

Introduction

In a movement, it is not the change of position which interests us, it is the positions themselves, the one the movement has left, the one it will take, the one it would take if it stopped on the way.

—Henri Bergson, *The Creative Mind*

As I am finishing the writing of this book, the coronavirus is spreading around the globe. In order to limit this spread, governments have implemented various restrictive measures. People are asked to stay home and not go to work or school. Travel to certain destinations and public gatherings are now forbidden. Many flights have been grounded. Entire towns and regions have been put in quarantine, and movement in and out these places is banned. Italy is currently subjected to a nationwide restriction on movement, and Switzerland and other countries are moving closer to the same regulations. The spread of this new and unknown virus has affected—and may continue to affect—our daily actions, our sense of the surrounding environment and the way we relate to others, as well as our plans regarding movement. The pandemic crisis has certainly had an impact on the way people move, rendering some immobile. It represents an extreme case of an event that (regardless of humans' responsibility) is happening to us, an event that is “a new becoming that was not there in advance” (Stenner 2017: 268), with uncertain ramifications. It makes us reflect on the fact that movement is undeniably a crucial aspect of human life, that this movement can still be stopped at any time, and that we may be incapable of changing our everyday and habitual movements. We move daily to reach our place of work or go to the grocery store. We move to go for a walk, meet friends, or go on holiday. We do not only move physically, though. We can imagine distant places, explore multiple directions for life, or project a future elsewhere. We encounter others and can be affected in one way or another by others' movements. We may be confronted with what we become when moving, with new roles and positions that may change over a period of time as we travel, enhance our career, or simply grow old. In our daily life, events

other than the coronavirus—whether long-lasting or transitory, unsettling or entertaining, small-scale or massive—can always happen to us unexpectedly, affect our routine, have an impact on the way we move physically, the way we perceive and move toward others, or the way we gravitate toward future moves. As a result, we can decelerate and interrupt our routine activities, change our life or work plans and experience a new rhythm in our lives, or feel immobile in various life domains or situations. We can come to accept or refuse change or the fact that others move toward or away from us; we can imagine or wait for our (or others’) next moves.

This book is about these spatial, symbolic,¹ and temporal moves along places, meanings, and times, or between positions, “the one the movement has left, the one it will take, the one it would take if it stopped on the way” (Bergson 2007: 168). It is about “the change of position” and related state of *betwixt and between* that might occur on the occasion of these moves (which will later be conceptualized as *liminality*), and about the encounters that this state gives rise to. The image of *betwixt and between* is a powerful one. Victor Turner perfectly defines this state and calls it the *liminal period*: “The liminal period is that time and space betwixt and between one context of meaning and action and another” (Turner 2001: 113). It is when a person, meaning, event, or place is *neither-this-nor-that*.

The book draws upon ethnographic explorations of different individual or community experiences of mobility. I explore the itinerancy of a group of monkey-training performers in Japan, who travel across the country, take spectators on the street by surprise, and ask them to stop their daily activities in order to participate in the show. I also explore the writings of adolescents at school who, during a “normal” school day are surprised by researchers in their classroom and write about the impact of migration on Italy and their lives. Finally, I describe the relocation to Switzerland of men following their partners on overseas work assignments and the ruptures to their working life and daily rhythms. These experiences are unique and very different from each other. Yet, despite their diversity, they present something in common. In all three there is a movement occurring at the spatial level, but also an act of moving at the symbolic and temporal levels. In all three, the events affecting people’s daily course of life are represented by one or the other (performers’, researchers’, migrants’, or family’s) spatial movement.

Spatial movement can mean different things for different people at different times. It can be a valuable experience for both those who move and those who do not move, but “not all movements are equally meaningful and life-shaping” (Salazar 2014a: 60). Not all can move for the same reason, in the same way, under the same conditions, and at the same velocity. Not all spatial movements automatically imply mobility (Kaufmann 2002).

When it comes to being infused with meanings intertwined with social norms, power, and imaginaries, and with change, movement stops being merely physical motion and becomes what in the social sciences is known as *mobility*. Mobility is an actual or potential act of physical movement that is profoundly and ambivalently entangled with the experience, aspiration, or refusal of change, and with a person's biography and life world. As a brute fact, mobility can be simply measured as "a thing in the world, an empirical reality" (Cresswell 2006: 3). The routes through which one moves, but also the velocity, rhythm, and spatial scale at which one moves, all define mobility as a physical movement. Then, there are imaginaries and representations of what mobility means in sociocultural contexts (e.g. freedom, creativity, transgression, or threat). As a social construct and practice, mobility is influenced by social norms and its embeddedness within specific sociocultural and political contexts (Vannini 2009). Finally, and most importantly for this book, mobility is experienced, practiced, signified, and embodied by the people themselves: "The way we walk, for instance, says much about us. We may be in love, we may be happy, we may be burdened and sad. We inhabit mobility differently according to our mood. Human mobility is an irreducibly embodied experience" (Cresswell 2006: 3–4).

Mobility, as a human experience, is made of an infinite number of components, which pertain to self-ascribed and attributed meanings, imaginaries, norms, experiences, and practices of movement (Frello 2008; Salazar and Smart 2011; Cresswell 2006). These components can hinder or enable the whole experience of mobility. I can be physically stopped by others or by external causes, or resist the idea of moving for the sense I attach to it (as I am afraid of flying), or find migrating to another country or commuting every day an impediment to my life project. I can block or accept the idea of another person moving, either as a barrier or a resource to my personal life progress. The embodied practice of mobility can range from being an exciting experience of freedom to being a dangerous or boring act. Mobility is also composed of various tempos, velocities, and intensities, and it is temporally oriented. As we move, we may stop or be stopped, we may slow down, wait, or resist our movement or the movement of others. Our travel speed can be reduced the very moment we are stopped at the frontier to show our passport, when our train is delayed, or when we wait for the airplane to take off. We can be physically stuck in border zones for a period of time, or we may experience a rupturing event on the occasion of a relocation that alters the routine of daily life. When we travel, we can go back to the past through memory or be oriented to a possible future through imagination (Salazar 2011b; Cangià and Zittoun 2020). Mobility, including all these and other forms of spatial, symbolic, or temporal displacement and blockage, is hence inextricably linked to the way individuals navigate

places, meanings, and times. It is linked to the way individuals engage with the environment and experience change.

Insofar as the experience of mobility is ambivalently entangled with an actual or potential change from one state to another, how can we explore this change? I propose to explore the change related to the human experience of mobility through the lens of liminality. The concept of liminality has recently acquired an increasing interest across many disciplines in the social sciences, ranging from anthropology to marketing. In its general sense, liminality refers to the experience of being in an in-between position, of transiting between states, stages, and forms, an experience where the boundaries of inside and outside, before and after, here and there are blurred and can coexist. Thomassen and other scholars (Horvath, Thomassen, and Wydra 2015; Thomassen 2014) proposed to view liminality as a prism for understanding the multiple and ambivalent transformations characterizing our contemporary world:

Liminality became established at the core of the modern project. Play, comedy, gambling, sexuality, entertainment, violence—in short, all the most evident aspects of liminality linked to human experience—took central stage within cultural, political and economic modernity. Simultaneously, at the level of thought, the human sentiments of fear, anxiety, skepticism and doubt (quintessential liminal sentiments) were established as anthropological foundations. (Thomassen 2014: 14)

The experience of liminality certainly acquires a new centrality in our times, where events such as global pandemics, global security politics (e.g. the Global War on Terror), climate change, the “24-hours-a-day” economy, and the increasing digitalization and Uberization of the world of work now blur spatial and temporal boundaries, create unprecedented existential uncertainty and social and economic insecurity, and have an impact on human mobility.

The concept of liminality represents a vantage point to understand the potentialities of the human experience of mobility and its interplay with immobility (Khan 2016). While humans can remain trapped in an in-between position between destinations, meanings, and times, this entrapment is all but a static condition. Despite the ambivalent and indefinite character of this state, within which future developments are mostly unknown, this condition can generate a terrain for possible transformations. The person, far from being completely immobile, continues moving across the multiple possible and yet uncertain paths that life might take. It is in this experience of immobility that the terrain for change and becoming can develop: “Within ... immobility, things are not still at all” (Cocker 2010: 4). In this sense, liminality is not only about an in-between position but also about a potential

becoming (Stenner 2017; Thomassen 2014), prompted by the potentialities and transformative qualities inherent to transitional moments, “when the past is momentarily negated, suspended, or abrogated, and the future has not yet begun, an instant of pure potentiality when everything, as it were, trembles in the balance” (Turner 2001: 44).

I think about street performances, writings, and waiting for work in terms of liminalities in a double sense. First, these experiences represent transitional passages to new symbolic forms, on the occasion of an event that creates a condition of *liminal affectivity*, an affective “condition of potentiality for being affected and affecting events” (Kofoed and Stenner 2017: 170). In these passages, a state of suspension and ambivalence between identities, meanings, places, and times emerges. Second, performances, writings, and waiting can work as liberating and channeling forces to bring about the unexpected transformative power of people’s creativity, desire, feelings, and imagination.

The Book

A large piece of research, drawing upon the work of Victor Turner on pilgrimage, has already attempted to explore the relationship of mobility and liminality. Anthropologists and cultural psychologists alike have examined how pilgrimage, tourism, and migration (as examples of mobility) in particular become occasions for symbolic transformation for individuals, who, by distancing from everyday settings and lives, can go through a liminal experience and then continue or come back by reconstructing, in the new context, a habitual environment with a changed status and state (Turner and Turner 1995; Hage 2009a; Salazar 2011b; Salazar and Graburn 2014; Graburn 1977; Gillespie 2007b, 2006). Other scholars have primarily explored how certain places of travel become liminal for the very fact of being marginal, dangerous, or transitory (Augé 2009; Andrews and Roberts 2012). While shedding light on the important interrelationship between travel and liminality, this research has mostly maintained a separation between spatial, symbolic, and temporal levels. The present book extends the analytical lens provided by this past research in various ways. Firstly, I combine the analysis of the spatial dimension with the analysis of the temporal and symbolic dimensions characterizing mobility. Secondly, I underline the interplay of mobility and immobility and see how liminality enters in between the two. I aim to explore how the spatial, symbolic, and temporal dimensions intertwine, and how liminality occurs at these multiple levels. Empirical cases here are not only liminal spaces but also and most importantly those in-between meanings and times across which individuals navigate when they

experience various forms of movement and stasis. In this sense, I aim to overcome the analytical separation between different forms of (im)mobility (Kaufmann 2002): spatial mobility is entangled with a multiplicity of (im)mobilities, including professional, social, semantic, and existential. I will give special attention not only to the realized forms of mobility but also to the potential character of mobility. When usual and meaningful patterns of movement are disrupted, or one experiences stasis, people can use the force of imagination and creativity to move toward, come to accept, or even transform personal or others' identity and change; to picture a life elsewhere; or to go back to the past (Cangia and Zittoun 2020). An approach that takes into account not only the realized forms of mobility but also the potential and aspirational character of mobility (in a word *motility*) can provide support in exploring those situations where mobility can occur at some levels (e.g. spatial, symbolic) yet remains merely a potentiality or is impossible to attain at others (e.g. professional, spatial, existential).

This book is inspired by an ethnographic methodological and multi-method approach. It includes various qualitative methods, such as participant observation, diaries and writings, and person-centered, biographical, and reflexive interviews.² The structure of the book is divided into four main chapters and a conclusion. Chapter 1 presents the theoretical framework and proposes conceptual integration in mobility and liminality studies. Firstly, I will present the concept of mobility and the “mobility turn” in the social sciences. Then, I will introduce my understanding of mobility and the various dimensions that are relevant for the sake of this study. I will hence describe mobility in relation to immobility. I suggest exploring the dynamic between mobility and immobility by considering the role that spatiality plays, but also the temporal and symbolic dimensions in the context of mobility. I will elaborate on the importance of considering the semantic encounter with alterity in the study of mobility. I will then discuss how mobility and immobility connect with the concept of liminality, and what liminality means in relation to the experience of (im)mobility. The chapter continues by examining recent theoretical transdisciplinary approaches to liminality in contemporary times and proposes using the concept of *liminal hotspot* as the analyzer for the study of the interplay between mobility and immobility. I will briefly introduce the migration of refugees in order to define the condition of liminal hotspot.

Chapter 2 will draw upon ethnographic research conducted in Japan with a group of monkey performers known as the Monkey Dance Company. I explore the mobile practices of the group's itinerant street monkey training (the so-called *jōgeyuki* practice of traveling around the country) within the context of the discrimination against the Buraku minority people in Japan, also known as the “Buraku-min” (literally “hamlet people”). The physical traveling across the country to perform the traditional practice of monkey

training to a larger audience represents a way of counteracting social immobility for the Buraku people. The street and the street performance, more specifically, represent an embodied and yet symbolic liminal space between identities, where boundaries between the “Burakumin” and the “Japanese” are blurred, and the Buraku cultural identity is reclaimed by partly transforming it into “Japanese national culture.” This chapter will also illustrate how the performance simultaneously becomes the depiction of past and future by revisiting tradition and, at the same time, shedding new light on the Buraku issue for future generations.

Chapter 3 will present my study conducted among adolescents in a high school in the suburbs of Rome in Italy. I will discuss adolescent writings about their feelings and opinions concerning migration. I consider the encounter with alterity and others’ movement as part and parcel of the whole human experience of mobility. I present some of the ways in which adolescents move between different, and at times conflicting, affective states and meanings when talking about migration. These adolescents can move around the image of the “migrant” in different ways, by blocking any engagement with alterity, opening up to migrants’ positions and motivations, or finally reinterpreting the very meaning of movement altogether. I will also explore how adolescents can remain in a liminal affective and semantic space between self and other, between migrant and nonmigrant, between meanings and feelings. The movement—or blockage—toward the migrant revolves around the imagination of, and feelings regarding, the future, be it in the form of fear, anticipation, desire, hope, or uncertainty, through which these pupils can empathize with or erect barriers to the migrants and their motivations for migrating.

Chapter 4 explores the experiences of migration of men who moved with the family for the assignment of the working partner, quit their job for the move, and relocated temporarily to Western Switzerland. I will describe the experiences of waiting for another job and the rupture and transitions in working life for these men, as well as their ambivalent understanding of work, family, and masculinity. The way these men decide to move with their families, understand the flow of their working lives, and make sense of family life with regard to the move can be affected by social and cultural norms and expectations around being a man and an accompanying partner rather than a breadwinner. Their work transitions are characterized by a condition of temporal immobility. By transiting from a professional work situation to another that is not yet in place and remains uncertain, such individuals may experience a condition of being betwixt and between identities, places, and times in their life trajectory. They find themselves face to face with unemployment, along with a new role in the family and rhythm of life within which they may feel suspended as they wait for a new job to come.

In the conclusion of this book, I summarize some of the observations made in the other chapters, the major aspects characterizing the interplay of mobility and immobility, and how a focus on liminality can assist in better understanding this interplay and the increasing uncertainty that characterizes our contemporary times. I briefly define the idea of change as it is experienced in the three empirical cases.

Moving along “Unconventional” Routes

This book is a journey along what I would call “unconventional routes.” These routes include phenomena and methodological perspectives that have received less attention from or that only recently started gaining interest across the social sciences, and that have proved at times to be “unconventional” or even “uncomfortable” in a way for me as a researcher in the field. For one thing, the phenomena under exploration represent alternative and marginal ways of practicing mobility (Vannini 2009). They include situations where mobility produces immobility and vice versa, where those who do not move spatially reflect on the spatial movement of others, and finally where those who are usually viewed as “hypermobile” and “privileged” people are immobilized by the impact and imperatives of mobility.

I choose to talk about the three phenomena presented above for two main reasons. The first reason is mostly personal, as the combination of these case studies contribute to marking the trajectory of my (im)mobile work and life journeys during the last decade. The other reason is more theoretical, as these case studies are suggestive of an important point I would like to make in this book: that mobility is a multidimensional experience involving moves and blockages at the social, spatial, symbolic, and temporal level simultaneously. These phenomena are representative of the possible zones of in-betweenness created by the experience of mobility, where people move and remain suspended between places, meanings, and times. Immobility, in these case studies, relates to forms of deceleration in daily moves, semantic barriers in the understanding of others’ motivations, and social and professional ruptures and a related sense of stuckness and waiting in life. Immobility is an integral and crucial part, and not merely the opposite, of any experience of mobility. The phenomena under exploration illustrate some of the multiple movements at stake when we talk about mobility: movements at the spatial level, in the form of physical traveling, encountering others who move; at the symbolic level, in the transformation of the sense attached to places, identities, and experiences; at the temporal level, in the act of revisiting the past to remake sense of the present, making sense of the present in view of an unknown and imagined future.

The experiences herein illustrated are composed of various timings and rhythms marking physical movements, and bring about the complex interplay between spatial, social, professional, and existential (im)mobilities. They are representative of the complex and ambivalent interplay between mobility and immobility: itinerant performers stop along the path of their travel and ask spectators to interrupt their daily activities to attend the performance; adolescents at school, merely viewed as “stayers” talking about the migration of someone else, can resist others’ movement and erect barriers that inhibit any form of engagement with the Other; male accompanying partners experience an alteration of their working life and a deceleration of their everyday rhythm as a result of their multiple overseas relocations, and wait for a new work opportunity to come.

These phenomena also represent three interesting manifestations of liminality. The mobile performance of itinerant monkey trainers resembles what Turner has called a “ritual of reversal,” a “pseudo-liminal” event that “exposes, attacks, or derides what it considers to be vices, follies, stupidities, or abuses, but its criterion of judgment is usually the normative structural frame of officially promulgated values” (Turner 2001: 40). The writing of the adolescents in the classroom about migration or the arrival of researchers in the school interrupting their daily routine illustrates an example of a staged liminal experience, or in Stenner’s words (Stenner 2017), a “fabulated” and “devised” liminal event, that is, a performative event artfully crafted by the researchers for provoking a transformation. Our research intervention in the classroom represents a form of *liminal affective technology* (Stenner and Moreno-Gabriel 2013), crafted into the *dispositif* of the school to provoke an affective change in the act of writing for adolescents. Finally, the experience of migration and the various implications of relocating to a new context (including the implications on one’s working life) can trigger an unstaged—and in a way unpredictable—liminal experience, where individuals find themselves involved in a passage from a place, state, status, or condition toward one that might be unknown and uncertain. All three cases represent good examples for exploring the semantic character of a liminal hotspot revolving around sociocultural and gendered identities (the Burakumin, the migrant, and the male accompanying partner) and around the whole experience of mobility (itinerancy, and vicarious and personal experiences of migration). I now explore the contexts of street performances, writings, and waiting, respectively, and describe how specifically the study of performances, “nonmigrants,” and “privileged migrants,” respectively, are important for the whole study of mobility. I will briefly introduce the case studies and my own fieldwork, the methods and the multiple positionalities, travels, and (im)mobilities of the researcher in the field.

Street Performances: (Im)mobility Producing (Im)mobility

The first case is the monkey-training performance of the Monkey Dance Company in Japan. The monkey-training performance is considered one of the traditional occupations of the Buraku, a people commonly described as the descendants of premodern-era outcasts, who were engaged in special jobs historically considered as impure (e.g. leather industry, meat packing, street entertainment, drum making), and were compelled to live in separate areas. A variety of Buraku activists and communities now engage in initiatives surrounding the idea of “Buraku culture.” These initiatives are local re-elaborations of national policies, grassroots and individual activities of cultural promotion, and local implementation of human rights education, which at times may extend to central institutions. Partly with the support of governmental, municipal, or self-governing bodies, partly independently, these initiatives adopt and revisit national measures of community development and cultural promotion, concepts and images relating to “culture” and “tradition” sponsored by nationalism since the 1960s, as well as human rights education programs. Despite their heterogeneity, most of these initiatives provide for new readings and a “trans-cultural” language for the Buraku by being simultaneously grounded in very diverse principles (e.g. everyday life, skills, industries, hometown, and human rights) (Cangia 2013c; 2012; 2013a; 2013b).

Between 2007 and 2009, I conducted ethnographic research across the urban communities and leather towns of Kinogawa (Tokyo) and Naniwa (Osaka), as well as across various monkey performance sites throughout the country together with the performers. I paid particular attention to specific social contexts in which the Buraku are represented, namely Archives Kinogawa—the Museum of Education and Leather Industry, the monkey performance of the Monkey Dance Company, the Road of Human Rights and Taiko, the Museum of Human Rights “Liberty Osaka,” and a group of drum performers known as Ikari. During my fieldwork, I linked up with key relevant persons and members of various organizations, visited museums and other exhibition halls, and conversed and shared opinions with a number of individuals. I have conducted participant observation during performances and community events, informal interviews, and conversations with teaching staff, museum personnel, children, residents of districts, supporters of the Buraku Liberation League, performers, and spectators and other individuals navigating in these social fields. A significant portion of the data collected included documentation displayed in the museums (labels, diaries, poems, and artifacts), performances, and rehearsals, as well as other visual material (photographs, videos, documentaries, and blogs). During the time spent with the performers, I traveled across the country from the

Yamaguchi Prefecture to Hokkaido Island. I followed the performers during their everyday life, rehearsals, and performances, and I accompanied one of the trainers during his walks with the monkey around his house. Monkey performers use mobility in the form of traveling across the country to counteract the social immobility of the Buraku people and spread Buraku art in terms of “Japanese tradition.” At the same time, immobility during their performance, in the form of deceleration in the everyday life of the spectators (who are invited to stop their activities and join the performance), is crucial for creating collaborative participation and hence the success of the show.

Performances, apart from a small exception (Vannini 2011; Cocker 2010; Fleishman 2014), have received limited attention in the context of mobility studies. However, and I am borrowing Vannini’s words here, “performance—like travel—is flow: it is the route from mooring to mooring, and it is mooring on the move. Even before being a symbolic phenomenon, performance is a kinesthetic event” (Vannini 2011: 245), relating to a person’s bodily movements. Performances are interesting contexts for studying mobility, as they are constituted of a specific structure and timing that goes along with actions of movement, including the action of gathering, the performance itself, and finally the dispersing and moving-on of spectators and people after the show (Schechner 2003): “To perform is to transition from gathering to dispersing, and therefore to move about, to go from a here to a there and back, or even from a then to a now, or from a now to a then and back again” (Vannini 2011: 245).

These movements around the performance site are emblematic of a liminal affectivity created with the event of performing in the street and taking people by surprise in their daily life. Performances provide for a vantage point to explore the bodily dimension of mobility, the way the body functions as one of the major channels for feeling and experiencing movement (Fleishman 2014). However, performances also represent an interesting context for understanding the symbolic and temporal dimensions of mobility, the way people construct meanings about identities and mobilities through materiality, images, movement, representations, and relations. Performances, like in the case of the Monkey Dance Company in this book, become an important vehicle to mobilize and reclaim the social value of public space through mobility and immobility, and by extension to revisit cultural and social identities (Jephta 2014).

Writings: Traveling without Moving

The second case under exploration relates to adolescent writings about migration in Italy. My colleague and I visited these adolescents in their classrooms in spring 2013, in a high school located in Centocelle in the eastern

part of Rome, an area inhabited by a large number of immigrants (Cangià and Pagani 2014a; 2014b). We asked pupils to write about their opinions and feelings concerning the fact that an increasing number of people from different cultural backgrounds live in Italy. The topic was mostly interpreted in terms of migration to Italy, but also at times in terms of migration from Italy toward other destinations and at other periods in history. Pupils were asked to indicate their gender only and were not requested to specify whether they were immigrant or Italian. Some adolescents explicitly stated they were Italian, immigrant, or had parents of mixed nationalities. Sometimes, when no explicit mention was made, it was possible to infer from the text whether the pupil was Italian or not. My interest here is in how adolescents who did not experience an international migration but were born and raised in Italy (not necessarily in the same town, though, and not necessarily from a family of Italian citizens) make sense of migration in their writings.

Empirically, these writings provide firsthand insights into people's constantly shifting thoughts and on the emotional resonance of the issue of migration. In this regard, a recent *postmigration* approach proposed to demigrantize migration research (Dahinden 2016), to challenge the ethnicity-centered epistemology that has long informed migration studies, and to reorient the focus of investigation away from migrant people toward the whole (also nonmigrant) population (Schewel 2019; Hjälms 2014; Jonsson 2014). Previous research has explored everyday life in multicultural neighborhoods (Baumann 1996), while other research has focused attention on different institutional contexts (e.g. school or immigration administrative offices) (Duemmler, Moret, and Dahinden 2010; Cangià and Pagani 2014a; Graham 2002) in order to explore how individuals construct categories of difference and similarity in their everyday life. These approaches demonstrate how the logic of the nation-state and a "mobility bias" have long informed social scientific research using categories such as "nation," "ethnicity," and now "migrant" and "mobile" people as "naturally given" and self-evident. A reorientation of the unit of analysis from migrants and mobile people to the whole population supports in overcoming the dichotomy between migrant/mobile and nonmigrant/immobile people, while at the same time maintaining mobility as significant experiences for various people. A reorientation of the unit of analysis in this sense can also involve rethinking the sites of movement as sites of exploration when thinking about mobility experience (Jensen 2009). Mobility does not merely occur *across* spaces but most importantly *along* places, meaning, and times, in those spaces of encounter, like, in this case, in the writing, but also in the classroom. So here the focus is not merely on nonmigrant adolescents, but on the writing itself, and more largely on the classroom with its own rules

and roles. I propose considering the writing as a context where a form of movement occurs at the semantic and affective level, “an itinerant, progressive, and regulated practice—a ‘walk’” (Certeau 2011: 135).

The writing involves a variety of meanings and feelings, in particular when young people show that they are affected by the issue, when they criticize, demonstrate empathy for, or identify with the migrants by making sense of their personal and vicarious experiences. I agree with Vergunst and Ingold when they state that thinking and feeling (an integral part of the act of writing) are themselves to be considered a way of walking, and hence movement:

To think and feel is not to set up a relation of external contact or correspondence between subjective states of mind and objectively given conditions of the material world, but rather to make one’s way through a world-in-formation, in a movement that is both rhythmically resonant with the movements of others around us—whose journeys we share or whose paths we cross—and open-ended, having neither a point of origin nor any final destination. (Vergunst and Ingold 2008: 2)

This resonates with what in sociocultural psychology has been conceptualized as semantic movements (described in chapter 1), as those movements occurring in the semantic world when a person moves along various social, temporal, and imagined geographic positions at the level of meaning and representations (Gillespie, Kadianaki, and O’Sullivan-Lago 2012).

Waiting: The Immobilities of Mobile People

The third phenomenon under exploration is the experience of male partners of transnationally mobile professionals. The mobility of professionals and their families represents an important component of current migration flows. This form of mobility commonly refers to the cross-border migration of professionals, including, among others, corporate managers, diplomats, employees at international and humanitarian organizations, business specialists, and academics. This population is often easily associated with the image of “privileged” and “economically wanted” people (Cangià and Zittoun 2018; Hercog and Sandoz 2018). And yet, these migrants have become more numerous and diverse with regard to gender, ethnicity, education, nationality, legal status, and migration trajectory, as a result, among other things, of the expansion of international assignments, and of the diffuse perception—especially in certain professional sectors—of mobility as necessary for career progress (Smith and Favell 2006; Meier 2014). The study of these professionals and their families’ everyday experiences poses important questions about the meaning of global mobility and the

“freedom” of movement for these allegedly privileged travelers (Favell 2008; Cangìà 2018; 2019). Their mobility is often all but a smooth experience. Apparently less subject to the structural and practical constraints of other forms of cross-border migration, and at times benefiting from more economic capacities and financial assistance than other categories of migrants, these mobile professionals can experience an unprecedented sense of “subjective insecurity” (Bourdieu 1999) and perceived risk of job loss, due to employment and job flexibility, to increased fixed-term contracts (Doogan 2015), and to the constant change of work destination (Cangìà 2018). These migrants can face various challenges in the context of their international multiple relocations, with several implications on family life (Coles and Fechter 2012; Cangìà, Levitan, and Zittoun 2018; Cangìà, Zittoun, and Levitan 2019; Ryan 2008; Ryan and Mulholland 2014; Suter and Cangìà 2020b), and with resulting forms of gender and social inequalities (Schaer, Dahinden, and Toader 2017; Riaño and Baghdadi 2007; Cangìà 2019). Some can encounter barriers in their career development with job search difficulties (Cangìà 2018; Ravasi, Salamin, and Davoine 2013), and some can face underemployment (Ariss and Syed 2011), status loss, and discrimination (Dietz et al. 2015). Often, their educational qualifications are not recognized and are rather devalued in the host country (Zikic, Bonache, and Cerdin 2010). In other cases, some short-term types of permit can create an obstacle in the job-search and application process.

Often these professionals move globally with their families. The precarious and highly mobile character of their work can reflect on their family life and family arrangements, in particular on the partners’ plans and working life. These partners can experience a rupture in their professional trajectory and various challenges with regard to the relocation process. The experience of mobile professionals’ partners represents an important yet under-researched aspect of global capitalism and mobility. A focus on these people will shed light on the unexplored effects of neoliberalism on the subjectivity and interiority of a greater variety of individuals and migrants (Molé 2010).

Between 2016 and 2018, I conducted person-centered, biographic, and reflexive interviews with eight male accompanying partners. I met three of these men again during this period for a second interview. I focused on their subjective experiences and feelings about the experience of migration and their work transitions. I also conducted participant observation at events organized by spousal organizations, in particular on business creation and job search. Interviews were guided by an “ethnographic imaginary” (Forsey 2010) and took a person-centered and reflexive approach (Levy and Hollan 1998; Ewing 2006): the interview becomes “a moment of engagement, a site of participation in the life of the person we meet and talk with” (Hockey and Forsey 2012: 75); it becomes an occasion for reflecting on

the researchers' positions in the field, as well as on the possible power and identity negotiations with the respondents.

As I discuss in chapter 4, these male accompanying partners may feel they are losing the coordinates of their (male and professional) identities on the occasion of the relocation and the rupturing event of becoming a full-time nonworking dad. Yet, they can be driven by the hope and desire for change and by the need to confer new meanings onto their personal career and life trajectories, to their male identities, as well as to the surrounding world.

Moving across Fields

My own personal experience—as a woman, foreigner, migrant, and academic—proved to be an important methodological tool contributing to understanding social phenomena from a reflexive point of view (Ellis 2003), as well as to influencing the conduct of field research, in particular the motivation and the emotional response to the specific topics under exploration. My own positionalities and moves across different roles in the field and with respect to my research work even created a liminal hotspot position for myself, as I was caught in “the paradox of in/exclusion in which one finds oneself simultaneously accepted and rejected, or perhaps included as excluded” (Kofoed and Stenner 2017: 176). In different circumstances during these years, I had to reflect on my own role in the research process, and at times to justify my choice of my research focuses in front of different audiences. In particular, during my research on the Buraku people, one of the most discriminated-against minorities in Japan, I was often confronted with the sensitive issue of how to present myself in public. As a matter of fact, mention of the Burakumin remains an unspoken taboo in public life and conversations. My self-presentation as a researcher in Japan changed every time depending on the situation, ranging from performances, TV documentaries, or generally with any people with whom I was not able to establish a relationship (situations in which I was supposed to introduce myself by saying “I study the Japanese culture”), to more intimate or academic-like situations (in which I was allowed to explicitly say “I am here to study the Buraku issue”). During my time and travels in Japan, I even tried to transform my feeling of “outsideness” into a strategic tool for becoming an “insider.” My own identity as a woman and a stranger became an integral part of the performance, at times by representing an additional attraction for spectators from the point of view of the performers, at others by assisting in the preparation of the performance site and show.

With regard to research with adolescents at school, my being an adult stranger, who might look like a teacher but is not a teacher, makes me reflect on the liminal position of the researcher crafting the very practice

of research for the people involved. Pupils showed various reactions to our presence in their classroom on that morning. After all, we had crossed the “border” of the school, by traversing the door of their classroom and interrupting the flow of a typical school day. Some just expressed indifference. In one essay, someone explicitly referred to the writing exercise as a “fake analytical test.” Some expressed curiosity, and others looked bored about the idea of writing. During one of our conversations, some expressed interest in the work my colleague Camilla Pagani had conducted in the past with children in some elementary schools and asked us to read essays written by these children. We genuinely felt that we had left an imprint on those adolescents by giving them the opportunity to talk about an issue that matters in their lives. Through becoming a reflective space, the classroom, for a brief moment, turns into a “child-controlled” space (Pache-Huber and Spyrou 2012: 294), virtually beyond the institutional walls of the school, where public and private, formal and informal levels meet, and where children’s agency unfolds within the complexity of everyday life.

When I started to collaborate on the project on mobile professionals and their families as part of NCCR—On the Move, our contributions were often either ignored or questioned during conferences or workshops on the grounds that the more the assumed economic and social privilege condition of a migrant (in this case the “expats”), the less the interest for academia. Other times, on the contrary, scholars welcomed our research by feeling part of it: a “finally, someone is doing research on us!” kind of reaction. During the interviews with male accompanying partners, my personal experience proved to be both of assistance and a limiting aspect at the same time. Like my research on the Buraku in Japan, my presumed and shifting “insiderness” and “outsiderness” were based on multiple positionalities, both adopted and ascribed by participants and myself, e.g. gender, parental, and professional status (Ryan 2015). These also played a role in my understanding of and emotional response to people’s stories. At times, I took advantage of my personal experience as a migrant working in a precarious context such as academia and becoming a mother in Switzerland. My personal experience, in this regard, helped me on various occasions to share similar experiences with these men and reflect on the emotional impact of job insecurity in mobility, parenthood, and professional life. It facilitated exchanges on issues of migration, work, and family life. These men, in general, seemed curious about my migratory experience. At the same time, being a woman and actively working created limitations in the way I thought I should formulate questions and discuss the issue of gender with these men. In the attempt to protect both the interviewee and myself from ensuing difficult feelings, I caught myself struggling to ask certain questions at times (Montgomery 2013).

Another important aspect of this book is the combination of a variety of perspectives, from sociocultural anthropology to cultural psychology, sociology, and geography, representing another aspect of my work trajectory that has often made me feel as though I occupy a liminal hotspot between disciplines, and on occasion has created an obstacle for my own disciplinary identification within academia. At the theoretical level, this book is inspired by the anthropological work of Victor Turner on liminality and recent literature on liminality (as described above), including the work of Bjørn Thomassen in anthropology and Paul Stenner in social psychology. I draw upon recent literature (already initiated by Turner himself with his study on pilgrimage) on the relationship between mobility (tourism, pilgrimage, and migration) and liminality. As discussed previously, I follow a critical perspective on mobility, across disciplines including anthropology, sociology, and geography. Firstly, the anthropology of mobility, as theorized by Noel Salazar (Salazar and Smart 2011; Salazar 2018), contributes to a critical debate on the human experience of mobility, in particular by showing how mobility is a complex and contested construct and not merely a spatial phenomenon of physical motion. The theoretical approach on the potential and aspiration to move, as proposed by urban sociologist and mobility scholar Vincent Kaufmann, in turn, offers an interesting analytical lens to study the “not-yet” character of mobility. Finally, readings of “immobility,” and related concepts (e.g. stillness, friction) of scholars across geography and sociology such as Peter Adey, Tim Cresswell, David Bissell, Ole B. Jensen, and Phillip Vannini, as well as the philosophical approach of Henri Bergson on immobility, also inspired this book.

By borrowing meanings and resources from our surroundings, we constantly make sense of what “being mobile” means; we contribute to creating the world around us—whether we can or cannot move—through our thinking, actions, and embodiment in it. Cultural and social inquiry into phenomena like human mobility cannot hence be separated from a psychological attention to mental processes. I combine sociological and anthropological perspectives on mobility and liminality with a cultural psychological approach to the life-course. This approach is interested in exploring change and continuity along the unique lives of individuals moving constantly through a variety of experiences (Valsiner 2007; 2014; Teo 2015; Zittoun 2012; Zittoun et al. 2013). This approach considers the transactions between the person and the societal environment from a dynamic perspective. Like anthropology, it acknowledges that social and cultural conditions provide symbolic, institutional, and material guidance to individuals. However, people and groups engage in a constant work of internalization, appropriation, and (re)positioning. A cultural psychological perspective is interested in ever-changing semiotic dynamics, in

people's ability to organize personal experiences under semiotic forms, and hence in the process of circulation of signs and meanings (or also semantic movements) through which people/groups make sense of self, others, and the surrounding world (Gillespie 2008; 2006; Gillespie, Kadianaki, and O'Sullivan-Lago 2012).

I analyze all the performances and different narratives from writings, diaries, and interviews from a combined ethnographic, interpretative, and dialogical perspective (Aveling, Gillespie, and Cornish 2015; Marková 2006; Irving 2011; Geertz 1977). I take into account the role of contextual aspects (e.g. interactions with others, spectators, partners, teachers, and peers; local social and political climate) and the more subjective processes of sense-making: I consider the dialogical constitution of sociocultural and political climate and the inner dialogues between self-other(s) emerging through explicit and implicit expressions and narratives in the performances, writings, and interviews. I use the unique stories told here as "experiential life-worlds" (Irving 2013) and "dialogical single case studies," where individuals dialogue and negotiate with real or imagined other(s) around meanings, perspectives, and feelings, where "they evaluate their mutual actions, [and where] they interpret their communication and their intentions" (Marková, Zadeh, and Zittoun 2020: 6). I pay special attention to the aspects constituting a mobility experience: the rhythms, features, landscapes, meanings, social encounters, and temporal orientations of a human experience of mobility. Following an ethnographic approach, I consider what events or situations people experience as change when moving or reflecting on movement. This has enabled me to closely examine the diverse ways in which people deal with change, and the alternative meanings that people can create from their experiences.

In addition, I consider the various positions from which people speak. At the same time, I explore how self and other categories emerge in their narratives. The presence of the Other in the narration is always an important aspect. It can take the form of an indirect quote of the opinion or idea of another person, or of a general or imagined Other, or of dominant discourses; or it can consist of a direct quote when the person adopts precisely the words of another person or refers to the "ways of doing" and attitudes of others. These combined analytical and theoretical approaches can contribute to the whole study of mobility and liminality through a special focus on how individuals navigate perspectives on the world and meanings about their and others' experiences of change. This book, again, is about how humans deal with change on the move.

NOTES

1. In the sense of semantic, relating to sense and meaning-making.
2. All three studies comprising this book were sensitive to an informed consent. Informed consent (written or verbal) was ensured and tailored depending on the context. Participants were informed that participation in this study was voluntary and withdrawal from the research could be undertaken at any time, without any consequences. They were also informed that the interviews were audiotaped, transcribed, and fully anonymized. In the case of research with adolescents, school administration approval was required. The rights and welfare of all human subjects involved in the research were fully protected and guaranteed.