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**Things in motion, things in practices: how mobile practice networks facilitate  
the travel and use of leisure objects**

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***Abstract***

While complex spatialities and mobilities underlie patterns of contemporary consumption, many of their dynamics remain unexplored. Authors have taken up Warde's suggestion that consumption is a moment within social practices, yet the implications of multi-sited performances and travel for this consumption have not been fully considered. This paper therefore focuses upon the objects within practices, adopting Appadurai's strategy of following things-in-motion in order to highlight how the travel of objects opens up opportunities for their use. Qualitative research is used to follow the things of two leisure practices, patchwork quilting and bird watching, illustrating how they involve both multi-sited performances and instances of consumption on-the-move. In order to discuss the changing sets of objects that enthusiasts make use of, the paper proposes the concept of 'mobile practice networks', which recognizes how temporary coalitions of objects and people actualize the portability of things. Whereas Latour's immutable mobiles maintain their links after travel, mobile practice networks are made to be broken, with their stability existing only during travel. Mobile practice networks are enacted as temporary accomplishments: as moments within the circulation of objects, when objects gain additional materials to facilitate their mobility. Following things-in-motion highlights the cycles of use and disuse, mobility and immobility within consumption, and demonstrates that the appropriation of objects is inseparable from the work of moving materials around.

***Keywords***

Theories of practice; follow the thing; material culture; consumption; travel; multiple mobilities; leisure; immutable mobiles; patchwork quilting; bird watching

***Introduction***

As understandings of consumption have expanded beyond moments of purchase, it has become increasingly complicated to discuss spatiality. One is no longer consuming only when buying a product, and people's participation in making the things they consume, through "prosumption" (Ritzer & Jurgenson, 2010) or "craft consumption" (Campbell, 2005) has expanded the set of spaces in which some form of consumption occurs. At the same time, researchers have increasingly emphasized the importance of recognizing the mobilities underlying social interactions (Sheller & Urry, 2006; Urry, 2000, 2007). Tracing the flows of global commodity chains has helped to make sense of complex networks of production and distribution (Cook, 2004; Kleine, 2008). The examination of online interactions has also highlighted how virtual mobilities shape consumption (Denegri-Knott & Molesworth, 2010). Other aspects of the spaces and movements constituting contemporary consumption, however, are less clearly articulated. This is particularly the case when consumption is understood as a part of social practices. This paper therefore adds to understandings of the spatiality and mobility of consumption by examining the movement of objects, and how this movement shapes moments of consumption within social practices.

Theories of practice have been taken up as a valuable resource for understanding consumption, and yet the spatial dynamics of this consumption have received limited attention. Since Warde's suggestion that consumption is "a moment in almost every practice" (2005: 137), the "analytical building blocks" of this approach have been used to situate consumption within the materiality of

everyday life (Slater & Miller, 2007: 22). As Trentmann notes, theories of practice offer a different take on the role of things in consumption:

Instead of taking either object or individual as its starting point, research on practices focuses on how users, things, tools, competence, and desires are coordinated. The life of objects, in other words, is not prior to or independent of social practices but codependent. This also means that value is not based in a product or its meanings but in how it is put to use. (2009: 297)

Focusing on the use of things, studies have examined consumption within practices such as eating (Cheng et al., 2007; Halkier & Jensen, 2011), DIY (Watson & Shove, 2008) and wooden boating (Jalas, 2009). Though some research has examined how the circulation of technologies around the world affects consumption (Shove & Pantzar, 2005; Wilhite, 2008), the spatiality and mobility of everyday performances has been largely overlooked. That is, little is understood about how doing practices in different places changes how objects are consumed.

The spatiality of existing research is limited. As Barr et al. note, many studies have examined everyday practices within the home, leaving out those performed during holidays and journeys (2011). Yet people routinely perform practices outside the home, and the same practices occur in different spaces – at tourist destinations “we swim, read, sunbathe, drink, eat, dance, play sports, shop and – language barriers permitting – watch television, much as we might do in our leisure time at home” (Williams, 2003: 86). Though, as Sheller and Urry have acknowledged, “social science has largely ignored or trivialised the importance of the systematic movements of people for work and family life, for leisure and pleasure,” engaging with mobilities opens up new understandings of the social world (2006: 208). Attending to spatiality and mobility is also important because theories of practice articulate the importance of space; practices are “spatially dispersed” (Schatzki, 1996: 89) and “time-space relations [are] inherent in the constitution of all social interaction” (Giddens, 1979: 3). Taking into account multiple spaces, and the travel between them, is therefore important for understanding how consumption occurs through practices.

This paper builds upon a qualitative study of two leisure practices – patchwork quilting and bird watching – to consider how objects move in and out of spaces and moments of use. By doing so, it contributes to on-going considerations of how theories of practice can be used to understand consumption, as well as to understandings of how corporeal and object mobilities shape contemporary social life. The first section provides an introduction to Warde’s understanding of consumption within practices, and then suggests that Appadurai’s call to “follow the thing” (1986) can be applied when interrogating the interdependence of travel and consumption. Though Appadurai understands consumption differently than Warde, his methodological approach highlights how movement changes objects, and can be usefully applied to the objects within practices. The remainder of the paper follows the travelling things used in patchwork quilting and bird watching. It illustrates important distinctions between consumption in place and consumption on the move, and introduces the ‘mobile practice networks’ that make performing in multiple spaces possible.

### *Following things, following practices*

Understanding consumption as something that happens in the course of doing something else, as a moment in practices (Warde, 2005: 137), involves a profoundly social and relational outlook. One must attend “less to individual choices and more to the collective development of modes of appropriate conduct in everyday life” (Warde, 2005: 146). For Warde, consumption is “a process whereby agents engage in appropriation and appreciation, whether for utilitarian, expressive or contemplative purposes, of goods, services, performances, information or ambience, whether purchased or not” (2005: 137). His focus acknowledges objects as one type of thing that can be consumed, and crucially these goods are part of practices.

In forming this view of consumption, Warde draws upon the loosely associated theories of practice, which emphasize the organized activities of people as a starting point for understanding the social world. This tradition emerges from scholars such as Giddens (1979, 1984) and Bourdieu (1977, 1984, 1990), and has been more recently developed by Schatzki (1996, 2002, 2010), Reckwitz (2002) and Shove and colleagues (Shove & Pantzar, 2005, 2007; Shove et al., 2012; Shove et al., 2007). ‘Practice’ is often used as a general term for human action or learning, but this tradition of work distinguishes the general term from identifiable ‘practices’. While the former corresponds with the German *praxis*, a practice in the latter sense “is a routinized type of behaviour” or *praktik* (Reckwitz, 2002: 249). Each *praktik* is composed of several different elements:

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)

Each time people bring these elements together, they take part in a “performance” and reproduce the routinized activities of a practice.<sup>1</sup> Schatzki describes practices slightly differently, as a “nexus of doings and sayings” (1996: 89) constituted by organized “‘bundles’ of activities” (2002: 71). For him, “the distinctiveness of different practices lies in the distinctiveness of the *package* of doings and sayings plus organization that each is” (2002: 87). In order to exist, practices must be continually enacted and reproduced as distinct packages of organized activities.

Within this framework, Warde sees consumption as pervasive, yet intermittent. It is a momentary accomplishment within many practices (Warde, 2005: 137). Rather than setting out to consume, as you might set out to make a patchwork quilt, “people mostly consume without registering or reflecting that this is what they are doing because they are, from their point of view, actually doing things like driving, eating or playing” (Warde, 2005: 150). As such, Warde suggests that consumption qualifies as what Schatzki calls a “dispersed practice,” which can be found in many different social arenas, and as moments within other “integrative practices” like driving or bird watching (Schatzki, 1996: 91-2, 98; Warde, 2005: 150). While integrative practices have all of the elements listed above, dispersed ones have only activities and understandings. They therefore take on different shapes in different contexts. Consumption, for instance, varies widely

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<sup>1</sup> The bringing together of elements by someone in one situated time-space is what Shove and Pantzar, following Schatzki, call “practice-as-performance”, whereas the collection of all such enactments over multiple times and spaces makes up a “practice-as-entity” (Schatzki, 1996: 89-90; Shove & Pantzar, 2007: 154). For more on this distinction, see Warde (2005).

depending on what practices it is a part of. One could articulate a shared understanding of what consumption is, but it would be difficult to name specific objects, goals or emotions involved without considering its relationship to an integrative practice such as eating or DIY. Neither would it be clear what determines the quality or appropriateness of different types of consumption. This is because the specificity of objects, aims and standards is only defined when consumption becomes a part of other practices. The moments of consumption during eating involve different objects, aims and standards than those during DIY.

If consumption is a consequence of practices, something that happens in the course of doing other things, then I argue that travel should be seen similarly. People know how to travel, and can identify when others do so. They also understand the difference between travel and simply changing the position of the body. Yet travel, in this sense of traversing space, is like consumption because it is mostly done without reflection, in the course of other practices such as patchwork quilting. It does not require specific goals or modes of transportation, but can be accomplished in many ways and as a part of many activities. Travel is a general understanding that can link the use of cars, bikes and trains together, but depends on none of them. This is because, as a dispersed practice, travel does not require specific objects.

Using this analytic distinction between integrative and dispersed practices allows Warde to productively de-centre consumption and examine its processes through a different set of frames. Warde does not discuss, however, tools for understanding the spatiality or mobility of practices or consumption. Though he draws upon the example of motoring, private automobile travel, the actual movement of the car seems inconsequential because other practices involving less travel could similarly demonstrate his points. If, as Schatzki suggests, practices are distinguished by the different packages of doings that make them up, then the fact that some practices have mobile doings while others are more static is important for understanding their differences. In addition, there is the potential that the appropriation and appreciation of objects – their consumption within practices – is facilitated or constrained by their movement. More attention therefore needs to be given to how movement affects the consumption within practices.

In pursuing this topic, it might seem appropriate to draw heavily upon concepts used within the ‘new mobilities paradigm’ (Sheller & Urry, 2006). This paper certainly shares Sheller and Urry’s concern for identifying how mobilities affect social life, and their awareness of the link between mobilities and immobilities. It is concerned, however, with a more specific understanding of practices than found in much mobilities research. While many mobilities scholars draw upon Goffmanian notions of performance that emphasize the embodiment and processual nature of social interactions (Edensor, 2007; Franklin & Crang, 2001; Haldrup, 2004; Haldrup & Larsen, 2010), theories of practice go one step further to distinguish between practices. Research on mobilities is also often more human centred in its focus, sometimes drawing upon the notions of choice and individual agency that Warde speaks against in his discussion of consumption (e.g. Schönfelder & Axhausen, 2010). Therefore, this paper draws upon general suggestions from this body of literature, such as the existence of multiple types of mobilities<sup>2</sup> (Urry, 2000: 49; 2007: 47), but does not adopt specific terminology in order to retain a conceptual focus upon practices and consumption.

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<sup>2</sup> Urry notes the existence of five types of travel – people’s corporeal travel, the travel of objects, virtual travel, communicative travel, and imaginative travel.

Since practices have many elements, and these elements move in different ways, there are many possibilities for studying how mobilities affect moments of consumption. This paper focuses on objects because of the longstanding importance of objects within studies of consumer culture. Not only have objects been a focus of previous work, but Appadurai presented an influential account of how studying moving things reveals new insights into consumption (1986). Bringing his insights into conversation with Warde's work offers opportunities to see more clearly how the movement of objects shapes everyday consumption.

Though Appadurai and Warde's work differs in many ways, they share an understanding that consumption is not, as in many economic portrayals, merely an individual concern. Rather, as Appadurai suggests, "consumption is eminently social, relational, and active rather than private, atomic, or passive" (1986: 31). While Warde pursues the social nature of consumption through a consideration of use, Appadurai places the process of exchange at the centre of his investigation. In order to reconsider the dynamics of exchange, he focuses on objects rather than people; "following the things themselves," he argues, is important because "their meanings are inscribed in their forms, their uses, their trajectories" (1986: 5). This is for him a methodological intervention, not a theoretical one: "even though from a *theoretical* point of view human actors encode things with significance, from a *methodological* point of view it is the things-in-motion that illuminate their human and social context" (Appadurai, 1986: 5, emphasis original). By discussing the movement of objects, and taking up examples of exchange in non-capitalist contexts, Appadurai argues that commodities have no absolute value and need not be paid for – rather their value is created through social processes of exchange. An object is therefore not automatically or always a commodity. Instead, as Kopytoff suggests, objects move in and out of "commodity stages" (1986: 64). Following objects within the larger frame of exchange allows these authors to bring into question what can constitute a commodity, how the permanence and value attached to this label are enacted, and the importance of considering the "social lives" of objects (Appadurai, 1986: 3).

Though Appadurai first used this method to discuss dynamics of commodity exchange, and it continues to be used in the study of commodity chains (e.g. Cook, 2004; Cook & Harrison, 2007; Kleine, 2008), it has been applied in a wide variety of studies. Indeed, Marcus identified "following the thing" as one technique for conducting multi-sited ethnographies (1995), and this method has helped to trace the movement and mediation of cultural objects such as Nike (Lash & Lury, 2007) as well as the movement and re-use of old ship components in Bangladesh (Gregson et al., 2010). Within studies of science and technology, authors such as Latour (1987) have used a similar approach, studying how the interactions and movements of humans and nonhumans enact scientific realities. As these examples show, following 'things in motion' has proven a productive strategy for pursuing diverse empirical and theoretical concerns.

Therefore, to echo Appadurai, even though from a *theoretical* point of view objects are only one of the elements needed for the performance of practices, from a *methodological* point of view, I argue that things-in-motion illuminate the importance of travel to objects' use. A 'follow the thing' methodology is therefore a promising addition to the repertoire of methods used within studies of practice. Authors have used a wide range of methods to study practices, including ethnography (Bourdieu, 1990; Wilhite, 2008), national time use surveys (Cheng et al., 2007;

Warde et al., 2005), and mass observation “day in the life” diaries (Southerton, 2007). Qualitative methods such as participant observation, interviews, focus groups and document analysis are also well represented (Jalas, 2005; Shove & Pantzar, 2005, 2007; Shove et al., 2007; Wang, 2007). While these methods have helped to highlight many dynamics of objects’ use, they have often given little attention to how objects move in between performances. Appadurai’s call to follow the thing is therefore a beneficial addition to this repertoire.

It is not necessary to undertake significant travel in order to follow the thing. That is, I consider following the thing to be a type of mobile method which, as Larsen et al. note, can be undertaken in two ways (2006: 6). Firstly, the researcher using mobile methods can move alongside the moving things that are being studied. Here following the thing would require travelling with things as they move. A second type of mobile methods, however, involves using observations, interviews, mapping and other traces to capture the complex mobilities of the case (Larsen et al., 2006: 6). Here following things requires imaginative mobilities and methodological and analytical attention as much as physical travel. Though this approach may miss out on some detail of the mobilities involved, for various practical reasons it can provide a good option when being co-mobile with things is not possible or desirable.

The remainder of this article explores this second way of following things, focusing upon the mobile materials within two leisure practices: patchwork quilting and bird watching. Though the discretionary nature of leisure practices can make them appear unimportant topics of investigation, their global popularity and practice-based organizations make them an important focus for studies of consumption. Leisure enthusiasts engage in vibrant voluntary organisations that are dedicated to mutual aid (Bishop & Hoggett, 1986), including the Quilters Guild of the British Isles and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) in the UK. In addition, these pursuits attract millions of participants around the world, and significant global industries have developed around their niche requirements. In Britain, 2.85 million adults go bird watching each year, with another 70 million participating in the United States (Target Group Index from BMRB International in Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, 2009; Wallace, 2004: 229). The bird watching industry in Britain alone was worth “£300 million a year at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century” (Wallace, 2004: 219). Though the scale of patchwork quilting is much smaller, with 27 million US quilters and over 31,000 people visiting the largest UK quilt show, the associated consumption is still significant, with a 2003 US survey suggesting \$2.27 billion a year was spent on patchwork quilting (Pfaff, 2007: 7; Quilting in America Survey in Stalp, 2006: 109). Both patchwork quilting and bird watching are therefore significant, albeit niche, practices that are supported by both voluntary and corporate organizations. The existence of these organizations helps to justify treating each case as a distinct social practice.

Qualitative research into these practices involved participant observation and semi-structured interviews with ten bird watchers and eleven patchwork quilters, as well as reviews of secondary literature. These methods were used to amass descriptions of people’s involvement in practices. Though some argue that asking people to speak about practices is insufficient because many aspects of practice are unconscious or not easily expressed, participants were already very familiar and comfortable with talking about their practices due to involvement in voluntary organizations. Undertaking participant observation also provided opportunities to corroborate the credibility and dependability of accounts. Participants were recruited from leisure organizations

and snowball sampling, and were purposively selected for varying career lengths, levels of skill, and frequencies of participation. Interview prompts focused upon diverse aspects of their careers and travel, whilst subsequent analysis centred upon how the travel of participants and their materials contributed to performances of leisure.

Drawing upon this qualitative research, the rest of the paper explores how following things-in-motion provides new understandings of the moments of consumption within everyday practices. The next section begins by considering the movement of objects surrounding the meeting of a small patchwork quilting group in the UK. As this fieldwork account illustrates, following things raises important questions about what objects are used, when objects are used, and how travel enables their use.

### *Assembling objects for multi-sited performances*

At 4:30pm there were few traces left. After twenty minutes of moving materials, the places for sewing and cutting fabrics were gone, leaving an empty village hall. The last pins had been swept off the floor, the tables and chairs were moved aside, and boxes and bags had been returned to cars. The local patchwork quilting group was over, for now. Hours earlier, six women were in the midst of performing crafts they love. Yet the ‘things’ of their practice had now been cleared away, and were about to travel back to the houses where they started the day.

Earlier, Alice, Martha and Molly were beginning a new project – a ‘Button Angel’ bag. Their work involved cutting out pieces of fabric for the bag’s many pockets and then sewing together several layers to make its multiple panels. Incorporated into this process of cutting and sewing were many materials: paper templates and pins, fabrics and cotton wadding, scissors and rulers, cutting boards and rotary cutters, threads and sewing machines. Without these tools, making the bag – performing patchwork quilting – would be difficult or impossible.

Though Alice, Martha and Molly carried their materials to this weekly meeting in order to facilitate cutting and sewing, they also carried much more than material elements because their things travelled in containers. Each woman had a similar plastic carrier that was slightly bigger than two loaves of bread stacked on top of one another. The lid, once opened, revealed shallow plastic trays for small items like scissors, threads and needles. Beneath these trays was more space for bigger items like bottles of spray adhesive. Their fabrics travelled in many containers – large uncut sheets were folded and placed in plastic bags while small cut pieces were stored in clear plastic tubs. Both Martha and Alice also had rolling bags to put their sewing machines in. Similar to rolling luggage, the bags had a main compartment slightly bigger than a sewing machine with wheels on the bottom and a handle to pull it. The sides of the bag were somewhat stiff and padded, to protect the sewing machine, and several pockets provided storage for smaller items.

Many objects had their own bespoke containers. Alice’s rotary cutter was stored in a small fabric pouch, Martha’s square ruler had a perfectly fitting fabric bag, and both Martha and Molly had similar bespoke bags for their cutting mats. Martha made these out of fabric to precisely accommodate the mats, which were approximately ¼ inch thick A3 and A2 sheets that needed to remain flat in order to prevent buckling.



In addition to specialized bags, all three women had an assortment of other plastic and fabric bags to carry pieces of other projects, wadding or materials that did not fit elsewhere. The sheer volume of materials these women transported, assembled, and then disassembled for each meeting is suggested not only by the twenty minutes it took to clean up the space, but also by Molly's remark that "you'd think we were leaving home".

While not all of the women at this meeting brought a similar abundance of things, this fieldwork snapshot highlights how the meeting, and the opportunities for performing patchwork quilting during it, were facilitated by a collection of moving things. Before objects can be used, they must be amassed. Patchwork quilting has what Hägerstrand called coupling constraints (1970), which Schwanen notes require people "to join other human beings, materials and/or artefacts for production, consumption or transaction" (2007: 9-10). The ability to have a patchwork quilting meeting, and to work on 'Button Angel' bags, relies upon joining together and making co-present the necessary elements of practice. Since patchwork quilters, along with other enthusiasts, perform in many locations – at home, as well as in public and private spaces near home or on the other side of the world – amassing stuff is a continual activity. It allows them to perform in multiple, widely-distributed sites. Acknowledging the connection of travel and consumption is therefore crucial because, as this fieldwork story illustrates, objects' travel makes performances of leisure possible. In other words, the travel of leisure objects opens up opportunities for their consumption and use.

Following the things of patchwork quilting, however, shows that they are not always in use. Scissors are picked up, used briefly, and then set down again. Molly brought her sewing machine to the meeting, but never got around to using it. Consumption is therefore not only a moment in the course of a practice, but also a moment in the course of objects' movement. Their social lives consist of both use and disuse. Specific patterns of use vary: while sewing machines are used without being transformed significantly, the same is not true of fabrics, which change form significantly during the process of patchwork quilting. In some cases, using objects prevents their future use in the same practice. At the same time, however, appropriation can open up new uses – thread that was used to stitch a bag cannot be re-used in a new one, but the bag itself can carry objects to a future meeting. The transformation of objects through use opens up new practices to be a part of.

In this instance, distinctions can be made between types of objects and of travel. There are the objects used in the process of patchwork quilting – those that are elements – and there are the bags and containers that help to move them. The use of the latter set of objects makes the use of the former possible. In addition, this patchwork quilting meeting involved two stages – first a period of travel in which the women and their things were moving to the village hall, and then a period in which they were all relatively static – moving only within the hall, during the process of patchwork quilting. While doing and moving appear somewhat discrete here, with different sets of objects linked to each stage, the next section illustrates that this is not always the case. Doing and moving also overlap.

### *Performing on the move*

Patchwork quilters often perform at home or in local meeting spaces, but these are not the only places in which their practice is possible. Interviewees, when asked if they had ever performed somewhere unusual, often made reference to doing patchwork quilting while on the move – in planes, buses and cars:

*Susan:* it's a wonderful way to wile away ten hours on a flight, you know. By doing some nice, relaxing sewing.

*Sylvia:* if I go on the bus trip to a quilt show, guaranteed ninety percent of them'll have a bit of quilting in their handbag and they'll be quilting away on the bus.

*Marion:* I do take it with me when I go orienteering. If there's something that I really need to get finished, then I'll take, I'll cart it around with me wherever I go

Performing on the move, however, is not the same as quilting in one space because of the objects involved. That is, performing on the move rules out some objects and makes substitutions necessary. Some parts of patchwork quilting like ironing and machine sewing are simply not possible in planes and cars because of a lack of space and electricity. Small amounts of fabrics, needles, and thread, however, can easily be carried around to facilitate sewing by hand whilst on the move. Nonetheless, doing on the move is not just about gathering objects that are small enough. When sewing on airplanes, patchwork quilters must also consider the constraints of security regulations, which prevent the mobility of things such as scissors:

*Sylvia:* Well I usually take a bit of quilting on the plane when I'm going to Aus[tralia to visit family] because it's such a long flight. I panicked when this thing came in about scissors, you know you couldn't take scissors on the plane, but we got 'round that with dental floss. If you take dental floss it cuts the thread. And I find if you've everything in a little case, I usually take a bit of hand sewing or a bit of sashiko [Japanese embroidery] and if you've got it in a kit, and it's all in a bag in your hand luggage and you admit, you know if you say, 'Look I've got this sewing', . . . I find no problem.

Sylvia's ingenuity in addressing mobility constraints highlights the flexibility that exists when patchwork quilting. In some cases, objects can be substituted for one another, in order to create sets that have different potentials to be mobile. While fabrics or needles cannot be substituted, because sewing depends upon them, scissors can because it is their capacity to cut, and not their inherent form, that is important. As these examples illustrate, both the number and type of things that facilitate mobile performances are flexible. At times Sylvia and Susan, like Martha, travel with sewing machines and many other objects. At other times, they carry much smaller sets of elements. This flexibility expands the possibilities for multi-sited enactments.

Changing the place of performances therefore influences the set of objects that are consumed. If people want to do patchwork quilting whilst on the move, many of the containers and objects introduced in the previous section are useless. The sets objects must be matched to their context of use, and many things that can be used when static are no longer useful when on the move. Changes in the sets of objects used within performances, however, are not permanent. That is, unlike with the 'Diderot effect', where a change in one object leads to multiple subsequent

upgrades that transform the whole set (McCracken, 1988: ch. 8), previously discarded things are easily reclaimed when mobilities change. Patchwork quilters reclaim their irons and scissors after returning from their trips, and are prepared to leave them again when more opportunities for performing on the move arise. Neither is there endless flexibility in what can constitute these sets of objects. Each practice requires certain things in order to accomplish its aims, and when appropriate sets cannot be constructed, performing on the move becomes impossible. Therefore while forward planning and mobile technologies can make work or leisure practices possible while commuting (see Holley et al., 2008; Watts, 2008), in their absence performances and consumption on-the-move is impossible.

Given that multi-sited performances and performances on-the-move rely so heavily on assembling the right things, discussing consumption necessitates finding a way to discuss these mobile sets. The next section therefore proposes the concept of ‘mobile practice networks’.

### ***Mobile practice networks***

The concept of ‘mobile practice networks’ provides a means of discussing the multiple things and people that help to realise objects’ movement. While researchers have acknowledged that packing and unpacking bags is central to travel (Burrell, 2008; Hyde & Olesen, 2011; Peters et al., 2010; Walsh & Tucker, 2009), this process has not been explored in relation to the accomplishment of specific practices. In addition, though mobilities research has engaged in extensive discussions of networks, these networks have predominantly focused on either social networks that enable people to move and connect (Larsen et al., 2006; Wellman, 2004) or how spaces are themselves made up of networked mobilities and infrastructures (Bærenholdt et al., 2004; Graham, 2002). By highlighting instead the movement of objects in relation to practices, ‘mobile practice networks’ provides a different frame for understanding contemporary mobilities and consumption.

The phrase ‘practice network’ helps to highlight the interconnection of multiple objects and people in the pursuit of one social practice. While objects such as cutting mats are portable, capable of being moved around, their movement is realized in cooperation with other things – bags, cars, petrol and people. In this way, portability is actualized as a network phenomenon – objects and people are temporarily linked in a mobile coalition. As the examples above demonstrated, a practice involves different sets of objects that are used in different circumstances, and each set becomes part of a mobile practice network. There can therefore be more than one mobile practice network facilitating any one social practice. While these networks may be disassembled after arriving at a destination, during travel they depend upon each other and travel as a linked unit.

The qualifier ‘mobile’ highlights an interest in how networks realise portability. It also suggests that these networks of objects and people may have different relationships when they are no longer mobile. When discussing networks, Mol and Law suggest that taking one element of a network away is likely to bring disastrous consequences (1994: 661). For mobile practice networks, this is true during travel – if the car breaks down whilst transporting materials to a patchwork quilting meeting, it is a major problem. The relationships within a mobile practice network, however, change when it is no longer mobile – during the meeting, the car sits unused,

waiting until quilter and fabrics and machines need to be moved again. That is, these networks are formed in order to move, but have different links when the practice is being performed. Where use occurs on the move, networks take on the “relatively immobile” state of the “unpacked passenger”, where objects are separated from containers and available for use (Watts, 2008: 716). Before getting off the train, plane or bus, just as before leaving the village hall, they are packed up again to facilitate mobility.

In this way, mobile practice networks are distinct from the immutable mobiles that Latour discusses. Certainly, immutability is important to both. As Latour notes:

You have to go and to come back *with* the “things” if your moves are not to be wasted. But the “things” have to be able to withstand the return trip without withering away. (1988: 26)

This is just as true for the drawings and inscriptions that concern Latour as for the materials of patchwork quilting. If a cutting board buckles and cracks in transit, it will no longer be useful for cutting out fabrics. Yet what it is that needs to be immutable, and for how long, differs. While immutable mobiles such as maps remain “*stable* so that they can be moved back and forth without additional distortion, corruption or decay” (Latour, 1987: 223), mobile practice networks have only temporary stability. That is, they are intermittent accomplishments. Their networked relations are stable during travel, but after reaching new sites for performance they are deconstructed in order to facilitate use. Whereas Latour’s immutable mobiles facilitate “act[ing] at a distance on unfamiliar events, places and people” by “somehow bringing [them] home” (1987: 223), mobile practice networks facilitate performances in multiple sites by bringing leisure objects to them. People participate in these networks not so that they can act at a distance, but in order to act in the presence of another location.

Highlighting mobile practice networks not only provides a way of discussing the accomplishment of objects’ travel, but also provides a new perspective on ‘following the thing’. As Gregson et al. note, the extended lives of things have been given surprisingly little attention, despite Kopytoff’s early statement regarding their importance (2010: 847). They therefore focus upon what happens to things after leaving initial users, and show how examining rubbish and recycling demonstrates “that the thing is multiple, mutable and material; and that the thing and the commodity are but moments in the circulation and assembling of material” (Gregson et al., 2010: 848). Objects in this view become materials that are brought together and temporarily, partially, stabilized, before they inevitably come apart again (Gregson et al., 2010: 853). While this paper does not similarly examine the extended lives of things, it engages with the temporary accomplishments that make circulation possible. Instead of looking at the object itself as a temporary alliance of materials, which then breaks down into parts at the end of its life, the concept of ‘mobile practice networks’ acknowledges temporary accretions of materials. As things circulate, they can partially align with other materials that join them for portions of the journey. Like people donning and removing various garments as they move from indoors to outdoors, objects temporarily gain materials and containers that are then later removed. Attending to mobile practice networks therefore acknowledges that objects circulate only after additional materials and actors are assembled to stabilize and actualize their portability.

The next section illustrates and expands upon this understanding of mobile practice networks by returning to the case studies. In particular, it focuses on how mobile practice networks are made

– how patchwork quilters and bird watchers negotiate and stabilize them in order to facilitate future use. Looking at these networks demonstrates how the movements of objects and people are intertwined. It also suggests that enthusiasts are never simply performing their practices – doing so is inseparable from the work of moving materials.

### *Assembling mobile practice networks*

During lunch hours, and occasionally before work, Jon watches birds at the seafront near his office. Though telescopes are excellent tools for seeing birds at sea, most of Jon's bird watching involves binoculars because of the challenge of getting his telescope to work:

the problem is it's cumbersome, is a [tele]scope and a tripod, and I cycle to work. I'm not going to stick that on my bike for four miles, and if I stick it in my panniers, I can't get my sandwiches in there <laughter> you know, the practical elements of taking a scope to work are pretty poor. I will occasionally, I say if the weather's really horrific and it's looking good for seabirds, I will actually drive to work so I can take my scope with me. About twice a year maybe I'll do that. So I can get there nice and early and park my car and get my scope out.

This story is a striking illustration of two different configurations of mobile practice networks that facilitate the movement of binoculars and of a telescope. Both can be seen as responses to anticipated opportunities for use. Yet while binoculars form a successful mobile practice network with Jon's bike and panniers and sandwiches, his larger and heavier telescope does not.

Therefore, carrying it to work requires a different network assemblage and the accretion of different containers.

Jon coordinates these mobile practice networks, but he has limited power when doing so. In addition to limitations of key resources such as money and access to containers or modes of transportation, the objects themselves condition the networks they are a part of. As Jalas argues in relation to wooden boats, elements make people do particular things: "the fact that old boats are few, make[s] humans behave [a] certain way; corrosion and decaying wood place very concrete demands on humans and schedule their action and establish projects" (2005: 193). In Jon's case, the characteristics of his binoculars and telescope place particular demands on travel. When assembling mobile practice networks to move them, he recognizes and responds to their portability. Similarly, when Martha made a bespoke bag for her cutting mat, she took account of and responded to its specific portability requirements.

Assembling mobile practice networks then is something objects and people accomplish *together*. Lury suggests a similar point when discussing the role of objects in tourism. She notes that since objects can influence destinations and practices of tourists:

it may then be helpful to think in terms of the object–people practices of tourism, without automatically privileging either objects or people as the prime 'movers' in such practices, but, rather, to see their travelling–dwelling as mutually implicated. (1997: 77).

While Lury's concern with 'object-people practices' relates to their role in cultures of tourism, this concept also highlights how both objects and people shape their shared movement. Jon's telescope affects the coalition of telescope-car-sandwiches-Jon, just as his binoculars support the binoculars-bike-panniers-sandwiches-Jon network. Objects themselves – their dimensions, fragility and weight – place constraints on movement and thereby suggest more and less

appropriate containers. Thinking back to Martha's bespoke bags and sewing machine trolleys, it is clear that these containers do not eliminate all challenges of moving objects around, but their specific fit makes mobility easier. Mobile practice networks are flexible then, in that they can be made up of many things, but the objects involved determine more and less effective combinations. As Schatzki suggests, "objects and order not just are coordinated with, but also exert a causal impact on activities and practices" (2002: 107). In this way, things' portability actively shapes the assembling of mobile practice networks.

Assembling mobile practice networks involves not only adapting to things' portability, but also anticipating how objects might be moved. In some cases, taking account of objects' portability requirements can commence long before they are purchased. Jeff, for example, tells of how purchasing a telescope involved imagining its future mobility:

when I bought my second telescope, I was in a group and I was just trying everybody else's telescopes and asking them why they liked them. And then [I] decided, 'Well that's the one,' because it was a lighter weight and at that time we were doing foreign holidays flying, so a lightweight telescope and a lightweight tripod saved you a couple of kilograms in your luggage.

As Jeff illustrates, assembling mobile practice networks can begin with imagining the implications of different objects, and making purchases in response to these. This scenario building incorporates not only the objects themselves, but also modes of transportation. After retiring, Jeff and his wife made a commitment not to travel by air, and anticipating this allowed him to re-imagine and re-configure his objects: "this means now that I've been able to buy much heavier, better equipment". Anticipations, however, are not always accurate. Norma illustrates this when discussing one of her sewing machines:

And I bought myself this Bernina [a brand of machine] which I thought I would take to workshops, but even that's heavy too, so I'm beginning to think, 'Oh I wish I could get a lightweight machine' . . . Just to take to workshops, you know. They're not easily available, lightweight machines . . . there's a gap in the market I think. Somebody should market a really good lightweight machine that clamps onto the table because lightweight ones tend to slide around a bit.

As Norma illustrates, the work of assembling mobile practice networks can be complicated when anticipations of mobility are not accurate, or when convenient objects do not exist. Objects good for travel may not be good for use.

Occasionally, purchasing objects makes certain mobile practice networks unnecessary. Knowing the difficulties of moving objects like telescopes or sewing machines, enthusiasts purchase duplicates in order to facilitate immobility and eliminate the need for mobile practice networks. Jon, for instance, solved the problem of having to adapt his mode of transportation to fit his gear by buying a very cheap telescope that he saw at a local supermarket. Though not top quality, it is kept at his office and suits his occasional needs:

it is a piece of crap, really, but it's ideal for just, you know, half an hour. I can, you know, if something's just a mile further out [from the shore], I'll be able to tell what it is, now I've got this super little thing.

Multiplying the number of telescopes he owns allows Jon to leave his good scope immobile, while still facilitating multi-sited performances. Debbie similarly has two sewing machines – one for workshops, and the other a "big, expensive sewing machine, which never, never leaves that

table [in my sewing room]. Don't even lift it. Cause it weighs 28 pounds". Duplicating this object makes multi-sited performances easier. Buying multiple objects, however, requires financial resources, and so this option for easing the burden of mobile practice networks has obvious accessibility issues. Nonetheless, for those with the means, purchasing and spatially dispersing multiple elements can effectively support multi-sited performances.

As these examples have shown, the work of assembling mobile practice networks depends upon objects and people, as well as understandings of how to create successful (albeit temporary) alliances between them. Enthusiasts respond to their things, adapting networks to their properties and to anticipated forms of networked travelling. This work can commence long before things have even been purchased, as enthusiasts anticipate future performances and mobile practice networks. Acquiring multiple things can also open up opportunities for use by facilitating their immobility and making mobile practice networks unnecessary.

### ***Things and practices in motion***

As this paper has shown, following the things of practices sparks new understandings of the relationship between travel and moments of consumption. Exploring this approach has provided four key insights into how the movement of objects shapes consumption within practices.

Firstly, it showed that moments of consumption are multi-sited, and therefore depend upon prior periods of travel. That is, use often requires mobility. While this insight has already been demonstrated in relation to the operation of global commodity chains, it is similarly relevant for everyday contexts. If Jon's telescope formed a convenient mobile practice network with his bike, then he would have used it more frequently while bird watching at work. That is, even after consumers purchase goods, travel is important for understanding patterns of use. It is therefore important that studies of consumption don't stop tracing the movement of objects once they reach consumer/practitioners. Throughout careers of practice and objects' lives, moments of travel facilitate moments of consumption.

Secondly, this paper illustrated how future travel shapes the assembling of sets of objects. This process can start even before things are purchased, as enthusiasts anticipate the portability of goods and how they will fit into different mobile practice networks. Rather than matching objects according to cultural and symbolic correspondences (see McCracken, 1988: ch. 8), participants evaluate their contribution to successful mobile practice networks. In this way, exchange is affected by anticipated use and anticipated travel. Travel also shapes sets of objects in another way. As the discussion of performances on the move illustrated, different sets of objects are used within practices. At times certain objects are substituted for others in order to facilitate mobility through regulated spaces or to make performing on the move possible. These substitutions illustrate how the demands of networked travel, and of performing on the move, necessitate flexibility in the objects used in practice. Where flexible sets of objects are not possible, opportunities for consumption on the move disappear. This illustrates the importance of recognizing how consumption faces different constraints depending on the practices involved and the travel resources available to practitioners.

Thirdly, this paper demonstrated that objects not only break down, but also temporarily grow through accretions. That is, the coming together and breaking apart of mobile practice networks extends Gregson et al.'s insight into the temporary stability of objects (2010: 853). Objects not only lose materials at various points in their lives, but also gain them, as other things become allies for travel. Following one thing can therefore involve following a variety of things, as materials and actors amass to enable mobility. Even during periods of initial use then, it is valuable to see objects as in-process and potentially changing forms, as mobile practice networks support their use and travel.

Finally, following things has highlighted the cycles of use and disuse, mobilities and immobilities that characterise the moments of consumption within practices. While Warde noted that consumption is a momentary part of practices, more attention has often been given to use than disuse. Similarly, research on mobilities has often focused more on mobilities than immobilities. Appadurai's strategy of following things is therefore beneficial because it creates new pathways through these flickering stages. It allows researchers to follow objects in and out of different spaces, in and out of moments of performance, mobility and consumption. Following the things of patchwork quilting and bird watching has proven valuable because it highlighted the multi-sited chains of consumption that exist. Consumption occurs during performances, in relation to objects of practice that are used. But this consumption is dependent upon the often hidden work of assembling appropriate objects. That is, forming mobile practice networks involves another type of consumption – the use of containers and carriers, cars and fuel. The moments of consumption within leisure performances are therefore connected to the consumption within mobile practice networks, together forming symbiotic chains. The former are possible only because of the latter, and the latter would be pointless without the former. It is not enough then to simply study the consumption within one space or one practice. The links between spaces and practices become of central importance, and tracing chains of consumption moments offers one way of understanding the multi-sited accomplishment of everyday lives.

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