

To Practice Mobility – On a Small Scale

By Ida Wentzel Winther

Abstract

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

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

Introduction

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

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

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

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

Mobility, Motion and Emotion

Being on the move is often viewed as a condition for modern people. In late Modernity, commodities, money, ideas, knowledge, people and practises are being moved around the globe. Motility in space and time is one of the fundamental affordances of contemporary everyday life. At the end of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st century this understanding has been a part of the ‘nomadic turn’, where parts of philosophy, anthropology, sociology and cultural studies have focused on mobility, flux, fluidity, transit, non-humanity and non-places (see e.g. Augé 1995; Bauman 1998; Rapport/Dawson 1998; Rushdie 1994, Urry 2007). In the macro sociological descriptions mobility sounds easy. Often it is described as a clean and frictionless move, where ‘the body is nothing more than a parcel in transit, a chess piece dropped on another square, it does not move but is moved’ (Solnitz 2001, quoted from Bendix/Löfgren 2007,7). Mobility has also been described as some sort of mental process rather than a physical process, which has had an impact on the way identity has been understood; from ‘being’ to ‘becoming’ (Deleuze 1987). Studies of commuting have been connected to and dominated by transport studies, focusing on urban transportation systems, transportation planning, logistics, time measurements, job-housing balance, and health or fitness after taking up active commuting (biking/walking to work). But also sustainability and land use (Horner, 2004). During the last 10 years, mobility studies have be-

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

When motion and movement are understood as bodily practices where our bodies and minds are placed in a material world (where we feel, touch, and taste eve-

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

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

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

Field Walking: A Theoretical and Methodological Approach

As a researcher of home, families and children it strikes me how rarely children’s perspectives are voiced in new mobility studies although it is often the children who travel between home. Mobility studies (traditional as well as new) take its point of departure in the standpoint of parents (if it includes children at all). From the field of children’s studies, critical voices have argued that children do not nec-

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

I will draw on two empirical materials from studies conducted between 2008 and- 2013.³ In 2008-2010, I was part of a large project called 'The Mobile Home Centre' (Petersen 2010; Lynggaard 2012). Firstly, I did on-line virtual fieldwork with 30 commuters, focusing on logistics and movement patterns. Then I chose to follow six of them on their journeys between domestic destinations, i.e. between homes. I arrived at the first home, watched them as they packed and I travelled with them. By doing this, I could pay attention to their day-to-day activities and their handling of stuff. In that way a lot of mundane little things one does without special attention, but also the annoying elements ('sweat, blood and tears') was placed in the foreground. When possible, I stayed with the commuters for some days, or I returned after some days and conducted new observations, interviews and video recordings. Most of them were adults, but I also followed teenagers living in and traveling between two households, and include these in the following analyses. From 2011-2014, I have managed a research project on siblings. Along

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

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

Navigating in a Changeable Landscape

A Condition

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

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

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

Ditte: If sheShe returns home from work and says: ok Ditte, how about going for a walk in the woods or to the Café? And I say 'maybe', 'perhaps' or 'no'. Some-

times she will argue ‘Come on, soon you’ll leave me, and stay with your dad. We can talk a bit before’ or something like that.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Ditte: No

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

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

Ida: They think it’s sad?

Ditte: Yeah.

Ida: And you do not?

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

The adults are sad. The mother makes an emotional speech. And Ditte becomes annoyed when her mother tries to install a sense of loss, attempting different strategies to get more time with her: going for a walk in the woods, going to a café, etc. Ditte dislikes it. The problem is not the café, but the mother’s argument for going there. The mother articulates her feelings, tries to share her sadness with Ditte; she uses an emotional discourse, which makes Ditte feel bored and intimidated. Ditte gets tired and annoyed when the adults talk her into their emotional landscape and use sadness and feelings as a weapon in her movable daily life. To Ditte, commuting is a fact of life; she did not decide on the fragmentation of her family, and her resistance primarily shows when her mother starts talking about missing her and wanting to share feelings. The emotion comes from without (discoursed by the mother), and thus it becomes problematic and conflictual (full of friction) instead of mediating. The sadness can be understood as an attempt at repairing and re-creating a sense of community. The mother and Ditte do not share the condition ‘Of having to move’, while the mother stays, Ditte leaves again and again as part of her continual coming-and-going. Of course, Ditte can reject her mother and her exposed and outspoken wish for closeness, but it appears difficult for her (because of the (broken) family, her position as teenager, the mother’s will, being the one who leaves and so on). The mother’s outspoken emotional discourse can become contra-intentional. The mother becomes disappointed; and so does Ditte, and then it becomes difficult to find ‘the right’ feeling. Ditte moves and that it is all right. But it is tough when her mother emotionalizes the change. Then the friction becomes stronger. It is a kind of ‘emotional labour’ within the private sphere to use Arlie Hochschild’s concept (Hochschild 1983).

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

Routines

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

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

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

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

Mind the Gap

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Arendse: Yes, I followed YOUR pace.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

To Be Dispensable and a Guest

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

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

At home with her father and his wife, she will for example, ask permission before taking something from the fridge and she calls to let her father know, if she will be home sooner or later than originally agreed upon. In this home, she is not a co-constructor of the home rules – she behaves more like a guest. Her younger siblings, who live permanently in each their own homes, are 100% part of the family,

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

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

Exit

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

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

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

move, and commuting becomes a mixture of attachment and fragmentations in a grid of more or less stable connection lines. I have showed that they are not parcels in transit, but subjects – mind and body – in transfer. For these continually coming-and-going-people, motion and emotion work together and emove them along.

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

Notes

¹ It is not a misspelling. It will be explained later on.

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

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

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

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