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Multilocality as a Way of Life

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THE TEMPTATIONS OF THE PROVISIONAL
Multilocality as a Way of Life

Johanna Rolshoven

The age of mobility has replaced the sedentary age. The increasing number of second or even third homes, both urban and rural, in Europe does not refute this assertion but is instead one of its indicators. In fact, increased localization and regionalization, and even the late-modern resurgence of the nation-state in an era of transnationalization, Europeanization or globalization, are both reactions to, and consequences of, the increasing number of forms mobility can take. The interdisciplinary 'mobile culture studies' approach adopted here takes movement and mobility as the starting point for cultural analysis (Rolshoven 2007).[1]

In cultural analysis, we understand human beings as the central protagonists of cultural and social change, and as cultural agents, they communicate, interact and receive. Cultural analysis studies how "people react to systemic changes and the way they reproduce them" (Katschnig-Fasch 1991: 62), though it is also "part, mirror and focus of processes of social change" (Becker & Merkel 1997: 27). The vocabulary generated by media theory is particularly suited for the cultural analysis of everyday life as it can represent communicative processes on several levels.

One can also say that cultural analysis studies connections and tries to grasp a "referential whole" from which "the individual cultural phenomenon derives its meaning" (Bude 1991: 107). Yet this is complicated, as culture itself is comprised of a dialectic between experience and action; that dialectic is individually experienced as the reality of everyday life. Cultural analysis owes to Roland Barthes

the methodological foundations of a "decoding hermeneutics" with whose help everyday practices can be deciphered (Lindner 2003: 63). This differs fundamentally from many social analyses that distinguish between "subjective structures of perceiving and judging, thinking and acting, and objective structures of classifying and creating hierarchies of attitudes and actions" (Bourdieu 2002: 142). In quantitatively-oriented social science analyses, social reality is a continuous, structured realm that can be studied using standardized survey methods and interpreted against the background of defined theories. Cultural analysis, on the other hand, sees a discontinuous, experiential realm that can be studied using varied methods appropriate to the object of investigation and that are embedded in complex interpretational connections (Alasuutari 1995). Contemporary cultural analysis does not tend to distinguish between subjective and objective structures, or between the continuous and the discontinuous.

A close look at local ethnographies and long observation of the forms European second homes take indicates they play anything but a secondary function. For this reason, we characterize such forms in terms of *multilocality as a way of life*. Multilocality is a strategy of the mobile actor, or as Kaufmann (2005) and Domenach and Piquet (1987) have argued, a cultural technique characteristic of mobile life-worlds that ensures a reversibility in the mobility of the everyday. It makes multilocality an act of connecting rather than an act of distancing.

Multilocality, as I use it, can be traced back to

Waldenfels (1985) and Miranda (1995), but its theoretical content corresponds to Appadurai's concept of locality (1996/2003), which he defines as actor-centred and processual. To him, it is a strategy and a practice of life-world contextualization and of a 'placing' of the self – a far more satisfactory definition, as it can encompass many of those who practice multilocal living but are otherwise excluded from the category of "second-home owners/users," such migrants, the children of divorced parents, commuters, seasonal workers, long-term campers, the users of garden allotments or even homeless squatters who occupy vacant summer houses during the winter.

This essay wishes to point to some of the life-world intentions that are connected to various forms of multi-residentiality, and begins with a sketch of a few examples of multilocality. These are then discussed with respect to the theoretical and methodological contexts of cultural analysis. We conclude with a discussion of what could be understood by 'multilocality' and 'cultural mobility' as empirically-generated terms. The aim is not to show common features of different phenomena but to emphasize differences between individual strategies and to situate them within their own reference systems (Rolshoven 2002).

From Roof to Roof: Strategies of Coping with Everyday Life

Sociologists have long described the dissolution or merging of the categories of work and leisure, as modern industrial society is increasingly replaced by a late-modern society in which work itself is dwindling. A division that was functional for the capitalist economy is becoming increasingly obsolete. Hence, too, research in cultural studies on temporary second residences indicates that we cannot speak of them as being used only for leisure purposes either, though this is how they are defined by government regional planning offices, administrators in charge of the real estate market, and those in the tourism sector.

This is one reason why the spectrum of multilocal ways of life has hardly been examined to date, though another is that the scope is as wide as the spectrum of individuals and social groups in a society. Examples of multilocality range from the well-known, discursively ritualised and classic forms of the summer holiday retreat (*Sommerfrische*) for the sophisticated, or the skiing vacation. Nearly everyone knows of the Pope's summer residence at Castel Gandolfo, as well as where their nations' presidents spend their summer holidays: the Russian president in Sochi, the French president in Fort Brégançon, etc. Or they know which summer castle their royal family resides in, the Swedish royals on the island of Öland, the British in Scotland, and many have seen pictures of the splendid chalets of the European nobility in Alpine ski resorts.

The more discreet bourgeois second homes in late modern times attract less public attention: the holiday home in Tuscany that belongs to a Munich teacher's family, the *Sommerfrische* residence on the Semmering of the Viennese professor of geography, the summer house on Canada's eastern shore owned by an entrepreneur from Lucerne. Even less discussed, documented or researched are the forms second homes of the "lower middle-classes" take – the apartment in Antalya owned by the Strasbourg grocer of Turkish descent, the Aargau locksmith's mobile home on a long-term camping site in Central Switzerland, the fishing cabin a male nurse from London regularly rents in Southwold on the northeast coast of England, the houseboat of a Copenhagen civil registrar who spends his summers on the waters of Zealand.

A multitude of still less well-known forms could be added to this list. There are many ways one can use those little wooden chalets that need neither construction plan, building permission, nor registration, and that can be acquired as do-it-yourself construction kits from local building supply stores, or ordered on the Internet. In France in 2006, small, attractive, one or two-room log cabins with names like *Rhubarbe, Vanille,* or *Cassis* cost between 4,000 and 7,000 euros. Or were you aware of the strong current demand for tree-houses? Or the interesting transformation processes going on in urban allotment gardens? Did you know you can buy mobile habitable containers that, in cities lacking space and apartments, can be moved from roof to roof, or city to city, by helicopter?[2]

Estimating the number of second homes in individual European countries does not reveal *how* a second home is used. Aside from that, gathering statistics, including on second homes, is a research instrument of the nation-state meant to serve government purposes, many of which ignore differences existing in society. Statistics also can provide no information on usage or interconnections, both of which are important for interpreting the function of second homes. Yet as the list above shows, second homes are found throughout all social strata, and ethnologist Françoise Dubost has even asserted that more than half the second homes in France are in the hands of workers, employees and pensioners living in modest circumstances (1996).

Our own Swiss micro-studies (Gyr & Rolshoven 2004) showed the opportunities and limitations of living and defining one's place in a given locale, and we argued that "being home in more than one place" is a democratic development not confined to one particular country. Indeed, having a more or less mobile lifestyle, whether more tourist-oriented or as part of residential practice, may reflect a strategy for coping with everyday life. In Switzerland, it is one that can be found among seasonal workers from Austria or Germany who work in the catering trade, students from the Tessin (the southernmost, Italian-speaking canton) who are studying in Zurich, Eastern European sailors working on Swiss freighters on international waters, or young people who move between different places of residence and reference systems.

Society in Motion: Movement and Spatiality
Multilocalists

We can begin by trying to circumscribe who multilocalists are, since they could be migrants, nomads, tourists, or simply contemporaries who are mobile for economic or private reasons. They seem to be the next stage in an already familiar pattern. If of bourgeois background, the second-home owner alternated between rural summer retreat (Göttsch 2002) and winter residence in a city apartment, mirroring the aristocratic pattern of having different summer and winter residences. In the lower strata, the practices of an agrarian population that moved between

summer and winter kitchens, or between *Maiensäss* (summer pasture huts at higher altitudes) and a farmhouse down below in the village, were mirrored by the movement of an urban-proletarian population between *cabanon* (Gontier 1991), *Heidehütte* (a cabin on the heath) (Brockhoff 1999), suburban *lotissement* (Abélès 1982) and metropolitan rented apartment.

But multilocalists are also the heirs of migration experiences of earlier generations. Migration, temporary or permanent, legitimised the notion of settling elsewhere for reasons of employment, kinship or origin (Urbain 2002: 297), which meant both influencing and being influenced by social roles, patterns and affiliations. Travellers, journeymen, and many professional groups, as well as pilgrims, migrants, or emigrants have obvious, socially recognized reasons to be on the move, both at home and abroad. Both historical patterns and the influence of migration mean that the duality or bipolarity of *main* and *secondary* residence, for the multilocalist in late modernity, is becoming increasingly blurred in both practice and representation. As a result, one finds both "double nesters" (Rich 2006) who try, with astonishing assiduousness, to reproduce the interior of their main home in their secondary residences, and "contrasters" who find an answer to their over-stuffed, highly decorated main residences by limiting the décor in their secondary residences to a minimum, practicing an aesthetics of the sparse. Or they may have entirely different life-styles in the two places, leading a kind of secret "double life." In a second home, interiors may be foreground or background, backdrops used to duplicate or hide the person, or a place to hone aspects of the self and play roles otherwise impossible in everyday life. Multilocality provides a space that makes new beginnings possible, and new opportunities to withdraw or participate in different milieus.

In the late modern era, people experiment with cultural techniques in which movement is a determining factor, and which allows them to organize their everyday lives between living, working and having time off, as well as shift between moving and staying put. The ambiguities of multilocal living

makes one receptive to Urbain's argument that this is ultimately a question of mental attitude or state (*état d'esprit*), and only secondarily a practice (2002: 314). Researchers from cultural studies take this a step further to argue that it is *both* attitude and practice, hence that multilocality is a *whole way of life*, in Raymond Williams's sense.

Lived Space

Augoyard, Barthes, de Certeau, Lefebvre and others made the concept of lived space a part of structuralist, semiotic and Marxist theories of space from the 1950s to the 1970s, and it was a central theorem in inter-disciplinary phenomenology in the generation before that (Rolshoven 2003). It is the individually experienced space that surrounds and moves together with the body, sense perceptions, and understanding. The concept of lived space inevitably links social space to the dimension of mobility, which means that everyday mobility is always cultural mobility in addition (Rolshoven 2000). In their everyday actions, people find their place in space, and develop or practice techniques of spatialization corresponding to their possibilities and social situations, or adapting to changing in social conditions. The experience of mobility is based both on historical memory and on the contemporaneity of the individual. Processes of acquiring mobility take place along a *long durée* axis, and are situated within an interaction between technical innovation, economics and socio-cultural dynamics (dubbed 'trialectics') that have feedback effects that change the balance of the system (Montulet 1996: 29, 31).

Research on everyday culture provides numerous illustrations of the practice of lived space, in the sense of inscribing oneself into the physical realm. The most virtuoso forms in contemporary western culture are probably the hip-hop and graffiti cultures of the young, which are both a form of culture and a life practice, as well as an indicator that youth belong to highly mobile cultures. In trying to locate their own identity, multi-cultural second and third generation immigrants turn their own physicality into art forms – against a background of lacking their own space(s) in the urban public realm (Rolshoven 2006a).

The marginalized urban poor are another example. Forced to be mobile in their everyday life, and increasingly homeless, they ask for recognition and visibility in the public realm and make their claims on space. Like the rich who stake their claim to status and upward mobility by gentrifying the inner cities, the public visibility of the poor represents social decline, neglect and a refusal to adapt. Yet they too want to belong and demand attention, and take up space in the inner cities where they are not welcome (Reiners, Malli & Reckinger 2006; Rolshoven forthcoming).

Transport and transfer technologies increasingly mediate how lived space is constituted as a social space (Rémy 1996: 149). The high degree of mobility and movement in everyday life not only concerns the work and leisure traffic sectors relevant in economic or social science terms, but above all have to do with everyday errands and routes, and the means of communication closely connected to them. They form the basis of urban everyday relationships.[3]

Representations of a Mobile Way of Life

From the perspective of mobile individuals, the duplication of spatial references is an everyday fact, and consists of a residential distribution of everyday life over several places. For the cultural agent himself, "mobile living" does not mean a lack of place or being rootless, or even a loss of "culture," but instead creates connections, ties, and is perceived as a consciously chosen enrichment. Whether it is regarded as a provisional solution or a long-term institution – the spectrum of individual or family judgments regarding living in several places is too broad to have the costs and benefits be interpreted as a constraint. A recent study, paradigmatic for mobility research and combining quantitative and qualitative approaches, speaks of network and "communicative" structures as the basis of complex socialities (Larsen, Urry & Axhausen 2006).

From the perspective of those settled in one place, multilocality is generally seen as something provisional, as "being on the move" or, more negatively, as "not having a place." These registered in national statistics as having spent most of their lives in only

one place are persons about whom information is gathered at a specific moment, but seen more broadly, they represent an ideologized and retrospective self-assignment of a generation which had been forced to move and whose ideal in life was a home of their own.

For multilocals, mobility is needed for residential duplication, and it is an immanent component and *fait social* of everyday life. That *fait social*, however, is divided, and not only by factors such as social status, age, sex, or cultural formation but also by the orientation toward being settled. For some, it is a goal they have aimed for or that they consider worth attaining. That can mean a dependable, cosy residence, or the realization of specific aesthetic, or having ideas as to the location, size and shape of a room, a flat, a house, or the geographic surroundings. For others, being settled is a stigma, a design running contrary to and unsuited to their way of living.

As a result, the provisional takes an intermediate position. It could be an existential and long-term dimension among those homeless who refuse offers to settle down. It could be a job-related second-home solution for commuters, or for those shuttling between jobs. It could also be a longed-for, though optional, form of recreational living, as in a weekend or holiday home.

It also could be a fixed element in life, for instance in historically shaped cultural forms of mobile living. In Europe, Jewish culture,[4] as well as the culture of other wandering groups, is an example of how – under pressure to be mobile – an ethos or a tradition evolved. Mobility becomes the stable element in the "nomadic existence" of Jews, for example (Raphaël 1996: 88f). The settled are made uneasy by the unsettled, the groups of vagrants, beggars, tradesmen, and migrant workers, who may have represented one-quarter of the European population in pre-modern times (Bade 2002; Sassen 2000). In the course of national identity formation during the nineteenth century being settled became the dominant cultural pattern and a cherished value among an aspiring bourgeois society (Leimgruber 2000: 174). Studies on migrant workers or hawkers, on conflicts between shepherds and peasants, of Sinti and Roma,

or on Jewish culture and history – as a metaphor of being without a home country and without a nation – illustrate a deep fear, literally unsettling or disturbing, the mobile evoke in the settled. In his classic study on the stranger, Simmel described the mixture of fear and fascination with which the local meets the multilocal: he comes and goes, and threatens to take your secrets with him! (Simmel 1968 [1908]) Forty years later, Lévi-Strauss (1977 [1948]) added that the stranger might even take your women with him – or they may be tempted to follow him.

In-between Worlds: The Criticism of Mobility

Our own studies indicate that it is mobility itself that makes it possible for individuals to profit from the complementarity of simultaneously existing places while leading an ordinary, everyday life. This justifies making mobility the primary object of observation in cultural analysis, though it also functions as a model for representing processes of cultural dynamics. The place-fixated paradigm of the modern age, however, must deny mobility as a way of life, since by its very structure, mobility stands in opposition to being settled. Only the empirically-oriented studies of migration "understand" the ambiguity of multilocality as something normal, for it is precisely in the place and space of the migrant that mobilities, and not settledness, converge (Tarius 1996: 94).[5]

In research on migration, push and pull factors were in the foreground: the interest was to regularize national-level strategies in host countries with respect to "integration" or "acculturation". How else can we explain the lacking reception for the innovative, plausible concept of the 'in-between world' (Hettlage & Hettlage 1982; Giordano 1984) suggested more than a quarter-century ago? Or the lack of influence of Bassand and Bruhlhardt's study (1980) of the significance of spatial mobility as a part of modern life-styles? Much like the strong pessimism in research on second homes in geography during the 1970s and 80s, and in current studies of commuters in economics (Specker 2005; Rolshoven 2006b), the belief in the culture-stabilizing effect of locally rooted life realities makes every transitory and mobile cultural phenomenon appear to be systemically

dysfunctional (Bourdin 1996: 37)! Non-settled man is "unreliable" in social and civil terms, and disquiets the settled – even in the late modern era.

The Nation State in Crisis, or "Estranging the Local"

The concept of a fluid trans-national space is now used to explain the dynamic connection of culture, identity and space, one that some cultural anthropologists call a "long-due normalizing discourse in view of mobile, multilocal life practices" (Salein & Hess 2004: 65). In the course of the de-nationalization of modern post-war democracies in Europe, it has become more possible to free the "home country" notion from its fixation on specific places in "regions of origin and residences" and instead to project it as "knowledge of migratory birds" (*Zugvogelwissen*) (Kohler 1991: 696f). The nation state – as a legal and cultural form – no doubt is in crisis to the extent that border-crossings by people, goods, finances and ideas are possible and taking place on a large scale.

We thus have good reason to ask the question: what actually distinguishes highly mobile contemporary man from the migrant? The answer lies in the reasons for wandering and the precariousness of social and economic situations. But why shouldn't the modern "nomad" – a term frequently used, though it does not quite link properly to the semantic field of "nomadism" (Attali 2003) – be assigned the power of relativizing? The modern "nomad" and the migrant are not really at home either "here" or "there" and thus correspond to the figure of modern urbanized man. Both are strangers and thus able to question the local certainties of the person who is at home in only one place.

The multilocalist, in whom the in-between space of everyday mobility affords distance to the *here* of the one as well to the *there* of the other place, also has the status of a stranger: "Being neither vagabond nor visitor, a genuine sedentary, 'eternal revenant' of the city, the intermediate status of this 'migratory' citizen is in fact an ambiguous state of residency for an indeterminate resident. The person is blurred and his social role undefined"[6] (Urbain 2002: 297).

The multilocal's social role is not only defined from the perspective of those who are "settled" but also results from a historically and territorially rooted experience, or put differently, to the symbolic relatedness to a place (Treinen 1965) or a regional identity (Schilling 1995). It takes for granted the unity of nation(ality), residence, workplace, and family model, embodied in residency permits and passports, proof of residence and proof of employment, bank account statements and reported marital status.

Yet the post-national multilocalist circumvents this ideology, and the new EU regulations are on his side. His multilocality becomes a technique to alienate himself, literally and symbolically, from the local, facilitating the cross-border transfer of himself as a person, as well as his identity, his goods and his money. It makes it possible for him to be there without having to be there (without corporeality) or to go somewhere else (in communicating, thinking, dreaming) without being there either. It fills him with *imagined knowledge*, even though it can have very real, experienced components as well. It also enables him to own or live in an apartment in one country without anyone in the other country knowing anything about it, or to work in one country without having the identity certification of the other country.

Multilocality therefore can be interpreted as a cultural technique, at times even as a subversive strategy, since it grants leeway within the nation-state's efforts to bind the individual. A foreign owner of a second home brings the threat of not being responsible to the nation he is temporarily or permanently in. These are "dilettante citizens", as Urbain wonderfully says, driven by a "search for detachment, for civic weightlessness, for loss of social gravity …"[7] (Urbain 2002: 304). They are motivated by all those reasons that in early modern times led the rural population to move to the city.

Multilocalities as Cultural Mobilities?

These reflections suggest that our concept of mobility needs to be extended, in part in order to contextualize it in terms of causalities and consequences, but in part to understand it as a cultural system of *motil-*

ity, *movement* and *directionality* (Montulet 1996: 17). Place-relatedness and mobility need to be seen as expressions of the varying conditions of social access individuals and groups possess, and also be linked to categories of experience and performance.

Supporting arguments come from research on migration, inasmuch as the mobility of migrants is defined as both a physical and a mental movement between cultures (Römhild 2004: 60): it is a pendular movement between places in one's own life as well. Migrant workers have integrated "multi-place perspectives" into their lives (Galloro 2001: 8f), and are specialists in the importing and exporting of knowledge, and in adapting it to their practices. This is *cognitive mobility* and stresses the active and interactive roles of the migrant as a cultural agent: "Migrating man moves around in the world and moves the categories of our thougt from their seemingly firm place, driving us to redefine his being a stranger" (Andrieu 2000: 122, 118).[8]

Thus, cultural mobility is one of the consequences and effects of movement and flexibility. It produces a knowledge of strangeness as a knowledge of socialization and experience. By having the experience of being a stranger while being at home in different places, a polycentricity of lived space is created, and the different "heres" and "theres" overlap.

Notes

1 Cf. www.mobileculturestudies.ch.
2 We are currently examining multilocal forms of residence as indicators for the aspirations of a society in motion. See the research project Multilocal Living at the Interface of Mobility and Settledness. Johanna Rolshoven & Nicola Hilti, Centre for Cultural Studies in Architecture, Dep. Architecture, Swiss Federal Institute of Technology, Zurich 2005–2008.
3 Figures for such "hypermobility of proximity" (Hervieu & Viard 2001: 44f) exist in national and supranational statistics on the means of mobility, mobile telephony and Internet use. It is more rare to find routes on foot, though a recent report on mobility in Switzerland found that daily distances covered on foot, like those of nearly all other transport means, have increased by more than 10 percent during the past decade (Bundesamt für Raumentwicklung 2004: 77; 2006).

4 There are few ethnographic studies of the ethos of mobility among Jews. See the impressive illustrated work by the French ethnologist Frédéric Brenner 2003: *Diaspora. Heimat im Exil*, 2 vols. Munich: Knesebeck.
5 See the outstanding "Projekt Migration". Ed. Kölnischer Kunstverein 2005. Cologne: DuMont.
6 Translation John Bendix: "Ni vagabond, ni visiteur, un vrai sédentaire, 'éternel revenant' de la ville, le statut de ce 'migrant' citadin intermittent est en fait un état résidentiel ambigue pour habitant incertain. Le personnage est flou et son rôle social indéfini."
7 Translation John Bendix: "quête de détachement, d'apesenteur citoyenne, de perte de gravité sociale…".
8 The Original in French is difficult to translate: "Le migrant se déplace et déplace en nous nos catégories mentales en nous obligeant à classifier son étrangeté."

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