

**Mobilities, mobile work and habitation: truck drivers and the crisis in occupational auto-mobility in the UK**

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**Abstract**

This paper examines the relation between mobilities and mobile work through a focus on occupational auto-mobility and habitation. Drawing on qualitative research conducted on truck drivers/driving in South-east England, it shows habitation emerges when driving stops; that it is cab-based dwelling-in-transit and nomadic dwelling rooted in and bounded by the material culture of the cab; and that it is displaced to the margins and interstices of the road and logistical network. The paper highlights the discomfort of cab-based habitation and its limits, in sanitation, and examines how recent developments at distribution centres intensify discomfort by denying cab-based habitation. These developments recast the relation of occupational auto-mobility and habitation through transient dwelling and are key to understanding the current crisis in labour supply in truck driving.

**Key words:**

cargo mobilities  
logistics  
distribution  
dwelling  
truck driving  
sanitation

## **1: Introduction**

This is the second of two companion papers that seek to open up the mobilities-economies interface through a focus on mobile work, specifically the occupational auto-mobility of truck driving. The first of these papers inflects the long standing interest in auto-mobility in mobilities research through a sharper economic focus and demonstrates how truck driving is being transformed by logistics in the service of supply chain capitalism (Gregson, 2015). The intent there is to economize the mobilities project. In this second paper I focus on what mobilities perspectives bring to an understanding of mobile work, and the significance of mobile work for the wider mobilities project. This is to put mobilities to work in understanding economies. Continuing with truck drivers and truck driving, I argue that the truck driver is part of a wider category of occupational drivers on whom contemporary life depends and central to understanding a crisis of occupational auto-mobility that is rooted in its relation to habitation, or dwelling.

Mobilities are founded on the mobile worker yet the category of the mobile worker has only begun to attract attention in mobilities research. It has been positioned through a spectrum of employment-related geographical mobility (Cresswell et al. 2016), defined as ‘frequent and/or extended travel from places of permanent residence for the purpose of, and as part of, employment’ (2016 p. 1787). This definition is such that the mobile worker is – if not every worker – at least most. It is therefore vulnerable to the sympathetic critique made early on in mobilities research that, if mobilities is everything, it is nothing (Adey, 2006). Correspondingly, I prefer to use the term mobile worker more tightly, restricting it to occupational labour mobility and movement and their relation to capital accumulation. In this reading, the movement of labour in time and geographical space is intrinsic to the doing of a particular job or occupation, and occurs at different scales and intensities. Of particular interest is a spectrum of occupations that require labour to be continually on the move across geographical space. At one end of this spectrum are the occupations of the kinetic global elite; at the other are those where movement is no less intense, but geographically far more

circumscribed – for example, home care workers, health visitors, trades people (plumbers, electricians etc) and couriers. In between are those who work in the transport and distribution/logistics industries. Their work is defined by the journeys and destinations of freight cargo and/or passenger routes and their geographical mobility can be international, national, regional or intra-regional.

Distribution and logistics are critical to the extended supply chains that characterise the global economy and that link producers to global consumers, mostly through combinations of land and sea transportation. Labour is involved at every stage but not all is mobile work. Taking maritime cargo as an instance, this entails the consolidation of cargo loads as unitised freight by logistics service providers, the movement of freight on merchant vessels, as bulk or containerised ocean-going cargo, and the work of stevedoring, although the combination of the shipping container and port automation has reduced the numbers involved radically (Herod, 1998; Cudahy, 2006; Levinson, 2006). Of these, only merchant seafarers are mobile workers, and here the work of Helen Sampson and colleagues has done much to illuminate this occupation (Sampson & Wu, 2003; Sampson & Schroeder, 2006; Sampson, 2014). On being released by ports, other mobile workers – mostly truck drivers and train crew - deliver imported goods inland by road and rail, or - in continental Europe - by barge. Inland freight deliveries are mostly destined for warehouses and distribution centres (DCs – Yu & Egbe, 2008; Cidell, 2015), where they are sorted by yet more workers for onward delivery to manufacturers and retail stores. In most parts of the world, road haulage by truck is the primary means to inland movement. Finally, another category of mobile worker connects retailers and consumers in the digital economy, couriers.

Mobilities research has only recently begun to turn its attention to freight, or ‘cargo mobilities’ (e.g. Cidell, 2012; Martin, 2014; Birtchnell et al. 2015). The focus has been on the shipping container as a counter to the emphasis on people and passengers. A consequence is that little attention has been

paid to occupational auto-mobility – or those who drive for a living. By contrast, considerable media attention has focused on the new ‘on-demand’ driver-dependent services; on the terms and conditions of work for the delivery driver in the digital economy, and on courier services (e.g. Stern, 2015; Heywood, 2016; Khaleeli, 2016). While these are the most visible forms of occupational auto-mobility to consumers they are not the most significant for the movement of goods. That role falls squarely on truck driving. A 2016 Report of the Transport Committee of the UK House of Commons stated:

‘Almost everything that people use in their daily lives has, at some stage, been transported by a [LGV<sup>(i)</sup>]. Most domestic freight [in the UK] is carried by road – 151 billion tonne kilometres of goods moved compared to 23 and 29 billion tonne kilometres for rail and water respectively’ (2016, p 5).

Stated thus, the dependence of contemporary mobilities on the mobile work of the truck driver is clear. This may change. Trials of driverless truck platoons began in continental Europe and the UK in 2016. Driverless trucks offer considerable advantages in efficiency, saving on fuel and emissions while increasing the productivity of vehicles that are restricted by the regulations governing driving time. Nonetheless, industry insiders estimate that it will be 2025 at least before these technologies are widely adopted and the job of the truck driver either eradicated or fundamentally transformed. So, in the interim truck drivers remain foundational to the movement of goods and to everyday life.

Yet there is a crisis of labour supply in truck driving that is now widely recognised. The same 2016 Transport Committee of the UK House of Commons, on enquiring into this labour shortage in the UK, identified this trend across the developed world. In the UK alone there is an estimated short fall of a minimum of 45000 drivers, with that projected to rise to 75000 by 2020, in response to the retirement of a predominantly older workforce and a failure to recruit younger people to work as LGV drivers. More telling is that the shortage is less of drivers per se and rather more of qualified

drivers willing to work as LGV drivers. The Transport Committee reports that ‘for every driver the sector needs there are three people in the UK with a valid license who could do the work but two in three choose not to’ (p 3). Occupational auto-mobility in the road haulage sector, then, is in crisis, but why?

In part the reasons lie with basic economics. Low pay is endemic, an effect of structural inequalities in the supply chain which exert the greatest pressure on those at the bottom of the chain (Bonacich & Wilson, 2008). In supply chain capitalism, where logistics is both a cost and a value-creating activity (Hesse & Rodrigue, 2004; Aoyama & Ratick, 2007; Coe, 2014) those who actually deliver the goods, as well as those who re-order them in warehouses and DCs, earn least. Zero hours contracts, agency-working and variants on self-employed piece work are all commonplace contractual arrangements for truck drivers (Belzer, 2000; Gregson 2015), as they are for workers in warehouses and DCs (Bonacich & de Lara, 2009; Gutelius, 2015). To this can be added poor work-life balance. Like other forms of mobile work such as train driving, seafaring or pilots and air crew, truck driving, and particularly long-distance ‘tramping’, has always been difficult to combine with domestic and family life (Hollowell, 1968; Sampson, 2003; Nóvoa, 2014). Now the 24/7/365 service offered by logistics providers and demanded by clients has created a situation in which drivers run out of driving time routinely but unpredictably and thus are forced to ‘over-night’ away from home (Gregson, 2015).

For contemporary truck drivers, however, absence’s effects are compounded by a dissonance in auto-mobilities. The effect of a life spent mostly on the road, away from home and governed by the regulations of occupational driving, means not only that drivers spend long periods away from a family home but also that the limited time that is spent at home ought to be rest time and time away from driving. When doing the family requires car-based auto mobility, as it so frequently does in contemporary social life, this occupational requirement can be challenging. The domestic lives of

truck drivers and their families, then, can be seen to be casualties of clashing mobilities – of people and goods, and of their very different auto-mobilities. It is perhaps little wonder then that many drivers are rejecting this life, effectively refusing to continue working as LGV drivers, whilst young people fail to see such forms of driving as an attractive working option.

Yet, to see things exclusively in terms of either supply chain capitalism or a contradiction of mobilities – important as these undoubtedly are - is to miss that this crisis of labour supply also relates to the condition of mobility in occupational auto-mobility. Nóvoa's recent work on Portuguese international 'tramping' in the EU provides a rare insight into this condition (Nóvoa, 2014). Her research highlights the monotony, repetition, exhaustion and fear associated with the long-distance truck driving life, and their alleviation for these drivers through a 'nationalised nutshell' on wheels. Portuguese material culture – flags, crosses, statues of saints, and food, Portuguese TV and radio channels, and travelling in Portuguese convoys on the EU road network are identified as means to making this form of occupational auto-mobility bearable. Together they mobilise national identity to enable the condition of mobility. Yet, whilst long distance, international truck driving is an important dimension of occupational auto-mobility, it sits alongside other forms of truck driving that are more circumscribed in geographical space, and which are nationally and regionally bounded. The paper addresses these. Counter to Nóvoa's emphasis on national identity as an enabler of mobility, a focus on nationally bounded forms of occupational auto-mobility highlights the importance of the relation of occupational auto-mobility to habitation in movement. This central insight from mobilities research, I argue, has much to contribute to understanding the current crisis in labour supply.

I develop the argument as follows. In Section 2 I build on recent mobilities research that has examined how dwelling, or habitation, is achieved in transit and in movement. I draw on nine

months of qualitative research conducted in 2013/14 in and around a yard in South east England that was then rented by five LGV owner-drivers<sup>(ii)</sup>, and particularly on two day journeys as an accompanying passenger with one of these drivers, to show that dwelling is achieved by making the cab a habitable space, through a material culture that speaks to identity but also a material culture that produces the affordances of comfort and cosiness (Section 2.1). At one level this affirms Nóvoa's arguments but I then use a close description of one of these day journeys to show the conditions in which habitation is achieved, not only through material culture but in pauses in auto-motion amidst relational lines defined by freight movement (Section 2.2). Although unique in terms of the journeys and consignments, the rhythm of these two day journeys in both driving and pauses in auto motion is typical of container work in South-east England. In their broad contours the day journeys also resonate strongly with most container and palletised work in the UK, the only major difference being in the amount of time spent driving. The pauses in auto-motion though are a ubiquitous feature of truck driving life and are generalisable to all truck drivers. Focusing on these pauses in auto-motion, and the practices that fill them, establishes that habitation for truck drivers is both dwelling in transit and an older, nomadic form of dwelling in the heart of auto-mobility, and, in the UK at least, it is frequently displaced to the margins, edges and interstices of road and logistics networks (Section 2.3).<sup>(iii)</sup> It also signals that there are limits to cab-based habitation. In Section 3 I focus on these limits and their connection to corporeal sensibilities of comfort (Bissell, 2008). Initially, drawing on my own experiences of these day journeys, I emphasise the bodily discomfort that is a feature of a life of moving goods in the UK. This is most visible in sanitation, and a politics of sanitation is shown to be never far away in the everyday working life of the UK truck driver (Section 3.1). In Section 3.2 I draw on conversations with the yard drivers triangulated with multiple voices from an unsolicited thread on the major UK truck drivers' forum (Truck Net) to examine new developments that are associated particularly with UK DCs and logistics parks. While these appear to address drivers' sanitary needs, they do so by removing drivers from the cab that is the primary site of habitation and the means to their comfort. I argue that these developments recast habitation



exclusively through transient dwelling, and that they correspondingly erase the cab-based habitation or nomadic dwelling that produces the affordances of comfort and cosiness that are critical enablers of the mobile working life of the truck driver. This transformation, and its relation to the crisis in labour supply in the UK, is the substance for further reflection in the conclusion (Section 4).

## **Section 2: The cab and habitation**

### ***2.1: The cab – an economic space, but more***

In mobility studies recently there has been a shift from the early emphasis on quotidian travel in transit spaces such as railway stations and airports (e.g. Adey, 2007; Bissell, 2009) and studies of driving and auto-mobility (e.g. Miller, 2002; Edensor, 2003; Dant, 2004; Sheller, 2004; Thrift, 2004; Merriman, 2007), to focus on mobility's relation to dwelling. Reconceptualising societies as on-the-move, or continually in movement, has established the importance of habitation in movement. In theoretical terms this is usually cast as a transformation in Heidegger-ian notions of dwelling and connected to Ingold's recasting of dwelling as habitation. It is argued that life is no longer sedentary but rather lived through relational lines that connect places (near and far) through practices of movement. In short, mobility, or movement, is how we dwell in the world, and dwelling is to be found as much in transit as it is at home.

In mobilities research these arguments have been developed through studies of travelling passengers across multiple mobile platforms (e.g. Bissell, 2010; Budd, 2011; Wilson, 2011). Laurier and his co-workers' ethno-methodological studies of car journeys (of families and commuting car shares) have shown how cars are made habitable and how car interiors and journeys reassemble social relations of family and friendship (Laurier et al. 2008). Watts (2008) has shown how train passengers work with the material culture of the train journey (pens, puzzles, nail files, the window) to craft travel time to colonise a space for the self, and to constitute a transient space of habitation. Similarly, Jain (2011) highlights the same processes at work in relation to coach commuting. Rather

differently, Crang & Zhang (2012) have examined the return train travel of China's floating migrant worker population at the annual Spring Festival, where the material culture of the snakeskin bag is the means to occupy space and to endure an extremely long, cramped and over-crowded journey on hard seats. Less considered in the literature is that dwelling as habitation also applies to the mobile worker. Laurier's (2004) study of mobile office workers is perhaps the one example in the literature, yet this is more a study of car driving than of dwelling, and so does not disrupt a body of work that has looked to the travelling passenger to develop an account of transient dwelling and its importance to societies on the move. Step up into the 8'x6'x6' space of an LGV cab and – over the course of a working day – the importance of this oversight becomes clear.

Sitting in the seat alongside Driver 1 in the cab of a 38-ton truck that is trundling along on the M25 early on a November morning in 2013 I am acutely aware that I am both researcher and passenger but in a space that is not designed for passengers. The seat I am sitting in is one that is normally empty; if occupied, it is usually taken by a second driver. Significantly for later arguments, it is plush velour, high-backed, supporting and enfolding of my body. Behind the cab, on a trailer, is a container, empty; on the job sheet clipped onto the dash board is our destination for loading the container – a self-storage warehouse in Slough – and the port to which it is to be taken for export (London, Tilbury). In some ten minutes, we pass, or are passed by, hundreds of other LGV cab and trailer units, doing exactly the same job of goods transportation. Many, like this one, are hauling containers; a similar number are 'curtain-siders' hauling palletised goods, whilst there are other refrigerated units containing fresh or temperature-controlled goods as well as a smaller number of bulk and liquid tankers. All are assets of logistics providers, whose names are advertised on their sides. Many belong to the big fleets (e.g. Stobart's, Maritime, Betz, Warberer's, Wincanton, Turner's, Norbert Dentressangle). Others, as in this instance, are those of an owner-driver, who work as self-employed contractors, in this case for a medium-size logistics firm. This cab unit, then, as with every

other LGV on the road, is an economic space, dedicated to the work of driving, and driving, the act, when coupled up to a loaded trailer, is a means to realise money, through the movement of goods.

The ICTs in the cab reinforce that point. Also on the dash board is Driver 1's hands-free mobile, connected to his Bluetooth device. Once or twice during a working day these technologies become the medium of contact with Driver 1's transport planner, who – from an office located in Felixstowe, the UK's major container port - choreographs Driver 1's daily working movements. The transport planner allocates this driver loads (or jobs) on a daily basis, and does the same for around another 50 drivers. But he also coordinates these trucks and their drivers' entry into the UK's congested ports, liaising with their real-time location on the road network to ensure their coincidence with a timed one-hour window that is the vehicle booking slot (VBS) for port terminal entry. The space of the cab, then, is not simply a space made economic through driving but part of a distributed logistical network that is in continual motion. Cab and trailer units on the roads are the visible end-points of that network.

Yet, whilst the cab is primarily an economic and logistical space, observation of its interior hints that it is more than this. Beside both myself and Driver 1, held back by tie-backs, are plush blue velvet curtains, with tassels and with a heavy-duty black-backed lining. A matching pelmet runs around the top of the windscreen (Figure 1 a & b). Carefully stashed in a recess are a small number of books that are 'on the go' and a couple of truck magazines (Figure 1 c). As with Nóvoa's drivers, there are photographs – of friends, family and animals. There are also a few small soft toys, but nothing that equates to a national identity. However, it is on arrival at Slough, once we are parked-up and waiting for the warehouse to open, that the cab's more-than-economic capacities reveal themselves most clearly.

Figure 1 about here

In the following section I use the rest of this day journey to provide a close description of key goings-on in the cab during pauses in auto-motion. The rhythm of this day is typical of the work of moving shipping containers from and to the UK's ports but, in recognition of drivers' tendency to customise cab interiors, the cab as described is an ideal type, drawn from the units in the yard at the heart of the research and triangulated with data drawn from web forum posts. The focus on a typical day parallels the approach taken in Gregson (2015) and works as its mirror. Here, I de-centre driving and the work that others do with goods when driving stops. This is to foreground a key point for further arguments: that during pauses in auto-motion the cab and the trailer are dislocated. Although they remain physically connected, for drivers, pauses in auto-motion, when goods are being loaded and unloaded, are when the cab and the trailer/box become discrete, separate spatialities and the cab a space where driving takes a back seat and habitation takes over. This point is critical to understanding the tensions currently emerging in logistical spaces. First though, and in order to open up the cab as a space and site of habitation, I highlight the pauses in auto-motion which punctuate large parts of a truck driver's working day. The details of these pauses, and their distinctive rhythm across the working day, are important, not least because they lay the groundwork to establishing the conditions of habitation for truck drivers in the UK.

## ***2.2: A typical day: doing the boxes and the rhythm of waiting***

### ***Stop 1: 07.25 – 12.00:***

07.25: Now that we are no longer on the road a different cab space emerges. Behind the seats are two stacked bunk beds; bedding (sleeping bag and pillow) is carefully piled up on one of these beds and a flat screen TV and DVD player are bracketed to the wall. Under the lower bunk is a small fridge. A plastic crate sits beside it. Inside this there is: a camping gas stove with canister attached, a

kettle, plates and cutlery, mugs, a 5l drum of water, instant coffee, tea bags, dried milk and food - bananas, breakfast pastries, bread, sandwich spread, jam, crisps, biscuits. In the fridge there is fresh milk and margarine. On parking up Driver 1 has decreed that it is 'time for breakfast', and the cab starts to morph to become a kitchen/diner. I am shown how a tray extends out from the dashboard in front of my seat, and am put in charge of making the breakfast tea, whilst sitting down – the stove is balanced on the tray, the kettle filled from the water drum, a lighter lights the stove (Figure 1 d & e). Meanwhile Driver 1 contorts himself to extract the milk from the fridge, and then starts preparing the breakfast pastries on a plate on his lap, whilst sitting at the wheel.

That the cab contains such supplies and has these capacities is something of a relief. Travelling along, it had become apparent that this experience was unlike any journey I had made by car or coach through the UK's motorway network. It would not be punctuated by stops to eat and drink and use the toilets at motorway service stations. Instead, stops were going to be determined by the passage of the goods that we were enabling. Without any food or water on me, contemplating the remote possibility of finding such goods to purchase en route, and whether I dared to ask if we could stop at a motorway service station to purchase them, I had begun to wonder whether I would find anything to eat or drink before the end of the working day. I need not have worried. Food and drink, together with water and a means to cook by, are all essential to carry on board. Driver 1 explains that this is not just about the all too clear lack of food and drink at warehouses, DCs and manufacturing premises. It also reflects the need for contingency, for delays are a feature of everyday working life for truck drivers. To carry well-stocked supplies of food, drink and water is actually a matter of survival, and you learn this lesson fast he says. So, in the back of the truck there are not just the supplies that I have seen so far but also a mix of convenience and fresh food: tins of baked beans, tinned soup, tinned fruit, packet rice, packet paella, tinned stew, and fresh vegetables suitable for making a stir fry, plus a small microwave and frying pan.<sup>(iv)</sup>

07.45 – 08.00: breakfast over, Driver 1 rummages at the back of the cab and brings out a can of Mr Sheen™ and a cloth. He uses the vehicle's airline 'gun' to blast crumbs off of the seats and out of the cab, and then polishes up the areas that we have been eating off.

08.25 +: the warehouse has opened and preparations for loading the container begin. Whilst I write notes in the cab, and then get out and go and talk with the consignors of the shipping container, Driver 1 climbs over into the bottom bunk-bed to get his 'head down for a couple of hours'. The cab's curtains are drawn – the black-out linings working to keep the daylight out. How he manages to sleep with the crashing, banging and rocking emanating from the container as it is being loaded is beyond me.

11.00 – 11.45: come 11 am Driver 1 is awake, sitting back in the driver's seat and with the curtains pulled back. He anticipates that the loading might be completed soon and gets out of the cab 'to go and assess the situation'. He returns to the cab: he judges that it will be at least another hour before we are back on the road. Then we may be tied up in Tilbury for an unknown time, and then 'who knows where we will be off to' – for that will depend on the transport planner. This poses issues for when the next meal time might be. He takes the decision that we will eat 'lunch' now. So, out comes the camping gear again, for another brew-up, whilst Driver 1 makes sandwiches. Meanwhile we talk about sleep – getting up at "0-fuck-hundred" every morning means that it is essential to 'grab a couple of hours' kip at the morning's stop, otherwise you'll be knackered by the end of the day'. Every LGV driver does this, apparently – a point that is verified later when the hands-free mobile becomes the means to constant chat with fellow drivers, who all seem to use the time between 2 – 3 pm to phone their mates to talk about their day. No one rings before then, knowing that the first stop of the day is when everyone is asleep.

After eating 'lunch' Driver 1 then tidies and cleans up again.

At 12.00, paper formalities with the shipping container completed, we are back on the road again – the cab has switched back to a driving space.

**Stop 2: 13.30 – 14.30:** @ 1.30 we are in a queue inside London Tilbury. We are waiting for the allocated VBS time (2pm) that will allow Driver 1 to access one of Tilbury's export terminals. Everywhere I look there are trucks in queues. Some have their ignition still running. Others, like us, are parked; some have the cab curtains pulled, indicating drivers asleep or resting. If ever there is a place where the arts of waiting are called for, it is in queues such as these. For me, currently, they are a researcher's boon. A cab not in motion is one where field notes on-the-go can be written. But what would Driver 1 normally be doing here where we are parked, waiting for his VBS slot, if he wasn't talking with me and explaining this landscape to me? This is where the books and magazines come in. Reading, usually for around half an hour, is what occupies his port time whilst waiting for his VBS.

@ 14.30pm we are back moving again, heading out of Tilbury with a destination of London Thamesport, to collect an import box for the next day's job.

**Stop 3: 15.30 – 16.45:** arriving at Thamesport, we park in the truck park and then leave the cab. The next hour is spent in a drivers' café, sitting on uncomfortable plastic chairs, drinking more tea and eating cake whilst Driver 1 checks every ten minutes with the Driver Reception in an adjacent building to see if the container that he is due to collect has been released. A handful of other drivers are also embroiled in this same waiting game – some of them eating meals. Although it would be possible to wait in the cab, to do so would involve repetitive walking to and fro from the truck park to the Driver Reception. Drivers, it seems, prefer to wait here in the café/reception area – they can talk with others enduring the same, and always unknown, delays and nip over to the desk to get the

clearance for their box as soon as it becomes available. There is little pleasure to be had in this waiting though, and much boredom. This is just sitting around on a plastic chair, with no sense of when the waiting will come to an end. It does, abruptly, at 16.45. Returning to the cab, and to its warmth and cosiness, I realise that I am glad to be back in this space. After the anomie of plastic tables and chairs this feels like a home, of sorts.

17.10: Driver 1 brings the truck to a halt in the yard. It is the end of a working day that began at 5am. In that time less than 4 hours have been spent driving; around 8 have been spent waiting, most of them spent sitting in the cab.

The significance of this tiny space for a truck driver's working life is therefore apparent. So too is the premium on what Bissell (2008) identifies as the corporeal sensibilities of comfort. Close description of everyday life in the cab establishes the fragility of driver comfort and its connection to habitation. In terms of affective resonances, the cab is designed to afford comfort for the driving body, through seats that make the task of driving long hours comfortable and through bunk beds that allow the sitting body of a driver to lie down, stretch out and to rest comfortably in sleep. Yet the same affordances that produce the cab as a comfortable driving space render other forms of habitation more problematic. Discomfort emerges – in the contorting moves necessary to fetch things, in ad hoc arrangements for preparing and eating food and drink, and in the sheer inability to stand up and move around in the cab in order to perform certain tasks. Living in this space as more than a driver is difficult, yet the condition of this form of occupational auto-mobility requires precisely that.

### ***2.3: Nomadic dwelling in the relational lines of freight movement***

Paying attention to the goings-on in the cab during pauses in auto-motion establishes unequivocally that the cab is a space of habitation. It is where drivers cook, eat, drink, sleep, watch TV or DVDs, read books, listen to music, craft social relationships by talking on their mobiles, and where they do



domestic chores, such as cleaning, and office work, such as mobile/telephone banking. The cab is not just an economic space in which driving realises money; neither is it simply a space in which to practice what others have labelled as the arts of waiting (Vannini, 2011). It is also a kitchen, living room, bedroom, mobile office. It is a site of habitation in the midst of the spaces of circulation but located in the movement of goods rather than the movement of people.

The location of habitation in the movement of goods has implications. Section 2.2 shows that the relation between habitation and movement for the truck driver as a mobile worker runs counter to that observed for travelling passengers. For truck drivers, dwelling emerges during pauses in auto-motion. Its conditions are not in movement but rather in the stilling of movement. This is not the dwelling-in-transit, or transient dwelling of passengers who colonise temporary spaces for the self in motion, on trains, coaches and so on. Rather, dwelling for the truck driver resonates with an older mode of habitation: nomadism.

The connections between a life lived on-the-road and nomadism have long been made, particularly in cultural studies. Here the on-the-road nomad has been located in distinctive cultural genres, especially fiction and film, identified with young men of the Beat generation in the US in the 1960s and seen as exemplifying hedonistic masculinities. That same reading features in some of the classic specialist truck driving literature, particularly that on international tramping (e.g. Coghill, 2010), and continues to resonate in modern-day truckers' conversations, where it is referred to, for the most part ironically, as 'living the dream'. It also finds its echoes in the new literature on roads, some of which features occasional but now out-moded representations of the truck driver – as a free agent, driving in abstract space, unfettered by logistics and stopping at whim at transport cafés along the way (e.g. Merriman, 2007 pp 184-6; Moran, 2009). Section 2.2 does much to dispel such an imaginary, showing that the rhythm of the truck driver's day is governed by the relational lines of the movement of goods that in turn are coordinated by logistics. It also highlights two further points:

that a truck driver's life, whilst defined by movement, is also rooted in familiar things in a familiar bounded space, the cab; and that the site of habitation, in the UK at least, is not the road per se but rather off the road, or public highway – in warehouse yards, in ports, even at the side of the road. In what follows I take each of these points in turn.

Time and again during conversations with drivers the phrase the cab is 'home' or 'home-from-home' would be repeated. At first I puzzled over this, especially since for all bar one of these five drivers, the importance of sleeping in one's own bed at night, in a home for the most part shared with significant others, shaped the form of truck driving that they were prepared to do. Latterly, through the day journeys as an accompanying passenger, I came to see the cab as a form of mobile home akin to a caravan or motorised camper van. What it affords is a rooted mobile life, in which a familiar domestic material culture of a camping stove, mugs, plates, cutlery, preferred food, a TV, sleeping bag and so on are all ready-to-hand in the Heidegger-ian sense. Additionally, cabs provide shelter as well as sanctuary. Whilst their material culture affords drivers a degree of comfort, also of significance is that the spatialities of the cab, through the material culture of the curtains, produce cosiness and a boundary that works to shut out the exterior world of freight cargo and logistics. All this is present wherever and whenever the cessation of auto-motion occurs and thus is always imminent. As such, we can see that the cab, its configuration and material culture are the means to an older style of dwelling for this particular mobile worker. Importantly, though, that rootedness and bounded-ness occur right in the midst of the relational lines of goods movement, as drivers transit road and logistical networks. When paused in auto-motion, the truck driver is *both* an on-the-move transient dweller and a bounded, rooted nomadic dweller, and they are this simultaneously. At the heart of contemporary mobilities lie not only travelling passengers and mobile workers dwelling-in-transit but also older forms of dwelling – not as an either/or but as a both.

To focus exclusively on dwelling or habitation in the interiority of the cab, however, would be to overlook that habitation for the truck driver can only be achieved in relation to roads and the road network. In the UK this occurs frequently on the margins or edges of roads themselves. Driver 1, for example, talked of being parked up one night in London's Hyde Park and realising he was 'sleeping in the gutter whilst the rest of the world went about a normal existence – it gives you a strange feeling'. Similarly, at all hours of day and night on the A2 adjacent to Cobham Services, lines of trucks are parked on the hard shoulder of both carriageways (Figure 2).

Figures 2 & 3 about here

Whilst the specifics of the trucks in the queues change each day, the queues are a constant presence here. These are drivers 'out of hours', 'over-nighting' and even 'week-ending', curtains closed to the world, asleep or resting whilst the cacophony of three lanes of motorway traffic thunders past their cab window no more than half a metre away. By contrast, in ports habitation occurs in the in-between zone that lies off the public road but outside port terminals. Stop 1 in Section 2.2 showed how drivers sleep in warehouse yards and DCs in the midst of the logistical work occurring around them. Other common locations for over-nighting in the UK include town-centre car parks and lay-byes (Figure 3). For these mobile workers then, habitation might occur within the relational lines of freight movement but it is displaced to the margins, edges and interstices of the road and logistical network.

Habitation on the margins impinges on habitation's quality. The noise and vibration of trailers being loaded and unloaded are constant accompaniments to most stops at warehouses and DCs; high levels of air pollution are encountered in ports as well as at the road side; and for those who sleep

on the hard shoulder or in lay-byes there are additional risks of being run into by other vehicles, whilst asleep, and of highway robbery. Whereas the cab's interior is a space that affords drivers comfort and cosiness, the location of cab-based habitation in geographical space, on the margins, edges and interstices of the road and logistics network, means that the exteriority of the cab can over-ride its interiority. Comfort can all too easily become discomfort, while cosiness can dissipate into a sense of vulnerability and insecurity. In these circumstances habitation becomes wearing, tiring, stressful, exhausting even and always a state to be endured.

In the following section I examine further the discomfort of habitation for the truck driver, focusing initially on sanitation.

### **Section 3: The discomfort of (cab-based) habitation**

#### ***3.1: Nomadic dwelling, displacement and its effects in sanitation***

If there is one space that the cab is not it is the modern bathroom, with its capacity to remove human wastes and waste-related products. Sanitation, therefore, marks the limits of the cab's capacities for habitation. These limits confirm the cab as a site of nomadic dwelling. As with other such sites (e.g. tents, caravans), defecation and urination inside this space are to be avoided if at all possible. Whilst there are very real practical difficulties of accomplishing these acts within a space designed for driving, mostly drivers cite a discourse of health and hygiene involving smell, proximity to food that is to be consumed, and the absence of soap and hot water for washing hands to explain their avoidance

These are the circumstances that explain my current position. It is Stop 1 of the day on my second journey with Driver 1 and we are somewhere in rural Essex, on a farm that has two light industrial warehouse units. One of the businesses has a mobile toilet facility, but this is not the one that we

are servicing, so Driver 1 says that I cannot ask to use it. This is a tacit rule. The other SME, which we are supplying, has no toilet facility – or, at least no facilities that they are prepared to allow us to use. So, with no facilities available, I am crouching down on open ground round the back of a slurry pit, hoping that no one has noticed my tracks in this direction. I muse on the appropriateness of the location and on how open defecation and urination are a fact of life for the truck driver. As is explained to me, it's frequently a choice between open ground, the 'flying toilet' – for the material culture of this cab also includes a discreet stash of plastic bags and toilet roll, 'for when you're caught short', or the extreme forms of bodily discomfort that come with refusing a body's need to defecate/urinate and which have severe health consequences. For truck drivers in the UK, then, sanitation takes a form that is typically identified as one of the markers of extreme poverty in developing countries (McFarlane et al. 2014; Desai et al. 2015).

It is not always like this. The previous day, for example, whilst at the warehouse in Slough, I had asked where their toilet facilities were and used them, just as did the consignors of the container. But such generosity cannot be assumed and all truck drivers have a litany of stories of being denied the use of toilet facilities. One of the worst I was told is this narrative of delivering to a DC off the M1:

'X had the 7am tip, I had the 8am and Y had the 6am. So there were the three of us with thousands of TVs between us. When I got there at 6.45, Y was still outside trying to book in and there were about 20 other trucks with boxes, all of them outside on the road – there was apparently 'a bit of a delay', translated: the DC was a full shift behind because of a problem with the night shift and the queue of trucks outside on the road was the stock for the day shift. By 2pm we were still outside and being told that we wouldn't be tipping that day. We started asking about using the canteen and the facilities but were told that no, we couldn't use them. That's when the shit really started

to fly. Drivers started chucking shit in plastic bags over the fence – not just dumping it in the bin or by the bin in the lay-bye but lobbing it over the fence into the DC.’

Three initial points are worth highlighting from this story. First, we can see the overflow that is everywhere in cargo mobilities. Any disruption generates congestion, or overflow, but truck congestion also results in habitation, as drivers stilled become nomadic dwellers. Second, where the logistical system fails to accommodate drivers’ need for sanitary provision, then sanitation’s lack literally spills over, beyond the cab. It overflows, as shit and urine, at the roadside, in lay byes and wherever trucks are kept waiting. Third, we can see how shit can become the medium for shit wars in logistical space. Throwing ‘flying toilets’ over the fence of the DC is a political act; it is the response of those denied a basic human right to those who deny it them, and as clear an expression of the lines of power and inequalities in logistical work as it is possible to imagine.

More broadly, these three points indicate that there is a politics of sanitation to set within questions of habitation in mobilities research. Unremarked upon in most studies of travelling passengers and passengering, sanitation – where it appears at all – is in relation to motion sickness or studies that use historical sources to record the travails of desperate or dangerous passages (Martin, 2011). An absence of a politics of sanitation in the literature on contemporary mobility testifies to how transient dwelling accommodates the sanitary needs of societies-on-the-move – in the developed world through the provision of a legally required sanitary infrastructure that removes the wastes of travelling and transiting passengers. As with train stations, airports, bus stations and ferry terminals, trains, boats and planes all have a statutory sanitary provision, with those of mobile platforms set according to the maximum number of passengers a given unit of transport is certified to carry. They show that sanitation is a regulated, and thus taken for granted, part of dwelling comfortably for passengers on the move. In contrast, cars, taxis, some coaches and most short distance service buses lack such facilities. It is then in auto-mobility, the iconic motif of mobilities, that habitation on the

move can be at its most uncomfortable for bodies. Whilst most experience such corporeal discomfort only occasionally, for the truck driver access to sanitary infrastructure continually requires negotiation and may be refused, and bodily discomfort is a routine, daily part of their working life.

In response a new corporeal politics of the road centres truckers' sanitary rights. In the UK, the campaign group Truckers' Toilets UK has been formed, which articulates truckers' basic human right to sanitation. It signals the degree of feeling around the inequity experienced by the truck driver whose sanitary rights on the move the UK has yet to make proper provision for. Such levels of politicization in what is a highly individualistic and largely non-unionised industry are rare (c.f. Doherty et al. 2003). Yet, they find themselves up against a representation that casts the figure of the truck driver through the conjuncture of waste and social dirt first articulated by Mary Douglas (1966). Here wider society layers the effects in sanitation of displaced nomadic dwelling with social dirt. Thus from the Scottish Highlands to Kent, drivers' practices of open defecation and urination have become the basis for their widespread condemnation. This finds its clearest expression in local news reporting, where stories of shit in lay-byes and in bins in lay-byes underpin representations of the truck driver as socially dirty and defiling (Ramage, 2015; Waite, 2015). In such a way, workers who are central to mobilities find themselves portrayed as its Other. A corollary is that, at the local level and especially in terms of the key relation to planning, the figure of the truck driver may undermine the political goal of achieving adequate provision of appropriate sanitary infrastructure for truck drivers.

### ***3.2: Distribution centres, transient dwelling and a new politics of discomfort***

Contemporaneously, a swathe of new developments at some of the DCs of the UK's major supermarkets and retailers (e.g. Asda, Tesco and Amazon) appear to address sanitary provision for truck drivers. Significantly, however, they do so in ways that disrupt the cab as a space of habitation.

Once on a bay at the DCs in question, drivers are required to hand over the keys to their trucks. They then have to go and sit in a 'driver facility' to await completion of the unloading or loading of the trailer – a task which may take less than an hour or last three hours or more.<sup>(v)</sup> This 'facility' is often little more than cubicle-sized, mostly window-less, with a few plastic chairs and a toilet that may, or may not, be serviced. It may have a coin-operated drinks machine, a table and a TV but, as in the waiting areas of garages and hotel lobbies, the TV cannot be turned off by those who are waiting.

Although these DC facilities appear to cater to drivers' sanitary needs the reality of sitting in them is that they are far from restful places. Seating here offers none of the personalised comfort of the cab. Instead it is hard, uncomfortable and designed to keep bodies on the move. Significantly too these facilities require drivers to sit in close proximity with unknown other drivers, often of varying nationalities – a situation which can, and does, lead to clashes. As important is that nowhere in such facilities is it possible to lie down and sleep. Figure 4 gives a sense of some of these new facilities – and how drivers feel about them.

Figure 4 about here

Sleep's loss defines a new level of discomfort in the habitation of the truck driver. The denial of the personalised sanctuary, comfort and cosiness afforded by the cab, and its substitution with uncomfortable, shared DC-determined driver facilities, represents the erasure of nomadic dwelling by transient dwelling, in the very periods of waiting when driving bodies need to be bodies comfortably stilled. Further, the discomfort produced exacerbates already overly tired driving bodies; it is productive of corporeal discomfort. For sure, individual drivers resist, or attempt to subvert, these changes, as when one of the drivers in the yard took his camp bed and sleeping bag into the driver 'facility' at a Tesco DC and, notwithstanding opposition from the attendant,



proceeded to set this up as a form of sleep-in protest (c.f. Neilson, 2012; Cowen, 2014 on port labour) . Nonetheless, at the systemic level, the transition shows conclusively the lines of power in the contemporary logistical system whilst the physical separation of drivers from their cabs signals the recasting of habitation and thus of the condition of mobility for truck drivers as mobile workers. In relational lines of freight movement coordinated by logistics, trucks are little more than mobile warehouses, a means to keep goods moving into and out of DCs and thence to stores and/or manufacturing premises. The driver in this is purely incidental and secondary to the efficient movement of goods. An effect of this erosion in working conditions, however, is to make the work of truck driving even less attractive for those who are already qualified to drive.

#### **4: Conclusions**

This paper has focused on the truck driver as a key figure in a looming crisis of occupational auto-mobility. Contemporary life in the UK, as in all developed countries and for all urban populations, is dependent on the movement of goods by a range of occupational drivers of whom truck drivers are the most significant. There is a crisis of labour supply here: the work of moving goods is being refused by those who are qualified to drive, to a level that threatens to undermine the goods mobility on which contemporary societies rely. While there are solid economic reasons for this, the paper demonstrates that to fully comprehend this crisis it is necessary to consider the condition of mobility for the truck driver in and amidst the movement of goods and its relation to habitation.

The paper has highlighted the lines of tension in the current condition of that mobility. On the one hand there is the nomadic dwelling in transit that truck drivers prefer; on the other there is an increasingly prevalent transient dwelling that relates to supply chain capitalism and which negates the possibility for cab-based habitation, or nomadic dwelling. The paper has shown that the nomadic dwelling of the cab, whilst enabling of truck driving, is far from an easy life. While the cab offers a

modicum of comfort and cosiness, these affordances relate exclusively to the driving body, allowing for driving in comfort and resting from driving comfortably. Beyond that, comfort is highly fragile. Sanitation's lack is a constant presence and habitation on the margins and edges of the road network brings further discomforts, of noise, pollution, and fear. The cumulative effect of such habitation over the years is undoubtedly wearing, and – along with its incompatibility with domestic life - it is one of the reasons why people fall out of this part of the driving labour market. More important still is the transition to transient dwelling that reflects wider developments in supply chain capitalism, notably the orchestration and coordination of supply chains by retailers and manufacturers and the just-in-time logistics transformation that has seen the shift from warehouses to DCs as the primary means to ordering and coordinating flows of goods. Their significance for truck drivers is to redefine the conditions of their habitation as mobile workers.

At one level these developments affirm transience as the primary mode of habitation for societies lived on-the-move. At another, however, in reworking the relation between habitation and mobility in occupational truck driving, they fail to recognise that the human-enabled movement of goods has unique corporeal requirements that are difficult to satisfy in relations of transience. As the paper has shown, the truck driver is a worker for whom mobility and habitation need to come together as nomadic dwelling in transit. Take this away and it is not just the long-standing appeal of nomadism to those who drive for a living that is lost. So too is the corporeal capacity for drivers to actually transport goods for here, in the conditions of transient dwelling, discomfort, notably in the form of an inability to sleep whilst resting from driving, becomes so intense as to be physically intolerable. Transient dwelling produces affective resonances that render occupational truck driving an impossible act; notwithstanding its challenges, a cab-based nomadic dwelling makes it more possible, or at least corporeally bearable, at least for a while. This needs to be recognised.

An over-arching message of the paper, then, is that mobilities have to reach a better, and more socially just, accommodation with the mobile worker on whom they depend: the truck driver. While automation promises a driverless future, these technologies are a decade or more off, have considerable safety considerations to overcome, and in the context of the UK at least face challenges related to the intensity of connections in the road network that may be insuperable. They are no panacea. So, the truck driver is not yet a redundant occupation – which makes the current crisis of labour supply even more pertinent. As the paper has shown, mobilities' perspectives have something important to contribute to this debate. In practical and policy terms, they suggest that, if the current crisis is to be reversed, there is a need to incorporate into the road and logistics network infrastructural provision that recognises truck drivers' rights to habitation in the form of quality and affordable sanitation and to sleep in comfort whilst they are transiting the spaces through which goods move. In the UK, more, and quality, fully serviced truck parks, that are cheap or even free to use, located not only on the primary road network but also adjacent to logistical clusters are required. At the time of writing, these needs are beginning to be recognised at ministerial level, albeit that the challenges in effecting such provision remain considerable.

At the same time, and in relation to future mobilities research, the paper has demonstrated that there is much to be gained from turning away from passengers and passenger-centric travel to examine mobility and the mobile worker in the relational lines of freight movement. The tension highlighted by the paper between nomadic and transient dwelling almost certainly transcends the occupational category of the truck driver. More research on the conditions of mobility of other mobile workers is undoubtedly needed, not only on other categories of occupational driving such as couriers and bus and coach drivers but also on train drivers and pilots. Its wider significance for the mobilities project is potentially to suggest a reconfiguration of our understanding of the current relationship between mobility and habitation. Claims to the pervasiveness of transient dwelling, while significant, may have been exaggerated. Instead, paying attention to the figure of the mobile

worker in and amidst the movement of goods suggests that nomadic dwelling is a required condition of mobility, at least for certain mobile workers; that the affective resonances of transient dwelling can annihilate the mobile worker, and that mobilities therefore require a continued accommodation with forms of dwelling that are often dismissed as belonging to another, more sedentary, age.

### Notes

(i) Large Goods Vehicle – a term used interchangeably with HGV, or heavy goods vehicle.

(ii) A full description of the yard, drivers and methods is given in the companion paper (Gregson, 2015).

(iii) This is a key distinction from the situation in continental Europe where dedicated truck service areas and over-night facilities are a feature of the road network.

(iv) All this convenience food is a world away from Nóvoa's Portuguese drivers and their fresh Mediterranean food on-the-move, and speaks to the coexistence of different culinary cultures on the road.

(v) Tracing the genealogy of these changes is beyond the scope of the paper. In broad terms, their introduction reflects the intersection between discourses of health and safety and security. At the level of drivers and DC staff, the changes are narrated through health and safety rules and regulations, and explained in terms of circulating myths of DC-forklift-truck drivers being injured as a result of a truck driver pulling off a bay on a red light. However, for DCs road haulage is one of the weak points in the security of the supply chain, and drivers a potential means to the theft of goods. Disciplining drivers in this way is a means to securitize the supply chain, akin to the use of biometric passes inside some port terminals (Cowen, 2007)

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