves as researchers to staff and fellow travellers, and making interventions into their own passenger experience (as well as others) by recording and writing.

“The sky is coalescing into dark clouds; the yellow sun, a disk appearing and disappearing within their midst. The countryside is lightly undulating: Georgian-windowed farmhouses, corrugated outbuildings, white painted cottages ... And everywhere trails of electricity pylons, telephone cables, and mobile phone antennae. The networks criss-cross in the air, interwoven amongst the occasional oak tree and chimney. Then, suddenly, we are in suburbia ... and each house bristles with TV aeriels, all pointing North, back down the train line.

The Americans, their heads to their seats, drift into sleep. The woman across from me does her powder. Now time has slowed. The train drags ... It seems, as the train grows closer to London, the destination, as if time expands; the minutes inflate. I feel tired, a cross London tube journey awaits and another train, then a thirty minute walk, and a hotel. I wonder, what journeys await my fellow passengers. How will they arrive?” (field notes from long-distance train journey, Lancaster to London, March 2004).

Travel time is situated in social and material practices of reading, writing ethnographic notes, using laptops, sleeping, all of which constitute a different temporality. As the train flies on down the line, other passengers’ temporalities tick slowly relative to that of the ethnographer. As has been well discussed, temporality is a located effect, situated in ongoing, moving practices (Adam, 1998; Massey, 2005; Serres, 1995): “we know as we go, from place to place” (Ingold, 2000, page 229). As passengers engage with the world, as they read and gaze through the window, they weave their temporality, landscape, and experience of train travel—their ‘trainscape’, so to speak. Thus, it seems that travel time is *made* in travel-time *use*. There are many travel times.

The timetable remains, of course, a crucial actor in the journey (often present to the passenger through WAP (wireless application protocol), wi-fi, text messaging, and other mobile data services, as well as in printouts and paper). The timetable tells passengers when to get to the station, when to be met, how long it will take.

However, travel time as a passenger experience is not only organised by the clock time of the timetable. Passenger travel time also involves a situated time that can be stretched and compressed and is, in part, dependent on the very practices and activities of passengers [as Bissell (2007) shows with regard to waiting]. Saving travel time is therefore not necessarily a matter of reducing the minutes between departure and arrival, but can involve attending to how the social and material practices of travel compress passenger travel time.

“As usual the temperature drops as we come over the pass to Keswick, which intensifies the feeling of adventure ... The cloud is down over the mountains ... Fresh air through the open window. [Here on the top deck of the bus it] feels like an IMAX cinema experience of the landscape ... Impossible to photograph this panoramic experience. The camera cannot handle the light variations between inside and out. Views are so changing, flickering, that I cannot photo them. Camera takes too long to switch on” (field notes from a rural bus service in the Lake District national park, September 2005).

“Besides me the man, who is partially sighted, has an old attaché case open before him ... [inside is] a grey mechanical ... a Braille device? A business man with a briefcase [is] doing sudoku and a crossword. An elderly lady sits and does nothing, looking out of the window. The world moves slower for all of them, my journey is faster [as I write my fieldnotes]. They are content to sit—our times run differently” (field notes from long-distance train journey, Lancaster to Penzance, July 2005).

And it is not only lumpy, fragile, and anxious bodies that move, for bodies are also ‘embaggaged’. Belongings must also move (see figure 3): handbag, tickets, luggage, water, book, keys, mobile phone, paper, laptops, pens, and a body together constitute the passenger. Person and property must move together, nothing should be lost en route. To follow ideas of distributed personhood (Gell, 1998), a person can be understood not simply as ending at the skin but as including all those prosthetic parts that are required for social interaction, including their luggage and travelling property. The implication for transport strategy is that this ‘distributed’ passenger requires more space than a body sitting in a seat (as in figure 3); the unit for counting and modelling is not just moving bodies but a configuration of persons *plus* property on the move. Moreover, these distributed passengers are spatially configured; the spatial relation between property and person is carefully managed. Handbags are unpacked onto table tops; rucksacks are stowed onto seats.

“The lady ... has put her handbag on the seat by the window—rummages in it for water, bottle, book ... and keys—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.” (field notes from long-distance train journey, Lancaster to Penzance, July 2005).



Figure 3. Unpacked passengers onboard trains and coach: (from left to right: train journey Lancaster to Penzance; train journey Newcastle to London; train journey Lancaster to London; coach service Oxford to London).

Two crucial configurations of passengers are the *packed* and the *unpacked*. Packed passengers are configured for waiting at sites of transit and for mobility (Gasparini, 1995); few items are ready-to-hand and so there are limited possibilities for practice. Unpacked passengers are a reconfiguration of person and property into a shape adapted for travel, which is itself relatively immobile. Artefacts for travel-time use are placed to hand (novel, mobile phone, water), and the vehicle landscape becomes included in the configuration and fixes it in place (usually in a designated seat), as the passenger spreads into, onto, under tables, seats, and windows.

Attending to these passenger configurations creates further insights for transport modelling. A high-quality passenger experience could be thought of as one that provides affordances for these reconfigurations. Unpacking takes time and space; therefore a journey where there is not enough time or space to unpack creates a sense of being squashed, even if the person has a seat and the vehicle is clean and punctual. Passengers are forced either to remain packed whilst travelling and consequently can make little use of their time. Or, as we observed with commuting, passengers adapt to cramped and short journeys by only partially unpacking with music players, mobile phones, and novels ready-to-hand in accessible pockets. And even in first-class travel the business traveller has to contend with the material objects of a cooked breakfast that intrudes upon how the space is being reconfigured as a mobile office—which is still predominantly constituted through paper (see figure 4; Holley et al, 2008; see also O'Hara et al, 2002).



Figure 4. ‘More elbow room’ negotiates breakfast crockery (train journey Newcastle to London; ‘more luggage space’ negotiates book and bag (train journey Preston to Birmingham).

The ethnography shows the importance of enhancing the affordance of travel spaces so as to realise different benefits of travel time (on affordances see Gibson, 1986). But to make these manifest to policy makers requires a shift in the transport modelling of the passenger so as to include the materialities and spatialities of travel.

And, as a method for engaging with transport policy, ethnography is problematic. Its evidence is necessarily (and richly) located rather than aggregated; there are always gaps and moments where the evidence does not hold. To attend to both issues of aggregation and location within transport policy we knitted together survey, group and individual interviews, ethnography, as well as other recordings and observations made during the research, from travel diaries to short videos, to make our ‘interference’.

Conclusion

Our account of travel time is a social, material, and spatial one. Travel time is a situated effect—an effect of the extraordinary richness of travel-time use. In all of these methods, we have shown that this situated travel time is not always wasted, unwanted, or minimised, but filled with highly valued activities, from soaking up the scenery during transition time to making mobile phone calls. Drawing upon this research (see Holley et al, 2008; Jain and Lyons, 2008; Lyons et al, 2007; Lyons and Watts, in preparation; Watts, in press, for further findings), we conclude with some proposals relating to the modelling of passengers and their productivities.

First, we propose that it is not travel time that should be audited but travel-time *use*. By removing the presence of travel time per se, other assumptions are also removed for which we found little evidence in this research: the direct relation between time and productivity, a singular focus on travel-time savings, the interchange between time and money, the utility-maximising passenger, and travel time as wasted time. Instead, by auditing travel-time *use*, the practices, places, and property of passengers become visible, including the moving landscapes *and* waiting rooms. What passengers do and where they are located becomes the basis for decision making. So what matters to policy might include the following concerns of both passengers and the transport industry more widely: providing appropriately designed moving places (trains/buses) and waiting places (stations/stops) that engender many different affordances for multiple activities and uses of time.

There is a crucial addition here; that the value of travel-time use is not calculated on the basis of earnings foregone as now but in terms of a noneconomic estimated value to the passenger. We found no evidence of a positive association between what people deem to be a valuable or worthwhile journey and engaging in economically visible employed work (see Holley et al, 2008). Societally important work, with no measurement potential in economic calculation, should not be discounted in transport modelling.

Moreover, business work on-the-move is not, for most passengers, where the benefit of travel is to be found. In contrast, we found that the value of travel time lay in its liminality, its role as a transition time, a ‘time for me’. The provision of facilities for constructing an office on-the-move is important, such as wi-fi networks, power sockets, and meeting facilities, since they increase the possible uses of travel time for a wide array of passengers. However, and this is crucial, it should not be the aim of policy to transform travel time only into work time, and carriages and buses only into mobile offices.

Our second suggestion extends this. If transport policy retains its focus on increasing the productivity of time, and we propose this includes travel time, then passenger productivity should be understood and modelled as spatial, social, and material. The productivity and possible uses of time for a passenger involve the configuration of the person, his or her property, and the landscapes of travel. Increasing travel-time productivity requires facilitating the reconfiguration of these into unpacked passengers; increasing the space and time for reading, soaking up the scenery, planning, destressing, transitioning, listening, writing, and so on. Auditing the effectiveness of moving and waiting places for engendering these processes might be helpful: not simply in the number of facilities, but in terms of their sensory quality, their embodied interaction with passengers—places as technologies for augmenting passengers and their activities.

Saving travel time is then no longer what is at stake, since passenger travel time is not uniform clock time, but may be stretched and compressed in practices on-the-move (as shown in Watts, in press). What matters becomes an increase in the effectiveness of travel places (both moving and stationary) as sites that aid productive and unpacked passengers in making and managing their own time—stretching and compressing different parts of their journey as they travel.

To develop these proposals further, we conducted a small set of passenger planning exercises on the basis of our results. We created a ‘travel remedy kit’, which was personalised on the basis of a structured interview conducted with the support of thirty different concepts developed during this research, many of which have been noted in this paper. The personalised ‘travel remedy kit’ included artefacts to support travel-time use (notebook, pen, magazine, drink, snacks, music player, book, earplugs, pillow, and so on), as well as detailed suggestions for how to plan activities for the journey, from refreshing walks to the train station to landmarks to look out for en route. Passengers then took the kit on a familiar journey and reported back on their experience (for a full account see Lyons and Watts, in preparation).

When we asked a female leisure traveller who participated in the ‘travel remedy kit’ research whether she was bored at any point on the remedied journey she replied, as with others:

“No! ... to be honest once I’ve looked for my landmarks, read my book, drawn some pictures, made a few notes. We’re there! ... But it went very quickly. It was great. And I was there before I knew it It was fun actually. It was quite fun. Other people were just sitting there, reading, or looking at their mobiles, and I’ve got plenty to do.”

There seems to be a connection between a highly active journey and the experience of it as ‘quick’—what travel appraisal might regard as saving time. Planning and anticipation are crucial to creating the possibility for such an active journey, which the travel remedy kit exemplified. The large-scale survey reported earlier found that those who had done no advanced planning were more than twice as likely to be bored. The configuration of the passenger must also include all the necessary moments, practices, and imaginary acts *prior* to departure, from booking tickets to packing bags. In the words of one presentation of the research to the UK Department of Transport:

“As with all journeys it begins with a thought, with an act of imagination: I would like to be Elsewhere A journey does not begin with a bus stop, train station or mountain footprint, it begins with *Imagineering* a destination: that is, the work of imagining the moment of arrival, the work of imagining being some where else” (Watts, 2006, emphasis in original).

There are many opportunities to re-constitute the uses of travel time. For travel-time use, the modelling of travel time, and the decisions achieved on their basis have far-reaching and long-lasting effects upon landscapes and lives. We have demonstrated an array of methods and provided a number of suggestions, not to hold the ephemera of travel time still, but to make present the diversity and fleeting experiences, while anticipating, while on-the-move, while waiting, and while recollecting.

The potential virtues of public transport are too important to be lost through adherence to a car-dominated method of calculation, which does not adequately make present the value and importance of travel time. This method ultimately leads to reduced investment in public transport—and in its travel times and places. Whereas, as we have shown, a reevaluation of travel-time use is one basis by which the seemingly omnipotent car system could be more modestly located in transport models and, at least partially, tamed.

Acknowledgements. We thank our colleagues on the Travel Time Use in the Information Age project at the Centre for Transport and Society, University of the West of England: Glenn Lyons, Juliet Jain, and David Holley. We would also like to thank the many participants in this research, whose voices made our account here possible.

References

- Adam B, 1998 *Timescapes of Modernity* (Routledge, London)
- Adey P, 2004, “Secured and sorted mobilities: examples from the airport” *Surveillance and Society* 1 500–519

- Anderson B, 2004, "Time-stilled space-slowed: how boredom matters" *Geoforum* **35** 739–754
- ATOC, 2007, "Travel by train for greater productivity" (campaign leaflet), Association of Train Operating Companies, 40 Bernard Street, London WC1N 1BY
- Augé M, 1995 *Non-places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity* (Verso, London)
- Bærenholdt J, Haldrup M, Larsen J, Urry J, 2004 *Performing Tourist Places* (Ashgate, Aldershot, Hants)
- Bechmann J, 2004, "Ambivalent spaces of restlessness: ordering (im)mobilities at airports", in *Space Odysseys: Spatiality and Social Relations in the 21st Century* Eds J O Bærenholdt, K Simonsen (Ashgate, Aldershot, Hants) pp 27–42
- Bissell D, 2007, "Animating suspension: waiting for mobilities" *Mobilities* **2**(1) 277–298
- Clifford J, 1997 *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century* (Harvard University Press, London/Cambridge, MA)
- Cresswell T, 2006 *On the Move: Mobility in the Modern Western World* (Routledge, London)
- Cwerner S, 2001, "The times of migration" *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* **27**(1) 7–36
- Davies, K, 2001, "Responsibility and daily life: reflections over timespace", in *Timespace: Geographies of Temporality* Eds K Davies, J May, N Thrift (Routledge, London) pp 133–148
- De Botton A, 2002 *The Art of Travel* (Pantheon Books, New York)
- Department for Transport, 2005 *Focus on Personal Travel: Report of the National Travel Survey* (The Stationery Office, London)
- DETR, 1999 *Transport and the Economy* Standing Advisory Committee on Trunk Road Assessment, Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions (The Stationery Office, London)
- DETR, 2000 *Transport 2010: The 10 Year Plan* Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions, London
- Gasparini G, 1995, "On waiting" *Time and Society* **4**(1) 29–45
- Gell A, 1998 *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory* (Clarendon Press, Oxford)
- Gibson J J, 1986 *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception* (Houghton Mifflin, Boston, MA)
- Glucksmann M, 2000, "Cotton and casuals: the gendered organisation of labour in time and space", British Sociological Association, Durham
- Goffman E, 1963 *Behaviour in Public Places* (Free Press, New York)
- Goodwin P, 2001, "Running to stand still? An analysis of the 10 Year Plan for transport", Campaign to Protect Rural England, London
- Gupta A, Ferguson J, 1997 *Anthropological Locations: Boundaries and Grounds of a Field Science* (University of California Press, Berkeley, CA)
- Haraway D J, 1997 *Modest_Witness@Second_Millennium. FemaleMan[©]_Meets_Oncomouse[™]: Feminism and Technoscience* (Routledge, London)
- Holley D, Jain J, Lyons G, 2008, "Understanding business travel time use and its place in the working day" *Time and Society* **17**(1) 17–46
- Jain J, Lyons G, 2008, "The gift of travel time" *Journal of Transport Geography* **16**(2) 81–89
- Ingold T, 1995, "Work, time and industry" *Time and Society* **4**(1) 5–28
- Ingold T, 2000 *The Perception of the Environment: Essays in Livelihood, Dwelling and Skill* (Routledge London)
- Latour B, 2004, "Why has critique run out of steam? From matters of fact to matters of concern" *Critical Inquiry* **30** 225–248
- Laurier E, 2004, "Doing office work on the motorway" *Theory, Culture and Society* **21**(4/5) 261–277
- Laurier E, Philo C, 2003, "The region in the boot: mobilising lone subjects and multiple objects" *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* **21** 85–106
- Lee J, Ingold T, 2006, "Fieldwork on foot: perceiving, routing, socialising", in *Locating the Field: Space, Place and Context in Anthropology* Eds S Coleman, P Collins (Berg, Oxford) pp 67–86
- Letherby G, Reynolds G, 2005 *Train Tracks: Work, Play and Politics on the Railways* (Berg, Oxford)
- Lewis N, 2000, "The climbing body, nature and the experience of modernity" *Body and Society* **6**(3/4) 58–80
- Lyons G, 2006, "Report on workshop—travel time use: developing a research agenda", Department for Transport, <http://www.dft.gov.uk/pgr/economics/rdg/reportonworkshoptraveltimes1081>
- Lyons G, Urry J, 2005, "Travel time use in the information age" *Transportation Research Part A* **39** 257–276
- Lyons G, Watts, L, in preparation, "Travel remedy kit: interventions into train lines and passengers", Centre for Transport and Society, Faculty of the Built Environment, University of the West of England, Bristol

- Lyons G, Jain J, Holley D, 2007, "The use of travel time by rail passengers in Great Britain" *Transportation Research A* **41** 107–120
- Massey D, 2005 *For Space* (Sage London)
- Merriman P, 2004, "Driving places: Marc Augé, non-places and the geographies of England's M1 motorway" *Theory, Culture and Society* **21**(4/5) 145–167
- Michael M, 2000, "These boots are made for walking: mundane technology, the body and human–environment relations" *Body and Society* **6**(3/4) 107–126
- Mokhtarian P L, Salomon I, 2001, "How derived is the demand for travel? Some conceptual and measurement considerations" *Transportation Research Part A* **35** 659–719
- O'Hara K, Perry M, Sellen A, Brown B, 2002, "Exploring the relationship between mobile phone and document activity during business travel", in *Wireless World: Social and Interaction Aspects of the Mobile Age* Eds B Brown, N Green, R Harper (Springer, London) pp 180–194
- Passenger Focus, 2006, "Findings of a review of the National Passenger Survey", <http://www.passengerfocus.org.uk/news-and-publications/document-search/document.asp?dsid=552>
- Porter T M, 1995 *Trust in Numbers: The Pursuit of Objectivity in Science and Public Life* (Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ)
- Salomon I, Mokhtarian P L, 1997, "Coping with congestion: understanding the gap between policy assumptions and behaviour" *Transportation Research Part D: Transport and Environment* **2** 107–123
- Sayer A, 2004, "Moral economy", Department of Sociology, Lancaster University, <http://www.lancs.ac.uk/fss/sociology/papers/sayer-moral-economy.pdf>
- Schafer A, 1998, "The global demand for motorized mobility" *Transportation Research Part A* **32** 455–477
- Shivelbusch W, 1987 *The Railway Journey: The Industrialization and Perception of Time and Space* (University of California Press, Berkeley, CA)
- Serres M, 1995 *Michel Serres with Bruno Latour: Conversations on Science, Culture and Time* (University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor, MI)
- Shapin S, 1994 *A Social History of Truth: Civility and Science in Seventeenth-century England* (University of Chicago Press, Chicago, IL)
- Sheller M, Urry J, 2006, "The new mobilities paradigm" *Environment and Planning A* **38** 207–226
- Turner V, 1986 *The Anthropology of Performance* (PAJ Publications, New York)
- Turner V, 1996 *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture: Anthropological Perspectives* (Columbia University Press, New York)
- Urry J, 2002 *The Tourist Gaze* 2nd edition (Sage, London)
- Urry J, 2007 *Mobilities* (Polity Press, Cambridge)
- Watts L, 2006, "Travel times (or journeys with Ada)", Department of Sociology, Lancaster University, <http://eprints.lancs.ac.uk/4348/>
- Watts L, in press, "The art and craft of train travel" *Journal of Social and Cultural Geography* **9** (June/July)

Conditions of use. This article may be downloaded from the E&P website for personal research by members of subscribing organisations. This PDF may not be placed on any website (or other online distribution system) without permission of the publisher.