

## **Moving with practices: the discontinuous, rhythmic and material mobilities of leisure**

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### **Abstract**

*When considering mobilities within social life, researchers have emphasized the importance of enactment and embodied practices. Yet such understandings of practice as praxis – human action in general – have often left the relationship between practices and mobilities vaguely characterized. This paper therefore engages with an understanding of practices as praktik – distinct patterns of social action made up of interconnected elements – in order to explore how people move not only with cars and trains but also with practices. Praktik provides a context for studying the multiple mobilities of people, objects and ideas, highlighting important dynamics of performance and units of study. Leisure subcultures, the empirical focus of the paper, are important social practices and yet limited attention has been given to how they rely upon and are constituted by mobilities. Drawing upon a qualitative study of patchwork quilting and bird watching, the paper demonstrates that enacting leisure is*

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*inextricable from enacting discontinuous mobilities. Enthusiasts' goals lead to common experiences of travelling-in-anticipation and travelling-in-disappointment, while the systematic circulation of objects, such as bird lists and bird books, shape travel even when they are not moving alongside participants. In this way, leisure practices unfold through temporally marked patterns of mobility.*

**Keywords:** mobilities, practices, leisure, materiality, travel experiences, temporality

## **Introduction**

Mobilities, Cresswell argues, are marked neither by merely the fact of human movement, nor by the meanings that accompany it (2006). Rather, the importance of mobilities is tied to their ongoing enactment: 'mobility is practiced, it is experienced, it is embodied' (Cresswell 2006: 3). Whether examining exceptional geographies or the mundane mobilities of everyday life, literature within the social sciences and the 'new mobilities paradigm' (Sheller & Urry 2006) has illustrated the pervasiveness and importance of these enactments to social life. On a global scale, people's mobilities for tourism (Bærenholdt et al. 2004; Edensor 2007; Larsen et al. 2006), work (Gogia 2006; Kennedy 2005; Paul 2011), and education (Cohen 2004; Collins 2012) are transforming experiences of home (Hui 2008; Nowicka 2007; Wiles 2008) and place (Massey 1991; McIntyre et al. 2006), as well as how people interact with flows of information (Collins 2009; Madianou & Miller 2012; Molz 2004). In addition, a recognition that being on the move is itself a complex social enactment has led to examinations of embodied performances in cars (Edensor 2004; Laurier et al. 2008), on foot (Ingold 2004; Middleton 2010), and on trains (Löfgren 2008; Watts & Urry 2008), as well as on bikes, ferries, buses and planes (Aldred & Jungnickel 2012; Budd 2011;

Burrell 2011; Edensor & Holloway 2008; Spinney 2006; Vannini 2011, 2009). This research has provided a wealth of information about how people's physical mobilities refract historical practices and prompt distinct performances of sociality.

Yet despite attributing considerable importance to the enactment of mobilities, this work has given limited attention to the relationship between practice and mobility. Certainly the importance of social practices has been asserted in an attention to process and a prioritization of people's embodied performances. Whether excited, tired, or bored, the emotions and 'material corporeality' of moving have proven important for understanding the social dynamics and consequences of travel (Bissell 2009, 2010; Cresswell 2006: 3-4; Sheller 2004). Yet theoretically, the lineage and definition of concepts of performance and practice are often minimally addressed, and though detailed accounts of practice have been developed within social theory, only a few aspects of this work have been taken up in relation to mobilities. For instance, while Cresswell briefly references Bourdieu and acknowledges that socially-structured and -structuring habits can be seen to affect embodiment, he does little to further elaborate the value of this and other theories of practice to understandings of mobility (Cresswell 2006: 107; 2010: 20). More remains to be said, therefore, about how practices and mobilities relate to each other.

The first aim of this paper is to illustrate how a more specific grounding in theories of practice can contribute to understandings of mobility. Rather than pursuing a purely theoretical discussion, the paper draws upon qualitative research into bird watching and patchwork quilting to facilitate an important and related secondary aim. Despite arguments that mobilities are pervasive aspects of all social life, many studies of leisure, hobbies and subcultures have failed to probe the significant extent to which travel affects these communities. After arguing that social practices are inseparable from their mobilities, this paper shows how the objects and goals of leisure reinforce structured ways of travelling. That

is, enacting the goals and emotions of leisure, and using specialized objects and knowledge, is only possible when leisure enthusiasts move in particular ways and according to distinct temporalities. Though the specificities of this movement differ for patchwork quilters and bird watchers, in both cases enacting leisure is inseparable from enacting intermittent mobilities.

The first section begins by addressing how different understandings of practice and performance have consequences for studies of mobilities. The following sections examine the cases of patchwork quilting and bird watching in order to illustrate how subcultures of leisure are comprised by distinct patterns of mobilities.

### **Practices, performances and mobilities**

As a general term, practice has long been associated with understandings of repetition and of people actively doing things in the world. This sense of practice as *praxis*, Reckwitz notes, can both encompass ‘the whole of human action’ and be used as an antidote to excessive emphasis upon theory and thinking (2002: 249). By taking up this generalized understanding of people doing things, studies of mobility have moved away from static, functional models of society to recognize the complexity, creativity and more-than-representational aspects of social life.

Yet even when studying banal, everyday mobilities, pursuing this focus on *praxis* can reveal a potentially dizzying wealth of details. As Binnie et al. suggest:

everyday travels rely upon a combination of practical competencies of how to get about—knowledge of bus and train timetables, how to purchase a weekly or monthly bus pass, notions about the best time to travel—and geographical competencies—knowledge about where the shops are and which are the best routes to get to them.

(Binnie et al. 2007: 166)

How these types of competencies and knowledge are used depends upon where one is going and why – in this way, driving down a road may be negotiated and experienced differently depending on whether one is on a daily commute, going on vacation or late for a first date. The best time to travel and the best way of getting somewhere are therefore relational understandings, which thrive on the details. Yet with only a general sense of practice as *praxis*, these details remain theoretically undifferentiated. While a general notion of *praxis* draws attention to the details of human action, it gives no necessary direction to how these actions are grouped or organized, and as a result researchers often draw upon either case-specific distinctions or additional theoretical resources (everything from individualistic accounts of rational choice to actor network theories) to make sense of them.

By contrast, theories of practice propose a more specific understanding of practices: one which depends upon shared social reproduction and treats practices as a key unit of study for social scientific enquiry. Instead of using the term practice to refer generally to what people do, those such as Bourdieu, Giddens and Schatzki use this term to acknowledge how people perform a set of distinct practices, and thereby enact social structures (Bourdieu 1977, 1990; Giddens 1984; Schatzki 1996, 2002). The practices of the social world are therefore not limited to what Cresswell calls the ‘mobile practices’ of walking or driving<sup>1</sup> (2010: 20), but also include the other everyday doings he discusses – photographing, working, cooking, dancing, voting (2006). Reckwitz, in his synthesis of theories of practice, calls these more specific practices *praktik*, and suggests that people reproduce them by repeating their distinct ‘pattern’ in unique ways (2002: 249-250). In doing so, they draw upon the interconnected ‘elements’ making up the pattern: ‘forms of bodily activities, forms of mental activities, “things” and their use, a background knowledge in the form of understanding, know-how, states of emotion and motivational knowledge’ (Reckwitz 2002: 249). While not all of these elements are used every time a practice is performed, nor can the practice be reduced to any

single element alone. Distinct practices are therefore recognized by their unique sets of elements.

Drawing upon this more specific understanding of practices as *praktik* is valuable in three ways. First, it provides a theoretical proposition regarding the use (and mobility) of heterogeneous elements. If the elements of a practice must be used together each time its pattern is reproduced, then their mobility to and through moments of performance becomes important and interlinked. Practices become a specific context in which to examine the multiple and interdependent mobilities of objects, people and knowledge for distinct (but shared) aims and goals (cf. Urry 2007: 47).

Second, focusing upon *praktik* emphasizes important dimensions of performance. Various understandings of performance have been used to highlight the embodied enactments of mobility – particularly within tourism studies (Coleman & Crang 2002; Edensor 2000; Haldrup & Larsen 2010; Mordue 2005). Since a key aim of this work has been to move beyond a focus upon static representations or symbols and attend to what people are doing, many authors have drawn loosely upon Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical understanding of performance. Yet when used metaphorically, this framing of performance can be just as vague as many discussions of *praxis* – people are doing things, but what makes some actions relevant and others irrelevant isn't entirely apparent. Those who take up Goffman more closely have emphasized the importance of interpersonal relationships, and particularly how they can be staged, such as in family tourism photographs (Bærenholdt et al. 2004: Ch 5). While this work is valuable, interpersonal relationships are not always the dominant focus of human action, and therefore underpin a limited understanding of performance.

Theories of practice frame the dynamics of performance differently by providing a specific understanding of performance grounded in *praktik*. A 'practice-as-performance' involves a 'localized and immediate integration of elements' - the unique and embodied

filling out of a pattern of action (Shove & Pantzar 2007: 166). Though interpersonal interactions may be important for some *praktik*, such as football, relationships between people are not inherently more important than those between people and the elements of practice. Doing photography, for instance, depends upon cameras and memory cards or film, and when taking photographs of nature, performances can have a relatively small interpersonal dynamic while still relying upon temporary technological appendages. When discussing *praktik* and performance then, ‘subject-subject relations cannot claim any priority over subject-object relations’ in reproducing the social world (Reckwitz 2002: 253). Nor are objects the only important elements of performances: relationships to mobile knowledge are also crucial. This *praktik*-specific knowledge is not simply factual – it shapes a collective ‘understanding [of] the world’ which is ‘largely implicit and largely historically-culturally specific’ (Reckwitz 2002: 253). People draw upon, reproduce and circulate social knowledge that marks out things of value and importance while also supporting goals and motivations. Therefore, though people bring together the elements of a practice in unique ways during each performance, they are always recalling and reproducing broader social structures (‘practice-as-entity’ according to Shove & Pantzar 2007: 154) through interactions with shared objects and knowledge. In this way, the understanding of performance that arises from *praktik* highlights the role of non-humans and provides a means of conceptually linking unique performances with the shared elements of *praktik*.

Finally, *praktik* is valuable as an encouragement to explore new units of study. Giddens suggests that the ‘basic domain of study of the social sciences . . . is neither the experience of the individual actor, nor the existence of any form of social totality, but social practices ordered across space and time’ (1984: 2). Whether or not one wishes to take up this argument in its entirety, the idea of using *praktik* as units for studying mobilities is promising because it offers new openings for carving out a mobile ‘sociology beyond societies’ (Urry

2000). There are still many areas of study – such as leisure and subcultures – which are distinct enough to be recognized as discrete *praktik* and yet which have incorporated minimal understandings of mobilities. Leisure studies, as Roberts notes, have often focused on the participation of different socio-demographic groups or the degree to which leisure is ‘serious’ (Stebbins 2007) while ignoring links between leisure and bigger societal issues (Roberts 2011: 5). Therefore, despite developing some attention to leisure tourism (Kane & Zink 2004; Scott & Thigpen 2003; Stebbins 1997), and many insights about the community, dedication, consumption and production within leisure (Bishop & Hoggett 1986; Moorhouse 1991; Stebbins 1992), there are limited insights into how mobilities shape these practices. Similarly, research on subcultures, which Abercrombie and Longhurst place on the same continuum as leisure enthusiasms (1998), has paid limited attention to mobile flows. Discussions of subcultural communities draw largely upon the strands of social theory, from Tönnies and Durkheim, that Urry notes have entrenched social understandings within static and bounded societies (Jenks 2005: Ch 2; Urry 2000: Ch 1). Many studies of subcultures have therefore considered single-sites (sometimes comparatively) and issues such as class, identity, style and deviance without probing the role of mobilities in social reproduction (Anderson 2009; Becker 1991; Hebdige 1979; Macdonald 2001; Muggleton 2000; Whyte 1993). The exceptions, such as studies of global yoga and capoeira communities (Delamont & Stephens 2008; Joseph 2008; Strauss 2005) and leisure activities that involve moving through space in particular ways (Saville 2008; Shields 2004; Tiessen 2011), suggest the value of devoting further attention to leisure and subcultural *praktik* as sites of mobilities. Taking up such cases offers a valuable opportunity to engage with the rich experiential dynamics of mobilities which emerge in everyday spheres.



In taking forward a consideration of *praktik* and mobilities then, the fundamental mobility of practices needs to be recognized. As Bourdieu has argued, practices are inherently temporal – indeed temporality gives a practice its character:

Practice unfolds in time and it has all the correlative properties, such as irreversibility, that synchronization destroys. *Its temporal structure*, that is, its rhythm, its tempo, and above all its directionality, *is constitutive of its meaning*. . . . In short, because it is entirely immersed in the current of time, *practice is inseparable from temporality*, not only because it is played out in time, but also because it plays strategically with time and especially with tempo. (Bourdieu 1990: 81, emphasis added)

I argue that the spatiality and mobilities of practices are similarly ‘constitutive of [their] meaning’ (1990: 81). To echo Bourdieu, practices also unfold through mobilities and are inseparable from travel because it has a strategic importance for their performance. Seeing practices and mobilities as thoroughly intertwined in this way provides a means of starting ‘with the fact of mobility’ (Cresswell 2011: 551) without necessarily starting from transportation itself. It provides a way of recognizing the importance of not only people’s movement, but also the interdependent and heterogeneous mobilities of elements that structure and sustain established social practices. Moreover, the temporal and spatial dynamics of practices can be considered together, to highlight how subcultures of leisure rely as much upon the tempo of their mobilities as the tempo of their performances.

The remainder of this paper illustrates and extends this argument by discussing the mobilities within two practices: patchwork quilting and bird watching. Despite the limited set of theoretical resources that have been used in previous studies of leisure (Roberts 2011: 5), theories of practice are promising resources for studying leisure travel (Ettema & Schwanen 2012) and have already been successfully applied in studies of wooden boating, Nordic walking, photography and free skiing (Jalas 2005; Shove & Pantzar 2005; Shove et al. 2007;

Woermann 2012). Though defining *praktik* is always ultimately an analytic task, the existence of national and international organizations, magazines and events focused upon patchwork quilting and bird watching suggests the relevance of highlighting these practices, and the well-developed communities that have arisen around them. They were chosen for their contrasting modes of engagement (making vs. observing things) and travel requirements (seemingly static vs. following mobile things) and were investigated through twenty-one semi-structured interviews, participant observation and a review of published sources.<sup>2</sup>

The next section begins by considering how leisure travel is framed by enthusiasts. Drawing upon examples from patchwork quilting, it suggests that looking at the products and traces of leisure – in this case quilts – offers a view of the multi-faceted and discontinuous journeys through which goals are achieved. The following section looks more closely at the experiences within these discontinuous journeys, highlighting how the successes and failures of leisure participation lead to travelling-in-anticipation and travelling-in-disappointment. The subsequent section steps back to consider the role of more systemic object mobilities in shaping these travel experiences. Through a consideration of bird watching lists and books, it illustrates the wider historical context that affects how people travel.

### **Traces of discontinuous travel**

People travel all the time to facilitate leisure projects. Patchwork quilters go to stores to buy fabric that they can cut up into pieces, sew back together using a pattern, and then sew into a sandwich with cotton filling and more fabric. They also attend collective events such as sewing circles and exhibitions, and quilt alone in a variety of places: ‘in the home, in the car traveling with family or driving carpool, and while on family vacation’ (Stalp 2007: 61). Similarly, bird watching ‘is an activity which is greatly enhanced and enriched by travel. Indeed, for all but novice bird watchers, travel away from their homes is an essential element

of their pastime; to see new birds one must travel to new places' (Jones & Buckley 2001: 16). Bird watchers<sup>3</sup> therefore travel to classes to learn about birds, and to places where birds are – ponds, nature reserves and sometimes even garbage dumps.

While one way to get a sense of this travel would be to catalogue where and when people make leisure-related trips, doing so would involve approaching these practices as outsiders. Stalp notes that outsiders often ask quilters how many quilts they have made, or how long it took to make a quilt. Yet 'any overarching linear concepts, such as time (e.g., hours, days, weeks, months, years) and quantity (how many quilts a quilter has made), are secondary to the meaning-making processes women used to measure and discuss their quilting activities' (Stalp 2007: 41). Patchwork quilters are therefore ill-prepared to answer such questions, in the same way that bird watchers would have difficulty reporting the time they spent watching birds. While Stalp's insights relate to the temporality of practice, they can be extended to its spatiality as well. Inquiring about the total miles travelled for quilting or bird watching would frame mobility in terms that participants rarely contemplate or discuss. They do, however, discuss quilts and birds. Whether with a few close friends or at regional quilt meetings, patchwork quilters tell stories about the quilts they have made and how they came to make them. Bird watchers also discuss and document the birds they saw (or failed to see), as later parts of the paper elaborate. In order to understand the temporality and spatiality that are inherent in practice, this section considers the mobilities that go into making a quilt.

If you happened to see Susan's quilt, *The Gingerbread Tree*, there would be little indication of the mobilities that made it possible. Yet creating this quilt involved moving 'to Spain, to France and back again' (Susan).

One could say that the project started at home in the UK, when Susan left for her regular fall trip to the quilt show in Harrogate. It was there that she was attracted to the work

of a well-known British teacher, who offered week-long quilting retreats in Spain. Twice in the following year she spent a week in Spain, studying under two different tutors.

At the end of one of these trips, Susan was waiting for a bus which would take her to the airport. To pass the time, she was flipping through a French quilting magazine called *Magic Patch*. In the midst of the waiting and the flipping, a photograph caught her eye:

I saw this piece of work and it was very similar to what we'd been doing, and so I thought 'Ah - that looks interesting' and I put it down again. Then, just before we went, I thought . . . 'I'd just like to have another look at this pattern' and so I quickly wrote down the publisher's details.

In this way, Susan's previous travel and her waiting-while-travelling provided the opportunity to begin an entirely new travelling-quilt.

After returning home, Susan called the publishers, who sent her a copy of the magazine. Once she read the article, which was written by a woman from France, Susan was even more interested in this Hawaiian-style pattern:

I became quite intrigued about it. It was reverse appliqué and it was very vibrant colors and I like vibrant colors. And so then I thought, 'I think I'll try and contact this lady' because she had a shop. I looked all around for a similar fabric and couldn't see anything at all.

After getting contact information from the publishers, Susan 'struck up a friendship' with the author, who sent her panels of the hand-dyed Indonesian fabrics used for the quilt.

Fabrics to hand, Susan began making the quilt; but its travel did not stop there. She had promised to show it in her guild's upcoming exhibition, and the pressure of this deadline led her to take it along when travelling to Tanzania for voluntary work. Whilst there, her work, illness, early sunsets and unreliable electricity prevented her from making much

progress. Therefore, when she returned to the UK, she had to work extremely hard so that the quilt was ready to be shown at the exhibition.

It is easy to see why Susan calls this her ‘cosmopolitan composition’. After all, it draws upon mobilities by bus, plane, car, phone, and mail through the UK, Spain, France, Hawaii, Indonesia and Tanzania. Yet these mobilities are not just about Susan’s corporeal travel. They draw in and draw upon the places that elements of her practice connect. Susan discovered the pattern in Spain, but it was the places that the magazine was connected to which became of subsequent importance. Susan didn’t set out to make a quilt that had touched three continents, but she ended up connecting many non-contiguous spaces through her practice.

Despite the fact that Susan was sitting still while doing much of the sewing for her quilt, *The Gingerbread Tree* is a document and trace of discontinuous fragments of travel. As such, it is a travelling quilt, the product of a journey with a similar spatio-temporality to the ethnographic rail journey that Watts undertook:

The temporality of my journey did not flow in a line, it percolated, as Serres would say (1995: 58), drip, drip, dripping, as I picked up the phone to book the accommodation one day, wrote an email to ask for permission a week or so later, occasionally daydreamed of early morning mist and coffee. Some times I was on the journey. Some times I was not. With this turbulent, juddering temporality, rather than an ongoing flow, the journey moved onwards. (Watts 2008: 714)

In order to see such juddering temporalities and the dispersed spaces they are connected to, Watts must look beyond when and where train travelling is most obviously performed. She considers times when she is far away from rail lines and rail stations, and finds these shape her travelling just as being on the train does. In the end, it is discontinuous times and non-contiguous spaces that make her journey. In a similar way, Susan’s quilt-making consists of a

series of activities occurring in different times and spaces. These come together to form an on-again, off-again experience of travelling – an experience where corporeal mobilities and imaginative or communicative ones become intertwined. While Watts' journey left traces in her notes and photos and articles, the mobilities of the *Gingerbread Tree* were etched into the quilt itself. It became a souvenir of the journey – one made, not purchased. Susan's experiences of travelling were etched invisibly into the materiality of the quilt.

As this story illustrates, Susan's travel experiences are not about miles so much as moments. That is, it is the percolating temporality of travel – the sporadic, gradual and yet persistent unfolding of diverse mobilities – that fills out the story of her quilt. While working on this project, she strings together mobilities of people and objects to create a meaningful memento. Her quilt becomes a souvenir of her discontinuous travelling-quilting experiences.

Bird watchers, on the other hand, make no similar souvenirs. Their practice is not oriented towards making any completed item, and the traces they produce – photographs, lists – are ever-expanding collections that can be grouped in various ways. Yet if we regard their goals as projects similar to making a quilt – for instance when bird watchers track the birds that visit one habitat over time, or try to see the largest number of birds in one year – then there is a way that their travelling is also discontinuous. Multiple mobilities, spread out over time, space and modalities, contribute to meaningful leisure projects.

Though each series of travelling performances is unique to an individual, there is also a sense in which these experiences are shared, and specific to the temporalities of one leisure practice. After all, the travel of Susan's quilt was marked by the shared goal of finishing in time to display it at a patchwork quilting show. Knowing well in advance when national or regional quilt shows are scheduled, and therefore when completed quilts need to be displayed, helps to coordinate and align the quilt-making of many individuals around these events. Yet for bird watchers, the fixed times and places of shows or classes are of little importance.

Rather, the practice of bird watching is more aligned with the temporalities and spatialities of birds themselves – seasonal patterns of migration or geographies of habitats. The spaces drawn into bird watchers' discontinuous mobilities are therefore more diverse than for patchwork quilters, because birds can be found nearly everywhere. However, because birds can also leave spaces, the pace of planning and executing mobilities has the potential to be much faster, compared to patchwork quilting shows that are planned months or years in advance. The next section considers these shared aspects of leisure performances further by examining how pursuing shared goals invests travelling with rhythms of anticipation and disappointment.

### **Travelling-in-anticipation and travelling-in-disappointment**

In any practice, the pursuit of goals can lead to repetitive cycles of anticipation, excitement and periodic disappointment. Depending on which *praktik* one is performing, success and failure depend on different sets of elements – different objects, skills and knowledge that lead to a beautifully crafted quilt or a sighting of a rare bird species. But to understand practices as unfolding through mobilities and inseparable from travel means that success and failure are also linked to how goals relate to travelling experiences. While it is easy to point out the uniqueness of travel experiences, given their performance in specific and ever-changing contexts, studies of transport have also shown how travel experiences are shared. Bissell, for instance, discusses how 'affective atmospheres' can 'align bodies together in particular ways' during train travel – whether in frustration or relaxation (2010: 280). Sheller has similarly discussed how the socio-cultural contexts of attribute them with a shared repertoire of emotions (2004). When looking at leisure then, we can consider how shared elements such as objects and goals foster shared rhythms of travel experience.

Episodes of travelling facilitate participation in leisure, and in the process are experienced in relation to the successes and failures of practice. In this way, the embodied experience of travelling takes on the emotions, understandings and values of leisure, which shift in relation to enthusiasts' goals. Birder Mike, for instance, speaks about his travel in relation to his bird watching: 'I don't really enjoy the long drives, but I enjoy the drive back if we've been successful'. Mike's qualification – the 'if' – is important. While travel is necessary to fulfill enthusiasts' goals and is at times rewarding, it doesn't always feel worthwhile. This is because attempts to see a bird or buy fabric sometimes don't work out, which affects how one feels upon the return journey. The fluctuating experience of attempting and succeeding or failing to reach leisure goals influences similarly undulating experiences of travel. Travelling-in-anticipation leads to travelling-in-excitement or travelling-in-disappointment. When going somewhere doesn't pay off as expected, travelling becomes embodied in the alternating contrasts of anticipation and frustration.

### *Patchwork quilting*

This pattern is manifest for patchwork quilters during trips to visit fabric shops. Since making patchwork quilts revolves around crafting with fabrics, obtaining these supplies is an important step in the process, and one that must be completed before cutting and sewing can be done. At times, particularly when visiting unfamiliar stores, going to find fabric can be an exciting occasion.

Susan attests to the enjoyment she felt when visiting shops as part of a patchwork quilting holiday. After flying to the US from the UK, she joined a bus tour that visited many fabric stores:

it was like you were a child in a candy shop. We were taken to all these fabric shops, I mean that was a big part of the trip, you know, and I've got hundreds of photographs



of these shops. It would be like a barn in the middle of a field and you'd have to walk down this track and the doors were open to us and it was like bolts of fabric from floor to ceiling!

Susan's excitement at visiting the stores is demonstrated by the many photos she took and the 'loads of fabric' she purchased. But her anticipation also started before she arrived. She and her friends 'were warned' about how good the stores were, 'and we took empty suitcases . . . we didn't really take many clothes'.

When Sylvia goes on bus trips with her quilt group, there is a similar type of shared excitement that pervades the bus and makes travelling exciting:

You get on the bus every morning, and there's sort of a buzz cause you're thinking 'Ooo we're going to the quilt shop and we're going to the quilt show', you know, 'What do you want?' 'Oh I'm looking for so,' and 'If you see so and so, come and tell us,' and 'I've seen this book I like' . . . everybody's got their little list

For Sylvia, travelling on 'the infamous bus which turns into mayhem' is enjoyable precisely because of the sociality built around travelling-in-anticipation. She knows all of her fellow quilters will be sharing similar experiences because of the shops and events they visit together.

At other times, however, particularly if quilters have a very specific idea of what they hope to find in the stores they visit, travelling can become much more frustrating. Jayne recalls a conversation she had with a shop owner:

we were talking about the influence of magazines, and one of the very best selling magazines had launched some project . . . with three different fabrics in it, and she'd had this pair of ladies in - they wanted to make that [exact same] quilt. And she happened to have two of the fabrics on her shelf, but she didn't have the third exactly the same as the author. But she had another one which would have gone fine. And one

of these women was *virtually in tears* because the shop owner did not have exactly the same fabrics.

Not being able to fulfill your leisure goals can be a very powerful experience, and in the case of buying fabric it is one premised upon travel to stores. Since stores have varying and limited stock, travelling-in-anticipation of finding something specific can lead to travelling-in-disappointment if the desired fabric is unavailable.

These experiences of travelling-in-anticipation and excitement or disappointment are not limited to embodied emotions. They also take on material forms that demand an embodied response. Susan, for instance, had to contend with transporting empty suitcases across the Atlantic Ocean, in anticipation of the fabrics she would buy. Then, on the return trip, she had to lug around and worry about suitcases that were dangerously close to their weight limit. A material shift from travelling-in-anticipation to travelling-in-excitement also occurred when Jayne drove to a quilt show with three friends. Travelling to the show in the car was comfortable, but on their return the materiality of success changed the experience significantly: ‘we absolutely struggled in getting four people’s purchases into the boot [aka trunk] of that car. I mean the girls in the back, they couldn’t see for carrier bags on their laps all the way home’. While in many other circumstances having bags piled up in this way would make for a negative travel experience, for these quilters it was a necessary and even pleasant inconvenience. Their momentary discomfort while travelling home was evidence of their success. Indeed, if their car was empty upon return, it would be a material indicator of their disappointment at not having found what they were looking for.

### *Bird watching*

The relationship between travelling-in-anticipation and travelling-in-disappointment is even more apparent in the case of bird watchers. Bird watching is a fascinating practice

because it depends upon people meeting up with independently mobile birds. While patchwork quilters seek out fabrics that are temporarily immobile in stores, bird watching can involve literally chasing after moving targets. This is particularly the case for those birders who are interested in seeing a great variety of species. Since birds spend most of their time within specific habitats, and these are unevenly distributed, one encounters a limited number of birds in the course of everyday travel. In order to see a range of birds, one must visit different locations. Moreover, since countries have different collections of habitats, the appearance of a non-native bird in the UK attracts much attention. Groups of birders known as twitchers travel from all around the country to catch a glimpse of a bird they would have few other chances to see in the UK. While patchwork quilters travelling to stores may know their destination weeks or months in advance, twitchers often leave for new locations at short notice, seeking one particular bird. The tempo of information flows and corporeal travel, as well as the mobility of their targets (fabrics or independently mobile birds) and destinations therefore differ significantly. Yet like patchwork quilters, twitchers travel in anticipation (of seeing a new species) and hope to avoid travelling-in-disappointment upon their return.

After graduating from college, Jon was regularly involved in this type of travel with his friends, even though they were on tight budgets:

There was a kind of a network. Almost every weekend I'm sure, certainly in spring and autumn for a number of years, I'd be in different parts of the country. Sleeping in the car . . . It was always kind of, find a pub, have a few beers, crash out in the car, get up in the first light, go and see the birds, and then spend the day ambling around a bit and then get home as soon as you can.

While car travel's independence and flexibility make it ideal for these spur-of-the-moment trips to sometimes remote places, twitchers make use of many type of transport, as Mike notes:

People know the transport system pretty well. The really big guys, in Norfolk, they've got, you know, a flying company ready. And they just ring and say, 'We need to go tomorrow, first thing.'

In contrast to patchwork quilting, the fast tempo of this type of bird watching makes the flexibility and speed of transportation crucial for one's success.

On occasion, getting to where the birds are can involve multiple modes of transportation. Stephen recalled one trip he made with a friend to Out Skerries, in the Shetland Islands. To get there they drove more than five hours and then caught an overnight ferry, after which they had to wait an extra day in order to catch one of the few flights to the island every week. Not long after arriving, Stephen's friend heard about a rare bird on a nearby island and left to find it. A few days later, after finding a rare bird of his own, Stephen met his friend at the ferry terminal and during the return ride they found out about another rare bird sighting. His friend was determined to see this bird too, and offered to drop Stephen off at a train station so he could continue home. Since the trip by train would have been little faster than staying in his friend's car, Stephen agreed to take a long route home via this new bird. For these men, seeing rare birds involved a dizzying array of transportation. Indeed, both the modes of transport and the prospect of travelling-in-disappointment kept evolving as new birds and the goals of seeing them emerged.

As these stories illustrate, dedicated twitchers experience travelling as quickly doing whatever you need to in order to see birds. Jon's birding travel involved cars full of friends, stops at pubs and uncomfortable sleeping arrangements, while more dedicated and wealthy birders can hire private flights on demand. For the most dedicated, travelling involves continually re-calibrating destinations and paths to both the affordances of different modes of transport and to the changing locations of birds. Since travel segments do not always join up easily, travelling-in-anticipation of birds can include sleeping in cars and waiting for

infrequent flights. Despite the diversity of these trips, they are all marked by a shared goal and the anticipation that accompanies it.

Yet the travel may not have been worthwhile. Birds can leave at any time, and one can travel many hours and miles only to discover that there is no bird to be seen. Cocker explains that this is what enthusiasts call a ‘dip’: ‘the associated crash in spirits when you fail to find the bird’ (2001: 124). These dips are a reality that every birder must face, as Peter notes:

you don’t win them all. So there was a very uncommon bird called a great grey shrike, which is on Dalton Crag. So we spent a morning climbing God knows how many feet up to the top. We never saw anything.

Such stories of travelling-in-disappointment become important lore, shared and re-told amongst enthusiasts. While success is valuable on its own, Cocker explains that it is not crucial to the sociality of sharing stories: ‘I found myself feeling jealous of another man’s failure, but at least he’d been there’ and ‘could join in the conversation with a genuine sense of agony’ (2001: 201). In this way, even travelling-in-disappointment ultimately holds some value because it demonstrates emotional investment and commitment<sup>4</sup>, provides a personal connection to shared goals and offers the opportunity to share personal stories with other enthusiasts.

Moreover, travelling-in-disappointment reinforces the value of travelling-in-excitement. Jon, for instance, recognizes that the unpredictable nature of travel makes it worthwhile. While birding in Spain with a biologist, he tells a story of disappointing travel:

I said, ‘I crossed the country, to go to the East Coast, to go and see this one, and it’d been there for several days, and when I got there, it had gone.’ He kind of looked at me with absolute disdain because he was a biologist, he wasn’t interested in this running around seeing birds, ticking them off [a list], you know. And he just said, ‘You cannot make an appointment with birds’. . . And I kind of liked that. You know,

it summed up what the study of birds is about. The unpredictability of it. And that's what makes it interesting 'cause if everything was nailed down, it'd be boring, wouldn't it?

What Jon recognizes here is the importance of initially ambivalent travel experiences. If travelling-in-anticipation was instead travelling-in-certainty, birding would be less fun. In this way, even travelling-in-disappointment after having dipped is valued because it helps to reinforce the potential within travelling-in-anticipation. Not knowing for sure what travel will bring, flirting with both frustration and success, makes it worthwhile and rewarding to continue travelling. The unfolding and percolating travel of leisure practices is therefore made meaningful in relation to these rhythms of experience.

As this section has shown, enthusiasts' travel is affected by and experienced in relation to the anticipation, satisfaction and disappointments of leisure. Travelling-in-anticipation links up with travelling-in-excitement or disappointment. These interconnected experiences have embodied material dynamics, where being uncomfortable or needing to wait while travelling reinforces anticipation or excitement. They also become social touchstones that draw enthusiasts together around shared goals. Considering these fluctuating experiences as part of one larger, heterogeneous journey helps to illustrate their inherent interdependence. As Jon recognizes, the excitement of bird watching is related to the unknown results of travelling. Recognizing the undulation of travelling-in-anticipation and travelling-in-excitement or disappointment is therefore crucial to understandings how and why travel matters to leisure participants.

Yet when one doesn't find the right fabric or the right bird after travelling, it is clear that the spatial discontinuity of mobilities is as important as the rhythms of experience. It is because fabrics and birds are travelling through non-contiguous spaces that travelling-in-disappointment emerges. While the co-present travel of people and things are therefore

important for understanding experiences of leisure travel, so too are their independent mobilities. Taking this into consideration, the next section examines in greater detail how the widespread mobilities of objects reproduce knowledge and understandings that shape the spatio-temporalities of bird watcher's travel.

### **Object mobilities and worlds of travel**

Thus far, this paper has focused upon how mobilities of enthusiasts and elements become interwoven during performances of leisure – how travelling with objects facilitates the pursuit of leisure goals. Yet treating leisure as a *praktik*, and not merely a performance, involves recognizing the importance of the interconnected elements of leisure even beyond moments of their active use. That is, the connections between elements may be important even when they are not co-present with people or being actively integrated into performances. In order to take seriously the argument that bird watching, as a *praktik*, is inseparable from its mobilities, one must therefore consider how the mobilities of objects can shape the subculture of bird watching, even when they do not travel alongside enthusiasts.<sup>5</sup>

This section therefore follows the mobilities of bird lists and bird books, arguing that they help to reproduce the goals, understandings and travel dynamics of bird watching. That is, just as the location and affordances of petrol stations affect how and where people drive, the circulation of bird books and the ideas within them affect how and where bird watchers travel.

The experience of bird watching is most closely associated with the moment of seeing a bird. Yet for Mike and Jon bird watching does not end until they arrive at their computers. Seeing birds for them is only a part of the process and their bird watching is not complete until they have updated their lists. For Mike this consists of adding his sightings to a specialized database, which can generate lists of all of the birds he has seen by year, country

or lifetime. Jon's listing is less structured and involves transcribing, from memory or the small notebooks he carries with him, whatever birds he saw onto his birding blog. These lists may not physically travel with them, but are nonetheless a central part of Mike and Jon's travelling experiences.

In one sense, while these are lists of birds, they implicitly record and serve as traces of each man's stuttering patterns of travel-as-a-birder. Just as quilts embody patchwork quilters' travel, lists document the fragmentary and heterogeneous travel involved in studying one habitat or seeing as many rare birds as possible. At the same time, however, the lists precede and in some sense initiate Mike and Jon's travel, because they actively shape what birders do and pay attention to:

'Perception' is list-driven in the sense that the current state of the list provides motives for: searching the environment; regarding, disregarding and selecting among potential experiences; remarking upon or saying nothing about an observed event; and treating an announced sighting as a notable, doubtful or unremarkable claim. (Law & Lynch 1988: 274)

For Mike, this power of the list is clearly seen in how he talks about his travel. Each year he keeps track of the total number of birds he has seen in the UK, and as a result his aim is to see as many different birds as possible:

We all keep year lists, of course. Because that is your motivation to go and see a relatively common bird that you've not seen in this year. So, you know, I nipped out yesterday to see a little ringed plover that's just about arriving now. It's a summer visitor, I just wanted to get it on the list for this year. I won't bother to see little ringed plover again this year. Next year, I'll go and see it again.<sup>6</sup>

In this way, the gaps in Mike's list – that is, the birds normally resident in the UK that he hasn't seen yet in a given year – become targets around which he structures his travel.



The importance of these lists of birds is also built into the sociality of bird watching. Not only do birders talk about successful and unsuccessful trips, but many bird clubs have yearly competitions to see who can compile the biggest year list in their area. Though not all bird watchers participate, even those who don't see the point of making lists or chasing rarities still appreciate opportunities to see birds that they haven't seen before. As Cocker suggests, every birder wants to see rare birds – the difference is merely in how much effort they will expend and how far they will travel to do so (2001: 127). The prioritization of lists and new birds is therefore a key understanding of the practice, even if participants vary in their response to it.

Lists of birds, however, themselves rely upon the organization of birds according to species. They are structured by other object mobilities, including the circulation of bird books and field guides that affect Mike and Jon's travel, even if they don't travel with them. For many people, bird books are a key part of their education into the practice. Jeff and Jenny, for instance, 'just got a book and pair of binoculars and started bird watching', figuring it out as they went along. Even those who take formal courses continue to use bird field guides as a key resource.

As a result, Law and Lynch's argument (1988) that field guides do not present neutral information is crucial because how these guides organize ways of seeing in the field affects what bird watchers try to do and where they do it. By structuring images and knowledge according to species and their distinguishing features, books such as the *Collins Bird Guide* (Svensson et al. 1999) emphasize and validate these distinctions and their importance in relation to seeing birds. People therefore travel to see and identify different *species* of birds. Levels of expertise, devotion and knowledge become tied to species distinctions – legitimizing the creation of personal lists of species rather than lists of bird behaviors or the sheer number of birds seen. In this way, the organization of bird books by species shapes a

collective knowledge and ‘understanding [of] the world’ for the practice (Reckwitz 2002: 253). The world of bird watching is one where species matter, and the circulation of these books perpetuates the continuation of this world.

The importance of species though goes back much farther than present guides – the first significant list of British Birds was published in 1666 and the first classification appeared in 1676 in Latin (Bircham 2007: 47, 63). As Bircham notes in his history of ornithology, studies of migration and bird behavior were long preceded by attempts to follow in the footsteps of Linnaeus and produce a clear classification of all bird species (2007). Even though today there are alternative bird guides that foreground bird behavior, they reproduce similar assumptions about bird species. One recent book advocates that it should be used ‘in tandem with a conventional field guide’ because it assumes that people want to identify bird species, and therefore gives instructions on what to do ‘if you come across an unknown bird’ (Couzens 2003: 9). In this case, even though the book highlights the behavior of birds, it also fits into a world of birding where understandings of species dominate.

By presenting an understanding of the world that centers upon the isolation of bird species, existing field guides reinforce patterns of travelling to see new bird species. If instead guides were focused upon listing and distinguishing nesting, feeding and mating behaviors, or the timing and volume of migrations, their circulation could re-orientate people’s understandings of what it is important to do when watching birds, and therefore where (and when) one should travel. Birders more often travel in anticipation of species than of behaviors that cross species boundaries because of the widespread mobilities of lists and books.

As this section has shown, experiences of travelling are not shaped solely by the things that travel alongside people. Even if Mike and Jon don’t take their field guides on trips, their experiences of travelling are shaped by them. Travel-in-anticipation begins as they

develop understandings about why recognizing different species is important. In fits and spurts, the travel of books and knowledge feeds into their embodied mobilities. Then, after seeing birds, their experiences are transformed into records that represent and continue their travel – as numbers in a local bird count competition or as figures on a website that brings the successes and failures of travelling-birding to others.

The widespread mobilities of elements – lists and bird books and understandings of species – are therefore important for understanding enthusiasts' experiences of travel. These mobilities have historical roots and establish deeply ingrained assumptions about how bird watching should be conducted and valued. As such, they both contribute to the reproduction of bird watching as an everyday practice and shape a subculture in which bird watchers repetitively travel in particular ways.

## **Conclusion**

If, as Adey suggests, 'mobility is really about being mobile-with' (2010: 18), then the context in which mobilities are studied has important ramifications. While previous research has made contributions to a performed and embodied understanding of mobile *praxis*, taking up an understanding of *praktik* offers opportunities to consider different relationships and things that people are 'mobile-with'. Ingold suggests that 'in dwelling in the world, we do not act *upon* it, or do things *to* it; rather we move along *with* it' (2000: 200). A similar argument can be made for people and practices – we do not act *upon* practices, or do things *to* them, but move along *with* them. Studying mobilities through the frame of practices is therefore important because it sheds light on how people are 'mobile-with' practices and the elements that compose them.

Focusing upon practices shifts understandings of mobilities in several ways. First, it raises questions about the spatio-temporal boundaries of understandings of travel experiences.

While at times it is valuable to consider continuous stretches of travel undertaken alongside particular objects or using certain modes of transport, at other times discontinuous mobilities can be read as contributing to the same travel experience. As this paper showed, the experience of being a travelling patchwork quilter or a travelling bird watcher is made up of spatially and temporally fragmented movements that are linked together by the stories and traces they draw from and create. Indeed being an enthusiast is marked by the fluctuating moments of anticipation and disappointment which characterize goal-oriented travel.

Approaching mobilities from the standpoint of particular practices therefore requires devoting attention not only to continuous trips, but to the percolating and repetitive rhythms of moving people and moving elements. Developing a wider vocabulary for discussing the temporalities and spatialities of these discontinuous flows will help in capturing the dynamics of practice-specific mobilities.

Second, patterns of travel are not just shared by leisure enthusiasts – they are constitutive of these groups. That is, subcultural practices are made distinct and meaningful by their temporally-structured mobilities. When comparing cases such as bird watching and patchwork quilting then, it is not enough to merely observe that practitioners visit different places – marshes and wildlife reserves vs. quilt shops and shows. The tempi and logics of their travel also differ – and are shaped by the shared expectations and goals of each *praktik*. As a result, the spontaneity and speed that are demanded by attempts to see rare birds matter little in patchwork quilting, whose mobilities are organized by other tempos. While this does not negate the fact that people's leisure travel is always the uniquely personal product of their context and resources and opportunities, it emphasizes that people's sphere of choice in relation to leisure travel is more constrained than often recognized. To be a patchwork quilter or bird watcher requires not only time and money, but the 'network capital' (Larsen et al. 2006) required to participate in the specific tempos and rhythms of the practice's mobilities.

Moreover, recognizing that people participate in many practices at the same time, it becomes increasingly important to consider how multiple travel requirements and cultures overlap and potentially contradict one other.

Finally, attending to practices foregrounds a set of important material dynamics. While previous studies have highlighted how the materialities of transport affect travelling, this paper has shown that being mobile with empty suitcases, quilts, and bird books also shapes both immediate experiences of travel and future ones. The periodic intersections of both human and non-human mobilities create opportunities for moments of performance, as well as reinforcing shared experiences of and opportunities for travelling. Travelling in tandem with the objects of practice can lead to the creation of traces that themselves instigate further travel – lists leading to new bird habitats. Moreover, the mobilities of objects are tied up with those of other elements – knowledge, skills, understandings, goals – and can affect people’s mobilities even when separated in time and space. Though one may not own a bird book, their circulation shapes understandings of what it means to be a bird watcher, orienting the world of birding towards a concern for bird species and their enumeration. For this reason, in addition to discussions of transport-related hybrids and assemblages such as the ‘driver-car’ (Dant 2004), it would be valuable to interrogate other subject-object or inter-element relations which shape mobilities, such as the quilter-quilt.

Though taking up an understanding of *praktik* does not eliminate important questions about how researchers negotiate the boundaries of theories and empirical cases, of unique enactments and shared structures, of continuities and discontinuities, it makes important contributions to these discussions. People move not just with cars or trains or bicycles, but also with practices and the heterogeneous sets of elements that comprise them. As this paper has shown, interrogating the relationships between people, practices, and mobilities creates new opportunities to recognize the inherent and constituent mobility of leisure practices, and

to explore how understandings of practice might contribute to the study of our richly mobile world. While Cresswell is right to suggest that ‘mobility is practiced’ (2006: 3), practices (*praktik*) also unfold through mobilities, and the latter process contains significant opportunities for further exploration.

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### **Notes**

<sup>1</sup> One could consider these different types of practices – what Schatzki calls dispersed practices (1996: 91-2). For more discussion see Hui (2012).

<sup>2</sup> Participants were recruited through UK leisure organizations and snowball sampling, with attention given to finding those with diverse periods and levels of involvement. Two of the patchwork quilters were interviewed in Canada.

<sup>3</sup> People who watch birds for leisure identify themselves using many terms including bird watchers, birders (which can connote more skill and experience) and twitchers. The latter is often used pejoratively to identify people who travel long distances to see rare birds.

<sup>4</sup> Thank you to one of the anonymous reviewers who pointed out this aspect of failure.

<sup>5</sup> A similar analysis could be undertaken using the case of patchwork quilting, but is omitted here due to limitations of space.

<sup>6</sup> Though the process Mike describes may be shared by other dedicated birders or twitchers, as many casual bird watchers do not keep lists of their sightings.

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