

**Ger Duijzings**

## **Miejskie trajektorie: tworzenie antropologii ruchu**

### **[Urban trajectories: anthropology of movement in the making]**

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1. [19] My research focuses on social and economic inequality in the post-socialist cities of Central and Eastern Europe, particularly in Bucharest (Romania). I am looking at the extreme ends of the spectre, which means that I study class and social divisions not only 'from below' (as anthropologists tend to do), that is from the position of marginalised and poverty-struck groups such as Roma, pensioners, the unemployed and homeless, in other words the *losers* of post-socialist transition, but also 'from the top', that is from the vantage point of the *winners*, especially the new elites and the nouveaux riches.
2. As part of my research I am experimenting with ways of doing anthropological fieldwork in urban areas. 'Fieldwork is not what [20] it used to be' is the title of a recent volume edited by James Faubion and George Marcus, and this is certainly true for those of us who have shifted their work from small-scale rural contexts to urban areas.<sup>1</sup> Doing fieldwork (that is participant observation) in urban contexts brings certain challenges and difficulties with it, and as part of this I have tried to adapt my methods to the conditions that are specific for cities. One of the problems is how to capture the lives of our subjects on their daily itineraries through the city. Because urbanites move around different urban spaces, play diverse social roles, and are often linked to various (unconnected) social networks, it is difficult to follow and analyse their lives, and capture the complex, large-scale, mobile, and transient urban environments in ethnography. What does 'participant observation' mean in this context: when do we participate, and how? And where do we observe? As Roger Sanjek has warned, one of the dangers is that we rely increasingly on interviews only.<sup>2</sup>
3. Because of the fact that anthropological research has traditionally taken place in small-scale communities, we are not necessarily well equipped to carry out fieldwork in cities. Anthropology has, for most of its history, focused on local and face-to-face communities even when working in urban contexts. If studying the latter, anthropologists have often looked at 'urban villages' and 'transplanted peasants', ignoring the larger urban settings, the flows and anonymity of city life.<sup>3</sup> A common site for ethnographic research has been the urban neighbourhood, likely to be inhabited by particular (minority) groups, where anthropologists hope to find bounded 'village-like' conditions and where the emphasis is on the 'local'. One could therefore argue that anthropologists have had a sustained preference for studying *Gemeinschaft* (community) instead of *Gesellschaft* (society), to use Ferdinand Tönnies' classic distinction, even though in cities it is much harder to throw a net around 'a community' that is demarcated and rooted as is the case in villages.<sup>4</sup> With its focus on 'community', anthropology has left the large-scale and

anonymous aspects of urban life, 'society', mainly to the sociologists and practitioners of other disciplines. A consequence is that we have produced ethnographies *in* cities, but hardly ever *of* cities, the latter of which in my view implies approaching, encompassing, or embracing the city as a whole.

4. In May 2010, I organised a workshop in Bucharest, inviting local anthropologists and practitioners of other disciplines using [21] ethnographic methods (such as architects and sociologists) to discuss issues related to doing ethnography in cities. The workshop grew out of the concerns mentioned above, focusing on the difficulties faced when applying the standard anthropological toolbox of methods designed for research in micro-settings to macro-settings. The aim of the workshop was to discuss the nature of anthropological research and ethnography in metropolitan areas, to question ethnographic research practices in urban contexts, push the methodological boundaries, and explore what is needed to adapt to the crowded, mobile, transient, and anonymous conditions of the twenty-first century post-socialist city.<sup>5</sup>
5. One of the conclusions I have drawn from my work is that anthropologists should give more attention to issues of movement and mobility, as it is a crucial and characteristic aspect of urban life. I am following Roger Sanjek's suggestion to study 'urban pathways', by which he means tracing people on their daily trajectories through the city, and doing participant observation at selected 'stopping points'.<sup>6</sup> I would like to add here that it is important to specifically study movement, for instance in the form of daily traffic behaviour and relations, as well as in terms of more long-term social and residential mobility. Even if mobility does not sit easily with traditional anthropology — with its focus on bounded and rooted communities — anthropology should adapt to the conditions of urban life, remove itself from the traditional sites of anthropological research, and turn towards forms of movement and displacement, and social interaction between strangers, for instance in spaces that Marc Augé calls 'non-places' (anonymous places which lack a clear sense of the social, such as metros, public transport, airports, shopping malls, etc).
6. For my own research in Bucharest I have developed a focus on urban trajectories and traffic. As part of my explorations of how social inequalities are expressed in the public sphere and in public spaces, I have been looking at people in motion, that is at people who go from point A to B, especially looking at what happens *between* A and B — how they interact with other road users for instance — and not what happens *in* A and B. So I have been deliberately cutting out Sanjek's 'stopping points', where people meet known and knowable others, at work or in the context of family, community, or church, where it is the assumption that it is here where 'the action' (the social interaction) takes place. I am critical of the idea that the busy and anonymous places where people move through, such as traffic arteries, transportation hubs, [22] airports, train stations are not particularly 'social', as reflected in Augé's notion of the 'non-place'.<sup>7</sup>
7. The city has interesting dynamics, engendered by the weaving of connections between dots on the map between which people move, randomly or routinely. Thus in cities we should try to shift our ethnographic focus from bounded and rooted places to flows and movements. The use of the concept of 'trajectories' is helpful in this context, as it opens

up the possibility of looking at agency amid urban structures and dominant scripts and protocols, that is the visible physical and material ones that channel and direct people's movements, and the invisible ones, which may become visible only at certain moments, in situations of interaction and friction for instance. Trajectories are also the results of intentionality, of the decisions and directions we take as social beings in our everyday lives, of relating to and moving towards and amongst others. Don Handelman defines a 'trajectory' as a path described by an object, projectile, or a body, under the action of given forces. If we speak of social and personal trajectories, then these are the outcome of the resolution of forces, of embodied intentionality and social pressures, which can be traced by looking at people's movements through space.<sup>8</sup> In this process (planned and unforeseen) interaction with others occurs.

8. Cities are diverse and anonymous environments, where strangers constantly interact with one another, subscribing — or not, or only partly — to a shared code of conduct, a social etiquette, an unwritten but negotiated set of rules of how to interact in public areas or on the street. These codes of conduct develop in each urban setting under the impact of a large variety of conditions: such as the (geographic) terrain, the weather, the density of the urban environment, the built environment, the vehicles people use, the regulations imposed by the state and local authorities, etc. etc. By examining behaviour phenomenologically (for example through the lens of cybernetics), we can start to see how groups and communities develop rules, spontaneously, consensually and without entering formal discussion. An example from my own research is the appearance of 'zipping' at certain traffic bottlenecks in Bucharest, which has emerged spontaneously only a few years ago, and which can be seen as a small traffic 'revolution', heralding the emergence of some kind of civil consciousness.
9. [23] One of the methodological implications of my interest in movement has been the use of moving images, because this is — obviously — the only manner in which movement can be recorded. I have filmed dozens of my trajectories through the city of Bucharest, while moving around as pedestrian or using different vehicles (bicycle, car, buses and metro). These films can be used to carry out a detailed and minute analysis of the weaving and friction that may occur in traffic, and how conflicts are negotiated and resolved. Moving images can be used as a mnemonic device that enables us to take a very close look at traffic interaction, analysing it time and again, and making the all-too-familiar everyday movements and interactions unfamiliar. Through this kind of analysis we may be able, for instance, to identify the conditions of what Edward Soja calls 'synekism', the positive energies and innovative synergies that arise from proximity and the clustering of people in urban agglomerations.<sup>9</sup> When do proximate communities merge into a single urban polity, willing to share notions of politeness, civility, and urbanity?
10. Instead of taking for granted that synekism is guaranteed, ethnographers could bring an understanding of when and where this fails or succeeds. This is an important question for the future of our cities: whether and to what extent does the social fabric of cities, for instance in Western Europe, depend on adherence to a shared etiquette, that is a set of clearly defined rules or codes of conduct, of disciplined and ritualised behaviour, of certain routines and protocols that make cultural difference bearable, predictable and

enjoyable? Anthropology, with its interest in ritual and the ways in which it glues society together but also allows for contradictions and contests to be articulated and expressed, can help us to discover such codes of conduct and rules of traffic (also in the most literal sense), assisting in developing the rituals and routines of urban conviviality, and ensure the sustainability of the public sphere in cities in Europe and beyond.

11. My attempt to push the boundaries of urban research and explore new and innovative methodologies has also resulted in *Cities Methodologies*, an interdisciplinary event the concept of which I developed in 2009. It has now grown into an annual event organised by the Urban Laboratory at University College London. While carrying out fieldwork in Bucharest, I also organised an edition of *Cities Methodologies* in Bucharest in 2010, together with a few Romanian colleagues, while another edition is planned to take place in Warsaw in the near future.<sup>10</sup> *Cities Methodologies* showcases, in the form of an exhibition combined with talks and debates, ways in which practitioners from a variety of disciplines approach the city in practical methodological terms. The emphasis is on the methods used, [24] and a number of projects is selected to present a variety of approaches. Although contributions come from many disciplines, right across the built environment, the arts and humanities, and the social and historical sciences, it is artists that take centre stage at the event. They have their own specific and often quite personal, intuitive and idiosyncratic ways of exploring the city, and that is where the inspiration for innovation may come from.
12. New types of research may emerge through forms of experimentation without a clear and preconceived idea of what the outcomes will be. It is in the process of just *doing* certain things, of experimenting with forms and protocols of data gathering that one may develop innovative methods, identify new topics for research, and ask interesting new questions. This is an inversion of the usual and dominant research practice in the social sciences, where the researcher first establishes the topic, then defines the main questions, as well as a hypothesis, and then decides about how to go about gathering the necessary data, the methods to be used to answer the questions. In most of the social sciences, especially in quantitative research, this is a structured, rigorous, and mechanical process, which is designed to produce viable and representative data. I do not want to dismiss these methodological approaches, but I do also believe that there should be room for experimentation. A way of doing this is to follow anthropological research designs, which are flexible and open-ended, whilst at the same time finding inspiration in the work of contemporary artists, particularly visual artists and especially those working with moving images.

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<sup>1</sup> James D. Faubion and George E. Marcus (eds.), *Fieldwork is not what it used to be. Learning anthropology's method in a time of transition*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009.

<sup>2</sup> Roger Sanjek, "Keeping ethnography alive in an urbanizing world", in: *Human Organization - Journal of the Society for Applied Anthropology*, 59(3), 2000, pp.280-288.

<sup>3</sup> An example is Andrei Simiç's *The peasant urbanites: a study of rural-urban mobility in Serbia*. New York: Seminar Press, 1973.

<sup>4</sup> Ferdinand Tönnies, *Community and association: Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1955 [1887].

<sup>5</sup> Ger Duijzings, "The Bucharest urban anthropology and ethnography workshop", in: *Colloquia: Journal for Central European History*, XVIII, 2011, pp.131-149.

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<sup>6</sup> Roger Sanjek, "Keeping ethnography alive in an urbanizing world", in: *Human Organization - Journal of the Society for Applied Anthropology*, 59(3), 2000, pp.280-288.

<sup>7</sup> Marc Augé. *Non-places: Introduction to an anthropology of supermodernity*. London: Verso, 1995.

<sup>8</sup> Don Handelman, "Dark soundings: towards a phenomenology of night", in: *Paideuma* 51, 2005, pp.247-261.

<sup>9</sup> Edward W. Soja. "Writing the city spatially", in: *City* 7(3), 2003, pp.269-280.

<sup>10</sup> Ger Duijzings, Simona Dumitriu, and Aurora Király (eds.), *Cities Methodologies Bucharest*. Bucharest: Galeria Nouă, 2011.