

Anthony Ince

Autonomy, territory, mobility: everyday (geo)politics in voluntary exchange networks

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Introduction

“[W]hat would happen if we foregrounded the spaces across which people (and commodities, information, and capital) move, so that they become conceived of as something other than the residual spaces that are left “outside” society?” (Steinberg, 2009, p.489)

- 1 Territory and mobility are commonly positioned as counterpoised against one another, yet both have become increasingly prominent, with globalisation leading, at least in the Global North, to both greater mobility across the world and a growing obsession with maintaining the integrity of state territories (MacKinnon et al, 2011). In the transformations of political, economic and cultural life through uneven globalisation processes, tourism has become a central trope of neoliberal consumer mobility. Arguably, factors of neoliberal globalisation – such as labour mobility, and urban “hyper-diversity” and the destabilisation of place-based community – inspire a growing search for a sense of “authenticity” in both everyday life (Ince, 2011) and tourism (Rickly-Boyd, 2013). These practices are thus indicative of complex relationships between mobility and territory that are particular to the contemporary neoliberal era.
- 2 The origins of backpacking lie in 1960s countercultural movements, but the past decade or so has seen the emergence of a pervasive, institutionalised backpacking industry (Ateljevic and Doorne, 2000). In tandem, however, a raft of alternative mobilities has (re)emerged, enacting a raft of sometimes transgressive or legally contentious practices such as mutual aid, hitchhiking, illegal exploration, wild camping, and visa fraud (e.g. O’Regan, 2012). Not only do many of these practices operate through different logics, but they may also produce territorial relationships and mobilities on a different plane to their dominant capitalist-statist equivalents, representing what Söderström et al. (2013) term “critical mobilities”.
- 3 In this context, this paper investigates the critical mobilities of participants in two of the more formalised networks in this alternative travel field. World-Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms (WWOOF) is a global network of at least 10,500¹ organic farms, where travellers work in exchange for meals, accommodation, and a hands-on learning experience in organic food production. CouchSurfing is a global hospitality exchange network claiming 6 million users² that connects low-budget travellers with hosts for free accommodation, events, and gatherings. These are examples of what I term “global voluntary exchange networks” – globally-networked initiatives based on non-financial practices of mutual gifting, sharing and reciprocity. Through this, I investigate the extent to which they represent critical global imaginaries that transect territoriality and mobility in unorthodox ways. Do participants in these networks somehow undermine or transgress dominant tropes of (statist) territorial integrity? And how are their mobilities shaped by their engagements with the territories through which they travel? Moreover, do these transgressive mobilities hint at new ways of conceiving the relationship between territory and mobility?
- 4 Scholars exploring connections between territory and mobility (e.g. Steinberg, 2009) emphasise the importance of re-centring the spaces and practices of transit that are often marginalised. It is in these interstitial spaces and transitory practices where this paper is focused. However, existing analysis in this area is yet to engage substantially in the questions of self-management and agency, and after a discussion of emerging literatures on territory and mobility, the second literature section constructs an analytical framework drawn from anarchist theory to address this. I argue that *autonomy* is a powerful analytical tool with which to critically engage the statist-capitalist nexus of tourism practices in a territorial world system dominated by neoliberal mobility regimes. Autonomy, as a collective process of self-

management, foregrounds individual and collective agency among travellers. In proposing this agenda, I articulate an approach that is both analytically resonant with current developments in geography and oriented towards potentialities for social change.

- 5 Drawing from the accounts of WWOOF and CouchSurfing participants, the empirical sections explore everyday “mobility vectors”, formed by the intersection of multiple social relations with both mobile and territorial characteristics. First, I interrogate territorial imaginaries of participants, particularly regarding the shaping and rationalisation of mobilities by certain ways of understanding the world. Second, I explore how dominant mobility regimes shape participants’ routes and modes of travel, and third, how they seek to exploit territorial vulnerabilities and loopholes. The research points to an autonomous, self-managed “infrapolitics” that, although politically ambiguous, informs our understanding of the intersections of territory and mobility, and highlights tools that may undermine or transgress dominant forms of territorialisation.

Mobilities and territorialities “on the road”

- 6 This paper is situated in the intersections between recent moves towards a “peopling of territory” and the so-called “mobilities turn” (Cresswell, 2010a). First, following a trajectory initiated by Agnew (1994) and continued by a range of scholars (e.g. Antonsich 2011; Bauder 2014; Berg and Van Houtum 2003), it is necessary to acknowledge the lived, practiced, and constantly negotiated dimensions of territory beyond state sovereignty: territory is not simply an elite construct linked to calculable ownership of space (Elden 2010) but also an everyday, relational and socially constructed mode of viewing the world. Repositioning territory as an effect of practice rather than a state of being, Painter argues (2010, p.1094),

“territory is necessarily porous, historical, mutable, uneven and perishable. It is a laborious work in progress, prone to failure and permeated by tension and contradiction. Territory is never complete, but always becoming”.

- 7 As I have argued elsewhere (Ince, 2012), it is specifically through everyday negotiations, constructions and transformations of social *relations* that this « becoming » takes political form. As such, not only is territory a “peopling” (Antonsich, 2011, p.424) process that emerges from practices but it is also inherently social. It is a spatial outcome of the co-articulation of multiple practices intersecting with one another in a range of (politicised) collaborations, contestations, negotiations and reworkings. This may reflect traditional statist-capitalist territoriality but, equally, other territorialisations beyond the state-capital nexus too. Territorial practices are structured according to power asymmetries embedded within society, yet dominant territorialities are also entwined with grassroots praxis. We can thus think of territory as more of a variegated entanglement of differential territorialisations than a singular, sovereign phenomenon.

- 8 Second, the peopling of territory is somewhat related to growing interest in mobility among geographers. This so-called “mobilities turn” (Cresswell, 2010a) emphasises lived experiences and practices by foregrounding people’s movements through space. In tourism studies, the primary focus has generally been on the destination (Hall, 2005). However, studying mobility allows scholars to explore the liminal elements between origin and destination, thus “inverting foreground and background” (Steinberg, 2009, p.489) to tease out how official/formal spaces of tourism (hotels, resorts, sights etc.) are interwoven with counter-practices:

“When tourism is subject to changing constraints, prohibitions and taboos — and when the contours of state territory and national identity are vague, shifting, and in constant contest... — the potential for breakdowns, bifurcations, ruptures, or contradiction multiplies” (Rowen 2014, p.67).

- 9 Given this understanding of tourism mobility as a space of contestation and change, it is important to note that resistance and transgression are by no means limited to “alternative” modes of travel (e.g. Pritchard and Morgan, 2006; Berdychevsky et al, 2013). The relationships between territory and mobility are stretched by tourism, but alternative travel even more so. Following Söderström et al. (2013), the label “critical mobilities” can be used to describe various mobile practices – within and beyond traditional tourism – that are not consistent with

- dominant prescriptions of “acceptable” silos of mobility, with capacity to shed critical light on them, and offering insights into alternative configurations of mobility.
- 10 Much like territory, some (e.g. Cresswell, 2010b; Salter, 2013) consider mobilities scholarship to be too closely bound to a false dichotomy between the study of mobile subjects and the institutional structures and policies framing their mobility. Recent work in migration studies has thus attempted to “[displace] attention on borders to the crossers of borders themselves” (Hyndman, 2012, p.243). With the politicisation of migration by state securitisation, geopolitics scholars increasingly recognise how mobility is entangled with governance through intersections of policy formation and bodily movement (e.g. Hannah, 2006).
- 11 Critical mobilities thus operate in matrices of “mobility regimes” (e.g. Glick Schiller and Salazar, 2013). Mobility regimes are the intersections of diverse structures and relations (e.g. governance, culture, infrastructure, etc.) through which routes are blocked, facilitated, regulated and observed. Although a key purpose is the prevention of “undesirable” mobilities (e.g. undocumented migrants, drug trafficking), governing actors also seek to use mobility regimes to ease the passage of “desirable” mobilities (e.g. skilled labour) (Jensen 2013). Salter (2013, p. 8) has argued that these regimes and the mobile subjects they seek to govern should not be separate topics for investigation; rather “the agent and structures of mobility are co-constitutive”. This raises questions regarding how to analyse such complex intersections in variegated landscapes of governance and practice, leading Salter to propose the couplet of *circulation* and *assemblage* in order to view mobility as “a concerted or emergent effect without there [necessarily] being an underlying organizing principle” (2013, p. 12). By foregrounding the *ad hoc* and unpredictable nature of mobility regimes, we must problematise the singular narrative counterpoising mobile subjects and territorial governance, and recognise their co-production in politically-charged encounters.
- 12 If we see mobility as a field of action manifested in time-bound encounters, the temporality of tourism mobilities also surfaces. Framing them as *temporary* mobilities “allow[s] us to see tourism within a wider social context” (Hall, 2005, p.132), such as lifecourse or geopolitical change. In turn, given that backpacking and long-term travel often involve a range of mobilities (Germann Molz and Paris, 2013), they offer opportunities for insightful, critical investigation. While short-term tourism is generally perceived as a rupture from everyday experiences of labour and belonging (Hall and Holdsworth, 2013), in long-term travel, mobility itself becomes everyday.
- 13 Cresswell (2010b, p.17) notes that we need to explore the “constellations of mobility” that involve “historically and geographically specific formations of movements, narratives about mobility and mobile practices”. This is important in relation to the rapid economic transformations in backpacking over the past two decades (O’Reilly, 2006). The emergence of a capitalist backpacking industry, alongside more autonomous backpacking cultures, indicates how specific spatio-temporal contexts influence how people move and engage with shifting territorialities. In this sense, mobility can be seen as intersecting with lived, everyday territorialities through the “entanglement of movement, representation and practice” (Cresswell, 2010b, p.19).
- 14 Given the complex “topology” of contemporary mobilities, paraphrasing Routledge and Cumbers’ (2009) notion of “networking vectors” in social movements, we might usefully apply this geometric analogy to mobility, as *mobility vectors*. Appreciating the co-constitution of “direction” (the cartographic route) and various “magnitudes” (decision-making processes, speed, duration, means of transportation, relationships with places, etc.) allows us to envision mobility’s diverse spatio-temporal and political “geometries”. The term “vector” – rather than, say, assemblage or constellation – emphasises mobilities as dynamic, and foregrounds the ways in which qualitative changes can affect the nature of mobility, even if the route or mode of travel remains constant. However, with this shift in vocabulary, an analytical shift is needed too; one which emphasises the deeply-politicised intersections of lived practices and mobility regimes, while being attentive to the often-overlooked dimension of agency. Thus, in the next

section, I develop a theoretical framework based on anarchist theorisations of *autonomy* as an analytical and political basis on which to critically address the core questions of the paper.

Autonomy and everyday infrapolitics of travel

- 15 Scholarship on territory and mobility touches on agency, yet it is a largely implicit concern, and there remains relatively little engagement with broader questions concerning social change. Given the growing focus on everyday practices and relations in these debates, it follows that a central feature of addressing this gap must involve a rootedness in everyday life. Scott (1990) proposed the notion of *infrapolitics*; the “hidden transcript” of people’s everyday subversion, reworking and transgression that operates below the “public transcript” of official politics. For Scott and others (e.g. Shukaitis, 2009), unearthing the interactions, contestations and grey areas between these two transcripts can bring to light a range of autonomous, creative collectivities. Combining with Scott’s conceptualization of infrapolitics, I suggest that anarchist geography – particularly anarchist theorisations of autonomy – offers promising analytical tools.
- 16 Anarchists propose an immanent understanding of social change, based on the everyday prefiguration of alternative social organisation in the present, rather than “top-down” or coercive approaches (e.g. Springer et al. 2012). In this sense, it is as much a “theory of organization” (Ward, 2011a, p.47) as a revolutionary project. A concept that has gained some traction beyond the anarchist milieu is *autonomy*. Early theorisations advocated autonomy as an anti-authoritarian logic of self-organisation in order to “structure and articulate [radical political] practices and aims” (Pickerill and Chatterton, 2006, p.730). Autonomous geographies thus foreground “those spaces where people desire to constitute non-capitalist, egalitarian and solidaristic forms of political, social and economic organization” (ibid.). In addition, the same authors conceive of autonomy as “interstitial” – occupying the blurred border between mainstream society and the alternatives that they seek to prefigure. This emphasises quotidian practices and self-managed structures as the primary basis for social change. Since these early works, autonomy has become relatively well-known in critical Anglophone geography (e.g. Brown, 2007; Wilson, 2013).
- 17 From an anarchist perspective, Colson (2001, p.47-48) outlines the philosophical underpinnings of autonomy:
- “[A]utonomy refers to the forces constitutive of beings, to the capacity to develop in themselves the totality of resources which they need in order 1) to affirm their existence, and 2) to associate with others, and to thus constitute an ever more powerful force of life”.
- 18 Autonomy thus emphasises the collective agency of people to shape and change their lives and the world together, independently of state institutions, capitalist markets and “official” organs of civil society. The nurturing of this “constituent imagination” (Shukaitis and Graeber, 2007) operates as a means of developing workable alternatives to established modes of politics – and, in this case, travel. Autonomy thus contains both transgressive and creative dimensions, working in tandem to circumvent and confront dominant modes of power (Crane 2012; Pickerill and Chatterton 2006).
- 19 The dominant attitude of anarchism to territory has been chiefly linked to its critique of sovereign, bounded states (e.g. Price, 2007). As a result, given their anti-state and internationalist principles, few anarchists have explicitly engaged with territory as a potential spatial strategy for autonomous political praxis. However, this is not to say that autonomous practices do not utilise territorial tactics. Autonomy can therefore operate through both mobile flows and the territorial establishment of discrete autonomous spaces (Halvorsen, 2012; Ince, 2012).
- 20 Given these diverse practices, a central theme running through autonomous politics is an emphasis on everyday life as a site of both injustice and potential liberation. Anarchist forms of autonomy inflect their practices in the present with envisioned future worlds, not as an end-point but as a processual reinvention of everyday life (Ince, 2010). This is situated at the intersection of authenticity and fabrication, where we experience the full range of embodied, material forces as well as manufactured symbols and spectacles (Debord, 1995).

Thus, Lefebvre (2002, p.65) noted that everyday life is “neither the inauthentic *per se*, nor the authentically and positively ‘real’”.

21 The ambiguous position of everyday life, lodged between the authentic and inauthentic, establishes autonomy as a powerful analytical tool for examining the infrapolitics of travel. Long-term travel and autonomy are both extraordinary and everyday; involving multiple (counter-)territorialities and mobilities; critically distanced from dominant ways of being while still engaging with them; and driven by a quest for an authenticity that remains just beyond their grasp. It is not surprising, then, that we can see parallels to an autonomous framework in recent critical tourism scholarship (e.g. Prichard et al, 2011). The editors of the journal *Hospitality and Society* propose an agenda that values practices beyond the confines of capitalist, authoritarian, and otherwise dominant modes of hospitality. They advocate

“doing togetherness differently – of imagining inside and outside, stranger and friend, self and other, host and guest in new, radical and potentially dangerous ways” (Lynch et al., 2011, p.14).

22 Here, the authors unwittingly indicate linkages between the emphasis on the everyday discussed above in relation to territory and mobility, and anarchist autonomy. The relationships produced through tourism practices offer myriad possibilities to recast how we understand and enact travel, not simply by critiquing dominant currents but by developing alternatives. As already noted, Antonsich (2011) has argued that there needs to be a conceptual and political move towards “peopling” territory. Likewise, the anarchist Colin Ward has argued for a “peopled landscape” in which the agency of ordinary people is valourised in analytical and lived practices alike (Ward, 2011b). In a sense, then, autonomy is a “peopling” of critique.

23 In the remainder of the paper, I investigate the interweaving of mobilities and territorialities among participants in WWOOF and CouchSurfing, exploring the extent to which they produce genuinely alternative spatial configurations. By using the anarchist notion of autonomy, it is possible to undertake critical explorations not only of the territorial politics of critical mobilities, but also of their agency and the political lessons to be learned. In turn, this provides glimpses of how we might deepen critical understandings of the relationships between territory and mobility, as well as ways of imagining and operationalising travel.

Methods: autonomous travel research in practice

24 CouchSurfing and World-Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms (WWOOF) are two of the most prominent voluntary exchange networks. At a basic level, CouchSurfing is a global hospitality exchange network where people – usually but not always backpackers – use its online platform to stay in each other’s homes for free. On another level, CouchSurfing also promotes intercultural awareness and knowledge exchange through encounters of difference. It is thus a globally-networked non-financial economy based on mutual hospitality. Organised not through a single website but as a semi-formal federation, WWOOF is a global network of organic farms that take on travellers and interested others for between a few days and several months to exchange hospitality and labour. Like CouchSurfing, WWOOF is a non-monetary economy that seeks to foster intercultural encounters, while also sharing skills in organic and sustainable food production, low-impact construction, and other alternative lifestyle practices (Ince, 2015).

25 Although CouchSurfing has received academic attention (e.g. Germann Molz, 2011), WWOOF remains relatively under-researched despite its size and global reach. Existing studies of WWOOF tend to disregard its origins as a political-ecological project, preferring to focus on its tourism dimensions, especially in contrast to for-profit farmstay operations (e.g. McIntosh and Campbell, 2001; McIntosh and Bonemann, 2006). Studies of CouchSurfing have, in contrast, been more nuanced in analysing its position in the complex politics of tourism, sharing economies, and hospitality (e.g. Buchberger 2012). Existing academic work has hitherto maintained a separation between the two initiatives, whereas their common themes of alternative travel, mutual aid, and non-financial hospitality indicate that together they offer a rich area for study.

26 This research is part of a larger study³ of independent and autonomous modes of travel, of which WWOOF and CouchSurfing are two key case studies. A number of sources constitute

this research, including mobile ethnography (Büscher and Urry, 2009), in-depth semi-structured interviews with 59 travellers and hosts, and a public travelogue used principally for personal reflections. Interviewees were selected through stratified sampling to ensure both hosts and travellers were represented, as well as different genders and ethnicities where possible. Access to interviewees was largely through ethnographic participation, supported by a smaller group accessed via “snowball” methods. This dual method of ethnography and interview sampling allowed for effective cross-checking. Secondary research on websites and internet forums added a wider context to this primary research. Chiefly deploying critical discourse analysis, these materials have been accumulated during 22 months of fieldwork in Europe, Asia and Southern Africa (August 2011 to June 2013).

27 Approximately 4.5 months were spent on 8 WWOOF farms (2-3 weeks each) in Europe (5) and Asia (3), and I participated in CouchSurfing as a guest in homes or at events and gatherings, across Europe (11) and Asia (45). To avoid replacing local labour in mainland East Asia, where poverty is widespread and welfare systems often minimal, the two farms visited in this region were non-commercial. The distribution of research sites was rooted in a grounded approach, with only the start and end as clear markers. The route was thus developed deliberately on an informal basis, based on practical decision-making (e.g. infrastructure, visas) and interactions with fellow travellers (e.g. recommendations). In doing so, the research design explicitly sought to reflect the informal, *ad hoc* strategies of long-term travellers.

28 The majority of participants in the research originated from the Global North, were ethnically European, usually under 40 years of age, and most were from culturally middle class backgrounds. Very few, however, were wealthy, and the majority exhibited low economic capital but high social and cultural capital. My positionality as a researcher with similar traits to other participants is likely to have influenced my access to individuals and may have shaped their responses. The ethnographic dimension of the fieldwork helped alleviate some of these influences, as did my interview technique, often using provocative or naïve questions to trigger greater clarity of response.

29 The empirical sections of the paper draw from the fieldwork to explore the intersecting everyday mobilities and territorialities practiced and experienced by participants in WWOOF and CouchSurfing. Rather than emphasise the organisations themselves, in this paper I consider the practices of their participants in critical mobilities more generally. I do so by thematically analysing WWOOF and CouchSurfing participation in relation to three key themes: spatial imaginaries, negotiations of mobility regimes, and infrapolitics. In doing so, I critically investigate the extent to which participants are producing autonomous configurations of mobility and territoriality, and the political implications thereof.

Mobilising imaginaries

30 A central empirical theme concerned the ways in which traveller mobilities are shaped through imaginaries linked to varied understandings of movement across and between territories. Interviewees exhibited a certain “gaze” that constructed places and borders as traversable, or not, by differently-positioned actors. Participants generally expressed nuanced opinions about the territorial barriers and opportunities that presented themselves to backpackers and others. This was often, but not always, quite distinct from a traditional tourist gaze, recognising material conditions in shaping differential mobilities:

“I’ve seen people in really bad conditions... walking barefooted along the road. I don’t know where their destination is, or what their goal is, but they’re travelling. [...] But going back to backpacking kind of travelling, yeah, I think you do need to be privileged in a way” (Gary, February 2013).

31 This recognition of differential travel strategies in relation to material inequalities is a common theme among participants, tending to develop spatial imaginaries that are critical of dominant territorial understandings of the world. These imaginaries may develop out of participation, or vice versa, depending on a range of factors including background, upbringing and personal motivations for travel. Many participants expressed a critical view of what Agnew (1994)

termed the “territorial trap”, and disregard towards nationalism and citizenship was a recurring theme:

“The fact that you were purely by chance born in a certain place and not another place – why does that give you more rights to a piece of paper than somebody else?” (Amanda, October 2011).

32 Others, like Anders, “don’t like borders” (June 2013), and his description of his birthplace, Sweden, consciously avoids ascribing a definite, bounded identity to it. He explains that “all I know is I was born in a cold kingdom of ice and I ran away from it”. This sense of exodus, and rejection of territorial bordering, indicates a spatial imaginary that reworks a seemingly rigid state system into feelings and (non-)belongings. Yves, similarly, counterpoises territorial nationhood against democracy, declaring

“I don’t know any country living in a real democracy. So all these people all over the world doing some kind of popular education I think are in the process of building democracy. [...] That is kind of a first step, thinking “OK how can we live together? How can we decide together?”” (November 2012).

33 Yves positions his participation in a global network of groups practicing popular education (see Ferrer, 2009) as part of a process of democratisation beyond the territorialities of the state and national identity. CouchSurfing, for Yves and others, is part of a process of discovering that “everywhere can be your home” (Anna, October 2012), although this is partially reflective of a privileged viewpoint of those who have the economic, social and cultural capital to do so. Nevertheless, while most had a sense of local or national identity, these were rarely linked to territorial ownership, indicating a departure from the “territory-effect” that one might expect from place-based feelings of belonging.

34 The correlation between participation in autonomous travel practices and the disregard of state-centric territorialities and mobility regimes is strong, linked to long-term travel’s fusion of everyday and extraordinary. Crucially, since self-managed encounters are *collective* event-spaces co-produced by hosts, guests and others, they underline the power of autonomous sociality in travel. These unmediated encounters also had the effect of disrupting preconceptions. For example, Rita, a CouchSurfing host from the USA who self-defined as politically conservative, spoke of hosting Iranian travellers:

“I know that I have some prejudices. For example, America and Iran: not friends, you know (laughs)... but I had Iranian CouchSurfers come and stay and they were lovely, they were very, very different from how I perceived what they would be, and different from how the political club makes them seem to most Americans, but it was a good experience to have them and be able to welcome them” (December 2012).

35 The development and remolding of spatial imaginaries operates relationally to dominant territorial imaginaries and mobilities, rooted in people’s negotiation of the social relations that construct territory itself (Ince, 2012). Autonomous ways of thinking about “doing togetherness differently” provide the basis for imagining territory “in new, radical and potentially dangerous ways” (Lynch et al., 2011, p.14). The question that follows is the extent to which these counter-territorial imaginaries correlate with participants’ material practices. The next section investigates WWOOF and CouchSurfing participants’ engagements with mobility regimes in greater depth.

Negotiating mobility regimes

36 Virtually all participants indicated how mobile negotiations of territorial bureaucracies shaped where and how they travelled. On a basic level, it was clear to interviewees that their citizenship (usually Global North) allowed them to travel relatively freely. For example, Anders notes that “a Swedish passport penetrates most manmade borders” (June 2013) and Adriana compares her Canadian mobility to her Turkish CouchSurfing hosts:

“[A]ll the CouchSurfers we’ve stayed with have talked about... how lucky we are to have a passport that we can go anywhere with. Like really, really lucky. It made me really appreciate being able to travel!” (March 2012).

37 However, visa and other regulations still influence participants' deliberative processes and mobility vectors. Anna, a Polish hitchhiker and CouchSurfer, explains that "we didn't get a Pakistani visa so we had to get a plane to India, and we stayed 5 months in India" (October 2012). Likewise, when long-distance cycling, "[v]isas are a bitch [in Central Asia]... [Y]ou have a month in a country, of which you spend 2 weeks in the capital getting a visa for the next country" (Pascal, May 2012).

38 Relatedly, regional geopolitical and economic relationships can have profound impacts on travellers' mobility vectors:

"It's really expensive to fly in and out of Tel Aviv, so by flying in to Cairo instead, it made it a little bit cheaper. Anyway, so then I'm going overland [through] Sinai, to Palestine, hopefully spending as little time as possible in Israel because I don't like to support the Israeli government, but I'll probably spend one night in Jerusalem because it's so wonderful" (Dorothy, August 2012).

39 Dorothy's narrative entwines direction, speed and mode of travel with geopolitical and economic conditions, and her own ethical principles, and is a clear example of how mobility is a multidimensional vector of intersecting processes and dynamics of both "direction" and "magnitude". Alongside contemporary geopolitical conflicts, past events can also play a part in shaping mobilities, and Ethan, a US CouchSurfing host in Vietnam speculates that "I don't have so many American CouchSurfers unfortunately because of, I think, the stigma of the Vietnam War" (November 2012). To state that fewer US citizens travel to Vietnam due to this legacy is hard to verify, but it tells us how past territorial conflicts can impact on mobility vectors through perceptions of access.

40 Participants negotiated political landscapes in a variety of ways, often with unexpected consequences. Differential mobility vectors were co-constituted by elite policy frameworks and their own agency. For example, how CouchSurfing hosts Zac and Karl engaged the Thai visa regime for long-term residency is indicative of these unpredictable differentials:

"[W]hen I first came here, I was granted a Religious Affairs Visa, basically a missionary visa. I've no active qualifications, no kind of Bible college credits, none of those kinds of qualifications, I've never studied at those places, I was supposed to have those to get my visa" (Zac, August 2012).

41 For Zac, either a loophole in the visa system or a generous immigration official provided him with secure residency. In contrast, despite fluency in the Thai language and deep knowledge of the legal system due to his work, Karl's inability to obtain a higher tier of visa is precarious and stressful:

"[Y]ou are in this, quite a vulnerable situation [...] I'm driving or out on the bike, I'm always conscious that I'm not a native as such; my rights are different and I'm more vulnerable" (October 2012).

42 Karl's struggle with Thai immigration led him to feel not only legally but also *corporeally* vulnerable, affecting his place-based mobilities. In contrast to Karl's deep understanding of the legal system, some autonomous mobilities are threatened by a lack of understanding. Lucy and Adam explain how their geopolitical naivety en route to a WWOOF farm caused problems in traversing state territories:

"Lucy: This girl said "so have you got your Russian visas?" and we were like "no, we're Kiwis" and she was like "yeah, you might want to check that"! [...]

Adam: [...] I've been blown away with the fact that you actually need to get visas for all the countries. I assumed that everyone in the world was all holding hands and going "yay, come to my country!"

Lucy: [...] We don't have a single enemy country in the whole world" (September 2011).

43 Lucy and Adam's travel had hitherto managed to ignore geopolitics altogether, indicative of a Global North positionality that takes the right to free movement for granted. Their encounter with the Russian visa regime shattered their illusions about transnational mobility as simply reliant on the presence or absence of direct conflict between states. Lucy and Adam's encounter with such barriers is indicative of an unfolding understanding of mobilities and territorialities through lived experience.

44 Participants in WWOOF and CouchSurfing often have some level of economic, social and geopolitical “privilege” to exercise their mobility, yet, despite opportunities to travel within the parameters of the backpacking industry, they make a conscious decision to at least partially eschew it. This exposure to state territorialities, normally mediated by organised tourism operators and agents, produces immanent spaces of encounter, learning, and sometimes conflict (Ince, 2015). The rejection of capitalist tourism and backpacking mobility vectors among interviewees was rarely total, however, as most interviewees strategically dipped into and out of the mainstream according to certain mobility needs at particular points. For example, Anna recounts how, in Cambodia “we were buying tickets [for] buses because we couldn’t hitchhike” (October 2012), and Stephen notes that he would only consider joining an organised initiative “when they seem to offer something locally [that] we couldn’t do ourselves” (July 2013). This interstitial negotiation of both “alternative” and “mainstream” spaces hints at a form of agency among these travellers that may be constrained by territorial governance, but would be further narrowed in formal tourism channels. Recognising these restrictive and uneven mobility regimes, the next section investigates the nature, extent and implications of infrapolitical techniques deployed by WWOOF and CouchSurfing participants.

Autonomous mobilities?

45 In the above section, even highly autonomous travel strategies are heavily shaped by state-territorial mobility regimes. The power of these territory effects closes down possibilities for enacting the alternative spatial imaginaries discussed previously. However, a range of practices among participants are crafted in the interstices of state legal frameworks and can transgress territorialities. For example, in order to establish a WWOOF farm in Malaysia Greta’s partner brokered a legally ambiguous deal to secure a long-term visa:

“We have found a company that would give us the working visa, and then Max could still work in other companies... He just has to officially claim [that this is his workplace.] [T]here are very thick borders for us, which is always and always the visa thing” (October 2012).

46 Similarly, different employment statuses among CouchSurfing hosts in China helped them to leverage territorial visa regimes. Sebastian notes how formal employment as teachers afforded friends more stable immigration status compared with his own life of low-level visa fraud as a mobile, self-employed photographer with a tourist visa. However, he felt this came with a cost to friends’ quality of life:

“Most of my friends, they’re... teachers and they’re on a work visa here, but I’m blessed that I don’t have to teach because most people who I know who are teachers really don’t like teaching – it’s just an easy job for them [to secure residency]” (December 2012).

47 It is common for travellers to participate in legally ambiguous activities. Yet, what is noteworthy about WWOOF and CouchSurfing is how transnational networking through such organisations can function as collective means of counteracting often oppressive territorial securitisation by states. For example, faced with heavy restrictions on tourism arrangements that are not approved by the Cuban government, Sofia shares how she used CouchSurfing to address these issues:

“[B]efore I actually got to Cuba I wrote down some numbers of some people... and we arranged [in advance]: OK we’re going to be at this place, this time, this day” (November 2013).

48 Sofia used CouchSurfing as a tool for making contacts in Cuba and developing mobility vectors that partially circumvented this state mobility regime. Likewise, Sarah’s CouchSurfing experiences in Iran are suggestive of how it can facilitate autonomous practices on the boundary between tourism and social networking:

“[O]ther networking sites such as Facebook are blocked so Iranians use CouchSurfing as a way of networking, dating and travelling around their own country. We were told that the Iranian government was generally against Iranians socialising too much with foreigners and it is true that CouchSurfing groups in Esfahan and Yazd... have been targeted by the Moral Police” (June 2013).

49 However, these acts of transgression take place not only within “authoritarian” state territories but also more “liberal” ones. In another case, struggles with Bulgarian border regulations led

Sandy to “bribe one of the guards to get us through” (September 2011). WWOOF hosts and volunteers have also faced threats of legal action by the French state over their alleged use of “illegal” migrant labour. One farm (a vineyard) had previously left WWOOF due to joint pressure from local government officials and large, influential vineyards. Through informal word-of-mouth networks and returning ex-WWOOF volunteers, they continued unofficially until they were able to quietly re-join WWOOF several years later.

50 In these and numerous other examples of infrapolitics (e.g. hitchhiking, informal labour, barter, swapping, busking), travellers undertake critical mobilities that undermine the “official” silos of tourism and territorial regulation, while also making tactical use of mainstream avenues. CouchSurfing and WWOOF operate as hubs for facilitating autonomous, networked practices of information-sharing. These practices can critically engage not only with formal state mobility regimes but also socio-cultural norms that shape mobility vectors informally (Buchberger 2012).

51 Nevertheless, whereas autonomy in an anarchist sense presupposes some level of both political conflict and infrapolitical reworking, these practices largely represent only the latter, seeking to circumvent, rather than challenge, dominant territorialities and the order that they uphold. Yet, in doing so, two key effects are achieved. First, they contribute to grassroots forms of agency and capacity through autonomous structures and relationships formed independently of state and capital. Second, they indicate how such structures and relationships might become generalised – not only in temporary tourism mobilities but also diverse societal contexts – through transnational forms of everyday mutual aid and hospitality. What these infrapolitics fail to engage with, however, is the global inequality and uneven development that have contributed to many participants’ capacity to undertake such mobilities at all. It is in this respect that the missing or downplayed political dimension is essential to anarchistic analytics of autonomy.

Where are we going?

52 Returning to the core question of this paper, I now consider the extent to which participants in WWOOF and CouchSurfing generate mobility vectors that can inform other ways of understanding the territory-mobility relation. Since territory is produced through social relations (Ince, 2012), an interweaving of territorialisations and deterritorialisations through these mobile practices is apparent. This is facilitated by the predominantly *collective* and *self-managed* nature of autonomous mobility vectors – be that through word-of-mouth information, formal initiatives, social networking or reworking of institutional relationships. These infrapolitics represent a tactically and legally diverse and implicitly internationalist set of tools and tactics, only a selection of which have been outlined here.

53 While studies have shown how some of these tactics can also be observed in mainstream tourist spaces, the level of autonomy and collaboration in voluntary exchange networks arguably makes them more accessible and materially useful. Critical mobilities are not *always* disruptive to dominant territorialisations, but they indicate that the carefully circumscribed parameters of travel are subject to forms of “peopled critique” through autonomous agency. If we see anarchism partly as a “theory of organization” (Ward 2011a), we can identify fragments in travellers’ engagements with structures of authority. This is not to say that participants are anarchists, nor that their infrapolitical practices directly contest dominant territorialities; however, their relationships with one another and territorial institutions produce mobility vectors that can disrupt or transgress sovereign territorialities. Whereas many engagements with state territorialisation seek inclusion in its sovereign governance (e.g. seeking citizenship, refuge, capital accumulation, regularised labour), participants in voluntary exchange networks are fundamentally focused on circumventing it.

54 Those involved in critical mobilities seek to maintain distance without severing connections with the mainstream. In doing so, they are able to continue moving while also partially withdrawing from the for-profit tourism industry’s reproduction of state-centric territorialities and the formalised transit of paying customers through predetermined mobility vectors of accommodation, transportation and recreation. Rather than establishing a false dichotomy

that contrasts “alternative” and “mainstream” travel as two discrete units, I have noted the interweaving of these two dynamics through participants’ imaginaries and practices.

55 Participants in WWOOF and CouchSurfing performatively “invert” (Steinberg, 2009) the foregrounded mainstream and downplayed margins through their infrapolitical, peopled critique, whereby the “how” of travel is as important as the “where”. Their self-management of route decisions, mode of transport, speed, and so on provides opportunities to produce everyday counter-territorialities through their *ad hoc* mobility vectors, networking both through and beyond formal organisations and initiatives. These autonomous disruptions are indicative of a partially constrained mobility that pushes at the weak points in dominant territorialities, strategically operating through, with, against or beyond statist-capitalist logics and parameters depending on the specific context.

56 As noted, however, acts of infrapolitical transgression are not necessarily transformative, since they often rely on privileged Global North citizenship, relatively high economic and cultural capital, and are more likely to circumvent, rather than confront, dominant territorialities. Future research thus needs to interrogate the wider political-economic implications of such strategies. The appropriation of alterity into the status quo is well-documented, and the tendencies of capital and state to capture or institutionalise alternative projects is an ever-present danger (Vaneigem, 2003 [1967]). For example, profit-making businesses in the so-called “sharing economy” (e.g. AirBnB) are already threatening CouchSurfing, and speculative investors are threatening its non-financial integrity. We must therefore be aware of both the durability and integrity of autonomous practices, and how they can be exposed to powerful processes linked to capital and state.

Conclusions: autonomous territorialities, autonomous mobilities

57 In this paper, I have investigated the intersections of territory and mobility in the everyday practices of participants in two global voluntary exchange networks, WWOOF and CouchSurfing. The guiding question has been to consider the extent to which these travellers reproduce or transgress the established parameters of dominant mobility regimes and territorialities, and to consider the ways in which they may or may not be reworking their relations with them. In foregrounding the marginal spaces and practices in tourism mobilities, this paper seeks a shift in the way that scholars approach the politics of travel, seeking to engage with broader socio-political questions regarding social justice and popular agency.

58 Territory and mobility have enjoyed renewed interest in Anglophone geography, and I contend that the study of critical mobilities can shed light on how mobility vectors are shaped by – but can undermine – established territorialities. Crucially, I have deployed an anarchist theorisation of autonomy as the driving analytical concept for understanding both the spatialities and the politics of travellers’ mobilities. These practices are partly facilitated by the security and opportunity afforded by class differentials and Global North citizenship, and rarely seek to directly challenge these power relations and inequalities. Nevertheless, it is important to highlight the (constrained) agency of “ordinary” people to shape their dynamic relationships with dominant spatial orderings through collaborative infrapolitical tactics.

59 I have also developed the idea of “mobility vectors” to explain how dynamic and changing assemblages of movement, relations, imaginaries and social processes co-articulate through one another in mobile subjects. This requires attention to the agency of subjects. More than arguing that territory is an effect of practice (Painter, 2010), I add that these practices are themselves internally complex, changeable, and embedded in social relations. This is where autonomy emerges as a powerful mode of analysis and practice. As Colson (2001) argues, an anarchist view of autonomy embraces not simply individual agency to fulfill certain goals, but that this agency is augmented through association with others. Thus, individual mobility vectors – themselves complex and dynamic – are multiplied in complexity and “collective intellect” through association (cf. Kropotkin, 2009). It is arguably this urge for unmediated connection that scholars have identified in tourists’ quest for “authentic” encounters.

60 A thorough engagement with autonomy, then, may hold tentative answers for such a quest in an uncertain world, where established territorialities and emerging mobilities are being made, unmade and remade through one another; not only by elite actors but also everyday practices. This development of autonomy as a concept in critical tourism geographies might take place, firstly, in drawing from existing scholarship on political agency (e.g. in labour geographies); and secondly, to interrogate the factors impacting on how or if actors collaborate, share, and mutually support one another. Such a refocusing of tourism scholarship on the political lessons to be learned requires a conceptual shift, and I argue here and elsewhere (Ince, 2015) that anarchism provides a strong analytical toolkit for such a task, emphasising how collective self-organisation could be maximised among hosts and guests alike. In making this conceptual shift, it is possible to imagine and enact new forms of mobility and territoriality that are conducive to collaborative ways of living (and moving) through turbulent times and spaces.

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Notes

- 1 This number, compiled from publicly available sources, is likely to be higher, since some large WWOOF organisations (e.g. France, New Zealand) do not publicly state the number of member farms.
- 2 While there is a total of 6 million registered users, a large minority is not active, and many members' activity fluctuates over time. Thus, *official* membership is greater than *active* membership.
- 3 Much of the fieldwork was undertaken in collaboration with a co-researcher, Helen Bryant.

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Résumés

In this paper, I examine mobile territorial practices among participants in two global voluntary exchange networks. CouchSurfing (a hospitality network) and WWOOF (an organic farming network) are part of a broad spectrum of alternative travel economies rooted in global networks of mutual aid between and among hosts and guests. Using ethnography and interviews, I examine the extent to which the everyday practices and imaginaries of participants offer new configurations of, and relations to, mobility and territoriality. Mobility and territory have been conventionally positioned as opposed to one another, but recent work in geography has emphasised the contested co-constitution of movement/borderlessness and fixity/enclosure. The counter-territorial practices of Couchsurfing and WWOOF participants may, therefore, indicate ways of imagining and creating global collectivities and solidarities that counteract prevailing statist-capitalist territorial logics and relations. Deploying a critical framework drawn from the anarchist tradition, I interrogate the extent to which the autonomous “infrapolitics” of WWOOF and CouchSurfing participants offer alternative modes of living and relating globally.

Autonomie, territoire, mobilité : (géo)politique du quotidien au sein des réseaux d'échanges volontaires

Dans cet article j'analyse les pratiques de territorialité mobile de participants à deux réseaux d'échanges volontaires mondiaux. Le CouchSurfing (un réseau d'hébergement) et les WWOOF (un réseau de fermes biologiques) appartiennent au large spectre des économies alternatives du voyage, ancrées dans des réseaux mondiaux d'assistance mutuelle entre hôtes et visiteurs. À travers une enquête ethnographique et des entretiens, je me demande dans quelle mesure les pratiques du quotidien et les imaginaires des participants donnent à voir de nouvelles configurations de la mobilité et de la territorialité, et de nouvelles relations entre ces deux termes. La mobilité et la territorialité ont longtemps été opposées l'une à l'autre, mais des travaux récents en géographie ont insisté sur une co-constitution ambivalente des mobilités et des frontières, de l'ancrage et de la clôture. Les pratiques contre-territoriales des participants au CouchSurfing et aux WWOOF permettent donc d'indiquer des manières d'imaginer et de créer des collectifs et des solidarités mondiaux qui mettent en cause les logiques et les relations territoriales capitalistes dominantes. En déployant un cadre théorique inspiré de la tradition anarchiste, j'analyse comment les infrapolitiques autonomes des participants aux WWOOF et au CouchSurfing offrent des manières alternatives de vivre et d'entrer en relation à l'échelle globale.

Entrées d'index

Mots-clés : territoire, mobilité, autonomie, tourisme, anarchisme

Keywords : territory, mobility, autonomy, tourism, anarchism