
TouchOn/TouchOff

Mobile Media Art and Digital Wayfaring: Creative Practice Ethnography into Regional Working Mothers' Commuting Practices

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Abstract

This article reflects upon a mobile art ethnography that sought to understand and rethink some of the tensions around regional/rural experiences of the digital. Using creative practice-based methods, it provides new insights into this regional/urban divide through the motif of working mother commuter as digital wayfarer, a term used to define on/offline digital entanglement through the lived experience of quotidian wayfaring. It contributes to debates around mobile communication and mobile media studies by connecting conceptual analysis of mobilities and its relationship to regional commuting with a creative approach to movement, play and a sense of place. Much of the academic research on mobile media and internet studies stems from an urban focus rather than engaging in the unevenness of the online as is much of the experience in the rural region of North Central Victoria, Australia. Being a working mother commuter for almost a decade, the researcher also took an autobiographical approach to aspects of this project through the lens of digital wayfaring. The artefact used ethnographic case study methods and is a creative non/fiction sound and moving imagery work made using the mobile phone, within the context of the regional Vline train. Utilising sonified global positioning system (GPS) data as part of the soundscape, it addressed problems in the production of this train activity (i.e. work, creativity, play, rest and playbour) regarding social and material participation of the commute infrastructure and overlaid internet connections. It showed how multisensorial art-making highlights the commute to be a journey to and from – and of – work, within the ecology of the Vline train, and therefore provides new ways of perceiving this copresent, mediated and entangled digital experience.

Touching On

The commute begins quietly; a foggy overcast early morning – news updates read via mobile technology, social media feeds checked. There is the low murmur of podcasts, tapping keyboards, digital radio and music, amongst the constant hum and throb of the train engine. The silent and almost horizontal splattering of raindrops on the window distract us from the sound of the conductor who has a friendly voice; checking tickets and speaking about the weather, rail infrastructure disruptions as he moves through the carriage. He greets everyone as he checks the ‘Myki’ cards, we are all regulars. A marriage proposal is performed over the loudspeaker – the conductor is in on it – happy to perform his role, engage in clever banter. It feels like a growing mobile family. More people get on, and more and more.

This introductory vignette depicts the Australian regional commuting experience – its connection to place, patterns, people, weather, the shifting network assemblage and “the all-resounding oceanic in-between, the auditorium in common that alone made sense of place” (Carter 2019: 5). When researching the commute ritual of the Vline train, the diminishing parallel lines that make up the V-shape speak of spatial perspective, and also as metaphor for distance travelled. To *touch on* and *touch off* – also known as “tapping on” – using the electronic Myki card, implies agency and adds texture to the haptic sociality alongside various other tactile exchanges that occur within the journey.

Fig. 1: The inaudibility of landscape through glass #nofilter, 2017¹



1 All figure images in this article are courtesy of the author.

Regional commuters have the benefit of distance to enable clarity of thought and time to plan, engage and work towards an efficient and productive daily experience. Whilst mobile phone use operates where “space and place are networked, embodied, emotional, playful and messy” (Berry and Schleser 2014: 58), the constant disruption of intermittent overlaid location-based services (LBS) within regional Australia changes this context to a more fractured online experience. Alternatively, it can also be understood as restful offline experience, where spatial participation changes the atmosphere and generates movement towards the working day (see Figure 1).

This article discusses the creative practice research project *TouchOn/TouchOff* (2017), initially developed through Punctum Inc.’s Seedpod residency² with experimental composer Damian Mason, following a live arts performance *Commute* (2014) and mobile art film *#commute*³ (2015). The intersection of mobilities discussed within this article connect as the spatial rhythm of the commute, with the vocal and sonic patterns heard in the temporal space of the listener, who hears “places of solitude interspersed with a sense of crowded observations” (Voegelin 2010: 22). Working with soundscape, field recordings, sonification of GPS data, ethnographic participant sound bites and moving imagery (all made within the mobile phone), this research project generates new ways of understanding the regional commuting experience through digital wayfaring working mothers from the rural area of North Central Victoria, Australia.⁴

The Demographic Shift and Performing the Data

As the substantial increase in the demographic shift to peri-urban occurs in regional Victoria (Butt 2012; Buxton et al. 2014), this opens up social and material issues for how working mother commuters experience transport infrastructure, distance, travel and smartphone usage. Due to increasing city living costs, the related housing crisis and lack of employment in regional Australia, many families have opted to make the tree change whilst maintaining city employment. Reported growth projections of 10.1 million in 2051 requires that Victoria’s population be rebalanced from Melbourne to regional Victoria (Rail Futures 2016: 5). Questioning the impact on working mothers, creative practice methods become symbolic representations of this everyday experience; employed through soundscape and mobile filmmaking. The related artefact is multisensorial in approach and performs the movement of wayfaring through mobile media practice as collective, active and location-based forms of copresence.

2 See <http://www.punctum.com.au/residencies/seedpod>.

3 See <https://vimeo.com/136169724>.

4 TouchOnTouchOff artefact <https://vimeo.com/219157799>.

By highlighting the digital habits of working mother regional commuters, issues relating to childcare, parenting, play and well-being emerge. The cultural phenomenon of remote access work practice, and how mobile phones act as mediators for work, communication, play and rest, motivated this project. While important research by Gregg focuses on the role of technology in working outside the traditional workplace, there is limited investigation of long-distance commuting as a place of work, touching briefly on remote workers who have “the expectation of availability placed on them by management [...] even the solitude of the daily commute” (Gregg 2013: 154).

Through mobile media art-making, whereby “mobile media making introduces new practices, formats and forms signifying avenues for creative innovation” (Berry and Schleser 2014: 3), this moving workplace is activated, enabling a more nuanced understanding of the “long-distance (or ‘extreme’) commuting” (Butt 2012: 60) social network, and its manifesting conditions.

A previous commuting and demographic mobility study through the lens of Planning and Development research explores the processes of change in the context of the rural town, arguing that the “new fundamentals of attraction and place-meanings have created risks to the sustainability of the very features that have attracted a highly mobile new community” (Butt 2012: 76). More recently, a report on the future of Melbourne’s peri-urban region calls for Government to change thinking around rural development, asserting that “the reliance on low density urban growth on township fringes is locating large numbers of people in areas poorly served by Public Transport, often far from town centres” (Buxton et al. 2014: 15). The 2016 Australian Digital Inclusion Index states:

This ‘geographic digital divide’ is largely due to widening gaps in Digital Ability and Affordability, while the Access gap has narrowed. Regional and local initiatives are needed to address the Geographical Digital Divide (Thomas et al. 2016: 5).

An article in *The Age* also highlights this issue, written by a regional commuter who states “both 2015 and 2016 were horror years, where it seemed that half of peak hour services did not run at all. Some were replaced by coaches, others disappeared without a trace” (Lahey 2017: np). This narrative describes the difficulties of commuting with children during this time, due to lack of sustainable childcare in regional Victoria, where many mothers were forced to travel with young children. This again changes the atmosphere of place and social experience for working mothers (and other commuters); the lack of distance between mother and child creates a different set of anxieties and extends the activity of playfulness as a tool for “being” (Sicart 2014: 3) while cutting into precious recovery time needed to manage the oscillating roles of parenting and work.

TouchOn/TouchOff is a project that makes visible the digital habits of working mother regional commuters from rural North Central Victoria. By focusing on the working mother subgroup of regional commuters, six interviews were achieved

during a short timeframe, with an age range of between 30 and 45 years. I begin by discussing mobilities and its relationship to regional commuting with a creative approach to movement, play and a sense of place. I then outline the methodology, which deployed a variety of ethnographic methods within a creative practice framework, such as semi-structured participant interviews, observation and multisensorial methods such as mobile video, and sound making within the art-making. Consideration of data iterations used will occur followed by brief conclusive remarks. Within the mobile and constrained space of the Vline train, commuters playfully dwell, work and operate socially.

Fig. 2: Screenshot: TouchOn/TouchOff



Mobilities: A Lens for Creative Practice

Mobile communication has rapidly transformed the way we function in society. They elicit new forms of private in the public and public in the private (Crawford 2012; Bull 2017). They can be understood as part of broader societal shifts that reshape work, travel and parenting. Smartphones provide new ways for making and contextualising art (see Figure 2), and “redefining the boundaries of creative practice” (Hjorth 2016: 172). They are not only vehicles for communication – but also incubators for mobile media art.

This project begins with the question: How can creative practice provide new insights into understandings of the working mother commuter from regional Victoria to the urban centre of Melbourne? Imagination and work can be seen as forms of playful mobility; Bachelard suggests creative work as the by-product of the imagination being the “space of *elsewhere*” (1964: 184, original emphasis) and Sicart sees play as a “way of being in the world” that moves across reality, rituals, sport and work (2014: 3). de Certeau states: “There is something at once incarceration and navigational about railroad travel [...] it combines dreams with tech-

nology" (1984: 120). The intricate balance of dreams and reality is vital to the well-being of the working mother, who leans heavily on the mobile phone for timeout, support, play and as primary contact with children left behind. Many scholars have identified the important and paradoxical role of the mobile phone in parenting – for Matsuda they are “mom in the pocket” (2009: 67), while for Clark apps create new ways to monitor and micro-coordinate (2013).

Drawing on the notion of digital wayfaring whereby knowing is through an embodied practice of movement across online and offline spaces, this project brings the significant role of the regional into the debate. As demographic shift occurs from city to country, this opens up social and material issues that will be explored through three intersections of mobilities. By no means exhaustive of the concept, it allows thinking on the interrelation and intrapersonal considerations of the social field that is the Vline train.

Digital Wayfaring and Networked Listening

Movement through copresent material/digital experiences of the everyday can be known as “digital wayfaring” (Hjorth & Pink 2014; Pink & Fors 2017). As an evolving development of movement across space, Ingold writes about the “idea of life as lived along lines, or wayfaring” (2011: 13), where wayfaring is considered to be “the fundamental mode by which living beings inhabit the earth” (ibid: 31). Alongside geographic theories around movement and place (Massey 2005; Gallagher et al. 2017) Ingold asserts wayfaring to be crucial to inhabiting the world, where the “reticulate meshwork” (Ingold 2007 cited in Hjorth & Pink 2014: 45) is how networked based knowledge is accumulated.

Analyses by Hjorth and Pink forefront thinking on the visual – camera phone photography – and how it highlights an embodied copresent practice. Yet the extended use of sound and moving imagery capacities in digital wayfaring allows a reconsidering of these visually dominant concepts, an “invitation to listen to the social world actively with depth and humility” (Bull & Back 2003: 18). Sound philosopher Salome Voegelin eloquently posits, “a sonic sensibility would illuminate the unseen aspects of visibility, augmenting rather than opposing a visual philosophy” (2010: xiii).

When combining creative practice research with working mothers’ digital behaviour, the role of the digital wayfarer is fitting. Crawford (2012) further informs a sonic and locational awareness regarding the smartphone’s mobility, specifically the iPhone as a cultural bookmark of technological social change, and how it transforms the process of networked listening. Discussing this “iPhone moment” and its multisensory modes and significance, mobile media practice heralds a cultural phenomenon. With a focus on contemporary listening and multiple networked habits, Crawford iterates the iPhone’s central role as an active “listening station” (ibid: 213), whereby it operates both with its inbuilt sound-based

technology – microphone and software – and also as a portal for social media dialogue rather than focusing on the paradigm of visibility.

The motif of working mother commuter as digital wayfarer underlines tacit parenting and work practices. This research argues that digital wayfaring habits are particularly important for working mother commuters, in terms of staying connected and conceptually negating the mobility of distance, to maintain well-being. The affective layering on social media posting of imagery, sound and text assembles a digital narrative of everyday playful observations related to commuting (see Figure 3).

Fig. 3: Instagram → Facebook posts: Linear travel with child + selfie



Mobility as Social and Material Participation

As mentioned, touching on and off implies agency, choice to gain access into a system that enables travel, to move forward. These gestures also imply a haptic connection to the body. The atmospheric condition generated by this practice and the train infrastructure combines an affected embodiment and sensory movement within this space (Edensor & Sumartojo 2015). It allows de Certeau to consider the modes of social behaviour by drawing on the train as mobile actor, and the role of passenger/spectator, whom he argues to be immobile (1984).

Certeau's poignant chapter on everyday train travel claims that passengers exist within order – an organised system – and relates this idea of the train carriage to that of text movement across a page. The rhythms and semiotic structure of text may change to create shifting timbres and meaning but essentially nothing moves outside the page. Within this carriage, the outside is also immobile; travellers have “a speculative experience of the world [... where ...] they have only *trompe-l'oeil* movements” (ibid: 119, emphasis added).

This moment-by-moment change in perspective – the art of illusion – is an extended remix during the commute, and whilst the landscape through glass is indeed immobile, the movement of image gains momentum as it travels through multiple smartphone platforms. “Place is an important motivator for sharing camera phone imagery” (Hjorth & Pink 2014: 42) and when thinking about the social aspects of commuting working mothers, this type of play is amplified, where the “notion of assemblage is one way to help us understand the range of actors [...] concepts, practices, and relations that make up the play moment” (Taylor 2009: 332). By sharing content online as playful activity, mobile phone practice “shows new ways of mapping place beyond the geographical location” (Hjorth & Pink 2014: 42), helping us to further comprehend the regional commute of the working mother.

Yet the hindrance of erratic internet service changes atmosphere and along with it so too does the digital wayfaring. There is often a lag time in posting content online, making the overlaid Location Based Services (LBS) erratic. The everyday commute becomes more than a contemplative and “dreamlike” space between home and work with digital activity. Instead, a process-driven engagement occurs within the social: the interactions with the train, and the various other nonhuman and human actors in a constantly moving performance.

The social within the Vline can be understood as an active form of material participation between people and things (Suchman 2007; Marres 2012), where “thinking through locally formative interventions in the world, everyday routines, shared experiences [...] and sensuous dispositions” (Lorimer 2005: 84) generates social liveliness. It can be known even further, as “‘letting things in’ *transforms* a specific category of social and political life, that of participation” (Marres 2012: 1, original emphasis). To identify this more-than-human assemblage as performative phenomenon, we can acknowledge particular discords of local material participation that can be applied to the regional transport system – the Vline train, its design, rail infrastructure, commuters, conductors, and technologies.

This argument is driven even further, when Marres suggests mobility, or “normative instability [...] in objects [...] insofar as engaging objects are happening or ‘lively’ objects, their participatory capacities fluctuate” (21). This idea of flux proposed relates well to the study of working mother commuters and their mobile phone habits, where “the role of digital wayfaring is a constantly evolving and shifting part of a larger social narrative” (Hjorth & Pink 2014: 43), especially when bearing in mind ongoing infrastructure and digital disruptions.

Marres indicates the home is a “useful site to develop a ‘device-centred’ perspective on material participation, one that pays special attention to the role of technologies, settings and objects in the performance of public engagement” (2012: 22). The Vline train, which can be seen in some respects as an extension of home, allows a site of similar exploration.

The Vline train chairs are comfortable. The space enables a spreading out of home; it carries feelings of family within it. We are affected by digital disruption

and distance. We sleep knowing that if necessary, there will be someone willing to wake us before our destination (see Figure 4). “I’ve been shaken awake by fellow commuters many times!”, laughs participant Rose.⁵ We have levels of familiarisation made possible by shared goals and failures. The flurry of phone calls made to employers and the operatic groans of dismay heard when there is no mobile service, no email. The fall-back plans for children left behind, the mental load of anxiety as distance between mother and child increases – with this expanding atmosphere of distance comes an expanding sense of vulnerability, and fear for the child’s well-being.

Fig. 4: Researcher’s Instagram post: Sleeping on the train



While Matsuda describes how Japanese children commute alone on their journey to school and cram school, which “prompts *keitai* [mobile phone] ownership for an elementary school child” (2009: 66, emphasis added), it is the opposite in regional Victoria. Once distance from the dependent child is added to the commuting parenting equation, the mental load increases, control is diminished and the shifting intrapersonal conditions dominate. Success and failure in this mental trajectory move hand in hand with material participation, and when these roles are impacted, this affects, disrupts and changes the mobility of the commuting experience.

5 Participant names are not their own.

Sound and Listening as Mobile Event

Contemporary thinking around sound stimulates arguments around mobilities and the working mother commuter, providing the ability to rethink how we relate to the significance of our social experience (Bull & Back 2003: 4) and also to transform current embedded language (such as gender) into a more pluralised way of thinking (Voegelin 2010; Lane 2016a). Conceptualising sound and creative forms of patterning (Jefferies 2012) enable the situated Vline commute experience to be understood using an alternative to the object/subject dichotomy, with the invisibility and mobility of a process-based event.

Listening is not just the sensory action of the ear; it is also a mobile act of connection with the world, an act of embodiment; “sound as vibrating energy, carried by air and atmosphere is a phenomenon both heard and felt” (Dyson 2016: 412). It is not the object that we *see* that we connect with, but the sound of the object created by our listening observation (Voegelin 2010). This delay is what sets it apart from hearing, where “the task is to suspend, as much as possible, ideas of genre, category, purpose and art historical context to achieve a hearing that is the material heard, now” (ibid: 3). It generates the *now* and enables us to explore.

When listening copresently with an iPhone, stated by Crawford as a “complex technology of listening” (2012: 213), it is like a multiple version of now, ever changing. With the iPhone, we can listen to place and our body through various self-managing software applications “that focuses its users’ attention back on themselves [...] this can be understood as ‘biometric listening’” (ibid: 220). Or it can listen to the user; through networked listening via social media platforms, through (often controversial) tracking data activated through software, and even through the phone interface itself. Translating collected Global Position System (GPS) data into sound, as texture to the research artefact, is a creative way to highlight this complex issue.

Working with the multisensorial aspects of the mobile, the participant invents their own form of knowing and in turn, this generates thicker research into the regional commuting experience. Creative practice research has mobility across academic fields and disciplines as a concept of mobility itself, which will be further considered in the following section on methodology.

The Intricate Dance Towards Knowledge and Collaboration

By considering mobility in terms of a social assemblage – that is, a composition of the material, digital and sensory experience (Pink et al. 2015), I argue the importance to recognise that these experiences are intrinsically entangled with an online copresence that is somewhat erratic, leading to affective change in atmospheric conditions of the site being researched. Digital wayfaring via mobile phone usage of working mothers on the Vline train varies throughout these journeys, and from

individual to individual. One way to understand these practices in a nuanced manner is by using methods of digital ethnography.

Zara, a publisher for start-up mobile applications simultaneously listens to work-related podcasts whilst playing the repetitive and dopamine dripping mobile game *Candy Crush*. It is a balance that makes her feel kind of embarrassed – but she insists that it “relaxes my brain when I need to zone out and helps with my thinking.” Youth worker Fiona knows exactly when there will be enough internet connectivity to check work emails and field calls with clients; during “black hole” periods, she chooses to “make work notes and add reminders into my mobile calendar.” Relaxing into the journey of “timeout” from her family and work, small business owner Rose plugs into her phone to stream online radio, admitting to becoming “a little annoyed” when it cuts out, switching to a physical book.

Catherine works within an academic institution and hits the ground running, “frantically getting out the front door at exactly two minutes past the hour,” which is perfectly timed to catch the train and declares “some of my best working and thinking time is on the train.” Mandy, working mother of two laments on how “we’ve all become so reliant on always being ‘in touch’ and the anxiety provoked when ‘out of touch’, or in a non-Wi-Fi zone,” alluding to her Facebook usage, and checking in with people via social media and text message.

To better understand individual digital wayfaring experiences of the working mother commuter, this creative practice project involved “doing” research by employing and adapting ethnography. By combining ethnographic methods with creative practice research and being immersed in on/offline copresent modes, “following practices of meaning-making as people draw on their online experiences within offline contexts (and vice versa)” (Hine 2017: 22) is strengthened within the regional commuting experience.

There are unpredictable connections when combining ethnography and socially driven creative practice making; each discipline takes turns to direct the other, initially with the creative practice in primary position, then oscillating in and out of choreographed ethnographic research – an organic and lively research method design.

The interviews conducted covered topics that related to work, parenting and mobile device use on the train. The format provoked non/fiction digital storytelling in the form of short anecdotes, “as form and process so that it adds [...] to the gathering, identifying, marshalling, ordering or making of the happening of the social [...] explicitly incorporating the performativity of the research” (Lury & Wakeford 2012: 26). Digital ethnographic methods utilising the mobiles’ moving imagery capacity is a way to extend the mapping of the social field alongside participant audio interviews. Catherine considers the motion of travel:

There’s a definite rhythm to it, you know, the view shooting by, the rocking of the train, slows you down. The ambient noise I think is conducive to allowing you to unearth those

deeper thoughts that you may not have been aware of. Often, it's the solution to problems you've been mulling over, whether consciously or subconsciously.

The intermittent connectivity can also breed activity that is highly disruptive; as Zara explains:

Well the issue with the connectivity is difficult because a good half of the ride you've got no internet. That's why I would do all my downloading before I go; it's just too frustrating with connectivity dropping out to actually try to do anything that requires continuity ... I've been thinking about what is it that makes podcasts so compelling. I think that even the very over produced ones always have that sense of intimacy, and obviously having the experience of having headphones in, they're sort of sensory cancelling kind of things and then the train and the rhythm and all that kind of stuff, the two go together really beautifully.

The intimacy described here can be developed further within this site. The private everyday rituals on this public transport system – such as eating breakfast, putting on makeup, public displays of affection (see Figure 5) – can show us common themes about why people continue to be extreme commuters for such long periods of time. As stated by Hjorth and Sharp, it is “the emphasis on the commonplace, the unromantic and the quotidian that is probably the most notable aspect of ethnography” (2014: 131). These mundane rituals hold valuable knowledge that can be utilised when thinking about concepts such as intimacy, and how it changes the tone, and therefore affects our sense of place.

Fig. 5: Participant Fiona eating breakfast on the train



The Illusive Art of Data

Enforced by fluctuating and coexistent public and private tensions within the social, adding mobile digital technologies to the assemblage of commuting relates to how mobile technologies in public spaces “helps users manage their interactions with the public” (de Souza e Silva & Frith 2012: 69). Catherine emotively describes the domestic and emotional labour of getting her children ready for their day:

For me it's frantic getting onto the train, I wake up; I'm completely and utterly frantic, getting the kids ready and all the rest of it... once I hop onto the train it's like calm, almost like peace and contentment.

The embodied sigh of relief once Catherine sits down for her long-distance train commute, where the private occurs within the public alongside her use of mobile technology; checking on the children, doing work. As a female artist working with sound, my interest is in how these types of affective trajectories and blurring of public and private can be understood better through art-making, where “voice has become one of the most important tools that women sound artists use to generate thinking, being and/or becoming” (Lane 2016b: 102).

TouchOn/TouchOff is shaped by experimental and interdisciplinary mobile art-making, and through ethnographic methods. By embodying the attitude of playfulness (Sicart 2014) and enacting my own form of “creative misuse” (Farman 2014: 5), I worked with a variety of datasets – both raw and symbolic – to evoke a poetic response to the social assemblage of the Vline train, and the digital behaviours of working mother commuters. This involved a staged process using GPS data, field recordings, ethnographic interviews, sound bites lifted from the recorded interviews and semi-improvised soundscape making, sitting on a bed of moving imagery, all via the mobile phone.

Using *Runkeeper* – a free mobile biometric listening application with a built-in GPS tracker normally used as a motivational tool for individual workouts – was an active way to gauge the mobility of the train moving through place. The capturing and translating of data through the process of sonification is a form of visualising sound (also known as “audioisation”) meaning to use data as input to generate an auditory experience. Each of the three data types representing GPS – longitude, latitude and altitude – were translated to a Musical Instrument Digital Interface (MIDI) and allocated different MIDI notes. This MIDI file was passed through a sequencer to create the sounds and then run through Ableton Live music production software. “What is significant about sonic data art is its potential to affect a listener by engendering unexpected relations among events/sites/things” (Akiyama 2014: 29). This texture was one element of the soundscape assemblage, alongside semi-improvisational soundscape performance and mobile moving

imagery, articulating motion and routine in the journey to and from – *and of* – work.

The motif of digital wayfarer was often performed via social media and through the blurred haze of weather (see Figure 6). The artefact itself is an atmospheric and sometimes-abstract experimentation, a kind of non/fiction digital essay made up of field recordings, sound bytes, semi-improvised electronic composition and site-specific mobile phone moving imagery. Using real-time radio recordings – disrupted by erratic online capability – combined with sporadic sound bites and repetitive loops of sound, there is an attempt to evoke the interwoven narratives of the social network that is the Vline train.

Fig. 6: Triptych Collage: Researcher's social media posting through the haze of weather, via Instagram, Twitter and Facebook



The measured and affective nature of long-distance commuting lends itself particularly well to the use of slow, as a creative technique to amplify the affective atmosphere of the train moving through an immobile landscape (de Certeau 1984), and also as a way to represent the sense of inertia that commuters very often experience (see Figure 7).

Creative practice methodology incorporating everyday life should not be “viewed as something to be smoothed over, hidden or erased in the final piece of work but are instead viewed as productive and interpretive lenses into social worlds” (Jungnickel & Hjorth 2014: 138). Art that combines ethnography to generate thick data about the everyday social assemblage of place amplifies this mess of signals, material, technology, objects, people and things. As Farman stresses when describing the importance of making communities more visible, “mobile media are increasingly offering ways to tell stories that have often gone untold” (2015: 2).

The research attempted to perform the atmosphere of the train through digital storytelling, and it is through the lively research of these concepts that I am able to argue that creative practice research has a distinct mobility as both a concept of mobility and a mobile methodology unto itself.

Touching Off

The conceptual linkage of creative practice with mobile media speaks of the need to balance visibility with the aural, to assist in a rethink of current embedded language such as gender, and in helping to first define and then understand how regional commuting working mothers engage with the digital during this journey. Each train journey had subtle differences in light, reflection and ambience, and this alters the affective and atmospheric nature of place. The digital and infrastructure disruptions and the constantly changing social assemblage and material participation provide a holistic representation of what it means to be a working mother commuter in regional Victoria.

Fig. 7: Screenshots: mobile phone moving image experimentation of slow using light, weather, movement and reflection



Using creative practice methodology as primary research highlights the experience for the digital wayfaring working mother to be a journey to, from – and of – work, not just a means to travel to and from the traditional workplace. As an active workspace, the project's focus on mundane train activity emphasises the need to think about the social field more deeply, the affective experience of distance and the

fluctuating roles of digital parenting and work. Digital Ethnography and creative practice playfully augments dimension and thickness when thinking around the digital divide, whereby the performance of mobile media allows valuable stories to emerge as we move through the everyday.

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