7 The Valorisation of Delay

Within the temporal structure that organises Neoplan's waiting relations, in which unscheduled departures are woven into a tapestry of many loose-knit threads, the positions of passengers, drivers, and gangs all imply a disposition of forbearance, albeit to different degrees. Passengers are compelled to endure the interval of waiting before departure inside the buses. Drivers have to manage and 'struggle' through recurring intervals of relative inactivity during the times spent waiting at the station between their journeys. Gangs have to bear the erratic intervals of paused activity between ticket sales and loading.

The position Neoplan's mobile sellers and service providers – locally defined by their practice of hawking – and shadow passengers take in relation to the temporalities of waiting is marked by a crucial difference. Their principal time of work is the time when other station actors wait. Above all, this pertains to the waiting of passengers, who represent the prime clientele of hawkers and the sole 'target' of shadows. For station hawkers, the passengers' waiting time is their main timeframe for sales and service, and thus work. The deployment of shadows is basically a means of making passengers wait. From the perspective of these two groups, or types, the temporal uncertainties that follow from irregular departures and fluctuating frequencies of passenger inflow are not endured with forbearance, but are acted on in such a way that their loose-knit threads are made to fall together and, ultimately, are exploited.

By transforming what to passengers is tantamount to empty, wasted, or delayed time into a means for generating income, the practices of Neoplan's hawkers and shadows render waiting time productive. In this, they provide a striking illustration of the generative capacity of hustle activities to harness economic margins. As they realise economic value through adaptive utilisation of other people's time lost to waiting, their practices give rise to a *micro-economy of waiting*. This is not an economy in the abstract sense of broader economic implications of unaccounted-for time, but in the literal sense of a system of

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commercial practices bent on economic engagements with and exploitations of waiting. These waiting trades are a by-product of Neoplan's involuting organisation of work and the surfeits of 'empty' time it produces. They emerge on the margins of what constitutes the station's core business, transportation, and they are principally performed when the main activities (of transporting people and goods) are interrupted temporally.

This ancillary position notwithstanding, the number of people who engage in the waiting trades is considerable. In fact, their number regularly exceeds that of transport workers found inside the station. At times, it even exceeds the number of passengers waiting inside the fleet of loading vehicles. The average number of shadows deployed by Neoplan's gangs is about 200. The number of hawkers who are active at the station is more difficult to assess, because, by the very nature of their trade, they are on the move while working. I counted between 200 and 250 hawkers who use the station as their primary base; and I estimated an equally high number of mobile vendors and service providers who regularly frequent its premises.

In this chapter, which continues the typology of Chapter 6, I attend to the perspectives of those who participate in, provide for, and benefit from Neoplan's micro-economy of waiting. To this end, I shift the focus from practices, experiences, and temporalities of waiting, which informed the discussion in the preceding chapter, to practices aimed at utilising the waiting time of others. I show that these practices are realised in quite different registers. First, I provide a general appraisal of mobile businesses taking place in Neoplan's yard and then zero in on the trade of mobile vending. In so doing, I focus in particular on hawkers' skills and strategies for accommodating to, and valorising, the uncertainties of differently timed delays. Next, I turn to the role of shadow passengers to explore a particularly manifest form of labour in time, enacted through practices of 'time-tricking' (Moroşanu and Ringel 2016), that emerges in the porous and erratic temporalities of Neoplan's unscheduled departures. Following Bear (2014), I here use the term 'labour' not as a metaphor for agency or practice, but literally as denoting acts of human effort and the creative and strenuous work of organisation, which illustrates another key aspect of hustling at the station. I argue that the efforts exerted by both hawkers and shadows basically serve to mediate, and conceal, temporal difference. Although these acts of mediation constitute a set of routinised practices, within the incalculability of time relations in which the station's transport work, services, and hustling activities take shape, the routines are maintained only by means of hard work.

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Servicing and Vending

A main feature of the ways in which hawkers tap into the waiting events taking place at Neoplan's yard is that their services are geared towards meeting the needs of those who wait. These needs include hunger and thirst, and they relate to conditions connected with the experience of waiting, such as boredom, impatience, fatigue, fear, and credulity. Neoplan's hawkers capitalise on these needs by offering food and drink, and by providing a broad range of petty services in the form of pastimes, distractions, and amusements – in other words, they offer substitutive value for empty time.

Mobile clowns and acrobats are a good example of the income-producing utilisation of waiting time through the provision of diversion. Using empty parking spaces for staging their shows, they target primarily the audience of passengers sitting inside the surrounding vehicles. Similar diversions include the irregular 'performances' of mobile preachers, usually Christian Charismatic or Muslim, who make use of microphones and loudspeakers, and at times even arrange stage lighting equipment when delivering sermons after nightfall. The span of attention that clowns and preachers receive from their spectators is normally limited to the duration of the loading of the surrounding buses. In order to counterbalance these temporal limitations, which are conditioned by the passengers' waiting time, the performers use helpers who go round collecting donations during the performance.

Groups of mobile preachers and herbalists who work at the station regularly show more fine-tuned adaptations to the waiting time of passengers. Organised in four associations, their work follows a rostering system which, like that of the drivers, determines the order in which they offer their services. They address the 'congregation' of potential donors and customers from inside the bus and, crucially, right before departure. During the short period of pre-departure effervescence, passengers easily lend themselves to the often spurious arguments with which preachers and herbalists promote their miracle-working products, most of which are advertised as remedies for travel-related illnesses.

Mobile service providers who frequent Neoplan's yard in search of customers provide another example of commercial practices that are well adapted to the different spans of 'spare time' before departure and between ticket sales. Specialising mainly in cosmetic treatments and grooming that are performed almost *en passant*, their swift services range from pedicures and manicures, beard trimming and hair cutting, to shoe

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Figure 7.1 Nocturnal sermon of a mobile preacher.



Figure 7.2 Mobile acrobat.

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polishing and on-the-spot repairs.[1] Similar to the young boys who wipe the windscreens of vehicles waiting at traffic lights, these mobile beauticians and other service providers have honed their crafts to an optimum of temporal effectiveness, performing their tasks within the shortest possible time and with the customer not even needing to leave the seat of the vehicle he or she has boarded.

By far the largest and most diverse group of those who venture into – and valorise – other people's waiting time are mobile vendors. They are the foremost specialists in Neoplan's waiting trades. At root, their work at the station is relatively simple: they provide passengers with provisions for the journey, which, as noted previously, comprise an abundance of products. The hawkers' customers also include drivers, gang and office workers, shopkeepers, and other hawkers, but they mainly specialise in tendering products customised to meeting the needs of travellers. Their vending practices, in turn, are mainly configured for selling to travellers waiting inside vehicles.[2]

At the basic level, this is performed by a kind of 'inverse window shopping' (Stasik and Klaeger 2018): the hawkers pass from one loading vehicle to another, offering the seated clients a mobile assortment of merchandise that passes by the windows of the parked vehicles. In the context of the highly competitive and volatile market-cum-work environment, hawkers have to make three basic choices: *what* items to sell and *where* and *when* to peddle them.

The first choice largely depends on socially constituted parameters of access, as the range of goods one can acquire through cash-and-carry arrangements is subject to the ties one can mobilise with storekeepers, stationary vendors, and other patrons (within networks of, for example, kin and church). The shift to higher value items over time, as suggested

[1] Other mobile services performed at Neoplan include medical diagnoses (e.g. blood pressure, eyesight, pregnancy, worm infection) and craftsmanship (e.g. paintwork, construction and repair of light metal, glass, wood, and concrete items), as well as repair and refurbishing of gadgets (mainly mobile phones), jewellery polishing, oil lamp refilling, and occasionally fortune-telling.

[2] Some passengers buy their provisions before coming to the station and boarding the bus. By and large, however, they tend to start their travel-related shopping only when they are seated inside the bus, for three reasons. First, it saves travel time: the sooner a passenger is seated inside the bus, the higher his or her chances of an early departure. Second, it is a matter of convenience, in that passengers can buy their provisions while seated in the loading bus, without necessarily having to pay higher prices than elsewhere. The third reason relates to the imponderability of the journey, which means that passengers can never be sure 'whether they will get to buy from hawkers in bottlenecks' on the road (Klaeger 2014: 99). Particularly for passengers on long-distance routes, it is safer to make their purchases before departure, at the latest when sitting inside the bus.

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by Alex Asiedu and Samuel Agyei-Mensah (2008) in their study of Accra hawkers, applies to hawkers peddling in and around bus stations, but with reservations. Rather than simply changing from one item to another of higher value, the station hawkers tend to broaden the range of goods they can access while including items of higher value. As noted previously (Chapter 5), the resulting capacity to alternate between sales of different items in quick succession, mainly between non-durables and durables, is an expedient strategy for adapting to the fast-changing rhythms of consumption at the station yard. Here, hawkers' alignment to variables of temporality appear more relevant than their concern for commodity prices. An alternative way to broaden one's assortment of goods is by selling other hawkers' items on commission. This is exemplified by the female hawker-turned-shadow in the account of loading in Chapter 6; she first sold her biscuits and then switched to selling drinks, fried rice, and meat pies on commission for three other hawkers.

The choice of *when* to peddle one or more items depends, first, on the general frame of the duration of work and the time of day – or, far more seldom, the time of night. Most hawkers I engaged with said that the duration of their daily work depended on individually set sales quotas, but it was normally equivalent to a minimum of eight hours of work, and that they usually started selling between 5 a.m. and 7 a.m. This general timeframe corresponds to the time when passengers/customers arrive in considerable numbers. Second, the choice of when to peddle depends on the narrower timeframe of finding, or creating, an opportune moment for making an offer and, ideally, performing a sale. This more proximate spacing of hawkers' activity in time – the *timing of vending* – relates directly to passengers' temporalities. The time each passenger spends waiting for departure, mostly inside the bus, produces a time window in which a hawker can make a sale, usually through the window of the bus. These windows of time for sales differ in duration, as some passengers wait longer than others, and in terms of the sale prospects they generate, as the moment may be more favourable for one kind of hawker than for others.

The lines of demarcation between good and bad moments for sales, however, are often blurred. For example, when passengers start perceiving their waiting for departure as overly long, they become reluctant to attend to hawkers' offers, let alone buy from them. The kind of product a hawker sells also plays a role. Some items can be sold at any time – drinks and food in particular; others, including most types of durables, require more time for assessment and price negotiations.

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Waka-Waka: Techniques of Spacing Time

In view of these many factors, the task of keeping time accurately, which is the main condition for successful hawking, is a complex matter. There are normally several dozen vehicles loading simultaneously and thus hundreds of time windows that open up at different moments and elapse at different speeds. There is a strong sense of unpredictability that underlies vending practices at the station. Like the loading gangs, hawkers have to deal with an erratic and highly intermittent pattern of work activity, as their peddling of products is only sporadically punctuated with actual sales. Yet, in contrast to the gangs, whose work is suspended whenever passengers stop coming in, the work of hawkers is hardly ever discontinued. While one might infer that, when peddling, hawkers perpetually 'lie in wait' for sales, this would be misleading. The point is that, when peddling at the station, the possibility of sale opportunities emerging can never be ruled out. In order not to miss an opportunity, hawkers need to actively insert themselves into the time windows during which opportunities might emerge. Essentially, this implies continuously wandering about, or, as many hawkers frame it, *waka-waka*. This English-derived West African Pidgin phrase, which blends the verbs *walk* and *work*, pointedly emphasises the repetitiveness and continuity of action involved in hawking.

As hawkers walk while working, walking is both a prerequisite and the quintessence of their work. The ways in which they move about *in space* – continuously assessing spatio-temporal configurations for finding or creating opportune moments for sales – thus bear a strong correlation to how they space their activity *in time*. As one bread-mongering hawker explained to me: 'I perambulate all day, up and down the street, up and down the [lorry] station. No store, no spot, no stall. I *waka-waka* all day.' The lack of a fixed selling place is turned into an opportunity for exploring, within walking distance, different sites at different times and, conversely, different timeframes for sales at different sites. The distinction between the third choice of where to peddle and the second of when to peddle is, in this sense, mainly an analytical one. From the hawkers' perspective, the dimensions of place and time are combined in the continual need for tactical manoeuvring, targeted on potential clients' shifting movements and timeframes. While the movements constituted in this fashion are extemporaneous in many ways, they are far from being random.

On a larger scale, this non-randomness is indicated by the fluctuation in the overall number of hawkers peddling at the station, which evinces a kind of collectively performed convergence in the rhythms of slow and

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fast business in the station yard. Any evident drop in the quantity of passengers, which signals declining demand and thus slow business, is usually matched with a reduction in the number of hawkers at the station. And conversely, whenever there is a rise in the number of passengers, signalling increasing demand and fast business, the density of hawkers tends to increase. Drawing on my observations of the practices of Neoplan's hawkers, and on my participatory walks accompanying different hawkers during their daily vending routines, I can distinguish three main patterns of convergence on an individual level, each of which represents a distinct vending strategy.

The first strategy comes down to a relatively regular and evenly timed striding through the rows of loading vehicles, without much variation in terms of the route or pace of walking. Here, little regard is paid to the variant temporalities in which passengers wait or to the different moods that permeate the waiting experience. The items for sale are advertised randomly, often with melodic phrases and chants that the hawker utters while moving about. Specific offers are usually made only when a customer calls the hawker and expresses an interest in buying.

The second and more versatile strategy follows a trial and error approach; this appears to be the most commonly practised hawking strategy inside the station. Here, the route followed by the hawker through the yard does not follow a pre-set course or tempo but varies according to the cues and indicators of prospective sales that are met with on the way: for example, a passenger may be spotted who seems to be on the watch for something, or a vehicle may appear ready to depart. Cues are also taken from the actions of other hawkers, either by joining them around particular vehicles or, conversely, by trying to avoid crossing their paths. The melodic phrases with which the hawker advertises his or her wares are produced erratically, and not in the rather monotone pattern characteristic of the first strategy. Shaped by ad hoc decisions, as well as by a good deal of intuition, this strategy translates into a walking pattern characterised by random moves, detours, turnarounds, and many vain trials.

The third strategy combines the regularity characteristic of the first, in that the hawker systematically scours a delimited area of the yard at regular intervals, with the more responsive attention to cues perceived along the way that characterises the second. This translates into frequent zigzagging, which results in a walking pattern covering the whole area. Chanting is used sparely or not at all. This strategy includes repeated returns to the same vehicle, which makes it possible to scan the same windows at different times, as well as the deliberate use of pauses in what is reckoned to be the right place at the right time. The key word here is

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deliberate. By adopting this strategy, the hawker is not randomly searching for opportunities to bring off a sale, but trying to actively place himself or herself in positions that seem to maximise opportunities for a bargain. This is a task of tracking time and, ultimately, *keeping time* with the differently elapsing time windows in which passengers wait. There are different levels of sophistication and subtlety by which Neoplan's hawkers realise this task of adjusting their own movement in relation to passengers' waiting temporalities. I will flesh out one particularly skillful adoption of this strategy by focusing on the techniques of Emmanuela, a station hawker whom I regularly accompanied during her daily *waka-waka*.

Emmanuela: Eyes for the Sale

Aged 43, Emmanuela has used the station as her main market for about seven years. During this time, she has hawked a variety of products – mainly clothes, toys, perfumes, and a range of other toiletries. Eventually, she settled for vending bread as her principle item, which she frequently combines with selling sachet and bottled water. Although these highly popular sales items bring her into competition with many other hawkers, she usually manages to achieve a high turnover of daily sales without difficulty. When I first met her, she explained the success of her venture by saying that bread and water sell 'fast', unlike perfumes, which she mocked as 'slow' and 'tiresome' articles. Obviously, this did not explain why her sales were faster than those of other hawkers who were selling the same items, even though she in fact walked slower than most.

I reckoned that a better explanation was her ability to find the right passengers and then target these potential clients at what appeared to be the right time for making a sale. When I asked her whether it was her, rather than the passengers, who decided when a purchase would be made, she first laughed at me. While this question was indeed rather ludicrous, it made her explain more details of her hawking technique. She instructed me while I carried her loaves of bread. As we walked past the windows of a large bus, carefully scanning the rows of passengers seated inside, she explained her strategy (I quote here from the notes I made after our tour):

> I look for the eyes. I count the eyes: closed – not closed. These eyes are closed [*a passenger sleeping*]. These eyes are open but look away [*a passenger looking in a different direction*]. These eyes look past me [*a passenger ignoring us ostensibly*]. So, I go further and return. When I catch the eyes, I do … [*she twinkles*]. This [*twinkling*] works for making contact.

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After circling the bus, we first moved on to two other buses, where we did the same exploratory 'eye count', and then we returned to the first one. As we walked past the windows for the second time, she tested me, asking whether I remembered the individual passengers. I did not. She, however, remembered them all, and she patiently demonstrated this by recalling every single pair of eyes: 'These ones were closed; these did not look; these looked away.'

The counting of eyes served Emmanuela as a mnemonic device for remembering passengers. What is more, she was also able to retrieve from memory the *quality* of the looks she had received from each pair of eyes during our first passing and the distinct moods she deduced from these looks. The inventory of passengers and their moods that she generated and continuously updated in this way then informed her decision as to whether it was worth returning, and apparently also *when* to return. Following the test run during our return to the first bus, she switched to her vending mode proper. First, she surveyed yet another bus and then returned to one of the two other buses we had surveyed before. There, she immediately headed for those passengers she reckoned to be most likely to buy from her; she started luring them individually, and, soon afterwards, she began making sales. After making initial eye contact, reinforced by twinkling, smiling, laughing, and generally by provoking affirmative and affectionate reactions, she began bantering with the respective client. At times, this involved jolly, insistent, and flirtatious approaches, while at other times she adopted a politer and more reserved attitude. To yet other customers she offered comfort by assuring that the bus would depart soon. She also picked out single loafs of bread and presented them to individual passengers as being particularly 'sweet' – that is, fresh and tasty.

Based on long practice and a well-trained working memory, Emmanuela's technique for choosing passengers enables her to gain an advantage over faster-moving hawkers. This advantage in time – and in *time reckoning* – provides her with latitude to respond to, act on, and even manipulate the different qualities of waiting in which she finds her prospective clients. Crucially, it allows her to invest considerable time in each bantering chat, and these investments yield regular returns.

While her vending strategy represents an exceptionally efficient, systematised, and successful *waka-waka*, it should not be mistaken for a generally applicable best practice. The specific techniques by which hawkers manage to track time are multiple and the complexities of differently emerging and elapsing windows of time for sales are attended to differently by different hawkers, not least because opportune moments for sales differ with respect to the items a hawker sells. The fact that there

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Figure 7.3 Inverse window shopping.

is no apprenticeship system by which hawkers enter the market and learn their craft adds to the diversity of individual approaches, and the multiplicity of techniques and ruses these bring about.

What the example of Emmanuela shows is the important role perceptiveness and timing play in the hawking trade. Notwithstanding that communicative skills and the ability to mobilise social networks and create a good rapport with patrons, clients, and colleagues all play a decisive role, the key prerequisite is perceptional and temporal attunement, or 'enskilment' (Pálsson 1994). Acquired largely through a bodily way of knowing, this is a form of perceptiveness in relation to the moods and needs of passengers as they evolve and change over the time of waiting, and a form of timing by which movements in space are timed in relation to the most propitious moments for action and, ultimately, for sales.

Shadowing

Mobile sellers and service providers participate in, and co-constitute, Neoplan's micro-economy of waiting by selling products and services

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to people who wait at the station, mainly passengers. Their activities qualify as waiting trades in that they make use of other people's waiting time for their sales and services. Principally afforded by different temporalities of uncertain waiting durations, theirs is a self-enterprising trade *in* commodities. Shadows, on the other hand, do not make use in this sense of the waiting time of passengers, but rather co-produce it. As a result of Neoplan's organisation of departures, which is both unscheduled and competitive, shadows are deployed to incite passengers to enter their vehicle (rather than another) and, ultimately, to make passengers wait. Through their work activity, waiting time itself becomes commodified. Engaged in order to create a false impression of advanced loading and thus of shorter periods of waiting, their purpose is to mislead passengers with regard to the departure time. It is essentially a bluff.

In Neoplan's diverse occupational arrangements, the position of shadows is characterised by the lowest degree of self-enterprise. Their work comes closest to that of wage labour. As such, labour is manifest here in its barest and perhaps most vulgar form. In the work of shadows, it is not so much productive labouring *power* that is exchanged for a wage as crude labour *time*. And it is not despite, but precisely because of, the reduction of productive capacity to mere bodily presence that Neoplan's workers conceive of shadowing as particularly arduous work, especially those who have had to shadow for long periods. Here, Alexander Chayanov's (1966 [1925]: 6) thesis of the inverse relation between productivity and drudgery proves painfully true. According to his thesis, the sense of drudgery decreases in proportion to the (real or perceived) increase in productivity, and vice versa. What shadows help to co-produce by way of their labour might be described as the epitome of unproductivity: waiting in temporal uncertainty.

The wages shadows receive depend not on the hours they work but on the vehicle they help to load. While gang members usually receive a share of the ticket sales, which varies according to the total sum generated, including luggage fees, the shadow's payment is fixed. During the time of my main fieldwork between 2011 and 2013, the fee was either 1 cedi or 50 pesewas. The difference has nothing to do with the net sum of ticket sales; rather, it depends on the branch shadows work for. Either way, it is substandard pay, even by the meagre standards of most gang members. For example, for six and a half hours of shadowing on the 46-seat Kumasi bus described in Chapter 6, for which each ticket cost 16 cedi, the shadows received 1 cedi each. The share of the sum of net ticket sales for each shadow was 1/736. In this respect, shadowing in smaller buses tends to be more remunerative, and less exploitative, than in larger ones. However, much of the relative gain in remuneration for shadowing in

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smaller buses is cancelled out by the higher levels of physical strain brought about by the cramped seating arrangements inside smaller buses.

There are, however, some exceptions to this. As noted previously, not all of those who shadow in buses work as full-time shadows. Loading boys are frequently called on to shadow as well. Yet they still receive their share of the ticket sales, which will usually be at least double the amount of the shadow's pittance. Hawkers are offered privileged access to selling inside the bus in exchange for a round of shadowing. Some spare drivers occasionally also hire themselves out as shadows. Because most regard the job as too menial for their standing, they do it furtively and only as a last resort. At times, even a station master might take on the shadowing task and sit quietly in a loading bus. His shadowing, however, serves the purpose of repose, not duty.

Generally, shadowing is the main entry point into yard work, especially for young recruits with no established ties to the station communities. As such, it serves as an initiation in two respects. First, as most of those who ask for work at the station do not know that there are shadow passengers, it introduces new workers to one of the basic ploys of Neoplan's transport work. By way of this hands-on instruction, they become confidants and accomplices from the first round of shadowing onwards. Second, shadowing is a form of initiation ordeal, not by fire or water, but by time. It severely tests steadiness and endurance, and can be interpreted as representing the principles of yard work in general, and as summing up key qualities of hustling at the yard in particular: it is fairly easy to enter, but immensely challenging in the long run.

While a bookman may engage a shadow on a short-term basis, usually for a single loading, the decision as to whether or not someone is hired as a shadow in the long term is made by the branch's station master. Demand is the main condition for allowing new candidates to enter the work. Although demand for shadows normally exceeds supply, people are sometimes rejected. I frequently witnessed incidents in which people were rejected because a station master or bookman deemed them to be unreliable or 'troublesome'. Most of the time, rejection is based on a candidate's unkempt outward appearance, which is also why vagrants, beggars, and the station balabala (whose work I discussed in Chapter 4) usually have no chance of being hired. Once someone is hired, he has to start shadowing right away and is immediately bound to the respective branch's shift work. The shadows' shifts tend to be shorter than those of the gangs. Especially during weekday nights, when only a few vehicles are put on scale simultaneously, many shadows are sent home around midnight.

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There is no set period for which a new initiate has to work as a shadow before he can advance in the employment hierarchy and become a loading boy. As with engagement, advancement is principally conditioned by demand: that is, when there is a need for new loading boys. While some have to drudge as shadows for weeks on end, others are asked to help out as loading boys during their very first days. Together with the poor pay and working conditions, this uncertainty about promotion prospects is the main reason why, among all the groups of station workers, shadows are the group with the highest rate of resignation and, correspondingly, with the highest rate of new recruitment.

Performing Waiting

The instructions new shadows receive are fairly basic. The many new recruits I saw (many of whom I also saw leaving again) during the time I worked as a shadow myself usually received just one order: '*Tena ase*!' – sit down. Other instructions concerning the specific procedures of shadowing are either provided at a later time or have to be figured out by the shadow himself. While there are no explicit guidelines for shadowing, three rather simple rules usually suffice: pretend well; get off the bus at the right time; and do not annoy the real passengers. The ways in which these rules are put into practice vary from one branch to another, and at times from one bookman to another.

The elementary practice of pretending, for example, varies according to whether or not the branch's shadows are equipped with special props (briefcases, books) and clothing (mainly clean shirts), refinements that allegedly go back to bookman Rasford's invention (described in Chapter 4). Other than that, the bluff basically comes down to impersonating the behaviour of passengers. Shadows take their seats as real passengers do: each one by himself and usually by the window. They remain passive most of the time, watching events in the yard or a film on the screen inside the vehicle. Some bookmen forbid their shadows to sleep in the loading vehicle; others explicitly encourage them to do so. And while shadows are generally allowed to converse with passengers and each other, they are sometimes scolded for flirting with female passengers. Their interaction with hawkers is generally limited to infrequent purchases of sachet water. Station-based hawkers are usually very fast in making out which of the passengers are shadows, and they then ignore them.

The right timing for getting off the bus is conditioned by the rule that there should be more empty seats than shadows in a loading bus, but this is often difficult to realise. Especially when several passengers board the

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bus at the same time, and towards the end of the loading, it is not easy for the seated shadows to get out. The task is further complicated by the fact that there is usually no prearranged order for leaving, and because leaving tends to collide with the imperative not to annoy passengers. The moments when shadows try to sneak off the bus, for which they regularly have to shove their way through rows of seated passengers or climb out of the window, are also the moments when shadows are most likely to raise suspicion among the passengers or even be unmasked by them. If they manage to get off unnoticed, they have to avoid being seen by the passengers they have left behind. Because the vehicle they are to shadow next is normally parked right beside the one they have just left, they cannot enter the new vehicle before the former has departed, which gives them time for a break.

If the seated passengers do become suspicious when shadows get up to leave, this regularly causes annoyance, anger, and aggression: the emotional pattern I have termed 'roadside rage'. The rule not to annoy passengers then translates into the task of keeping their annoyance and anger to a minimum. Crucially, this implies not arguing, retorting, or hitting back when they are attacked verbally or physically. Here, the maxim is to take the blows and insults stoically and bail out as quickly as possible. As already noted, such aggressive and violent reactions on the part of passengers, when shadows become scapegoats for accusations of fraud and 'delay', are not at all exceptional but an integral part of their routine drudgery. The shadows take these frequent accusations and aggressions as part and parcel of an unrewarding work routine fraught with monotony and hardship. Being on the lowest rank of the station workers' hierarchy, their work represents perhaps the most palpable reification of hustle as hardship.

Grievances about ill-treatment, underpayment, physical overload, and mental underload are staple topics in the shadows' conversations. Notwithstanding these repeated laments, few shadows allow their frustrations to impinge on their actual work. Indeed, most full-time shadows accept the hardships with apparent ease and even a sense of serenity. Irony is of enormous value in this respect. Their mockery knows few limits, and usually takes no heed of the authority of their superiors. When on shadowing duty, shadows regularly sneer about the indolence of the loading boys, the bookmen, and the station masters; they taunt hawkers by pretending to be interested in buying from them; they scoff at the sham prudery of mobile preachers; they mimic passengers and fellow shadows; and they call on drivers' assistants to clean the windows so that they will have a better view during the trip. In this performance, their appearance as juvenile passengers serves as a protective cloak of sorts.

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Alex's ridiculing impersonation of the young man's phone conversation described in the Kumasi-loading account (Chapter 6) is a telling example. Performed under the pretence of pre-departure 'bus talk' between two seatmates, Alex's mocking of the young man's promise that the bus will soon depart afforded us some relief from the monotony of our work. What is more, it gave us a kind of 'complicity in irony' (Fernandez and Huber 2001: 5). Alex's joke was at the expense not only of the young man telling his girlfriend or wife about the bus's imminent departure, but also of all the other real passengers awaiting departure inside the bus, including the ones who joined in the laughter. This concealed play on the ambiguity of our position – as faux passengers and 'waiters' – provided us with a sense of mastery of the situation, in turn asserting the generative capacity to withstand the hardship of the station hustle, if only transiently. A similar sense of mastery was frequently conveyed by the ways in which the shadows I worked with reacted to successful escapes. Especially after some more tumultuous exits from a bus, when we left behind fiercely enraged passengers, they regularly burst out in hearty laughter. When measured by these laughs, the shadowing work appeared to be but one lasting prank – which, of course, is not altogether wrong.

For the performance of this bluff-cum-prank, the shadows embody many of the characteristics that make up the *outward* appearance of passengers waiting for departure. Shadows sit, sweat, and sleep in the loading buses just like real passengers do. They engage in small talk in order to kill time, suffer from numb limbs, back pain, and the stifling mixture of heat and fumes, and generally experience the same symptoms of incremental physical and mental fatigue caused by sitting for a long time in a cramped position. Indeed, as shadows sit through numerous loadings successively during their shift, the 'violence of exhaustion' that they have to endure is much greater than that of passengers, who go through the loading of only one single bus.

Unlike real passengers, however, shadows do not actually wait but rather emulate and *perform* waiting. They may be waiting for the end of their working day or for their half or full cedi compensation after a completed loading. But these forms of waiting are in a different category from the waiting of passengers. After all, the waiting for departure that shadows perform is work – a form of work, that is, in which they sell their labour *time* and, ultimately, co-produce waiting time.

The shadows' selling of labour *time* (rather than labour *power*) parallels the work practice of two groups of professional 'waiters' in other contexts. The first are so-called bar girls, who work soliciting drinks in popular tourist destinations in Southeast Asia and who are hired to sit

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in bars and pretend to wait for (male) company in order to drive customer demand. The second group are so-called *coyotes* in Mexico (Levine 1997: 115), who hire themselves out as substitute queuers in bureaucratic procedures. These 'temporal wet-nurse[s]', as Robert Levine (ibid.) describes their trade, are paid according to the amount of time their queuing saves the customer. Although their professional waiting is 'embedded in graft', Levine (ibid.) notes, they 'provide a necessary and important service'.

Similar to the work of bar girls, the principal task of shadows is to drive customer demand – only here the 'company' they pretend to be waiting for is that of co-passengers rather than patrons. Like bars that hire well-performing bar girls, well-shadowed buses also tend to fill up quicker than those with unconvincing shadows or no shadows at all. Whenever one group of shadows manages to attract more passengers in a given time than another group, their time-selling work amounts to a time-saving service. The well-performed shadowing bluff is, in this sense, not the cause of a 'delayed' but of an expedited departure. In this, their work parallels that of Mexican *coyotes*, although the 'temporal wet-nursing' they provide is realised in a concealed manner. While the 'clients' they attract usually take no notice of the service rendered, they nevertheless benefit from it.

At bottom, however, the service provided by the shadows is neither really necessary nor important, irrespective of how well or how badly it is performed. The competitive loading of Neoplan's buses would also work without the deployment of shadows. Indeed, if one were to assess their work from a productivist point of view bent on maximising productive capacities, it would stand to reason that loading might work better and more effectively without them. This, however, is not the rationale that is at work at the station. What is at work here is involuting competition within a niche economy logic, hence the kind of self-perpetuating drive towards static expansion and labour intensification discussed in Chapter 4. Rather than maximising the utilisation of existing capacities, the underlying dynamic leans towards their multiplication.

Constitutive of these processes is the capacity to incorporate and utilise labour that otherwise would be deemed redundant. Ultimately, this gives rise to a particular kind of 'surplus labour' – not in the Marxist sense of work performed in excess per capita, but in the literal sense of a *surplus of labourers*, which effectively reduces productivity per capita. Shadows are a conspicuous result of these static expansions and the multiplication and intensification of labour. Drawn from a surplus of labourers, their labouring power is used to conceal the *surpluses of time* produced by the unscheduled and competitive organisation of loading. And although this

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is not strictly necessary for Neoplan's structure of loading and departure, it directly corelates with the organisation of both its work time and the waiting time this organisation produces.

Conclusion

I started the preceding chapter (Chapter 6) with two related contentions, which I will reassess here in the light of the above discussion. First, I suggested that the focus on waiting events at the Neoplan Station provides a fuller picture of the everyday life – and hustle – that takes shape within it and the practices, experiences, and orientations that unfold there. Waiting is one of the main activities at the station. Differently timed intervals of hiatus and 'delay' are constitutive elements in the tapestry of temporal relations in which people act and interact in the station environment. Temporalities of waiting not only 'pervade' (Hage 2009: 1) social life at the station, they *invade* it. Uncertainty holds sway over the sequentiality of clock time. More often than not, people do not know for how long they are going to have to wait nor whether they have to wait at all. Far from shaping time (Munn 1992), the station actors wrestle with its erratic qualities and the often intractable conflicts over disparate expectations of the duration of events and the 'empty' intervals between them. The invasive quality of waiting at the station becomes especially palpable from the perspective of passengers and drivers. Their engagements with the station boil down to the emblematic *waiting for departure*, which represents the main activity (for passengers) and the main temporal frame for other activities (for drivers). As departure time follows a logic of its own, the period of waiting for departure may range from instantaneous closure to durations of agonising length.

In analytical terms, the fleshing out of the ordinary, or 'infra-ordinary' (Perec 1999), facets of station life that the focus on waiting reveals moves beyond (or below) abstract conceptions of waiting as a generic category as ascribed to the irregularities of 'informal work' (in terms of both its legal status and its time patterns of work). In the context of research on African everyday mobility in general, and on practices and experiences of African road transport in particular, the focus on the mundanity of waiting counterpoises the salient bias of highlighting the dangerous, lethal, corrupt, and spectacular, while disregarding the habitual, normal, often boring and banal, yet nonetheless laborious and often utterly burdensome daily routines.

Directing ethnographic attention to these routines, as well as to their variation and reproduction across groups and over time, facilitates an articulation of social and temporal realities that otherwise are lost from

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sight, and thus from descriptions and analysis. What the ethnographic minutiae of situational waiting events at Neoplan bring to the fore is station life – and properties of the station hustle – stripped down to its barest and perhaps most drudging forms. They speak of monotony, the humdrum, and the eventless – qualities I have attempted to concretise through my notes made during the six-and-a-half-hour loading of the Kumasi bus. This examination of the collectively staged performance of shadows and temporal and visual trickery that station workers deploy highlights not only the harshness implied in their hustle but also the ways in which they accommodate volatility and mask the lack of work and the surfeit of time.

It is this lack of events and this waiting for events to occur that in great part constitute the everydayness of station hustle. Ultimately, the close reading of mundane waiting events contributes to a more nuanced understanding of what hustling at the station means. By foregrounding how the labour in, or of, time (Bear 2014) is implicated in the organisation and mediation of station-bred temporal practices and structures, this focus reveals realities of hustle beyond the more readily visible dimensions of rush, hardship, and competition linked to economic pressure. Indeed, much of the pressure that defines the station workers' understanding of hustle materialises not in the form of high levels of activity and corresponding levels of bodily energy exerted, but in the struggles to accommodate the enforced and erratic periods of inactivity and the mental and physical exhaustion these produce.

Second, I suggested that the irregularity of Neoplan's departure times translates into a porosity of temporalities of work and wait. In this connection, I have set out the often erratic structuring of activities in time in contradistinction to structures of formalised work temporalities common to modes of production in industrial capitalism, emphasising in particular the differences in terms of productivity. For most people working at Neoplan, this porosity is in fact enveloped in a relatively stable schedule of working hours. Gang members toil in shifts that are undeniably long but fixed, and which usually preclude overtime. While Neoplan's hawkers do not abide by any roster, their flexible adjustments to customer demand nevertheless result in relatively regular hours of operation. Seen from this perspective, the workdays of people working at Neoplan are not that irregular after all.

What is far less stable, and far more irregular and porous, is the actual workflow, which comes in fits and starts. Such intermittent, stop–go patterns of work activity, however, are a feature that is common to transport work in general. For example, writing about the temporal routines of British railway workers in the 1980s – who performed their

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work within a rigidly formalised transport system – Tim Ingold (1995: 25–6, drawing on Starkey 1988) assesses that their 'average actual working time for an 8-hour shift was only 3 hours 20 minutes' (Ingold 1995: 25). During the greater part of the working day, they were not 'doing anything but waiting around for the next train' (ibid.). With regard to the actual number of hours of active work, Ingold asserts, railway workers in Britain bear comparison with the affluent hunter-gatherer communities portrayed by Sahlins (1972), whose need-oriented subsistence quest left them with equally large amounts of time to spare.

What makes the difference, however, is the degree to which hours of active work are wedded to a regime of calculability. While British railway workers' periodic intervals of wait between periods of actual work are scheduled according to the timetable of train arrivals and departures, and are in this sense predictable, the intermittent discontinuations of work for Neoplan's workers (and most likely also the hunter-gatherers' discontinuations of leisure through hunting and gathering) are not.

As I have shown, there are significant differences with regard to the ways in which people position themselves within, act upon, and endure, or fail to endure, these porous time patterns of work and travel. Practical knowledge and skill, honed by perceptual engagements with, and attunement to, the temporalities of the yard, are crucial prerequisites for accommodating to the incalculable currents of activity; and so are stamina, wit, irony, and commitment. Well-performed attunement may soothe the sense of drudgery that the work necessarily conveys. Generally, the intermittency of the workflow exacts a great deal of effort from those who labour within it. As a result, much labour power is underutilised. The station economy runs below capacity and is, in this sense, underproductive – a quality that is inextricably linked to, and aggravated by, Neoplan's involuting occupational organisation.

What appears more noteworthy, however, is the intriguing division of labour that the incalculable temporalities of work and wait in the Neoplan Station produce. While the system of indeterminate departures leaves many resources to peter out in the time lost to waiting, it simultaneously creates a repository for commercial exploitations of 'delay'. This repository is tapped by the venturers of the waiting trades: the station's mobile sellers and service providers, as well as the squads of shadow passengers. Taken as a whole, temporal uncertainty – or, more precisely, *temporal incalculability* – simultaneously erodes productive capacities and promotes generative possibilities. The loss of time inflicted on some groups of station actors, passengers in particular, opens up a timeframe of opportunity for others. This is not exactly established on principles of mutuality. Yet it is also far from the disruptive and extractive

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nature of the 'politics of delay' (Beck et al. 2017a: 11) as practised notoriously at roadblocks across Africa (Klaeger 2013a; Lombard 2013). The valorisations of 'delay' constitutive of Neoplan's micro-economy of waiting are performed as services. While the service-oriented character is more obvious with some of the trades (hawking) and less with others (shadowing), at root they are all geared towards mediating, tempering, or simply distracting from the inevitable experience of waiting that – besides the evident busyness and 'bustle' – characterises the station hustle, as both activity and situation.

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