

Stop, rest, and digest

Feeding people into nature

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The route and the land through which it runs are in constant motion. They are not static entities over or through which dynamic men and their machines are moving. The route and the land are not taken out of time, they are not frozen on a canvas. As part of the earth's surface they revolve through day and night, they pass below clouds and showers of rain, they move from winter to spring, they become brittle and crack, are overgrown, maintained, and painted. In this chapter, I want to add two new angles in the approach to the route which complement the perspective of a moving observer who develops judgments about the aesthetics of route and landscape: first, the perspective of the dynamic route, second, the perspective of the corporeal, living human body. Of course, neither roads nor bodies do have a perspective of their own. The idea is to take the actual entities that are relevant in this volume – routes and the land – as starting points that are of equal analytic value as constructs or concepts such as the sublime, landscape or mobility. The idea is to examine what kind of agency these entities unfold in interactions with those who are *en route*. This interest in the dynamics that arise when different kinds of agency (natural, conceptual, technological, social, psychological, etc.) mix and interact is inspired by work in science and technology studies, where the division between human and non-human agency is not taken for granted.¹ Inspecting the ways in which the non-intentional/material and the intentional/social blend into each other, my analysis will situate itself in a peculiar place along the route or in the land – the rest stop or view point – and study what happens there.

¹ Latour, Bruno, *Science in Action : How to Follow Engineers and Scientists Through Society* (Cambridge Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1987). Pickering, Andrew, *The Mangle of Practice : Time, Agency & Science* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

Feeding the route and being fed

The road itself is reserved exclusively for moving vehicles – stopping, being on the road without moving, is anathema to its regime. Places in which stopping is acceptable or even required have to be marked and highlighted in an attention-grabbing manner. There are several kinds of places that allow such stops, places which are designed and used in very specific ways, and riddled with regulations.² Points of particular interest such as remarkable views are marked up by means of signs and landscaping strategies, or indicated on maps and other navigation devices. Points of consumption enable the traveler and his/her vehicle to continue the trip, supplying food, drink and fuel, together with a range of other necessities such as souvenirs, fishing rods, skiing equipment, sun cream, condoms etc. Since people continuously digest and since they regularly produce waste while on the road, they need places to get rid of the digested food, empty packaging, left-overs and other unwanted stuff: points of excretion. Toilets and facilities for collecting different kinds of waste are announced along many touristic routes, and the need to use these facilities is often the most urgent reason for people to interrupt their automobility.

These three kinds of places participate in the production of the route as a very specific setting. Accordingly, the statement that stopping is anathema to the route has to be qualified: without occasional stopping, the movement of humans and their vehicles cannot be sustained. In this chapter I will focus on these stopping places as part of the route. They are the site from which I can display a different perspective on movement and mobility. Inspired by Lefebvre, this chapter treats the production of the route as process based on a triad consisting of (a) its dynamic materiality, (b) ideas of the route, where it leads to and what it should look like, and (c) the lived experience of corporal beings *en route*.³ The term process has a decidedly neutral tone, but the processes happening here are not neutral. The encounters of different entities and the crossing of different courses are often conflict-laden and rough. It could be understood as a mangle that forcefully blends different agencies, bringing forth something new and different.⁴ However, seen from a less post-humanist and more sociological point of view, the processes at stake here can also be understood as performances. They are performative in a double sense: firstly, they are enacted on a certain stage and in a specific setting, but still open to contingencies, to sudden changes, disruptions and redirections. Secondly, they are performative in the sense that they are displayed, shown and made sensible to others who are co-present in the situation. The important point for the present work is to focus on the encounter, the active mingling and mangling of different

² Peter Merriman, “Materiality, Subjectification, and Government: The Geographies of Britain’s Motorway Code”, *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 23/2 (2005): 235-250.

³ Lefebvre, Henri, *The Production of Space* (trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith, Oxford/UK: Blackwell, 1991), pp. 38-40.

⁴ Pickering, *The Mangle of Practice*; Andrew Pickering, ‘Practice and Posthumanism : Social Theory and a History of Agency’, in Theodore R. Schatzki, Karin Knorr-Cetina, & Eike von Savigny (eds), *The Practice Turn in Contemporary Theory* (London: Routledge, 2001): pp. 163-174.

kinds of agencies in a way that is perceived by others, presented to others and influenced by co-present others – be they human or non-human.

Co-managing the disgusting and the sublime

The two main locations that I have studied are part of the Norwegian Tourist Route project.⁵ In her contribution to this volume, Janike Kampevoll Larsen provides an in-depth analysis of the aesthetic ideals informing these installations. In this chapter, I want to supplement Larsen's account with considerations about aesthetics as *aisthesis*, i.e. as concerned with sensual perception. This means I will focus on how concepts such as the beautiful and the sublime enter the settings and how they mix and interact with the everyday perceptions and practices that are enacted at the sites.

The two sites chosen for this study vary in their material setup and in the way they present the landscape – spectacularly in case of the vertigo-inducing Stegastein platform, and mundanely or even ironically in the case of Hereiane's bright yellow toilets. However, both sites are within a day's driving distance from the principal cities Oslo, Bergen, and Stavanger and lie close to popular routes that direct road traffic through Norway. My fieldwork was carried out in two periods: the first at the end of March, and the second at the end of June, during the warmest week of the year. In addition to my logged observations, photographs and video-recordings, I relied on one main methodical device to get access to the perceptions of those who spent time at these places: video narrations.⁶ The intention was to get access to the ways in which the surroundings appear in someone's perception and to the ways in which someone moves her or his perception onto something. Put differently, this method helps to analyze what Waldenfels in his phenomenology of attention calls the tension between paying attention to something (*aufmerken*) and having one's attention drawn to something (*auffallen*).⁷ Having the moving images of a film accessible for the analysis in synchronicity with the narration of the one who is filming is of course not the same as "reading the mind" (which, from a phenomenology of the body's point of view, would necessitate "reading the senses" too) of someone who lets his senses wander through his surroundings, but it is definitely much richer than simply observing someone or asking them to film and later talk about it (as in photo or video elicitation interviews). To focus the video

⁵ More information and images of the different sites can be found on the project's website: <<http://www.turistveg.no>>.

⁶ Previously explored in Lars Frers, 'Perception, Aesthetics, and Envelopment : Encountering Space and Materiality', in Lars Frers, & Lars Meier (eds), *Encountering Urban Places : Visual and Material Performances in the City* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007): pp. 25-45; Lars Frers, 'Video Research in the Open : Encounters Involving the Researcher-Camera', in Ulrike Tikvah Kissmann (ed.), *Video Interaction Analysis : Methods and Methodology* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2009): pp. 155-177.

⁷ Waldenfels, Bernhard, *Phänomenologie der Aufmerksamkeit* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2004).

narrations, I attached a small printout with three questions to the point-and-shoot camera and asked the respondents to answer the questions while filming:⁸

1. How did it come to your stop here?
2. Please film and talk about what is characteristic for this place. Take your time.
3. Is this place as you thought it would be?

Before analyzing the responses, a brief introduction to the two sites will be useful. The following two photographs show the sites' main architectural features (the platform and the toilet building) in March, outside of the tourist season.⁹ Taken off-season, both photos show the sites in a somewhat problematic state. The wet snow enters the encounter in a way that requires significant attention from those who want to walk along the platform. The existing tracks of downtrodden snow, material trace of former social uses, lead the way along the center of the platform.



Figure 1: Stegastein platform in March

⁸ I provided these questions in Norwegian and German translation to offer at least one language in which the respondents were sufficiently fluent to understand the questions.

⁹ Both photos have been taken with a wide angle lens to capture more of the surroundings – with the effect that the objects in the center of the image appear relatively smaller/more distant in comparison to their surroundings (this is also true of the third photo).



Figure 2: Hereiane toilet building in March

Driving off the road and entering the Hereiane rest stop, one quickly notices that the toilets are not open. Wooden planks have been nailed into the entrances and closer inspection reveals that the yellow glass doors have been destroyed. If the aim of the stop was to get rid of one's excrements in a civilized manner, then encountering the closed facilities can be a frustrating experience. Walking off into the landscape to search for a hidden spot to relieve oneself is one solution for this problem. The main difficulty of this solution is the management of visibility or perceptibility. The toilet building hides the person who urinates and/or defecates both visually and relating to sound and smell, whereas the relatively open landscape at this location only does so if one makes a substantial effort. It is necessary to look for an inconspicuous, safe and fast route which takes one out of the reach of the senses of others. In comparison to other rest stops, however, very little suspicious litter could be found in the vicinity, it being off-season. The toilets at Stegastein were closed too, without any visible reason or explanation other than the fact that freezing night temperatures might have forbidden the use of running water in an unheated building.

During the main season, the toilets at both locations were open. At this time of year they emerged as highly relevant actants in both settings, although in almost opposite ways.¹⁰ At Stegastein, the main architectural sight is the platform. The rest of the architectural setting – the concrete benches, the waist-high walls built from roughly cut stone and the black-painted, concrete and wood toilet building – contributed to the presentation of the location but in a less remarkable way. To some degree, the narratives of the respondents were steered to the platform

¹⁰ Latour, Bruno, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

through my actions because I often approached them at the end of the platform, after they returned to its base. Nonetheless, the platform is *the* obvious main attraction of the site, and people spend most of their time there. Even when they are at other locations of the site they often refer to the platform with gestures and gazes. But many people still spent a substantial amount of time at the less spectacular part of this site. During the busy hours (from about ten o'clock to about seven o'clock in the afternoon) visitors often had to wait before they could enter the toilet. People perceived this waiting time to be longer than it should have been because one of the toilets, the one marked as the women's toilet, was permanently locked. What made things worse was that the men's toilet room also housed a urinal which was clogged and (for several days in a row) full of smelly, yellow urine. In two interviews, people remarked on the contrast between the wonderful site and the architecture, which was characterized as probably very expensive, one the one hand and the poor state of the toilets on the other hand. Since the toilets are not the most salient topic it is remarkable that they were mentioned during the few minutes of a talk with a stranger.¹¹



Figure 3: Inside the Hereiane toilet

¹¹ Mostly because of their location at the site and because of the taboo quality of talking about defecation. To a certain degree the taboo is not very strong in this setting, because “complaints” seemed to be a salient topic for a talk with a researcher that was perceived to be in some connection with those who are responsible for the state of affairs and who could forward their complaints. See also Diana Boxer, ‘Social Distance and Speech Behavior: The Case of Indirect Complaints’, *Journal of Pragmatics*, 19/2 (1993): 103-125 on complaints as a topic for conversations with strangers. I sometimes made this connection even more plausible by telling people that the project in which I am involved is also collaborating with the National Road Authority (Statens vegvesen).

At Hereiane, the toilet building is the main architectural feature – the extravagant building even acquired the nickname ‘the million dollar toilet’ [*‘milliondo’*] in the local press.¹² In the interviews and narrations, the toilet was repeatedly described as special, surprising, clean and/or beautiful.

Transcript 1¹³

SW: [*reads instructions while walking towards the toilet building, keeping the building in the center of the image*]
Please film and talk about what is characteristic for this place. Take your time. (1) .hhhh Well the toilet (.) is very special
ehehehehe |.khh hh |beauti(.)ful building
AW: |yes it’s an unusual |building yeah

Transcript 2

It wasn’t really the rocks so much that a that grabbed my attention it was it was this [*centers the view on the toilet building*]
(0.5) .hh ahm (0.5) I guess this facility here (.) .hh aahm which is pretty unusual a architecture

Several people remarked on the attractiveness not only of the exterior of the building but also talked about the interior facilities as being clean and unexpectedly pleasant (although no one filmed the interior). There are two separate toilets, without any signs regarding gender or disability status on the doors.¹⁴ As can be seen in figure 3, the interior contrasts with the exterior insofar as the slate stone surface is not flat and polished but rather rough-cut. The toilet, the sink and the trashcan along with a few other implements were made of either brushed or polished stainless steel. The floor and wall that separates the two toilets are painted in the same bright yellow color as the outside floor, and the glass doors feature a semi-opaque, bright yellow plastic layer. One of the toilet rooms also has facilities to make it more accessible. The interior was warm, and usually it did not have a particularly unpleasant smell.

¹² Hardanger Folkeblad, *Nasjonal Turistveg Jondal - Utne*, (2007, retrieved 08-11 2010) <<http://www.hardanger-folkeblad.no/hfkultur/article2832969.ece>>.

¹³ I am using standard conversation analytic transcription markup. See J. Maxwell Atkinson, & John Heritage (eds), *Structures of Social Action : Studies in Conversation Analysis* (Cambridge/UK: Cambridge University Press, 1984), pp. 9-16. Oblique text in square brackets gives information about what is going on, numbers in brackets indicate the length of pauses in seconds, full stops in brackets indicate a very short but audible pause, “.hh” and “hh” indicates an audible in or exhalation, “ehehe” indicates laughter, underline text indicates an emphasis, and pipe symbols “|” indicate the starting point of overlapping talk.

¹⁴ This has obviously changed. The photographs in *Hardanger Folkeblad, Nasjonal Turistveg Jondal - Utne* show that one toilet originally had a disability symbol on the door, while the other displayed a man and a woman symbol.

While the Stegastein toilet was used by those who stopped at the site, it was never characterized as inviting or pleasant. The smell and the sight of the clogged urinal had a serious impact on the place's feel. The Hereiane toilet, in contrast, was not only used by those who stopped there. Campers who stopped at this site overnight told me that the toilets (and access to running water) were one of the principal reasons why they decided to stay at this site for an extended period of time. These parties even tended to the toilets to some degree, picking up the odd piece of litter that short time visitors left on the floor in the building.

The ethnographic data on which this chapter is based is of course not sufficient to claim that there is a significant correlation between the design and the state of maintenance and functionality of a toilet on the one hand and the tourist experience as a whole on the other hand. However, the fact that the toilets emerged as a topic in the narratives and conversations at both sites points to the fact that they were perceived and treated as one of the main components of the site – a component which became an actant that elicited complaints (in the case of Stegastein site) or praise (in the case of the Hereiane site). The toilets became part of the narrative about the experience of the site itself but they also featured as part of narratives about the touristic experience of Norway as a whole. In this narrative, the Hereiane toilets were seen as exemplary and very different to rest stop toilets in other places, either at home or in other touristic regions.

The need to excrete and urinate is part of the mobile experience. It goes along with the need for managing a taboo, and with managing one's temporary disappearance from the attention of others. Performing these urgencies, people are required to pay attention to their relation to others, to their own bodily processes, to concepts of hygiene, and to the sensible traces left by other human bodies. These performances have a pleasant side – as the act of excretion, the feeling of relief and also the temporary solitude can be pleasurable – but they are also attached to a whole set of potentially unpleasant, disgusting or even painful experiences.

The two rest stops display unusual and even spectacular architecture, but they are also embedded in a geographic region that is typically Norwegian: the fjord. Renowned for their breathtaking views, where the sheer scale, the non-human forces at work, and the configuration of water, mountains and plant life creates sublime experiences, the fjords and the views they afford appeared in almost all of the narrations. Connections to the aesthetic ideal of the sublime were stronger at the Stegastein site, where the combination of a deep, vertigo-inducing descent to the Aurlandsfjord, the steep mountainsides and the waters of the fjord were experienced and described more often in terms connecting it to the idea of the sublime.¹⁵

¹⁵ Kant, Immanuel, *Kritik der Urteilskraft : Beilage: Erste Einleitung in die ‚Kritik der Urteilskraft‘* (Hamburg: Meiner, 2006); Burke, Edmund, *A Philosophical Enquiry Into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (Oxford/UK: Oxford University Press, 1990).



Figure 4: View from Stegastein platform

Transcript 3

yeah it's actually more breathtaking than (.) than we ever thought it would be

The characterization of the aesthetic experience at Hereiane was somewhat closer to the beautiful, but still contained references to a sublime dimension, to vastness¹⁶ – although this vastness often also interpreted as being peaceful rather than awe-inspiring.



¹⁶ Price, Uvedale, *Essays on the Picturesque, as Compared With the Sublime and the Beautiful: And on the Use of Studying Pictures for the Purpose of Improving Real Landscape* (3 vols, Westmead, Farnborough: Gregg International, 1971).

Figure 5: View from Hereiane

The following transcript follows on from the conversation about the toilet from the first transcript:

Transcript 4

AM: [*sniff-like inhalation*] (1) but what is really special is
this [1 sec, camera moves to the right to show the fjord]

SW: the view hh

AM: the view (.) and the rocks (.) they look very like very much like
 ehm (.) the rock formations in Australia (1)

SW: .hh and its very peaceful |here

AM: |and its very peaceful °here yes°

[5 sec, walking closer to the edge of the parking lot, trees coming into view]

AM: and beautiful (0.5) trees (2.5) they're pines .hh but they're
 t|iny

SW: |yeah (1).hh everything is |tiny here

This sequence displays how quickly and easily the attention can shift from the toilet building to the surrounding landscape. In this transcript, the Australian man also marks his contestation of the prior statement of his partner, a Swiss woman who said in transcript 1 that the toilet building is special, by starting his utterance with an audible inhalation followed by a “but”, further emphasizing the weight of his claim by the use of the word really in “what is really special” and emphasizing the contrast by stressing the “*this*”. In the next turn, his partner offers “the *view*” as a suggestion for what could be special. The suggestion is then briefly acknowledged in the following turn, but particular stress is put on another aspect “the *rocks*”. According to descriptions of Hereiane on information signs and in brochures, the rock formation, and the way it smoothly glides into the Hardangerfjord, is the main geographic feature that makes the landscape at Hereiane special. As can be seen in figure 5, the gentle descent of the rock surface allows an easy transition from the parking lot to the rocks surrounding the site and then further down into the fjord (several people went swimming at this site and some were fishing too). Quick switches like this, from one aspect of the site to another, from toilets to landscape, from road to benches, can be found in many of the video narratives. Sometimes the image shows a feature first and then the narration turns to that feature, but other times the narration turns to another aspect and then the camera is quickly moved to focus on the new topic too.

The narrations demonstrate that the proximity of mundane or even disgusting features or experiences to sublime or beautiful features or experiences is not uncommon, and that people have a ready repertoire of interactional and narrative tactics to address these transitions. Sometimes the contrast is accompanied by laughter or irony, sometimes in- or exhalations mark the shift, other times the only

thing in-between is a slightly elongated pause. As the video narrations show, the spatial proximity and sometimes even the architectural or material proximity goes in parallel with this narrative proximity. Accordingly, it can be said that the sublime and the mundane are not mutually exclusive in the sense that they can only happen at very different sites or that a long time needs to pass to be able to have one kind of experience follow the other. On the contrary, the different agencies of the body, the material surroundings, and social or aesthetic concepts clearly overlap with each other. While this overlap can become problematic and require involved interactional responses to manage the transition from one activity or experience or topic to another, the same overlap is also used as an opportunity for further interactions, be they the making or sharing of complaints or for shared amusement.

Aesthetic agencies

When the route is understood as a process in which the different agencies of people, of material spaces, and of social or mental concepts are mangled then Tim Edensor's claim that mobility is as much about the mundane as it is about the extraordinary shows its full potency.¹⁷ The rest stops of the Norwegian Tourist Route with their contrasting aesthetics – where nature and architecture, the eternal and the contemporary, the sublime and the disgusting are in close proximity to each other – unfold a very specific set of aesthetic agencies. People bring some of the agencies with them. They have ideas about what the place that they will stop at should look like. They follow routines, some dictated by the route itself, others dictated by social conventions and personal preferences. But in their perception practices they encounter the places with their specific material agencies, the current weather which interacts with the land around them,¹⁸ the current state of the facilities, the view that unfolds in their senses and in their cameras – all of these entities figures into the perception or *aisthesis* of these places. But more than that: as the world is not waiting for things to happen, people also are not passive recipients of external cues. They perform their own aesthetics. They position themselves in certain places to produce a view. They manage their absence in the eyes of others when they go to the toilet and when they wait for someone to finish taking a photograph. They adjust their hair and their clothes, smile into a camera and crack jokes. Or they search for a spot where they can stand still for a while, immersing their senses in the local flow of time, embedding themselves into the landscape. In all of these performances, they display their expectations and their taste.¹⁹ In these performances, they place themselves and the site on a field of aesthetic agencies that is open to shifts and movements, but that is also deeply hierarchical. To para-

¹⁷ Edensor, 'Mundane Mobilities, Performances and Spaces of Tourism', *Social & Cultural Geography*, 8/2 (2007): 199-215.

¹⁸ Tim Ingold, 'Bindings Against Boundaries : Entanglements of Life in an Open World', *Environment and Planning A*, 40/8 (2008): 1796-1810.

¹⁹ Bourdieu, Pierre, *Distinction : A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (trans. Richard Nice, Cambridge/MA: Harvard University Press, 1984).

phrase some statements: 'You think the toilet is special? Look at the rocks!' 'This is maybe the most beautiful place in the world.' 'I have been here before, this is what I expected Norway to look like.' 'If only they would properly manage this site.'

But in my material it also becomes obvious how people display themselves, their taste and their perception of the place in their bodily performances, in playfulness, in furrowed brows, long looks or deep sighs. Thus, social and aesthetic hierarchies are put into play at these sites. In this article, I have focused on aesthetic categories – but other categories and identities are also negotiated in the context of these places: they impact perceptions of a nation state as a whole, à la 'Norway is a beautiful country, of economic developments and tourism 'they spent a lot of money on this building, maybe they should rather have fixed the holes in the road', and of one's own role in the world 'I can really let it all go here and think about my life'. The rest stop and the nation, the social and the individual – they all are in constant motion, negotiated by all the things and people who encounter each other at these sites.

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