

Waiting Territories in the Americas

Waiting Territories in the Americas:

Life in the Intervals of Migration and Urban Transit

Edited by

Laurent Vidal and Alain Musset

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and Ingrid Wassenaar

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GENERAL INTRODUCTION

LAURENT VIDAL¹ AND ALAIN MUSSET²

Mobility and displacement are major characteristics of contemporary societies. These population shifts are far from fluid, homogeneous or linear, but are instead interspersed with a range of longer or shorter periods of waiting. Whether these intervals are technically, administratively or politically motivated, they are often understood in spatial terms: waiting societies have a territorial dimension.

ANR TERRIAT,³ a research project funded by the French Agence nationale de la recherche and staffed by historians, geographers and sociologists, was set up to examine and assess the many forms that waiting territories take, in order to better understand their various juridical statuses, their relationships with their spatial environment and specific forms of temporality, and to examine the various economic and social relationships which they foster.

It seemed apposite to focus on the Americas because this continent is the product of the (voluntary or forced) displacement of various population groups that have themselves left their mark on the territories which they have appropriated. After being for a long time a refuge for persecuted people of all creeds and then being taken for an Eldorado by millions of hopeful immigrants, the American continent is still undergoing many population shifts today, as many leave the countryside for sprawling cities, as terrified illegal immigrants try to cross borders, and as climate refugees pile up in drought camps or precarious shelters (as happened in the wake of hurricane Katrina).

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³ ANR TERRIAT is the name of an international and interdisciplinary four-year research project (2011-2014) financed by the Agence nationale de la recherche (France). For more information, see: <http://terriat.hypotheses.org>.

This work is the fruit of a collective and interdisciplinary investigation of waiting territories in American societies. It seeks to renew the analytic paradigms that we use to understand waiting territories, through a new perspective which focuses on ambiguous situations that test the limits of society, of the power of the state, and of modernity (in the case of contemporary predicaments).

As ever with such investigations — and indeed perhaps more than ever — particular attention must be paid to the precise meaning of the terms which make up the phrase ‘waiting territories’.

Focusing on the languages of the American continent, we note that Spanish and Portuguese only have one word for waiting: *espera*, which itself has two separate meanings — ‘immobility’, on the one hand, and ‘hope’, on the other. This double signification finds an echo in French in the words *attente* and *espérance*. In English, however, three different words or phrasal verbs can express the notion of waiting, adding further layers of meaning to the nuances found in Spanish, Portuguese and French:

- *To be put on hold* suggests a break, a moment of downtime, interlude or interim, implicitly with a view to resuming activity, as in the phrases ‘please hold’ and *on hold marketing*.
- *To wait for something* suggests a level of projection into the future, whether to reach an objective or to await an outcome. In this case, waiting evokes a psychological state, an affect. There is a certain sense of expectation associated with focusing on an outcome. ‘The word “waitier” [is] a Normand variant of the old French “guaitier”. “Guaitier” or “guetter” in modern French — watching out or lying in wait for something — is also a form of waiting’.⁴
- A *standstill* evokes a time out, something that has stopped moving or happening. This term also has a juridical dimension, as when legal proceedings are said to be ‘at a standstill’.

We note that all these different definitions of waiting implicitly or explicitly have a spatial dimension. Immobility is by definition a localised experience which evokes the (enclosed, saturated or constraining) places where people are often forced to remain, with the feeling of spatial tyranny this creates. As for hope, it often focuses on a desired or imagined place, such as Saint Augustine’s City of God or Thomas More’s island of Utopia,

⁴ EDWARDS, M., *Éloge de l’attente. T. S. Eliot et Samuel Beckett*, Paris: Belin, 1996, p. 65.

or indeed the visions of lands of riches that economic migrants often entertain. Such distant places consume the present and swallow it up, so to speak, obliterating its temporal and spatial substance.⁵ In other words, waiting territories either foster or curtail possibilities of action: dreaming of such territories fosters mobility, but being forced to endure them produces immobility.

If we now turn to the meaning of ‘territory’, the word seems, at first glance, to encompass two separate notions:

- Waiting territories bring to mind the notion of an enclosed space that stands apart and is highly visible. Such spaces typically have a single use within the framework of a specific legal apparatus. They are set up to hold groups of displaced people for a limited period of time — whether this is for administrative, political, medical or humanitarian reasons — and to keep those who are waiting apart from the surrounding society. Examples include lazarettos, immigration stations, holding areas, and exile and refugee camps. If there is one form that evokes these territories, it is the island, that ‘inconstant object’,⁶ to quote Franck Lestringant. Indeed, islands were initially considered especially appropriate for lazarettos and immigration stations. The fact that islands are spatially separate from the continent was considered advantageous, fostering the illusion that island territories stood apart from or outside the national territory which prospective immigrants wished to enter. This also made islands into good sorting places, so to speak. In fact, many enclosed waiting territories operate as though they were islands. Refugee and transit camps, for example, are organised and administered like islands falling under a different jurisdiction, and as such are not bound by ordinary rules of law. Today, holding areas are still based on this legal fiction, since they make it possible to treat individuals who are physically inside a country as though they were outside that country.

⁵ Here is how Thomas Mann described a man waiting for his weekly mail: ‘Waiting, we say, is long. We might just as well — or more accurately — say it is short, since it consumes whole spaces of time without our living them or making any use of them as such. We may compare him who lives on expectation to a greedy man, whose digestive apparatus works through quantities of food without converting it into anything of value or nourishment to his system’. *The Magic Mountain*. Translated into English by H. T. Lowe-Porter. London: Vintage, 1999, p. 237.

⁶ LESTRINGANT, F., *Le livre des îles. Atlas des récits insulaires de la Genèse à Jules Verne*, Paris: Droz, 2002, p. 13.

- Waiting territories also evoke another notion: the notion of a space that is open yet constraining or saturated, such as the space that illegal immigrants take up in a country or that commuters stuck in a traffic jam occupy on roads. Situations of waiting lead such spaces to be used in unexpected ways, and these novel uses of space (temporarily) overlap with their ordinary uses. Although these spaces are used for waiting (among other things) this particular purpose does not define them. There is also no specific legal apparatus to regulate these periods of interruption. It would be difficult to give a comprehensive list of the more open territories which are occasionally or regularly occupied by stalled groups of people: in the past, they included inns and ports, but also the liner decks where emigrants stood; today, they encompass bus stations, airports and check points, but also border cities where illegal immigrants seek a passage through a walled or barbed wire boundary line, motorways and congested urban ring roads, and the waiting rooms of administrative officer, where an ephemeral sense of solidarity can arise and where the economy of waiting takes shape.

Since ordinary spaces can often take on a different social and symbolic meaning during those periods of time when they become waiting territories, this analysis might also have been conducted from the perspective of the study of ‘other spaces’ — or ‘heterotopias’ as Michel Foucault called them, pointing out their importance as early as 1967 — if this term hadn’t become such a catch-all notion.⁷

Whether waiting territories are enclosed or open, those who wait in those spaces always experience their predicament as a temporary period of transition. These periods of transition can suddenly and unexpectedly give rise to moments of *coalescence* (to use a concept coined by Emile Durkheim and applied to the sociology of waiting by the sociologist Henri Desroche⁸). Such moments of coalescence generally elude all control and generate new ways of understanding a space and its potential, as well as new relationships to time and new solidarities — in short, they forge new identities.

⁷ FOUCAULT, M., ‘Of Other Spaces. Heterotopias’. Translated into English by Jay Miskowiec. *Diacritics* 16: 1 (Spring 1987), pp. 22-27.

⁸ DESROCHE, H., *Sociology of Hope*. Translated into English by C-M. Sperry. London: Routledge, Chapman & Hall, 1979; DESROCHE, H., *Dieux d'hommes. Dictionnaire des messianismes et millénarismes de l'ère chrétienne. Contribution à une sociologie de l'attente*, Paris: Mouton, 1969.

A total social fact

The waiting — understood both as a lived experience that unfolds in time and as a practice — that goes on in waiting territories is a ‘total social fact’ which brings several dimensions into play:

- *Psychological*: waiting can be inhibiting or it can be exhilarating;
- *Physiological*: waiting is a physical experience. It can either be endured as a necessary evil which must be concealed — as in the case of illegal immigrants, who try not to attract attention to their presence on a national territory — or it can be equated with feeling constrained within an enclosed space or ill-treated. The experience of waiting is felt in the body;
- *Social*: waiting creates moments of coalescence and unexpected social experiences;
- *Economic*: periods of waiting foster various activities, including those of peddlers, who sell their wares on congested urban ring roads, inn-keepers and smugglers, not to mention the practice of ‘on hold marketing’;
- *Legal*: waiting is linked to the notion of ‘standstill’, whether this refers to a temporary status quo or to the notion of a ‘state of exception’.⁹
- *Sensory*: waiting induces a different perception of time because it produces a heightened awareness of duration, which, as Bergson reminded us, is a lived and elastic temporal experience that may stretch out, speed up or slow down depending on the situation. In confined spaces, the past, present and future are defined differently. Far from being idle, those who wait reinvent their attitudes to temporality: the crisis which led to a situation of waiting forces the individuals, groups or communities concerned to rethink the temporal categories which allow them to act in the present and to project themselves into the future;
- *Cultural*: waiting can also be experienced as acculturation;
- *Geographic*: the space where one waits can feel constraining or can induce the desire to discover its resources;
- *Political*: power operates differently in zones of exception.

⁹ AGAMBEN, G., *State of Exception*. Translated into English by Kevin Attel. Chicago, Ill: University of Chicago Press, 2005.

Reflecting on the experience of waiting — that is to say, on what goes on when nothing happens or when nothing is supposed to happen¹⁰ — may in fact be considered a poetic enterprise, to the extent that poetry strives for a global, simultaneous and immediate insight into a situation.¹¹ Indeed, good working definitions of the phrase ‘waiting territory’ can be found in the following phrases by French poet René Char: ‘an enclave of metamorphoses and unpredictables’,¹² and the space ‘at the centre of the gap’;¹³ or indeed in this line by Martinican poet and activist Aimé Césaire: ‘non-time imposes the *tyranny of its spatiality* on time’.¹⁴ The point is not to take such quotes as definitive statements, but rather to respond to their invitation to question the connections they emphasise, and to let them spur us on or act as ‘intercessors’¹⁵.

The possible pitfalls of this approach are many but easily dispelled. The metaphor of waiting can easily lend itself to a wide range of social situations. Yet, not everything falls into the categories of waiting and waiting territories. In this project on society, mobility and displacement, the phrase ‘waiting territories’ specifically refers to the spaces where displaced populations or people in transit are kept waiting, whether these spaces were designed to hold them or whether their wait

¹⁰ Jean Duvignaud, Paul Virilio and Georges Perec reflected on this issue in the same issue of the journal *Cause Commune* (‘Le pourrissement des sociétés’, 1975) where Perec first published ‘Tentative d’épuisement d’un lieu parisien’ (*An Attempt at Exhausting a Place in Paris*. Translated into English by Marc Lowenthal. Cambridge, MA: Wakefield Press, 2010).

¹¹ In *Approches de la poésie*, Roger Caillois defines the poetic in the following terms: ‘I call ‘poetic’ all those ‘signs’ of intelligence which lie beyond words and poems (even if they include them as privileged intercessors), and beyond objects, things, emotions, and situations, and give each of us a split-second insight into an enigma and the rather artless feeling that we alone hold its key’ (Paris, Gallimard, 1978, p. 254). This feeling of universal understanding also evokes Walter Benjamin’s thesis V: ‘The true image of the past flits by. The past can be seized only as an image that flashes up at the moment of its recognizability and is never seen again (...) For it is an irretrievable image of the past which threatens to disappear in any present that does not recognize itself as intended in that image’. (‘On the Concept of History’ (1940), in *Selected Writings*, vol. 4 (1938-1940). Translated into English by Edmund Jeffcott and others. Edited by Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003, pp. 390-391).

¹² CHAR, R., *Leaves of Hypnos (extracts) and Lettera Amorosa*. Translated into English by Jackson Matthews. Rome: Botteghe Oscure XIV, 1954, pp. 19-20.

¹³ CHAR, R., *Aromates chasseurs*, Paris: Gallimard, 1975.

¹⁴ CÉSAIRE, A., *Moi, Laminiaire*, Paris: Seuil, 1982.

¹⁵ CAILLOIS, R., *op. cit.*

was unplanned. In other words, this phrase necessarily has a collective dimension. Indeed, in this perspective, illegal immigrants themselves are not alone, since they seek to activate networks.

Fields of study

In this project, we propose to concentrate on three areas, each of which will allow us to experiment with a change of analytical perspective, moving away from the observation of different forms of mobility, displacement and migration, towards a focus on the periods of standstill, pause, and waiting which punctuate such movements. Working at the intersection of complementary disciplinary perspectives (geography, history, sociology and literary studies) will allow us to describe and understand the territories where these intervals occur, as well as the social and identity dynamics they foster.

- A typology of waiting territories. We analyse the territorial configurations of standby situations through comparisons between two different modes of waiting: on the one hand, the dramatic and exceptional predicament of migrants and refugees being kept on hold, and, on the other, the more ordinary forms of waiting that people experience in the intervals that punctuate everyday social life. We also create a typology of territories where people are kept waiting, from camps specifically designed to hold people to congested urban ring roads, and to the landscapes of illegal immigration. The way these different forms of waiting evolve with time also needs to be described and understood. Do waiting territories share any invariable or constant features despite the fact that they can take many different forms? What social forms do they foster? What are the legal statuses of these territories?
- The economy of waiting: we investigate the ordinary experiences of those who spend days or hours waiting in a holding area: what are the social and economic activities promoted by the experience of 'elastic time'?¹⁶ It is important to describe and understand the spatial forms that come from human 'resourcefulness', ranging from prostitution to street trading. An important aspect of our investigation focuses on the study of the social transformations that occur in such waiting territories: experiences of exile and internment in camps can

¹⁶ BEAUD, S., 'Un temps élastique', *Terrain* (September 1997), n° 29, 'Vivre le temps', pp. 43-58.

sometimes throw social models into upheaval. Can we say that such upheavals have taken place in the social economy of North and South American migrant camps? The question of *inoperativeness* also needs to be addressed: Giorgio Agamben shows that it can to a large extent be understood as a paradigm for modern forms of human governance: inoperativeness is one of the ways in which modern states manage large groups of people, and in particular migrants.¹⁷ Kept waiting in specific places and barred from any legal form of economic activity, such people are patently socially useless, and as individuals, each one of them is alone and defenceless in the face of the administrative apparatus of the state. Waiting territories therefore also have an added dimension as spaces of inoperativeness. How do public services manage this idleness?

- Memory and identity: waiting territories do not fall into the category of the ‘non-place’ that Marc Augé described in 1992, to account for spaces that create ‘neither singular identity nor relations; only solitude and similitude’¹⁸. Augé gives the example of transit camps. However, it is a poor example. Identities can in fact be forged in waiting territories, which are ‘sites of a possible public space’¹⁹ despite pervasive feelings of uncertainty. These new identities do not necessarily erase previous ones. On the contrary, these identities constitute additional resources for those who develop them: they call on them depending on their needs and on the social strategies they devise in order to get by in uncertain times. We must therefore describe the range of identities that the shared experience of waiting in a confined space fosters among individuals who do not necessarily know each other, but suddenly find themselves bound together by their common predicament. In precarious situations, this invention of identity may reactivate earlier — religious, or ethnic — frames, when these are perceived to bring solace.²⁰ In fact, the museums that have been set up on sites such as Ellis Island in the United States — a place

¹⁷ AGAMBEN, G., *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*. Translated into English by Daniel Heller-Roazen. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998.

¹⁸ AUGÉ, M., *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*. Translated into English by John Howe. London: Verso, 1995, p. 103.

¹⁹ AGIER, M., *Managing the Undesirables. Refugee Camps and Humanitarian Government*. Translated into English by David Fernbach. Cambridge: Polity, 2011, p. 65.

²⁰ KAUFMANN, J.C., *L'invention de soi, une théorie de l'identité*, Paris: Hachette, coll. Pluriel, 2005.

of transit, waiting and hope that the French writer Georges Perec,²¹ among others, has described in detail — or the *Hospedaria dos imigrantes* in São Paulo,²² are evidence that these places played a major role in the formation of immigrant identities.

With the exception of congested spaces and airports, contemporary waiting territories are for the most part inhabited by the ‘slow men’ that Milton Santos speaks about,²³ that is to say the most underprivileged segments of the global population, who are excluded from the speed that comes with globalisation. Although it would, of course, be misguided to oppose waiting to speed, our globalised world nevertheless fosters ‘disoriented’ relationships to time, particularly in waiting spaces where, as we have already said, that relationship is reconstructed. This raises the question of the territorial grounding of the identities and memories forged in these spaces.

This book is divided into five parts. Part I, ‘The Genealogy and Stakes of Waiting Situations’ presents waiting as a state of mobility; Part II, ‘When Waiting Defines a Territory’ focuses on the spatial implications of situations of waiting; Part III, ‘Social Practices and Spatial Dynamics in Waiting Territories’ explores the ways in which people inhabit waiting territories; Part IV, ‘Waiting Territories and the Challenges to Identity’ examines the mutations of identity in situations of waiting; and Part V, ‘The Memory, Heritage, and Curation of Waiting Territories’ looks at the way in which waiting territories can become the focus of heritage practices and the politics of memory.

²¹ PEREC, G., and Bober, R. *Ellis Island and The people of America*. Translated into English by Harry Matthews. New York, NY: New Press, 1995.

²² MOURA, S., *Memorial do imigrante. A imigração no estado de São Paulo*, São Paulo: Imprensa Oficial, 2008.

²³ SANTOS, M., *A natureza do espaço: técnica e tempo, razão e emoção*, São Paulo: Hucitec, 1996.

PART I

THE GENEALOGY AND STAKES OF WAITING SITUATIONS

If there is any object of study in the social sciences that may be said to be prone to ambiguity and shifts of meaning, waiting is one of them. The fact that waiting lends itself to such a large number of metaphors touching on so many different facets of social life, means that it sometimes can seem as though any situation might be perceived through the lens of waiting. This considerably diminishes the heuristic potential of waiting.

The texts included in this section seek to posit waiting as an object of investigation for the social sciences, within the specific framework of mobility and displacement studies.

Our first task is to delimit the field of application of waiting: the scope of this study will be restricted to the forms of waiting that occur within mobility processes. As such, we define waiting as a state of mobility: this is the focus of Chapter 1. Understanding waiting as a pause (which may be either unexpected or planned) within a journey shifts the historical, geographical, sociological, anthropological (etc.) perspective towards the periods of low intensity that punctuate the temporalities of displacement. How is the specific temporality of waiting experienced?

However, in order to understand these forms of waiting, we must first construct them as historical and geographical sources. Chapter 2 proposes a few possible methods for the construction of sources in both archival work and fieldwork.

One last methodological precaution brings this section to an end: far from everyone having the same experience of waiting, feelings about, perceptions of and attitudes to waiting vary across time and cultures, and may be affected by gender. Any analysis of the forms of waiting that mobility involves must identify and evaluate the different ways in which individuals experience waiting, if it is to avoid the pitfalls of anachronism and ethnocentrism.

Laurent Vidal
Nancy Green

CHAPTER ONE

WAITING UNDERSTOOD AS A STATE OF MOBILITY

LAURENT VIDAL, ALAIN MUSSET

Let us begin with a preliminary observation: modern societies are mobile – people, goods and territories are all in movement. Although this has been true of Western societies since at least the Renaissance, it is nevertheless worth noting that this phenomenon took on a new meaning with industrialisation. As Georges Balandier explains, ‘modernity is movement plus uncertainty’.¹ The periods of waiting which punctuate mobility may well account for some of this uncertainty. Thirty odd years ago, we entered an era of hypermobility. This phenomenon attracted the attention of a number of scholars seeking to understand the specific characteristics of this new form of mobility. Their research helped to coin the now familiar phrase ‘mobility turn’. Initially, those who spoke of a mobility turn emphasised flows over the territories where these flows occurred — we are thinking here of the work of Paul Virilio, but also Zygmunt Bauman and several others.² Thus, Manuel Castells contrasted ‘the space of flows’ with the ‘space of places’. This induced several proponents of the mobility turn to downplay the role of territories in the name of a ‘metaphysics of presence’.³

¹ BALANDIER, G., *Le détour*, Paris: Fayard, 1985, p.14.

² For other arguments in the same vein, see the concepts of time-space compression (Harvey, 1989), time-space distancing (Giddens, 1989), the immediate event (Jameson, 1991), ‘glocalization’ (Robertson’s 1992 analysis of the dynamics of globalisation and localisation), as well as the shift of focus from temporal to spatial analysis (Soja, 1989) and the idea of the triumph of the present (Laidi, 2000).

³ URRY, J., *Sociology beyond Societies*, London: Routledge, 2007; URRY, J., *Mobilities*, London: Polity, 2000.

Today, in what might be described as the second wave of thought on the mobility turn, new approaches are emerging which question ‘the power of discourses, practices and infrastructures of mobility in creating the effects of both movement and stasis’.⁴ Moments of friction and turbulence, immobility and stability, pause and calm are now considered as useful as speed and flows to our understanding of the production, practice and representation of these patterns of mobility, and of their variations depending on gender, class and race. ‘Critical mobilities research interrogates who and what is demobilized and remobilized across many different scales, and in what situations mobility or immobility might be desired options, coerced, or paradoxically interconnected’.⁵

In this perspective, waiting may be understood as intrinsic to societies in movement. Those who invoke the utopian notion of the ‘death of distance’ fail to take into account the moments of interruption and the (temporal and spatial) constraints experienced by those who are waiting or displaced. Instead, if one considers, with Milton Santos,⁶ that space is composed of fixed and flowing elements, and that these elements alter the meaning and value of space as they interact, then waiting becomes a modality of this interaction.

Waiting: a paradigm for societies in movement

Our approach to waiting nevertheless moves away from the debate on the mobilities turn, in the sense that it is primarily through an investigation of waiting that we seek to understand mobile societies. Inspired by the methodological focus of microhistory on the ‘exceptional normal’ (the belief that exceptions have much to tell us about norms) we seek to further our understanding of movement through an analysis of waiting. Significantly, if waiting is generally presented as an exceptional phenomenon, it may also sometimes be considered a normal occurrence — indeed, this can depend on the point of view adopted, as in the case of peddlers working at border posts and drivers caught in urban traffic jams, for example.

⁴ SELLER, M., ‘Cosmopolitanism and Mobilities’, 2011, p. 2. In: NOWICKA, M and ROVISCO, M (eds), *The Ashgate Research Companion to Cosmopolitanism*. Aldershot: Ashgate, pp. 561–89. STOCK, M., ‘L’habiter comme pratique des lieux géographiques’, *EspacesTemps.net*, 18.12.2004.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ SANTOS, M., *A natureza do espaço: técnica e tempo, razão e emoção*, São Paulo: Hucitec, 1996, p.38.

Similarly, although there have been major investigations of human displacement and migration ports in modern times and in the contemporary period, they have not seriously examined the everyday lives of those who wait. Camille Maire⁷ has highlighted the issues of housing, law and order, etc. that councils face in immigrant cities. In *Humeurs vagabondes*, Daniel Roche defines the hostel as ‘a liminal space [that is] neither totally marginal nor totally integrated’⁸ and argues that its activities are based on ‘the economics of chance’. As for Alain Montandon, the editor of *Le livre de l'hospitalité. Accueil de l'étranger dans l'histoire et les cultures* (2004), he does not at any point call for a specific investigation of the places where foreigners are kept waiting.

Although mobility studies are thriving, the ‘moments of slack’ which punctuate mobility remain to be examined, whether they are the result of movement (switching between different modes of transportation, but also stops, breakdowns, etc.) or of governmental attempts at flow control. The same is true in the field of geography: although there is a geography of transport systems, not only was this area considered for a long time to be no more than an appendix of economic geography, but there is no geography of periods of immobility and waiting places. The existence of break-of-bulk points is widely acknowledged, but few have examined what happens when goods or passengers wait to be transhipped or to change vehicle. The geography of transport systems also tends to operate at a macrogeographic level, focusing on complex global exchanges and producing studies of regional or intercontinental integration processes backed up with pages and pages of statistical analyses. However, the geography of transport systems is less keen on local perspectives, which it often considers merely anecdotal. Yet, working at the local level is essential if one is to understand waiting territories, even when these are part of much larger systems of circulation, as demonstrated by Alain Tarrius, who coined the phrase ‘circulatory territories’ to describe the systems set up by migrant communities from the south shores of the Mediterranean: ‘The notion of circulatory territory acknowledges that spaces of movement are at some level socialised. Individuals recognise each other within the spaces they invest or cross during their shared experience of migration, and this creates an original social bond between

⁷ MAIRE, C., *En route pour l'Amérique, L'odyssée des émigrants en France au XIXe siècle*, Nancy: Presses universitaires de Nancy, 1993.

⁸ ROCHE, D., *Humeurs vagabondes: de la circulation des hommes et de l'utilité des voyages*, Paris: Fayard, 2003, p. 518.

them. These spaces have the symbolic and factual resources of territories'.⁹

In 1999, Nancy Green invited historians 'to historicise places and moments of passage, and also bring out their deeper socio-anthropological meaning'.¹⁰ In 2005, Laurent Vidal's investigation of the Amazonian relocation of the population of the Moroccan city of Mazagão led him to call for 'a social history of waiting',¹¹ on the grounds that the displacement of a community cannot be understood without taking into account the periods of time when and the places where the members of this community are kept waiting, as well as the transformations that take place at those times and in those places. This led him to propose a new analytic paradigm that does not merely account for the different sequences or stages of a journey, but also strives to understand what happens in these transit spaces and during these moments of transition: 'whether their emigration is voluntary or organised by one authority or another, emigrants never reach their destination on the same day they left. They will often have to wait for days or weeks on end — for a ship, an authorisation, etc. What do they do during this time? Where do they stay? Who do they meet? In ports as in rail stations, seamen and inn-keepers like to talk and rumours travel fast: they have been to or have heard of the travellers' country of destination. It would be wrong to pretend that those who board a ship are the same than when they arrived a few days or weeks earlier: they have in fact been changed by their experience of waiting and their stay in a place of waiting'.¹²

In other words, the form of waiting that we are speaking of here is impeded motion. Recently, the concept of 'stranded mobility',¹³ sparked a number of very insightful arguments on this issue. Bergmann and Sager have shown that flow control authorities take a rather dim view of pauses

⁹ TARRIUS, A. 'Territoires circulatoires et espaces urbains. Différenciation des groupes migrants', *Annales de la recherche urbaine*, No 59-60, Sept. 1993, pp. 51-60. Online: <http://libertaire.free.fr/Tgv03.html>, accessed 28/10/2013.

¹⁰ GREEN, N., 'Trans-frontières: pour une analyse des lieux de passage', *Socio-Anthropologie, Revue interdisciplinaire de sciences sociales*, No 6, p. 48.

¹¹ VIDAL, L., 'Pour une histoire sociale de l'attente'. In: *Mazagão, la ville qui traversa l'Atlantique : du Maroc à l'Amazonie (1769 – 1783)*, Paris: Aubier, 2005, pp. 251 – 255.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 252.

¹³ BERGMANN, S., Sager, Tore. 'In Between Standstill and Hypermobility – Introductory Remarks to a Broader Discourse'. In: Sigurd Bergmann, Tore Sager (eds), *The Ethics of Mobilities. Rethinking Place, Exclusion, Freedom and Environment*, Burlington: Ashgate, 2008, p. 5.

and stasis, which can sometimes be signs of social exclusion. In particular, their work on Hurricane Katrina demonstrated that the authorities' use of the word 'refugee' — as opposed to 'displaced person' — had political overtones, because it created an association between mobility, income level and race.¹⁴ The use of the term 'refugee' to describe the victims of flooding had an impact on the evacuation of the city and highlighted the link between mobility and power. In short, it is possible to view New Orleans as a metonymy for a world in movement.¹⁵

This is not to say that we plan to focus on the point of view of the authorities. We are also interested in the experiences of waiting groups and populations. However, this implies a radical shift in perspective: there are opportunities as well as constraints associated with waiting. Living through uncertain times can shake up traditional social structures, and this can give some people the opportunity to escape social constraints that they might not ordinarily have been able to challenge. When waiting is part of everyday life, as in our contemporary societies (traffic jams, crowded underground stations, the packed waiting rooms of highway terminals, etc.), another approach is needed in order to understand how waiting times have become part of the pattern of daily life and the uses to which these periods of waiting are sometimes put.¹⁶ Whether waiting in such cases is an ordinary occurrence or an exceptional phenomenon, this means examining the social experiences that take place during periods of waiting and in waiting spaces — which in turn requires an approach based on what Goethe called 'delicate empiricism'.

This study therefore focuses on periods and spaces of transition. The periods of uncertainty which coincide with transit situations are explored from two different analytical perspectives: we focus both on the way in which the authorities manage displacement and waiting, and on the way in which displaced people experience waiting. However, we must of course avoid transforming waiting into a universal category, as though it held the key to all the situations of pause and stasis encountered by groups in movement.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 137.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

¹⁶ On this subject, see chapter 10, 'Waiting as a Resource. The Street Traders of Rio de Janeiro and Tijuana' by Leticia Parente and Alain Musset.

Two different perspectives on waiting: approaching waiting on an *etic* and an *emic* level

The distinction that the linguist K. Pike made between the ‘emic’ (from ‘phonemics’) language spoken by the actors in a given culture, and the ‘etic’ (from ‘phonetics’) language of observers and researchers at a remove from that culture, has implications for our understanding of waiting. Do etic insights into waiting capture the emic experience of waiting, with its associated feelings? We work from observations made on an etic level, in order to try and understand how actors experience the specific spatio-temporal configuration of waiting on an emic level. Do actors have words to describe these moments, and if so what are they? If they do not have words for these experiences, do their social and spatial behaviours appear any different than they ordinarily would? It is important to be aware of the shift between what happens at the level of the observation of waiting and at the level of the experience of waiting (an experience which may in fact not necessarily be perceived in these terms).

Additionally, it is also worth analysing the names of the spaces where waiting processes unfold, interrupting flows, movement, or mobility. Naming can arguably be said to constitute an attempt to take ownership of waiting — whether this attempt is lasting or fleeting, virtual or empirical, official or informal, etc. — because naming something is already a way of asserting dominion over it. (Hence also the need to interrogate both the notion of territoriality and the process of territorialisation). Insofar as they are part of a system of geographical knowledge, toponyms commonly describe places on the three more or less interconnected levels of symbol, memory and practice. However, the meaning given to the spatial attribute of a place name will also vary from one individual to another, depending on age and personal experience. Names embed temporal experiences into lived spaces. It therefore is necessary to understand how subjects forge a relationship with their waiting places, depending on their status and culture. When these places are explicitly described as waiting rooms (or waiting halls, or any other type of waiting place), how do those who spend time more or less provisionally and voluntarily in these spaces assert ownership of them? How do they qualify or subvert them? We also need to examine the names of waiting spaces that were not designed for this use and are being diverted from their original function.

On an emic level, traffic jams are good examples of the experience of time in a context of interrupted mobility, as Néstor García Canclini reminds us in his work on the congested roads and urban mythology of Mexico City: ‘In Mexico City, several million people spend two to four

hours a day travelling on the underground, on buses, taxis and private cars. With twenty-nine million individuals crossing the city every day, these journeys represent significant ways of asserting spatial ownership of the city, while the places where they occur fire the imagination. As we travel across areas we do not really know, we come across many ‘others’ and start imagining their lives in settings different from those of our own neighbourhoods and workplaces’.¹⁷

The realities and the representations of the city (notably those that arise from the hiccups of mobility) contradict the frameworks of interpretation proposed by the apostles of supermodernity (or postmodernity), globalisation and networked urbanism — particularly, the notion that time asserts its hegemony over space (understood both as a concept and an experience). Understanding the city as an ‘atopia’ (a non-place) means no longer thinking in terms of miles but of minutes, or in terms of square miles (this surface area no longer having any meaning) but of interconnected points. Thus, Serge Wachter claims that in today’s global cities, the hegemony of flows and networks has radically transformed values and spatiotemporal scales.¹⁸ According to him, spatial notions such as remoteness, distance and proximity no longer have any value and have been replaced by units of time. In other words, Wachter believes that our mobility practices are independent of the physical properties and the asperities of the landscape, as though the contour lines on a topographic map no longer meant anything to us.

It is true that the recent development of information and communication technologies has gone hand in hand with — and even stimulated — not only the transformation of actors’ personal and professional habits, practices and tools, but also their perceptions of urban mobility and its value. Thus, Georges Amar, who is in charge of development and innovation in the French railway system, considers that ‘mobility is increasingly understood as a way of forging connections, rather than as a way of overcoming distance’.¹⁹

¹⁷ CANCLINI, N. G., ‘Ciudad invisible, ciudad vigilada’, México, *La Jornada Semanal*, 18 May 1997. Online: <http://www.jornada.unam.mx/1997/05/18/sem-nestor.html>, accessed 28/10/2013.

¹⁸ WACHTER, S., *Trafics en ville: l’architecture et l’urbanisme au risque de la mobilité*. Paris: Éditions Recherches, 2004, p. 138.

¹⁹ AMAR, G., *Du transit à la reliance: Le nouveau paradigme de la mobilité*. Online: <http://www.ludigo.net/index.php?rub=4&dossier=2&focus=203816&doc=207506&fsize=2>, accessed 29/10/2013.

Our work on the temporal and rhythmic patterns of waiting in situations of mobility nevertheless seeks to refocus the debate on the role of space in the collective and individual management of social time. However paradoxical this may seem, the density of time in a particular space is what gives that place its texture. This is particularly the case with traffic jams: when the traffic is congested in a given place and at a given moment, cars — those great symbols of modernity and mobility — remain stationary because the flow which they create and which usually sweeps them along is disrupted, for a greater or lesser period of time. When a congested road more or less becomes an institutional waiting space (red lights, roundabouts, access ramps, tollbooths, etc.), it can be transformed and foster new forms of social interaction not only between drivers and their passengers, but also between the occupants of different vehicles, as in Julio Cortazar's short story, 'The Southern Highway'.²⁰ In order to understand how this impromptu space operates, it is also important to investigate the relationships which are forged between those who are trapped inside their cars and the subjects surrounding them in the public space (passers-by, pedestrians, street traders, etc.), including all the new possibilities that new communication technologies (the radio, television, the internet, mobile phones, etc.) give them to escape their predicament, if only virtually.²¹ Just as in any other situation where new forms of time management arise from waiting, the shared feelings of boredom, interest, tiredness, anger, conflict and other related emotions, which can crop up as a result of the very specific situation of being car-bound — i.e. kept stationary in an enclosed private place within a larger public space (the street) — lead to the creation of a provisional society.

Moreover, if, as well as being alert to the distinction between the etic and the emic, one also considers waiting from the perspective of François Hartog's notion of 'regimes of historicity',²² which describes how a society articulates the categories of the past, the present, and the future at a given historical moment, it becomes clear that perceptions of waiting may

²⁰ CORTAZAR, J. *La autopista del Sur y otras historias / The Southern Highway and Other Stories*. Spain: Editorial Bruño/Anaya Commercial, 1991. In 1979, this story was turned into a film by Luigi Comencini, under the title *L'Ingorgo: Una storia impossibile*.

²¹ In chapter 9 ('The Physical Experience of Waiting While Travelling on the Underground'), Luis Campos Medina and Miguel Angel Aguilar D. examine the objects of waiting on the underground platforms of Santiago and Mexico City.

²² Hartog F., *Regimes of Historicity: Presentism and Experiences of Time*. Translated into English by Saskia Brown. New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2015.

vary from one regime of historicity to another. In particular, this may be the case in societies where the chain binding the past, present and future together is out of joint, either as a result of the invasion of a perpetual present or of the omnipresence of the future, as in utopian societies: if waiting is an all-pervasive experience, then there is no such thing as waiting anymore. This is a key factor, since perceptions and practises of waiting can vary considerably from one culture to another and within a single culture, depending on the place, the moment and the period. In the particular case of our contemporary societies, where waiting is arguably part of the modern experience of dwelling, Mathis Stock does not hesitate to speak of a 'mobility habitus' ('habitus mobilitaire'),²³ to describe the ability of individuals to cope with strange places and make them theirs. It seems very likely that migrants go through this process of spatial appropriation and territorialisation when they find themselves in waiting situations, particularly when their wait drags on indefinitely. And let us not forget that human beings are defined by the places where they spend time — i.e. by the territories where they make themselves at home, even if only in the context of a collective dynamic. Indeed, Olivier Lazzarotti notes that as levels of mobility increase, individuals are not so much defined by a place as by a multiplicity of places in what he calls 'the society of mobile individuals'.²⁴ In other words, waiting places and territories must be considered in the context of a global space populated by mobile individuals. Denis Retaillé developed an innovative approach to this question, investigating what a place comes to mean in spaces and routes marked by mobility, such as, for instance, 'a stop at a crossroads where it is possible to forge enough social ties to feel at home, however provisional these ties may be'.²⁵ In the same way, condemning the 'misleading annexation of the problematics of spatial mobility to the umbrella category of transport', Alain Tarrius has been calling since 1989 for an 'anthropology of movement'²⁶ focused on 'the micro-phenomena which foreshadow new social productions' at every stage in a journey.²⁷

²³ STOCK, M., 'L'habiter comme pratique des lieux géographiques', *EspacesTemps. Net*, Travaux, 18.12.2004. Online : <http://www.espacestemps.net/document1138.html>, accessed 29/10/2013.

²⁴ LAZZAROTTI, O., *Habiter. La condition géographique*, Paris: Belin, 2006, p. 91.

²⁵ RETAILLÉ, D., 'L'espace du contrat'. In: GRANDJEAN, P. (ed.), *La construction identitaire de l'espace*, Paris: L'Harmattan, p. 7. Online: https://www.academia.edu/1802184/Lespace_du_contrat, accessed 06/01/2014.

²⁶ TARRIUS, A., *Anthropologie du mouvement*, Caen: Paradigme, 1989, p.6.

²⁷ TARRIUS, *op. cit.*, 1989, p.7.

The notion of ‘circulation territories’, which he formulated in the same work, is today a key concept for those who wish to understand ‘territorial superimpositions’ and the ‘cosmopolitan forms of identity forged by contact with others’.²⁸

Returning to the specific question of migration, this means investigating how migrant societies shape the territories where they wait, whether their stop is a simple halt or a stay of several months in a border city, or whether it is part of what is sometimes called ‘step migration’.²⁹ Admittedly, the notion of step migration does not explicitly conceive of waiting as a structural element in the personal journeys that individuals or families undertake across space and time, in order to achieve a goal or cope with a given situation. However, waiting — understood both as a concept and a practice — can shed light on a number of hierarchical, non-linear staged processes involving migration and mobility. (Although such movements may be geographical, they may also sometimes be social, in cases of upward or downward mobility). Whether or not a process of migratory circulation takes the form of step migration, it does not unfold continuously or linearly, but is instead interspersed with periods of pause and waiting. The moments of slack that punctuate the movements of migrants are usually the consequence of either their travel practices or technological glitches (transportation changes, stops, breakdowns, etc.). These intervals lead to the creation of territories, as waiting migrants try to make themselves at home in the places where they find themselves stranded, at least for a period of time.

Going back to Stock’s concept of ‘mobility habitus’, which describes the ability to make oneself at home in any given place, it is worth noting that this habitus is particularly well-developed among certain social groups, ranging from the nomadic people and seasonal migrants of yesteryear to the inhabitants of today’s urban conurbations. As Alain Tarrius explains: ‘Mobility is not a lesser state of sedentariness, and neither is it the result of a wandering curse or of the laws of ballistics on erratic human flows; instead, mobility gives nomadic people a certain power over sedentary populations: their knowledge of the great pathways which connect different centres to each other, and which are the condition for the concentration and the circulation of tangible and intangible goods, give them a certain edge over the sedentary order, and more specifically

²⁸ TARRIUS, *op. cit.*, 2010, p. 64.

²⁹ FARET, L., *Les territoires de la mobilité. Migration et communautés transnationales entre le Mexique et les États-Unis*, Paris: CNRS Éditions, 2003, p. 61.

over its primary reified form: the urban space'.³⁰ As a result of their mobility habitus, these groups have also developed what one might call a 'waiting habitus', that is to say a set of (behavioural, social, etc.) skills, linked to the waiting situations which are part and parcel of being on the move. However, this habitus is not and has never been the same for everyone. There are still people today who experience mobility as an exceptional state, and for them, waiting can be an event in itself, a moment of rupture, a shock.

A wide range of situations and behaviours are associated with the experiences of waiting, from the 'waiting habitus' to the 'waiting event'. It is important to identify these situations, if we are to understand how, within a given regime of historicity, men and women attempt (as best they can, and with varying degrees of success depending on their abilities) to make themselves at home for a period of time. Indeed, even when they do have a mobility habitus, people may discover that the skills this has given them are of no use in the particular mobility situation where they find themselves. Walter Benjamin's 1940 suicide at the Franco-Spanish border is perhaps the most well-known example of this predicament.

Conclusion

Waiting calls for a multi-scale investigation of the rhythms and temporalities of mobility and waiting (on a temporal level), and of their micro-territorial and macro-regional implications (on a spatial level). This implies an interdisciplinary approach, at the crossroads of the social history of waiting, the geography of movement, the sociology of migration, and urban anthropology, in particular.

In some ways, our working perspective on waiting as a state of mobility may be compared to the approaches that Halbwachs, Ricœur and Augé developed on memory and forgetting. For a long time, history was understood at the etic level and memory at the emic level, until it became clear that, not only could history and memory both be studied on both of these levels, but forgetting was also a key part of the processes of memory, despite having for a long time been assumed to be temporally and spatially inoperative. Now that the role played by forgetting in the construction of individual and collective memory is well-established, the time has come to re-evaluate the place of waiting in mobility practices and imaginaries.

³⁰ TARRIUS, *op. cit.*, 1993.