Living in a world that is increasingly ‘on the move’ means that many of us now rely on mobile devices, social media and networking technologies to coordinate togetherness with our social networks even when we are apart. Nowhere is this phenomenon more evident than in the emerging practices of ‘interactive travel’. Today’s travellers are more likely than ever to pack a laptop or a mobile phone and to use these devices to stay in touch with friends and family members – as well as to connect with strangers and other travellers – while they are on the road. New practices such as location-aware navigating, travel blogging, flashpacking and couchsurfing now shape the way travellers engage with each other, with their social networks and with the world around them.

*Travel Connections* prompts a rethinking of the key paradigms in tourism studies in the digital age. Interactive travel calls into question longstanding tourism concepts such as landscape, the tourist gaze, hospitality, authenticity and escape. The book proposes a range of new concepts to describe the way tourists inhabit the world and engage with their social networks in the twenty-first century: smart tourism, the mediated gaze, mobile conviviality, re-enchantment and embrace.

Based on intensive fieldwork with interactive travellers, *Travel Connections* offers a detailed account of this emerging phenomenon and uncovers the new forms of mediated and face-to-face togetherness that become possible in a mobile world. This book will be of interest to students and scholars of sociology, tourism and hospitality, new media, cosmopolitanism studies, mobility studies and cultural studies.

**Jennie Germann Molz** is an Assistant Professor of Sociology at the College of the Holy Cross in Massachusetts, USA. Her research focuses on the social and civic implications of tourism mobilities and technology. She is the co-editor of *Mobilizing Hospitality* and an editor of the journal *Hospitality & Society*. She has published extensively on the topics of tourism, mobility, hospitality, globalization, cosmopolitanism and new technologies.
International Library of Sociology
Founded by Karl Mannheim
Editor: John Urry, Lancaster University

Recent publications in this series include:

Risk and Technological Culture
Towards a sociology of virulence
Joost Van Loon

Reconnecting Culture, Technology and Nature
Mike Michael

Advertising Myths
The strange half lives of images and commodities
Anne M. Cronin

Adorno on Popular Culture
Robert R. Witkin

Consuming the Caribbean
From arkwarks to zombies
Mimi Sheller

Between Sex and Power
Family in the world, 1900–2000
Goran Therborn

States of Knowledge
The co-production of social science and social order
Sheila Jasanoff

After Method
Mess in social science research
John Law

Brands
Logos of the global economy
Celia Lury

The Culture of Exception
Sociology facing the camp
Bülent Diken and Carsten Bagge Laustsen

Visual Worlds
John Hall, Blake Stimson and Lisa Tamiris Becker

Time, Innovation and Mobilities
Travel in technological cultures
Peter Frank Peters

Complexity and Social Movements
Multitudes acting at the edge of chaos
Ian Welsh and Graeme Chesters

Qualitative Complexity
Ecology, cognitive processes and the re-emergence of structures in post-humanist social theory
Chris Jenks and John Smith

Theories of the Information Society, 3rd Edition
Frank Webster

Crime and Punishment in Contemporary Culture
Claire Grant

Mediating Nature
Nils Lindahl Elliot
Haunting the Knowledge Economy
Jane Kenway, Elizabeth Bullen, Johannah Fahey and Simon Robb

Global Nomads
Techno and new age as transnational countercultures in Ibiza and Goa
Anthony D’Andrea

The Cinematic Tourist
Explorations in globalization, culture and resistance
Rodanthi Tzanelli

Non-Representational Theory
Space, politics, affect
Nigel Thrift

Urban Fears and Global Terrors
Citizenship, multicultures and belongings after 7/7
Victor J. Seidler

Sociology through the Projector
Bülent Diken and Carsten Bagge Laustsen

Multicultural Horizons
Diversity and the limits of the civil nation
Anne-Marie Fortier

Sound Moves
IPod culture and urban experience
Michael Bull

Jean Baudrillard
Fatal theories
David B. Clarke, Marcus A. Doel, William Merrin and Richard G. Smith

Aeromobilities
Theory and method
Saulo Cwerner, Sven Kesselring and John Urry

Social Transnationalism
Steffen Mau

Towards Relational Sociology
Nick Crossley

Mobile Lives
Anthony Elliott and John Urry

Stillness in a Mobile World
Edited by David Bissell and Gillian Fuller

Unintended Outcomes of Social Movements
The 1989 Chinese student movement
Fang Deng

Revolt, Revolution, Critique
The paradox of society
Bulent Diken

Travel Connections
Tourism, technology and togetherness in a mobile world
Jennie Germann Molz

Forthcoming in the series:

China
The cultural logic of contemporary capitalism
Lash Scott, Keith Michael, Arnoldi Jakob, Rooker Tyler

Mobility, Space and Culture
Peter Merriman

Staging Mobilities
Ole B. Jensen

Transforming Images
Screens, affect, futures
Rebecca Coleman
Travel Connections
Tourism, technology and togetherness in a mobile world

Jennie Germann Molz
To Martin and Elliot, the best travel companions I could ever hope for.
Contents

List of illustrations x
Acknowledgements xi

1 Introduction: tourism, technology and togetherness in a mobile world 1

2 Fieldwork on the move: mobile virtual ethnography 17

3 Landscape: connecting to place, connected places 38

4 Gaze: mobilizing and mediating the tourist gaze 61

5 Hospitality: the mobile conviviality of CouchSurfing 83

6 Authenticity: representation, commodification and re-enchantment 110

7 Escape: unplugging from modernity 135

8 Conclusion: performing mobile sociality 160

Notes 179
Bibliography 180
Index 196
Illustrations

Figures

3.1 Listening to Audissey’s Boston Public Garden tour 50
3.2 Urban Interactive kiosk in the Boston Common 54
4.1 Gazing at/from my computer screen 66
5.1 Walking and talking with a CouchSurfer in Italy 103
6.1 Backpackers using the computers in the guest house common room in Cusco, Peru 123

Table

2.1 CouchSurfing demographics 35
Acknowledgements

I am grateful to everyone who engaged with this project, first at the Centre for Mobilities Research at Lancaster University, where these ideas first took root, and then later as they were routed across two continents, through several conferences and into the hands of friends and colleagues around the world. While I was writing the book, I presented working drafts at a number of conferences and seminars. I would like to thank all of the conference organizers and participants for invigorating conversations and valuable feedback, with a special note of thanks to David Bissel, Sonja Buchberger, De-Jung Chen, Jim Conley, Matilde Cordoba Azcarate, Tim Cresswell, Timothy Dallen, Adriana de Souza e Silva, Tim Edensor, Christian Fisker, Malene Freudendal-Pedersen, Nelson H. H. Graburn, Maria Gravari-Barbas, Juliet Jain, Ole B. Jensen, Paola Jiron, Hillary Kaell, Sven Kesselring, Chia-ling Lai, Daniel Olson, Cody Paris, Noel Salazar, Mimi Sheller, Jen Southern, Vicky Steylaerts, Jennifer Sweda, Phillip Vannini and Dennis Zuev. I am especially grateful to John Urry for his unfailing support of this project from the very beginning, and for his helpful guidance along the way. Thanks are due to Anne-Marie Fortier, Michael Haldrup, Sven Kesselring, Mimi Sheller and Soile Veijola for their generous intellectual hospitality, especially during the early stages of this project. I would also like to express my appreciation to Monika Büscher, Michael Epstein, Adi Kuntsman and Peggy Schyns for their astute comments and words of encouragement on early chapter drafts, as well as to Lydia Brauer, Jonas Larsen and Mary McGlynn for their valuable advice. Thank you also to Gerhard Boomgaard, Jennifer Dodd and Emily Briggs at Routledge for their enthusiasm about this project and for their editorial assistance.

At Holy Cross, I would like to thank the Charles and Rosanna Batchelor (Ford) Foundation Grant, the Michael C. and Maureen Ruetgers Research Fund and the Committee on Faculty Scholarship for providing financial support for fieldwork, conference travel and research assistance. Heartfelt thanks are due to Michele Latour, Lia McCarthy and Kristen Troy for their invaluable research and administrative assistance, as well as to my students whose smart questions and creative observations helped me think about travel and technology in new ways. Many of my department colleagues commented on this project at various stages, and I would like to thank them for their time, insights and encouragement: Renée
Beard, Susan Crawford Sullivan, Susan Cunningham, Jeffrey Dixon, Ara Francis, Dave Hummon, Ellis Jones, Tom Landy, Jerry Lembcke, Ann Marie Leshkowich, Sasha Newell, Susan Rodgers, Royce Singleton, Ed Thompson and Caroline Yezer.

I am extremely grateful to all of the people who participated in this research and shared their stories and experiences of interactive travel with me. Thank you especially to Simon Dao, Michael Epstein, Richard Paik and Nicholas Tommarello, to the travel bloggers who allowed me follow and analyse their blogs and agreed to let me interview them, and to the dozens of CouchSurfers who welcomed me into their homes and their lives.

Thank you to my dispersed networks of dear friends and family members, whom I see only intermittently (and mostly online!), but whose support for this project has been tangible and constant. Thanks also to my neighbours in Massachusetts and Italy for food and laughter, for filling in at the last minute, for sharing the garden duties and the harvest, for snow-blowing the driveway and for caring about the progress on this book! I am indebted to Susie Masters, yoga instructor extraordinaire, whose expertise on flow and movement rejuvenated and grounded me on a weekly basis.

And of course my deepest appreciation goes to my husband, Martin Molz, and my son, Elliot Molz, for making this book possible, in every sense, with their patience and understanding, their creativity and fearlessness, their warm hospitality to the CouchSurfers I brought home, their good sense to put my phone on the charger and their love of travel. They are my mooring in the midst of mobility, for which I am always grateful.
Wired and wireless communication at the airport in Cusco, Peru.
Source: Photograph taken by the author.

**travel**: to go on or as if on a trip or tour; to move or undergo transmission from one place to another; to journey through or over; to move in a given direction or path or through a given distance; to move rapidly.

**connection**: a link; a relation of personal intimacy; a means of communication or transport; a political, social, professional, or commercial relationship; rapport; tie; bond.
1 Introduction

Tourism, technology and togetherness in a mobile world

Yogyakarta, Indonesia, 1994

The rooms in the Sumaryo Guest House where I was staying opened onto a sunny central courtyard blooming with hibiscus bushes and furnished with low-slung lawn chairs. Small clusters of three or four travellers, mostly young Western backpackers, would sit in the lawn chairs late into the night engaging in that casual banter and story swapping that tends to characterize backpacker socializing. Mark made an odd exception to this social choreography. I noticed that he had pulled one of those lawn chairs up against a wall and was sitting there alone, hunched over a black portable computer. Wires spilled out of the side of his computer and snaked up the wall where he had rigged a power converter to plug his computer into an outlet. When I asked him what he was doing, he slowly peeled his gaze away from the screen to look at me and then patiently explained that he was keeping a digital travel journal and writing articles about travelling around the world with a computer. These articles were intended as a kind of ‘how-to’ guide for other travellers who might want to bring their computers along, but were worried about security or weight or voltage. He gestured to one of the wires, which led to a phone jack, and explained that he was occasionally able to connect his modem to the phone line in the guest house to transmit his travel journal to friends back home. ‘All my friends get is a postcard’, I joked. But, I quickly figured out that his friends were not like my friends. They were tech-savvy computer nerds who spent most of their time in a university lab and knew how to make computers on opposite sides of the world talk to one another. He clearly wanted to get back to the task at hand, so I wandered off, fascinated and confused by this guy in a guest house in Indonesia communicating, somehow, with his friends on another continent.

Introduction

I did not realize it then, but I had encountered my first ‘flashpacker’. Of course, in 1994, that term did not exist and would not be coined for another decade or so. At the time, I thought of Mark rather prosaically as the guy with the computer. Like me, he was in his early twenties, from the United States, and taking a few months off to backpack around the world. Unlike me, or any other backpacker I had met so far on my journey, Mark was hauling a heavy, expensive laptop computer everywhere he went. It is difficult to capture in retrospect my initial reactions to Mark and his computer. It helps to remember that, at the time, few people were
using email let alone mobile phones or social networking sites for daily communication. There was no Yahoo! and certainly no Facebook. There was no Google. I had still not heard of a browser. The word ‘blog’ did not yet exist. I knew people who owned laptop computers, but it would never occur to them to lug their laptops around the world in a backpack. What Mark was doing with his computer in the courtyard of the Sumaryo Guest House seemed uncanny to me. There he was, his face buried in a computer screen, his back to the communal space of the guest house, apparently alone and yet, at the same time, connected across time and space to distant friends.

The image of Mark bent over his laptop computer and the sense I had that he was both connected *and* disconnected – socially, digitally, physically – piqued a curiosity that has motivated much of my scholarly research over the past fifteen years. Since then, I have been exploring the way travellers integrate portable computers and the Internet, and more recently mobile phones and social media, into their travel and tourism practices, a trend I refer to as ‘interactive travel’. In this book, I explore some of the questions that Mark and his laptop computer prompted all those years ago. How do we ‘do togetherness’ at a distance? What kinds of connections – and disconnections – do new technologies make available to travellers? What do we gain by being able to connect to places in new ways or stay in touch with loved ones while on the road, and what do we give up? These new patterns of togetherness and sociality that emerge when physical travel intersects with communication technologies are the topic of this book.

In this introductory chapter, I describe the growing trend of ‘interactive travel’ and locate it within the larger debates surrounding mobility, technology and sociality. I begin by showing how the rapidly evolving context of new mobile and media technologies has made interactive travel an ever more significant element of modern social life, especially in a mobile world. As interactive travellers use mobile phones and the Internet to upload blogs, post photos and videos, network with other travellers or navigate through tourist spaces, they are not merely rewriting the social and spatial significance of travel, they are pointing to significant shifts in how we use mobile technologies every day to engage with each other and the world while on the move. I then situate this discussion within the debate between social cohesion and fragmentation that often arises when new technologies appear on the social scene. Here, I expand in particular on Andreas Wittel’s notion of ‘network sociality’ and Zygmunt Bauman’s concept of ‘liquid love’, using their critiques of the frail and fleeting nature of social life to frame the questions I ask about mobile sociality. I conclude the chapter by considering how new communication technologies afford certain forms of togetherness on the move, and how the anxieties and aspirations travellers attach to these new technologies shed light on the imagined limits and possibilities of this mobile sociality.

**Taking technology on the road: the rise of ‘interactive travel’**

Interactive travel looks quite different today than it did when I met Mark at that guest house in Indonesia. Mark’s seemingly idiosyncratic travel hobby has, in fact,
become a massive trend. What began as a marginal activity is now central to backpackers’ experiences, and to the general practice of travel. By 2000, hundreds of round-the-world travellers were publishing websites similar to Mark’s digital travel journal. By 2011, the term ‘round-the-world travel blog’ had become so commonplace that a Google search returned more than 89 million results for this keyword. According to the annual ‘State of the American Traveler Survey’ from Destination Analysts, Inc. (2009, 2010, 2011), travellers in the United States have become increasingly likely to use the Internet and mobile technologies to plan and coordinate their journeys. In 2011, more than 43 per cent of travellers surveyed reported that they consulted user-generated online content, up from 30 per cent in 2009. In 2009, only 8.5 per cent of respondents used social media and photo sharing sites while planning their trips. By 2011, this number had risen to 25.8 per cent. That same year, significant numbers of respondents reported taking laptops with them on leisure trips, as well as using mobile devices to access travel or destination information online and to download destination-specific podcasts, locative tools and interactive guides.

Over the past decade, the proliferation of Internet cafés, portable computers, mobile smartphones, wireless Internet, connected hotspots, online social networking sites, user-friendly social media platforms and photo sharing sites has normalized ubiquitous access to the Internet among mobile and geographically-dispersed social groups, not least of all interactive travellers. Travellers’ tales from the road reveal the assumption that blogging and flashpacking, a neologism that refers to packing digital devices like laptops and smartphones in your backpack, have become ordinary aspects of most travellers’ journeys. Logging onto Facebook, emailing home, uploading photos or texting friends are now normal, everyday aspects of a travelling lifestyle. Boots’n’All.com, an online network for independent travellers, notes that ‘To blog or not to blog?’ is now a common question for prospective round-the-world travellers. It is so common, in fact, that the website has published a guide to help travellers decide which blogging tools and smartphone applications to use while on the road. The author of Nomadic Matt’s Travel Site, a popular travel blog that I will discuss in depth later in the book, observes that most of the backpackers he encounters are toting iPods, smartphones and laptop computers. He asks on his blog, ‘Are we all flashpackers now?’ As we will see, the answer to this question is less about the statistical significance of a trend than it is about the new patterns of sociality that emerge when movement, communication and technology converge.

To explore these new social configurations, I focus in this book on three interrelated practices of interactive travel, each one a point of intersection between technology and tourism. I describe my methodological approach to these practices in more detail in Chapter 2, but I want to introduce briefly here the three case studies that make up the empirical context of the book. First is a study of mediated walking tours in the nearby cities of Boston and Cambridge. Curious about the way interactive technologies shape visitors’ connections to the urban landscape, I downloaded several of these mobile guides to my iPod and iPhone and followed them around the city. Afterwards, I contacted the developers who had created these
guides and interviewed them about their vision for mobile technologies in urban tourism. In Chapter 3, I describe my experiences with these mediated and interactive walking tours and recount my conversations with the developers, highlighting in particular the way these mediated guides produce a hybrid geography of digital and physical landscapes and reflect the tension between commercial and civic applications of mobile technologies.

The second instance of interactive travel involves the interrelated practices of flashpacking and travel blogging. As I mentioned earlier, flashpacking refers to the relatively new practice of bringing digital devices along on a trip and using them to stay in touch while on the road. The flashpackers I focused on in my study were ones who used those devices to publish travel blogs as they travelled around the world. For several months, I followed these travel blogs online, regularly reading the stories travellers published online, looking at their photographs, watching their videos and paying careful attention to the back-and-forth comments posted by other readers. In Chapter 4, I describe my interactions with these blogs and introduce some of the travellers who published them. For example, I describe The World Effect, a blog published by Beau and Meggan, a couple from Colorado who set off on their round-the-world journey in 2008. Like most of the travellers in my study, Beau packed so many gadgets, converters, chargers and power cords that the inside of his backpack resembled, as he put it, ‘a bowl of spaghetti’. The reason he packed all those devices, Beau explains on the blog, was not just to record his and Meggan’s experiences, but also to share the trip – as it happened – with friends, family members and other travellers. In Chapter 4, I examine the implications of this impulse to stay in continuous touch with a dispersed and distant social group while on the move.

In order to address the specific kinds of sociality that emerge around social networking sites, I selected as my third case study an online network aimed specifically at travellers: CouchSurfing.org. CouchSurfing is an online hospitality exchange network that connects travellers in need of a couch to crash on with people willing to host them for a night or two. Like other interactive travel practices, CouchSurfing has grown exponentially in the past several years. It developed from a handful of founding members in 2003 to a worldwide network of more than 3 million members by the summer of 2011. In this case, my fieldwork took place both online and offline. Online, I analysed the CouchSurfing website, browsed member profiles and participated in virtual community groups. At the same time, I surfed with, hosted and interviewed dozens of CouchSurfers in person. In Chapter 5, I describe my experiences as a CouchSurfer and introduce some of the people I met along the way, including Noelle and Marise who hosted me in Montreal, the eclectic group of CouchSurfers I hung out with at an organic farm in New Mexico, and Nico, an Italian artist, who sees CouchSurfing as fulfilling the revolutionary potential of the Internet. My interactions with these CouchSurfers reveal the new possibilities social networking technologies pose for interacting not just with friends, but also with strangers.

Throughout the book, I explore these intersections between tourism and technology in detail, in each case asking how travellers use mobile technologies, social
media and online social networking to connect to – and disconnect from – people and places while on the move. My aim is to provide a textured account of mobile sociality as an increasingly predominant form of social life in an ever more mobile world.

**Connecting in a mobile world**

By most accounts, we now live in a mobile world crisscrossed by intersecting trajectories of people, media, data, goods and risks. Travellers and tourists, satellite images and digitized photos, soldiers and refugees, currencies and debt, voice messages and email, food and clothing, and disease and pollution are constantly on the move. Most people in the world now find themselves living ‘mobile lives’ (Elliott and Urry 2010), whether they have chosen a mobile lifestyle (like many middle-class professionals, including the travellers I introduce in this book) or had mobility thrust upon them (like many asylum seekers, refugees and involuntary migrants). Questions of who moves and who does not, how movement is chosen, enforced or blocked, and the uneven conditions of movement are thus central to contemporary life (Sheller and Urry 2006). Based on sheer numbers, tourism mobilities are certainly implicated in these questions. The travel and tourism industry alone is worth more than US$7 trillion per year and is arguably the largest industry in the world (Elliott and Urry 2010: ix). Tourism accounts for close to one billion international arrivals annually, a number predicted to rise to 1.6 billion by the year 2020. Tourism is also implicated in the power-geometry of this mobile world (Massey 1993). As theorists have carefully pointed out, the mobility of some is often predicated on the immobility of others, and the fairly comfortable conditions of movement enjoyed by most of the travellers in this study rely heavily on privileges afforded by factors such as race, social class, gender, ethnicity and national citizenship.

If mobility itself is not exactly new, its particular salience within modern society certainly seems to be. The speed and scale of physical and virtual mobilities, the diversity and complexity of mobility systems, the ubiquity of movement in our everyday lives, and the new forms of communication, consumption, citizenship, space, selfhood and sociality that emerge through these mobilities are remarkable. What is also new, or so it seems, is the significance scholars now attribute to mobility. From ‘scapes’ (Appadurai 1990), ‘flows’ (Castells 1996), and ‘acceleration’ (Rosa and Scheuerman 2008) to ‘turbulence’ (Cresswell 2010), ‘stillness’ (Bissell and Fuller 2010) and ‘moorings’ (Hannam, Sheller and Urry 2006), a rich conceptual lexicon has emerged to describe the way contemporary social life is fundamentally organized around various mobilities and immobilities. These concepts signal a ‘mobilities turn’ in the social sciences that aims to make sense of social networks that are increasingly stretched across space, social relations that are ever more reliant on mediated communication, and social inequalities that are entrenched in access to or exclusion from physical and virtual mobilities.

In their analysis of the mobile lives that many people now lead, Elliott and Urry (2010: 5) observe that ‘the emergence of complex global mobility systems
Introduction involves the creation of new forms of mobile social life, new kinds of daily experience, and new forms of social interaction. Central to the mobile lifeworlds they describe are the information and communication technologies people use to order, arrange and mediate life on the move. Especially for middle-class citizens living in wealthy societies, ‘modern’ lifestyles are only made liveable by virtue of the various mobility systems that whir ceaselessly in the background. One of the most striking aspects of this mobile, mediated and networked world is the extent to which physical movement and communication technologies intersect in new articulations of self and sociability. As networks of colleagues, friends and families extend and move across geographical space, social life now involves multiple forms of co-presence established through physical travel, online interactions and mobile communications (Larsen, Urry and Axhausen 2006). We see this in concentrated form in interactive travel, where travellers experiment with technology to engage in new mobile lifestyles, establish new ties to space and place, and navigate new modes of co-presence with friends and family members while on the road and far away. Physical travel and mediated communication are the ‘social glue’ (Vertovec 2004) that holds these dispersed and mobile social networks together. This hybrid sociality is impossible apart from the technologies of travel and communication that enable it, and yet, as we will see, it is not reducible to these technologies.

Connecting

As I explore the contours, qualities and textures of togetherness in this mobile world, I return again and again to the concept of connection. I argue that connectivity, and especially the dialectic between connecting and disconnecting, lies at the heart of mobile sociality. In many ways, interactive travel conflates social, spatial and digital connectivity, and the title of this book is meant to capture precisely these overlaps. The phrase from which the book’s title derives – ‘travel connections’ – conjures up many images: passengers rushing through airport terminals or train stations to catch the next leg of their itinerary; subway maps and airline routes built around hubs and spokes; and cartographies of the Internet or cellular networks depicting the wired and wireless routes that data travel along as they move between transmitters, servers and computers. These kinds of travel connections are predicated on complex mobility systems composed of interconnected infrastructures, services and modes of transportation and communication. But, ‘travel connections’ also connotes the social, intimate and interpersonal relations that emerge in the midst of all this mobility.

In public discourse about mobile technologies and social media, the term ‘connect’ often gets used in such unselfconscious ways that we rarely ask how we get from the digital to the social. Facebook, for example, claims to ‘help you connect and share with the people in your life’. Nokia’s motto is, ‘Connecting people’. Cisco, a multinational telecommunications company, brands itself as ‘the human network’ and claims to be ‘bringing people together’. The conceptual leap from electronic connectivity to human and social connections in these corporate
taglines appears to be seamless. We are led to understand ‘connection’ as a fairly straightforward way of referring to social ties, especially ones that are technologically mediated. Connecting to the Internet and connecting to a faraway friend are barely discernible activities.

The fact that ‘connection’ refers today as easily to social relationships as it does to travelling or to Internet access attests not only to the term’s polyvalence, but also to new forms of sociability that revolve less around physically proximate communal relationships and more around geographically-dispersed, mediated and mobile social networks. Bauman (2003) notes that people now refer to their social experiences in terms of connections; connecting and being connected rather than in terms of relating and relationships. Urry (2007: 46) argues that ‘all social relationships should be seen as involving diverse “connections” that are more or less “at a distance”, more or less fast, more or less intense and more or less involving physical movement’. Because social relations at a distance are never simply fixed or located in place, they must be constituted and maintained through a combination of social, spatial, emotional and technological connections (Elliott and Urry 2010). Our ability to talk about our social relations as connections relies on a conflation of the digital with the interpersonal that epitomizes the mediated and mobile nature of modern social life.

The tourist as a metaphor of the mobile world

Interactive travel has a lot to tell us about this changing social world, and especially about the way social life has become wrapped up in technologies of moving and communicating. In many ways, travel, tourism and backpacking are symbolic of this increasingly mobile world (Richards and Wilson 2004a) and, more generally, ‘of the problem of “being modern” ’ (Minca and Oakes 2006: 1). In this sense, I focus on interactive travel as a set of practices that are embedded in and emblematic of modern life and I look to these practices to reveal the kinds of sociality and togetherness that are possible, or impossible, in an increasingly mobile, mediated and networked world. This book thus extends a long-standing and ongoing agenda in historical and sociological studies of tourism that sees the leisure traveller as a metaphor of the social world.

Scholars have focused on the tourist not only because the tourist is an important figure of the largest industry in the world, but also because the tourist has ‘provided a sociological understanding of that world’ (Dann 2002: 6). Much of the foundational literature in tourism studies has explored the way changing styles of travel reflect broader social and cultural shifts. For example, Judith Adler’s (1989) seminal piece on the history of sightseeing explains how performances of travel shifted over time to reflect changing social values. According to Adler, changes in tourists’ ways of seeing and encountering ‘scenic’ landscapes mirrored broader societal shifts from the Scientific Revolution of the seventeenth century to the Romantic sensibilities of the eighteenth century. By the middle of the twentieth century, tourism practices had shifted yet again, this time toward mass tourism. One of the earliest treatments of tourism in the social sciences, Valene Smith’s
influential collection *Hosts and Guests* (1989), offers an anthropological critique of this shift. In response to the rise of mass tourism in the 1970s, the studies included in Smith’s book described a socioeconomic milieu that made modern tourism an economically viable pursuit for post-war Americans, even as it contributed to the dichotomous and often unequal encounters between travellers and their local hosts in a postcolonial context.

Soon after Smith’s collection on the anthropology of tourism appeared, John Urry introduced *The Tourist Gaze* (1990), a sociological exploration of the relationship between mass tourism and modernity. For Urry, the massification of tourism in the mid-twentieth century, with its emphasis on visuality, spectacle and the consumption of place, was emblematic of a shift to a more reflexive and flexible post-Fordist economy. Urry argued that mass tourism in the twentieth century became a crucial element of what it meant to be modern, not only as a marker of status but as a way of coping with the heightened stress and complexity of modern life. In a similar vein, Dean MacCannell (1999[1976]) interpreted the tourist’s quest for authenticity as characteristic of the alienating effects of modernity, motivated in part by a desire to escape the strictures and simulacra that define life in the modern world (Rojek 1993).

Out of this literature have emerged some of the key theoretical paradigms scholars use to make sense of tourism as a metaphor of modern social life. The role of place and landscape, the tourist gaze, relations between hosts and guests, the quest for authenticity and the desire to escape are not merely concepts for explaining what tourists do or why they do it; they are frameworks for understanding the complex ways in which travel and tourism are inextricably linked to the broader political, economic, cultural and social composition of the world. These paradigms have also highlighted the complex spatial and social relations involved in tourism, including the way travellers connect to the self, to others, to places and to the world while on the road. The extent to which these connections (and disconnections) are now mobilized, mediated, coordinated and networked through mobile technologies and online media, however, now requires a better understanding of tourism as a socio-technical practice.

Dann (2002) points out that foundational tourism texts like Urry’s analysis of the tourist gaze, Smith’s collection on hosts and guests and MacCannell’s treatise on modernity and authenticity, were all published prior to the arrival of the Internet, mobile phones, blogs or social networking sites. One of my objectives in this book is to reconsider these dominant tourism studies paradigms in light of recent technological innovations. To this end, I devote a chapter to thinking through each of these paradigms. For example, in Chapter 3 I explore the theme of landscape and examine the way mobile technologies shape tourist places and tourists’ encounters with urban landscapes. In Chapter 4, I describe the way flash-packing and travel blogging mobilize and mediate the tourist gaze in new ways, resulting in interactive, sociable and hybrid performances of togetherness between travellers and their social networks. A similar theme emerges in Chapter 5, where I consider the paradigm of hospitality and relations between hosts and guests in light of online hospitality exchange sites like *CouchSurfing.org*. I take up the question...
Introduction

of authenticity in Chapter 6, where I ask how travellers appeal to a discourse of authenticity to make sense of new socio-technical practices such as travel blogging and CouchSurfing. In Chapter 7, I revisit the notion that tourism constitutes an escape from modernity and ask what it means for travellers to escape or disconnect in a world of ubiquitous computing. I conclude in Chapter 8 by considering the insights that the ‘performance turn’, a newly emerging paradigm in tourism studies, brings to interactive travel and mobile sociality. Before I move on to these chapters, however, it is important to situate interactive travel and mobile sociality within the broader theoretical debates unfolding around mobility, technology and sociality and to establish the foundation for the questions I ask throughout the book.

Mobility, technology and the problem of human togetherness

New communication and transportation technologies often enter the public realm on the horns of a familiar dilemma: Will they bring societies together or tear them apart? In other words, will these technologies provide us with new (and better) ways to be social, or will they further isolate an already alienated modern population? During the 1990s and 2000s, the emergence of the Internet, mobile phones and online social media animated this debate along fairly predictable lines. Proponents of these technologies argued that connecting in the digital age held great promise for sociability, insisting that social ties mediated online or via mobile phones could be surprisingly cohesive. Critics argued, however, that online connections were inevitably weak, especially in comparison to the more substantive quality of face-to-face relationships, and were therefore likely to unravel the social fabric. Furthermore, online relationships and virtual communities threatened to replace, or at least distract us from, our ‘real’ relationships with family, neighbours and friends.

The very same promises of enhanced community and threats of social fragmentation can be traced back to the introduction of the railway, the steamship, the telegraph and the telephone in the nineteenth century. In her historical analysis of the public’s reaction to electronic innovations in the late nineteenth century, Carolyn Marvin (1988) explains that new technologies like the telephone and telegraph posed both opportunities and risks to the social order. On the one hand, they heralded a new age of global community, cultural harmony and civilization. New electronic communication technologies promised an era of ‘neighborship without propinquity’ that would embrace even the most secluded member of society into a tighter community (Marvin 1988: 66). At the personal level, these technologies allowed people to share intimacies from afar in ways that had never been possible before. Marvin recounts stories of telephone operators falling in love over the telephone line and suitors using the telephone to offer proposals of marriage. Not all connections had such happy endings. The introduction of the telephone was also seen as threatening traditional courtship, intruding on the private space of the family, abetting new kinds of crimes, and facilitating the ‘wrong’ kinds of connections across class and racial boundaries. Advances in transportation met similarly
mixed reviews. The railroad, followed by the automobile, was seen as a marvel of technological progress that would unite the far corners of the world in social harmony. At the same time, however, nineteenth century innovations in transportation were met with worries about the socially disruptive and disorienting effects of roads, railways and speed (for a fuller historical account of these tensions, see Kern 1983 and Schivelbusch 1986).

What seems especially salient by contemporary standards is Marvin’s (1988: 5) observation that in the nineteenth century, people ‘struggled to come to terms with novel … devices that made possible communication in real time without real presence, so that some people were suddenly too close and others much too far away’. In other words, by enabling communication at a distance, new technologies tightened some social bonds while rendering others more tenuous. What lay at the heart of this public debate, according to Marvin, was the ‘ambiguous presence’ that electronic communication produced. By divorcing social proximity from embodied co-presence, the telegraph and the telephone threw togetherness into question. In the long run, as we will see, the dichotomy between social cohesion and social fragmentation does not provide a very useful empirical framework, but it does reveal the way a society imagines the parameters and vulnerabilities of its ‘togetherness’, especially when the terms of that togetherness become uncertain.

Like the telegraph and the telephone in the nineteenth century, contemporary mobile media and communication technologies both transcend and redefine co-presence. Although most of us have by now grown accustomed to communicating at a distance, as well as on the move, we are still a bit uncertain about precisely what kind of togetherness we are doing when we text a friend or update our status on Facebook. Our co-presence remains ambiguous, though in slightly different ways from our nineteenth century counterparts. When I described my encounter with Mark at the beginning of this chapter, I depicted Mark as being both there in the guest house courtyard and yet somehow not there. Recent research on mobile phones, online social networks and interactive communities has tried to pin down this ambiguity of presence. Gergen (2002), for example, uses the term ‘absent presence’ to refer to the way mobile phones divide one’s attention between here and elsewhere. Bauman (2003) would describe Mark’s use of the computer as a kind of ‘virtual proximity’ with his friends back in the United States, but one that also rendered him ‘virtually distant’ from me and the other backpackers at the guest house. At the time, Mark was able to connect his modem only infrequently, but interactive travellers today are able to stay in almost continuous touch with their extended social networks, a condition Licoppe (2004) has referred to as ‘connected presence’. Ito and Okabe (2005), in their study of teenagers’ use of mobile phones, call this ‘ambient virtual co-presence’, suggesting that our social networks are continuously present and available, whether we are actively engaged with them or not. These terms all aim to capture the interplay of connecting and disconnecting, distance and proximity, togetherness and apartness that characterizes social life in technology-saturated societies. The question, then, is not whether new technologies result in more or less cohesive societies, but rather what kind of
sociality they produce. How do people share with one another, care for each other and integrate themselves into the fabric of each other’s everyday lives, even when they are apart?

I am certainly not the first to ask what this togetherness looks like. Among the theories of mobile sociality that have influenced my analysis in this regard are Andreas Wittel’s notion of ‘network sociality’ and Zygmunt Bauman’s concept of ‘liquid love’. As I describe in the next section, Wittel’s and Bauman’s accounts of technologically mediated social life provide a provocative, if problematic, departure point for the theoretical direction I take in this book. Bauman and Wittel offer richly-textured accounts of the kind of sociality we might expect from our mediated connections, bringing attention to the tangible ways in which digital connections shape interpersonal relations, but leaving little room for the complex interplay between technological affordances and travellers’ desires.

Network sociality and liquid love

According to Andreas Wittel (2001), the fact that social relationships look and feel different today is unsurprising given that sociality is no longer predicated on spatially proximate communities, but rather on spatially diffuse networks of people and technologies. Mobile social relationships necessarily take on a different texture than those built around place-based community, a point Wittel (2001: 51) makes clear in his definition of ‘network sociality’:

> Community entails stability, coherence, embeddedness and belonging. It involves strong and long-lasting ties, proximity and a common history or narrative of the collective. . . . Network sociality . . . does not represent belonging but integration and disintegration. . . . Social relations are not ‘narrational’ but ‘informational’; they are not based on mutual experience or common history, but primarily on an exchange of data and on ‘catching up’. . . . Network sociality consists of fleeting and transient, yet iterative social relations; of ephemeral but intense encounters.

Network sociality alters the quality not only of online relationships, but of face-to-face ones as well. For instance, Wittel explains, ‘in a network sociality, strangers become potential friends’, but the very meaning of friendship undergoes a transformation (ibid.: 71). Instead of sharing a common biography or history, friends ‘catch up’ with quick bits of information. And instead of enduring over time, relations tend ‘towards ephemeral but intense, focused, fast and over-loaded social ties’ (ibid.: 66).

Wittel offers the example of ‘speed dating’ as a somewhat extreme example of how social – and potentially romantic – relationships revolve around the quick but intense exchange of information. This example of speed dating also illustrates another feature of network sociality: the tendency to commodify human relationships in both personal and professional realms. Wittel observes that ‘connections’ are currency in the network society. Quite similar to the kind of network
sociality Wittel describes here, the mobile sociality that emerges in interactive travel involves both intense bonding and ephemeral relations. As we will see in the analysis of CouchSurfing and hospitality in Chapter 5, mediated connections can lead to emotionally intense, but ultimately brief and potentially commodified, face-to-face interactions between travellers.

The features Wittel identifies in network sociality are inspired, in large part, by Zygmunt Bauman’s notion of ‘liquid modernity’ (2000). In contrast to the solid modernity of nineteenth century industrialization, Bauman describes contemporary modernity as light, mobile and flexible. In his book *Liquid Love* (2003), he elaborates on the social dimension of this liquid modernity and the consequences of mediated communication for human togetherness. As Bauman (2003: 59) describes it, ‘connecting’ is both the premise and the effect of mobile sociality:

> Your mobile always rings (or so you hope). One message flashes on the screen in hot pursuit of another. Your fingers are always busy: you squeeze the keys, calling new numbers to answer the calls or composing messages of your own. You *stay connected* – even though you are constantly on the move, and though the invisible senders and recipients of calls and messages move as well, all following their own trajectories. Mobiles are for people on the move.

Bauman’s illustration of the nature of relationships in contemporary society focuses in particular on the problem with denoting human interactions as connections. The more we perform our sociality on the move and at a distance, Bauman worries, the less we are able to be social without our mobile technologies and the more our social relations take on the character of these ‘connections’. Bauman finds this troubling because he sees these mediated connections as frail and fleeting, vulnerable to being ‘both substantively and metaphorically, finished with nothing more than the press of a button’ (2003: 62). Liquid love may involve connecting, but even more importantly it involves the ability to disconnect; to ‘unfriend’; to hit delete. Elliott and Urry (2010: 5) reiterate the clickable nature of mobile life, ‘The task of holding self and one’s social network together is increasingly reconstituted around instantaneous computer clicks of “search”, “erase”, “delete”, “cut-and-paste”, and “cancel”.’ Bauman explains that ‘contacts require less time and effort to be entered and less time and effort to be broken. *Distance is no obstacle to getting in touch – but getting in touch is no obstacle to staying apart*’ (2003: 62, emphasis in original).

Digital connections thus make sociality possible, but only by disembedding and distancing human relationships. In this sense, connecting and disconnecting have the effect of respatializing human interactions, as Bauman (2003: 59) explains:

> You would go *nowhere* without your mobile (‘nowhere’ is, indeed, the space without a mobile, with a mobile out of range, or a mobile with a flat battery). . . . It is unimportant which place you are in, who the people are around
you and what you are doing in that place filled with those people. The difference between one place and another, one set of people within your sight and corporeal reach and another, has been cancelled and made null and void.

Bauman argues that human togetherness now revolves around ‘virtual proximity’ and ‘virtual distance’, which means that people can be close even while they are far apart, or disconnected even when they are right next to each other. It also means that it does not matter which place you are in, since ‘the difference between one place and another . . . has been cancelled and made null and void’ (ibid.: 59).

Bauman’s critique raises a relevant question: What are the spatial implications of mobile sociality? Will mobile technologies and the virtual spaces of the Internet make space and place redundant? Bauman’s observation speaks to anxieties not only about the way technologies transcend spatial distance, but also about a kind of homogenization of places and disconnection from place. And yet, places remain vitally central to tourism. The idea that mobile technologies necessarily dilute the distinctiveness of places or detach people from places is a serious matter that I take up in the chapters that follow as I explore the spatial implications, along with the social implications, of mobile technologies and online social media.

According to Bauman, the ease with which we connect and disconnect from people and places also has significant consequences in terms of the kind of sociality we perform. Instead of building and cultivating bonds through attachment and engagement, we make and break connections. These connections are short and sweet, instantaneous and disposable, intense yet brief, and frequent but shallow. What results, Bauman argues, is a brittle sociality assembled around connections that are ‘too shallow and brief to condense into bonds’ (Bauman 2003: 62). In part, Bauman attributes the frailty of this sociality to a consumerist logic that objectifies and trades on human relationships. In this sense, he shares Wittel’s concern that the more our sociality revolves around technologically mediated connections, the more complicit it becomes with a market logic that seeks to commodify those connections. Human relationships become resources in themselves that can be used up and consumed. Bauman observes in mediated social relations a ‘tendency, inspired by the dominant consumerist life mode, to treat other humans as objects of consumption and to judge them after the pattern of consumer objects by the volume of pleasure they are likely to offer, and in “value for money” terms’ (ibid.: 75).

Bauman’s cynicism about a sociality of ‘connections’ stems from the fact that he sees technologically mediated sociality as deeply implicated in a ‘market economy’. There is profit to be had in exploiting frail connections. Mobile technologies, and the light and loose ties they facilitate, are the enemy of what Bauman calls the ‘moral economy’. In contrast to the market economy, the moral economy revolves around enduring relationships, spatial proximity and shared history. It involves things like ‘family sharing of goods and services, neighbourly help, friends’ cooperation: all the motives, impulses and acts from which human bonds and lasting commitments are plaited’ (Bauman 2003: 69). In a moral economy, Bauman (ibid.: 70) argues, sharing goods, services and help ‘without
money changing hands’ produces a sociality of solidarity, compassion and mutual sympathy rather than frequent, fleeting and frail connections.

I draw attention to Wittel’s critique of the commodification of connections and Bauman’s distinction between the moral economy and the market economy because these competing impulses appear again and again in the practices of interactive travel that I describe in this book. Whereas Bauman associates mediated communication and frail sociality with the market economy, however, I argue that interactive travellers also use mobile communication technologies to create alternative economies, promote solidarity and fortify connections with other people and with places. For the mobile developers, flashpackers, travel bloggers and CouchSurfers I introduce in this book, mediated communication does not necessarily objectify or commodify social ties; it also facilitates more meaningful and authentic encounters with place, enables sharing and caring at a distance, and underpins non-commercial economies based on generosity and mutual help. Travellers use new technologies to both detach from and attach themselves to the people and places around them, and to participate in but also resist the commercialized nature of global tourism. As we will see, mobile sociality thus involves a negotiation of connection and disconnection, of coming together and moving apart, that is undoubtedly shaped by, but not reducible to, the technologies involved. To get at this more nuanced interplay between travellers, technology and mobile sociality, I turn to concepts of affordances, aspirations and anxieties, which I describe in the next section.

**Affordances, aspirations, anxieties**

The social uses and meanings of new technologies are shaped by relational and contextual factors, and not just by the materiality or functionality of the technology itself. In his study of digital tourist photography, Jonas Larsen (2008a) uses the notion of ‘affordances’ to make sense of the complex ways in which camera technologies and social practices inform each other in the context of travel and tourism. Coined by Gibson (1979), the term ‘affordance’ refers to the physical make-up or capacities of the environment. Larsen explains that the material environment, including technologies like the digital camera, may enable or produce certain performances but not others, depending on the place and context. By way of example, Larsen explains that a material space such as a grassy lawn may afford performances like running, walking or lying, whereas performances like diving and swimming are afforded by the deep sea. Technological devices, like environments, also afford certain performances. In the case of digital photography, for example, Larsen describes how the delete function allows for more ‘casual and “experimental” ways of photographing’, while the display screen ‘“affords” new sociabilities for producing and consuming photographs’ collaboratively (Larsen 2008a: 148). In neither case, however, does the functionality of the camera itself prescribe these sociabilities. As Larsen notes elsewhere, ‘communication technologies afford possibilities but do not determine how people
Larsen’s use of ‘affordance’ to study digital photography shapes the approach I take in my analysis of interactive travel. Instead of thinking of mobile sociality as deriving from the technology itself, my analysis asks how certain possibilities for togetherness are opened up or closed down by particular features of the technology, such as interactivity or portability. Like photography, interactive travel is ‘a technological complex with specific affordances and a set of embodied social practices or performances’ (Larsen 2008a: 143). In the first part of the book, I focus on this combination of material affordances and social performances. In my discussion of places and landscapes in Chapter 3, the tourist gaze in Chapter 4, and hospitality in Chapter 5, for example, I describe the way mobile devices and online social media and networking platforms shape a range of possibilities for travellers to connect with places and with other people while they are on the road, but do not necessarily determine the way travellers perform or make sense of this mobile togetherness.

The notion of ‘affordance’ highlights the realm of physical possibilities for social action, but a range of ‘social affordances’ can also be observed in the way new communication technologies influence everyday life (Wellman et al. 2003; Larsen 2008a). As Larsen points out, these social possibilities are shaped by ‘intentions, cultural knowledge and past experiences’ (2008a: 146). In other words, technologies also operate within a social and cultural realm of possibilities and their meanings and uses are often constrained and shaped by existing social codes. Interactive travel, and the forms of mobile sociality it makes possible, are thus implicated in a series of ongoing social dramas: what kinds of connections are worth making; what counts as knowledge; when should we break down social distances and when should we shore them up; how should we treat strangers; who may be included and who must be excluded; and what kind of world do we want to make for ourselves?

Marvin (1988: 5) notes in her early history of electrical communication that ‘new practices do not so much flow directly from technologies that inspire them as they are improvised out of old practices’. She argues that at the end of the nineteenth century, electrical communication technology ‘came to existing groups less as the transformative agent of its own mythology than as a set of concrete opportunities or threats to be weighed and figured into the pursuit of ongoing social objectives’ (ibid.: 232). New practices and meanings were grafted onto old ones, revealing in the process the aspirations, anxieties and fantasies that social groups held about themselves, about others and about the world as a whole. ‘How new media were expected to loosen or tighten existing social bonds … reflected what specific groups hoped for and feared from one another’ (ibid.: 6).

As I described earlier, similar aspirations toward social cohesion and anxieties over social disintegration that greeted nineteenth century innovations in electrical communication continue to shape contemporary public reaction to mobile communications, smartphones, digital photography, new media and online social networking.
As I consider the practices, risks and strategies that emerge alongside these new technologies, I am aware that these technologies are incorporated into an already existing social field of hopes, fears and meanings as well as existing privileges and inequalities. Uncovering and disturbing these social meanings requires a shift in focus away from the technological devices themselves, their engineering or the evolution of their technical capacities and onto the social dramas and fantasies that surround these technologies. In my discussion of authenticity in Chapter 6 and escape in Chapter 7, I follow Marvin’s lead by paying attention to the way aspirations and anxieties about representation, global community, the corporatization of social life, modern subjectivity, choice and control are attached to new technologies. As I argue in those chapters, the way travellers embrace, reject and negotiate new technological practices in their pursuit of mobile sociality reveals more about existing social contexts and conflicts than it does about the technology itself.

Conclusion
My encounter with Mark and his computer in the courtyard of our guest house in Indonesia is emblematic of the way new technologies are given social and spatial significance in particular contexts. Mark may have been making his way through uncharted technological terrain, and even trying to clear a path for other travellers to follow, but he was not doing so in a social or cultural vacuum. Though it is much more heavily travelled today, that path has not been paved in stone. Even as new practices like flashpacking, travel blogging and CouchSurfing become normalized, especially among wealthy travellers from Western societies, the social meanings and embodied performances surrounding these practices remain inchoate and undetermined. In this book, I describe these practices-in-the-making as travellers negotiate a variety of connections, disconnections and missed connections.