Rethinking 'mobile work': boundaries of space, time and social relation in the working lives of mobile hairstylists

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Abstract   This article investigates the relationship between spatial mobility and the labour process, developing a typology of 'mobile work'. *Working while mobile* is a largely white-collar (and well researched) phenomenon whereas *mobility as work* and *mobility for work* involve more diverse occupations and have been omitted from sociological analysis of mobile work. The article explores the range of work involving spatial mobility before focusing on an hitherto unexamined form of *mobility for work*, mobile hairstyling. Relationships between mobility, employment status and the construction of spatial, social and temporal work-life boundaries are excavated. It is shown that previous arguments linking mobile work with decorporealisation or unboundedness are inadequate, applicable primarily to *working while mobile*. Other types of mobile work may or may not corrode work-life boundaries; whether they do depends in part on workers' income security. Data are drawn from the Labour Force Survey and interviews with self-employed mobile hairstylists.

Keywords: hairstyling, labour process, mobile work, self-employment, temporality, work-life boundaries, workplaces

There has been a recent explosion in academic analyses of 'mobile work' (for instance: Aguilera, 2008; Brodt & Verburg, 2007; Felstead et al., 2005a, 2005b; Laurier, 2001; Lilischikis, 2003; Perry et al., 2001; Sherry & Salvador, 2001; Vartiainen, 2006). This is partly due to new evidence that shows that workers are working in multiple workplaces (Felstead et al., 2005b; Hislop & Axtell, 2007), but interest in mobile work predates and is at times only perfunctorily linked to evidence of its prevalence. Instead mobile work is presented as a manifestation of broader dynamics: the transformative (and liberating, or alternatively disciplinary) potential of technology (Sherry & Salvador, 2001; Toffler, 1980); the diminishing importance of place (and 'decorporealisation') in a world of globalizing flows (Castells, 1996; Urry, 2000); the commodification and increasing 'abstraction' of space (Brown & O'Hara, 2003; Lefebvre, 1991); and the 'greediness' (or unboundedness) of work (Baines & Gelder, 2003; Felstead et al., 2005a). These theoretical foci have provided fruitful lenses through which to examine mobility – for example, highlighting nicely the requirement on mobile workers to 'assemble' and 'reassemble' their workplaces (Felstead et al., 2005a; Laurier, 2001) – but they have also exacerbated a tendency to focus on one kind of work mobility – mobility driven by information and communications technology (ICT) – at the expense of other kinds,[1] thereby obscuring the material reality of most spatial mobility for work.

Since the spatial mobility of work predates recent technological innovations (Brodt & Verburg, 2007, p.62) and encompasses diverse occupations (discussed further below), empirical and theoretical analyses that concentrate on ICT-dependent mobile workers are partial. They are also class and gender biased – spotlighting relatively privileged white-collar 'professional and managerial' work whilst, as Brown and O'Hara footnote (2003, p.1565), 'neglecting' blue-collar and, it could be added, traditionally female, or 'pink collar' work.[2] This article introduces a conceptualisation of mobile work that allows occupational and class diversity to be captured, whilst highlighting issues of temporal and spatial freedom and control.

Three types of mobile work are identified by specifying different drivers of spatial mobility: *mobility as work*, *mobility for work* and *working while mobile*. Previous studies of mainly white-collar mobile workers have examined a single type of mobile work: *working while mobile*. Conversely, most spatially mobile 'working class' jobs involve *mobility for work* or *mobility as work*. By extending conceptual

and empirical discussions to include these types of mobile work a more complete understanding of spatial mobility, and its causes and consequences, is achieved.

Later sections of this article examine rates of mobile work by occupational group, highlighting the diversity of mobile work, before focusing in more detail on an empirical example of *mobility for work*, mobile hairstyling. This example is employed to underscore some of the characteristics of *mobility for work*, especially the ongoing importance of place and corporeality, and persistence of 'social' as opposed to 'abstract space' (Lefebvre, 1991).[3] Mobile hairstylists inhabit 'workscapes' (Felstead et al., 2005a, pp.16-19) extending across the city, but their workplaces are neither corporate nor uniform. Rather, the majority of their work gets done in a series of otherwise 'private' sites; their work and extra-work spaces incompletely compartmentalised.

Conceptualising Mobile Work

Initially, mobile work (alternatively termed 'telework') aroused interest from academics whose primary concern was large-scale social, temporal and spatial transformations rather than the labour process *per se*. Toffler (1980) began the trend, linking mobility, technology and freedom: ICT-enabled mobility was emancipatory, making possible a future when workers' home and work spaces were reintegrated and alienation vanquished. As Pyöriä (2003, p.168) notes, these 'unrealistic and populist claims still doggedly raise their heads when discussing the possibilities of telework'. Thus, even with the appearance of more critical academic studies (Felstead et al., 2005a; Perry et al., 2001; Sherry & Salvador, 2001), the connection between mobility and ICT is reproduced. For example Vartiainen asserts that, ''[m]obility' [has] a strong link to wireless technologies' (2006, p.14). The popular media meanwhile continues to idealise this relationship. For instance a story in CNNMoney.com on 'extreme teleworking' is subtitled, 'want to see the world and collect a healthy paycheck? Just grab your laptop and go' (Morrison, 2007). Thus increasingly the archetypal mobile worker, independent, decorporealised, achieving 'anywhere, anytime' connectivity, has become a potent symbol of the new. He (it usually is a 'he') has come to embody macro-social potentialities be they Harvey's 'time-space compression' (instantaneous communication undermining the importance of geographic distance, or location), or the connectivity of Castells' 'network society'. Even when arguments are made for the ongoing importance of co-presence, these discussions assume white-collar workers. Co-presence is seen primarily as a means of achieving 'informal conversation' (Urry, 2002,

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p.260) or the 'face work' necessary for smoothing collegial relations (Aguilera, 2008, pp.1110-1111; Felstead et al., 2005a, p.164), rather than primary labour process objectives.

In this conceptualisation mobile work is both product and cause of the declining importance of place. As fewer and fewer sites are outside of mobile phone, and therefore email range, work can be done anywhere. As more places become workplaces the values and rationality of the workplace are generalised. Space becomes commodified, generating universal and virtually identical worksites (Brown & O'Hara, 2003; Lefebvre, 1991). This should mean that workers can enter a new potential worksite (for example a motorway service station 'Business Centre') and immediately feel at home (or 'at work'). However, in practice Felstead et al. find that white-collar workers visit 'the same sites …time and again' (2005a, p.149). Aware that not all places are equally adequate workplaces, these workers resort to the familiar. Where mobile work involves physical manipulation of inert or situated materials unfamiliar places may pose greater problems and, as discussed below, the decreasing importance of place a yet less sustainable hypothesis.

Where mobile work transforms previously non-work spaces into work-spaces it has the potential to dissolve spatial and often also temporal boundaries, as 'aspects of working on the move may lead to an overlap or merging of the times and spaces of work and non-work' (Felstead et al., 2005a, p.34; See also: Lilischikis, 2003; Sherry & Salvador, 2001). Whether this is a function of mobility *per se*, however, is problematised by Hislop and Axtell's (2007) comparative study of mobile domestic appliance service engineers and HR consultants, which highlights the importance of employment relations: whilst the self-employed consultants work evenings and weekends, 'a positive flipside of the engineers' employment relationship [employees with 38 hour weeks and paid overtime] was that it established a clear boundary between work and home and contributed to them not experiencing a problem in managing their work-life balance' (2007, p.48). This study also links the ability of workers to maintain work-life boundaries with worker-client relationships. These arguments – that mobile workers' employment and client relations influence their capacity (and desire) to maintain spatial and temporal boundaries – are developed in later sections of this article. First, a new conceptualisation of mobile work is developed by exploring variation in the space and time flexibility (and therefore 'moveability') of different jobs and then developing a typology of mobile work. Central to this discussion is control over work movement: is mobility made possible or required by the labour process?

Reconceptualising mobile work 1: time, space and mobility

The time and space (in)dependence of different types of work is highlighted nicely by Wiberg's (2005) two-by-two matrix (adapted in Figure 1, below). Few tasks are truly 'anytime, anywhere' (cell 1); generally they are only those requiring little or no direct communication and few lightweight materials. In practice, additional constraints – technological (faulty equipment), practical (logistical problems with carrying equipment) and cultural (norms governing suitable and unsuitable behaviour in specific environments) – mean that even fewer tasks can be accomplished 'anywhere, anytime' (Felstead et al., 2005a; Laurier, 2001; Perry et al., 2001). Other tasks are time-sensitive but can (formally) be done anywhere (cell 3). Many of these involve direct communication (and associated interpersonal schedule-harmonization), but not face-to-face contact. Notwithstanding corporate hyperbole about 'anytime, anywhere access,' ICT advances have probably been particularly effective in facilitating 'anywhere, particular time' work. Importantly the time-dependence of work may exacerbate pressures to work outside of formal workspaces, on vacation for instance (Fraser, 2001).

Figure 1 here

Some place-dependent work ('anytime, particular place', cell 2, or 'particular time, particular place', cell 4) involves multiple locations and thus movement (for example, fire-fighting), but some does not (assembly-line work) and some may or may not (actors in a touring company perform at various venues but actors in a local company perform and rehearse in a single workplace). Therefore, whereas place-independent work (cells 1 or 3) *may* involve mobility, place-dependent work (cells 2 or 4) will only involve mobility where multiple workplaces exist. However, given multiple workplaces, workers' mobility is *required*, not optional. When work is 'particular time, particular place' (cell 4) external temporal cues determine the temporality of workers' movement.

Reconceptualising mobile work 2: a typology

The most influential extant typology of mobile workers categorises workers on the basis of their 'level of detachedness' from the workplace (Lilischikis, 2003) but does not specify the relationship between work (or the labour process) and mobility: thus 'yo-yos' have a fixed base but occasionally work away and 'nomads' work at changing fixed locations, but workers whose work *requires movement* are

undifferentiated from workers who *choose* to work in multiple places (a distinction between choice and constraint Felstead et al.'s (2002) homeworking study highlights). In contrast the following typology focuses on the relationship of mobility to the accomplishment of work-tasks, differentiating between workers whose object is the achievement of motion, those whose work is not movement itself but necessitates movement and those whose work may be accomplished while moving or in multiple locations, but could equally be accomplished in a single location.

- **Mobility as work**: *cycle couriers; truck drivers; pilots*. The end is movement – of people, goods or vehicles between places. Where human beings are transported *mobility as work* encompasses more than physical transportation; jobs such as flight assistant are peripheral to transportation aims but essential to successful customer transit and therefore included in *mobility as work*. Some workers control the temporal ordering of work (cycle couriers) or their routes (taxi drivers); whereas other workers have little (bus driver) or no (flight assistant) control over route or temporality. *Mobility as work* is place and (usually) time dependent, but involves spatial maps or 'workscapes' peculiar to the work-task (thus flight paths, cycle routes and bus routes across a city all vary).

- **Mobility for work**: *district managers; migrant farm labourers; plumbers; construction workers; direct-sellers.* Work is spatially dispersed, requiring mobility to accomplish it. Visits to each workplace may be brief or extended. This work cannot be accomplished in a single workplace but may involve more or less frequent movement. Therefore workers' experience of mobility may be more or less central to their jobs. Whether intra-workplace mobility (Lilischkis's 'on-site movers') should be categorised as *mobility for work* is an open question. *Mobility for work* occurs where the place of work is immovable and yet inconstant. Place therefore remains important. *Mobility for work* occurs either 'anytime, particular place' (Figure 1, cell 2) or 'particular time, particular place' (cell 4).

- **Working while mobile**: *accountants; hand-knitters; editors; IT consultants; academics*. Some or all work tasks may be (but are not necessarily) carried out while mobile or at multiple sites. Formally *working while mobile* is a choice, but circumstances (time-pressure, location) may constrain this choice. *Working while mobile* is likely when journeys occupy a considerable portion of the day (perhaps due to *mobility for work* or long home-work commutes) or where

pressure is exerted (from managers or family) to externalise workspaces (Felstead et al., 2005a). ICT transformations have expanded the tasks that are possible to do *working while mobile*. Notably, in stark contrast to *mobility for work*, place is of no importance (Figure 1, cells 1 or 3).

Given that jobs tend to involve a bundle of tasks workers may experience more than one type of mobility: the district manager, *mobile for work,* moving from site to site, may also *work while mobile*, setting up meetings or completing paperwork while travelling between sites, similarly the paramedic is *mobile for work*, travelling to emergency sites, but also *mobile as work*, responsible for the safe transportation of patients to hospital. Generally however *mobility as work* and *mobility for work* are more likely to be experienced by blue and pink collar workers than *working while mobile*, whereas *working while mobile* is a predominantly white-collar experience.

Only where the purpose of workers' real presence is communication rather than embodied interaction (with animate or inanimate materials) may tele- or virtual-presence be adequate substitutes (and the requirement for *mobility for work* reduced). This condition is rarely met by blue and pink collar work: the former often involves heavy (and difficult to move) machinery, the latter, customers or patients (nurse; nanny; hairdresser). In both cases the object of work mobility is co-presence with, or the movement of, materials (persons, machinery, or other physical objects). 'Decorporealisation' is therefore primarily experienced by white-collar workers, with increasing opportunities to *work while mobile* and decreasing need for *mobility for work*. The following sections empirically outline the occupational diversity of mobile work and then explore a kind of *mobility for work*, mobile hairstyling.

Mobile work and occupation

The quarterly Labour Force Survey (LFS) is used to outline rates of mobile work and, later, to describe the mobile hairstyling population and changes therein. Since many mobile workers are self-employed own-account workers they are only captured in individual-, not establishment-level, surveys and the size of the LFS, with multiple occupational groups well represented, allows inter- and intra-occupational analysis. Critically the LFS asks for respondents' place of work. Mobile workers are identified using a question that asks whether respondents work mainly from home and includes the response: *different places with home as a base*. There has been frustration about the fit between this response category and mobile work (Felstead et al., 2005a, pp.58-59) and it misses occupations (like

paramedic) which involve mobility from a work rather than home base. However, given the paucity of other indicators, the question provides a rough-and-ready assessment of mobility across the labour force. First included in 1981, the question was not used again until 1992. Since then it has been included in every wave of the LFS.

Table 1 shows rates of mobile work by major occupational group – weights have been used to estimate population proportions. Skilled trade occupations, a group including occupations such as plumbers and electricians, are the most mobile: over a quarter of skilled tradespeople work in different places with home as a base, comprising nearly a third of the total mobile workforce. In contrast, white-collar work (the first four categories) comprises less than half (44 percent) of mobile work, despite over half of the labour force being in these occupations. 'Managerial and professional' workers, defined as the top two categories, comprise 27 percent of mobile workers and have rates of mobile work just below the UK average.

Table 1 here

The occupational groups in Table 1 are large and heterogeneous. To provide a better sense of what mobile workers do the following is a list of 22 highly mobile occupations (with rates of mobile work at least twice the national average)[4]:

marketing and sales managers (20 percent);

beauticians (21 percent);

importers/exporters (23 percent);

management consultants (24 percent);

fitness instructors (25 percent);

telecommunications engineers (28 percent);

seafarers (30 percent);

trading standards inspectors (30 percent);

taxi drivers and chauffeurs (31 percent);

debt, rent and cash collectors (36 percent);

bricklayers (39 percent);

clergy (40 percent);

market and street traders (40 percent);

plumbers and heating engineers (42 percent);

photo and audio-visual operators (43 percent);

gardeners and grounds-workers (43 percent);

chiropodists (55 percent);

plasterers (58 percent);

window cleaners (60 percent);

actors (61 percent);

roofers (61 percent);

driving instructors (81 percent).

That only 31 percent of taxi drivers are categorised as mobile is a reminder that the LFS only catches workers who 'work in different places *using home as a base*' (emphasis added) thereby excluding workers who are mobile from a work-base (such as a minicab firm). Notwithstanding such measurement problems, the tremendous variety of peripatetic work stands out.

Mobile styling

This section examines more closely one type of *mobility for work*: mobile hairstyling. Hairstyling is 'body work' (Wolkowitz, 2002), requiring touch and therefore co-presence. Either clients must either go to workers or workers must go to clients. Historically clients moved, travelling to salons or barbershops, but worker mobility is a solution to clients who are unable to move (through disability, illness or age), unable to move within the temporal constraints of high-street hours (workers with irregular hours), or where moving is socially or economically difficult (parents caring for young children find attending salons logistically difficult). Clients are spatio-temporally arranged, ready for stylists in particular places at specified times. Thus the work is time and place dependent.

Hairstyling has stimulated academic interest over the last decade (for instance: Drummond (2004), Druker et al. (2005) and Lee et al. (2007)), with attention given to the sector's poor pay rates (Druker et al., 2005) and growing size (Nolan & Slater, 2003). To date these discussions have not, however, addressed 'mobile' hairstyling, perhaps because of its invisibility (an exception is a Hair and Beauty Industry Authority report (Berry-Lound et al., 2000)). Mobile stylists are self-employed own-account workers and although some work 'casually' many are tax registered (accessing tax relief on car expenses, office and styling equipment). Most charge less than in-salon prices. Each stylist-client interaction is formally one-off, but usually part of an ongoing series, potentially evolving into a long-term relationship. Unlike some own-account workers (accountants, consultants) hairstylists' clients are individuals. Working at clients' premises therefore involves entering the private spaces of others. Although half of in-salon stylists do some extra-salon styling (Cohen, 2008) the term 'mobile stylist' will only refer here to stylists *without an in-salon base* (or other uniquely designated workplace).

The changing shape of mobile styling

Defining hairstylists as LFS respondents whose 'main job' industrial classification is 'hairdressing and beauty parlours' *and* whose occupational classification is 'hairdresser, barber' or 'hairdresser and barber manager and proprietor' produces samples of 300-500 hairstylists in each of 16 LFS waves examined. Industrial and occupational agreement produces a low-end estimate of total stylists but ensures those captured are actually doing styling. Hairstyling falls within the occupational group 'personal services', which has below average rates of mobile work (Table 1) and in 1981 the rate of mobile work in hairstyling was lower than the labour force average (1.6 as compared to 2.8 percent (Figure 2)). Between 1981 and 2006 however, mobile hairstyling rates grew 800 percent to 14.8 percent, whilst the rate of mobile work in the labour force increased more slowly (up 200 percent to 8.6 percent). Since the size of the occupation also grown this equates to a tenfold rise in the absolute number of mobile hairstylists (2,205 to 25,416). In 2006, hairstylists accounted for over one percent of total mobile work.

Figure 2 here

The movement from in-salon to mobile styling usually involves two transitions – a change of employment relationship (from employee to self-employed own-account worker) and of spatial location (from salon to mobile). Thus it is unsurprising that a large increase in mobile styling came during the 1980s when UK self-employment rates also increased (C. Lindsay & Macaulay, 2004, p.403), during which time the proportion of in-salon hairstylists classified as 'self-employed without employees' also grew (from 12 to 29 percent between 1981 and 1992, analysis not shown). Transitions to mobile work may therefore be rooted in broader socio-economic and institutional change. More recently however in-salon 'self-employment without employees' has fallen (declining by about one third between 1997 and 2006) in response to a government crackdown on 'disguised wage-earners' including 'chair-renters', whereas rates of mobile styling have remained relatively steady. The persistence of mobile styling is probably underpinned by wider social and cultural change, including the number and accessibility of 'immobile' clients, especially their co-location in residential homes facilitating easy access, and changes in clients' normative expectations, including demands for 24 hour service availability. Additionally, technological innovation (albeit not ICT) may have sustained mobile styling. Increased car ownership among women facilitated transport and hand-held dryers which proliferated from the 1960s (Cox, 1999, p.197) made styling equipment portable.

If rates of mobile work have remained relatively static over the fifteen years since the first expansion in mobile styling, mobile stylists have changed. In 1992 (after the first increase) mobile stylists were similar to in-salon stylists: marginally more likely to be female, the same average age (32) and no more likely to be married. By 2006 although in-salon stylists had aged, mobile stylists were an average nine years older and 60 percent more likely to be married. This could be a product of the aging of the first large cohort of mobile-stylists (stylists aged 32 in 1994 were 42 in 2004). Alternatively, it may signify a new niche for older, married workers, given the coexistence of three social developments: large numbers of trained, but not currently working hairstylists (Berry-Lound et al., 2000), increased expectations that women return to work after marriage and child-rearing and large salons' exclusionary emphasis on the aesthetics of youth and trendiness (Lee et al., 2007; J. Lindsay, 2004). This raises the possibility that as service sector corporate aesthetics extend their reach, mobile work, especially *mobility for work* involving interactions in 'private' spaces, is an escape for workers who do not 'fit'. This contrasts with conclusions from studies of *working while mobile*, which suggest that mobile work simply extends the commodification of space, transforming non-work spaces and aesthetics and underlines the importance of distinguishing types of mobile work.

Mobile styling involves specific temporal constraints. It requires that workers are sequentially present at particular places at particular times, making gaps between appointments, or 'dead times' difficult to avoid. 'Dead times' can be employed for productive activity by those *working while mobile* (something that contributes to work intensification (Perry et al., 2001, pp.337-339)), but workers who are *mobile for work* are unproductive between workplaces. When workers are employees they may relish 'dead times', using them to 'steal time from the organisation' (Laurier, 2001, p.13) but self-employed workers have no-one to steal from and no reason to relish unproductive spatio-temporal in-betweens. In addition, *mobility for work* enforces a sequential spatial ordering of work-tasks and produces hiatuses because some tasks are not conducive to constant attention (for instance perms take time to 'set'). During hiatuses workers are trapped in others' private places – this is 'baggy time'. Thus the spatial constraints of *mobility for work* systematically produce 'dead' and 'baggy' times. These retard labour efficiency and productivity and are experienced differently by workers in different employment statuses.

Doing mobile styling and constructing boundaries

The following section examines mobile stylists' working lives in more depth, investigating the interconnection between stylists' mobility, the different 'dimensions' of the work-life boundary (social, temporal and spatial (Cohen 2008), and employment relations. The section is based on semi-structured interviews with seven mobile and formerly-mobile hairstylists in a city in the north of England. These interviews were part of a wider investigation of hairstyling work, which involved interviewing in-salon stylists from over 50 salons, including many who performed some amount of 'mobile' work alongside their main job. The latter are not drawn upon in the discussion below. However their more limited experiences of mobile styling contextualised, and validated, the experiences of the fully mobile stylists discussed here.

Arranging interviews with mobile stylists is difficult: without identifiable workplaces they are tricky to locate. Few are listed in business directories and most do not advertise widely. Moreover, as discussed below, their 'free times' are unpredictable. In consequence most interviewees in this study were identified via recommendations from in-salon stylists. Six interviews were face-to-face and one was by telephone. Since the ensuing discussion draws on a limited set of cases the findings are not statistically generalisable, and they cannot provide a definitive account of boundary work amongst self-employed workers who are *mobile for work*.[5] By 'theoretically selecting' a previously un-studied and analytically distinct group of mobile workers, however, this study seeks to advance the theoretical analysis of mobile work (a logic similar to that underpinning theoretical development via case study research (Eisenhardt, 1989)). Nonetheless, the empirical limitations of this study underscore the need for further research into *mobility as work* and *mobility for work*, including mobile hairstyling.

The following sections draw on evidence from two interviewees, Sandra and Fiona, selected as exemplifying respectively the lived experiences of bounded and unbounded mobile styling. Neither case is 'typical' of all mobile styling (indeed, given the relatively few mobile stylists interviewed it is difficult to say what is 'typical'). They represent, however, relatively clear and contrasting positions on the work-life 'segmentation-amalgamation' continuum (Nippert-Eng, 1996) and usefully highlight the conceptual issues involved. As 'extreme points' neither Sandra's nor Fiona's experiences were identical to those of other mobile stylists in this study, yet whereas Sandra's strongly bounded work-life was exceptional more aspects of Fiona's unbounded work-life were experienced by other stylists.

Unbounded mobile styling

Fiona worked in a salon until she had her son. She then held other jobs, whilst 'doing hairdressing in the background' largely for friends and family. Gradually her clientele expanded through informal social interactions until eventually she 'went mobile' full-time. Fiona gained advantages from overlapping social and styling relationships, especially in the accommodation of her extra-work life during the working day, taking her children to play with clients' children while she worked, for instance. Over time, however, she started to resent the ways that her 'work' role competed with and usurped extra-work social relations.

> You get to a point, when you've done it for a long time. Your phone rings and it's never anybody to speak to you to see how you are. It's always, 'can you fit me in?' and you become: 'People aren't interested in me. They just want me for what I can do'.

Thus social unboundedness was fundamental to Fiona's work-life, enabling her to establish a clientele and combine work with childcare, but she also complained that it undermined extra-work sociability.

Fiona benefited from weak spatial boundaries, enabling the transformation of workplaces into places of childcare or socialising. Pressure to build and maintain a 'following' also meant that she saw all space as potential workspace, for example an encounter in a municipal sauna ended with a haircut:

> Me and my sister we were in there and got chatting. And I told this woman I were a hairdresser. And she said, I got a pair… will you just cut my hair. I sat in the shower room in sauna cutting this woman's hair. After that she said, 'Give me your number,' and I used to go to her house and do her daughter's and hers and her husband's and it got me a whole family.

Here, Fiona emphasises her payoff (the 'whole family'). At other times she railed against the seepage of work into extra-work times and spaces:

> 'I'd be out on a Saturday night in a pub and somebody would come up and say, 'Can you do my hair Tuesday?' You're always on call!

Fiona's exasperation involves her attempt to mark a time (Saturday night) and place (pubs) as non-working, but she later mentions 'finding' regular clients through pub conversation. This contradiction demonstrates the centrality of social and spatial integration to Fiona's establishment and reproduction as a self-employed mobile worker and the corrosiveness of this integration for her non-working life. Without clear spatial or social work-life boundaries Fiona is unable to define her work as work or persuade clients that she has non-working times.

> It's harder to get your holidays. Because if you're in a shop, I close for Christmas and nobody dreams of asking. But when you're doing it home, they're like, well, can't you just nip round. And I don't think people see it as a job either sometimes: you're in and out of their homes.

Fiona's work occurs in non-work or 'private' places and she is unable to transform these into socially designated 'workplaces', partly because her extra-work sociability with clients undermines these attempts. As such these places resist homogenisation, maintaining social meaning. White-collar workers who *work while mobile* also experience spatial and temporal unboundedness (Felstead et al., 2005a) but are less likely to experience social integration; bringing files home rarely involves colleagues or clients entering the home, and does not turn family and friends into clients. Thus a key difference is that unbounded *social relations* underpin Fiona's spatio-temporal unboundedness.

Work in others' places also reduces workers' temporal control:

> One of the worst things was you'd turn up to do a cut and blow and you'd allowed yourself your time. And you'd get there and they'd say auntie so-and-so has come, can you do hers while you're here. Or can you just cut my husbands while you're here. That was cramming your time.

This lack of control is exacerbated by Fiona's employment relationship: as a self-employed worker, unpredictable demand means unpredictable income and, as has been shown elsewhere (Parker et al., 2005) self-employed workers seek additional work as 'insurance'. Here Fiona's fear that 'you might not get any phone-calls' pushes her to oblige clients, 'cramming' her time.

Bounded mobile styling

Sandra works regular hours, 9am to 3pm, three days a week. Unlike Fiona, her clientele has been deliberately constructed, starting nearly 30 years ago with elderly clients who could not manage the steps to the salon in which she then worked. Today Sandra still recruits from her former salon. Additionally she advertises in a local church magazine and uses home-care workers as word-of mouth recruiters, generating a relatively housebound following. Sandra determines both how many clients she 'takes on' (only recruiting when an existing client dies or is ailing) and the area within which she operates (a residential district, near her former salon). The production of an older clientele is thus a conscious strategy. When Sandra first 'went mobile' her clients included women of her age with children, 'but then gradually as their children grew up and they had more freedom they'd go back out to the hairdressers'. Older, immobile clients are different, she explains, 'once you get them, then that's how it is until they die.'

By socially defining her clientele Sandra reinforces the social work-life boundary:

> I think you can treat it like a nurse. You know how nurses can be so kind, but when they walk out of the door they forget about you. That's the same kind of thing really. Because you can't become attached to people can you. When my ladies die, which of course they do, I always think, 'Ahhh, I really liked her'. And then fill the gap in with someone else.

This bounded sociality enables Sandra to construct and maintain spatial boundaries. As mentioned above, her clients occupy a distinct residential area. Since she lives elsewhere her home and workscapes rarely overlap. The relative anonymity and helplessness of her clients allows Sandra to maintain the definition of clients' homes (their private places) as workplaces: 'you don't go in and have a cup of tea and sit down for half an hour and chat.' Her clients' dependence, and therefore predictability, allows Sandra relative income security and she has little pressure to recruit (or network) in extra-work social spaces. Thus consciously constructed social boundaries make mobility, and entry into individuals' 'private' spaces, commensurate with the retention of spatial boundaries.

Because Sandra's clients are relatively immobile and therefore willing to be seen at her convenience, time-dependence is reduced. Consequently Sandra exercises the temporal control Fiona lacks, virtually eliminating 'baggy' and 'dead' times:

> Each person has a time and I do one every half hour. So I get to one at nine o'clock, put her under the dryer. Perhaps drive up the road a bit. Put the next lady under dryer at half past nine. Go back and comb the first one out. And do the next one at half past ten. It works quite well, because they're all quite well trained and they're all ready waiting for me.

As Sandra notes, this schedule regularity is possible because her clients are 'well trained', something enabled by her careful spatial and social screening. Her clients are dependent (without styling alternatives). They are ready and waiting (with little else to do). Moreover they demand frequent services, either because of style preferences requiring regular upkeep ('wash-and-sets' or, for men, short trims) or their desire for company. There are, however, costs. As is the case whenever workers are *mobile for work*, the elimination of 'baggy times' involves inserting additional visits where hiatuses would have been. Consequently Sandra complains of backache caused by getting into and out of her car an uncomfortable '30 times a day'. Sandra's working life nonetheless demonstrates that even when self-employed workers travel between private spaces they can maintain social, spatial and temporal work-life boundaries. Their ability to do this however depends on their ability to resolve the chronic income insecurity of self-employment.

Conclusion

Since work-based mobility is increasing, empirical and conceptual analysis of the phenomenon is timely. Yet, while LFS data highlight the variety of occupations involving workers in spatial mobility, theoretical and empirical research on mobile work remains fixated on novel ICT developments and white-collar workers who are core technology users. In consequence work mobility has been associated with the declining importance of place, decorporealisation and either workers' freedom to work 'anytime, anywhere' or clients' and employers' unbounded demands. The above discussion demonstrates, however, that these developments are not necessary corollaries of work-based mobility. What mobility means, whether workers can control their socio-temporal schedules and the importance

(or not) of place all depend on the time-space dependence of their work-tasks, whether mobility is required or an option, their employment relations and their relations with clients, among other things.

The analysis of work-related spatial mobility developed here began by examining workers' ability to control their own mobility and the places, times, and social relations of work these involve. From this starting point this article has introduced a threefold typology of mobile-work. This typology is useful in revealing types of mobile work that have been largely ignored. Moreover, it highlights structural differences between *working while mobile*, which is largely white-collar and the only type of mobile work positively related to ICT developments, and *mobility for work* and *mobility as work*, which are types of mobility experienced by workers across the labour force. For example, whereas *working while mobile* is ordinarily a 'choice' (albeit not necessarily one workers control), *mobility for work* and *mobility as work* are usually necessitated by the work-tasks involved.

Where mobile work involves *mobility for work*, it occurs *because place matters*, because goods, people, crops, or structures are situated and because work requires workers be at particular workplaces to accomplish their tasks. This space is not simply 'abstract' (Lefebvre, 1991), but retains definite 'use-value'. Similarly *mobility as work* is conditional upon the need to move materials or people between particular places. Thus, neither type of mobility fits a model of 'decorporealisation' or the decline of place-dependency. Moreover, as the example of mobile hairstyling shows, mobile work is itself conditioned by the complicated socially-meaningful locations within which it occurs, some of which are 'private' spaces. Feasibly, work in private places enables workers who do not 'fit' to circumvent the increased aesthetic controls imposed within public workplaces (Lee et al., 2007; Witz et al., 2003). Whether, and the extent to which, this is occurring or, alternatively, whether private spaces are increasingly commodified, are empirical questions requiring further study.

Others have shown that white-collar mobile work (*working while mobile*) almost inevitably undermines temporal work-life boundaries – since work *can* be done in multiple places it is left to workers to prevent its seepage into non-work spaces and times (c.f. Felstead et al., 2005a). Workers who are *mobile for work* are different. They cannot work 'anywhere, anytime'. Nonetheless many of these workers also lack temporal control. Here place, not the absence of place, engenders unpredictability, undermining workers' ability to maintain boundaries and temporal control. The effects of place are,

however, mediated by workers' insecurity (including their dependence on clients), something closely associated with employment status.

Strong work-life boundaries delimit work and therefore set limits on profit-making activity. Consequently structurally insecure self-employed own-account workers may be loathe to enforce rigid boundaries between working and non-working places, times and social relations. This means that the self-employed who are *mobile for work* become subject to the social and temporal dynamics of others' spaces. Where workplaces are simultaneously private spaces (sites for both work- and extra-work sociability) the social work-life boundary is blurred. As a worker's capacity to socially designate her 'visit' as work is undermined so too is her ability to control the temporality of work. In this context, if the lack of temporal control produces resentment and if social and work relationships are merged, the worker's resentment can extend into her extra-work life. In effect therefore the income dependence of self-employed workers transforms *mobility for work* into spatial and social integration (the merging of social and work relationships), which can be experienced as work seepage and social alienation.

Nonetheless, and in contrast to those *working while mobile*, the worker who is *mobile for work* may successfully maintain spatial, social and temporal work-life boundaries. The engineers studied by Hislop and Axtell (2007) achieved this. As hourly paid employees with income-security these engineers had little incentive to conform to the wishes of clients and were able to enter multiple workplaces, renegotiating their role in each without disrupting their status as worker or undermining their temporal control. Rather, social and temporal boundaries were presupposed. As suggested above, the maintenance of spatial, social and temporal boundaries is more difficult for the self-employed who are *mobile for work*. It is however achievable if workers are able (as Sandra was) to resolve the chronic insecurity of their employment status by, for example, producing reliable or 'well trained' clients and predictable 'workplaces'. The evidence presented here suggests that this might be most likely when clients are highly dependent and extra-work sociability is circumscribed.

Acknowledgements

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Appendix: Tables and Figures

Figure 1. Time and place dependence, adapted from Wiberg (2005)

		"Space" [Place]	
		Independent	**Dependent**
Time	**Independent**	**1. Anytime, anywhere: Tasks that can be done independent of time and place. They can be done anytime, anywhere.** Work reliant on light-technology and no communication: *accounts or report writing, editing, web design, crocheting...* Communication work in which immediate response is unnecessary: *initiating email contact, leaving or checking phone messages...* [a] [b]	**2. Anytime, particular place: Tasks that need to be done in a particular place but can be done anytime.** Work requiring particular (immovable) technologies: *assembly line work, sound mixing...* Work tied to a place but with no/open schedule: *construction, maintenance, inspections...* [a]
	Dependent	**3. Particular time, anywhere: Tasks that can be done independent of place but at a certain time or in a certain order.** White-collar or service work requiring live-communication, but not co-presence: *IT support, telephone sales, negotiation, management, radio interview...* [b]	**4. Particular time, particular place: Tasks that must be done in a particular place within a particular time.** Personal and professional services requiring co-presence: *manicure, direct-selling, teaching, live performance...* Seasonal work on land/sea: *crop picking, fishing...* Situated emergency work: *fire-fighting, emergency repair...*

[a] This is a simplified presentation. In practice some of the tasks in cells 1 and 2 might involve temporality (i.e. schedule or ordering or coordination) and therefore fall into cells 3 and 4 respectively.

[b] Although this work may not be constrained to a single place, it may be that in practice there are locations (e.g. that are loud or socially inappropriate) where some of this work cannot be done. Place independence may not therefore be absolute but relative.

Figure 2. Mobile work in the labour force and hairstyling, 1981-2006
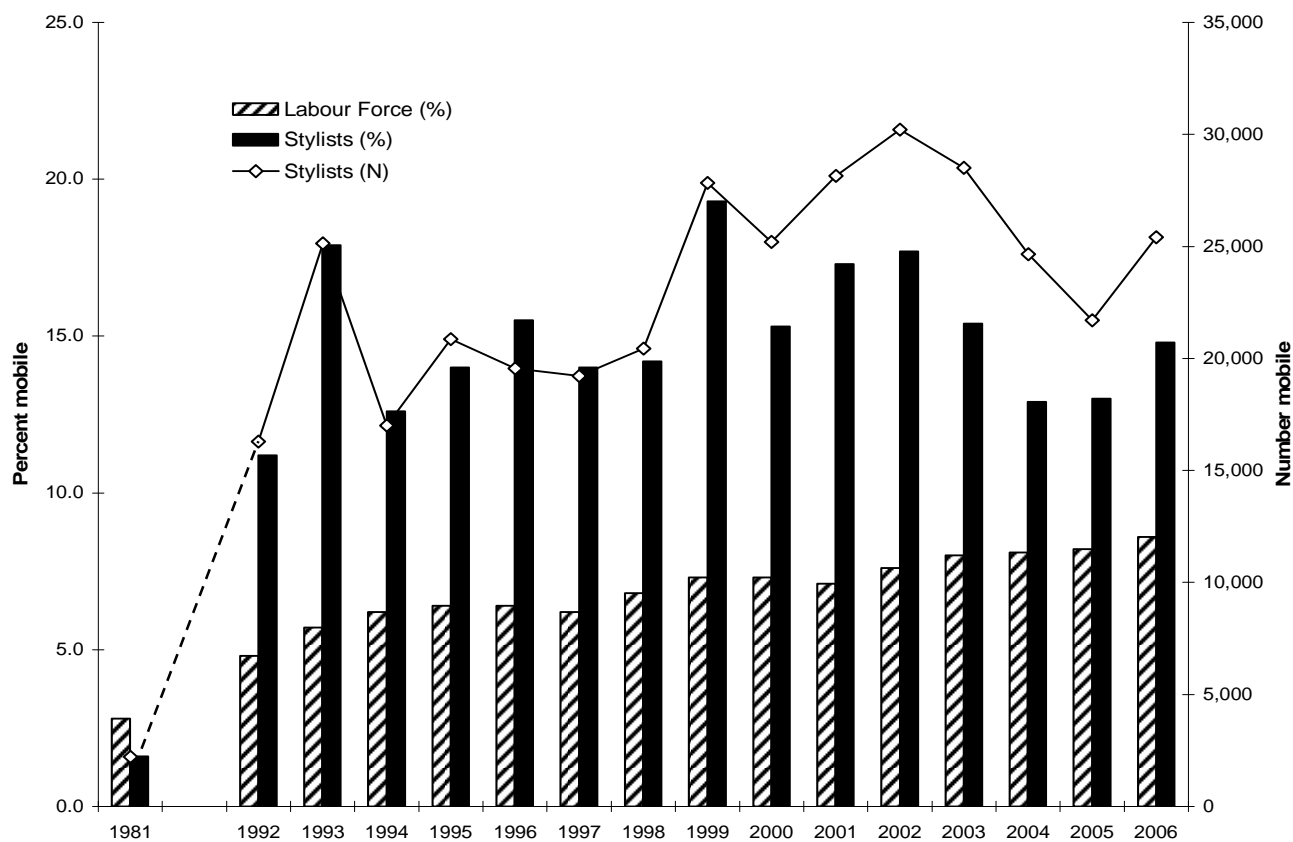
Notes: This data is based on the spring Labour Force Survey for each year in which a question about work location was asked. Percentages are calculated from those respondents who answered the question about location of work. Data is weighted by the appropriate variable to compensate for differential rates of response. Rates of mobile work in the labour force for 1981-2002 are from Felstead et al. (2005b, pp.420-421). For 2003-6 they are the author's own calculation. Rates and estimated numbers of mobile stylists fluctuate considerably because they are based on a relatively small sub-sample of the LFS.

Table 1 Mobile Work by Major Occupational Group, Spring LFS 2006

Major occupational group	Percent of Total Mobile Workforce in group	Percent of group Mobile	N Mobile
Managers and Senior Officials	15.3	8.5	364,385
Professionals	11.7	7.8	283,204
Associate Professionals and Technical Occupations	15.2	9.1	368,738
Administrative and Secretarial Occupations	2.3	1.7	56,732
Skilled Trades Occupations	32.8	26.2	796,237
Personal Service Occupations	4.8	5.3	116,833
Sales and Customer Service Occupations	3.0	3.4	73,605
Process, Plant and Machine Operatives	7.9	9.0	190,778
Elementary Occupations	7.2	5.5	175,341
Total	**100.2**	**8.6**	**2,425,853**

Notes: This table is based on the spring 2006 Quarterly Labour Force Survey. Percentages are calculated from those respondents who answered the question about location of work and occupation. Percentages are subject to slight rounding error. Data is weighted to compensate for differential rates of response. Analysis is confined to workers' 'main job', thereby omitting those who are mobile in a second job and under-representing occupations frequently pursued as second jobs.

Endnotes:

[1] The focus on ICT-dependent mobile work may have more prosaic causes. Analysts of mobile work (academics and journalists) personally depend upon mobile devices such as laptop computers. Additionally ICT companies systematically sponsor research. For example an examination of mobile workers' coping strategies was produced by *Intel Labs' 'People and Practices Research group'* (Sherry and Salvador 2001), while Perry et al.'s (2001) study is co-authored by a member of *Hewlett-Packard Laboratories*. This research is often high quality, even critical, but the centrality of ICT to mobility is assumed.

[2] Notable exceptions are Baines and Gelder (2003) and Hislop and Axtell (2007). Studies of migrant labour also examine disadvantaged workers' spatial movement, but emphasise labour-market, not job-related (or work-task), mobility.

[3] Lefebvre (1991) argues that 'abstract space', analogous to Marx's 'abstract labour', is produced by capitalist commodification. Abstract labour simultaneously involves 'the triumph of homogeneity' (pp.52,337) and compartmentalisation, for example of 'spaces for work and spaces for leisure' (pp.310,320).

[4] Over 50 occupations fit these criteria; these were selected as exemplifying the range of highly mobile occupations.

[5] Previous research into mobile work has also employed very small samples: for example Hislop and Axtell (2007) interviewed 12 consultants and six engineers, whilst Perry et al. (2001) interviewed 17 workers 'from a range of professions'. Since the interviewees discussed here share not only mobility but also geographic location, occupation and self-employment status, 'saturation' requires fewer cases.