MOBILITY AND PROXIMITY[1]

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In this paper I discuss just why travel takes place. Why does travel occur especially with the development of new communications technologies? I unpack how *corporeal* proximity in diverse modes appears to make travel necessary and desirable. I examine how aspects of conversational practice and of 'meetings' make travel obligatory for sustaining ' physical proximity'. I go on to consider the roles that travel plays in social networks, using Putnam's recent analysis of social capital. The implications of different kinds of travel for the distribution of such social capital are spelled out. I examine what kinds of corporeal travel are necessary and appropriate for a rich and densely networked social life across various social groups. And in the light of these analyses of proximity and social capital virtual travel will not in a simple sense substitute for corporeal travel since intermittent co-presence appears obligatory for many forms of social life. However, virtual travel does seem to produce a strange and uncanny life on the screen, that is near and far, present and absent, and it may be that this will change the very nature of what is experienced as 'co-presence'. I conclude by showing how issues of social inclusion and exclusion cannot be examined without identifying the complex, overlapping and contradictory mobilities necessarily involved in the patterning of an *embodied* social life.

MOBILITY AND PROXIMITY

1. WHY TRAVEL?

This paper is concerned with a very simple question: why do people physically travel? Even before the recent emergence of the internet and the mobile phone, there were many forms of communication between people geographically distant from each other. These 'modern' media of communication include the letter, the postcard, the telegram, the telephone, the fax, print media, film and the TV. Each of these communications can in different ways substitute for physical transportation. Elsewhere I elaborated four different kinds of 'travel' (over and above communication through the telephone, letter, fax, mobile): the physical movement of *objects* which are brought to producers or to consumers whose physical travel may be consequently reduced; *imaginative* travel, to be transported elsewhere through the images of places and peoples encountered on radio and especially the ubiquitous TV; *virtual* travel, to 'travel' often in real time on the internet with many others so transcending geographical and often social distance; as well as the physical, *corporeal* travel of people, as being 'on the move' has become a 'way of life' for many (Urry 2000: chap 3).

Given the significance of imaginative and virtual travel within contemporary societies why is there an increasing amount of physical, corporeal travel? Why bother with the risks, uncertainties and frustrations of corporeal movement? Will computer-mediated communications restructure the very relationship between 'physical travel' and 'communications' enabling, through the latter, much of what has only been possible through physically moving to *sense* the other person or event or place?

Elsewhere I suggest that the explanation of different forms of travel is centrally important within a reconstituted sociology that takes mobility as its central concern (see Urry 2000, for such a manifesto). Sociology has tended to focus upon those ongoing and direct

social interactions between peoples and social groups that constitute a proximate social structure. In this article I argue that central to sociology should be both the analysis of those processes by which such co-presence is only on occasions and contingently brought about, and the forms of socialities involved when one is *not* involved in ongoing daily interaction but with whom a sense of connection or belonging with various 'others' is sensed and sustained. One should investigate not only physical and immediate presence, but also the socialities involved in occasional co-presence, imagined co-presence and virtual co-presence. Indeed all forms of social life involve striking combinations of proximity and distance, combinations that necessitate examination of the intersecting forms of physical, object, imaginative and virtual mobility that contingently and complexly link people in patterns of obligation, desire and commitment, increasingly over geographical distances of great length.

The discipline of geography particularly researches such mobilities but it has not much concerned itself with the *social* bases of travel and of its likely transformations. The geography of transportation has regarded travel patterns as *necessarily* generated by work, household, family and leisure needs. Its most radical turn has been to show that new transportation structures themselves generate new patterns of travel, indeed that there is often a 'predict and provide' model of transportation forecasting and planning (Adams 1995; Whitelegg 1997). There is also a related 'environmental' critique of physical travel, arguing that the current hugely costly system of 'hypermobility' simply cannot continue indefinitely (Adams 1999). However, what this literature omits are the *social* bases of corporeal travel, and the present and future intersections and trade-offs possible between physical, imaginative and virtual travel. Indeed the critique of 'hypermobility' needs to examine just how and why there is an apparent desire to travel physically, a desire stemming from the significance of intermittent corporeal co-presence within social life.

The scale of contemporary travelling is immense, and this provides the context both for the environmental critique of 'hypermobility' and for the belief that travel has become so central to contemporary socialities that sociology neglects it at its peril. There are 663 million international passenger arrivals each year (1999, compared with 25m in 1950 and a predicted 1 billion by 2010); at any one time 300,000 passengers are in flight *above* the US, equivalent to a substantial city; a half million new hotel rooms are built each year worldwide; there are 31m refugees across the globe; and there is one car for every 8.6 people worldwide (WTO 2000; Kaplan 1996: 101; Makimoto and Manners 1997: chap 1). International travel accounts for over one-twelfth of world trade constituting by far the largest ever movement of people across borders. International *and* domestic tourism account for 10% of global employment and global GDP. And this affects everywhere, with the World Tourism Organisation publishing tourism statistics for over 190 countries (WTO 2000). There is more or less no country that is not a significant sender and receiver of visitors. Such mobilities are enormously costly for the environment, transport accounting for around one-third of all CO_2 emissions. There is a projected tripling of world car travel between 1990-2050 (Hawkin, Lovins, Lovins 1999).

Kaplan captures the socialities involved in such extensive mobility (1996). Because her family was scattered across the USA and across various continents, travel was for Kaplan 'unavoidable, indisputable, and always necessary for family, love and friendship as well as work' (1996: ix). Indeed she says that she was 'born into a *culture* that took the national benefits of travel for granted' as well as presuming that 'US citizens [could] travel anywhere they pleased' (Kaplan 1996: ix). Implicit in such a culture is the idea that one is both *entitled* to travel and indeed *should* travel. It ought be an essential part of one's life and is a fundamental human right. Prato and Trivero describe 'transport' becoming the primary activity of existence and a key marker of status; it is no longer a metaphor of progress when it

characterises how social life within households is so constituted (1985). If household members are regularly on the move then the distinction of home and away loses its analytical power. Indeed there are complex connection between forms of transport, particular 'family events' and the general sustaining of family life (see Pearce 1999, on the importance of lengthy car journeys for 'families'). People can be said to *dwell* within mobilities; bell hooks writes that at least for richer households of the 'west', 'home is no longer one place. It is locations' (1991: 148).

Moreover, households in developing countries also develop extensive mobility patterns as incomes increase. The proliferation of 'global diasporas' seems to have extended the range, extent and significance of all forms of travel for far-flung families and households. In the case of Trinidad Miller and Slater argue that one can really only be 'Trini' by going abroad, with about 60% of nuclear families having at least one member living abroad (2000: 12, 36). Clifford summarises the importance of resulting travel for diasporic communities: 'dispersed peoples, once separated from homelands by vast oceans and political barriers, increasingly find themselves in border relations with the old country thanks to a to-and-fro made possible by modern technologies of transport, communication, and labour migration. Airplanes, telephones, tape cassettes, camcorders, and mobile job markets reduce distances and facilitate two-way traffic, legal and illegal, between the world's places' (1997: 247; see Cohen 1997).

Travel occurs of course for many reasons. However, one unifying component is indicated by the term, *corporeal* travel. This highlights that travel is embodied and that as a result people are bodily in the same space as various others, including work-mates, business colleagues, friends, partner or family, or they bodily encounter some particular landscape or townscape, or are physically present at a particular live event. In other words travel result in intermittent moments of *physical proximity* to particular peoples, places or events and that in

significant ways this proximity is felt to be obligatory, appropriate or desirable. This article seeks to put the body into the analysis of the social organisation of mobility.

Boden and Molotch show how social life requires moments of physical proximity (1994; see Schwartman's research on the dynamics of 'meetings': 1989). I draw out some ways that 'co-presence' seems to make corporeal travel 'necessary'. I then examine some shifts in the nature of contemporary social life and consider the role that travel plays in establishing and sustaining pertinent social networks. Putnam's recent analysis of social capital is discussed and the implications of different kinds of travel for social capital are elaborated (2000). I examine what kinds of corporeal travel are necessary and appropriate for a rich and densely networked social life for different social groups. It is shown that virtual and imaginative travel will not simply substitute for corporeal travel since intermittent co-presence appears obligatory for sustaining much social life. However, I also show how virtual travel (especially via new mobile devices that travel with one 'on the road') produces a kind of strange and uncanny life on the screen that may change what is meant by 'co-presence'. I conclude by noting how issues of social inclusion and exclusion cannot be examined without identifying these mobilities and proximities. This article attempts to establish an agenda for future research noting that currently there is little empirical material that directly addresses these complex issues.

2. THE IMPORTANCE OF PROXIMITY

Boden and Molotch maintain that since 'co-present interaction' is fundamental to social intercourse, virtual travel will not significantly replace physical travel (1994). The modern world produces no reduction in the degree to which co-present interaction is preferred and necessary across a wide range of tasks. They analyse how such 'thick' co-presence involves rich, multi-layered and dense conversations. These involve not just words, but

indexical expressions, facial gestures, body language, status, voice intonation, pregnant silences, past histories, anticipated conversations and actions, turn-taking practices and so on.

In particular, co-presence affords access to the eyes. Eye contact enables the establishment of intimacy and trust, as well as insincerity and fear, power and control. Simmel considers that the eye is a unique 'sociological achievement' since looking at one another is what effects the connections and interactions of individuals. (Frisby and Featherstone 1997: 111). Simmel terms this the most direct and 'purest' interaction. It is the look between people which produces moments of intimacy since: '[o]ne cannot take through the eye without at the same time giving'; this produces the 'most complete reciprocity' of person to person, face to face (Frisby and Featherstone 1997: 112). The look is returned and trust can get established and reproduced (as well as perceiving insincerity and power; see Urry 2000: chap 4 on visuality).

Boden and Molotch also demonstrate how co-present bodies are actively involved in turn-taking within conversations, a tilt of the head indicating a willingness to receive an utterance. Likewise co-present people can touch each other, and there is a rich, complex and culturally variable vocabulary of touch. The embodied character of conversation is 'a managed physical action as well as "brain work"' (Boden and Molotch 1994: 262).

Such co-presence is located within time and space. Participants travel to somewhere to meet together, they each commit themselves to remain there for the duration of the interaction, and each uses and handles the timing of utterances and silences to perform the pertinent conversations. There is an expectation of mutual attentiveness and this is especially the case within the kinds of focused interactions known as 'meetings'. Such meetings are multi-functional, for making decisions, seeing how one is heard, executing standard procedures and duties, distributing rewards, status and blame, reinforcing friendship as well

as distance, judging commitment, having an enjoyable time and so on (see Schwartzman 1989).

Co-presence afford opportunities to display such attentiveness and hence commitment, and simultaneously to detect where there is little commitment in others. Conversations often begin with small talk, participants often protect the other in order not to embarrass them, and much loose talk involves helping and moulding the conversational flow. Co-presence is likely to be necessary to talk through problems, especially the unmediated telling of 'troubles'. Face-to-face conversations are produced, topics can come and go, misunderstandings can be corrected; commitment and sincerity can be directly assessed. Trust is something that gets worked at and involves a joint performance by those in such co-present conversations. By contrast letters, memos, faxes and email are less effective at establishing long-term trust relations especially over emotional, personal or financial domains of activity, partly because they are more functional and task-oriented (Boden and Molotch 1994: 263-7).

Research shows that managers in the US can spend up to half of their time in face-to-face meetings and much of their time lies in working with and evaluating colleagues through extensive physical co-presence (Boden and Molotch 1994: 272). This in turn reflects the apparent shift within organisations from the 'individual work ethic' to the 'collective team ethic' in which face-to-face social and leadership skills are especially valorised (Sennett 1998: chap 6). This is especially important in organisations that have been 'blown to bits' by new technologies (Evans and Wurstler 2000: 217, on the fluidities of 'deconstructed' organisations). The higher the position in an organisational hierarchy the more significant is establishing and nurturing 'complex interpersonal nets' - where unwritten and informal co-presence is most salient (Boden and Molotch 1994: 273, show the importance of face-to-face talk for crime networks).

Such nets also facilitate the 'inadvertent' meetings that happen because like-minded people from similar social networks are informally encountered - in certain parts of towns or cities, on golf courses, campuses, cafes, bars, conferences and so on. Where people live geographically distant from each other, then sites of 'informal co-presence' will be regularly travelled to, although most of the specific encounters are unplanned (such as the 'small worlds' of international conferences; see Lodge 1983). The importance of such informal encounters is connected to the growth in the number of telecommuters who may be able to live much further from their notional workplace that is then only occasionally visited (what we may call the academic-isation of the workplace!)[2]. This will in turn change the character of such workplaces away from that of the formal 'office' to that of a 'club' where informal conversation is the main activity, as Cairncross projects as a likely development for many professional employees (1997).

Overall the importance of co-presence 'limits the degree and kind of organizational, temporal, and spatial reshaping that the new technologies can induce' (Boden and Molotch 1994: 277). Boden also shows this in research on new technologies within the global futures markets (2000; Thrift 1996: chap 6). As the world financial system is progressively disembedded from place, so it necessitates ever-richer particularistic face-to-face relationships. The fragility of the symbolic communities formed in electronic money-space, mean that re-embedded intense meeting-places are necessary in order to cement and sustain trustful relationships. Boden summarises: 'Surrounded by complex technology and variable degrees of uncertainty, social actors seek each other out, to make the deals that, writ large across the global electronic boards of the exchanges, make the market. They come together in tight social worlds to use each other and their shared understanding of "what's happening" to reach out and move those levers that move the world' (Boden 2000: 194). Research on the

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[2] Such home-working may not necessarily reduce the 'amount' of travel, just as e-commerce may increase travel as individual objects have to be delivered to homes rather than shoppers going to the shops for multiple

City of London in particular also shows how its intense communicative role has not disappeared and if anything has been enhanced with increased mobility. Thrift maintains that the City: 'has become a global node of circulating stories, sizing up people and doing deals...much of the City's population will consist of visitors, but they are not incidental…They are part of the communicative commotion that places the City in the electronic space of global finance' (1996: 252).

This also connects with the increased tendency for prosperous young single people to prefer not suburban but city-centre living focussed around socialities within public spaces of bars, leisure clubs, restaurants and nightclubs. This gentrification involves a lack of distance between work and home so as to sustain the co-presence of 'tight social worlds' within city centres (see Zukin's pioneering account of *Loft Living*, 1988). Similarly, members of many other organisations do intermittently come together to 'be-with' others in the present, in moments of intense co-present fellow feeling. These moments of co-presence include festivals, conferences, holidays, camps, seminars and sites of protest (Szerszynski 1997). Such intense moments of co-presence are necessary to sustain normal patterns of social life often organised on the basis of extensive time-space distanciation with lengthy periods of distance and solitude (see Cohen 2000, on sociology's neglect of solitude).

Thus social life often appears to involve variously organised 'tight social worlds', of rich, thick co-presence, where trust is an ongoing accomplishment and which sometimes permits disembedded relations to straddle the globe. The issues raised by the analysis of such 'tight social worlds' include the following. How, when and why do such social worlds come together? How frequently does this have to occur? How much sense of obligation is involved? What power relations operate in the determination of the time-space location of such 'meetings'? How does trust get generated and sustained? How much do we simply seek co-

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purchases.

presence because the available means of transportation are accessible? Does the possibility of co-presence involve negotiation over whether or not corporeal travel will take place?[3]

Moreover, not only do people feel that they 'know' someone from having communicated with them face-to-face, but they desire to know a place through encountering it directly. To be there for oneself is critical. Many places need to be seen 'for oneself', to be experienced directly: to meet at a particular house say of one's childhood or visit a particular restaurant or walk along a certain river valley or energetically climb a particular hill or capture a good photograph or feel ones hands touching a rock-face and so on. It is only then that we know what a place is really like (see Lewis 2000, on the touch of the rock-climber). Thus there is a further sense of co-presence, physically walking or seeing or touching or hearing or smelling a place. Indeed it has been said that: 'the body comes to life when coping with difficulty' (Sennett 1994: 310). Putting one's body through its paces demands that people physically travel from time to time to that place of difficulty and subject the body to a direct encounter of 'facing-the-place' (as opposed to 'face-to-face'). Those places where the body comes to life will typically be geographically distant – indeed 'other' – to sites of work and domestic routine. These are places of 'adventure', islands of life involving bodily arousal, from bodies that are in motion, natural and rejuvenated as people corporeally experience environments of adventure (see Macnaghten and Urry 2000; Simmel 1997).

And there is a further kind of travel to place where timing is everything. This occurs where what is experienced is a 'live' event programmed to happen at a very specific moment. 'Co-presence involves 'facing-the-moment'. Examples include political, artistic, celebratory, academic and sporting occasions, the last being especially 'live' since the outcome is unknown. Each of these generates intense moments of co-presence. These events cannot be 'missed' and they set up enormous demands for mobility at very specific moments.

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[3] I do not consider here the corporeal travel of escape - *from* the co-presence of torturers, child molesters, violent partners, exploiters, sources of poverty, famine and so on. This would be another article on 'coerced mobility'.

Three bases of co-presence, face-to-face, face-the–place and face-the-moment, have thus been elaborated. Such co-presence does not mean that resulting patterns of travel are uncoerced and equal in their volition by each of the parties involved. The power to determine the corporeal mobility of oneself or of others is an important form of power in mobile societies, indeed it may well have become the most significant form of power with the emergence of awesomely mobile elites.

In conclusion to this section I elaborate the main bases of co-presence before considering in the next section the significance of such mobility for building up and maintaining social capital [4]:

- *Legal, economic and familial obligations either to specific persons or generic types of people*: to have to go to work, to have to attend a family event (wedding, christening, marriage, funeral, Christmas, Easter and so on), to have to meet a legal obligation, to have to visit a public institution (court, school, hospital)

- *Social obligations*: to see specific people 'face-to-face', to note their body language, to hear what they say, to meet their demands, to sense people directly, to develop extended relations of trust with others, to converse as a side-effect of other obligations

- *Time obligations*: to spend moments of quality time with family or partner or lover or friends

- *Place obligations*: to sense a place or kind of place directly, such as walking within a city, visiting a specific building, being 'by the seaside', climbing a mountain, strolling along a valley bottom

- *Live obligations*: to experience a particular 'live' and not a 'mediated' event (political event, concert, theatre, match, celebration, film [rather than video])

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[4] Actual journeys will normally involve a number of these bases of co-presence as well as negotiating the complex geography of often multiple locations.

- *Object obligations*: to sign contracts or to work on or to see various objects, technologies or texts that have a specific physical location (see Dant 1999: 55, on some related properties of 'objects')

3.MOBILITY AND SOCIAL CAPITAL

Societies are built up of different socialities that necessitate often extensive forms of mobility (Urry 2000). And because of the important need for co-presence, corporeal travel is essential for constituting social and economic life and is not an optional add-on. There are no simple ways to distinguish between journeys that are, and those that are not, 'necessary'.

Putnam's extensive research on the US reported in *Bowling Alone* shows that social inclusion depends upon complex, rich and multi-layered forms of social capital (2000[5]). Societies with high social capital are characterised by dense networks of reciprocal social relations, well-developed sets of mutual obligations, generalised reciprocity, high levels of trust in one's neighbours, overlapping conversational groupings, and bonds that bridge across conventional social divides (see Putnam 1993, on how social capital correlates with economic growth across different Italian regions).

Like Boden and Molotch, Putnam is concerned with the social causes and consequences of 'conversation' within everyday life. But while Boden and Molotch argue that the pleasures of conversation are so profound that virtual travel will not erode people's compulsion to physical proximity, Putnam laments how declining social capital within the US is already reflected in far less frequent face-to-face conversations. For Putnam co-presence is not fixed, as Boden and Molotch maintain, but has already declined since the 1960s. Putnam's research data bears out Wellman's claim that 'community interactions have moved inside the

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[5] See www.robertclark.net/civilsociety/index.htm, for extensive debate and references on Putnam although as yet there is little written on *Bowling Alone* published in 2000. See Foley and Edwards 1996, generally on the connections between social capital and civil society. I am less concerned here with the empirical details of

private home …and away from chatting with patrons in public spaces' (2001: 7). It is the household that gets visited, telephoned, emailed and, according to Putnam, receives those TV images that destroy conversation and social capital.

Putnam does not much elaborate on the mobility implications of his argument except in one chapter to argue that lengthy commuting car journeys reduce social capital (2000: chap 12). He shows that two-thirds of all car trips involve 'driving alone' and this is increasing; that the time and distance of especially solitary work commutes is rising; that each additional growth in daily commuting time cuts involvement in community affairs by commuters *and by non-commuters*; and that spatial fragmentation between home and workplace is especially bad for community groups that historically straddled class, ethnic and gender divides (2000: 212-4). 1950s and 1960s slum clearance programmes also destroyed those close-knit community ties that involved intensive short-range corporeal mobility (2000: 281).

Putnam strongly favours re-establishing dense social networks. He criticises the suggestion that more TV watching and the use of the phone and the internet should be encouraged so that people travel less and experience 'life on the screen' (see Turkle: 1996). Indeed he argues that the widespread growth of TV has been, together with generational change, the main cause of declining social capital. TV 'privatizes leisure time…TV watching comes at the expense of nearly every social activity outside the home, especially social gatherings and informal conversations' (Putnam 2000: 236-7). However, elsewhere it has been argue that TV provides a new window on the world through 'imaginative travel' across the globe that can extend social capital (Urry 2000: chap 3, especially on Heidegger's analogous account of early radio).

At the end of *Bowling Alone* Putnam outlines how to reverse declining social capital. One suggestion is that: 'Let us act to ensure that by 2010 Americans will spend less time

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Putnam's thesis and more with the specific links he does and does not theorise between social capital and mobility.

traveling and more time connecting with our neighbors than we do today, that we will live in more integrated and pedestrian-friendly areas, and that the design of our communities and the availability of public space will encourage more casual socializing with friends and neighbors' (Putnam 2000: 407-8). Now while most observers would echo these comments they are surely totally implausible. The development of American cities has been dominated by commercial interests which have found it profitable to locate housing (especially gated communities), (gated) workplaces, retailing (gated shopping centres), leisure (gated theme parks) and so on in separate zones; such zoning being characteristic of much urban planning. These zones necessitate extensive car-based mobility to get from one to the other. There have minor modifications of this through some city centre housing and apartments, pedestrianising city centres, and so on, but none have countered how co-presence in American life mostly requires *extensive mobility* to move from zone-to-zone even within quite small cities. And social capital in rural areas is even more dependent upon extensive automobility.

Putnam also ignores what his own practice as an academic shows, the widespread *growth* of longer range mobility especially by air, as conferences, holidays, family connections, diasporic relations, and work, are increasingly internationalised. The need for co-presence often involves those in other societies, what we might loosely call the 'globalisation of intermittent co-presence'. I noted earlier how Boden shows the importance of intermittent, deeply embedded co-presence for the maintenance of patterns of global futures trading, that increasingly 'small social worlds' are periodically re-constituted of those who otherwise live in geographically dispersed locations (2000). Certain kinds of social capital seem to depend upon extensive long-range travel. The global world appears to require that whatever virtual and imaginative connections occur between people, moments of co-presence are also necessary and that co-presence requires extensive travel (see Kaplan 1996).

For many social groups it is the lack of mobility that is the real problem and they will seek to enhance their social capital through access to *greater* mobility.

Thus *contra Bowling Alone*, social capital depends upon the range, extent and modes of mobility, especially vis-à-vis the mobilities of other social groups. Interventions that reduce, channel or limit such mobilities will weaken social capital and generate new forms of social exclusion. Mobility in general is central to glueing social networks together, while physical travel is especially important in facilitating those face-to-face co-present conversations, to the making of links and social connections, albeit unequal, that endure over time. Such connections derived from co-presence can generate relations of trust that enhance both social and economic inclusion. What is crucial here is how patterns of social trust can be extended and sustained in the absence of co-presence, or rather the quality and frequency of co-presence will determine the patterning of social trust that gets established.

In conclusion, then, to be a full, active and engaged member of a society sharing in its range of rights and duties stretches analysis beyond legal, political and economic rights to include socio-spatial access to participate within the main practices of one's society. Such participation in order 'to be admitted to a share in the social heritage' (Marshall and Bottomore 1992: 6) depends upon extensive social capital within localities and regions and within each 'society'. In particular, participation involves issues of transportation and mobility – namely, how to facilitate widespread participation in society by all social groups, especially ensuring that divisions of class, gender, ethnicity, age, do not result in significant forms of socio-spatial exclusion, of 'mobility-exclusion'.

Empirically, car-driving and its resultant socialities have become central to sustaining social capital across most societies across the globe (with half-a-billion cars roaming the globe). Hence, reducing the demand for driving is not innocent in its effects and may indeed undermine existing levels and forms of social capital. Car-driving has become a central

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element of social citizenship and many restrictions upon car-drivers are therefore massively unpopular and strongly resisted (as with European campaigns against high petrol taxes/prices in late 2000: Hodgson and Conner 2000; Sheller and Urry 2000a). And yet mobilities themselves can generate social exclusions that reduce social proximity, social trust and social capital (and see Putnam 2000: 143, on the declining civility *on* American highways).

I now go on to consider whether virtual proximities could engender some of the characteristics of co-presence and thus maintain social capital *without* the need for continuous increases in physical travel and especially of automobility that has especially detrimental effects upon the social capital of those excluded from that particular mode of corporeal mobility (see Sheller and Urry 2000a, on gendering the car).

4. VIRTUAL PROXIMITY

Two points will be initially noted. First, pre-virtual forms of co-presence should not be described as implying an integrated set of community relationships, which can then be compared with the airy, the fragile, and the tenuous relations of the virtual world. The relations of co-presence always involve nearness *and* farness, proximity *and* distance, solidity *and* imagination. Even communities based around co-present propinquity depend upon mobilities within a community's boundaries - such as walking along well-worn paths, driving or cycling familiar roads and so on (see Urry 2000: chap 6). And any such community is interconnected to many other places often through extensive routeways of corporeal travel. For example, Raymond Williams in *Border Country* is 'fascinated by the networks men and women set up, the trails and territorial structures they make as they move across a region, and the ways these interact or interfere with each other' (Pinkney 1991: 49; Williams 1988; Cresswell 1997: 373).

Second, we should not suggest that there could be a straightforward 'substitution' of virtual travel for corporeal travel as though there is a fixed amount of travel that has to be met in one way or another. Both the virtual and changing forms of physical travel will transform the very nature and need for co-presence (as well as intersections with changing object mobilities).

In section 2 the main bases of physical co-presence were outlined. I now consider virtual co-presence and ask to what degree, and in what ways, can it *simulate* one or more of the bases of physical co-presence. These are complex issues because such virtual travel is so new, there is a paucity of relevant research and virtual relations are strange and difficult to classify in conventional terms of presence and absence or power and status. We can note that there were thought to be 143m internet users in 1998, with 700m expected by 2001 and 1 billion by 2005[6]. Virtual travel is deconstructing organisations that were once huge centres of work and enforced proximity. Now organisational relations are most significantly made with consumers and this involves both branding and appropriate 'navigation'. Neither of these demands the physical unity and organisational hierarchy of large numbers of workers within a single 'co-present' site (Evans and Wurstler 2000: 107-9; Klein 2000).

Such virtual travel or digital sociality results from the apparent 'dematerializing the medium and conquering … space and time' (Benedikt 1991: 9). Cyberspace, 'feels like transportation through a frictionless, timeless medium. There is no jump because everything exists ... all at once' as we effortlessly leap across hypertext links (Heim 1991: 71). There is (more or less) instantaneity and simultaneity. Such virtual travel reconfigures humans as bits of information, as individuals come to exist beyond their bodies (see Sheller and Urry 2000b, on the implications for the 'private'). Persons leave traces of their selves in informational space, and can be more readily mobile through space, or simply stay in one place, because of

a greater potential for 'self-retrieval', for the retrieval of their personally information at another time or place. If people bank electronically, for example, they are able to access their money in many parts of the world; if they need to establish personal contacts with family and friends, they can do so from most anywhere in the world including at home; if people want to work on texts with others they can do so from any networked computer. People are able to 'plug into' global networks of information through which they can 'do' things to at least certain objects (especially with increasing bandwidth) and 'talk' to people without being present in any particular place, without their bodies having to travel. 'Persons' thus occur as various nodes in these multiple networks of communication and mobility. Their body's corporeal location is less relevant in these networks of person-person communication, communication that will be increasingly visual and hence may foster a kind of virtual 'telepresence' (Wellman 2001).

This virtual travel and the separation of the body and information results from the array of technical and instrumental means of communications being combined with humans. They have partially at least replaced the spatiality of 'co-present sociality' with new modes of objectified stranger-ness (see Bogard 2000, for a Simmelian reading of cyberspace). Such hybrids involve 'strangeness…a contradiction between nearness and remoteness, or mobility and fixation…Cyberspace communications, in a word, are strange – at the push of a button, territories dissolve, oppositions of distant and close, motion and stasis, inside and out, collapse; identities are marginalized and simulated, and collectivities lose their borders' (Bogard 2000: 28). As a consequence there are always now 'strangers' travelling in our midst, but they are often hybrid strangers since cyberspace not only dissolves the distances between people (the 'stationary wanderer') but, more importantly, between persons, machines and organic and technical systems. In the near future many sensory experiences as will be

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[6] See Evans and Wurstler 2000: 13-4; www.wsws.org/articles/1999/aug1999/www-a17.shtml. There are more

digitised, informationalised, exchanged and replayed (see famously Gibson 1984; Makimoto and Manners 1997; Bogard 2000: 33). Bogard proceeds to characterise such a collapse of distance as an impure or indeterminate relationship: the cyborg is neither the monad nor a dyad, neither private nor public, neither intimate nor distant (2000: 40). Virtual travel produces a kind of strange and uncanny life on the screen, a life that is near and far, present and absent, live and dead. The kinds of travel and presencing involved will change the character and experience of 'co-presence', since people can feel proximate while still distant.

Moreover, these bits of information themselves travel, tracking where people are, where they are moving to. Deleuze and Guattari suggest that there has been a recent shift in the west away from *disciplinary* societies à la Foucault, to societies of *control* where social relations are based upon numbers and de-territorialisation (1986). Bauman refers to these as 'post-Panopticon' societies organised around 'liquid modernity' (2000). Such smooth de-territorialised spaces result from computerised digitisation where what counts is not the barrier but the computer that tracks each person's position (Thrift 1996: 291). Bauman similarly talks of power becoming 'exterritorial', no longer bound by the resistances of space (2000: 10-11). In particular, quaternary relationships occur where new electronic media facilitate the obtaining of information about others, without those people knowing about the information flow or about the specific details (Lyon 1994, 1997: 26-7). Even the most intimate 'private' is no longer entirely 'personal' as information flows about each individual are recorded, monitored and instantaneously circulated, as power is liquefied and separated from territory (see Sheller and Urry 2000b). Many individuals can thus be tracked without physical, corporeal surveillance.

And finally, *intermittent* 'co-presence' is significant even within these virtual communities. They do meet up corporeally from time to time, dwelling together in a shared

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computers in north America than the rest of the world put together.

place (Baym 1995: 157). This physical co-presence can reinforce the 'magical, intensely personal, deeply emotional bonds that the medium had enabled them to forge among themselves' (Rheingold 1994: 237). Thus face-face conversation appears crucial for the development of trustful relationships even, or perhaps especially, within cyberspace. Koku, Nazer, Wellman argue on the basis of research on research scholars that 'Frequent contact on the Internet is a complement to frequent face-to-face contact, not a substitute for it' (cited Putnam 2000: 179). Other research in the US suggests that those who are on-line are also those most active in voluntary and political work within their immediate neighbourhood (Wellman 2001: 10). Their range of contacts may be predominantly local but much broader than those who are not online. Virtual travel would thus appear to promote more extensive local ties, *contra* Putnam, and hence more corporeal travel.

Indeed the distinction between on-line and off-line may gradually dissolve since 'many community ties are complex dances of face-to-face encounters, scheduled get togethers, dyadic telephone class, emails to one person or several, and broader online discussions among those sharing interests' (Wellman 2001: 11). Thus networked ties exist in both physical space and cyberspace. Virtual proximities involve multiple networks, where people can switch from one to the other, using connections from one network as a resource within another. This will be enhanced through the shift to a personalised wireless world and its furthering of person-person connectivity (via the general development of the 'mobile internet'). Each person links their *particular* set of networks and they may do so wherever they have appropriate access across cyberspace. Virtual travel offers various social affordances as cyberspace is transformed into multiple cyberplaces (see Wellman 2001, as well as Miller and Slater 2000, on how using the internet is becoming central to being a real 'Trini' in Trinidad).

In cyberplaces it is possible to sense the other, almost to dwell with the other, without physically moving oneself or without moving physical objects. Cyberplaces are thus hybrids, networks of bits of information as the 'person' gets distributed across cyberspace. Cyberplaces are focused on multiple, non-overlapping person-to-person connectivities that are interconnected with diverse modes of co-presence. Being on the screen involves a strange combination of proximity and distance, nearness and farness, what is virtual and what is non-virtual. How then does virtual proximity provide ways of simulating the nature of physical co-presence?

- *Legal, economic and familial obligations to either specific persons or generic types of people*: these will be mostly impossible to simulate and hence corporeal travel will continue

- *Social obligations*: this is difficult to simulate since it requires co-presence but it may be that the frequency of co-presence will reduce – that some conversation-work in cyberplaces will replace some co-present conversations

- *Time obligations*: impossible to simulate although the moments of such co-present time may be further shortened and made more intense with increased information, scheduling and monitoring of arrangements, journey times and so on

- *Place obligations*: increased visual and VR information about different places and their unique characteristics will probably heighten the desire to be corporeally present at the place in question and hence to travel there

- *Live obligations*: there is considerable possibility here of live mediated events on TV and the internet replacing attendance at many live events – indeed that the notion of what is 'live' will change to that which is mediated

- *Object obligations*: with much greater bandwidth the increasing capacity to send multi-media simulations of objects will mean that virtual travel can simulate corporeal travel,

although many new media of virtual travel and communication will simultaneously emerge

Overall there are significant possibilities of virtual proximity simulating physical co-presence especially with regard to proximities around objects and events. It may also be that virtual travel will make the compulsion to co-presence based upon social obligations less frequent. And the strange and uncanny 'life on the screen' will more generally change the character of social life. Miller and Slater argue that internet use in Trinidad 'has permeated all sectors of society' as hot, stylish and fashionable (2000: 27). We should regard: 'Internet media as continuous with and embedded in other social spaces, that they happen within mundane social structures and relations that they may transform but that they cannot escape into a self-enclosed cyberian apartness' (2000: 5). As virtual travel thus becomes part of everyday life so it produces a life that transforms what we think of as near and far, present and absent. It indissolubly changes the character of co-presence, even where the computer is resolutely fixed in place.

And new modes of transport and communication are increasingly converging and this will transform the requirements and characteristics of co-presence. Already the mobile phone with SMS text messaging is enabling the flexibilisation of people's paths through time-space, making arrangements on the road as to where and when to 'meet'. There are countless new means of communication emerging that are small, mobile and embedded within, or part of, the very means of mobility. These involve what one might call 'replicated co-presence' produced by mobile computers, palmtops, computer connections on trains and aircraft, cars as 'portals' to the net and so on (Gow: 2000; Sheller and Urry 2000a). These convergences of travel and communications further transform the character of co-presence that is increasingly 'mobilised'.

5. CONCLUSION: MOBILITIES AND THE 'GOOD LIFE'

In conclusion I consider some political implications of this analysis that has shown that while certain bases for co-presence can be met through virtual travel, many others cannot. The need for physical co-presence and corporeal travel would appear to be with us for a long time yet.

Moreover, if all other things were equal, then we could imagine that a 'good society' would not limit, prohibit or re-direct the desire for such co-presence. The good society would seek to extend the possibilities of co-presence to every social group and regard infringements of this as involving undesirable social exclusion. This is partly because co-presence is desirable in its own right but also, according to Putnam's research, there are other desirable consequences. It is he says 'good to talk' face-to-face since this minimises privatisation, expands highly desirable social capital and promotes economic activity, in mutually self-sustaining ways. A socially inclusive society would elaborate and extend the possibilities of co-presence to all members. Significant inequalities with regard to access to such co-presence constitute undesirable social exclusion. A good society would minimise 'coerced immobility' (as well as the many forms of 'coerced mobility') and maximise the conditions for co-presence.

However, this all depends upon the socio-spatial organisation of that society and of its linkages with other societies. And because of massive resource and environmental constraints, the right to corporeal travel to realise co-presence will never be unlimited. Co-presence always has other consequences. Thus it cannot be realised without extensive limitation, especially related to the transportation infrastructure as well as to more general socio-spatial ordering within different societies.

The following are then some of the crucial issues around mobility that this analysis of co-presence raises. First, if there are limitations upon proximity how should it be decided that

co-presence is more important for some social groups, for some geographical areas, or for some kinds of organisations, than for others? Which socio-spatial inequalities with regard to co-presence can and should be eliminated over time and which cannot or should not? How should decisions be made about new investments that will enhance the physical co-presence of some groups rather than others (say of commuters, or air travellers, or car-drivers and so on)? Is it possible to develop ways that differentially value different forms of movement for co-presence, such as family or work or education or pleasure or shopping and so on? Should we be bothered if virtual proximity, such as banking on-line and missing out on the face-to-face conversations with bank staff, replaces such conversations? Does the example of imaginative travel via the TV show that there will be less conversation and a weakening of social capital if more and more relationships are conducted on-line? How can we ensure that sufficient corporeal travel occurs so that the pleasures of proximity do not disappear as more people appear to live Putnam's dystopia of privatised 'lives on the screen'?

And finally, I have talked about corporeal mobility without considering the various *modes* of travel. However, there are huge variations, not only in the functional saving of time or the covering of more space within the same period of time, but in the pleasures and pain involved in such different modes of mobility. Travel is a 'performed art' involving anticipation and day-dreaming about the journey, the destination and who/what might be encountered on the way (Adler 1989). Travel also can involve entering an unbounded 'out-of-time' zone between departure and arrival. Travelling permits certain novel socialities, the domestic regime of the car, the solitary reverie on the plane, the business meeting on the train, the talk down the mobile while walking the city, the dangers to cyclists from untrammelled car use, and so on. Different modes involve very varied combinations of pleasure, expectation, fear, kinaesthetics, convenience, boredom, slowness, comfort, speed, danger, risk, sociability, playfulness, health, surprise and so on, as has been shown elsewhere with

automobility (see Sheller and Urry 2000a). Does it follow that travel to generate co-presence should be undertaken by all major social groups in the same fashion (such as on public transport)? How much should there be equality in access to the same *modes* of mobility, knowing that access to different modes are socially divided by gender, age, ethnicity, social class, dis/ability and so on? And how much is the choice of different modes of transport is itself dependent upon distinctions of social taste directed against those deemed to possess less symbolic capital?[7]

Thus the analysis of why people travel, and whether they should travel in the way they currently are, is to interrogate a complex set of social practices, social practices that involve old *and* emerging technologies that reconstruct notions of proximity and distance, closeness and farness, stasis and movement, the body and the other. These intersecting mobilities and diverse proximities are topics fit for a twenty-first century sociology.

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[7] I do not here deal with the huge environmental impacts of different modes of corporeal travel: see Whitelegg 1997; Adams 1999; Hawkin, Lovins, Lovins 1999.

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