8 Conclusion
The Hustle Reloading

I began this book by suggesting that two distinct yet related meanings of hustle serve as a useful analytical framework for understanding the workings of Accra's Neoplan Station. The first meaning of hustle is crowded, hectic, and potentially confusing *situations*, as related in many popular and academic uses of the term as a noun that evoke the complexity (or what some call 'disorder') of certain sites in African cities, with the central bus station being a particularly prominent example. The second meaning of hustle, which I derived from the station workers' uses of the term as a verb – and which is linked to its genealogy of describing the simultaneous hardship and hardiness of marginalised groups – designates precarious, yet venturesome, economic *activities* and is expressive of popular livelihood strategies wedded to conditions of constraint and possibility. Throughout the chapters of this book, I saturated these twofold meanings of hustle through ethnographic descriptions. I proceeded from the broader historical context from which today's station hustle emerged (Chapter 2), to a description of the station's operational and occupational organisation in and from which its confusing situations enfold (Chapter 3), through to detailed elaborations of the different activities by which the station workers try to accommodate the situations of hustle by way of both routinised and creative practices (Chapters 4–7). The two meanings of hustle can, in this sense, be read as a short form for much larger processes at work in contexts of popular urban economic engagement in different African settings.

The lens offered by hustle, I argue, offers a conceptual framework that is empirically more grounded and analytically more productive than the catch-all term 'informality', to which the work in – and production of – mobility in sites such as Accra's Neoplan Station is regularly reduced. When assessed from a perspective bent on large categorical distinctions, the activities and organisational structures that underlie the workings of Accra's station may in fact be labelled 'informal'. To recapitulate: the work practices at Neoplan's yard take place in the context of a relative lack of state supervision, taxation, and support; the station's labour

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relations are characterised by low entry barriers in terms of capital and skill (notwithstanding that *successful* station work-cum-hustle in fact requires well-honed skills) and, correspondingly, by high levels of competition and bare subsistence incomes; and the income opportunities at the station are largely irregular and are insecure due to the lack of benefits and protection. Yet, these attributions of generic qualifiers of 'informal work' tell us little about the practices, orientations, and livelihood logics of the people who work at the station, and whose activities make transport work. Taking the 'informality' of Ghana's transport provisions as read, or simply inserting the term 'informal' as a self-explanatory qualifier of economic action (as is frequently done), obscures more than it reveals, especially as it negligently disregards the significance of lived experience and the dynamic and not always congruous ways in which people adopt to shifting situations.

As I have shown, in their attempts to accommodate to the station hustle, people draw on a wide range of registers of practice and positioning, including social ties, cultural norms, gendered identities, political affiliations, and commercial capabilities. Taken together, these different registers provide a striking illustration of the social embeddedness of economic action. Significantly, here, the qualifier 'social' encapsulates more than just non-economic aspects. It also implies different forms of bodily, sensory, and temporal enskilment, and thus the tacit dimensions of action and perception. To put it more succinctly: what is of relevance to an understanding of station hustles are the writings of both Karl Polanyi, as regards the substantivist thesis, and Michael Polanyi, as regards the capacities of practical knowledge.

The Social Organisation of Hustle

By exploring the social life and action of the small, yet extraordinarily dense, urban space of the Neoplan Station, the analysis presented in this study ties into larger questions concerning the dialectic relationship between social order and social change, as well as between structure, practice, agency, and contingency. A consideration of the two common understandings of social order is helpful for bringing out some of the central findings of this book. In the first case, where 'order' is understood as referring to a particular system of interrelated structures, institutions, and practices that maintain patterns of action and organisation, Neoplan's 'hustle park' emerges as an urban institution with a markedly complex array of economic activities, the dynamics of which are, on the one hand, embedded within a wider national economy constituted within capitalism and processes of accumulation and social differentiation, and,

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on the other, driven by involuting densification within a niche economy logic. The central characteristics of processes of involution taking shape in Neoplan have been discussed in Chapter 3 with recourse to Geertz's development of the concept, primarily as an analytical means of capturing the inward-bound labour intensification that fuels the station hustle. Marked by high levels of creativity, institutional complexity, and virtuosity in the creation of economic niches, all of which are driven significantly by competitive pressures, the station organisation facilitates a wide leeway for tension and change while simultaneously maintaining and reproducing its modes of operation, and, ultimately, its order.

This relates to the second understanding of social order, which contrasts order with social disorder or chaos. Hustle, as I hope the preceding chapters have shown, does not mean chaos. Accra's Neoplan Station does exhibit an organisational pattern, and it works according to its own institutional logic – successfully so. This institutional logic, though clouded by Neoplan's propensity for confusion and 'hustle and bustle', nevertheless structures the ways in which people make the station work and, conversely, the ways in which the station makes people work. Because of the many converging and conflicting practices by which people try to capitalise on situations of hustle, the station is constituted as an ambiguous space for work, mobility, and dwelling in which both uncertainty and opportunity abound.

By acknowledging the basic indeterminacy of social relations and of economic actions and rationales, I have taken up two prominent strands of the Africanist urban research agenda, which, in Chapter 1, I discussed as the 'dramatic' and 'enthusiastic' views. Accra's bus station, as presented in this study, provides no reason to succumb to doom-mongering, but neither does it justify exaltation. In my descriptions of the hustle activities and situations that constitute Ghanaian road transport and roadside economies, I have refrained from lamenting over Africa's reputed urban 'disaster' and from celebrating the creativity by which urban denizens come to cope with the strictures of city life. In so doing, I have attempted to clear an analytical space for unravelling some of the complexities in the organisation of urban economic life and for exploring the emerging properties of social action, in all their incongruence.

In this vein, my study of the complex (and 'convex') urban space of Accra's Neoplan Station contributes to the growing body of anthropological scholarship that sets out to recast social science engagements with (auto)mobility, infrastructure, and urbanism in Africa and in the global South more generally. My approach has been principally informed by the methods of classical, or realist, ethnography, and of thick participation in particular. This grounded perspective, here centred

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on eliciting the qualities and implications of hustle, is especially productive for understanding how, in a dense urban locale, people strive to invest their practices with value and meaning and to make their engagements productive. Moreover, by homing in on people's everyday triangulations of seemingly disparate domains – such as more regular and more irregular forms of organisation and administration or the configurations of techno-material systems and of social relationships – it allows a detailed reflection on how infrastructures of mobility and exchange work in Africa, and how they are *made* to work.

The Hydra of Self-Rule

One main argument of this book is that Ghana's privately run road transport works beyond the regulatory power and order-creating agency of the state. This, however, is not to suggest that the transport sector is autonomous, or somehow decoupled from the reach and effects of state bureaucracy and economic policies. As discussed in Chapter 2, during the century-long relationship between private road transport providers and state authorities, the ventures of private operators have developed in direct relation with, and reaction to, state-crafted regularity interventions and larger policies that have shaped market structures and labour relations. The establishment of the Neoplan Station itself is a prominent example. It was a by-product of the introduction of market liberalism by the state, which facilitated rapid expansion of transport and encouraged investments in the transport sector.

The constitutive interlinkages between the domains of government and private transport operators, with their different, sometimes converging, but mostly clashing interests, strategies, and logistics, complicate two frequent uses of the term 'self-rule'. Contrary to the ways in which the notion is used in the discourses of development specialists and policymakers, who lean towards the dramatic view of African urbanism, self-rule does not imply a 'regulatory vacuum'. But neither is self-rule tantamount to a kind of acephalous creature devoid of hierarchy and leadership, as has been argued with regard to comparable places of urban hustle in contexts of popular economic endeavours, especially by cultural analysts. The prefix 'self' in self-rule does not stand for a quasi-automatic, or 'natural', functioning-by-default. If anything, Neoplan's structure of self-rule has a polycephalic character; it is a hydra whose multiple heads are its competing and involuting branches, which, although largely independent in their statutes and terms of operation, are nonetheless rooted in state-directed economic realities and constraints. Self-rule, as used here, thus involves *rule* in the sense of

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governing power, and it encompasses multiple governing entities, or 'selves', that operate within a complex of local, national, and global market forces and urban policies.

Acknowledging the multiple, or polycephalic, character of regulating agencies at the station does away with misconstrued notions of 'order in disorder', which, as has been argued in this book, confuse cause and effect. The search for 'order in chaos' – or, for that matter, order in the confusion of hustle activities – is based on a false premise. Things are not as 'disordered' as they might seem, especially to the non-initiate. Confusion and 'disorder' do not conceal, or even prevent, order, but emerge from specific constellations – and in specific situations – with concurring structuring orders on different scales, on the one hand, and competing ordering attempts, and hence practices, on the other. The two meanings of hustle as situation and activity provide an opportunity to consider this interrelation between context, structure, and practice in which the workings of the station take shape. Ultimately, the term 'hustle' is a lens that helps to put flesh on the analytical construct of social order in a complex African urban space, and to bring its everyday constituents to life.

Temporalities of Uncertainty

The everydayness of station hustle, as I have repeatedly pointed out in this book, is fraught with uncertainty. In their efforts to make sales, find an income, and travel, the station workers, vendors, and passengers frequently do not know what will happen next, or when it will happen. Although, in the end, sales are made, incomes are generated, and journeys are accomplished, the ways in which the station organisation facilitates these goals is far from clear to everyone. A salient lack of predictability conditions many of the actions performed at the station. What makes the uncertainties of station hustle particularly manifest, I argue, is the dimension of time, and, more specifically, the intermittent and irregular temporalities of work and travel, which are inextricably interlinked. This is not to suggest that the unpredictability of temporal relations is the main source of uncertainty, let alone the only one. Different uncertainties permeate the constituents of hustle on different levels and to different degrees, relating to institutional, economic, and techno-material realms, among others. The dimensions of time and temporal practice, however, which I have examined in Chapters 5, 6, and 7, provide an empirical window for capturing the social practices people draw on in order to accommodate – or fail to accommodate – to uncertainties of different kinds. At bottom, this follows from the

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disruptive factor of unscheduled bus departures, which most of the station actors' activities are oriented towards.

Looking at the orientations that underpin people's hustle activities through the lens of temporal uncertainty brings to the fore the temporal strategies and practices they adopt to deal with such uncertainty, and which include distinct repertoires of skilled and often tacit synchronisations with the irregular patterns of work and travel. Moreover, the time lens foregrounds the drudging periods of inactivity and waiting, which account for large parts of everyday station work and life. As I have shown, the irregularity and insecurity of livelihoods at the station are related to the 'unreliable time' in which work is performed, which brings in its wake a lot of 'empty time'. In fact, for most of the station actors, waiting is an elementary mode of action and in this sense is a constitutive, if easily overlooked, element of hustle. In turn, and related to the involuting divisions of labour and the generally low levels of institutional integration, waiting routinely comes to replace social coordination. Ultimately, waiting serves as a kind of strategy for accommodating uncertainty, the most institutionalised form of which is the use of shadow passengers, described in Chapters 6 and 7.

Hustle, then, is not just 'bustle' in the sense of teeming situations, nor is it just 'hassle' in the sense of annoying activity. It also involves inactivity, stagnation, and long periods of involuntary idleness, when stasis and inactivity exact much effort and lead to exhaustion. Including periods of waiting in the analysis provides a fuller and more accurate understanding of how the irregularity of station work – and hustle – play out on the ground, and how waiting provides the basis for adaptive and agentive action and even for the emergence of what I have termed a 'micro-economy of waiting'.

Paying attention to the practices and ruses people deploy for dealing with uncertainty, and for making their hustle successful, brings out the productive potentials inherent in engagements with the largely unpredictable, incalculable, and risky conditions of station work. The exhausting effort the station workers make in their attempts to make a living is not an end in itself. Though characterised by a high degree of precariousness and often born out of necessity, station work *qua* hustle also represents aspirations to improvement, achievement, and success. Successful hustle thrives on the capacity, and the promise, to convert uncertainty into a social and economic resource to be explored and exploited.

The ability to exploit the opportunities presented by the station's contingent social and economic relations has its underside, which becomes manifest through opportunism. Practices of deception, lying,

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manipulation, bluffing, and using tricks are aimed at taking advantage of the circumstances and maximising one's own chances, and all loom large in the station workers' everyday hustle activities, whether as actors or as victims of trickery. Frequently, trickery and opportunism convert into action that challenges, circumvents, or negates established norms, as illustrated in Chapter 4 by the range of savvy practices of preparing buses for departure. Here, trickery turns into a routinised response to uncertainty, both through skillful adaptation to shifting situations and through practices of confusion-mongering. What is implied by these practices is the shrewd resourcefulness of people acting in contexts characterised by a lack of resources and predictability.

The Political Struggle of Hustle

The combination of ingenuity and opportunism is also manifest in other places and practices of popular economic endeavour. This especially applies to sites and activities with structures of operation devised from the bottom up, which, like Accra's Neoplan Station and its workforce, are integral to the provision of infrastructural services, such as housing, water, electricity, and waste disposal. As I have shown, and as other ethnographies from across Africa and beyond have demonstrated with regard to infrastructures as sites of socio-economic improvisation and initiative, the underlying efforts are born out of inadequate or non-existent state services and are linked to inequalities of distribution and access (Anand 2017; Degani 2017; Fredericks 2018). Commonly resulting from local group endeavours, the so-established infrastructures speak of the resourcefulness of their non-state operators and the conditions of instability, vulnerability, and need that necessitated their instalment in the first place, as well as the opportunity they offer for capitalising on the lack of state services. Whether these services are built from scratch or appropriated from existing but poorly accessible, maintained, or controlled state structures, there are regular calls for the state authorities to recapture, restrict, or end the practices responsible for making and maintaining them. Seen from this angle, the station hustle – as a conspicuous form of infrastructural practice 'from below' – becomes a terrain of political struggle.

In Ghana, and throughout the African continent, struggles over the legitimacy, making, and uses of infrastructures are on the increase. Following a period of state pullback and reductions in government spending, as fostered in particular through structural adjustment measures during the 1980s and 1990s, the African economic renaissance of the new millennium heralded a shift in policy aimed at bringing the state

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back in. Through liaisons with private investors and international donors, many states have undertaken large-scale projects of infrastructure renewal, including the massive rehabilitation of road, electricity, and communication networks. Serving to demonstrate state-directed progress, development, and modernity, these projects simultaneously create new opportunities for differentiating and controlling populations. The provision of infrastructure as a technology of rule depends on the state's capacity to limit, or even eliminate, those infrastructural practices that do not conform with official standards. Ultimately, this means curbing the prevalence of hustle activities as an element in infrastructural workings.

The current efforts of the Ghanaian state to redevelop the country's road transport infrastructure, which I outlined in Chapter 2, are a case in point. In addition to investments in road construction and parastatals, the new transport policy includes a reorganisation of central nodes of transport and transit. Effectively, this implies closing the old-established lorry parks and replacing them with government-mandated and top-down-administered public road transport terminals. Ghana's largest new transport terminal was built in Achimota, a suburban district of Accra, and started operating in 2009. For the time being, the new terminal operates in parallel with Accra's lorry parks. According to the planning authorities, the Achimota terminal is a model by which all of the country's major lorry parks are to be supplanted, including the Neoplan Station.

In the remainder of this concluding chapter, I assess the practicalities and political struggles of infrastructural renewal, as exemplified by Accra's new transport terminal, to consider the relationship between infrastructure as a 'hard' technical system and as a 'soft' system of sociality. In so doing, I address questions of governance, social order, and the significance of usage and non-usage. Expanding on the comparison between the workings of the old-established lorry park and the designated function and subsequent uses of the 'new station', as Accra's urbanites have pithily dubbed it, I reflect on the broader implications of this study by showing empirical and theoretical continuities in respect of practices, places, and politics of urban hustle that go beyond this particular case of a West African bus station.

The New Station

Built on the northern outskirts of Accra, the location of the new transport terminal conforms to exemplary models for the integration of inner-city and inter-city transport services, drafted by international transport planning agencies and patronised by the World Bank. These models project a

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formative grid of large interchange stations at the intersection of inter-city carriageways and inner-city roadways.[1] Near the flyover construction where these two redesigned axes cross, the new terminal stands as a concrete harbinger of future connections. Corresponding to these large-scale spatial reconfigurations, the terminal is of oversized proportions. Its neatly paved grounds spread over nine hectares.[2] Its interior duplicates the design of large bus termini common across regions of the North Atlantic. Enclosed by walls fortified with barbed wire, it includes five roofed terminals, five canteens, two administrative blocks, three toll booths, two passenger halls, a police station, a clinic, and two large toilet blocks. Yet to be installed are a fire station, electronic destination boards, and a CCTV monitoring system. Its official designation as a 'transport terminal' was deliberately chosen in distinction to the popular labelling of long-distance bus stations as 'lorry parks'. As a senior officer from the Metro Roads Department explained to me: 'The new terminal should be precisely what the old lorry parks are not.'

With regard to the place of the new terminal's establishment in historical developments, it should be remembered that the 'old' lorry parks grew out of processes of appropriation of the then 'new' lorry parks established by the colonial administration during the 1920s and 1930s. As discussed in Chapter 2, the establishment of lorry parks followed a calculated order by which the government intended to increase its regulatory leverage over the commercial road transport industry. This was an attempt to compensate for the lack of 'horizontal' control over transport infrastructures, people, mobility, and exchange by means of a concentrated, 'vertical' spatial intervention. As I have shown, these efforts to formalise local commercial endeavours were of little avail, and even turned out to be counterproductive, as they triggered the emergence of a concentrated organisation of 'indigenous' entrepreneurs: the drivers' associations.

When seen from this historical perspective, the political rationale behind the establishment of the new terminal brings full circle a logic of governmentality aimed at re-establishing 'order' in what is perceived to be a 'disordered', 'chaotic', and 'hazardous' register of infrastructural practices. The involuting organisation of the Neoplan Station that I have described can be conceived as the result of a full-blown appropriation of

[1] Two main strands of this reshaped network of infrastructural links have been completed so far in Accra: a vertical artery linking the city centre with its northern suburbs, which then merges into the rehabilitated Accra–Kumasi road; and a horizontal link from north-west to north-east (the George Walker Bush Highway, a six-lane freeway named after its main patron), which forms part of the Trans-African Highway No. 7 (from Dakar to Lagos).

[2] For comparison, the Neoplan Station covers about one hectare.

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the original, British-imported lorry park model. From the perspective of the authorities, appropriation poses a threat. Indicating a loss of authority and thus of power and control, this threat played a role in the decision of the colonial administration in the late 1920s to undertake regulatory interventions, and it similarly appears to have encouraged governments in the 2000s to take relevant measures.

By constructing this historical parallel between the establishment of the 'new' lorry parks during the 1920s and 1930s and the transport terminal in 2009, I do not mean to suggest that history repeats itself. The social, political, economic, and technological constellations in Ghana in the new millennium, in the context of which the agenda for the comprehensive redevelopment and 'modernisation' of Ghana's road regime has been formulated, are obviously of a different order compared with those in the colonial Gold Coast in the inter-war period. What I do suggest, however, is that certain principles of the production and usage of road(side) and urban infrastructures in Ghana can be conceived of as reverberating through time and through space. These principles pertain, on the one hand, to the cycles of expanding and contracting fiscal power and ordering capacities of the state, and, on the other hand, to the inversely related cycles of vernacular appropriation and intensifying processes of involution (for a related argument, see Beck 2017). These principles must not be confused with the regularity of natural laws, but they nevertheless appear to have a certain systemic causality. And they offer significant parallels with the practices and politics targeting sites of urban hustle in other contexts.

Dramas of Exclusion

Perhaps the most obvious parallel to be drawn here is the eviction of street vendors from city centres, which is currently on the rise across Africa and beyond (Bhowmik 2010; Brown et al. 2015; Cuvi 2016; McMichael 2015; Roever 2016). The adoption of restrictive measures against urban Africa's so-called street economies is part of a larger policy shift in urban governance. Informed by dominant urban visions of the type of the 'Millennium City', 'Global City', or 'World-Class City' (Grant 2009; McDonald 2012; Obeng-Odoom 2011; Smith 2002), in turn fixated on global competitiveness in attracting foreign investments, these ambitions for urban renewal draw on the rhetorical aims of progress, development, and modernity. As numerous analysts conclude, these tantalising goals serve as powerful symbolic devices for glossing over the fact that the toll of 'progress' is the growth of urban inequality (Gugler 2004; Mains 2019; Satterthwaite 2003).

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Projects of infrastructural 'modernisation' play a key role in these processes in two respects. First, they serve as a principal vehicle for the staging of (state) modernity, frequently reinforced by evocations of technological achievement (Larkin 2013: 336; see also Harvey and Knox 2012; Larkin 2008; Melly 2013; Schwenkel 2015). Second, by reconfiguring spaces of mobility and exchange, the specific affordances implied in new infrastructural forms bear the potential to precondition users' involvements with material and social structures and thus constrain and control their scope of action (von Schnitzler 2013). At the same time, infrastructural interventions enhance the capacities of planners and authorities to exclude from exchange relations those designated as 'undesirables', an enforcement of difference that is further strengthened by technologies of demarcation and surveillance. The threat posed by involuting 'social infrastructures' (Larkin 2008; Simone 2004b) is chastened by the hard-wired logics of material infrastructure. Technical functions dovetail with political effects.

The result of this masking of politics by technological intervention is what Kurt Beck (2017, expanding on Pfaffenberger 1992) refers to as *technological dramas*. These 'dramas', he contends, 'are in fact political dramas veiled in a rationality of technical norms, for they are about participation and expulsion' (Beck 2017: 243). The acts of these dramas involve particular social 'scenes' (such as roads and transport terminals) on which various struggles, frictions, contestations, and, in more drastic instances, violent confrontations are played out until some form of closure is reached.

At the 'scene' of Accra's new transport terminal, the drama unfolded under the World Bank-advocated scheme for 'public–private partnership', which prescribed that the management of the terminal would be delegated to a private sector company. The management has to follow a set of rules and regulations devised for 'the prudent and effective management of the terminal' (as the preamble has it), the enforcement of which is the duty of a subcontracted squad of 'station guards'. These rules and regulations prescribe that all commercial activities must be authorised by the management, which in practice translates into the exclusion of all entrepreneurs labelled 'informal'. Hawkers are explicitly banned from tendering their services within the terminal. The terminal's statutory order is complemented by a comprehensive list of prohibited practices (no littering, no loitering, no sleeping, no urinating or defecating in unauthorised places, etc.).[3]

[3] See Appendix B for the full list and wording.

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With regard to the scope of engineering measures deployed, both material and social, Accra's new terminal can be thought of as one great stride towards high modernity, hence an intended reordering of social relations through technological intervention. The material structures generated by these transformations call to mind what Marc Augé (1995) calls the 'non-place': that is, a mono-functional (i.e. transport only) 'placeless space', reductive of social experience, 'sanitised' of 'undesirables' characteristic of the old road regime, and streamlined according to generic features of 'modern' transportation. The calculative order on which it is premised is not only promulgated by way of statutes, but also inscribed into the architectonic principles that govern its materiality. The presence of hawkers and other roadside itinerants, for example, appears to be ruled out by default, with the new technological standards turning them into 'redundant populations' (Bauman 2004: 9–10).

Accra's new station indeed appears to be 'precisely what the old lorry parks are not'. Unlike the 'thick' field of social and economic interactions characteristic of the Neoplan Station, and similarly of other 'old' bus stations in Ghana, the structures of the new terminal are directed at 'thinning out' sociality; at trying not so much to disentangle the urban 'knot' (De Boeck 2015) as to weave the connections it channels into a whole new, neatly arranged fabric. The move to exclude from it significant parts of the old-established station communities is tantamount to cutting out the 'social' from the social infrastructure on which Ghanaian road transport has relied for the past one hundred years. Ultimately, its design and the uses it prescribes appear to foreclose its possible development into an 'anthropological place' (Augé 1995).

How Infrastructure Is Made (Not) to Work

The new terminal has met with positive responses from Accra's population. Local media have praised it as 'Accra's first modern lorry park' (*Daily Graphic* 2010) and, implying a somewhat ambiguous connotation, 'Ghana's terminal connection to modernity' (*Daily Guide* 2009). Passengers and drivers praise its orderliness. One driver explained to me his delight with it as follows: 'It is safe, tidy, and sane' – an assessment he intended as a negation of corresponding qualities at the old stations (which are 'unsafe', 'messy', and 'loony'). Even some of the officially banned hawkers took a liking to it. For my part, I remained reluctant to join in the praise. When I shared with people from the Neoplan Station my concerns about the social and economic improvements that the establishment of the new station was supposed to trigger, I mainly received evasive answers. People confronted me by asking whether bus

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stations in Germany had anything in common with their lorry parks, implying that the new terminal was equal to a German bus station – a contention I could only endorse by remarking that Accra's new terminal in fact appeared more 'modern' than German bus stations.

Only in hindsight did I realise that the attitude implied in my scepticism towards the infrastructural renewal corresponded to a celebratory view of urban hustle. James Ferguson (2006: 21) has expressed an apt criticism of exactly that kind of attitude, writing that the many realms of improvisation and appropriation in which Africans are involved, 'brilliantly inventive' as they may be, are 'more likely to be celebrated by the cultural analyst than by the "locals" themselves, who may see such practices more as signs of weakness than of strength' (see also Mains 2012). And, apparently, Accra's denizens see the new terminal as a 'sign of strength' and, ultimately, of progress and modernity.

Yet all commendations notwithstanding, most people – above all passengers – remain reluctant to use the new station. The reasons for this collective non-use by 'non-collective actors', paraphrasing Asef Bayat's (2010: 14) definition of 'social nonmovements', are diverse. And they are not politically motivated – at least not in the narrower sense of the term. They relate, first, to the remote location of the terminal, which for many passengers, such as market women wanting to transport their merchandise to and from the market, is simply too far to walk to and from; second, to what Ghanaian drivers call 'overlapping' or 'sweeping' the road – that is, the practice of picking up passengers along the road and not inside the station (see Chapter 6) – which many of the officially relocated drivers began resorting to after the opening of the terminal, induced mainly by insufficient passenger demand; and third, to the fact that the routes that are supposed to be served by vehicles from the new station are still plied from many old-established lorry parks, including the Neoplan Station.

Another reason for the lack of passengers is the absence of hawkers inside the new terminal. This absence, however, is relative in two regards. First, it is symptomatic rather than causative. If hawkers were permitted inside the new terminal, this would not necessarily mean that more passengers would start using it. Second, it is relative because, against all odds and despite the risk of prosecution, there are in fact hawkers who secretly enter the well-secured grounds of the terminal. For illicit hawking inside the new terminal, they have had to reinvent the common repertoire of peddling skills.[4] But the point I want to make here

[4] I describe elsewhere the processes of this reinvention of hawking skills (Stasik and Klaeger 2018).

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is a different one. The 'quiet encroachment' (Bayat 2010: 56) of these hawkers is performed only sporadically and in a restrained manner. Overall, the enforcement of difference through the terminal's infrastructural form and affordances in fact works very effectively. The ways in which 'the urban disenfranchised … inscribe their *active* presence in the configuration and governance of urban life' (ibid.: 5, 15, emphasis added) is manifest here only at a very early stage.

Much more manifest are the 'disjointed yet parallel' (Bayat 2010: 14) practices of *not using* the new terminal. In combination, these practices set in motion a process that can be described as a 'negative feedback loop'; this process is diametrically opposed to the involuting densification within the niche economy logic that is at work in the old-established lorry parks. The 'loop' of negative feedback at the new terminal proceeds as follows: fewer passengers mean longer waiting times for those passengers who do travel via the new terminal. Despite the top-down decrees relating to operational optimisation and 'modernisation', vehicles still load and depart according to the 'fill and run' principle. In the new terminal, loading usually lasts for many hours – much longer than the loading of vehicles for the same route at other stations and on the roadside. Many passengers who go through this experience do not return. This translates into even longer waiting times for subsequent passengers, which eventually leads to even fewer passengers, as well as fewer vehicles and fewer transport workers (and fewer clandestine hawkers). With the rhythms of departure gradually petering out, there is no opportunity to learn or apply temporal and kinaesthetic enskilment, which is crucial for (successful) engagement with the 'taskscape' of the 'old' lorry park (see Chapter 5).

Infrastructural Disruption

The dynamics at play in Accra's new transport terminal provide a striking illustration of what Tineke Egyedi and Donna Mehos (2012) call a 'disruptive inverse infrastructure'. The collective non-use of the terminal by a self-organising network of largely non-collective actors disrupts state-driven efforts to formalise a largely self-organised group economic endeavour.[5] And it thwarts aspirations to transform the old road regime and meet international standards of road infrastructures. Ultimately,

[5] As most drivers and all branch workers at the new terminal belong to the transport associations, they do not as such qualify as 'non-collective' actors. The creation of these 'disruptive infrastructures', however, follows principally from the unwillingness of (individual) passengers to use the new terminal.

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non-usage translates into a 'silently' enacted form of everyday political practice, which, in this sense, goes beyond what James Scott (1985) has famously termed 'everyday forms of resistance'. In parallel to the ways in which technological innovation and intervention mask political aims, contentious forms of using the new technologies – or, more precisely, of *not* using them – bring into effect antagonistic forces, giving a new twist to the unfolding drama.

Here, Bayat's notion of the 'art of presence' – by which 'ordinary people' gradually transform 'fundamental aspects of state prerogatives, including the meaning of order, control of public space, of public and private goods, and the relevance of modernity' (Bayat 2010: 56) – needs to be qualified in one important dimension. Rather than being performed by way of a cumulatively encroaching *presence*, as in the cases Bayat describes for the Middle East, in the case of the new terminal the collective practice of non-collective actors is one of *not* being present, which might be described as an 'art of absence'.

Of course, this implies that those who are 'absent' are present somewhere else. Mainly, they are present in the old-established lorry parks. Although the new terminal has been designated essentially as an 'architecture for circulation' (Larkin 2013: 328), the practices of circulation and movement it facilitates operate at variance with its purported objective. Indeed, many people take great pains to avoid using its structures: for example, by first travelling halfway across town to board a vehicle at Neoplan, which on its way north then drives right past the new station. This is not exactly a case of a prestigious yet impracticable 'white elephant' project (Appel 2012). The terminal's 'gross under-utilisation', as the city authorities frame the situation, was not its intended function.

The rationalities by which everyday road and roadside users (i.e. passengers, commercial drivers, and station hawkers) accommodate to, and evade, the infrastructural reconfigurations reified by the new terminal are all remarkably trivial. This very triviality of the everyday, however, fed by 'petty' economic, social, cultural, and temporal concerns of 'ordinary people', has the potential to bring infrastructure to a standstill and the drama to a close. Conversely, it is exactly these kinds of everyday concerns and contestations that underlie the predominantly social infrastructure that makes the Neoplan Station work the way it works, regularly pushing it to the very limits of its operational capacities. At the same time, it is people's practices and interactions, embroiled in activities and situations of hustle, that facilitate the station's extraordinarily recalcitrant workings, thus creating and maintaining its social order, however brittle.

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Figure 8.1 Gross under-utilisation.

Two Unruly Concepts

The 'peculiar ontology' of infrastructures, writes Larkin (2013: 329), 'lies in the facts that they are things and also the relation between things'. Because of this duality, infrastructures are 'conceptually unruly' (ibid.). This unruliness appears to be 'tamed' (or 'tameable') to some extent when the network of infrastructural elements operates in a stable and predictable manner: when the electric grid is supplied with steady voltage, when the toilet flushes, and when buses depart at the scheduled time. The complex configuration of such smooth-running systems is still intriguing. But in the phenomenal world of users it tends to take on the category of a solid substrate of mundane relations – barring, of course, instances of breakdown.

In the 'hustle park' of Accra's Neoplan Station that I have described, the relationality of infrastructural 'things' is weighted differently. This is not to say that Ghana's public transport infrastructure is in a state of perpetual malfunction or even breakdown. Accra's Neoplan Station does work – and it works despite the fact that 'things' and their relations are

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structured in a far less predictable and 'solid' manner than, for example, in a European international airport. In fact, the instability of relations endows the Neoplan Station with the capacity to remain operational despite actual breakdowns. Because of this instability of relations, here the conceptual 'unruliness' stemming from the infrastructure's ontological duality appears far more pronounced. It is comparatively harder to determine the degree to which its workings depend on its 'elements' and on the relations between them.

The conceptual unruliness that Larkin identifies in relation to infrastructure similarly applies to the conceptual implications of hustle, as developed in this book. The meaning of hustle, as both a noun and a verb, encompasses not only the physical aspect of crowded, hectic, and complex situations, but also the social and economic activities that shape and are shaped by these situations and the spaces in which they take place. This duality of hustle captures a larger dialectic process at work in contexts of popular urban economic engagement in different African settings, one encompassing precarious livelihood strategies and the material, economic, and political conditions that shape these strategies.

The rendering of hustle as an economic logic and mode of production that appropriates space and time in distinctive ways ties into conceptualisations of how social relationships and actions intersect with the material figurations of infrastructure; and, specifically, how the power of infrastructural 'things' and relations forms sociality, and vice versa. Writing about the relationship between material infrastructure and the 'infrastructure' of sociality, AbdouMaliq Simone suggests that (material) infrastructure

> exerts a force – not simply in the materials and energies it avails, but also the way it attracts people, draws them in, coalesces and expends their capacities. Thus, the distinction between infrastructure and sociality is fluid and pragmatic rather than definitive. People work on things to work on each other, as these things work on them. (Simone 2015: 375–6)

The degree to which the distinction between infrastructure and sociality is fluid, I suggest, is context-dependent. In the context of smoothly operating systems, it tends to be less fluid and, especially from a phenomenological perspective, more definitive. In a European airport, for example, we can discern the system of techno-material configurations from its passenger-users. In the context of systems that lean more towards irregular, involuting, and contingent workings, the distinction is more blurred. Here, the sociality of users is far more involved, and 'drawn in', in making the system work. In the same vein, the 'force' that this more hybrid infrastructural assemblage exerts becomes more palpable and, at the same time, harder to tame.

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Seen from this angle, the installation of Accra's new transport terminal can be interpreted as an attempt to redraw the distinction between material infrastructure and sociality, limiting the involvement of users by enforcing a difference of categories. Ultimately, it is an attempt to rework the 'ontological substructure' of infrastructural relationalities. The apparent failure of this intervention brings home a fundamental point: infrastructure, however sophisticated, 'modern', or 'authoritative' its technical functions are, depends on people using it.

Shortly after my last period of fieldwork, the dormant drama of a reconfigured road regime gained new momentum. In July 2013, large-scale construction works commenced at the Kwame Nkrumah Circle and, by mid-2016, transformed the former roundabout into a massive three-tier flyover. The roadworks greatly affected the transport businesses of adjacent stations, Neoplan and the Circle Station in particular, with rows of oversized bridge piers being erected right in front of Neoplan's main entrance and, in the case of the Circle Station, inside the yard. The levels of congestion inside Neoplan's yard reached grotesque proportions, all the more so when compared with the idling situation at its designated successor, the new transport terminal. The obvious assumption here is that ferro-concrete is supposed to accomplish what politics have not been capable of doing: to hamstring Neoplan's transport operations – in its manifestation of hustle as situation and activity – and thus facilitate its closure and relocation.

As of December 2020, however, none of Neoplan's branches had ceased operations. People stayed put, once again giving proof of both their apparent recalcitrance and their operational resilience. The New Patriotic Party administration, which won the 2016 and 2020 general elections, abstained from enforcing the relocation of Neoplan's transport operators. There might be renewed direct political pressure after the re-elected government sets in and again resumes a more confrontational stance in relation to private transport operators. Whether or not a forced eviction of the station will take place ultimately depends on the determination of the incoming administration. More interesting, in anthropological terms, is the prognosis regarding a possible relocation of Neoplan's transport operators into the new station and the struggles over establishing order that such a move would inevitably entail. The possibility that the new terminal's techno-material configurations will 'tame' the 'soft' system of involuting socio-economic relationships cannot be fully ruled out. But this scenario appears rather unlikely, not least in view of the rapidly dwindling ability to keep the far smaller number of initially relocated drivers busy and the terminal running.

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What appears far more likely is that, once relocated, the thrust of Neoplan's social infrastructure will bring full circle the cycle of appropriation of the roadside technology of the bus station that has been installed from the top down. To put it more pointedly: the station hustles will prevail. Yet this is not to suggest that the new station will turn into a replica of the old lorry park. The transformative dynamics of appropriation cut both ways, changing the object as well as the subject of appropriation. The ways in which people will make the new station work – and, most likely, they *will* make it work – will ultimately change the ways in which people work. More drama is on the way.

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