

Oral Presentation Session

**Reviewed by:** Society for Urban, National and Transnational/Global Anthropology

**Of interest to:** Practicing and Applied Anthropologists, Teachers of Anthropology in Community Colleges, Students

**Primary Theme:** Technology

**Secondary Theme:** Materiality

## (6-0155) Revisiting Railroads: Sociality, Mobility, and Infrastructure

 11/18/2018  8:00 AM - 9:45 AM  Location: Hilton, Lobby/Street Level, Winchester

Mobility has been a central feature of human adaptation, and the transgression of social and geopolitical boundaries and barriers has often been seen as a form of resistance. Scholars have shown how different technologies and infrastructures of mobility shape particular ways of being in the world (Ingold 2011, Urry 2007, de Certeau 1984). While railroads have been portrayed as a symbol of modernity and its discontents and a technology of empire (Schivelbusch 1987, Bear 2007, Urry 2007, Aguiar 2011), they have largely fallen out of the anthropological research agenda, as evinced by their near-absence in the growing body of anthropological literature on transportation infrastructures. This panel aims to extend the scope of this literature and to revisit approaches to the study of (transportation) infrastructure existing in anthropology and the social sciences. Research on railway mobility and sociality, we argue, is timely. While railroad technology characterized the industrial transformations and nation-building processes in Europe during the 19th century, technological advances of the 21st century, the production of new frontiers by geopolitical and resource extraction interests, and the increased density and sprawl of urban centers have renewed state and corporate interest in railroads. Yet railroads, we propose, produce particular configurations of remoteness and (dis)connection, linking certain places and disavowing others. Their promise of progress, furthermore, is often entangled in complex infrastructural histories and haunted by the specter of failure.

The papers in this panel examine railroads as (post)modern projects engendering new forms of (im)mobility, remoteness and (dis)connection, social engineering, and interactions, involving human and non-human agents. The papers will consider (but are not limited to) the following questions: How have railroads been used to engineer particular configurations of remoteness and dis/connectivity? How do the particular affordances of railroad infrastructure, in specific ethnographic locales, shape (im)mobility? What are some of the entanglements and encounters with human and nonhuman others engendered or enabled by railroads? What is the affective and material life of railroads in contexts of modernization and ruination?

As mobility and transportation continue to be pressing global issues, often exacerbating inequality and demanding creative adaptive responses, we hope to spark the anthropological imagination through an ethnographically-grounded conversation on railroads and their sociomaterial and affective entanglements in different locales.

### Chair(s)

**Peter Schweitzer**

Professor  
University of Vienna

**Presenter(s)****Peter Schweitzer**

Professor  
University of Vienna

**Iwona Kaliszewska**

University of Warsaw

**Adrian Deoanca**

University of Michigan

**Gabriella Körling**

Stockholm University

**Organizer(s)****Olga Povoroznyuk**

Postdoctoral researcher  
Institute for Social and Cultural Anthropology, Vienna University

**Presenter(s)****Olga Povoroznyuk**

Postdoctoral researcher  
Institute for Social and Cultural Anthropology, Vienna University

**Organizer(s)****Stephanie Mc Callum**

University of California, Santa Cruz

**Presenter(s)****Stephanie Mc Callum**

University of California, Santa Cruz

**Discussant(s)****Michael Fisch**

University of Chicago

**Presentations:**

8:00 AM - 8:15 AM

Railroads and the Arctic: Historic and Ethnographic Examples from Russia and Alaska

Peter P. Schweitzer – University of Vienna

8:15 AM - 8:30 AM

How railroads come to matter in the North Caucasus?

Iwona Julia Kaliszewska – University of Warsaw

8:30 AM - 8:45 AM

Railroad Blues: The Politics of Waiting for Infrastructure in Romania

Adrian Deoanca – University of Michigan

8:45 AM - 9:00 AM

The Elusive Railway: Anticipations of Infrastructure Development in Niger

Gabriella Körling – Stockholm University

9:00 AM - 9:15 AM

A (Post)-Socialist Railroad: Experiences and Expectations of Infrastructural Modernization

Olga Povoroznyuk – Institute for Social and Cultural Anthropology, Vienna University

9:15 AM - 9:30 AM

Monster Trains: "Rogue Infrastructure" and Precarious Mobility in Buenos Aires

Stephanie Mc Callum – University of California, Santa Cruz

9:30 AM - 9:45 AM

Discussion

Michael Fisch – University of Chicago