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### **The Classy Coach Commute**

#### **Abstract**

This paper considers a corporate vision for a coach service between Oxford and London in relation to the experiences and observations made by the author through a series of journeys on the same service. The journey is presented as a whole narrative to articulate the context of the passenger performance. The paper is concerned with how time and space are performed through the journey, and considers the relationship between the passenger and vehicle in creating comfort and managing boredom. It suggests that while a vision anticipates and shapes the future through the materiality of the vehicle, the passengers and their various possessions also have to enrol in the emergent performance of 'doing a classy commute'.

Key words: coach, passenger experience, time, space.

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## Introduction

From my own preconceptions about coach travel I would normally not put the words *classy* and *coach* together! My image of dingy coach stations and tedious journeys come from very limited personal experiences many years ago. One's own travel encounters may shape the choices about what modes to research, as Letherby and Shaw (2009) readily admit. Any research about coach travel, let alone the passenger experience of coach travel, is even more at the academic margins than bus travel (see Jain, 2009 on bus), with deregulation of the bus and coach industry prompting examination of structures and innovation potential (e.g. White and Farrington, 1998, Parkhurst, 2005). Are there prejudicial assumptions about the experience or the passengers that ride coaches, or just not enough academic coach passengers to raise it as a worthy topic? Even if academics do not 'do' coaches, I believe coach travel remains imbued with negative assumptions more widely, and such negativity is perpetuated by the implicit assumptions of time in modernity within transport research and economics.

For example, coach journeys are slower and passenger space is more limited in comparison to rail travel. In a society that places greater value on high speeds, slow infers inferiority; thus speed is a central element in the 'politics' of mobility (Cresswell, 2010; Adam, 1995). Certainly in calculating the economics of 'the value of travel time savings', speedier travel is understood as more beneficial to the economy, with the underlying assumption that time is more productive in destination activities than the equivalent on the move (Mackie et al, 2003; Lyons and Urry, 2005; Lyons et al, 2007). Likewise, the inference of calculations around 'willingness to pay' suggests that if an individual wants to get somewhere quickly he or she will pay for it, even at a high premium. Infrastructure investments (e.g. toll roads, premium rail routes, etc) can create social division between those who can and cannot afford to pay for a faster journey (Cresswell, 2010), thus there should be recognition of the role slow, cheaper forms of mobility take a role in social cohesion.

Bearing this negative image of coach travel in mind, on hearing a story of a service that was consciously placed at the premium end of the market suggested a conundrum. How could coach travel be made different? What would be the value to the traveller? How would the passenger experience and time use be different to that of the train or urban bus journey? What would continue to be the spatial constraints of the vehicle? Thus, this classy coach commute, the *Oxford Express*, joined the bus and train routes selected for a series of 'mobile ethnographies' for the research 'Travel Time Use in the Information Age'<sup>1</sup>. While the focus of the research was on how technologies could provide travel time with a positive utility, the physical context and experience of travel could not be ignored.

Many coaches are used for non-scheduled trips such as day trips and other excursions, but scheduled coaches have a significant network across Britain. For example, 'National Express' serves 1,200 destinations and carries 50,000 passengers per day (CPT, 2006). Like the *Oxford Express*, there are many other local and regional players in this transport sector providing important commuter connections. However, Parkhouse (2005) argues there have been few 'innovative' responses to deregulation in the bus and coach industry, and these relate to 'visionary' leaders rather than specific demographic lead demand. Yet as coaches use road space very efficiently in comparison to cars, they could take a more innovative role in sustainable transport futures (CPT, 2006). Exposing the passenger experience of coach travel, therefore, appears to have value both to raising its status as an object of research, but also in considering the user benefits of this mode when peak travel on trains is becoming increasingly congested and expensive as a sustainable alternative.

In this paper I recount 'stories' of the *Oxford Express* coach service. This is one of two commercially successful services that operate at high frequency between Oxford and London, and offer a slower but cheaper alternative to the train (Parkhurst, 2005). My stories attempt to 'perform' something of the atmosphere and spirit of being on board. These stories are my encounters with the coach and its travellers. My narrative weaves between dream and journey, and plays with time, space, people

and things to pursue the ephemeral and transient passenger experience that is both an individual and a collective performance. Juxtaposed with these experiential stories are excerpts from an interview with Matthew Bradley, former Group Marketing Manager for the Go-Ahead Group, who had developed the 'Espress' brand. At the end of the journey, I pause to consider the implications of such a narrative and tease out the passenger experiences of the classy coach commute.

### **Early morning, and finding a place for academic baggage.**

Tim (my former colleague) has come along for the ride, and it is good to have company and share experiences. Bristol to Oxford on two early morning trains; we emerge from the station to damp Oxford streets and navigate to the coach station. We are hurrying, not because of the inclement summer weather but to connect in time. Our aim is to catch the 7:36 'Oxford Express' coach to London Victoria, a journey of around two and a half to three hours. (At Victoria we interchange to a London bus, but that is another story - partly told in Jain, 2009)

The package of five trips on the Oxford Express in July 2005 is a series of many routes under observation through which a 'thick description' of travel time use in the journey context will augment the counts of things carried and reported time use practices (Watts and Urry, 2008; the latter counts are analysed in Lyons et al, 2007). These autobiographical/participant observation journeys have contributed to the recognition within the 'mobile methods' debates of the heterogeneous arrangements of objects, and the multiple sensory encounters of travelling (e.g. Urry and Buscher, 2009), which have emerged through the use of the autobiographical experience alongside of the observations of travellers (Letherby and Shaw, 2009; Laurier, 2010). The panoramic gaze of the participant researcher presents only a *partial* story of the route, in comparison to collections of 'go-along' style interviewing or visual diaries that Heins et al. (2008) and Murray (2010) employ.

Unlike our fellow travellers we are not innocently 'people watching' on our way to work, meeting friends or going shopping. We are academic tourists, whose gaze is consuming others while bodily and mentally experiencing the coach journey. Notepad, pen, watch, and camera are aide memoires. I observe my fellow passengers take out and use mobile phones, laptops, and other handheld devices, paperwork, books, magazines, and sandwiches. I am concerned with the placing of these objects in the space, and when they are used along the journey. At the same time I absorb the atmosphere, and noting comfort, noise and smell. My gaze moves in and out of the coach, across others. I reflect on the passing of time, and consider the role of carried objects and action on the experience of time.

Like Massey (2005), in doing mobility I deconstruct the discourses of time from transport and social theory, as time plays out along the route. It is necessary for the quantitative approach of economic appraisal and the calculations of 'the value of travel time savings' and 'willingness to pay' to abstract time, so that a monetary value can be attached to each unit. Yet as many in the social sciences discuss, social interaction with time is more complex and relational – the spatial context, speed, social rhythms, seasons, personal biorhythms, etc, are intermeshed (for example, Adam, 1995; Latour, 1997; Massey 2005). Notably the study of time and movement indicate how the ordering of society around clock time performs particular social rhythms (e.g. the rush hour) and these clock orientated rhythms interplay with personal experiences and encounters with other times (Crang, 2001; Hodson and Vannini, 2007; Edensor, 2010 forthcoming). Thus, time, especially the sense of 'being in time' (punctuality for a scheduled slot) and experienced time (e.g. time being wasted) shape the journey experience, and the sense of temporal 'comfort' (Bissell, 2008).

Commuters actively inscribe temporal rhythms onto the landscape in the production of space (Crang, 2001). On this classy coach commute, I and my fellow travellers move through the landscape with many other road users heading towards London, becoming part of this morning rhythm. As the collective movement on limited road space slows our pace towards London, the opportunity to

interact with the passing landscape is also reconfigured (see also Edensor, 2003, on traffic jams). The relationship between commuter and passing landscape can become more than just casual observance (Edensor, 2003, forthcoming; Merriman, 2004). Edensor (2003) articulates how the traveller's gaze learns the route's landscape through repetition, giving a sense of belonging to places only experienced through transience. Time of day and the seasons not only reshape these visual encounters with the passing landscape, but other sensory encounters – the sound of rain on windows, the swoosh of wet roads, the heat of sunshine. Interior and exterior space fold into each other.

Inside the commuter body tacitly inhabits vehicle space – the seat and its surrounds, shaped by gained knowledge of past journeys, the temporal expectations of the day (e.g. preparing for an interview, business meeting, or 'killing time'), and a reactive response to fellow passengers (see also Laurier, 2004, on car travel; Bissell 2007, 2008). The passenger dwells temporarily, creating a personal space with moveable objects that is so different to the car<sup>ii</sup>. Here on the coach, the occupation of travel space is clearly relational, as Massey (2005) describes, through the objects brought from home (or office) and selected for destination and journey activities, particularly with the mobile phone offering continual access wherever, whenever. As Watts (2008) describes, the 'unpacked passenger' often has a versatile repertoire of objects and activities in order to quickly adapt to the specific journey context.

As Tim and I hurry towards the coach station, my personal experiences of time and space are as important as my observations of other people's activities. I am a reticent coach traveller, concerned that I will feel sick and miserable during these journeys, and un-nerved by motorway travel. In my mind the journey interminably stretches out. But personal reticence towards coach travel does not entirely shape my expectations, because I have been told will be more comfortable and pleasurable.

The vision behind the Oxford Express has fuelled this exploration into the classy coach commute. In December 2004 I interviewed Matthew Bradley as a stakeholder in the Travel Time Use research, as

the Go-Ahead Group has interests across the bus, coach, rail and air networks in the UK. Matthew spent some time describing the Oxford Express to me, along with other innovative initiatives the company had made within the bus industry. Through Matthew I was able to obtain permission to undertake these trips. I re-tell Matthew's vision as the journey unfolds. His vision of the future is materially brought into being through the vehicle, but the vehicle itself is a stage on which mobility 'stories' are constantly re-performed<sup>iii</sup>, of which my narrative tells only a few.

## **The Coach**

In 2005 Oxford Green bus station is a bit of a hole and the clock doesn't work. It's a long thin grey strip with no seating for passengers. It doesn't inspire class or an up market ride. There are a few shops facing the concourse including a café. The London coaches have a customer service desk at the appropriate bay, where you can buy tickets and obtain information. As Tim and I hurry in we see the 07:36 Oxford Express waiting in the bay.

The Oxford Express is a green coach with mustard yellow curtains. There are sockets for laptops, but back in 2005 wifi was still an aspiration, (an aspiration now in place). Mostly the Express coaches are swish, but the odd older substitute can be a slight disappointment when an upmarket image has been sold. Across in the adjacent bay, I gaze on the competitor - a smart red double decker style coach.

The Oxford Express is Waitrose, according to Matthew, and the competition - Morrisons. The business model, for the Express, is based on market growth at the 'upper end', meaning those with greater disposable income. The assumption behind developing the posher product or a classier commute is that there is room for growth in this sector – a market sector that otherwise would probably catch the train or drive. "People are actually prepared to pay a bit more, that wasn't our objective, they are just looking for better quality," he says.

Matthew tells me “[we’ve] translated the business model into the physical design of the coach .... You don’t have to cram in too many seats – we took seats out, put in lots of leg room. We fitted toilets to all the coaches. Put in air conditioning, and the other thing we put in and were first for UK scheduled express coaches, were power points for laptops.” “Oh” I mumber. “And,” he continues, what we’re saying is how people travel in the south east does not have to be like this – i.e. crammed into cattle truck conditions. Commuting doesn’t have to be a nightmare. Actually, it can be quite stylish. So the strap line is: Oxford to London in style. It’s been promoted as this stylish more aspirational view of the coach.”

I look round at my fellow travellers. What are their aspirations? Do they think about style? One can always jump to conclusions, especially when watching the obese woman with a union jack hat riding the adjacent competitor coach; so interpret observations with caution. Here in *Oxford to London in style* the passengers seem a mixed bunch; from young foreign tourists to everyday commuters. However, the prevalence of Guardian and Economist readers on board suggests a certain social class, with certain political persuasions. Participant observation, with occasional conversations, is unable to provide a depth understanding of what draws passengers to this service besides the green and mustard livery and an inch or two more leg room.

One of the reasons for choosing the coach over train is the convenience of spatial relationships: a proximate home and work location to the route. Another, I am told by the customer service desk is the comparative cost between the coach and train<sup>v</sup>. Certainly the importance of route convenience was borne out by the ad hoc chats with fellow passengers, which supported Matthew’s statement during the interview: “...so if someone’s got an office quite near Baker Street, and they happen to live near the coach stop in Oxford, ....they can be really up market, they can be millionaires, but still get on it - because that’s the most convenient form of transport.”

On the digital clock at the front, 07:36 glows in red: time to depart.



### **Stage One: City Centre to Park and Ride**

The coach negotiates the honey historic streets festooned with dripping hanging baskets on yet another drizzly summer morning. We discover that the majority of passengers are gleaned from various 'bus stops' as we journey to the edge of town Park and Ride.

This first part of the journey is slow and the activities of stowing luggage and bikes beneath the coach, the purchasing tickets and asking information is an opportunity to people watch for all. There are a small group of regular faces that we 'get to know' – a Greek man who works in a West End restaurant and says he likes to sleep on the journey, and academic<sup>v</sup> woman who smiles at me each day. The driver also has to issue tickets (from expensive season tickets to a single journey), provide rather general travel information, redirect ticket holders of the rival company, and manage stowing of large luggage beneath. Regulars interact with the drivers on familiar terms. Each stop is protracted, but the bustle is distracting and time does not really drag for the curious observer.

At the final stop - the Park and Ride interchange - the coach becomes full. The window seats have been taken first, and bags strategically placed on aisle seats have to be moved, incurring temporary folding of papers, cramming coats above, and minor conversations, before the unpacking for the journey can recommence in the more confined space. Occasionally passengers are requested to wait for the next service – they are about every 10 minutes, as standing is not permissible.

### **Stage Two: Park and Ride to Hillingdon**

I sit back as the Espress exits the Park and Ride for the journey properly to begin. Following the announcement from the driver dictating our behaviour and a reminder of where we are going, a hush descends. The engine hum is our soundtrack and the hiss of other cars as we speed along the motorway. It is unusual to hear passengers talking, except between the occasional young couple.

These are travellers who respectfully maintaining the anonymity of each other, as they withdraw behind their paper or stare into the middle distance.

Time is adrift. The only schedule was the point of departure at 07:36; and as the journey duration is dependent on road and weather conditions there is only an estimated arrival time. Thus, the coach time is very different to railway time. There is no punctuation – no clear markers in time and space through which to measure progression along a route as with timetabled station stops. The red digital display draws attention to the passage of time, but here on the motorway speed is made relative by the passing vista and other traffic. Interior suspended animation contrasts against the vehicle's velocity and the moving world outside.

Each time we travel I gain a repertoire of visual markers as my gaze strays outwards – the flax fields, the white house, a graffiti-ed fence. These markers shape the route and a sense of moving towards the destination. It is easy to relate this growing relationship with otherwise unknown places to Edensor's narrative of motorway commuting, and the connection between memory and emotion. Tim and I share our sightings, and I am excited to notch his bulrushes another day, but it comes as a surprise to discover that other travellers share place-related knowledge. Brenda<sup>vi</sup>, who unusually engages me in conversation for much of the journey, tells me about some red kites released into the wild that she and others look out for. She says it was reported in the local paper.

Window gazing, however, does not necessarily mean actively engaging with the passing scenery, but enables the passenger's mind to wander in the drift of time. In another setting, a traveller I shadowed described how looking out the window enabled him to dream and for creative thoughts to flow. Today a man, let's call him Colin, sits across the aisle from me. Colin has some A4 colour print outs of aircraft design on his lap. "Is it work or a hobby?" I wonder. He is wearing smart trousers and a dark shirt but no tie. He has, like many others, a small rucksack on the seat next to him.

As the journey progresses, I note that Colin spends more time looking out of the window than looking at his planes. Is there a need to have something at hand – a just in case activity, assuaging guilt in a world where time equals money?

So here I am travelling at speed trying hard not to be like Colin and endlessly stare out of the window lulled by motion into a Walter Mitty<sup>vii</sup> world not-of-researcher. I need to watch, listen and sense the interior activity, and inactivity, of the coach. It's not a simple task. I can't just get up and walk around like on a train. No one is that active – it would be out of the ordinary, except to face the subterranean toilet. And I'm hidden in a soft cave of high padded seats, with only a small gap to peep through. I can't keep turning round like a small child and invade the privacy of others. There isn't the open vista of the train or bus here. This enclosure, the ability to hide, to be discrete, goes hand in hand with the library silence, and almost stillness.

Time is stretching out. So are legs. Men's legs into the aisle. Papers rustle. Cultured books are read. People doze and occasionally a snore emanates from somewhere. There is a funny noise, so I peep to see Helena behind me rubbing something out, and then the crackling of a plastic bag.

Interior time is in friction with exterior time, the small movements inside the larger rushing vehicle. I look over at George and see that he has finished browsing his holiday brochures. He clutches them to his chest and shuts his eyes. What is his dream journey?

Certainly Matthew Bradley had a vision, one that was much influenced by his travelling on GNER trains between Newcastle and London. "I had this vision," says Matthew," that some commuters might want to have wide seats, loads of legroom, power point, personal consul thing to plug in for their earphones for the radio or plug in for the TV not have the sound broadcasting, and also service on board in terms of an at seat menu, a drink of gin and tonic. Imagine getting on at Baker Street and you've got all of that. Everyone else is sitting in traffic - I've got a nice gin and tonic, reading the paper in my own personal space - to have that as the ultimate goal as the gold plated option." More specifically in relation to my question about travel time use he says "So far as other aspects are

concerned we are going to trial wireless internet connection on the coach, not on the basis that those people need it. Hardly anyone uses their laptops, but it draws people in thinking well I know if I wanted to use my time in this way I could play with my laptop. Most commuters fall asleep. It's a good selling point it creates interest. So it's actually quite worth doing. It's relatively cheap to do so I think it may be the wireless internet connection that it's a selling point."

Matthew is right – there are only a few laptops out on board, and literally used on laps. It is a difficult working space. No table, or flap down thing like airline seats, to put papers and other bits and bobs. One or two passengers check Blackberry emails. Bertram connects to the internet via GSM, which Tim remarks is an expensive way to do it. Of course the wifi is yet to be ubiquitously rolled out, and technologies have swiftly moved on. Phones are mostly silent and any conversations discretely managed.

But suddenly a phone *is* ringing. The persistent 'ring, ring, ring' begs for immediate attention but strangely is ignored. It has crossed the boundary of acceptability. A female voice, clearly irritated, demands, "Could somebody please answer their phone or turn it off?" A man suddenly realising it is his, laughs and apologises as he rescues the offending technology from his bag stowed overhead.

It's that fence with the graffiti on again.

### **Stage Three: Hillingdon to Victoria**

George has swapped his dreams of exotic holidays for the Economist. Then he takes his seat belt off and packs his bag and gets money ready. Around 8:45 we near the edge of London. The Espress draws up by Hillingdon tube station, so I know where I am. George and another exit, and four people get on.

There is nearly another hour's travelling before Victoria, depending on the traffic. The tempo has changed. More phones ring, although conversations remain quietly conducted. I'm feeling tired and hungry, and a sense of 'when are we going to get there?' gnaws.

To my right Judy finishes curling the ends of her hair. She has been sitting with a round brush shaping her bob for the duration of the journey. Now she starts to apply make-up. Why is it that women choose to conduct personal grooming in such public spaces? I smell nail polish, but it's not Judy. I guess they are 'saving' time, by not doing it at home.

The urban landscape dominated by lanes of cars and advertising hoardings funnels us forward. Clive, who came on board at Hillingdon, is prepared for the urban tedium. His gaze is not for the window but he comes equipped with a DVD which he watches on his laptop carefully propped against the seat in front. I wonder how long it took him to work out this was the choice activity.

The inside lane is moving fastest. We're now in it, but it is because of a slip road, so now stuck back in the jam. We move back to the middle lane. The Oxford Tube goes passed on the inside lane. Moving a bit faster now. Stan looks out the front and returns to his book. Alex stretches. Tom fidgets and stretches too. We pass the iconic art deco 'Hoover Building'. We overtake the Oxford Tube. Park Royal – a string of car show rooms. Tom is looking around out the windows on both sides. Bull rushes. 'Gypsy Corner' bus stop. Man waits with a suitcase. We wait in the traffic. Tom in front of me inspects an Arsenal 'West Stand' ticket and returns it to his bag. BBC New Media Village.

We speed up at last. Elevated high up above the houses there is a sense of soaring as the road bisects the Monsoon offices. (The canteen is flyover level and they have croissants on offer.) We drop down into Paddington and again edge slowly towards the first London stop - Baker Street. Like on the train, people are preparing for exit. Bags packed, and newspapers folded away, the gaze

through the window has become the dominant activity. Many people leave at Baker Street. Next stop Marble Arch and then Victoria. At last the end. Interchange and onwards.

### **Café chat**

Each morning, after travelling for some hours on two trains, a coach, and a bus, Tim and I rest and recuperate at a café we have discovered in Brixton. Over the late breakfast we talk about our travel experiences and swap stories of what we have seen that morning. This café chat is the start of the sifting and ordering - deciding what is important, what needs to be considered on the next journey, and exploring our different perceptions (see Law, 1994 on ordering). Like any traveller we are learning about our route, but more actively engaged in its analysis, we shape the future stories of each journey through the positioning of our gaze and focus on specific sensory and emotional experiences (Urry and Buscher, 2009). But after all the journeys – train, bus and coach, what has been learnt *specifically* about the passenger experience on classy coach commute?

The vision for the Oxford Express, as described to me by Matthew Bradley, was about creating a place image, not only through marketing but in the material shaping of the vehicle to enable relaxation and certain types of time use. As the product was aimed to attract more 'up market' travellers, the notion of customer's comfort expounded by Matthew embraces the three elements of the affective, aesthetic and objective elements of comfort set out by Bissell (2008). Yet being comfortable within coach travel, as a traveller, is an individually nuanced experience, and there remains a psychological barrier for many to concede that coach travel can be a comfortable experience.

As Bissell (2008) also explores comfort is also an embodied experience; thus comfort is expressed as a relational experience between the space, the image, and bodily practices. The containment of high padded velour seats are clearly an intentional material manifestation of passenger comfort on

the part of the service provider. The body, whatever shape or size, has to attune personal needs to the seat, and the body in the seat next to it. Thus within the Oxford Express there appeared to be unwritten codes of practice which enabled a comfortable atmosphere for all. Bodies next to windows had to be more contained than those who could stretch out and expand into the aisle. Objects such as newspapers had to be managed not just in relation to personal comfort, but the comfort of fellow passengers. Likewise, the auditory impact on others of ringing phones, headphone 'leakage', and conversations were managed to avoid emotional discomfort; so on the one occasion that a phone did ring it was an uncomfortable moment for all, including the owner of the offending item. However, the seat design did appear to contain noise.

A comfortable journey suggests a journey where time does not lag, and boredom does not overpower. The vision for the Oxford Express was not prescriptive over traveller's time use, but it assumed that travellers would mostly want to relax or perhaps have activities to pass the time. There was an inference that time on the Express would be a break from the industriousness of the work place, especially on the evening return commute. Here the liminality of the journey is emphasised as the traveller 'transforms' between roles (Davies, 2001; Jain and Lyons, 2008), but transformation in an inactive state of being a passenger without boredom is challenging. Relaxation while travelling requires props such as reading matter and auditory accessories (or even a DVD), which double up as comforters through the delineation of personal space and barriers to communication with proximate others (Schievelbush, 1980; Bull, 2002). However, gazing through the window marks a boundary between boredom and relaxation as the activity enables the mind to wander and transcend the bodily inertness of being a passenger (see Anderson, 2004).

The coach offers little physical opportunity to shift the tempo and lift any sense of boredom that might descend. The body is forced to remain seated for the duration of the journey, unlike on the train. Once the coach has completed its final pickup point, then time is played out through small movement and stillness. In comparison to the active waiting Bissell (2007) describes in the

intersections of mobility, here passengers are acquiescent in waiting for their own arrival in a much more contained space. The window is fundamental to monitoring the changes in speed through the relational movement of coach to the passing landscape and other traffic. Thus, the most boring drawn out period is the slow drag into central London through the rush hour traffic. The contrast of speed each trip as the coach was physically elevated through into Paddington awakened the spirit to the joy of near arrival.

By taking the whole journey different temporal experiences can be connected by different phases of the journey, and therefore choices of activity, or routines, can actively mitigate against boredom and the stretching out of time, while recognising that relaxation and daydreaming are valid activities (see Watts and Lyons, 2010). Clive with his DVD demonstrated forethought in managing his temporal experience, and transformed the tedious trek through London traffic. In contrast other travellers, perhaps those less familiar with the route, became fidgety, possibly edgy at the uncertain arrival time and attending to the slow progress along the route. The idea proposed by Watts and Lyons (2010) that the journey experience can be personally 'designed' and therefore 'improved', connects with the many tactics already practiced by seasoned travellers to maintain their mental as well as physical comfort. However, may be the onus is on the traveller to create the experience, rather than any major re-visioning by the provider. As smaller technology demand less space, and wifi is ubiquitous, the spatial constraints of the coach are likely to appear less significant, especially as train interiors are being redesigned to contain more passengers in similar spatial arrangements.

As I discuss with the bus (Jain, 2009), the journey is performed as a whole, and here 'performance' as a theoretical concept enables the drawing together of the embodied articulation of time and space, the emotional experiences triggered along the route, the physical encounters with the interior vehicle, and the use and placement of carried objects to articulate how this whole is an *emergent relational process* (see also Thrift and Dewsbury, 2000). Travelling from Oxford to London *in style*, however, is contingent on travellers abiding by many unstated rules of behaviour that



maintain a tranquil experience of nothing much obviously happening. Thus, the phone that transgressed was an emergent reconfiguration of the space, which ruptured expectations, or as Law (1994) might put it – a technology that was not appropriately enrolled. In this respect, the mobility performance on the Oxford Express does not adhere to Cresswell's (2006) suggestion that mobility offers an openness and freedom that counters the boundedness of place. While it may remove a notion of being bound in location by taking people from one location to another, on board in many ways it is a bounded and closed place. Its very essence and aspirational aim would be violated if some of its passengers for instance partied, talked loudly and incessantly on their phones, or transgressed in other ways. Thus, I would argue that the Oxford Express can only become (and remain) a classy coach commute through passengers playing the role assigned by the styling and pricing of the product.

At the start of this paper, I suggested that the coach has marginalized in academic study, partly because of journey speeds and image (cheap, cramped and slow). The Oxford Express offers a distinct experience of 'classy' coach travel; although the passenger experience in the coach has many parallels with both train and car travel in the ways in which time and space are encountered and experienced. Recognising that the coach, like the train and bus, is a space where time can have individual value is part of the political shift to understand the nuances of travel time and shift away from the concept that travel time is wasted. However, given the wide variety of coach travel for scheduled and non-scheduled trips, the broader coach experience is worthy of greater investigation across different providers, landscapes and journey purposes, and not limited to the odd opportunity for travelling in style. Notably, such investigations should consider more explicitly the political situating of more everyday coach passengers and how their reasons and experiences for choosing the coach connect or disconnect with economic assumptions about travel behaviour choices, and the future role of coach networks in developing sustainable and equitable transport trajectories.

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<sup>ii</sup> The car can be *permanently* personalised with music, tissue boxes, sweets and accumulated bits and bobs stuffed into glove boxes and pockets.

<sup>iii</sup> Jain, 2009, explores the concept of performance and bus travel which is similarly applicable to the coach.

<sup>iv</sup> Parkhurst (2005) notes that it can be 25-60% cheaper travelling by coach than train.

<sup>v</sup> Her work ID tag displays her professional status.

<sup>vi</sup> All passenger names are pseudonyms.

<sup>vii</sup> Thurbers' Walter Mitty is a meek fictional character who gets through his mundane life by transcending into heroic fantasy, such as imagining being a fighter pilot as he drives.