

Sutured and sundered

**The order-productive cohort of carsons, mophonkers and other
customer-assemblages visiting a petrol station.**

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The petrol station – where mobility and consumption overlap

It seems that the world is on the move. In Sweden 83% of the population travel away from their home daily, covering a total of 363 million kilometres, mostly by car, and we make almost 5 billion individual trips every year (SIKA, 2007). This highlights the essential role of mobility in Sweden and this is in line with global statistics, which show that travel and tourism constitute the largest industry in the world (Urry, 2007). Mobility has become an essential part of society mobilising a 'mobility turn' in the social sciences, as well as within design and engineering (Hannam et al, 2006, Sheller & Urry, 2006).

Unsurprisingly, mobility affects another key factor in understanding our society, namely how production and consumption are organised and integrated in our daily lives. In recent years, research on consumer culture has turned to theories of *practice* (Warde, 2005), a theoretical turn that is growing in importance across many diverse fields of contemporary social research (Schatzki et al, 2001). Instead of regarding consumption as behaviour isolated to the situation of the transaction (or calculation), consumption can also be studied as a heterogeneous assemblage of all those intermingling actants and bodies involved in our daily lives, some of which are also entangled in the field of the market economy (Brembeck et al, 2007, Callon, 1998, Callon & Muniesa, 2005). It becomes possible to analyse how the fields of consumption and production are not discrete and separate, but how they are interconnected in ways more complex than simply being a matter of supply and demand, i.e. "consumption occurs from within and for the sake of practices" (Warde, 2005). The study of petrol stations, in this respect, is particularly interesting as they are not only the nexus for a vast range of practices concerning mobility and consumption, but also because the petrol station is undergoing a shift in functionality, i.e. it is in transit between patterns of practices.

Petrol stations are a vital but overlooked semi-public place in our mobile societies. Cars are used for 64% of travel in Sweden (SIKA, 2007), and fuel is consequently the largest expenditure item (after housing rent) for Swedish households (CFK, 2008:44-46). Globally, on average we visit a petrol station at least once a week. In fact, one petrol station brand (Shell) is the world's largest retailer across all categories (Minale, 2000). The same brand can be found in Africa or Indonesia, Alaska or Norway. But petrol retailing is far from being a stable institution as the retail industry has experienced considerable transformations over the last 30 years.

Since the mid-eighties more and more products have moved into the petrol station, turning them more into convenience stores. In addition to fuel, you can find leisure articles, clothes, rental videos, groceries, lotteries, postal and banking services, car-wash facilities, coffee, toilets, etc. Petrol stations now even sell pharmaceuticals (Figure 1). This may not be surprising in light of the larger profit margins that merchandise generates, averaging three times more than fuel.

Figure 1: A banner announcing that the petrol station is also a pharmacy.

Parallel to the diversification of petrol station services, we are seeing a reduction in the number of petrol stations. The "dying out" of petrol stations ("mackdöden" in Swedish) has provoked a considerable emotional response from both the media and politicians (Frithiofson, 2008, Glesbygdsverket, 2008). Overall, 1000 stations are soon expected to close in Sweden (and a number have already gone out of business), reducing the number of stations by one third. Based on the reactions to this, the problem does not lie solely in the

availability of petrol but rather in the role that petrol stations play in a community and the consequences of losing such semi-public places.

In short, petrol station retail is in a state of flux in which heterogeneity and reduction are complementary movements. However, “as yet, no in-depth studies have emerged of consumption practices in service areas” (Merriman, 2007: 241 note 34). Of the few studies available, Minale (2000) provides a vast array of examples of petrol stations from an architectural perspective; Lægran (2002) studies different identities among rural youth in Norway where the petrol station constitutes a contrast to internet cafés; Merriman (2007) analyses the development of service stations in conjunction with the M1 motorway, exemplifying how they were an integral part of the exclusive features and histories of the *particular* M1 landscape in Britain; while Wilson (2008) analyses the aesthetics of the rise (and decay) of petrol station retailing in Sweden. Finally, Normark (2006a; 2006b) conducted a relatively short ethnography (3 months) of a petrol station in southwest Sweden in connection with the possible implementation of Wi-Fi hotspots at the stations (Magdic & Sjöstrand, 2002).

Based on previous research, some initial findings can be outlined. First, the survival of a petrol station does not hinge on its ability to sell petrol but rather on its success in providing additional services. Consumption practices revolve around easy access to merchandise that people might need, such as pacifiers, hot dogs or milk on the way to somewhere else. Second, far from being a monofunctional place (i.e. only selling fuel), petrol stations continually attend to a whole host of other services, keeping personal keys for someone else to collect, helping foreign truck drivers with directions, selling fish, heating gruel, chatting about cars and renting out videos. At the station *heterogeneousness* is accomplished not only

in the tasks and activities, but also in the identities of the visitors and their mobilities. As a strategically sited ethnography, the petrol station study provides a resourceful insight into the dwellings of automobility (Urry, 2007).

This paper presents ethnographic accounts from a petrol station, describing how the site is in-between the fixed and the mobile. The petrol station enables the driver to move around while immobilised in the car, while temporarily immobilising the vehicle. At the same time, driver and car are recognised as a customer-assemblage; they act as co(a)gents –temporarily disconnected – sutured and sundered on the forecourt.

Co(a)gency in consumption and mobility

Actor-Network and other STS approaches have fervently explored ‘the performativity’ of agency. The phenomenon of agency is ceaselessly under scrutiny and debated. At the same time it ‘never exists as such’. It is not an asset or force you sociologically can count on even when it is inert, waiting to be taken in possession by its ‘agents’. It is something else (Latour, 1992; 1999; 2005).

Latour even argues that the fact that humans are entangled in/with/by non-humans is a distinctive trait of human societies, “non-humans are necessarily present in all human encounters” (Michael, 2000:22, see also Latour, 1992, Strum & Latour, 1998). Assemblages accentuate the contradiction in our everyday lives: that we are mixtures of human and non-human that would cease to function without our assemblages, even though we continuously create (re-create) a division between nature and society, between object and representation, between human and non-human (Michael, 2000:25, 71-95 and Michael, 2001).

In order to garner the novel perspectives on man-machine coupled assemblages (temporarily or otherwise), while avoiding the problematic associations traced to terms such as cyborg or hybrid, we will in the following refer to the assemblage as co(a)gents, or units of co(a)gency. Co(a)gency, as a conceptual tool, was developed by Mike Michael (2000) as a continuation/combination/comment/critique of both the ANT hybrid and the (cultural studies/Haraway) cyborg. But the word is also a contribution to the sociological discussion on agency. Even though we focus on the process and relations rather than any structure or backdrop, like many other concepts agency has associations that we find problematical. There are two specifically problematical aspects of agency. First, agency is often attributed to singularities rather than composed, networked and heterogeneous assemblages.¹ Co(a)gency highlights a pluralistic take on agency. “When we follow the hybrid, we assume its agency to be distributed, pluralised, contingent. So the components of a hybrid all contribute to its agency, as do the other entities that are more or less associated with the hybrid. Thus hybrid entails *co-agents in a melee of co-agency*” (Michael, 2000:42). Second, as with the term ‘user’ or ‘actor’, agency presumes a human superiority – a human heroic agency. The term co(a)gency is, in line with the advocated approach in ANT, a move away from the human overconfidence in social science, away from ‘sociology of the social’. As Michael (2000:41) remarks:

“When the technologies are also viewed as material culture, when we unpick some of the cultural assumptions reflected in, and mediated by, the technologies, we find that they play a pivotal part in ‘problematic’ human comportment... As, such technologies do not uncomplicatedly serve in building orders. They are not mere intermediaries; sometimes they verge on being jokers, involving only diffuse

orderings; sometimes they are parasites, disrupting and transforming the messages that flow between designers and users, and among users... Technology is implicated in the patterning of order and disorder.”

Following the human-&-non-human-assemblage, then, enables us to study the order-productive accomplishments (Garfinkel, 1967; 2002, Livingston, 1987, Ryave & Schenkein, 1974) without ascribing or taking for granted a human ascendancy. However, despite the heterogeneous relations, the distributed components that make up the co-agency of the assemblage (or, in ethnomethodology, the focus on a heterogeneous scene) hybrids are dubiously singularised, compressed and united. The strength (or power) of assemblages is radically different from the strength of the distributed parts of which the assemblage consists. With regard to the driver-car assemblage, Dant (2005:62) argues: “Neither the human driver nor the car acting apart could bring about the types of action that the assemblage can; it is the particular ways in which their capabilities are brought together that bring about the impact of the automobile on modern societies.” Thus, while we assume a distributed agency or co-agency, we simultaneously (or rather ambiguously) need to deal with an assemblage’s *cogency*, “that is, its convincing power and unitariness.”(Michael, 2000:42). Thus the term co(a)gency is used as a conceptual tool that guides the reader to simultaneously think about “on the one hand, distributed, *exploded* agency and on the other, concentrated, *imploded*, agency.”(Michael, 2000:42). As will become apparent in this chapter, one consequence of this perspective is that we prefer to focus on distributed and concentrated agencies such as ‘carsons’ (car-person) instead of the traditional traffic or driver.

Accomplishing co-presence and heterogeneity at petrol stations

Let us for a moment regard the petrol station forecourt as one of many local scenes where order is accomplished. Here in the overall arrangement of things – the placement of parking areas, pumps, the car wash, rental trailer parking, the entrance to the petrol station store, etc. – everything is used as resources for the order-productive cohorts' accomplishment. For example, parking close to the trailers can be a witnessable account for renting trailers, where the car 'pointed' to what the customer 'intended' to do, taking 'possessional territory' (Goffman, 1971:62, Laurier et al. 2001) of the space in front of the trailer, thus 'booking' the trailer prior to his formal request to rent it. The relationship between the location of the car and the trailer thus made visible was integrated into the conversation as a relational term (Schegloff, 1972, see also Goodwin, 2000) to make the rental procedure smooth. The spatial arrangement² of the forecourt, affording a clear view from the counter of the forecourt and the rental trailers to one side, assisted the conversation between staff and customers. At times, I observed how the staff already started to prepare the paperwork when they saw someone parking by the trailers. Similarly, if someone parked by the pump, they would write down the license-plate number in anticipation of the potential event of a 'drive-off' (I will return to this phenomenon later). Seeing how and where people parked is thus an important aspect of the production and recognition work at the petrol station.

The frequent use of spatial arrangements as clues for the production and recognition work did not, however, imply that everything had its designated place. On the contrary, people could park and engage in other activities than those primarily associated with the place, but this too was a situated accomplishment. For example, people could park in front of the rental trailers without leasing them, they could wait for a pump to become vacant sequentially³,

park and buy things in the store, wait for travel companions, change nappies, read newspapers, take coffee breaks, and so forth. Sometimes, these subsidiary tasks were considered inappropriate, especially when more than one visitor wanted to use the same spot for different activities. In such situations, staff and customers collaboratively *accomplished* an understanding of a location as inappropriate for that particular moment. Hence, the activities taking place at different locations on the forecourt were perceived as *more or less* appropriate, depending on the appearance of other competing activities in situ (see also Normark, 2006b).

The co-present cohort used the arrangements of objects, inside the store and on the forecourt, to accomplish order. The order of the place was part of the cohort's accomplishment, while it reflexively provided the 'documents of' how that order should be maintained. Not by restricting and limiting the space to a few activities, but instead by distributing (allowing/denying) accessibility to a wide variety of services, all of which were temporarily considered appropriate or inappropriate depending on the situation, i.e. doing-heterogeneousness.

However, sharing the space was not only spatial but also temporal, and we could therefore observe how the relational property of time was accomplished by the production and recognition work of different *intensities of staying* (Normark, 2006a). Predominantly a feature when sharing petrol stations is that people perceive them as places with fast service and smooth flow. This understanding is partly based on the petrol station design, with streamlined and practical forecourts. But the flow of cars at the petrol station is not only a feature of the arrangements of pumps, entrances etc.; it is equally an accomplishment by the carsons in place. The assemblages take different 'liberties' on the forecourt, depending on

how long they intend to stay. For example, a common denominator among carsons that took the liberty of parking by the entrance was that the visit at the petrol station was brief, i.e. they were being 'on the way'. Similarly, carsons stopping for long breaks were careful about where they parked on the forecourt so that they were not 'in the way'. This care could be observed in customers' behaviour and how they located themselves and their vehicle in relation to the forecourt and other carsons that were co-present. Thus, the ways customers find it appropriate to act depend both on what they intend to do and how long they intend to stay.

Being sundered and achieving suturing – two in two places at the same time

Cars are big and occupy the space and any services connected to that space whenever they are parked in the different areas of the forecourt. Thus, when visitors leave their car to visit the store, they occupy the space of the car and the space that they have themselves (e.g. in the store). This increases the complexity of avoiding being in the way. Regardless of whether the visit is brief or long, customers have to split their attention between activities in the store and the situation around the car on the forecourt – being two in two places at the same time. The ambiguity of minimising the risk of being in the way while utilising the various activities at the petrol station is handled in a variety of ways. Visitors are guided by the design of the petrol station, but they also adjust to each other's probable requests, levelling between either taking time or taking space.

One way is to move the vehicle to an appropriate location on the forecourt prior to entering the store. This was nicely exemplified through the actions of one visitor observed during the study. A woman arrived at the petrol station. Having parked in a parking space, the woman entered the store. She returned from the store with (one or two) plastic bags. She opened the

backseat door behind the driver's seat and placed the bags there. She got into the car and moved the car from the parking space to a vacant pump where she started refuelling. After refuelling (and conducting other subsidiary tasks) she locked the car and walked back into the store. Once she returned to the car she moved it to the car-wash queue.

This observation showed how the carson divided her tasks at the petrol station. She performed the tasks as a series of sequences: grocery shopping, refuelling and using the car wash. But as she conducted her tasks she also moved the car on the forecourt to an appropriate location for her activity in the store. This forced her to repeatedly go back and forth between the store and the forecourt. By dividing the tasks, she was able to be as little as possible in the way of others on the forecourt and still conduct the tasks available at the station.

Another approach was to find locations on the forecourt that were considered 'off-the-way'. During the fieldwork we observed a group of people in one car that stopped at the petrol station to eat lunch. They parked their car beside the underground containers' ventilation pipes at the far end of the forecourt, from the perspective of the store. The group, consisting of two men and one woman, left the car and walked across the forecourt into the store. Later, exiting the store, they returned to the vicinity of the car and sat on the grass beside it, enjoying the sun and their lunch. They stayed for more than half an hour on the grass.

The location of the car was not the customary place to park. They positioned their vehicle so that, after buying their lunch, they could sit on the grass and enjoy the sun, while still being in proximity to their vehicle – maintaining the assemblage. Being close to the car (while eating) seemed to be more important than being close to the store (while purchasing). By parking far away from the entrance of the store they could have a long break and still

maintain a sense of the place as a location with fast service and smooth flow, while they also sutured their customer-assemblage by maintaining proximity to the car while it was immobilised.

Moving the car on the forecourt can, however, be misinterpreted. As the following excerpt shows, the location of the vehicle is an 'index' of the activity that the customer is conducting. Thus, leaving the vehicle in specific locations on the forecourt can be important. In this excerpt, the customer moved the car from the pump before she entered the store.

1	Visitor A: Great, err I just thought, I thought I wonder what they'll think if I start
2	driving now, so actually you don't want that, just now there
3	were (no cars but
4	Staff: (for my sake, could you please not move the car
5	Visitor A: Okay, so it's (better to do that?
6	Staff: (Exactly
7	Visitor A: Even if that might create a (queue?
8	Staff: (Exactly
9	VisitorA: Okay, then I know for next (time
10	Staff: (Yes, great

Conversation between Visitor A and staff after Visitor A moved the car from the pump.

In the above excerpt, the customer displays uncertainty over whether or not she should have moved the car before entering the store. She states that she got confused as she got back in the car and started to move it. The staff informed the customer that it would be better to leave the car by the pump until the petrol was paid for.

There are two reasons why the staff did not like her initiative of moving the car from the pump. These reasons are not made explicit in the conversation, the member of staff only hints that it would be better for him if she did not move the car. However, these two reasons were repeatedly referred to by staff and even customers throughout the fieldwork. First, refuelling involves more than just filling the petrol tank with fuel; you have to pay for it too. Paying for fuel is highly mundane. Carsons refuel and afterwards staff enforce payment while ensuring that carsons pay for the amount of petrol with which they refuelled.

There are several resources at the store counter that 'format' (Latour & Hermant, 1998) the purchase sequence, the most apparent of which is probably the commodity that the customer-assemblage intends to buy. Placing it on the counter, sometimes with the phrase "*this*" was an utterly mundane and obvious act that could not be misinterpreted.

However, since a commodity such as petrol cannot be manifested physically at the counter, this mundane and ordinary activity becomes more sensitive and uncertain. By suturing the carson (or customer-assemblage) at the counter this tension can be temporarily alleviated. The traces of the refuelling sequence are numbers on a display by the pump (unless someone else had initiated a new refuelling sequence) representing the amount of petrol and the total price for that amount, each pump being labelled with a number (e.g. 1-7) painted in large figures on and beside the pump. At the counter, a list on the computer displays numbers (again representing each pump on the forecourt) and either the volume with which the two last customers filled their vehicles or the total price for filling up. In this situation, the carsons and the staff have to negotiate so that the right amount of petrol purchased is linked to the right customer-assemblage. They have to collaboratively suture the sundered carson. Instead of an object, four different traces acted as resources in this negotiation. These

'indexes' were the total price or volume (that was available for the customer out on the forecourt and for the staff in the list on the computer); the number of the pump (written on the pump and displayed in the list); and the car itself, connecting the refuelling sequence on the forecourt with the purchase sequence in the store.

The relation between the location of the car and the location of the pump is an index of the purchase of petrol. Without this (as when the woman moved her car before entering the store), it is much harder to verify the correct purchase.⁴ See also Figure 2, where another petrol station notifies customers of this procedure by using a sign.

Figure 2: Sign on a pump stating: IMPORTANT Fuel must be paid for before the car is moved and parked

Secondly, moving the car before paying is seen as a possible act of 'drive-off', i.e. when customers refuel and drive away without paying for the fuel. This is a serious problem for the petrol retailing industry.

Nevertheless, the actions of the woman were not made with any illicit pretence. She moved in an effort to make the pump available for other customers. Her concern was how her car occupying the pump would limit the flow of customers using the pumps. She felt she was in the way of others using the petrol station, even though she was only walking into the store to pay for the fuel. In a situation, as she states, where there was no queue on the forecourt, she thus moved not only in response to other cars present, but also in response to cars that might arrive while she was in the store.

Concern about being in the way of others when entering the store is particularly problematic for those buying groceries subsidiary to refuelling. Instead of moving the car, other tactics can be used to attend to the risk of being in the way. As in the following excerpt, when a woman left the car at the pump after refuelling. As she walked towards the store, she picked up her mobile phone to talk. When she arrived at the store, she came into eye contact with one of the staff members.

- 1 **Visitor B:** I'm just going to have a quick look round the shop, is that okay?
- 2 **Staff:** Sure.
- 3 **Visitor B:** I've filled up outside.

Conversation between staff and Visitor B, asking permission to walk around the store.

The woman refuelled and entered the store. Inside, she walked around to buy groceries. However, she was tense and wanted confirmation from the staff that it was alright for her to buy groceries before paying the petrol. She therefore informed the staff that it was her car by the pump. She involved the staff, informing them of her purpose but also engaging staff in the collaborative act of doing-being-sensible-if-the-car-is-in-the-way.

Others try to keep an overview of the situation on the forecourt themselves while they are choosing groceries. They walk back and forth in the store, continuously checking the flow of cars on the forecourt to see if they are in the way. On several occasions customers approached the counter to pay for fuel before continuing in the store to buy groceries or carry out other tasks. Thus, they finished the 'petrol purchase sequence' and the car by the pump was no longer needed as an index. Nevertheless, they seldom walked out and moved the car before choosing and paying for groceries. By maintaining an overview of the

forecourt, customers can continue buying groceries as long as no queues are forming on the forecourt.

The coordination between various requests and intentions among customers becomes particularly complex as they try to be two in two places at once, making sure that they are not in the way. Some, such as Visitor A, who overcompensated their efforts of trying not to be in the way faced the problem of making the payment of fuel more complicated. Others, such as Visitor B, were concerned that they might have been undercompensating the risk of being in the way by purchasing groceries when the car was parked by a pump. Thus, they shared the petrol station by acting as they found appropriate for the situation, but also by negotiating with others, trying to find out whether their activities were perceived as appropriate.

Furthermore, these examples describe how customers act as co(a)gents – alternating between being kept together and broken apart. The carson and mophonker (or whatever we should call the mobile-phone-talker as) are probably the two most obvious examples of contemporary assemblages, continuously acting and interacting on the road and at other sites of mobility. The petrol station has always been visited by carsons. Interestingly, these carsons retained their cogency, even when they were apart, such as when the person walked into the store to purchase groceries while the car was left outside on the forecourt. The assemblages are not instantaneously dissolved; they also remain in situation even when the parts of the carson are divided (Michael, 2000:117-139, looking at the human-dog-leash-dog, see also Laurier et al., 2006). Hence, looking at the performativity of assemblages forces us to:

“...explore how these are formed (e.g. in their heterogeneous process of everyday life) and formulated (e.g. in lay and professional discourse)... By looking at how

these are, on the one hand, kept together, sutured, and, on the other, broken apart, sundered, we can begin to unravel otherwise hidden or obscure heterogeneous processes that characterize everyday life. In the process, everyday life becomes conceptually a very complex domain: it is made up of the shifting relations between humans, technologies and natures – relations that often settle into ordered flows, but sometimes spin out in little chaotic eddies.”(Michael, 2000:10-11)

Multiple identities – multiple assemblages

Unsurprisingly, people arrive at petrol stations with their mobile phones, which they also use on the forecourt and in the store. Petrol stations are locations where carsons on the move stop temporarily, which enables them to do a variety of things that are not necessarily related to road use. For example, we could see the effect of mobile phone use at the petrol station. For instance, a driver with a coach refuelled and left the station without paying – i.e. the criminal ‘drive-off’ that the staff worried about. A member of staff ran out onto the forecourt to stop him. But it was too late; the coach was already on the main road. However, the coach was decorated with large stickers with contact information and the staff member eventually got in touch with the driver by phone. Half an hour later the coach driver returned to the store, giving the excuse that: *‘I got a phone call while I was filling up so I just got into the coach and took off...’*

This example shows that while the coach driver was refuelling, his attention was diverted by the mobile phone conversation, and he therefore unintentionally left without paying for the petrol – a mophonker and carson (or even coachson) at the same time. The diver managed to refuel and talk on the phone, but not to conduct the multiple activities of entering the store

and paying while using the phone. Mobile technologies increase the complexity of engaging in the activities of a place.

With regard to mobile phones, co-located carsons show 'civil inattention' towards those using mobiles and the users actively avoid being in the way. For instance, a person that had a lengthy conversation in the store walked to a secluded area behind the shelves when a topic was initiated in the conversation. He then returned to a more visible area when the topic seemed to be finished. This more visible part of the petrol station also provided an overview of the forecourt and the vehicles on it. When a new conversational topic was initiated, the person once more moved behind the shelves. The movement during the conversation could be interpreted as an effort by the mobile phone user to avoid being in the way and to choose a less visible part of the store in which to talk. This limited the impact on those that were co-present as he tried to minimise the impact of the 'indiscrete technology' that he was using. This activity confirms and supports the findings about how people handle mobile phone use in public places (see Brown et al., 2001). Both users and those that are co-present at usage attend to the situation.

The petrol station as a multifaceted retail site

First, the study of the petrol station reveals that the cohorts' accomplishments are not only semiotic and material – they are also spatial, using the layout of the forecourt to achieve order in which negotiation – such as calculation – takes place. The strength (and weakness) of petrol stations depends on their similarities and differences in relation to other sites of commerce. While balancing between fixed and mobile, they also balance between (spatial) limitation and availability (of different goods).

Second, the petrol station is inhabited by consumer-assemblages, but it is also in itself a retail-assemblage of humans and non-humans (temporarily) sutured and sundered. For example, the reverse sequentiality of buying petrol (refuelling before you pay), together with the present absence of petrol at the counter reveal some of the negotiations, repairs and suturing of the staff-counter-computer-pump-calculator-assemblage necessary to make the goods calculable (Callon & Muniesa, 2005) so that the seller and the buyer collaboratively can accomplish calculation and transaction.

Third, what I find particularly fascinating about Michael's perspective on co(a)gency is the commitment to studying these assemblages in mundane everyday settings rather than advanced exotic technological novelties. Here the theories are novel but the setting is mundane. In part, this is a consequence of the bold statement that assemblages of humans and non-humans are always necessarily present in all human encounters. They are as persistent as the ethnomethods that ethnomethodologists study.

These assemblages take part in the practises of shopping – they are consumers as well as customers. Sometimes this assemblage becomes a tension in itself, making a purchase sequence more complicated; at other times the co(a)gency between, e.g. customer and credit card, can speed up the processes (however, this assemblage is not always as smooth as it could be; see Normark, 2006a). Further studies of the customer-assemblage are therefore needed.

Finally, consumption and mobility are enmeshed with pairs of composite things and orderly city-situated users: revolving-doors-door-passers, trolley-trolley-movers, traffic-signs-pedestrian-passers-by, plastic-bag-container-walkers, shop-chart-goods-customers, mobile-phones-conversationalists, human-dog-leash-dogs, car-persons, escalators-passengers etc.

These human/non-human assemblages challenge our traditional notion of agency by shifting the focus from *either* humans *or* non-humans to a hybrid state of co(a)gency. However, we have only just begun studying these assemblages and sites where multiple identities overlap and the petrol station remains an underinvestigated nexus of mobility.

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Figures



Figure 1: A banner stating that the petrol station is also a pharmacy.



Figure 2: Sign on a pump stating: IMPORTANT Fuel must be paid for before the car is moved and parked.

¹ What Callon & Law (1995) referred to as hybrid collectifs and Cochoy (2008) describes as a cluster.

² Cf. Crabtree (2000); Laurier et al. (2001), a spatial arrangement, such as a petrol station totem, is primarily constructed for its visibility along the road. Secondly, it is known to 'members' of the place; we know that there is a petrol station wherever we see a totem. Thirdly, it is paired with an interactional competence for the use of the place, for the petrol station totem with the activity of refuelling. But it also mirrors an increasing heterogeneity of the place, with the possibility of buying groceries, fixing the car, drinking coffee, etc.

³ That is, accomplishing a queue. The appearance of queuing is sometimes misinterpreted and customers spend a lot of time collaboratively agreeing on the order of queues. However, since this article, like the forecourt, is limited in space, I will briefly note that customers establish queues in various ways.

⁴ Having different traces of refuelling in the petrol purchase sequence is both a resource and a cause of confusion. More than one index could be used in the event that either the staff or the customer-assemblage become uncertain with regard to a sequence that was presented in the petrol purchase sequence. For example, during the fieldwork a woman approached the counter and said "petrol on four there [pointing with her hand] or err... do I have three, the red one [a red car is parked beside a pump on the forecourt], no? four." The staff member replied "yes, it's four". Here the car strengthened the sequence and became a recourse when the customer was uncertain of the number of the pump.