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## Travel, technology, and hybrid mobilities: Interview with Jennie Germann Molz

### Viagens, tecnologia e mobilidades híbridas: entrevista com Jennie Germann Molz

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#### ABSTRACT

Jennie Germann Molz is Professor of Sociology at the College of the Holy Cross in Worcester, Massachusetts where she teaches courses on social theory, travel and tourism, mobile technologies, global citizenship, and emotion. We had the opportunity to interview her during the SPMob 2023: Fourth School of Advanced Science in Mobilities, held from June 13-21, 2023, at the University of São Paulo and the Federal University of the State of Rio de Janeiro, to which she attended as a keynote speaker. In this interview, Germann Molz emphasizes the need to overcome the moralistic view of technology. Rather than subscribing to technological determinism, she proposes the concept of affordances, claiming that, while technology affords certain ways to engage with it, we have agency in determining how we will utilize it and integrate it into our lives. That's why in her works, she describes the many and complex ways in which travelers have been engaging with communication and networking technologies while on the move. Technologically-mediated interactions do not necessarily result in frail and brittle sociality, she adds, since they may entice new forms of solidarity, emotional support and a sense of togetherness or belonging.

**Keywords:** mobile lifestyles, network hospitality, worldschooling.

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## RESUMO

Jennie Germann Molz é professora de Sociologia no College of the Holy Cross em Worcester, Massachusetts, onde ministra cursos sobre teoria social, viagens e turismo, tecnologias móveis, cidadania global e emoção. Tivemos a oportunidade de entrevistá-la durante a SPMob 2023: Quarta Escola de Ciência Avançada em Mobilidades, realizada de 13 a 21 de junho de 2023, na Universidade de São Paulo e na Universidade Federal do Estado do Rio de Janeiro, evento do qual ela foi uma das principais palestrantes. Nesta entrevista, Germann Molz enfatiza a necessidade de superarmos a visão moralista da tecnologia. Em lugar de o determinismo tecnológico, ela propõe o conceito de *affordances* (em tradução livre, potencialidades de uso) alegando que, embora a tecnologia proporcione certas formas de nos envolvermos com ela, temos algum grau de agência para determinar como a iremos utilizar e integrá-la em nossas vidas. Em seus trabalhos, ela descreve as muitas e complexas maneiras em que viajantes se envolvem com tecnologias de comunicação e *networking* enquanto estão em movimento. As interações mediadas tecnologicamente não resultam necessariamente numa sociabilidade frágil, acrescenta ela, uma vez que podem suscitar novas formas de solidariedade, apoio emocional e um sentimento de união ou pertença.

**Palavras-chave:** estilos de vida móveis, hospitalidade em rede, *worldschooling*.

## Introduction

Jennie Germann Molz is a Professor of Sociology at the College of the Holy Cross in Massachusetts, USA. Following her interest in tourism mobilities, her academic journey led her to Lancaster University, England, where she earned a Ph.D. in Sociology and served as a Postdoctoral fellow at the Centre for Mobilities Research (CeMoRe), founded in 2003. The main focus of Germann Molz's work revolves around the implications of new digital technologies for different practices of travel and hospitality. Her research interests include hospitality, the sharing economy, mobile families, social media, belonging, emotions, digital nomads, educational travel, and mobile lifestyles.

The opportunity to interview Germann Molz arose when she was one of the keynote speakers at "SPMob 2023: Fourth School of Advanced Science in Mobilities", held from June 13-21, 2023, at the University of São Paulo and the Federal University of the State of Rio de Janeiro. Conceptualized by Bianca-Freire Medeiros<sup>1</sup> and Thiago Allis<sup>2</sup>, the event aims to disseminate the *mobilities turn* in social theory and research (Sheller & Urry, 2006; for the SPMob general concept, see Freire-Medeiros, Telles & Allis, 2018). Speakers and participants were encouraged to explore new methods for tracking moving empirical objects (Büscher & Urry, 2009), to reflect critically on flows, fixities, and frictions (Freire-Medeiros & Lages, 2020), and to investigate socio-spatial mobilities and their dynamics of presence and absence, proximity and distance (Urry, 2007).

At the event, Germann Molz discussed the seminal book *The Tourist Gaze 3.0* (Urry & Larsen, 2011) alongside Mimi Sheller,<sup>3</sup> Thiago Allis and Bianca Freire-Medeiros in a public session at SESC Pinheiros, in São Paulo, and presented the opening conference "On the Horizon: Tourism's Unfinished Futures" in Rio de Janeiro. During the days of SPMob2023 in São Paulo, she also delivered the conference "Mobilizing and Mooring Tourism: Reflections at the Intersection of Tourism Studies and the Mobilities Paradigm" for a numerous and attentive audience.

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<sup>1</sup> Bianca Freire-Medeiros is Professor of the Department of Sociology at the University of São Paulo (USP), associate researcher at the Center for Metropolis Studies (CEM), coordinator of UrbanData - Brasil and leader of the research group Mobilidades: Teorias, Temas e Métodos (MTTM).

<sup>2</sup> Thiago Allis is Professor of Tourism at the School of Arts, Sciences and Humanities at the University of São Paulo (USP) and leader of the research group Mobilities and Tourism (MobTur).

<sup>3</sup> Mimi Sheller is the Dean of The Global School at Worcester Polytechnic Institute. She co-founded the Centre for Mobilities Research (CeMoRe) and the journal Mobilities.

In this interview, Germann Molz emphasized the idea that we must go beyond a moralistic view of technology. If we want to understand how people, places, mobile technologies, and digital or hybrid environments are intertwined, we need to change or adjust our analytical lenses. Rather than subscribing to technological determinism, she advocates for the concept of *affordances*. According to her, whether technology *affords* certain ways of engaging with it, we have agency in determining how we will utilize it and integrate it into our lives. That's why in her works such as *Travel Connections* (2012) and others, she described the many and complex ways in which travelers were engaging with communication and networking technologies while on the move. Technologically-mediated interactions do not necessarily result in frail and brittle sociality, she adds, since they may entice new forms of solidarity, emotional support and a sense of togetherness or belonging. Their effects are complex and paradoxical.

Mobilities' perspective highlights the spatial and temporal dimensions of movement. As Germann Molz (2014, p. 554) accurately explains: "social life is produced through various intersecting mobility systems and experiences. In her works, she addresses the intersection between traveling and communicating for travel bloggers, couch surfers, Airbnb guests and hosts, world schoolers and other groups of mobile individuals. What she has perceived as features of an emerging *mobile sociality*, especially regarding the shift from *Web 1.0* to *Web 2.0*, is now everywhere, thanks to the rapid growth of smartphones, mobile computing devices, user-generated social media and online social networking platforms. All this leads to a "nearly ubiquitous connectivity that characterizes contemporary social life" (Germann Molz, 2014, p. 553).

How does this relate to topics of infrastructure and mooring (Hannam, Sheller & Urry, 2006)? Digital, mobile, and networking technologies are now proliferating in all parts of society and, therefore, they comprise the mobile infrastructures of our everyday life. "Mobile, mediated and networked relations now constitute the dominant mode of social life" (Germann Molz, 2012). In *Mobilities*, sociologist John Urry (2007, p. 17) has noticed "how new technologies of both transport and communication characterize modern societies". For the travelers Germann Molz interviewed and investigated, experiences were always "in between mobilities and moorings", as they were driven by competing desires to escape and to embrace. Furthermore, in addition to relying on material infrastructures, staying in touch with friends

and family while on the road involves an emotional mooring, as it “grounds them within their social networks even as they lead a mobile lifestyle” (Germann Molz, 2012). For her, these are some of the interesting ways to grasp the impacts of network technologies and platforms in a “technology-saturated society”.

Among Jennie Germann Molz’s most notable publications are *Travel Connections: Technology, Tourism, and Togetherness in a Mobile World* (2012, Routledge), *Mobilizing Hospitality: The Ethics of Social Relations in a Mobile World*, co-edited with Sarah Gibson (2016, Routledge), and “Social networking technologies and the moral economy of alternative tourism: The case of couchsurfing.org” (2013), published in *Annals of Tourism Research*. More recently, she authored *The World is Our Classroom: Extreme Parenting and the Rise of Worldschooling* (2021, NYU Press) and co-edited *Affect and Emotion in Tourism* with Dorina-Maria Buda (2023, Routledge). She was also a founding co-editor of the journal *Hospitality & Society*.

The interview took place on a Saturday, June 17, 2023, at Sesc Avenida Paulista, during her stay in São Paulo. All of its content was recorded and transcribed. What follows is an edited version of the dialogue, which was organized and formatted for public reading.

## Introdução

Jennie Germann Molz é professora de Sociologia na *College of the Holy Cross*, em Massachusetts, Estados Unidos. Seguindo o interesse no campo das mobilidades turísticas, sua jornada acadêmica a levou até a Universidade de Lancaster, Inglaterra, onde obteve seu Ph.D. em Sociologia e atuou como bolsista de Pós-Doutorado no *Centre for Mobilities Research* (CeMoRe), fundado em 2003. O principal foco do trabalho de Germann Molz gira em torno das implicações das novas tecnologias digitais para diferentes práticas de viagem e hospitalidade. Seus interesses de pesquisa incluem hospitalidade, economia compartilhada, famílias móveis, mídias sociais, pertencimento, emoções, nômades digitais, turismo educacional e estilos de vida móveis.

A oportunidade de entrevistar Germann Molz surgiu quando de sua presença como uma das principais palestrantes da “SPMob 2023: Quarta Escola de Ciência Avançada em Mobilidades”, realizada de 13 a 21 de junho

de 2023, na Universidade de São Paulo e na Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro. Concebido por Bianca Freire-Medeiros e Thiago Allis, o evento tem o objetivo de disseminar o *giro das mobilidades* em teoria e pesquisa social (Sheller & Urry, 2006; para o conceito geral da SPMob, ver Freire-Medeiros, Telles & Allis, 2018). Os palestrantes e os participantes são encorajados a explorar novos métodos para rastrear objetos empíricos móveis (Büscher & Urry, 2009), a refletir criticamente sobre fluxos, fixos e fricções (Freire-Medeiros & Lages, 2020), e a investigar as mobilidades socioespaciais e suas dinâmicas de presença e ausência, proximidade e distância (Urry, 2007).

No evento, Germann Molz discutiu o livro seminal *O Olhar do Turista 3.0* (Urry & Larsen, 2011) com Mimi Sheller,<sup>4</sup> Thiago Allis e Bianca Freire-Medeiros, no SESC Pinheiros, em São Paulo, e apresentou a conferência de abertura “*On the Horizon: Tourism’s Unfinished Futures*” no Rio de Janeiro. Durante o período da SPMob2023 em São Paulo, ela também apresentou a conferência “*Mobilizing and Mooring Tourism: Reflections at the Intersection of Tourism Studies and the Mobilities Paradigm*” para uma plateia atenta e numerosa.

Nesta entrevista, Germann Molz enfatiza a ideia de que devemos ir além de uma visão moralista da tecnologia. Se desejamos entender como pessoas, lugares, tecnologias móveis e ambientes digitais e híbridos estão entrelaçados, precisamos mudar ou ajustar nossas lentes analíticas. Ao invés de adotar o determinismo tecnológico, ela defende o conceito de *affordances*. De acordo com ela, ainda que a tecnologia proporcione certas formas de engajamento, temos autonomia para determinar como iremos utilizá-la e integrá-la às nossas vidas. Esse é o motivo pelo qual, em *Travel Connections* (2012) e outros trabalhos, ela descreveu as várias e complexas formas pelas quais viajantes se relacionam com as tecnologias de comunicação e de *networking* enquanto se deslocam. As interações mediadas pela tecnologia não resultam necessariamente em uma sociabilidade frágil, acrescenta ela, porque podem atrair novas formas de solidariedade, apoio emocional e senso de pertencimento. Seus efeitos são complexos e paradoxais.

A perspectiva das mobilidades ressalta as dimensões espaciais e temporais do movimento, como Germann Molz explica: “a vida social é produzida por meio de vários sistemas e experiências de mobilidade que se cruzam (2014, p. 554). Em seus trabalhos, ela aborda a interseção entre viagem e comunicação para blogueiros, *couchsurfers*, hóspedes e anfitriões do Airbnb,

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<sup>4</sup>Mimi Sheller é reitora da The Global School no Worcester Polytechnic Institute. Ela co-fundou o Center for Mobilities Research (CeMoRe) e o periódico *Mobilities*.

*worldschoolers* e outros grupos de indivíduos móveis. As características que ela diagnosticou como inerentes a uma sociedade móvel emergente, sobretudo em relação à mudança da *Web 1.0* para a *Web 2.0*, estão agora em toda parte, graças ao rápido crescimento de *smartphones*, computadores móveis, mídias sociais geradas por usuários e plataformas *online* de redes sociais. Tudo isso leva a uma “conectividade quase onipresente que caracteriza a vida social contemporânea” (Germann Molz, 2014, p. 553).

Como isso se relaciona com os tópicos de infraestrutura e *ancoradouros* (Hannam, Sheller & Urry, 2006)? As tecnologias digitais, móveis e de rede estão se alastrando para todas as partes da sociedade e, desse modo, constituem as infraestruturas móveis de nossa vida cotidiana. “As relações móveis, mediadas e em rede constituem agora o modo dominante de vida social” (Germann Molz, 2012). Em *Mobilities*, o sociólogo John Urry observou o modo “como as novas tecnologias de transporte e comunicação caracterizam as sociedades modernas” (2007, p. 17). Para os viajantes investigados por ela, as experiências estão sempre inseridas “entre mobilidades e ancoradouros”, pois são movidas por desejos concorrentes de escapar e de abraçar. Depois, além de depender de infraestruturas materiais, manter contato com amigos e familiares durante a viagem envolve uma *ancoragem emocional*, pois “os apoia em suas redes sociais mesmo quando levam um estilo de vida móvel” (Germann Molz, 2012). Para ela, essas são algumas das formas interessantes de apreender os impactos das tecnologias e plataformas de rede em uma “sociedade saturada de tecnologia”.

Entre as publicações mais notáveis de Jennie Germann Molz estão *Travel Connections: Technology, Tourism, and Togetherness in a Mobile World* (2012, Routledge), *Mobilizing Hospitality: The Ethics of Social Relations in a Mobile World*, coeditado com Sarah Gibson (2016, Routledge) e “Social networking technologies and the moral economy of alternative tourism: The case of couchsurfing.org” (2013), publicado em *Annals of Tourism Research*. Mais recentemente, ela escreveu *The World is Our Classroom: Extreme Parenting and the Rise of Worldschooling* (2021, NYU Press) e coeditou *Affect and Emotion in Tourism* com Dorina-Maria Buda (2023, Routledge). Ela também foi coeditora e fundadora da revista *Hospitality & Society*.

A entrevista aconteceu em um sábado, 17 de junho de 2023, no Sesc Avenida Paulista, durante a sua estada em São Paulo. Todo o conteúdo foi gravado e transcrito. O que se segue é uma versão editada do diálogo, que foi organizada e formatada para leitura.

**Interviewers:** *Let's start with your academic trajectory. How was the contact with John Urry and Mimi Sheller at Lancaster University and with the New Mobilities Paradigm, which was being developed during the period? Did your Ph.D. and Post-Doc project change a lot as you went deeper into the mobility framework?*

**Jennie Germann Molz (JGM)** - Thank you so much for inviting me to do this interview and for sharing ideas about your work with me. I decided to study at Lancaster because I had read *The Tourist Gaze* (Urry, 1990). I looked to find out “Where is John Urry and is there a Ph.D. program there?”. When I arrived at Lancaster, I started working with Mimi Sheller and Anne-Marie Fortier,<sup>5</sup> who were both lecturers in the Sociology department at Lancaster. They were supervising my Ph.D. project, which I had proposed as an ethnography of a small village in Vietnam that had recently re-opened to international tourists. I was starting to put into place all of the things I needed to do fieldwork in Vietnam. As I was online doing the research about how to get a study visa and so on, I kept finding websites from travelers who were backpacking around the world. These websites were fascinating to me! So, my Ph.D. project changed completely. I thought “Ok, this intersection between round-the-world travel and technology is more interesting to me than doing fieldwork in one place”.

**Interviewers:** *Were they travel blogs?*

**JGM:** Well, that's what we would call them now, but the word blog did not exist yet, at the time. These backpackers were beginning to take advantage of *Web 2.0* possibilities, so they were publishing websites that could also interact with the readers or the audience. For example, they had a comments section. And this is what I was so interested in because when I was traveling around the world in the early 1990s, I couldn't be in contact with anyone. It was right around the time the Internet became available, but it was not very common. When I was traveling, we were still receiving letters at the *Poste restante*.<sup>6</sup> However, I did see one backpacker at a hostel who had a big

<sup>5</sup> Anne-Marie Fortier is a Professor of Sociology at Lancaster University. Among her books are *Migrant belongings: Memory, Space, Identity* (2000) and *Uprootings/Regroundings: Questions of Home and Migration* (2003), co-edited with Sara Ahmed, Claudia Castañeda and Mimi Sheller.

<sup>6</sup> *Poste restante* is known as a delivery service where the mail is posted and the recipient collects it.

laptop with all the cords and he was trying to splice them into the telephone wire to get a modem connection. As I was designing my doctoral research, I remembered this guy and I thought it might be more interesting to think about how people like him were experimenting with travel and technology than it would be to go to just one place. John Urry and Mimi Sheller (2006) were starting to write, publish and talk about the *Mobilities Paradigm* and it all made sense to me that this should be the theoretical lens for thinking about what these tourists, these travelers were doing.

**Interviewers:** *We live in a “technology-saturated society”, as you have encapsulated before (Germann Molz, 2012, p. 24). Societies in which technologies of transportation and communication, visualization, and social media are now ubiquitous and pervasive. However, social scientists still look at the relationships between new technologies and social life with distrust or moral suspicion. Why do you think this happens? Are there longstanding preconceptions about their impact? How to construct a sociological view of these hybrid interactions?*

**JGM:** This is a great question! And I think it’s really interesting that you’re picking up on this enduring idea of distrust. In many cases, scholars are addressing technology from a critical perspective. But I think what you’re suggesting here is something a little bit different than critical, it’s more negative. I did my master’s degree in Popular Culture Studies and, at the time, we were engaging with theories about mass or popular culture informed by the Frankfurt School.<sup>7</sup> These theories took this moralistic view, although it wasn’t named as such, that television, the telephone, these technologies were fragmenting the social fabric, isolating people, and feeding into the worst impulses of human nature to just want to be fed entertainment rather than to have critical engagement with cultural products. I’m thinking about Neil Postman’s book, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business* (1985), which criticizes television’s impact on society and really positions viewers and people as non-critical thinkers. I think that maybe it’s that orientation that you see continuing on and being applied not

<sup>7</sup> The Frankfurt School is known as a movement of Philosophical and Sociological knowledge that emerged, since the mid-1930s, at the University of Frankfurt and had critical theory as its main established line. It was marked by a variety of intellectuals and generations with names such as Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer, Herbert Marcuse, Jürgen Habermas, Franz Neuman, among others.

just to television, but to every new technology that enters the public sphere. There's a similar way of thinking in some of the early work on tourism. Daniel Boorstin's (1961) work on *pseudo-events*, which was referring to tourists as cultural dupes who just take anything that you feed to them. They're not really trying to understand the culture that they're visiting, they're just consuming whatever is in their tourist bubble. This notion of tourists as dupes never sat right with me because it didn't make sense to understand round-the-world backpackers or couchsurfers or many of the interviewees in my research. Bringing that to the current day, into some of the more recent scholarship, there have been several ways of thinking about this. There's a whole debate around *technological determinism*, this idea that technology somehow determines how users will use it or how users will interpret it. Then, the concept that became really useful for me coming out of Science and Technology Studies (STS) was the idea of *affordances*. Rather than the technology determining how we will use it or how we will perform in a particular place, the technology *affords* certain ways of engaging with it and we then have some kind of *agency* in deciding how we're going to use it or how it's going to become part of our lives. *Affordances* was a more helpful concept for me to deal with that debate around *technological determinism*. The other work that really influenced my thinking about new technologies and shifting away from that moralistic view was Carolyn Marvin's book *When Old Technologies Were New* (1988). Marvin is a historian and she goes back and looks at when the telegraph was first invented, when the radio was first invented, the telephone, and so on. Each new technology enters the social sphere in a bit of a moral crisis, then people work out the moral meanings of that technology. New technologies often tap into existing aspirations, for example hopes of creating a global community, but they also reveal existing anxieties. One of the anxieties about introducing the telephone into people's homes was that people might have access to other people of different social classes that they should not be communicating with. Or that young women might pick up the phone and be able to talk to a man somewhere or communicate with someone whose racial or class background isn't socially appropriate for them to be interacting with. Therefore, the anxiety isn't just about the technology itself, it's about how the technology enters or threatens to disrupt other kinds of social norms and social order.

**Interviewers:** *There's indeed an interplay between technological affordances and social desires. Things are being enacted. This combination or assemblage (tech + social relations) is sort of being collectively constructed in the present. Some technologies don't even get the use they're supposed to.*

**JGM:** This is why technical fixes, technical solutions to social problems, don't always work. Because it has to be a social solution to a social problem and then maybe we can use the technology secondarily. But usually, we're like "Okay, what can the tech do?" and then we build a solution based on that, as opposed to "What do we need?" and then build the tech around that.

**Interviewers:** *In your work, you have been investigating different types of travelers and tourists, such as flashpackers,<sup>8</sup> couchsurfers, round-the-world travelers with their blogs, voluntourists, Airbnb tourists, slow tourists, culinary tourists, and so on. Do you think such distinctions help us understand the aspirations and anxieties of contemporary tourism practices? Are they more diverse in the 21st century?*

**JGM:** It's kind of interesting to think about it as types because I'm actually very skeptical of typologies. I find them useful up to a point and then their usefulness kind of falls apart once I go into the empirical field, because no actual person fits the category but the category gives us a little bit of a map of how things might be. If you look at this list, actually, the travelers that I've interviewed and studied, they're all of these things at the same time. It's not like there are couchsurfers who don't eat, because of course they're eating while traveling, so they're also culinary tourists. But they're also often flashpackers because they're using mobile technologies while they're traveling. Sometimes, voluntourists go and stay in an Airbnb, so these are really like overlapping practices that people are doing rather than discrete categories. But I think you're right in suggesting that by giving these different practices a name, like couchsurfing or voluntourism, gives us an entry point for thinking about their diverse aspirations and anxieties. Sometimes people will frame it in terms of who benefits and who suffers,

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<sup>8</sup> Flashpackers are travelers who merge aspects of conventional backpacking with elements of more luxurious or comfortable travel. The term itself is a fusion of "flash," which conveys notions of style, trendiness, or even affluence, and "backpacker," denoting those who typically seek budget-conscious and self-directed travel encounters.

which is maybe more of a political framework for it. For me, thinking about anxieties and aspirations is just more interesting, I guess.

**Interviewers:** *Does it also imply more attention to the subjective or affective dimension? Like the social ties constructed within these different types of travel?*

**JGM:** I think you're right and I think that gets to where my scholarship falls in terms of the sociological imagination. I tend to approach it more from the micro level, from the level of identity and lifestyle, only then I try to think about structure or larger historical forces a bit more. But I'm so much more interested in the personal stories and the rich texture of actual everyday experiences. It's the story that pulls me in and then, from there, I try to step back and look at where in the bigger picture these couchsurfers or culinary tourists fit. Thus, my interest is much more in the everyday performances of self.

**Interviewers:** *Following this line of reasoning, what is interactive tourism, and who are interactive tourists? Is it related to mobile sociality? Considering these intersections between technologies and travel experiences of different kinds, why did you phrase this concept interactive tourism?*

**JGM:** This is a great question and I think this term *interactive travel* or *interactive tourism* dates my work because I think today the term I would use is travel or tourism. The interactive almost isn't even remarkable at all anymore. When we are on observation decks, for example, mostly everyone is on their phones taking pictures. It is completely normal, we don't think "Look at all these people with their phones!". It doesn't even occur to us. When I was first writing about *interactive travel*, it was at this moment right when the iPhone had been invented and when *Web 2.0* was rolling out. This was really transformative, because the first iteration of the internet was really just broadcasting websites, pushing out websites, but you couldn't interact with the website, you could just read it. Then, with *Web 2.0* and with the interactive features, you could comment, you could have a discussion forum, and you could have peer-to-peer interactions. All that was really transformative in terms of the *affordances* that the technology was

providing. I think that's why maybe my book has a shelf life [laughs], now it's a historical account.

**Interviewers:** *About this transition, do you mean that every social interaction and every travel experience is now mediated by these digital technologies?*

**JGM:** Pretty much. And I would say if it's not, you have to make a choice to opt out, in most cases. Not to overgeneralize, because even now not everyone has a mobile phone or has access to the internet, but that privileged stratum of travelers that I'm studying more or less does.

**Interviewers:** *Do mobile technologies necessarily dilute the distinctiveness of places or detach people from places as some authors claim? How places or tourist destinations are being fueled by the circulation of information, photos, and messages on social media?*

**JGM:** On the walk over here, we were just talking about Walter Benjamin (1995) and his work on the arcades, the *flâneur*, and the idea of aura. Is the aura diluted by the proliferation of all of these images on social media? This goes back to your earlier question about the moralization of technology. We often talk about authenticity in these moral debates. Are places losing their authenticity because they are so mediated and because those media images are circulated so broadly? By the time I actually arrive to look at the Eiffel Tower, do I even feel it's the real place? I would go back to the concept of *affordances* because that is one of the effects that the technology *affords*, that perhaps, in some ways, meaning is being diluted or the experience of being in a place is definitely being impacted by the circulation of that place in social media. But then, on the other hand, when I was doing the research for *Travel Connections* (Germann Molz, 2012), I noticed that as much as a sense of place was being diluted by technology, other meanings and other ways of being in place were being invented and experimented with. I use the concept of *enchantment* and *disenchantment*, which is inspired by the work of American sociologist George Ritzer (2005) on Weber's idea that the modern world is *disenchanted*. I won't give you a lecture on the Enlightenment, the discovery that the Earth revolves around the sun and not the other way around, the challenges to cosmological ideas about human exceptionalism...

The argument goes that modern life has sort of been hollowed out of meaning and purpose. But one of the things I was curious about was how technology might be *re-enchanting* places. There are other forms of mystery and there are other forms of depth and *new ways of connecting* with places because of the technology or through the technology. For example, when I studied the mobile walking tours in Boston, I found that they led tourists to off-the-beaten-path corners of the city and revealed sights and insights that were otherwise hidden. Therefore, the technology can both hollow out and dilute places but also give us new, cool, exciting ways to engage with places.

**Interviewers:** *In your discussion on Travel Connections (Germann Molz, 2012), you explored a sense of togetherness and connection facilitated by the mobile world. Recently, practices of virtual tourism have emerged and multiplied. What is your perspective on how connection and a sense of togetherness can be both experienced and analyzed within this context.*

**JGM:** There's a sense that it's not ever going to replace corporeal tourism. John Urry was very influenced by Diedre Boden and Harvey Molotch's (1994) idea of a "compulsion to proximity". People want to be together and they want to be together in certain places. That is a desire that virtual tourism hasn't been able to replicate yet. But maybe it can; maybe there are ways of replicating togetherness that are more important than replicating the sense of being in a place. It seems to me like a lot of the research on the technology in this area is around *e-word-of-mouth*, ratings, or destination management questions, as opposed to these other questions about identity, selfhood, and lifestyle that I'm more interested in.

**Interviewers:** *Regarding the ways in which mobilities shape social inequality, there are similarities and differences within empirical contexts. Both rich and poor people are mobile, but the contours, qualities, and textures of their movements are highly differentiated. Mobilities' literature talks about involuntary migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers. On the other hand, it talks about middle-class and upper-class professionals, the so-called expatriates, the kinetic elites (Sheller & Urry 2006), and so on. How to deal with these social differences? Should we adjust our analytical lens from one group to another?*

**JGM:** For a lot of researchers, social class is the starting point. Someone could ask “What is this class of traveler doing?” and that’s the unit of analysis which bounds what they’re actually looking at. In my research, I get interested in a thing that people are doing, like when I get interested in *worldschooling* as a lifestyle practice (Germann Molz, 2021). And it just so happens that who’s doing *worldschooling*, of course, is a very small slice of relatively privileged families. Or my interest in *digital nomadism* (Mancinelli & Germann Molz, 2023) leads me to this very small slice of the demographic profile of people who are in a particular social class. That’s probably a limitation or a weakness in my own research design. I’m looking at a lifestyle practice rather than looking at a relation like you’re talking about. If I were to ask “Whose forced mobility or forced immobility makes a digital nomad lifestyle possible?”, maybe that would be a more interesting way for me to come into the debate rather than saying “What are digital nomads doing?”. In other words, it may be more interesting to ask what is making that lifestyle possible. What makes the *worldschoolers*’ lifestyle possible? What makes an expat family’s lifestyle possible? And often it is someone else having to stay put or someone else being forced to travel.

**Interviewers:** *Normally, social groups are treated separately by social researchers. They do research on poverty or they research rich people, but they rarely see the interconnections and systems that put together and intersect rich people’s mobilities and poor people’s mobilities. In your research, how do you deal with this consciousness of class? How do you deal with it analytically? Do you have to be explicit that your interviewees are rich or poor people and how this helps in writing down your analysis?*

**JGM:** Even though I critique the work of Zygmunt Bauman, I also find his work so interesting and I love reading it. Bauman (1998) has this concept of tourists and vagabonds, and it’s so helpful to me thinking about how he describes them as two sides of the same coin. Because if we get caught up in the dichotomy of who’s moving and who’s not moving, we hardly see anything interesting. But it changes everything if we look at who’s moving under different conditions and how some people’s mobility relies on the mobility or immobility of others. I haven’t written about it, but one of the ways I think about it is in terms of a *politics of comfort*. Who’s traveling

in comfort? And who's not? And who's traveling with peace of mind? For example, "Oh yeah, when I get to Immigration, of course my passport is going to be fine and of course my bag is going to go through Customs". Whereas other people who maybe are also on the flight are not comfortable because they're not sure if their visa is going to be accepted at the immigration checkpoint. They're traveling in worry. I think those affective nuances are really interesting to think about.

**Interviewers:** *When John Urry talked about "the end of tourism", what was being suggested is that the tourist gaze became increasingly integrated into the everyday. You also write on this topic. What do you mean when you say a set of dichotomies such as home and away collapse in this process?*

**JGM:** In his work, John Urry has taken Heidegger's concept of *dwelling*, which is a very ontological, a very fundamental concept. It's about *beingness* and *becoming*. Then he mobilizes it and he talks about *dwelling in mobility* (see Urry, 2000). We can make ourselves at home while we're traveling. This goes back to *the politics of comfort* because it's much easier for some people to feel at home than for others. For me, being from the United States, I arrive in Sao Paulo, but I recognize all of these cultural markers. When I walk by Burger King or McDonald's at Paulista Avenue it feels familiar to me. But for other travelers, maybe it's harder for them to feel at home while they're traveling. I developed this idea of *global abode* around that issue (Germann Molz, 2008). Travelers and backpackers have all of these objects and embodied, ritualistic, and habitual ways of making themselves at home, anywhere that they are. For example, one of the women I interviewed carried a mug with her everywhere she went. She would have her oatmeal in that mug every day for breakfast, that was how she started her day, and that gave her a sense of familiarity. Or people would go to the same restaurant every day in a new place to try to feel at home there. It addresses the "homing desires" that Avtar Brah (1996) talks about. Even though we have a desire to move, we also have a desire to be rooted. That tension is part of who we are as humans. It also reflects a colonial mindset, like "This is mine now", "I can be here", "I belong here", and "I'll make myself at home here" that is not necessarily true for everyone. But this goes back the other way too and it reminds us that home is not, and never has been, the stable, fixed,

static place that we assume it to be. Home is also constantly being habitually reproduced by eating our breakfast in the same bowl every morning or by making ourselves at home in our homes. Therefore, this idea of global abode disrupts both the stability of home and the mobility of travel.

**Interviewers:** *About the digital nomads you're studying now, they make themselves at home wherever they go with a lot of existing infrastructure like Wi-Fi cafes. And cities are redesigning themselves in similar ways to receive them.*

**JGM:** Absolutely! When nomads arrive in a new place, the first impulse is: "Where will I live?", "Where will I work?", "Where is my community?" and to build that around themselves. And you're right. There are all these cottage industries of intermediaries catering to that desire, like offering co-working spaces or connectivity services. There's this new accommodation app that I just saw called *Landing* that offers flexible, short-term leases for digital nomads. It's your spot in Sao Paulo, or your spot in Beijing, or your spot in Bangkok, your little apartment where you can "land" and do your digital nomad work from there. But I like to reflect on both sides of it, as with the tourist gaze. Just as cities or tourist destinations reorganize themselves to appeal to the tourist gaze and the tourists arrive already knowing what they want to see, cities are now organizing themselves to meet the needs of digital nomads. It's that partnership, that interplay between the place and the people.

**Interviewers:** *Continuing with the discussions about objects of tourism desire and the industry's role in building myths and products, how do you conceive the idea of network hospitality and what are its specificities in relation to other forms of hospitality, such as commercial, domestic, or virtual? What are your perceptions of network hospitality in the context of the contemporary tourism industry, considering exponents such as Airbnb, for example?*

**JGM:** *Network hospitality*, the way I'm envisioning it, is not a different type of hospitality, but instead a form of togetherness that occurs in commercial, domestic or virtual domains. What I was trying to get at with this idea was that there is an emerging, new social logic. *Network hospitality* is trying to describe a new way of being together thanks to the *affordances* of all of these network technologies and peer-to-peer platforms. In developing this idea, I

was inspired by Andreas Wittel's (2001) work on *network sociality*, which in turn was inspired by Manuel Castells' (1996) work on *network society*. I was trying to think about how, in the 21st century, so much of the way that people are together isn't necessarily just social, but it's hospitable.

People do their social lives in hospitality settings, like restaurants, hotel lobbies, and so on. So, we're actually in places that are hospitality settings, often commercial and sometimes private, domestic hospitality settings. And a lot of the discourses around tourism, but also around national policy toward immigration, are filtered through this idea of hospitality, hosting, and guesting. So, when we think about sociality, we're often thinking about how we host each other or how we are guests with each other.

I was trying to think about how these new platform technologies are shaping those encounters in particular ways. Andreas Wittel's concept of *network sociality* lists five specific features of this new kind of sociality that he was identifying. I tried to come up with *five parallel features of network hospitality*. The first one was that we have all these instances of *sharing with strangers*, as you do with Uber, couchsurfing or Airbnb. The second feature was this idea of *engineering randomness*. With the internet, mobile mapping, and social media, everything is kind of known. You know where you're going because you have the map on your phone, you know what your Airbnb place is going to look like because you looked at 73 pictures of it before you got there. And so, it goes back to my earlier comments about *disenchantment* and *re-enchantment*. So, tourism becomes disenchanted because there's no mystery, there's no question, and we know what's going to happen because we can pre-visit places on our phones. But the couchsurfers I interviewed were inventing ways of *engineering randomness*. Some of them told me: "Oh, yeah, I'll just accept a request from somebody. I won't even look at their profile" to try to reinsert some of that unknownness into the experience.

Then, the other feature I was interested in was the idea of *feeling like a guest*. This is getting at the affective quality of what it feels like to interact with strangers. On this point, I'm really informed by Paula Bialski's (2004) work. She's a Polish-Canadian sociologist and writes about *intimate tourism* and how it feels to get to know a stranger really quickly, really intensely, and then say goodbye tomorrow and never see each other again. The fourth one was *pop-up assemblages* and how we can use technology to almost have Flash Mob type sociality. There was this really interesting project called

*Restaurant Day*. People would come out, they would sell food out of the window of their houses. It was just a very grassroots thing. And it was very last minute because they were able to use the technology to coordinate it, really quickly.

The final one is *guests without hosts*. This is the idea that the technology and the forms of interaction that the technology *affords* flatten the host-guest power hierarchies of it. Everyone is a guest or everyone is a host. It kind of disrupts the host-guest hierarchy. But I've since developed this idea into some other more critical directions as well about the ways technology can sort of replace the host. What is happening in places that are allowing short-term rental is that there's a lot of speculative investment. And so, the people who are buying these places to rent out aren't even really the hosts, they're just speculative landlords who may delegate to a property manager, so they're not really hosting the guests. What happens in these neighborhoods is that the price of housing rises so high that the only people who can afford to be there are guests. The local hosts get pushed out. So, you have neighborhoods full of guests wanting to have the experience of local life, but there are no hosts to host them because of the economic impact on housing. These are some of the ways I'm trying to develop this idea.

**Interviewers:** *Revisiting your discussion on slow tourism and the rhythms that surround the phenomenon of tourism, as well as the contemporary movements that reveal much about mobility and immobility, how do you currently visualize and perceive global tourism? Considering this context and including discussions about movement, speed, slowness, and rhythm, which are also part of tourism's object of desire. Also, how do you visualize the face myths of tourism, which circulate and are part of the tourism industry, showing how rhythm and place are highly intertwined?*

**JGM:** You are asking about my new favorite concept, which I've been thinking about for a long time: *the spatio-temporality of tourism* and *pace* (see Germann Molz, 2010). I'm really interested in this idea of *pace* and *the politics of pace*, which is informed by Tim Cresswell's (2010) work on the politics of mobility. The project I want to work on next is about the emotional politics of pace. That is, the affective and atmospheric qualities of pace, but also the moral discourses that we assign to moving fast and moving slow.

Whose speed is seen as morally justifiable and whose slowness is seen as immoral or criminal even? So, there's this whole moral geography of pace as well. But this idea of *pace myths* comes from Rob Shields, who worked with John Urry as well. He had this notion of *place myths*, about how the images of place circulate (Shields, 1991), which relates to your earlier question about whether places are diluted because of the media circulation of place imagery that primes the way tourists want to experience the place. Then, I was just adding on other dimensions about the temporality of the place: Is it a fast city or a slow, laid back place? Do tourists often travel because they want to have a temporal or rhythmic experience, as well as seeing a place? That's the idea.

**Interviewers:** *You propose the application of a Mobile virtual ethnography (MoVE) for the investigation of mobile-mediated walking tours, travel blogging, flashpacking, couchsurfing, Airbnb, and worldschooling. Can you explain the process behind the development of these virtual ethnography practices in your research? How does the appropriation of images and text in virtual spaces relate to the ethnography approach?*

**JGM:** This may be another intervention that dates my research, because I think that, at this point, the idea of doing virtual ethnography, netnography, or using digital text as part of the evidence, or as part of the data set, is normalized. It's almost assumed that the digital artifacts in some way are going to be part of the story that you're investigating. But when I was starting my Ph.D., this was not assumed at all, and so anthropologists like Daniel Miller and Don Slater (2000), Christine Hine (2000) and Sarah Pink (2008) were trying to figure out how to move our social scientific methods into this digital space or virtual space. Can we just use our same old methods in digital spaces? Or do we need new methods? Same with mobilities. How do we shift these sedentarist notions about how we collect data to study mobile phenomena? Can we just adapt our old techniques to this mobile world or do we need new techniques? I was trying to thread that needle between "OK, I'm going to be studying travelers, but I'm not going to be studying them just online or just offline because they're not traveling just online or just offline. I have to find a way to do both". I was trying to learn from the virtual ethnography literature that was coming out and from the new mobile

methods that were being developed. *Mobile virtual ethnography* (MoVE) was my attempt to combine those.

**Interviewers:** *Mixing methods?*

**JGM:** Yes, mixed methods! Multi-sited ethnography was not new but this idea of multi-sited in physical places and in digital spaces was kind of a new thing.

**Interviewers:** *Your research was conducted on public pages and platforms. In the case of closed or secretive communities, such as private Facebook or WhatsApp groups that require invitations for participation, how should researchers position themselves? What are your thoughts on the practice of lurking and the use of visibility when engaging in online participation within the practice of virtual ethnography?*

**JGM:** These questions about research ethics are absolutely important! It's something that I've grappled with a lot in my own research and had to give a lot of thought to how to position myself. Especially because my entry into the fieldwork was often blurry: I was a sociologist, but in order to study couchsurfing, I also was a couchsurfer. I had a profile on the couchsurfing website. Same with Airbnb. I'm an Airbnb guest, I'm an Airbnb host. So, where's that line? When do I become a sociologist? Also with worldschooling, while I was doing that ethnography I was a worldschooling parent. So, when I would reach out to respondents, they responded to me as a fellow parent rather than as a sociologist. I had to be really explicit about my position in those moments. There were some social media forums that I wanted to study, but it wasn't very clear what my ethical relation was because some of the Facebook groups were for worldschooling parents, but they were definitely private or moderated, so I didn't use much of that data. Or maybe I would use those forums to connect with someone and then do an interview where I was much more clear about my position as a sociologist. At the same time, though, I see blogs and other public pages as fair use. Even though maybe I'm consuming and analyzing it in a way that's different from what the author intended, it's public. It's public data. One way I like to think about it is who has control of their own story. The travelers that I'm studying have control of

their own story. They have the network capital, they have the digital capital, and the cultural capital to really tell their own story, so I think it's fair to analyze and critique those stories that they're telling in public spaces. But there are other people who don't have so much control over their own story or their position in the digital space is more vulnerable, and they use it to shore up their security in a way. In those cases, it's important to be careful and maybe more collaborative in terms of telling their story.

**Interviewers:** *There's so much to learn from your work! Thank you so much for your availability and kindness. Would you like to add something?*

**JGM:** Well, thank you! Thank you for reading something I wrote, that is just such an honor and a gift! Thank you for engaging with my work and for reading pieces that were published a really long time ago, and for giving me all this space to talk. I've been so inspired and heartened by meeting you all and meeting some of the other students and Ph.D. candidates throughout the event. Your projects, your knowledge, your training, your grasp of this field... Like Mimi said yesterday, I think John Urry would be proud of my work, but I think he would be so proud of what you all are doing! He would be really impressed and excited to see these amazing directions that you're taking these ideas. So, congratulations to you all. It's really amazing!

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