

## Chapter Six

### The Making of Mundane Bus Journeys

*Juliet Jain*

Timetables score rhythms of movement across space, structuring relationships between people, places and things. The timetable performs an official interpretation of public mobility “needs” or “desires” based on assumptions about established social practices (e.g. commuting around nine-to-five working hours). The timetable is the temporal stage on which travel time is performed, while the vehicle (e.g. bus, train) facilitates the spatial arena for temporal improvization by individual passengers and their possessions. Thus, time and space are interwoven in the multiple performances of travelling.

The chapter is concerned with the *making* of the bus journey: setting out, waiting, the unfolding rhythms of the journey, and the performances of bus passengers—the performance of travel time along mundane bus journeys. Temporalities flow through and around spatial encounters along the journey, like daydreaming at the bus stop or watching from the top deck cinematic-scenery unfold. The intermingling of the times and spaces on the move perform what I describe as “mobility-scapes.”

Each bus journey is a unique local experience, but the journey taken in this chapter gathers geographically heterogeneous fragment “scenes” taken from my mobile ethnography to produce a montage performance of mobility-scapes as an unfolding journey. These scenes illustrate the interplay between passenger and material (carried objects, infrastructures, and so forth) in the constant re-making of mobile spaces, which interplay with the sensory and emotional embodied experience of place (see also Watts 2008). Specifically, it articulates three tropes of bus travel: individual, sociable, and tourist, all of which move between the temporalities of experienced time and scheduled time.

In telling the stories of making mundane bus journeys, the field accounts of the author (Juliet) and co-researcher (Laura) slip between the autobiographical and the participant observations of others. The research was generated for an investigation into “travel time use” that had a specific interest in the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) while travelling<sup>1</sup>, but was also interested in the contextual setting of travel and the unfolding of the journey from start to finish. Thus while the experiences of travelling engaged a range of emotional and physical responses (fascination, fear, nausea, exhaustion) I have distanced these narrative from the attitudinal discourses of “good” and “bad” perceptions of bus travel (Guiver 2007; Stradling et al. 2007), and customer satisfaction surveys pursued for “official” purposes (e.g. DfT 2008).

*Mobile ethnography* is a novel methodology for transport research which is useful for revealing the richness of the travel experience and contextual setting. However in this case the challenge of this methodological approach was capturing an essence of the fluid and transient (see Watts and Urry 2008). Thus the autobiographical detail of the quasi researcher-traveller became an important element to our interpretations of journeys (see Jain unpublished), as did the repetition of travelling routes over a series of days<sup>2</sup>. Our selection of routes reflected the urban and rural, and included London, however such selection did not intend to represent all possible bus journey variations, but rather give a taste of the differences and commonalities.

---

<sup>1</sup> “Travel Time Use in the Information Age” was an ESRC funded research project jointly conducted by the Centre for Transport and Society, UWE, and the Centre for Mobilities Research, Lancaster University. The research contested the assumption that travel time is wasted time and investigated, using mixed methods, travel time use, contexts, and discourses.

<sup>2</sup> Juliet and Laura travelled across Britain on six train routes, four bus routes and one coach route.

Stories of bus journeys are rare, and even within the emergent field of mobilities the bus has not yet arrived<sup>3</sup>. The dearth of social research on the bus reflects, perhaps, its “minority” status. Although during 2007/2008 nearly five million journeys were made by bus in Britain—of which two million journeys were undertaken in London (DfT 2008a, 2008b)—this *only* accounts for 6% of *all* journeys in the country. While mobilities research has not yet caught the bus, this mundane mode of everyday mobility plays an important role in social life and the economic functioning of the country. Current UK transport policy desires an increase in bus use to counter urban congestion, and the 2007/2008 bus patronage figures indicate an annual rise of 1.3% on the previous year, but delivery is managed at a local and regional level in negotiation with commercial bus operators (DfT 2008a).

The bus journey experience is variable across Britain—it is not only shaped by the landscape, local populations and time of day, but also by politics and the economy. The deregulated bus industry competes for routes and much of the country is dominated by a few large operators (for example Stagecoach is the main operator in Lancaster and Cumbria, and First Bus in Bristol). There is geographic variation in the investment into buses, as well as in the associated infrastructures such as bus lanes, real-time information, bus shelters, and ticket machines. The topography of the bus landscape form heterogeneous agents in the performance of bus travel. The many journeys incorporated here acknowledge such geographic as well as temporal variations<sup>4</sup>.

### **Performing Bus Travel**

Bus travel is clearly rooted in ordinariness of everyday practices such as commuting, shopping, visiting places and people. The “doing” of passengering is embodied and unfolds along the

---

<sup>3</sup> The exceptions being ‘73urbanjourneys’, a web-based social analysis of the last Routemaster bus in London – the no 73, and Nash’s (1975) analysis of American buses.

<sup>4</sup> The four routes reported on in this paper were: 1) Emersons Green to City Centre (no 49) Bristol; 2) Victoria to Brixton (no 2) London; 3) Lancaster to Caton (no 80) Lancashire; 4) Windermere to Keswick (no 555), Cumbria.

journey, as well as being set in the context of official discourses (timetables, ticketing, and other written rules) and heterogeneous arrangements of personal technological objects. Everyday practice, situated within heterogeneous technological arrangements, is central to the concept of performance within non-representational geography (Thrift 1996; Thrift and Dewsbury 2000). Taking a performance approach facilitates a fluid interpretation of relational context of people and technologies, in the making and unmaking of hybrid states. While “actor-network theory” has inspired this approach (see Thrift 1996), inclusion of the multi-sensory, emotional, and atmospheric enriches the context of the human-technical relationship in the making of place on the move (Wylie 2005).

Buses are made on the move through their passengers. Buses *become* buses through the coming together of bus company and passengers as co-producers of place performance. The temporal cusp of “emergence” and “becoming” engage the performative notion of places in the making (Dewsbury 2000; Massey 2005; Wylie 2005). Time cannot be separated from space in this emergent fluid state of journey-making and passengering, which Hodson and Vannini (2007) also describe. The abstracted timetable produces a narrative of clock time inscribed on Euclidean space, the bus performs this choreographed tale in response to the road conditions of each specific journey and the individual performances of the passengers as they talk, watch, read, and listen. It is with all these elements together that the journey narrative unfolds.

Timetables reshaped society with the coming of the railways; a national clock time unified the nation and rail travellers’ choices were held in the organizational power of the travel service provider (Adam 1995; Jain 2006). This social structuring of time remains, although one of the challenges to public transport is the notional freedom of independent modes (notably the car). It is within such structured time that passengers re-perform their own temporal experiences, often clawing back what is regarded by some as “dead” or “wasted” time (Urry 2007). Occupying travel time with books and newspapers is a long established practice, especially in managing the close proximity of strangers; while Walkmans and iPods, mobile phones, and other mobile

technologies accompany the contemporary journey (see Brown and O'Hara 2003; Bull 2000; Laurier 2004; Letherby and Reynolds 2003). Objects afford the individual a method of “crafting” travel time in situ, thus time is experienced in relation to activity and place (Watts 2008). Experienced time *stretches* and *compresses* along the journey around activity and stillness; not ignoring any imposed timetable but operating alongside references of time and place expectations of station/bus stops and interchange (Latour 1997; Watts and Lyons 2007). As Adam (1995) argues multiple times co-exist and flow through the individual.

Travel time emerges in a temporary making of place, and the bus is the stage for multiple performances. As Edensor (2001:64) describes in relation to tourism: “stages can continually change, can expand and contract. For most stages are ambiguous, sites for different performances.” For instance, the bus may be simultaneously a tourist opportunity and a utility journey. The bus therefore is a stage where any number of identities emerge, and it may be the very liminality of an interspace or inbetween-ness of a space *on the move* that facilitates a particular performance (e.g. the *transition* between parent and work roles, doing business on the move) (Jain and Lyons 2008; Urry 2007).

Thus, performance and non-representational theory provide an opening into the making of the journey: the physical context, the props, the passengers’ and drivers’ words and actions, the lighting, sound effects and scenery. This approach also facilitates an understanding of the emergent state of being on the move where passengers respond to the physical and social context of the journey.

### **Making the Journey: A Performance in Many Acts**

Conceptually, the journey usually conjures a single linear narrative: beginning, middle, and end. This linear narrative is the journey of the bus; but passengers’ journeys only partially connect, travelling with the bus along shorter sections the collective journeys thus fragment the linear, and

scattering numerous narratives along the route<sup>5</sup>. “Starts” and “finishes” are performed in multiple locations creating an “endless landscape”<sup>6</sup> of interchangeable experience.

In making the mundane bus journey each performance of the individual’s journey narrative is initiated with some form of preparation or thinking about travelling before setting out on the journey. Often there is a period of waiting before boarding the bus and finding a seat or place to stand. The seated or standing passenger “settles” into the journey. Passengers prepare to leave, and finally alighting they continue the journey by other modes. Thus, this chapter utilizes this mode of ordering to discuss the flows of people, objects, activities, sightings and conversations through which “mobility-scapes” emerge.

However, the flow of travel time is rarely continuous. Sometimes it stretches out interminably, while other times it passes so rapidly that you are suddenly there. The experience of time is shaped by activities conducted while travelling, the travelling conditions (vehicle environment, other people, physical comfort, road congestion, and so on) and time flexibility and constraints. While most factors cut across all modes, there are some very specific attributes of bus travel that affect the journey experience.

Notably, the urban bus journey is punctuated by frequent stops, and the journey for some passengers may be only a few minutes, with average journey lengths being around 32 minutes (just under 40 in London) (DfT 2006). Travelling in Bristol and London my field notes became dotted with clock time checks every few minutes as the bus picked-up or discarded passengers. Observing other passengers, this punctuation of flow is incorporated into the flow of activities.

---

<sup>5</sup> Out of the four routes included in this research, only on one (Bristol) did the researcher complete the full route. On the others a selected section was undertaken, replicating the majority of travelling experiences.

<sup>6</sup> An ‘Endless Landscape’ (or polyorama) is a game that consists of a series of paintings of fragments of a panorama that can be arranged in billions of combinations to form a continuous landscape.

Passengers adapt their activities around the spatial and temporal constraints of the bus journey. On the bus, space for the disconnected individuals is about managing personal containment (disconnected individuals are the solo travellers who might equip their time and space for travelling alone). These travellers may not have anything specific to do, but the travel performance engages particular acts which disengages the traveller from others. Others continue conversations across others and between seats.

Travel time use is also part of a local knowledge of passengering that connects the route landmarks and timetable. Bus timetables are the corporate journey narrative: it is the de-contextualized “no-incident” combination of units of time and space interjected with local place names (e.g. Staple Hill Portcullis, Caton War Memorial). The passenger’s experience of journey time mingles with the expectations constructed by the bus company in the timetable. Responding to the tension of layered mobile time-space narratives, passengers may or may not equip themselves for using their travel time.

#### *Act 1: Setting out*

Scene 1: Laura sets out with her packed bag and timetable. She feels equipped for the field work ahead. She enters Lancaster bus station anxiously seeking her bus, but the bus is not evident. A closer inspection of the timetables reveals the code “NSch” above the schedule—School Holidays Only. The bus station is heaving with school children so blatantly the bus will not run. How was she to know? It seems to her that using buses requires local arcane knowledge, which includes the local school authority’s term dates!

Scene 2: On a rainy morning in London, Juliet and Tim hover at the edge of Victoria Station trying to work out how to get across the bus station to find their bus stop. Then there is a negotiation with the ticket machine and a search for change, as there are no credit card payment facilities.

Crossing the threshold of home, work, place of study or other point of departure, travellers are equipped for the journey (albeit in varying states). An imagined journey has begun

to materialize in the activities of bag packing and information sourcing—the journey starting with the idea, not at the moment of physical departure (Watts 2008). As research-travellers we pack for both roles: adding camera, pen and notebook as the tools of our trade. The handbag, briefcase, or rucksack, accompany most travellers, and although bags are often problematic to stow, they are an important deterrent to would-be seat sharers. Bags and their contents, therefore, are crucial in the manifestation of the “hybrid state”—the equipped passenger, where the performance is augmented by material objects (Thrift and Dewsbury 2000). Other focus groups and journey-shadowing conducted for the travel time use project indicated that everyday bags remain packed with essential items: keys, money, season ticket, phone, as well as with the additional gendered items of make-up and hairbrush. Other items—such as a newspaper, magazine, novel, lunchbox—have their own mobility timeframes in and out of bags, and are cyclically replaced and sometimes shared. Laptops, perhaps like their owners, are used and recharged at home, and on the bus, at least, wait for their office destination to re-start in the world of work.

We know what others carry *only* from observations of the things that appear at different points en route. Being packed supports the notion of “equipped waiting” proposed by Gasparini (1995). However, it is evident from participation and observations that equipping oneself for travel time use is more diffuse and connected with other associated practices such as work in terms of the objects that travel with people and where they are used (Brown and O’Hara 2003; Holley et al 2008).

The equipped traveller often holds a series of local knowledges: the spatial arrangement of urban and travel infrastructures and organizational practices (e.g. bus stops, toilets, where to purchase a bus ticket). Travelling for the first time reveals the importance of local knowledge that becomes embodied, ritualized and habitualized day after day. Small lacunas challenge inexperienced travellers, or those on a new route, including Laura and myself (see also Nash 1975). In situ learning leads to more “successful” future journeys where flow is more confident



and seamless. After two or three days our field notes change is dynamic; no longer focused on thoughts of “how to catch” or “where to get off,” our attention can now re-orientate around other experiences and the social relations and activities of co-travellers.

Catching the bus is part of a whole series of interconnecting events, times and places. Thus how the passenger is equipped for the *imagined* journey ahead is shaped by the journey context (e.g. business trip, commute, going shopping), mode, and spatial encounters (Holley et al 2008). Mobile objects—the material possessions that travel with us or are picked up en-route—are critical to the journey experience. Knowing what to take, where to buy a coffee, the availability of a free newspaper (usually ~~on~~ “the Metro”) become part of the travel repertoire, not exclusive to any mode, but tailored to personal desires and distinctly connected the immediate locale (Watts and Lyons 2007).

#### *Act 2: Waiting for the Bus*

Scene 1: Juliet and David wait at the Broadmead shopping centre bus stop observing a semi-ordered queue. Others loiter out of line against the shop windows. A young male reads a magazine, another man smokes. Headphones, mobiles, text messaging, a couple chatting—whatever the activity, everyone looks towards the direction of a potential bus.

Scene 2: Sitting on a paint-scuffed bench at Windermere in the warm sunshine, Laura muses on the waiting environment and facilities that make this particular wait a pleasurable experience. There is a bus stop with a timetable. There are other people waiting for buses—hunting in packs means safety in numbers—it is likely a bus will arrive and there are people with local knowledge to ask if not. Booths tea shop, café and espresso are to hand. It is light, not dark and smelly, like a bus shelter.

Scene 3: Laura, at the Glass Houses stop in Caton, waits with scholars, absorbing the sensory experience of the atmosphere which marks it so different from Windermere. Here it smells of cigarette smoke in this shelter, although she cannot see any cigarette. A loud bullying girl starts teasing a younger boy, but is more playful than derogatory. A possible student appears and

stands aloof with a rucksack outside the shelter. They see the bus at a stop further up the road and the schoolgoers stand and pour out of the shelter ready to fight their way onboard.

**[Insert figure 6.1 about here – portrait]**

### **Fig. 6.1 Evening commuters wait at Broadquay**

The provision for waiting is variable from a single bus stop pole perched on a grass verge to the bustling bus station with digital displays, uniformed officials and retail opportunities. The stop and surrounding infrastructures are the first stage on which the emergent passenger plays waiting. It marks the meeting of the individual with the official in space and time.

At Windermere waiting is a pleasure, but this experience of waiting challenges official and theoretical assumptions. For the transport economist waiting is the least desired part of the journey, with monetary values placed on waiting being up to four times that of being in-vehicle in the cost-benefit analysis of travel time savings (Makie et al. 2003). Likewise from a social scientific perspective, waiting ruptures the dominant focus on speed and velocity and challenges a modernity based on the time-economy (Bissell 2007). Yet waiting remains an inevitable element of the travel narrative, and multifarious social practices emerge to accommodate this time that respond to the physical shape of the waiting area, time of day, and weather conditions. Objects, either packed or ornamenting the traveller, equip and extend the possibilities of waiting so that waiting is not performed as a passive state, but as a time-space that could feature an activity performed anywhere such as a mobile phone conversation (Bissell 2007; Gasparini 1995). Waiting has its own temporal and spatial performances.

Waiting is an embodied performance that collectively draws a heterogeneous group into anticipation and expectation and orientates the collective gaze towards the flow of traffic (or occupation of a bus bay). These not-quite-yet-passengers occupy space haphazardly, but with individual intent. Waiting engages haptic practices of standing, touching, leaning, and the effects of the elements (e.g. sun, rain, wind). Motion might be limited, but bodies shift around, often easing the physical burden against walls, buildings or other street furniture. Other senses are

engaged. Traffic fumes, cigarette smoke and take-out coffee pervade the olfactory realm. The aural domain filters half conversations, road traffic, ring tones and music leaking from personal stereos—the sound track that accompanies urban life. In distant settings such as Wylie’s rural walking (Wylie 2005) sensory encounters perform a similar story of embodied place.

Enmeshed with the sensory is the emotional. No one says they enjoy waiting, but it is accepted as the mode of operation. While time feels suspended, the clock and timetable are constantly monitored. Anticipation, frustration, anger, anxiety, acceptance and resignation imbue those who wait. We feel such emotions in our quasi researcher-traveller role, catch the sighs of others and eavesdrop the complaining halves of phone conversations, but always orientated towards a near future goal: catching the bus and becoming a passenger. The point of interchange is intermodal *and* a passage into passenger identity.

### *Act 3: A Place on Board*

Scene 1: The driver has turned off the engine and is acting as a local travel agent and guide. Lots of nervous tourists are asking: “How much to Keswick?” “Can we go on the steam boat with an explorer ticket?” People do not board the bus to ask these questions, they stay behind the threshold. To step on is a significant move: it is to begin the journey. So they call from the pavement, and the driver mediates the portal to the journey.

Scene 2: Upstairs on the 49 to Bristol Nina sits with a bag next to her and a handbag on her lap. She reads the Metro. The bus turns the corner onto Staple Hill High Street and stops at the Red Lion. It’s 8 o’clock. Charlie is reading at the back. Nina glances at the passengers coming up the stairs, a lone man, and returns to her newspaper. Elaine fiddles with her bag at the front in the “driver’s seat.” Another girl smiles as she appears up the steps and joins her friend. They chat.

Scene 3: Back to Lancaster people gravitate to the front of the bus, even the long bench opposite the stairs, despite the discomfort. This is a “short hop” mentality. They appear to be pressing in against the driver, and that’s both old people and young people.

Scene 4: “Ambleside!” yells the driver as we pull in, finally. The drinking bottle couple leap up; not to leave, but to take the place of the Japanese couple who were sitting up at the front. More people get on with bags of shopping. The young teenagers go to the back, the middle-aged at the front, towards the view.

For me the excitement of climbing the stairs to the “driver’s seat” in the upstairs front is perpetuated by my own children. Journeys made for this research were made by adults only, apparently devoid of the sense of fun and excitement of the world through a child’s eye and rooted in the banal nature of routine commuting and apparent utility trips. However, choosing where to sit, and observing others’ choices indicated how location within the bus mediates part of the making of travel time, identity and notions of safety. London, Bristol and Cumbria double-deckers offer a choice of levels. Two weeks after the London bombings, Tim and I were nervous about venturing upstairs, but in Bristol, David and I alternated between downstairs and upstairs on each journey noting how our regular commuters head for their favorite location, subject to availability (see Jain unpublished). The view from upstairs front remains an attraction for many passengers.

Each bus has a mix of solo travellers, couples, and friends, and occasional parents and children. School children are evident on school commute routes, but mostly excluded by the timings of our route selections. Choosing a seat, or seats, is associated with two more ubiquitous bus travel tropes: the bus of disconnected individuals and the bus of social play, which are symbiotically managed. In our research a third trope emerged: the bus trip as tourism. The seat, if available, as observational point for the worlds inside and outside the bus locates the performance of emergent travel time use.

#### *Act 4: Activity Time*

Scene 1: Upstairs on the 49 bus from Bristol people are chatting. Cindy takes a call and she discusses dinner arrangements. After the call she discusses dinner with Kevin next to her. Some women in front talk about cars while looking at adverts in the newspaper. A mobile phone rings

and a man answers. There are quite a few people with headphones. Barry flips his mobile phone open and shut.

Scene 2: Downstairs on the No. 2 Danny sits in the corner of the back seat and plays with his Gameboy while his mum watches him next to him. Others on the back seat: Petula reads a newspaper, and Penny holds a hot coffee sitting in the middle. Next to Tim sits George; he reads a newspaper and listens to his earphones. There is an able-bodied woman, Sue, in the disabled seat reading a novel. Celia stands listening to a CD player. A man sitting in an aisle seat is asleep, head forward. The girl next to him is looking out of the window; does she feel penned in?

Scene 3: There are lots of Walkmans again. The bus is more than half full of school-goers, with their iPods and Walkmans. Looking at other travellers, Laura observes that the girl from the bus stop who was reading the novel is still immersed, and realizes she has very small headphones in her ears too.

The shaping of space with belongings, and the making of travel time use with action or inaction is ubiquitous: the routine choices of seat, the picking up of the free paper, the checking of the phone and so on. Alice, for instance, whom I observe over several mornings on the 49 in Bristol always picks up the free Metro, aims upstairs for the front seat, reads her paper, after checking her phone, gets out her headphones and listens to music. Music, reading, texting, and phoning facilitate spatial withdrawal, enliven “dead time,” and reduce the sense of time stretching out. The stop start of the bus interrupts the flow of reading and readers momentarily gaze at newcomers who negotiate the ticket machine and move through the bus seeking a space, or out the window at landscapes and traffic, before returning to the written word. In contrast, music continues to flow over and around such hiatus in corporeal mobility.

#### *Act 6: Brief Encounters*

Scene 1: Juliet and Tim have watched Joan and George, an elderly couple, negotiate seats and travelling quietly along. Somewhere near Stockwell the tempo gears up. Carmen gets on and exclaims. She kisses Joan and George and stands in the aisle talking. There is a woman, “Sandra,”

with a pushchair behind her, who looks slightly annoyed she can't get through. George's helper indicates to Carmen she is blocking the way. Carmen moves, and a cute baby is positioned into the "disabled" bay. Sandra sits in silence minding the pushchair. Carmen sits the wrong way round on the seat in front of George and Joan talking loudly, not in English. The conversation is animated. George's helper indicates it is time to get off, but Carmen makes them stay, and the conversation continues.

Scene 2: The bus in to Lancaster picks up more people. Two ladies, going to work, sit at the front behind the driver. Opposite, two girls are rifling through their bags, showing each other their new notebooks and school stuff. A new pink iPod mini is being passed around. "That's really nice" comments one girl.

Scene 3: At Troutbeck we hit another queue for Ambleside; it's going to be a long trip. But the chatty women gabble along. The older couple peer through the trees to the lake and quietly share comments. Talking, social interaction, Laura notes, makes time compress.

Talk suffuses the journey with another rhythm. In the bus of social play friends often choose to co-locate, or string out along the bus talking along the aisle. In other instances, acquaintances exchange pleasantries, then retreat in their own worlds. Talk plays alongside the interruptions of bodily movement at stops, and often slips into observations of the outside of momentarily glimpsed events and commentaries on surrounding urban congestion.

Social interaction, as Laura comments, clearly removes the passenger into another temporal realm, not necessarily attached to time. Conversations however, often are brought to an abrupt halt, as one party leaves before another. Travel time is not always enough time, as Bull (2000) also notes with music listening. Occasionally, talk drags the passenger into an extended journey as observed downstairs in London. Spontaneous conversations and unexpected encounters shift the bus into a stage of social interaction where time is too short and the brief encounters of the short bus hop are left with promises of more.

The bus as social play is also a central part of young people's travel, which can create tensions between different social groups (Stradling et al. 2007). Here, the bus really is the extension of play time: unobserved by authority figures. Sharing of objects mirrors other studies of young people and mobile technologies (see Green 2002), but also indicates how technologies not only facilitate social withdrawal, but active social engagement too. Sharing is not limited to school children; observations included sharing the iPod earphone moving around a group of young women commuters and the sharing of phone images between young work colleagues commuting home.

*Act 7: A Seat with a View*

Scene 1: In Cumbria Laura notes that everyone wants to be on the left for the lake. As we pass half the bus cranes, mesmerized by the water. Later, she notes how the top deck is an extra IMAX: no need to feel the inner ear move, the rocking, buffeting bus over the pass, does it all. What a ride!

Scene 2: In London the window mediates spatial markers. Off again. The Thames is full. Today St Georges Wharf is visible: expensive flats that overlook the Thames. Timecheck: 10:05; as the bus approaches Vauxhall interchange. There is a loud siren behind us. Everyone looks out of the window. Are other travellers as anxious as us? Tim informs Juliet that the Brazilian who was shot was on the no. 2 bus.

Gazing from the window has been briefly mentioned above as incorporated into the practices of both the disconnected individuals and those engaged in social play. The gaze takes the passenger into a transient visually mediated world, creating a quasi tourist space in the most mundane space. Notably, it is the upstairs that particularly transforms this relationship with the passing landscape, although travelling downstairs there a sense of longing of a past life in me as the bus crosses the Thames and I identify landmarks.

On the Cumbria route the tourists sit alongside the everyday passenger. Laura's field notes describe how the tourist's gaze on sites of interest becomes mediated through seating

choices. It is on this bus gazing on the passing scenery that she likens the panoramic design of windows surrounding the passenger on all three sides to the IMAX experience, with the sense of motion augmenting the visual.

**[Insert Fig. 6.2 about here – portrait]**

**Fig. 6.2: The Bus IMAX in Lakeland Fells**

Yet we do not know if all these “tourists” are authentic, or the mundane bus journey creates transitory tourists still enjoying the childlike thrill of being on the top deck and observing the world, whether it is tourist location or not.

*Act 8: Confined*

Scene 1: People stare around at nothing in particular. Is there an art of looking like you’re not staring at anything in particular that has been developed by London commuters? There is no eye contact.

Scene 2: Leaving Bristol again the bus is full, more or less. Two unclaimed seats remain at the back. People stand. Jackie gets on the bus having a phone conversation, which she continues, as she stands next to us holding on. It ends abruptly. Penn Street. People squeeze on. Jackie reads a novel, a paperback that looks old. One woman gets off and the other friend moves back one seat. People cling to the backs of seats and hand rails. It is hot and cramped and uncomfortable.

The open expanse mediated through the top deck in the Lakes contrasts the dark, oppressive, and cramped conditions of the evening commute in Bristol. It is here that people stand, in overcrowded peak conditions, hanging on to rails, seats, and dangling hand stirrups. Downstairs in cramped overcrowded buses the seated passenger feels much more under the surveillance of others, and the windows’ perspective retains the traveller in everyday quotidian. Upstairs is a more liberating experience: the window sanctions voyeurism and lifts the traveller into a god-like perspective of looking down at-a-distance.

*Act 9: Are We There Yet?*



Scene 1: This 20 minute journey to Brixton extends into eternity with discomfort. Juliet's rear is roasted in on the back seat, presumably something to do with the engine. There is foul perfume smell. When are we going to get off?

Scene 2: It is a hot September evening. The 49 drags its way out of the city centre. We wait on the hill and slowly crawl forward. Music escapes, overlaid with the roar of the traffic moving in the other direction. Mike has his eyes shut, elbow resting on the window ledge. As Juliet looks round out of the window she notes how the slowness infiltrates the bus. Roundabout Eastville Park. The traffic is very heavy. It will be difficult for the bus to squeeze into the bus stop, but it does. Time check: 17:25. At the stop Mike looks out at the park. As the bus moves off his eyes droop once more, but then he is momentarily alert again to check his watch.

Urban congestion layers another temporal flow. In Bristol the slowness of entering and exiting the congested city drags. The timetable is lost into uncertainty with progress along the route marked not by time but by landmarks formed through route familiarity. The heat of the extended summer that September accentuated causes the weariness of the early evening commute, as passengers retreat into the paper, music, or limply gazing on the passing landscape. Conversation often lulls and reading discarded, accentuating the nothingness of the moment. It is only music once more that overlays the temporal drag.

#### *Act 10: Arrival*

Scene 1: There are few passengers left on the 49. Tina opens her bag, rummages through it, and retrieves her make up. She applies cream foundation from a round compact with mirror, eyeliner, and then lipstick. She must have a steady hand. Rupert Street Stop. She has a gold bag. Nearly at Broadquay, the final stop. She opens the bag and checks her packet of ~~fags~~ cigarettes is still there. Tina taps her finger. Any second now.

Scene 2: Brixton at last. People move to the middle door to get off here. The doors don't open, yet people are getting on at the front. The bell is repeatedly rung demanding the doors to be opened. Is this a sense of angst or frustration? Does the driver realize we are waiting for him to

release us? The surge propels me forward onto the street. The bus is not aligned with the raised pavement. Juliet has no option but to move forward. The woman's child is stuck behind her and the mum is in front. She feels her holding on tight to her child. There is no respect for age or infirmity as they are disgorged.

Moving towards the destination bus stop, like on the train, there is a reorganization of possessions: bag packing, newspaper folding, then the anticipation gaze searching for familiar landmarks, the bus stop. Reach for the bell, if no one else has. People half-move in seats, others stagger down the aisle as if anxious they will miss their stop or will be hindered by the rush. Others hover near the driver to confirm they are at the correct location. It is strange that many buses carry the sign "do not talk to the bus driver while the vehicle is in motion" since the driver is the *only* authoritative voice.

My sense of relief is always enormous when getting off the bus. In London, it is the fear of terrorist threat that ensures an edgy anticipation of safe arrival. In Bristol, it is the battle against nausea and the relief of fresh air in the autumn heat. We watch others depart along our journeys—the ting of the bell ringing out the impending stop. Those that leave before us have partly arrived, walking on or waiting for connecting services to their final destinations, we know not where. The end point for the researcher-passenger is different: often an intermediary place of rest, reflection and recollection before the return journey. Even then a similar space is constructed once home, or in the hotel. Disgorged on the pavement we once more become pedestrians in control of our own bodily mobility. The identity of a passenger is clearly bounded by the movement from vehicle to kerb in a different way to waiting for the bus.

## **Conclusion**

Back at the desk, field notes become ordered into stories of into performances of mundane mobility. The fragments of scenes presented in this chapter are unfinished stories: temporary glimpses of other travellers' lives that come and go across all travel networks. It is only the autobiographical experience that takes the narrative from packing the bag to final destination.

The use of mobile ethnography—observations and conversations with others, and our own travel experiences—unveils the many experiences of bus travelling. The ethnographic narratives illustrate the complex time-space relationships in this rather neglected mode of travel. The bus is a place that has enmeshed into both rural and urban lives, tourist travel and routine commuting, but has become overshadowed by interpretations of the car and train. The bus and its passengers perform a very different mobile experience, which has its own cultures and rituals. The process of recording the bus stories of a transient population, capturing the ambience, the changing tempo of the unfolding of journeys, promoted a performance interpretation.

An empty bus can flow seamlessly, its carcass ambivalent to place. Passengers in making the mundane journey transform this stage, as this chapter describes. Passengers draw the outside into the bus through their gaze, experiencing the sun or the darkness of night. Passengers affect the tempo of flow through talk, music, reading, and getting on and off, and they also internalize the flow of the day such as traffic congestion and bio-rhythms. Passengers are also held in check by the timetable, and connected to other schedules. Thus, the time-space of the bus is a hub of flows; some intersecting, some running their own course. How the traveller travels—as individual, social group, or as tourist—changes the experience of the bus space, how it is occupied and used.

The journey and travel time are a making and unmaking of hybrid states. The journey is a liminal experience of distance and detachment: an in between world of withdrawal, observation, and idle chitchat that is contained by the physical structure of the bus and the timetable. The technical objects (e.g. books, iPods, phones) that travel with passengers move them between worlds of the bus, the imagination, the passing landscape, and to distant places. Such props, scenery, and so forth, facilitate travel time use to be made multiple, while the context shapes their use. Thus travel time is an emergent experience: a performance in the making: the making of mundane bus journeys.

## **Acknowledgements**

I am indebted to Laura Watts, who spent hours on the bus in Cumbria and Lancashire generating the data presented here, and to Dr Tim Jones and David Holley for accompanying me on the bus in London and Bristol, as well as the bus companies who provided access and the unsuspecting passengers who made ethnography viable.

## References

- Adam, Barbara. 1995. *Timewatch: A Social Analysis of Time*. Cambridge, [UK](#): Polity Press.
- Bissell, David. 2007. "Animating Suspension: Waiting for Mobilities." *Mobilities* 2: 277–298.
- Bull, Michael. 2000. *Sounding Out the City: Personal Stereos and the Management of Everyday Life*. Oxford: Berg.
- Brown, Barry, and Kenton O'Hara. 2003. "Place as a practical concern of mobile workers." *Environment and Planning A* 35:1565-1588.
- Dewsbury, John David. 2000. "Performativity and the event. Enacting a philosophy of difference." *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 18: 473-496.
- Department for Transport. 2008a "Public transport statistics bulletin: 2008 edition." Retrieved April 30, 2009. (<http://www.dft.gov.uk/pgr/statistics/datatablespublications/public/annualbulletins/publictransportstatsbul08>).
- Department for Transport. 2008b. "Transport Statistics in Great Britain 2007." Retrieved April 30, 2009. (<http://www.dft.gov.uk/pgr/statistics/datatablespublications/tsgb/2007edition/transportstatisticsgreatb2007>).
- Department for Transport. 2007. "Transport Statistics Bulletin: National Travel Survey 2006." Retrieved April 30, 2009. (<http://www.dft.gov.uk/adobepdf/162469/221412/221531/223955/322743/NTS2006V3.pdf>).

- Edensor, Tim. 2001. "Performing tourism, staging tourism—(Re)producing tourist space and practice." *Tourist Studies* 1: 59-81.
- Gasparini, Giovanni. 1995. "On Waiting." *Time and Society* 4: 29-45.
- Green, Nicola. 2002. "On the move: technology, mobility, and the mediation of social time and space." *The Information Society* 18: 281-292.
- Guiver, Josephine W. 2007. "Modal talk. Discourse analysis of how people talk about bus and car travel." *Transportation Research A*. 41: 233-248.
- Hodson, Jaigris N., and Phillip Vannini. 2007. "Island Time: the Media Logic and Ritual of Ferry Communication." *Canadian Journal of Communication* 32: 261-275.
- Holley, David, Juliet Jain, and Glenn Lyons. 2008 "Understanding Business Travel Time and Its Place in the Working Day" *Time and Society* 17: 27-46.
- Jain, Juliet. 2006. "Bypassing and WAPing: Reconfiguring Timetables for 'Real-Time' Mobility." Pp 79-101 in *Mobile Technologies of the City*, edited by M Sheller and J Urry. London, UK: Routledge.
- (unpublished) Betwixt and between: the bus passenger-ethnographer.
- Jain, Juliet, and Glenn Lyons. 2008. "The Gift of Travel Time." *Journal of Transport Geography* 16: 261-275.
- Latour, Bruno. 1997. "Trains of Thought: Piaget, Formalism and the Fifth Dimension." *Common Knowledge*. 6: 170–191.
- Laurier, Eric. 2004. "Doing officework on the Motorway." *Theory, Culture and Society* 21: 261-277
- Letherby, Gayle and Gillian Reynolds. 2003. "Making connections: the relationship between train travel and the processes of work and leisure." *Sociological Research Online* 8 (3). Retrieved January 10, 2004. ([www.socresonline.org.uk](http://www.socresonline.org.uk)).
- Lyons, Glenn and John Urry. 2005. "Travel time use in the information age." *Transportation Research A* 39: 257-276.

- Mackie, Peter J., Anthony S. Fowkes, Mark Wardman, Gerald Whelan, John Nellthorp, and John Bates. 2003. "Value of Travel Time Savings in the UK". Institute of Transport Studies, University of Leeds in association with John Bates Services. Retrieved February 1, 2004. (<http://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/2079/>)
- Massey, Doreen. 2005. *For Space*. Cambridge, UK: Sage.
- Nash, Jeff. 1975. "Bus Riding: Community of Wheels." *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 4(1): 99-124.
- Stradling, Stephen, Micheal Carreno, Tom Rye, Allyson Noble. 2007. "Passenger perceptions and the ideal urban bus journey experience." *Transport Policy* 14: 283-292.
- Thrift Nigel, and John D. Dewsbury. 2000. "Dead Geographies – and how to make them live." *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 18: 411-432.
- Thrift, Nigel. 1996. *Spatial Formations*. London, UK: Sage.
- Urry, John. 2007. *Mobilities*. Cambridge, UK: Polity.
- Watts, Laura and Glenn Lyons (2007) "Travel Remedy Kit. Interventions into train lines and passengers." Retrieved January 3, 2009. (<http://eprints.lancs.ac.uk/10658/>)
- Watts, Laura and John Urry. 2008. "Moving Methods, Travelling Times." *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 26: 860-874.
- Watts, Laura. 2008. "The Art and Craft of Train Travel." *Social and Cultural Geography* 9: 711-726.
- Wylie, John. 2005. "A single day's walking: narrating self and landscape on the South West Coast Path". *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 30: 234-247.