Banking on It

A Material Culture Analysis of Contemporary Private Banking Practices

Joakim Sten

Master of Applied Cultural Analysis

Department of Arts and Cultural Sciences
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Supervisor

Thomas O'Dell

ABSTRACT

Private retail banking is a central aspect of contemporary life in Sweden. By engaging in banking actions and activities, individuals are able to access money, make payments and commercial transactions and aim to organize and control private finances. Through the introduction of banking onto digital platforms, handheld devices and plastic cards, banking has become more flexible, mobile and individual than ever. As a result, private banking becomes increasingly delocalized relative to bank offices as it places much of the activity in the hands of the customer. Banking becomes enveloped in everyday life and ingrained to the point of being taken for granted. Yet, cultural research into the field is rare and banking as everyday activity has been largely overlooked or left to micro-economic research.

This thesis investigates private banking as everyday practice, coming together as a meshwork of embodied skills, places and things. It asks what contemporary Swedish banking practices are and how they may be understood from a cultural analytical vantage point. As its primary perspective, the thesis identifies and acknowledges the salience of material things to private banking practices. Thus, it engages an analysis of the material culture of the things which make and frame these: the authentication device, the credit/debit card and new media technology, specifically the laptop and smartphone. The theoretical foundation rests on the objectification and entanglement of these things and, consequently, what this may be understood as entailing for those who engages in banking practices.

To support this investigation, the analysis draws on ethnographic material gathered during two applied cultural analytical research projects for a niche bank in Lund, Sweden. By composing a cultural analysis of banking practices through the material culture of the things that make and frame it, the thesis ultimately reflects on the benefits of this research for three interlinking yet distinct fields: cultural science, business and activism. In the end, it is suggested that ethnographic research of the material culture of banking practices offers openings for the creation of new knowledge regarding customer behavior, potential action and further research into the relation of individuals and their financial resources.

Keywords: Banking; Material culture; Materiality; Practice; Entanglement; Private finance; Financial practice; Online banking; Credit cards; Authentication

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The reason we make things is that they potentially extend us as people.

      – Daniel Miller, *Stuff* (2010)

It is of the essence of life that it does not begin here or end there, or connect a point of origin with a final destination, but rather that it keeps on going, finding a way through the myriad of things that form, persist and break up in its currents. Life, in short, is a movement of opening, not a closure.

      – Tim Ingold, *Being Alive* (2011)

1. Introduction

Banking every day

I remember when as a kid growing up in Sweden of the early nineteen-nineties, my mother and father would sit down together at the kitchen table around the 25th of every month, when their salaries came in. They would be surrounded by papers, forms, folders, envelopes, pencils and other appliances, the stapler, the calculator, the hole-puncher. And coffee. And they would do small talk while drinking their coffee, doing calculations on the calculator, jotting down numbers, punching holes in the papers before inserting them in their designated folders marked "bank", "loans", "the house", "payslips". They would place the bills and forms in envelopes which they later took to the post box up the street. This process lasted for an hour, usually two. Once they finished, they cleared the table, put the folders in a kitchen cabinet, took the things back to their right places, making them easy to find. Being about ten at that time, it all seemed so complicated to me, almost frightening, all those calculations that had to add up, the papers that had to be organized correctly, the responsibility, all that concentration and know-how that had to be put in to do banking. How did they know what to do? There were so many things that had to come together for everything to work out.[1]

The event described above is private banking using a giro model. Simplified, this was a remote private banking system. Bank customers were issued forms, folders and envelopes with prepaid postage so that bills and transfers could be made from the home through the postal system and bank/giro accounts, instead of having to go to a bank office. Postal giro was widely used in Sweden until it was incorporated into online banking, which started in 1998 and, in 2014, is the ubiquitous banking practice (Swedish Bankers Association, 2012: 13).

Swedish banking practices have changed dramatically since the nineteen-nineties. The increased speed with which customers now access money in their account, through credit or debit cards, online or mobile banking platforms, moves Swedish society and commerce in a trajectory towards a cashless society. Banking has become more flexible, more mobile in relation to time and place. As a result, face-to-face interaction between bank and customer has been largely severed, leading to the relation becoming perceived as increasingly immaterial. The things that litter the narrative above have decreased in number while seemingly gaining in complexity. In this process of change, they stand at its center.

To clarify, this is not a thesis on banking systems. This is a thesis on *private banking practices*, analyzed through the *things* and *material culture* that frame those practices and constitute *what contemporary banking is in Sweden*. The background to this investigation is research from two interconnected applied ethnographic cultural analytic projects for a niche bank[2] in Lund, Sweden; the first on private banking practices and the second on customer relationships to loans and credits. Both projects aimed at supplying insights on customer culture which the client could incorporate and apply to marketing strategies, product development and customer service. During the research two such insights became especially salient. The first was that even if contemporary banking can be perceived as "de-placed", customers created their own private *places of banking*. These places were performed through *practices*. These practices could in turn be understood as an entanglements of *skill, things* and *place* coming together. This should not be misinterpreted as a question of how often or not Swedish customers visit bank offices or talk to bank staff. Instead, it concerns the role banks and banking have come to play in Swedish everyday life. This was the second insight, how banking becomes *ingrained in everyday life*. Swedish customers are no longer in contact with banks only when, for instance, doing monthly payments. Contacts are made daily, through commercial transactions by cards, checking account balances, transferring money and making payments online. Central to both insights were the things that framed these practices.

Frequently used material things are often taken for granted in everyday practices, yet they frame and define the way we live our lives. Through use and complex entanglements they can make us grow and extend our reach, but they may also force us to act in certain ways and require vast, sometimes increasing amounts of resources in order to operate. Things make banking materialize, while simultaneously defining not only how and where such practices are engaged in but also an individual's relationship to the state, society, banks, consumption and money. In Swedish banking such central things can be said to be the *authentication device*, the *credit/debit card* and what may be called *new media technology* (Horst, 2012): primarily laptops, and smartphones. But if this thesis focuses on the material culture of *contemporary* banking, why do I begin with a narrative of my parents entangled in postal giro banking?

The materiality that frames banking in Sweden in the twenty-tens is very different from that of the nineteen-nineties, just as the practices of postal giro was different from the office based banking that preceded it. The introductory narrative serve as my baseline going forward. The postal giro system and the material things that framed it can be seen as the predecessor of the contemporary online banking and supply historical resonance to my analysis. The narrative further captures banking as part of an ordinary, mundane routine. It is

from this perspective that I begin a cultural inquiry of contemporary banking: as everyday practices and the material things that make and frame them.

Aim, research questions and disposition

Running in line with the applied research projects mentioned above, this thesis aims to investigate banking from a cultural analytical position with the explicit intention of creating new knowledge useful to three entangled yet distinct fields: cultural science, banks and activism. The main topic can be summarized with the question: *what are contemporary Swedish banking practices?* This is operationalized by drawing on ethnographic material from the applied research projects to compose an analysis around the material things that make and frame banking, posing the more precise question: *how can contemporary Swedish banking practices be understood through material culture and what does this entail for practices and practitioners?* To support this inquiry, I pose three further research questions:

1. How can banking be understood as a practice of everyday life? How can the entanglement of skill, place and things be understood as making banking practice?

2. What is the material culture of the primary things involved in banking, the authentication device, the debit/credit card and new media technologies (such as laptops and smartphones)? How can these be understood as making and framing banking practices?

3. How can cultural insights on banking practices and material culture be applied in academic, banking and activist contexts?

I will begin by introducing the theoretical attachments of the analysis. I draw on contemporary anthropological and ethnographic theories and methodology, taking as starting point banking as everyday practice. Here I draw inspiration from Sarah Pink's (2012) research on everyday practices and place and Tim Ingold's (2007; 2011) theories on meshwork and movement. To analyze everyday practices through the material culture of the things that make them, I attach to Daniel Miller's (2005; 2010) theories on material culture and objectification and Ian Hodder's (2013) theory of entanglement. Theory is followed by methodology, where I introduce the research background and participants, discuss how the analysis is composed and offer a discussion on field methods, ending with reflexivity on my own situatedness and issues of translation. Afterwards I move on to the analysis by introducing a practice. This is followed by the material culture analysis of the primary things in banking, the authentication

device, the credit/debit card and new media technology respectively. This concludes with a discussion. The results of the analysis will then form a further discussion on application into cultural science, banks and activism.

How, or why, this thesis aims to offer new knowledge for cultural scientific research, banks and activism might not be self-evident. Thus, before traversing any further, the benefits of cultural research into private banking practices will be briefly addressed.

Why banking? – **Grounding the benefits of cultural analytical research**

I should first define what I mean by banking[3]. The correct way to designate this term would be "private retail banking", but for simplicity's sake I will use "banking" throughout. Though *Bank*, or *Banking*, as noun (e.g. a banking system) and transitive verb (e.g. to bank a cheque) can be used to denote a large quantity of things and actions, in this thesis, banking is used to refer to the actions of bank customers using products and services supplied by their banks in everyday life. In this thesis, these actions include checking account balances, transferring money, paying bills, but also card transactions and services where the bank acts as mediator and supplier. This entails that I will not, for instance, focus on what a bank does when doing its own banking, or the role that this type of banking plays in national or international trade and politics. It further entails that I will not focus on loan and credit taking. Though these inquiries are ripe for cultural attention, they are best spared for investigations in themselves. Similarly, since banking is primarily accessed through online sites, these spaces and how they reflect banking practices and experiences are intriguing research topics, but will have to be kept for future inquiry.

By attempting a material culture analysis of banking practices, I hope to open a window of opportunity for new knowledge into three, somewhat opposing, applications. Firstly, the benefit of this inquiry is relevant to cultural studies and disciplines engaged in cultural analysis. An investigation of banking as everyday practice is not only rare, as a subject of cultural research it has been largely ignored. Even though important work has been done in the past decade within cultural economy (e.g. Thrift & Ash, 2004; Löfgren & Willim, 2005), as well ethnographic research into how the culture in Wall Street investment bank offices is implicated in the world financial market (Ho, 2009) and how financial theory materializes for Japanese security traders (Miyazaki, 2005), there seems to be much to do in bringing a cultural analytical perspective to private financial practices. For instance, as will be shown in this thesis, banking mostly takes place in the home. Yet when, for instance,

anthropologist Sarah Pink (2012) in a recent study of everyday life lists recent cultural research of the home, banking is nowhere to be found. Included are analyses of materiality and sensoriality of housework, laundry, home decoration and food practices, radio and residents negotiating with agencies, the state, landlords and previous owners (2012: 68ff). Banking is present only by omission. For a practice so central in defining the conditions of everyday life, why has so little cultural research been devoted to it? It is argued by social scientist Jaqueline Botterill (2010) in her cultural history of discourses surrounding personal finance and consumerism in the United Kingdom that, traditionally, cultural studies has skirted around personal finance in favor of arguments against consumerism and materialism. Though Botterill notes interdisciplinary polemics between cultural studies and economics and a lack of "sex appeal" of personal finance as reasons for this gap (2010: 5-6), for now, it is enough to acknowledge its absence and the need to attend to it.

A second benefit relates to banks. Though connections between bank and customer are more frequent that ever, customers appear generally displeased with the work they perceive banks to be doing and do not seem to acknowledge the intensity of the relationship.[4] Since things and their material culture constitute the primary channels of bank-customer relationships as they are practiced in everyday life, insights into these are important to banks of all sizes, their marketing, product development, innovation and customer service.

Thirdly, in societies such as Sweden, activist approaches to consumption, environment and sustainability are gaining more ground (e.g. Pink, 2012). Understanding how material culture makes and frames banking and how it becomes ingrained the everyday, might prove helpful in inspiring and developing financial practices more suited to such ideals and actions.

2. Theoretical attachments

In the following chapter, the main theoretical attachments will be presented as they relate to the aim and research questions at hand. During the course the thesis, other theoretical perspectives that reflect, resonate or criticize these attachments feature as well.

But first, a disclaimer is in place. During the course of my applied research process (of which this thesis is but one result) the common academical division between *theory* and *method* has become increasingly difficult to sustain. Especially for the applied cultural analyst for whom the results of ethnographic analyses should aim to be useful for a client (O'Dell, 2009), theory and method have a tendency to roll up into one. This creates what corporate

ethnographer Patricia Sunderland (2013: 122) titles a "monstrous hybrid", an academic-slash-practitioner for whom theory and method are always intertwined and inform each other in a circulatory process, making any clear-cut division necessarily artificial (2013: 124). I find this important to mention here as to not lead the reader into believing that my theory and method, as presented below, are separate and divisible. They are part and parcel of the same process and should be understood as such.

Practice and place; meshwork and movement

What are banking practices and how can they be conceptualized in relation to the aims of this thesis? Drawing inspiration from anthropologists Sarah Pink (2009; 2012), I use *practice* in contrast to the common sense term *doing*. Where doing has often been used as a descriptive term to explain the things people "do", practice can be understood in a more theoretical sense as a set of human actions associated with each other and which may form a category for analysis (2012: 15-16). Practice, in Pink's use of the term, should further be understood as an "open analytical concept that stands for human actions that may have multiple potentials" (2012: 19). This is contrasted with Pierre Bourdieu's habituated, normative sense of practice and Michel de Certeau's celebration of everyday doing as tactical resistance to institutionalized strategic doing (2012: 17-18). Finally, it is through ethnographic attention to individual performances of practices (e.g. someone performing online banking) that their richness opens up to cultural analysis (2012: 21). In other words, by keeping practice open to "multiple potentials", investigating banking will not be a case of attempting to find a normative way to bank, or even to highlight forms of resistance towards how banks (strategically) want banking to be practiced, but to see banking practices as offering simultaneous openings and closures, normative as well as resistant. Banking may thus be understood as a set of actions forming practices, which are individual to each practitioner, to their biography, situation and locality. There is no one way of practicing banking, as there is no one single action which is banking. Had there been, the focus of this thesis might have been banking rituals, not practices.

As sets of performed actions, practices also have to take place somewhere and through something. Pink (2012: 23-29), ties practice especially to *place*. Neither practice nor place has primacy over the other, but are understood as co-creative of each other. Place as theoretical construct should not be confused with *location*, which is a physical, geographical and spatial description, while place is something that comes into being in correlation to *practice taking place*. Pink offers the example of kitchens. When failing to supply people with the

possibilities to perform what they identify as important kitchen practices, kitchen may fail to be recognized as real kitchens. Likewise, when kitchens are set up in locations not specifically designed to be kitchens, but which offer these possibilities of practice, these locations may become kitchens (Pink, 2012: 53-56). Such a perspective implies that practice and places are temporal, which offers the possibility for a location to serve as many places depending on the practice that takes place there (what Pink, following geographer Doreen Massey, labels a *place-event* [2012: 25-27]). Thus, a *place of banking* is not necessarily a location where banking is designated or designed (for instance an ATM), but comes into being where and when a practitioner practices. With more flexible and mobile technology such as mobile banking, kitchen tables, coffee houses or train rides may become places of banking.

If practices are understood as situated in place, and places are practiced, how are they made meaningful to practitioners? To explain this, Pink (2009: 34-35; 2012: 25-26) draws on anthropologist Tim Ingold's (2000; 2007; 2011) conceptualization of practice and place as *movements* of life. Ingold uses a metaphor of a spider, spinning its web, entangled lines *along* which the spider acts and perceives. The lines are then seen as relations along which life is lives, not transitions *between* different points (2007: 81; 2011: 85). This is both a literal and figurative movement which forms what Ingold terms a *meshwork* (2007: 84-104; 2011: 63-95). A meshwork (a term borrowed from Henri Lefebvre) can be understood as the entanglement of multiple lines of growth that make up organisms, like vines or roots. Ingold's main argument is that humans, as well as things, are not entangled in relations, but are themselves to be understood as being comprised of entanglements (2011: 87). Consequently, humans (as well as other organisms and things) do not *have* relations, they *are* their relations (2011: 70). Understood as meshworks, practices may be conceptualized as being open to lived experiences, biographical knowledge and skilled ways of knowing, all coming together to make the performance of a practice anything but static, but instead highly dependent on a multitude of entanglements and possibilities.

With such an open concept of practice, it seems difficult indeed to say anything about banking practices without also saying everything. But as I have noted, banking is intimately tied to the material things which make it possible. Through these things, practices are made and consequently framed. How can these things be understood and how it is possible to discuss a material culture of banking practices through them?

Material culture – **Objectification and things**

As mentioned in the introduction, material culture is the driving perspective I use to probe deeper into everyday banking practices. Giving primacy to the things involved in our lives and the relations they create and uphold between themselves, between them and us and, in turn, us and them, opens the materiality of these practices to cultural scrutiny.

Anthropologist Daniel Miller, in his continuous work on *material culture* (e.g. 2005; 2008; 2010; 2012), establishes a perspective that attempts to bring things closer to us (and cultural theory), by taking the point of view of things first, instead of upholding opposition against them (2010: 5). Materiality in this respect is more than a human production of objects, it is reaching for an understanding of how things outside of ourselves make us, just as we make them. The materiality that constantly surrounds us and which we act and react to, informs us who we are, where we come from and how to be and become. This Bourdeau-inspired process of habituation comes to pass through a dialectic process "in which material objects are viewed as an integral and inseparable aspect of all relationships" (Miller, 2008: 286). Far from being an exterior source of oppression which can be reduced to mere functional tools, materiality acts as a driving force in cultural processes and human experience, implying that "much of what makes us what we are exists, not through our consciousness or body, but as exterior environments that habituates and prompts us" (Miller, 2010: 51).

To Miller, the dialectic relation of things and humans is central to his take on material culture and forms a theory of *objectification* (2010: 54-68). Drawing on the Hegel's dialectic, by way of Marx's and Simmel's critique and expansion of the theory, objectification is "the way we enhance our capacity as human beings" (2010: 59) and "the idea that objects make us, as part of the very same process by which we make them" (2010: 60). Conversely, "in making the world around us, we also make ourselves" (Hodder, 2013: 31). But in creating things, we also create the potential for things to gain autonomy from us and become alienating to the point where they might oppress us rather than make us grow (Miller, 2010: 58). When we create a thing such as the credit card, we extend our economic mobility and open up new ways of commercial practice and cause new economic systems to develop, leading in turn to new possibilities for both individuals and businesses. But we also risk creating an encouragement of uncontrolled individual debt, economic fraud and expanding the influence of large multinational credit card companies in our lives (Ritzer, 1995). This too is objectification and reveals the dual side of things and the material culture they elicit, where they risk becoming alienating to us in the sense that we will want to distance ourselves from

them based on their negative influence over us, or when we do not recognize ourselves in them because we no longer feel that we have control over them, but rather them over us.

I use the concept *thing* when referring to materiality in contrast to similar terms like "artefact", "entity" or "object". Here I am following Miller (2008: 290) and anthropologist Ian Hodder (2013: 7) in their use of this concept. Far from being only a stylistic choice (though it is that as well), using a deliberately generic term for material "things" opens them up as concepts which deepen a theory of objectification by revealing the multitude of ways in which things affect us, and we them. While "objects", "entities" or "artefacts" suggests a physical closed-off-ness to the world, "things", by the openness it implies, allow for wider reach.

Hodder (2013: 8), resting on Martin Heidegger's example of a jug (1971: 167) to illustrate "thingness", comments that while the jug is a material object in that it is made out of material and has clear limits and specificity in physical space, it is the jug's ability to gather different kinds of material, meanings, uses, and intentions, Heidegger's (1971) "fourfold", that makes the jug a "thing" instead of simply an "object". Things, in contrast to objects then, have the potential to gather, to assemble. Bruno Latour (2004: 245) forms a similar notion through Heidegger's jug, but argues for an extension of the thing-concept as a multifold of assemblages, more fitting contemporary life and its great potential for entanglements of and within things. As a consequence of their ability to assemble, things, Hodder (2013) argues, are never isolated. Things pull flows and relations into various configurations where time, energy, information and matter are brought together. They "bring humans and non-humans together in heterogeneous mixes" (2013: 8). These mixes are to be understood as the things themselves.

A related quality of things is what Miller calls the *humility of things*, the ability to slip into the background, to become like the frame of a painting, letting the spectator focus on the art on the canvas while at the same time defining how the art is looked at by directing the spectators gaze (Miller, 2010: 50). By using the thing-concept to refer to material assemblages, my ambition is to allow for an open conceptualization of the things involved in banking, such as the authentication device or the debit/credit card. These are not mere objects, but things which have the ability to assemble and pull together multitudes of folds. If I am to capture the permeating effect, or ingrainedness of contemporary banking to everyday life, the things which make it materialize should be approached from a theoretical standpoint which allows them a certain degree of openness.

If material culture and a theory of objectification allows me to move away from the dichotomy of humans versus things and instead approach things as open-ended assemblers

that make us just as we make them, this is good and well. But how can these processes be accounted for when things come together in space and time to frame practices of banking?

Relations – **Entanglement**

While Miller's theory of objectification is a solid grounding theory for introducing the dialectic relation of things and humans (or things and culture), it is also underdeveloped, as Miller himself points out (2010: 75). When analyzing material culture, stating that things and people effect and co-create each other with the risk of things gaining autonomy and ending up oppressing us, is not sufficient. These relations must also be more analytically accounted for, how they dialectically effect both things and humans and what the consequences of this are.

Similar to Miller, Hodder (2013) grounds the theory of *entanglement* in the point of view of the thing, but attempts to integrate a perspective on *how* things come to assemble and how this can be understood as dependent on the relationship of things and humans (Hodder, 2013: 10). Hodder argues that humans and things are stuck together in a process of often increasing entanglement, where humans come to depend on things, things depend on other things, things depend on humans and where humans, then, depend on other humans. The more a thing is used, the more it gets entangled. The key to entanglement is that things seem to be "out there", but their existence as things is still dependent on how we manufacture, use and define them (2013: 12): "[t]he defining aspect of entanglement with things is that humans get caught in a double bind, depending on things that depend on humans" (2013: 88-89). "Depend" and "depending" may sound like pessimistic terms, but this is not the intention of entanglement (though it might well be a consequence). Instead, entanglement is to be understood as a dialectic process of *dependence* and *dependency* (Hodder, 2013: 89). Hodder defines this conceptual pair as dependence being a generally positive aspect of things, akin to "rely on". We depend on things in order to live, build, eat, sleep, and so on. But dependence often leads to dependency, which limits our ability to develop or grow by becoming an addiction of sorts, which ends up consuming increasingly vast amounts of resources and attention. Importantly, neither dependence nor dependency is inherent in things themselves but come to fruition "in the interaction between humans and things" (2013: 18). A dependence may, simply put, become a dependency when a thing is relied on to any great extent. This deep entanglement of dependence and dependency, where a thing that makes us grow is also a thing we increasingly have to support, is not predetermined by the thing or by those who depend on it. Because of the openness of things discussed in the previous section (and which

Hodder adheres to), entanglement cannot be planned in advance because we can never fully tell where entanglements begin or end.

In contrast to a widely popular approach to the human-thing relation, the *Actor-Network Theory* (ANT), entanglement does not aim to dissolve this relation by giving things or hybrid human-thing networks their own agency, or by equating actions made through them with human action (cf. Latour, 1999: 303). The actions of things instead resides in entanglement itself and in the dialectic of dependent-dependency that arise within it but where human maintenance, in the end, is the most essential part of the activity. Furthermore, ANT, especially its network metaphor[5] Hodder argues, does not provide sufficient attention to the stickiness of things to society and culture (Hodder, 2013: 94). We cannot simply sever or do away with entangled things without causing major societal disruptions, because our dependency on them is simply too high. Ingold (2011: 29) goes further in this critique of thing-agency by taking the position that adding a sprinkling of agency does not bring things to life in any actual or theoretical sense. Instead, restoring things to the *material* from which they are made and continue to persist, does. Things come alive because they are swept up in a circulation of surrounding media that dissolve or regenerate them (2011: 68). Ingold's comments offers a critique of materiality that should be addressed before moving on.

Both Ingold (2011: 20) and Hodder (2013: 33) argue that while most theories of material culture take the relation of things and humans seriously, they do not take seriously enough the material and material processes from which thing are made. Paraphrasing Sartre, for Ingold and Hodder, material precedes materiality (cf. Ingold, 2011: 215). How the manufacture of plastic, its molecular structure effects temporality, form or dependency of, for example, the credit card is not covered by adhering to Miller's material culture, which instead focuses attention on things in a more "ready-made" sense, often in relation to consumption. In heeding to the aim of this thesis I will focus on materiality before material, and stay content with taking note that "things break", based in part on their material assembly and make-up.

3. Methodology

This section aims to account for and contextualize the ethnographic research material this thesis builds on and the methods used to gather and assemble it. I begin by introducing the research background and the participant before moving on to a discussion of methodology, methods and material, ending on notes of reflexivity, ethics and translation.

Research background and participants

       The bulk of the material for this thesis comes from two applied cultural analytical projects for a client niche bank in Lund, Sweden. The projects were engaged February to May and September to November 2013 and performed under the umbrella of the MACA-program of Lund University as a specialized research project and internship respectively. The projects were well received by both the client and the university department and perceived as eye-opening for bank management, staff and researchers alike. Both projects involved prolonged periods of preparatory project design, four to six weeks of ethnographic fieldwork followed by four to six weeks of analysis and two weeks for completion of deliverables. Research was pursued as team efforts, the first project consisting of four master's students and the second of three, all with different professional and academical backgrounds. Summarizing both projects, a large quantity of material was gathered during the respective fieldworks: 6 focus groups, one of which took place on Facebook, 26 in-depth semi-structured interviews including "go-alongs" of banking practices, several observations of banking related spaces, 10 interviews with the client's staff and management, go-alongs with call centre sales representatives and visual material in the form of more than a hundred photos as well as filmed material, taken by both researchers and participants. Though only a fraction of the material appears in this thesis, its larger body should be understood as underpinning the analysis.

       Regarding participants, the research team opted for an inclusive age bracket, the youngest participant being 21 and the oldest over 70 year of age. To a lesser extent diversity of cultural and national background was sought to gain "outsider" experiences of Swedish banking. These distributions were agreed on by the client. The wide age diversity was maintained, but culturally, economically and socially most participants belonged to what would commonly be classified as Swedish middle class. Most were ethnic Swedes who spoke fluent Swedish. Some were home owners, most had full time employment, or were students or pensioners. Most had debts, student loans or mortgages or a combination of both, but no single participant explicitly discussed having any problems with paying these. The cultural and financial distribution among the participants leads to a bias in favor of the relatively stable middle class. If the material culture is different or if banking is practiced differently among other distributions is a question to be answered by further research.

       Recruitment of research participants was pursued differently for the respective projects. During the first project (banking practices) participants were contacted directly by the team. Before fieldwork commenced, the team discussed issues in performing, for instance,

in-depth interviews regarding private finance with unfamiliar participants, knowing from personal experiences that these can be very private matters (cf. Botterill, 2010). It was decided to turn first to familiar participants, friends, family and social networks, where connections of trust were already established. There are obvious risks in using familiar participants. For instance, the researcher might reveal intimate or sensitive details uttered between friends (e.g. Ellis, 2007: 10). The researcher also risk not giving proper attention to establishing the research situation, which might cause discomfort or negative participation (Davis, 2008: 169). These issues were addressed by the team in advance and attended to by clearly explaining the purpose of the interviews and not taking the personal relation for granted. Both researchers and participants experienced the process as rewarding, resulting in material that was both personal and culturally revealing. For the second project (loans and credits), participants were co-contacted by the client and the team by sending out a call for participation through the bank's internal customer database. Participants who were interested were then screened by the team, primarily for age diversity. Taking into consideration the privacy of the participants involved in the research projects, all names as they appear in this thesis have been changed. Gender, age and occupation is represented to supply context for the reader.

Field methods: Go-alongs, interviews and focus groups

In this section I will discuss briefly the main methods used during the fieldworks and how they allow me to approach banking practices and material culture.

Since things and their subsequent material culture can be more or less humble (Miller, 2010: 54), a method that allows the researcher to both observe how things are negotiated and to ask questions about how they are used to frame them in a larger context, is beneficial. The "go-along", presented by Kusenbach (2003) as "hybrid between participant observation and interview" (2003: 463) offers such a method. The go-along is a method of researcher-participant interaction based on moving, usually walking together, while the participant is engaged in everyday practices (cf. Pink, 2009: 76). While the researcher is "going along", questions may be asked to the participant about what, why and how they do as they do.

As noted, contemporary banking in Sweden is primarily accessed through online or mobile banking platforms. This meant that going along with participants doing banking became more a "sitting along". Yet, the practices of banking still took place in a physical location. By going/sitting along with participant to/in their place of banking, whether this was on a living room couch or at a coffee house, I could become a part of the event and share in

the experience of what it took to make a place of banking. As researcher I could follow participants along by being attentive to their movements, hands, eyes or fingers, at each step of the way. Though a go-along is not a "natural" occurrence, it enabled access to skilled knowledge, embedded in banking practices in the form of rhythms and movement, as well as participants' thoughts about the things they had to move about and negotiate and the actions they were performing. For example, going-along made me aware of the half-conscious actions of place creation while doing online banking in public, something I might never have realized had I conduced only sit-down interviews or observations.

While go-alongs provide the backbone of the material, semi-structured interviews and focus groups provide narrative backgrounds to experiences, biographies and knowledge, supplying rich input on reflections and attitudes to banks and banking. Regarding the semi-structured interviews, the approach to these was open ended, aimed to allow researcher tone of voice and questions to be context-dependent, and adapted to the "style of sociality that develops between the researcher and the research participant" (Pink, 2009: 83). Lists of possible interview questions were discussed by the team, but freedom was given to each researcher to elaborate or detract from these in the situation. In these interviews, as Pink (2009: 86) also notes, the situation creates a *place-event*. In our case, most interviews took place in participants' homes, which meant that the participants could, and did, get up during the interviews to show us things on their computers, their authentication devices or credit cards, or the places where they often did their banking.

With focus groups, the team decided to frame questions and discussion more strictly than in the semi-structured interviews, with a moderator providing information to participants, framing questions and keeping track of time and equal participation. This was done to facilitate fair group dynamics and discussion (Fallon & Brown, 2002: 199). Groups varied in size between 4-8 for regular focus groups and 12 in a social media focus groups conducted on Facebook. These numbers were based on how many participants the research team judged could be handled (cf. Fallon & Brown, 2002: 198). Though the Facebook group was conducted in an asynchronous setting through posts, threads and answers in a social network platform, with participants answering and then discussing a question posted by a moderator during one week's time over a total period of five weeks, the tone and style of the replies could none-the-less be considered as close to oral, with the sometime inclusion of "phatic communication", such as written "hmm", and the "non-verbal" inclusion of emoticons for emphasis (cf. Steward & Williams, 2005: 404-405). In general the Facebook group was treated similarly to the regular focus groups, though acting out as if in slow motion. There

was no participant overlap of the Facebook group with the other focus groups, but there was overlap in relation to interviews, with discussions in the Facebook focus group at times inspiring questions or discussions with these participants during their interviews.

The multiple methods used in the fieldworks have resulted in an ethnographic material rich in details of everyday life and banking practices. Things, their humbleness and entanglement are usually hidden in the mundane or often lie at the corners of material gathered by interviews or focus groups. The richness of the material thus offers more possibilities to detect and analyze the things themselves. The variety of research methods and the material that has been gathered from them should further be understood as openings from which to approach and challenge everyday practices, things and their place in the participants' lives, revealing important details which might go unnoticed by using, for instance, more quantitative methods such as questionnaires or structured interviews.

From applied to academical – **Compositional ethnography**

What you are reading now is an academic thesis. The research that supports it was collected and assembled through applied cultural analytical work for an external client. Thus, this thesis represents an intersection of two fields: cultural academical and corporate financial. Though in many ways wide apart (Jordan, 2013), these two fields are beginning to meld together in Sweden, as they have in the United States and the United Kingdom (Pink, 2006; Löfgren & Willim, 2005; Ehn & Löfgren, 2009; O'Dell, 2009). To businesses and corporations, culture has become something which is important to grasp, whether in the sense of the organizational culture of a corporation (Alvesson, 2002), dealing with increasing multi-culturalism (Mellander & Fagerström, 2013), consumer research (Sunderland & Denny, 2007), or the cultural history of products (Jönsson *et al.*, 2013). My reasons for making this point is to highlight that the material I draw on was first and foremost gathered with an *applied* cultural analysis in mind, aimed at presenting insights about banking relative to the client's situation. When this material meets a higher academic ambition (i.e. this thesis), it changes to reveal new insights and different paths to knowledge (cf. Denny, 2013: 138). What happens in this process is important to consider since it has deciding effects on how the material is used and placed in relation to the research questions to create the analysis.

My approach to the research material is inspired by ethnographers Tom O'Dell and Robert Willim's (2011) *compositional ethnography* where "... more than logically ordered wholes, ethnographies are made out of a multitude of bits and pieces ... that are not 'naturally'

connected, but which have to be linked together by the ethnographer" (2011: 36). The processes where the "bits and pieces" are "linked together" may be understood as taking place not only within a project frame, but between projects, between places, fields and actors. This way of thinking is furthered by how ethnology and cultural analysis is taught in Sweden, as an "art of the possible" where "[t]heory, methods, 'the field', the classroom, and text production lie continuously jumbled and in juxtaposition to one another" (2011: 29). A compositional ethnography approach can be used to analyze completed ethnographic research, but may also act as a methodological approach to a researcher's own material, where the ethnographer intentionally "composes" their ethnography by actively engaging in and acknowledging the linking-together process of all the bits and pieces. This goes beyond the perception that an ethnographic "field" is something already assembled, and that ethnographic practice and process is necessarily logical and ordered (O'Dell & Willim, 2011: 31). Most often, it is not (e.g. Wilk, 2011; Pritchard, 2011).

As seen in the discussion of the methods in the section above, my research material represents a multi-sitedness (Marcus, 1995) which did not allow it to be contained in any specific "field" in the first place. Research material was gathered through social media, during interviews and focus groups with different age-brackets, in participants homes, at the client's offices, through participant's own photographs, digital on online banking websites, in physical locations outside and inside bank offices and at ATM's both in southern Sweden and Copenhagen, and more. The resulting material is both rich and diverse. It is able to inspire a multitude of narratives and result in multiple unique ethnographic analyses[6]. But in order to make an ethnography, it needs to be composed, or "intentionally pulled together" (Pink, 2009: 42). Within the applied projects, this pulling together was a process where each team member was equally responsible for having a say in assembling the final deliverables. In this thesis, where I am alone in composing, the material needs to be pulled together in a different way, drawing on other insights, using different narratives and analyses. In creating new paths through the material, I also create new knowledge from it.

Composition has also served as a guiding tool for me when engaging other kinds of material for the analysis, for instance auto-ethnographic material. As an individual living in Sweden at this time, researching banking could not be contained to a nine-to-five practice. Because banking was already a part of my everyday life, the ethnographic research came to consume my way of thinking on an everyday basis (cf. Wilk, 2011), how I scanned the news for financial items, began subscribing to *The Economist*, listened to NPR's *Planet Money*-podcast, watched documentaries[7] and read up on financial history (e.g. Ferguson, 2010) and

business challenges facing banks today (e.g. King, 2013). Research also came to include discussions and interviews with my personal bank advisor, friends and family. Relevant pieces of my ethnography spring from these sources and have found themselves being edited together with the fieldwork research material. Seen through a compositional approach, the material gathered both "inside", "outside" and "in between" the projects respective fieldworks, is the result of a constant process of "cutting, mixing, edition, layering as well as rewriting" (O'Dell and Willim, 2011:30).

Compositional ethnography should not be understood as an underhanded way to adhere to a do-what-thou-wilt approach to the material, bending it to fit the analysis, but it does open the material and resulting ethnographic analysis to challenges of objectivity. In response, I draw on Sarah Pink's definition of ethnography as:

> ... a process of creating and representing knowledge (about society, culture and individuals), that is based on ethnographers' own experiences. It does not claim to be an objective or truthful account of reality, but should aim to offer versions of ethnographers' experiences of reality that are as loyal as possible to the context, negotiations and intersubjectivities through which the knowledge was produced. (2007: 22/2009: 8)

The main point being made here is that ethnographic research does not strive for objectivity (though being able to defend certain choices is essential), but to establish relations in order to produce new knowledge. Such a position places attention and responsibility on the role of the ethnographer, the ethics of the research process and the resulting ethnography.

Reflexivity and ethics

If compositional ethnography entails acknowledging and allowing the ethnographer to pull together material to produce new knowledge, then a certain amount of reflexivity should necessarily follow. *Reflexivity*, as explained by Davies (2008: 4) is a "means a turning back on oneself, a process of self-reference ... reflexivity at its most immediately obvious level refers to the ways in which the products of research are affected by the personnel and process of doing research". The nature of my research field implicates me directly as both researcher, consumer and bank customer. I am not only constantly aware of the "field", but also constantly *in* the field to the point where the division between "field" and "home" becomes blurred (Wilk, 2011: 15). Not only during fieldwork but also during analysis and the writing of this thesis, banking is always with me, in my wallet, on my laptop and in my apartment.

From time to time, I have had to engage in my own banking, pay bills, keep track of my mortgage, *et cetera*. "The ethnographer can never stand outside of the ethnographic practice, but is ever corporeally entwined in it" (O'Dell & Willim, forthcoming: 2). This has made me "native" as well as analyst and entailed a constant attention to banking related events happening around me, which in turn have influenced my research process and analysis.

One notable implication of these personal attachments can be observed in the lack of focus on power relations in this thesis. I am an active bank customer with specific experiences of being a customer with Nordea, the largest bank in Sweden. Though still a student, I should be considered as belonging and coming from the middle class, with stable financial resources. I own my small one bedroom apartment and I know that I have financial support from my family, should I need it. I have never felt distrusted, disempowered or discriminated by my bank. Had I come from a less privileged background, perhaps standing in a less privileged position in Swedish society, the focus of this thesis might have been different. This is not to say that privilege, for instance economic stability, necessarily frames a researcher's ethnographic analysis (Pritchard, 2011). But it might result in me associating banking primarily with personal experiences which are not categorized by power relations. This in turn might entail that I have framed my research aim more towards material culture and entanglement, rather than, for instance, domination and subjugation. Even though an analysis of power does not feature in any central role in this thesis, acknowledging my own situatedness (cf. Pink, 2009; Pritchard 2011) as well as acknowledging the strong emotions of disempowerment which are sometimes connected to personal finance (Botterill, 2010) has been of importance relative to how I approached participants during the research and subsequently incorporated them as material in the analysis.

Before closing this section, I need to address issues of translation in relation to transcription of participant quotes and narratives as they feature in this thesis. None of the team members and only a few of the participants in the research were native speakers of English. Most participant interaction was conducted in Swedish by me and other Swedish speaking team members. In the analysis, all participant quotes have been translated from Swedish with the exception of that by Sophia of the International focus group, which was done in English (page 34). Following Bucholtz's (2000: 1440ff) argument that ethnographies are creative and politicized documents where the researcher as author and authority is always implied, transcription (and likewise translation) must always be understood as an interpretive process. The decisions of what and how to transcribe has profound effects on the representations and arguments made in an ethnography. For reasons of consistency, all

material in this thesis has been translated solely by me. While not a licensed translator, I have attempted to keep as close my understanding of speaker intentions as possible. Here, being both transcriber and translator, I am in a sense acting as double interpreter of participant intentions. This is most evident where there are no direct translations from Swedish to English, such as the case with the word for "authentication device", which in Swedish is referred to with the more informal noun "dosa" (see discussion in footnote 10), or "banking" (discussed in footnote 3). There is no a straightforward way out of these power relations (Bucholtz, 2000: 1463), but in offering this reflexivity, I wish to make the reader aware of my active decisions as transcriber and translator.

4. An analysis of the material culture of contemporary banking practices

With the foundation now set, the following chapters are devoted to the analysis of contemporary banking practices and how they may be understood as framed by the material culture of the things that make them. The first chapter introduces and analyses a banking practice and sets the scene for banking practices in the everyday. The primary material things involved in banking are then identified and in the following chapters considered in themselves. The analysis is concluded with a discussion.

Banking in the twenty-tens - Practice, skill, place and things

We're sitting at a coffee house just off the main commercial street in central Malmö. It's a weekday, late afternoon. Most of the vintage wooden tables are occupied by seniors, parents with infants and young people bent over books, laptops and smartphones. Chloë is 23 and a close friend of mine. She's a cultural studies student at Lund University but lives in Malmö. The coffee house is a favorite spot of ours, a place we usually go to escape the confines of the south-central parts of town where we both live. Chloë is well aware of the banking project I'm involved in, since banks and banking are essentially the only things I talk about anymore. Naturally, I've asked Chloë about how she does her banking. She's told me that she doesn't really think about it, when and where she does it. If there's money to be transferred, bills to be paid, she "just does it". Usually at home, sometimes in public. This is the reason why we're at the coffee house. I'm interested in what goes on when she "just does" her banking in public.

We have coffee and talk for a while, mostly about a recent episode of the tv-series *Girls*, as Chloë takes her iMac out of her bag and sets it up on the wobbly table. The coffee house has

no Wi-Fi access, so she begins working an internet connection by using her smartphone, a Samsung, as a modem. The laptop and the phone both run on batteries, there are no power cords. Chloë tells me she has always done her banking online, going to bank offices only when depositing the cash she occasionally makes for helping out at art galleries. She began doing banking by herself around the time she turned 16.

After a few failed attempts, eventually Chloë's laptop established a connection through the phone-modem and she gets started. She opens an internet browser and types in the address of her bank, nordea.se. She hits the keys fast and fluently. When she presses "enter", she hits the key with emphasis. There is a certain rhythm to it. She clicks her way onto the private banking section of the webpage. Then she uses a small authentication device she finds after rummaging through her bag for a while, and her VISA debit/credit card, which is in her wallet, to begin logging in to her private banking pages on the site. Authentication is done by inserting the card at the top of the device, which activates it. The webpage displays an access code. By entering the webpage code together with the pin of her card, the device generates another access code. By typing this in, together with her personal social security number, she successfully authenticates herself and is able to log on.

Once Chloë is in, she passes briskly through her errands, signing an e-invoice phone bill by checking a box in the window, authenticated by using the same device-card-code combination as before. I ask her who taught her how to use online banking. She looks at me as if I have no clue what an odd question I've just asked.

"No one," she says. "It's pretty self-explanatory, right?"

Chloë pays for membership in a communal housing queue and transfers some money she owes to friends. She checks the balance in her account and sighs. She only uses sections of the site that concerns her account. I ask her if she ever clicks on any of the other sections, but she says she has no use for them. "Stocks and bonds? Not likely in my case," she comments.

During her time at the bank, people come and go in the coffee house around us. Chloë seems unfazed by doing these errands in public, and I ask her why that is. She tells me that we are sitting with our backs against a wall, so it's alright. She says she always sits like that when doing banking in public, very much aware of the space around her, seeking to position herself at a vantage point where she is comfortable, where no one can look over her shoulder at the screen and where she has a good over-view of the environment. She says this way of placing herself comes natural to her, and that she would never have brought it up, had not asked her.

Chloë logs off by closing down the browser, closes her laptop without shutting it down. She turns off the Wi-Fi connection on the phone. "It drains battery otherwise," she says. The

whole practice has taken less than ten minutes. It would have been much faster if I had not asked questions. We keep drinking coffee, talking about friends and sporadically about her relationship to money. (Go-along: Chloë, 2013)

Taken at face value, Chloë's banking at the coffee house presents a certain image of contemporary banking practices that goes in hand with an image many Swedish banks are currently aiming for when launching marketing campaigns to promote new online and mobile services, where availability, flexibility and mobility are the prominent concepts.[8] Should we get stuck looking at such attitudes, we risk ending up with only representations of banking.

My reasons for using this specific go-along to open up the analysis is not only that it offers a contrast to the situation with which I began this thesis. It is a way to observe how and what is necessary for contemporary banking to come into being, the embedded skill one has to master to be able to get it to work, understanding and making place and the intricate functions of the material things that have to work together. In this chapter, I will analyze Chloë's banking practice through these three aspects: embedded skills, place and things. I will bring them in one at a time, beginning with skills, which may be considered closest to the practitioner, to place, which is arranged by the practitioner in relation to the location, ending with things, which require the most external interactions to function. In doing so, I aim to address the question of how a banking practice can be understood as an entanglement of everyday life, involving a practitioner's own actions as well external actions and environments which she reacts and adapts to. By doing so, I aim to open this type of practice to cultural analysis, specifically to the analysis of the things that make and frame it.

During our go-along, Chloë comments that "no one" taught her how to use online banking, that "it's pretty self-explanatory". While these comments in themselves do not reveal too much about how Chloë acquired her banking skills, it does open for two interesting perspectives: her taking for granted a specific way of practicing, and the fact that the rhythm and precision of her negotiating the things involved indicate how embedded they are with her skills of using them. Following Pink (2012: 54), a performance such as Chloë's banking practice can be analyzed as a matter of *embedded skills*, imbued on her through the experience of living in a society that makes these skills seem mundane, or "lived manifestations of and modifiers of skilled ways of knowing" (Pink 2012: 60). The things and technologies Chloë uses make sense to her, having grown up with digital things and online platforms (cf. Palfrey &

Gasser, 2008). Yet, if Chloë's practice is to be analyzed as lived manifestations of knowing expressed through specific skills, what has informed this knowing and how?

Among the research participants, often those with adult children, it was pointed out that they had taught their children personal finance and banking while raising them, as they themselves had been taught by their parents. This teaching was often enacted through material practices. Lisa, a newly retired school administrator, explains:

> I brought my son there when he was sixteen, to the bank, because I thought he should know what a bank was. He was rather... no. He must have been much younger because he did not get a card, but in the end he got one anyway, because he was wise for his years. So, then he could go and withdraw his own money through the wall if he wanted to, but he could not use it to buy things, of course. (Interview: Lisa, 2013)

Lisa's narrative reveals a relationship between things and the gaining of a particular skill. Her son (wise for his years) is given a card by the bank which allows him to take charge of his own cash withdrawals. Though not mentioned in the narrative above, this is an "electron" card, usually issued to youths under 18. The card does not allow for purchases, only ATM withdrawals. By being given both the responsibility and the thing with which to practice, a transmission of knowledge of banking practice can be understood as taking place through material practice (Pink, 2009: 37). By giving children access to the things related to banking, they can explore on their own and gain knowledge that may in time become "self-explanatory" skilled knowing. Drawing on what Pink (2009: 35), together with Ingold (2000: 353) call an "ecological approach to skill" and "knowledge transmission", skill is not a property of the human body alone, of physical movement or muscle memory (cf. Chin, 2011), though this naturally constitutes a necessary part of it. Instead, it is the individual being placed in a "richly structured environment" where they are being provided with the "scaffolding" that garners "attentive engagement" with a practice which transmits skilled knowing (Ingold, 2000: 353). This knowledge transmission is further noticeable when considering another material thing, mentioned by older participants as their first encounter with banks and private finance: the piggy bank, According to ethnologist Lennart Börnfors (1996: 24), the piggy bank was developed to teach children from an early age the importance of thrift and toil, important values connected to banking at that time.[9] Even if Chloë claims to be self-taught and successfully negotiates her things, she may be understood as being embedded and situated in a "richly structured environment" where her skills have been shaped by active engagement with a specific material culture. This might result in her taking-for-granted the skills she masters.

Leaving skill, I will now attend to place. Looking back at the narrative of my parents sitting at the kitchen table surrounded by the material things that their banking, how different that situation seems from Chloë's. The proliferation of things working in unison has been reduced and become more flexible and mobile, compact, digital and immediate. Chloë has no papers, no envelopes or folders. Consequently, she has no need for things that make papers fit into folders. No puncher, no pencils. She needs no post box, her actions seem to have immediate effect. Chloë seems to need only four things to do her banking: laptop, smartphone, authentication device and a credit/debit card. While my parents practice appears locked to a locality where the things they need are situated (the home), Chloë's things are easier for her to move around. For example, though most of the things Chloë uses need electrical power to operate, her laptop, authentication device and phone all run on batteries. Through a modem in her phone, the internet connection is wireless. Chloë's banking appears delocalized, meaning that the location itself is not specifically designed for the practice she engages in, but rather that the practice makes the place (cf. Pink, 2012: 60ff). Because of this mobility and flexibility of things, the location of banking appears less relevant than in the early 1990's.

An argument can be made here that my parents' kitchen was not a location specifically designed for banking either and that people practicing banking through postal giro could also take their things to locations other than the home. After all, folders and envelopes and pencils are decently mobile things as well. Yet, the thought of postal giro banking at a coffee house seem unreasonable. The culture of public life in Chloë's society, where work and leisure may share the space of a coffee house, is not the culture that enveloped the society where the postal giro dominated. While negative and positive aspects of the intertwining of work and leisure may be debated, its impact on contemporary life in Western societies cannot be ignored (cf. Sennett, 1998). Banking, being considered much closer to "work" than "leisure", would seem strange if acted out in a public space such as a cafe in the 1990's. This greater cultural shift considered, there is also an issue of the materiality of the things themselves. The materiality and number of things, their weight and size, can also be understood as what kept banking firmly localized around the kitchen table. The home, as will be seen in later on in the chapter on new media technology, is a powerful things, able to gather vast quantities of things.

For the research participants, doing banking in public was not the most preferred or even most common place of banking in Sweden. When asked about locations where they would *not* do banking, participants in the Facebook focus group singled out public, unfamiliar locations, referring to security concerns with open networks and software authentication, as well as concerns about privacy. Public spaces such as cafes were perceived as too "open",

lacking the necessary security and comfort that the participants associated with banking practices. While security concerns came from not trusting open networks, comfort seemed to relate mostly to participants being able to use their own things and being in their own places, for instance laptops and internet connections and establishing privacy. For most, this comfort was easiest to establish within the home (Facebook focus group, 2013).

In the 1990's, banking had already made the transition from bank offices to the home. The postal giro system had replaced having to physically go to a bank to do banking, causing a delocalization by introduction of new technology and things which changed the material culture of banking and consequently how it was practiced. To people banking in for instance in the 1950's or 60's, when banking was more firmly tied to branch offices (Börnfors, 1996: 189ff) the postal giro system in the 90's would appear very delocalized indeed. Things in and off the home and their entangled relations to other things, people, institutions or practice, form what Miller (2008; 2009) calls an *aesthetic order* which is a material order that equally relates us to experiences about ourselves and keeps us localized to certain places, for instance the home (2008: 287; 2009: 3-25). The relations between the things that constitute such material orders define or frame what can be done and where. Once the postal giro system and its folders, stamped envelopes and forms became common practice, the material culture of private banking became re-localized to the home, where the necessary things could be kept safe and handy. By things finding their place in the home and practices emerging around them, a *place of banking* emerges. Through repeated practice, such places may become more static and routinized (cf. Miller, 2008: 285).

Though "delocalized", the location in which Chloë's banking takes place is not unimportant in determining her performance of the practice. The coffee house is not a bank or a home, but for Chloë it becomes a place of banking once she begins practicing banking in that location, at that moment. Drawing on Pink's use of the concept *place-event* (2012: 25-27), Chloë's banking can be conceptualized as material things (such as the laptop, smartphone and authentication device) coming together with a place (her using the corner of the coffee house for banking) in a specific time, through embedded, skilled knowledge of how banking is done and how the things she operates work. In other words, banking is neither just a skill, a place nor an assembly of things. Banking is not found in anyone of these alone, but in their coming together as a spatio-temporal place-event. This is not to be misconstrued as a situation where the coffee house offers an ideal location for banking which Chloë identifies and uses. Following Ingold's (2011: 68) conceptualization of the relation of humans as enveloped by their own environments, it can be said that the location itself does not shape Chloë to do her

banking there. Instead, the location becomes shaped to suit Chloë by her *movement* through it, how she moves through/along with her things and skills to create the place-event.

In Chloë's banking place-event there are different sorts of movement going on simultaneously. By being aware of and negotiating the location around her, Chloë physically moves to position herself with her back facing a wall to make sure no one is watching over her shoulder. This makes her feel secure by giving her an overview of other movements within the location. The fact that the material things she needs for banking are easily movable, makes her able to bank in that specific location, at that specific time. Though of a different kind, the things themselves allow for movements of their own, with information moving from one device to the next, either digitally, such as the connection between the smartphone modem and the laptop receiver, or by Chloë typing the code that comes up in the authentication device with her laptop into the banking site, a hybrid-moving of a code from one thing to the next. Had her phone failed to move information from her laptop through the internet connection, for example, banking would not have been possible. Following Pink (2012) in her argument for how the practice of laundry can be understood as a meshwork of things and actions moving through a house, creating not only laundry itself but also serving to ensure an aesthetic of a home (2012: 74), the practice of banking can be understood as coming into being through these different simultaneous movements of skills, things and places. This movement ensures not only immediate financial progression or action through payments and transfers, but also a continuous movement of everyday private life. This constitutes yet another kind of movement, that between public and private life. Through banking, Chloë moves along in relation to public systems, for instance banks and financial systems. When she pays her membership fee for communal housing, she does not only move money, but makes herself move, in this case ensuring that her place in the queue keeps moving forward. The dialectic trade-off is that in order for Chloë to move along in her private life, she has to entangle herself in public systems and subjugate herself to the workings of a financial system, the Swedish state, her bank and other public institutions. Here, bank and banking act as mediators, in the sense that they transform Chloë's actions into financial actions between her and public life (cf. Börnfors, 1996: 30) and definers, in the sense that they constitute and demarcate and frame the (only) way in which these practices can be performed (cf. Botterill, 2010: 132-156).

So far, things have featured in relation to skill and place and since these will constitute the center of the following chapters, I will only briefly mention them here in relation to how their entanglement plays a part in the making of Chloë's practice. As described above, Chloë

banking practice is entangled in a complex thicket of skill, place and things which stand in relation to exterior institutions and experiences which are at the same time close and remote. All of these have to come together for her to be able to perform her banking at the coffee house at that specific moment in time. Things gather and are gathered at the center of this entanglement. To take an example, the banking place-event described above is impossible without access to a wireless internet connection, something Chloë manages by negotiating the modem in her smartphone, which naturally has to function in its designated way. The wireless receiver in the laptop has to find the phone modem, which has to be able to supply internet access through Chloë's operator. When she first attempts to connect, this process does not work. She has to try a few times, repeating the same action. This does not cause her any direct concern, as if the action is expected to need a few attempts before working. Chloë knows that her things, the laptop and the phone, though being of different brands (Apple and Samsung) can communicate successfully. As pointed by several authors of user-technology relationships (i.e. Connolly [2002]; Hayles [2012]), the complexity involved in the movement of information between laptop and phone and phone and internet connection, such as where the phone signal goes, how that signal gets transmitted and turned into text, images and action, is not necessary for Chloë to understand in order for her to successfully establish an internet connection. Neither is the entanglement of businesses, institutions, science, history and nature that needs to have gathered for her connection to exist in the first place. Though many of the requirement for the success of this action are literally out of Chloë's hands (e.g. the phone-internet connection), her skilled knowledge of how the things are designed to operate, how to establish Wi-Fi connections, set up phone modems, keeping check on battery time, as well as the location allowing for such access, is sufficient for her as user.

To conclude this chapter, I have introduced an event of contemporary banking and analyzed it as a practice, understood as an entanglement of embodied skill, place and things. These form a place-event which is not designated explicitly to any location, but comes into being through different movements, often related to material culture. By opening up banking as an entangled practice, it appears as subjected to constant change and motion, or what Ingold (2007; 2011) terms a meshwork of entangled, constantly moving lines of becoming. Through the entanglement with things especially, banking places the practitioner in relation to things far outside of her control. Yet the control and making of a place of banking through skilled knowledge of things and location seems to be what makes her comfortable and secure enough to perform the practice. By understanding this practice as an entangled meshwork, cultural

aspects, such as gaining embedded skills through growing up in "richly structure environment", or locations such as coffee houses being made suitable for making places of banking, private banking practices may be opened further opened to cultural inquiry.

A running thread in this meshwork are the material things, those which are seen but rarely acknowledged. Though the entanglement of the movements of the smartphone was briefly addressed, there are other things which feature in the practice and which serve to frame it. Though skill and place are important, all actions taken by Chloë in relation to her banking are mediated through things which make it possible for her to perform her banking in the coffee house in the first place. What of the authentication device? The debit/credit card Chloë uses? Her laptop? As material things they all inform and function in a way which Chloë appears to take for granted. Following Miller (2010), it is this taken-for-grantedness of things that not only make them central to the story of contemporary banking practices, but also to any analysis of such practices. This will be attended to presently.

The "device"

The following three chapters focus on the primary material things involved in contemporary Swedish banking: the *authentication device*, *credit/debit cards* and *new media technology*. These are analyzed through a material culture perspective with emphasis on their objectification and entanglement. The aim of these chapters is to analyze how the material culture of banking practices are made and framed with and through these things. How are they used relative to banking? How do they make places of banking? What is their impact on practices? In the end, what do we gain from applying such a cultural analytical perspective?

In this chapter, I aim to bring attention to the authentication device and how it frames banking practices by largely being taken for granted. In doing so, I aim for an understanding of how a thing which goes mostly unnoticed serves to make it all the more powerful in framing practices and determining expectations. The device is introduced through its purpose to banking and how it is has become objectified, used and handled, analyzed primarily through its humility as a thing. I then move on to analyze it further through its position in a wider material culture of everyday things, how it can be understood as symbol of current material cultures of banking.

Of the material things involved in banking, such as credit/debit cards, smartphones and laptops, the authentication device, in Swedish vernacular referred to as "dosa"[10], can be

identified as that which is least associated with anything other than banking. While for instance credit cards have seen increased used for both commerce and authentication (e.g. printing tickets at airports or checking in at hotels), the device is used only for personal authentication in online banking. And while the credit card is an acknowledged cultural icon and has been analyzed in terms of economic and social status, class and as a transmitter of culture (Ritzer, 1995), it is hard to perceive the device as carrying any such culturally salient associations. Such a perception, as will be shown, is not necessarily sustainable.

In the go-along with Chloë, I described how she used the device to log onto her online bank (Go-along, Chloë, 2013). Without going too deep into technical aspects, the device can be described as a "hardware authentication token", applied by banks to protect customers from fraud. Through special algorithms which generate temporary, random access codes from the input of a personal pin, tokens allow customers to access online banking services. This "2-factor" system, based on *what you know* (i.e. your pin code) and *what you have* (i.e. the authentication token) to generate access codes (Gunson, *et al.*, 2010: 209), is the primary online banking security system used in Sweden. In the few years since it was made a requirement by most banks, around 2007-2008, it has become ubiquitous to private banking and a thing which Swedish customers have had to adapt their banking practices to and around. This is emphasized by the fact that simplified online bank log-in (where the device is not needed for checking account balance), is a service usually available with any bank but not reflected on by any of the research participants.

Even though all full service banks in Sweden use and issue hardware authentication tokens, devices differ from bank to bank in their aesthetic design choices and in how they are supposed to be operated by customers. Taking examples from two of Sweden's largest banks, the device issued by Nordea (Img. 1) authenticates by having the customer insert the card tied to their primary account at the top of the device and signing with the regular pin of that card, while Swedbank's device (Img. 2) authenticates through unique pin code only. As a result, Nordea's device is slightly larger than Swedbank's. In Nordea's case, the actual device is identical for each customer and it is the personal credit/debit card that works as the unique *what you have*-token. With Swedbank, the device itself is the unique authenticator token. This is by far the most common device model, while the one Nordea uses is less common.[11]

The devices have simple digital displays at the top, usually under the bank logo. They appear similar to branded, gimmick calculators, a similarity furthered by all devices running on small cell batteries which last for extended periods of time. The buttons, designated by imprinted numbers and text, are clearly marked by being raised up from body. The buttons

offer slight resistance when pressed, the intention presumably being that this minimizes the risk of pressing the wrong button. Devices appear designed to be pedagogical, easy to operate. Though small, they have a robust quality. Dropping them won't make them break. The simple sunken display protects it from scratches even if kept in a pocket or a bag. In recent years Swedish banks have developed online and mobile banking platforms that allow access through software authentication tokens (e.g. downloadable software programs or apps), but the hardware authentication token remains, at least for the participants at the time of research, the principal way of authentication for online banking.

(Img. 1: *Nordea device with card inserted*)   (Img. 2: *Swedbank device from drawer*)

Having to use the device for online banking has neither been a choice nor a request on the part of the customer. The relationship is asymmetrical, the device having been introduced to banking practices without customers having had much say in the matter. Taking this into consideration, together with the fact that the device is necessary for online banking, it seems reasonable to assume that customers would express displeasure with having to use it. Yet, this appears to not be the case. For most participants, the device stands out by not standing out. It is not a source of serious aggravation. If anything, it seems to most often be taken for granted and goes unnoticed.

Following Miller's concept of the *humility of things* (2010: 50), it is possible to appreciate the dual side of the device as both central to banking practices and taken for granted by practitioners. Far from indicating a lack of importance, being able to go unnoticed is what makes the device central. By being humble and not generating too much focus on itself, it works just outside of practitioner attention and moves banking practices towards the purposes one has when engaging in them. This quality can be observed in the way it is handled and talked about by the participants. Maria, a 20-year old electronics store cashier living with her mother, explains how she practices her banking:

> I've often bought something just before, like, shopped around on the internet, if I've found something, shoes or whatever. And then I feel like this: "Well, now then, if they cost this or that much, I'll go in and check how much money I have to move around with." Then I get my wallet, and then I log onto nordea.se. And there, there's this tab that says: *Log on - Private customer*. I do that. And then you use this device, and your personal code for your card. And then you're like, on it. (Interview: Maria, 2013)

"This device" appears in Maria's narrative as just a thing among the other things that enables her to use her online bank. In contrast to the wallet (where she keeps her card) the device is not a thing she has to get up and get. It is in her bag and she assumes that it is simply supposed to be there, presumably wherever she has to do her banking. Maria's narrative is far from unique. Only one participant out of twelve in a Facebook focus group discussion on where their banking took place and why, mentioned the importance of having the device close at hand (Facebook focus group, 2013).

An important reason as to why the device is able to sustain its humbleness is found in the fact that it usually works as intended. Breakdowns of any kind were not presented during the research. But it is easy enough to assume that a malfunction in the device would expose a customer to their dependency of this thing, largely taken for granted (cf. Miller, 2010: 50; Hodder, 2013: 18). As a thought experiment, should the device malfunction for Maria or Chloë, or should they fail to find it in their bags, in its intended place, the device would make itself noticed by its absence. Its materiality and function as a necessary thing to banking would be explicitly felt. The same applies to it running out of battery, or if it for any of the reason to which digital things are prone, would simply refuse to work. In such cases, the device would immediately become a problem and its breakdown probably result in apprehension. It would no longer be able to sustain its humbleness. It can no longer serve to be a thing which gathers what is needed for banking to materialize.

During a subsequent go-along with Maria, taking place outside of her home, I note her speed and near frictionless maneuvering of the card-device-laptop-webpage authentication. She keeps her device in a medium sized trendy leather bag. Like Chloë, Maria has to search through the bag for a while before finding it. When I ask Maria if she always keeps the device in her bag, she say that she does, and comments that she also has another one at home, which she shares with her mother. That device is always located by the living room table, next to the sofa where she and her mother mostly do their banking. The device in her bag has no designated place in the bag itself. It shares space with other things private and practical Maria

carries with her while moving about. The fact that she has to search through her bag to find it is nothing she comments on. It is merely part of the situation (Go-along: Maria, 2013).

The necessity of having to authenticate yourself through the device entails that for most customers, banking cannot take place where the device is not. Maria's solution is to have two devices. This practice is possible with Nordea since the card is the unique *what-you-have*, and the device is generic. It does not work with most other banks where you can only have one unique device.[12] Since the device has to be present, it has to be carried along. Given its light weight and small size, this speaks to the mobility of contemporary banking practices. Yet, mobility of practice depends on there being mobile things which can move along with the practitioner. These in turn have to be moved *in* something. Laptops, smartphones and authentication devices have to be carried in bags, backpacks, cases, and so forth. Now, the device is in no way the instigator of our current need to carry bags so that we may carry other things, it only humbly tags along. But it is an example of how things entangle in everyday life and create a dependency with other things which has direct effect on how we move and what we move with (cf. Hodder, 2013: 43). A corollary of this mobility is that losing the device means losing the ability to bank. Since most customers only have and use one device, it is important to know where your device is when you need it. Because of its small size and mobility, it runs the risk of being moved between different locations and getting lost along the way. Thus, the mobility of the device is not only an asset, but a potential problem. It should come as no surprise then that the location where most participants kept their devices was in their homes, close to the material order of things (e.g. laptops) that make up potential places of banking. Perhaps ironically, the mobility of the device in combination with its uniqueness as necessary thing to the practice means that it, and consequentially contemporary banking itself, is less mobile than its potential suggests. But if this is the case, then why do customers not simply abandon the device in favor of software authentication? Maria explains that:

> The purpose of the [smartphone] app is that you don't have to carry around the device, right. But it feels like, if I would accidentally tell someone my code, or if someone would figure it out, then they can just log in and do whatever they want. No, I think it feels unsafe. /.../ It feels safer when there is something in between, and I have to punch in my own code. Like that device. And the fact that I actually use my card. It's like a safety. (Interview: Maria, 2013)

Maria comments that she needs something "in between" her authentication and the bank in order for her banking to feel "safe". Using the smartphone app is simply not safe enough, because she cannot trust the codes, or herself, with its security. Having to use the

device instils feelings of security. Miller (2008: 287) describes material culture as a relational perspective. Things we keep close to ourselves, in our homes or in our bags, have the potential to develop special relationships with us. They make us as individuals at the same time as they make the world around us through their entanglements with us (Miller, 2008: 285ff; Hodder, 2013: 86). Things have relations to people, but they also have relations to other things, institutions, *et cetera*. Through analyses of material things, we reveal relations in and to private and public worlds. The authentication device is one of the last remaining material, physically delimited things issued by banks to customers. It relates the customer directly to the bank though movement and action (pushing the buttons, typing the codes). As such, it can be understood as a relationship of materialized trust, establishing itself as a conduit between bank and customer. Once that conduit is transferred to, or enveloped into, another handheld digital thing used for other things than banking (e.g. a smartphone), the relation of trust which is upheld by the device might be experienced as becoming weaker. For instance, if the trust conduit is changed and a bank forces its customers into software authentication too quickly, customers might not have the time to secure their trust. This might already be perceived as a problem, with older generations especially being concerned with the development of banking moving too fast into fully digital and delocalized practices. For the Hässleholm focus group this issue was voiced emphatically, though interestingly enough not in relation to the participants themselves, who were in their 50's and early 60's, but in relation to their parents who were seen as helpless in the face of the ever changing digital technology forced upon them. The participants themselves had no problem with online banking, but did acknowledge that their children were more skilled than they were in dealing with digital technology (Hässleholm focus group, 2013). To understand what is implied by the device upholding a relationship of trust, we need to return to how it is used.

For Maria, as for Chloë, the authentication device has always been a part of banking practices. Even having to find it by rummaging through a bag is a part of the reoccurring movement of access between the individual and her economy. The almost unconscious nature of such actions, their flow and rhythm, repeated time after time, might be perceived as ingrained in muscle memory (cf. Chin, 2011). Turning to older generations these action are not as ingrained, or at least not as fluent:

> On top of a couple of books are the family bills. My mother takes them down and puts them on the desk when she has sat down. As she sits she crouches down, take a sip of coffee and starts typing in the website. I'm surprised how well she handles this; my

mother has never been much for technology but this part she seem comfortable with. She types in sparbankenikarlshamn.se and from there she goes on to grab her device and enters the codes. She does it really slowly, taking her time, making sure that all numbers are correct before she hits any follow-up buttons. Once she is logged in, she checks all the e-invoices that has been piling up and checks that the numbers are correct. (Go-along: Kristine, 2013)

In contrast to Maria or Chloë, Kristine, a 48-year old former bank clerk, negotiates the device and log-in at a more deliberate pace. She takes her time, makes sure that the numbers are correct and checks them carefully. Kristine is comfortable with the device and its functions, though she seemingly "has never been much for technology". Even if the contrasts are noticeable between the accounts of Maria's and Kristine's practices, so are certain similarities that illustrate a common quality of the device to banking practices: it is easy to use and allows for both fast and deliberate movement. Furthermore, it is not associated with discomfort. Kristine's go-along highlights a common occurrence among participants, especially the generations who have not been brought up surrounded by digital technology. The device, which in actuality is a complex digital thing, does not seem to induce the kind of anxiety caused by digital things associated with the rapid pace of changing technological paradigms, such as laptops or smartphones might have a tendency to (cf. Miller, 2012: 21).

This difference between how younger and older generations handle the device might be explained through concepts such as *digital natives* and *digital immigrants* (cf. Tapscott, 1998; Palfrey & Gasser, 2008; Glöss, 2012). Natives, born roughly around the mid 80's, have grown up in a world of digital technology and are phenomenologically and habitually attached to it from childhood, resulting in a more naturalized approach. For older generations, the immigrants, naturalizing digital technological things is like learning a second language (Glöss, 2012). Though this dichotomy might explain a level of comfort attached to banking practices in terms of appropriation of technological paradigms, it runs the risk of missing one of the most defining characteristics of the device: it is seldom treated as a complex digital thing. This has impact on how it is experienced and communicates trust and user friendliness, and consequently also on how it is objectified:

> I never thought about banking systems at all, until I came here, and I was faced with... First of all when I came to the bank, and then I signed the thing and they gave me this, identificator, whatever... this small thing you put the pin in... You know what I thought when they gave it to me? I was thinking: "What a nice bank. They gave me a present, a calculator." I was so happy! (International focus group, 2013)

Sophia, a 22-year old exchange student from Ukraine studying at Lund University, relates her first experiences of banking in Sweden. Banking as she is used to it from home center around practices which physically tie the customer to the bank office. When bills are to be paid, you take the bill and cash and you go to the designated bank office. When Sophia first came to Lund, a few months prior to the focus group, she was amazed at the extent in which banking was practiced through online platforms. She likes it, she says, and she likes her bank, the products and customer service they provide. She can do banking anywhere. Above, Sophia mentions "this small thing", the "identificator" that she first thought was a gift from the bank for signing up with an account. This point is revealing to the material culture of the device. When Sophia is first given the device, she identifies it as a gimmick calculator. She does not acknowledge its centrality to her future Swedish banking practices, but instead relates it to another material thing she is familiar with. This connection indicates how the device fits into a material culture of recognizable things which Sophia knows how to use, in other words, her embedded, skilled knowledge (cf. Pink, 2009 35; Ingold, 200: 353). Had the device been more complicated, or had Sophia been introduced directly to software authentication and mobile banking, her experience of transitioning from Ukrainian banking to Swedish banking might have been too wide, causing her to feel negatively about her bank. Instead, a process of objectification, where the device and Swedish banking as a whole becomes an extension of herself and her financial resources, progresses smoothly for Sophia.

Objectification, the process where we extend our reach by making things and simultaneously re-making ourselves, is never a straightforward line of progression, but a "flow of dialectic relations" (Hodder, 2013: 31). As Sophia's narration illustrates, the objectification of the device might be explained at least in part through its position in a material culture of already known things. By taking this position seriously, the device can be understood as acting as a symbol of the material change from one way of practicing banking to another. The same process that makes the device meaningful, relatable and trustworthy to a material culture related to a world of handheld calculators, will also be the process that makes the device redundant as technology moves onto more entangled and mobile things and their material culture. As a thing, the device is not flexible enough to move forward. The particular "flow of dialectic relationships" which relates it to calculators, will make it increasingly difficult to relate and adapt to new banking services and platforms. This kind of material cultural change can also be observed in the transition from postal giro to online banking.

Explaining how her banking practices have changed over the years, Inger, a 56-year old municipal director, comments: "I remember you did it in a different way before the device

showed up. It was the device that I... that I think is very new to me" (Interview: Inger, 2013). For Inger, the device conceptualizes a change. It stands for something new, making a clear contrast to a material culture that came before it. Later on in the interview, Inger confesses that she dreaded having to use the device when she was first introduced to it by her bank. When asked to relate this resistance and why it later changed to acceptance, she explains that:

> I didn't have any control any more. From first having gone in to the bank and doing everything eye to eye. Then to sit down and write, yourself, and place invoices in one of those bank envelopes and send it. It was still me that did it. And then I understood that a human person opened that letter and looked at it with human eyes. But after that, came those scratch things, some scratch code you got. Then, it still felt as if it was me that did something. And that felt like, good in some way. But I understood that it was not human beings who received it, that much I began to understand. It really was kind of mysterious. But then came this device. And by then, it was all technology. Then, it was all pushing buttons. I didn't write anything, I didn't scratch anything. I did nothing myself, except to put in the card and push the buttons. But once I'd passed that threshold, it was really easy. And it feels at least as safe as before. Today, I don't think it feels strange at all. (Interview: Inger, 2013)

Inger's narrative illustrates a process of change in the material culture of banking, roughly from the early 1970's until today, and how she came to embrace a "new way" of banking and regaining feelings of control. "Technology", by which Inger should be understood as referring to digital technology specifically, removes human interaction from banking, leading to a practice which is "all technology". But once she passes the threshold of use and adopted the new technology, safety and control is re-established. What Inger's narrative reveals is the process by which the materiality of banking has moved along. One order of practice informs and paves the way for another. The postal giro system was a way to make customers less dependent on bank opening hours. To authenticate in that system, customers signed pre-printed forms and sent them along with their bills to the bank. Once banks began offering online alternatives to the postal giro system, another way to ensure customer security was necessary. Special "scratch cards", where you would scratch a code from a credit-card sized plastic card, were issued as a way to authenticate yourself together with your pin. When the authentication device was introduced as a replacement for these cards, having to authenticate yourself for online banking and the movement of banking practices from the bank to the home had already been established. Running alongside this narrative are the developments in home computers and faster and more accessible internet connections in Swedish homes. Hodder (2013: 3), in his argument for the entanglement of things and humans, comments with sociologist Alex Preda (1999) that if things are to be

useful and relevant to us, it is not only the thing itself that is of importance, but our ability to recognize the thing for what it is and how it can be used. Such knowledge is usually tacit. This follows in line with Miller (2010: 53ff), for whom cultural make-up and knowledge emanates from orders of things large and small we acquire by being habituated to them throughout our lives. The device fits in with Inger's generation, one who grew up with early digital technology in the form of calculators, clocks and remote controls. The action of button pushing have always been a part of their lives. Going back to the first paragraph of this chapter, it might not be a coincidence that the device is called "dosa" in Swedish, short hand for remote control, a thing that generation was familiar with from the mass introduction of televisions that took place during their childhoods (cf. Åberg, 1999).

The material change in a practice such as banking can be seen as a process through which the individual is forced to assimilate a new material culture pushed upon them from above unless they risk becoming oppressed by it, to lose control. This is the negative side of objectification, where the oppression from a material order is alienating for individuals. But as this analysis has shown, at least for banking, the process appears to be more dynamic. Things, as Miller (2010: 64) notes, are intrinsically contradictory, able to simultaneously oppress and make us grow. To Swedish banking, the device has become a conduit of trust between bank and customer, facilitating in the movement of banking onto online platforms by introducing digital authentication and more flexible and mobile practices. As such, it represents a bridging of an early material culture of remote and digital things and a newer order, instantiated by software, perceived as more complex, more distant and perhaps even immaterial, as Inger seems to suggest in her narrative above.

Concluding this chapter, through investigating the device as a humble thing which may also be understood as being a symbol of transition from one material order to another, I have addressed questions of mobility and trust in banking practices. The authentication device should be regarded as successful in establishing and materializing trust between customer and bank in Sweden, evident in that even with recent introductions of more streamlined software authentication, the device is still relied on by customers. The device manages to be both humble and express a certain measure of trust while making banking more mobile than it was before its introduction. I have outlined how this is not only a matter of function or design, but depending on its relation to material culture, primarily to more robust, early digital things.

By engaging a material culture analysis focused on how the device is objectified, entangled and how its material culture frames banking practices, I have also shown how such

perspectives may reveal the dynamic nature of transitions of ways of practice. Theoretically speaking, this is tying together theories of practice with theories of material culture. The entanglement of the authentication device does not only lie with its relations to the other things of banking, it lies with the perception of what contemporary banking practices themselves are and how such practices are framed. The device is not only a thing which banking customers have had to adapt to, it is also a thing that is adapted to material culture of the society in which it was created. As banking continues to transition into more complex digital things, these connections to earlier material culture and practices is also what will make it redundant once new technology becomes more definite.

Cards

This chapter focuses on the credit/debit card, which has become the primary way Swedish bank customers access money through their bank accounts and perform commercial transactions. The chapter aims to gain an understanding of how the increased use of cards changes banking practices, bank-customer relations and perceptions of the materiality of money. What happens to Swedish society when cards become objectified and increasingly entangled in everyday life? This question aims to challenge a common social science stance that cards are necessarily destructive to ordinary consumers. Instead I aim at addressing how cards become mundane and normalized things in everyday life, and how this can be understood as a process of dialectic relations of dependence and dependency. The chapter will introduce how the card is used and perceived. I then investigate its materiality relative to money, before ending on the dependence and dependency caused by its increasing entanglement with everyday life. To begin, I offer a personal experience:

It is around two in the afternoon and I am sitting in my apartment in Malmö, trying to write this thesis before an increasingly pressing deadline. A few hours ago, I had to run down to my local corner shop to buy milk for my coffee. 10.50 Sek. I paid by card. Yesterday night, a few friends asked me to go out for a beer. Modestly, I had two. 116 Sek. I paid by card. Last week I refilled my travel card with Skånetrafiken in order to get to the university. 200 Sek. I paid by card, to refill another card. Later on today, I am going to buy a train ticket to Stockholm. The price is reasonably high. I will pay by card and authorize with my device on the train company webpage.[13]

More and more, the everyday economic transactions I make are done or involve a plastic card. The card in this case is my ordinary credit/debit card, issued by my bank and connected to my bank account. I have only ever used it for debit, simply because I never found a need or purpose to use credit. The card usually stays in a slot in my wallet and is, together with my phone, one of only few things that I carry with me wherever I go. I know that I can use it to pay for just about anything anywhere in Sweden. It works in every place in the world where there are up-linked card terminals or ATM's, from Ulaan Baatar to New York. As one research participant noted, I can be amazed that it works in small towns in Sri Lanka just as well as it does back home (Interview: Ann-Katrin, 2013).

The dominance of the card to my everyday consumption is no coincidence. By way of recent financial deregulation, cooperation between banks and card companies as well as legislation that prohibits retailers from taking service charge on card transactions[14], Swedish commerce does not only have a high acceptance towards card use, it is increasingly geared towards it. In a report by VISA Europe, Sweden appears as the leading country in Europe in card transactions. Cards are used for transactions in Sweden up to four times as often as the European average and for much smaller purchases. Almost 4,3 million transactions are made per day and the average amount per purchase is 320 Sek (compared to the European mean of 435 Sek). Almost every adult Swede own at least one credit/debit card (Barganowski, 2014). According to a report by the Swedish Banker's Association (2012), card transactions in Sweden have multiplied close to twenty times from 1995 to 2011, going from 101 million transactions to 1,951 million transactions per year. Almost all of these are debit, where the customer used the card to access their bank account. Thus, this can be argued to be one of the main reasons why nearly every economic transaction in Sweden goes through a bank.

To gain an understanding of this steep rise in card use, an important issue of discourse needs to be addressed. Sweden is rapidly becoming a cashless, card society. This is not to be confused with the often critical sense of a "credit card society", argued for by Ritzer (1995; 2001), where the credit card is the harbinger of cultural and ideological Americanization and rampant individual debt and personal financial disaster, wherever it goes. Even if credit and debit functions can share the same card, in verbal as well as practical discourse they are two different things. Swedes tend to refer to the credit/debit card they most often use, simply as "kort", "bankkort" or "kontokort", meaning "card", "bank card" and "account card" respectively. Talking about a "*kredit*kort" (*credit* card), tends to have different connotations. If one of the defining characteristics of the authentication device is its humbleness, the opposite is traditionally said about the material culture and image of the credit card. Much

maligned for the frivolous economic behavior and sociocultural calamity it is said to encourage (Ritzer, 1995: 28ff), this perception has been repeated in discourses of Western societies until it has become a truism. Similar imagery apply to credit cards as a symbol of social status or economic affluence (e.g. Bernthal, *et al*., 2005). Since my focus lies with the card as a material thing entangled in private banking, a broader critique of credit and credit cards as an integral part in the construction of consumer societies (e.g. Ritzer, 2001) or of private financial discourse and behavior (Botterill, 2010) is kept outside of this analysis. What on the other hand needs to be acknowledged is how these critical perceptions still linger among the participants in the research. For example, in Sweden (and many other countries), the reality television show *Lyxfällan*, based on the concept of charismatic economic advisors assisting people caught in consumptions traps to sanitize their economy, often features a dramatic moment when over-extended credit cards of oblivious debtors are cut in half. This show was referred to at one point or another by virtually any and all participants when discussing the risks of debt and over-extensions of credit.

I do not mean to insinuate here that credit cards are not common among Swedish bank customers. They are. Participants, especially those in a focus group of bank customers aged 45 and upward (Client focus group, 2013), were frequent credit card users and expressed clear perceptions of how to use them, and how careful you have to be to pay invoices on time and avoid the steep interest charged for late payments. Most of the participants in the group knew by heart the rebates offered by various cards, revealing knowledge not only about card use, but also what those cards give you back in the end. For some, this resulted in using more than one card, depending on purpose and location. This lead to major issues related to the amount of cards you would have or be offered, all with different yet similar bonus programs and attached to different chains of supermarkets, gas stations, *et cetera*. Participants explained how they had to deploy different practices to keep track of their use and expenses with different cards. For example, one participant in the group had a little black book in she would write down the different transactions she made with each card respectively. Another issue related the number of pin-codes one had to know:

> *Jan-Erik*: ... I had the problem that you have to keep all these codes in your head, if it was Preem, Statoil or whatever gas station, right, then you had to have a new code for every place you went to.
> *Anneli*: But you can often change those by yourself.
> *Jan-Erik*: Sure, but well, it's not really that good to have the same code for everything.
> (Client focus group, 2013)

The exchange between the participants above illustrates not only issues of security, but how credit cards bring forth practices, such as deciding on pin-codes and memorizing them. From a perspective of objectification, credit cards extend your reach as consumer. But the card also entangles the individual with a potentially vast amount of other things (e.g. a book with transactions) and practices (e.g. memorizing or choosing codes) needed to uphold its functions (cf. Hodder, 2013).

In contrast to much of the lingering discourse on credit cards, it is through its relatively more safe and easy use as debit that the card has become a mundane thing in Sweden. Since both credit and debit functions usually come together on the same card and since customers paying with credit or debit use identically shaped cards that work through essentially the same technology and practice (e.g. card terminals and pin-codes), the shape and routine of using a card becomes important to its material culture. Material things establishes relations (Miller, 2008: 287), but the nature of these relations are not always clear to customers. Through continuous everyday use, customers barely register what the card *is*, but rather what is *gives*. Thus, the entangled relation it upholds between customer and bank (and card companies) fades into the background, usually to be recognized only when something fails. Furthermore, the deep entanglement of the card, with banks, credit card companies, financial laws, the infrastructures of local and online commerce down to the electricity companies that supply the power for card terminals, all these relationships are shielded from the attention of the customer through the card's mundane, everyday use.

Analyzing the card as a material thing, an interesting problem becomes apparent. The card is not only a thing and cultural icon. It is also thing which is a means to obtain other things "as well as virtually anything else available in the world's markets" (Ritzer: 1995: 1). It shares this quality with any other form of currency, such as coins and bank notes. Any currency is always attached to things with arbitrary economic value exchanged for other things (Ferguson, 2008), but in contrast to coins and notes, the carrier of a card does not have to have a multitude of things at hand. One participants phrased this as: "I use it all the time. /.../ In its way it's practical. You have money. Even though you don't have any money in your wallet, you have money with you. /.../ It's a feeling of freedom in that way, I think, to have it on your card" (Hässleholm focus group, 2013).

The card can be sufficient to obtain most everyday things. This is the primary relation of cards to contemporary banking. It facilitates transaction by letting the holder avoid cash, allowing more or less direct access to money in bank accounts. Thus, a card is not only a

thing by which you obtain other things, it is a thing that has the ability to eliminate other material things of currency. The same thing (i.e. a card) can be used to buy milk for 10,50 Sek at the corner shop, or a sofa at a trendy furniture store for 25,000 Sek. The emerging changes in practice that comes with increased card acceptance in Sweden is recent, but their effects are already widespread. For example on the experience and conceptualization of money:

> It nice being rid of money in it physical form. It's kind of disgusting and unhygienic. /.../ Not that I really care. But it's nice not having to deal with it in your hands. To me, money have become more of mental numbers. When I think "money", I very rarely think of bank notes. It's just a number that's put in relation to my salary that's also on my account. /.../ The physical symbolic value of money has in any case switched to the card, and maybe to the things that belong to the card, the teller machines, perhaps the ATM. (Interview: Andreas, 2013)

Andreas is 29 and works as a municipal administrator. He has used cards for payments all his adult life, but comments that it was not until recently that he began thinking about how unhygienic handling cash really is. In the quote above, he expresses strong emotions regarding money in its "physical form", meaning coins and notes. Andreas was not alone in this sentiment. Especially among younger participants, unhygienic cash was a recurring reference.[15] This, together with switching, as Andreas explains, the "physical symbolic value of money" from cash to cards and their associated things, signals what might be understood as a conceptual change in the perception of the materiality of money. Drawing on digital humanist Katherine Hayles (2012: 14), this can be explained as a shift in *attention*, understood as a "focusing action which co-determines materiality" through adaptive cognitive exposure. Materiality (in this case, things) can be understood as something that is not pre-determined, but assembles though where, or on what, practitioners focus their attention. A side-effect of this change in attention is an emerging perception of money accessed through cards as immaterial: "[b]ecause really, I kind of don't think [my money] exists. Like, sure they exist, but not physically. They're numbers" (Interview: Maria, 2013). When money appears to participants solely on receipts or lists of transactions, money both exists and does not exist at the same time. The materiality of money is changing, but attention has not yet made money as "numbers" appear fully material to some participants.

In relation to this, many of the participants bring up tactility and practices attached to cash. Some see to it that they always have a few hundred in notes on them, "just in case", that it makes them feel more "secure". For example, you might "end up at a yard sale" where you need to pay in cash (Interview: Inger, 2013). Others mention having begun tipping at cafes or

giving all their spare change to the homeless just to get rid of it, the weight of which has started to become an annoyance (Interview: Andreas, 2013). The pro's and con's that the participants discuss relative to cash or card could (or should) be a volume of research in itself, but here I will only note, that the fact that coins and notes in their physical materiality are frequently discussed and conceptualized seems to indicate that the increased use and acceptance towards cards is affecting the materiality of money.

While it does not take a cultural analyst to look at the authentication device and the card and determine that they are two very different types of things, comparing them relative to banking practices sheds light on the differences of their entanglements. While the device can be said to be the result of security concerns of online banking, cards are entangled in a deeper sense with financial systems through the influence of credit card companies and their relations to banks, locally as well as globally, making them one of the most powerful everyday things one can engage with in Sweden today. For instance, the more cards are used, the more the influence of card companies and banks have over how commercial transactions are made. With such increased influence and use, the pressure builds on the state to facilitate card transactions, and for businesses of all sizes to support it. Following Hodder's (2013) argument on positive and negative aspects of entanglement (e.g. 2013: 208), the entanglement of the card, both through its financial functions and physical, material form, creates strong *dependence* and *dependency*. Positive dependence in the sense of enabling consumers to use it as a tool to shape and reshape their lives through increased financial reach; negative dependency in the sense that Swedish society might not be able to sustain current standards of living without the card, and as a result must engage vast resources to sustain it. This can be observed in business owners having to install card terminals and smaller businesses, such as pop-up stores and market vendors, beginning to equip themselves with card readers attached to smartphones or tablets. Without things which facilitates card use, it becomes increasingly difficult to conduct business in Sweden. If nothing else, then simply because there is less and less cash in customers' wallets.

Even though increased card transaction can rid businesses of some of the problems of cash (theft, handling, depositing), a "break" in the card system means that they might face serious challenges in conducting business at all during such times. This applies equally to private customers. When a main server of a major Swedish bank malfunctioned for twelve hours in April 2014, the connection to all issued credit and debit cards was severed, causing customers in different locations all over the world to panic as they were unable to use their

cards or use them access money through ATMs. Customers could not pay restaurant bills, travellers could not pay for lodging and those who were out driving experienced serious problems at gas stations (Tidningarnas telegranbyå, 2014, April 11). The bank's Facebook page and the comment section of national news sites quickly filled with enraged comments and threats of leaving the bank for good. As Miller (2012) comments: "The more effective the digital technology, the more we tend to lose our consciousness of the digital as material and mechanical process, evidenced in the degree to which we become almost violently aware of such background mechanics only when they break down or fail us" (2012: 25). Though these problems are generally not common, they reveal Swedish society's dependency of cards and might pave the way for customer (and banks?) developing new practices to avoid getting caught without the access to money in case of a system breakdown. Customers' response to the breakdown further illustrated how uncommon it seems to have become for Swedish customers to carry cash, even when traveling.

Following Ingold's (2008; 2012) theories on life through movement, we may grasp the card as a thing that moves us and through which we are able to move other things. The card enables different kinds of movement, financially as well as physically. Through use, the card becomes an extension of customer behavior, not only in the sense of a consumption of goods, but in the sense of people as organisms, how to move, where to move and what to become (cf. Ingold, 2004: 332). Movement, as Ingold points out, can be seen not as a relation *between* two points, but as life lived *along trails of progression* (2011: 69). If we analyze the card only as a thing which connects customers to goods, where they gain in material expressions of themselves, we lose track of the reconfiguring power cards gain by moving things *along* on a global scale (such as international shipping, credit card companies and more) as well as how it locally makes individuals move, change and grow (e.g. through consumption or travel). When we move with the card, we not only end up in different places, with different things. The world entangled in the card through its relations of dependence and dependency is moved along with us. As a result, the distance between an individual and their destination (geographical, material or emotional) might decrease because of the facilitating effects on movement the card has. This gives a certain freedom. Yet, freedom, as George Simmel (1978 [1907]: 283) points out, is only free relative to its obligations, obligations which we never fully realize until they become a burden. The card grants certain freedoms and these freedoms come with obligations. For instance, things, Hodder (2013: 96) notes, are temporary. They materially break down, disintegrate and fall apart. The only reason we perceive things to be long lasting is that we are constantly maintain them. The more entangled a thing is the more

maintenance it demands in order to function. This is the dialectic of things at taken at a societal scale (Miller, 2010: 56). Not only are we as individuals obliged to keep using cards and keep phasing out cash, but through our entanglement with them, we become obliged to maintain their existence. With the increased use of cards and cash becoming scarcer, Swedish society has to keep moving with the card in order to sustain the flow and circulation of money. Very real, material systems have to be engineered and maintained that makes card use possible, and laws have to be made that facilitates it. Furthermore, with the decrease of cash, living in Swedish society without a card is becoming close to impossible and when the systems that support them break down, most are left without access to their financial resources. Paraphrasing historian Niall Ferguson, paraphrasing the musical *Cabaret* (2008: 32), the card, and the money it moves, does not literally make the world go around, but it does make a staggering amount of things go around the world.

In conclusion, the credit/debit card is a dominant thing in defining Swedish banking practices. From the initial critical discourse surrounding credit cards, card are now mostly used for debit and as a result, have become more mundane. Today Swedish society has a very high card acceptance and a state which has actively encouraged it. This has meant that almost all transactions in Sweden are made through a bank. This seem to entail a change in the perception of the materiality of money, from cash to card, set on a trajectory towards a cashless society. Because of its wide and common objectification in Swedish banking, the entanglement of cards run deep, where customers are dependent on it to facilitate and extend their commercial practices and increasing their movements. This dependence causes dependency, which might entail that contemporary life in Sweden would be difficult to sustain without continuous and increased support, reliance and acceptance of cards. What this means in relation to banking practices is a further distancing of personal financial resources from bank offices or location designed for banking (such as ATMs). Since money from bank accounts can be accessed through any card terminal and transactions made without having to use cash, banks as mediators and facilitators of transactions become almost invisible to the customer. When things break down on the other hand, negative attention immediately gathers around banks.

As a thing, the card seems to make Swedish society increasingly dependent on it for access to money. But in doing so, it might be beginning to challenge its own materiality. This begs the question: what happens to cards if (or when) means of paying and accessing financial resources begin to assemble on even more entangled things, such as smartphones? Here, it

becomes possible to see how Miller's objectification (2010: 54-68) is challenged by what happens to things where their entanglements increase rapidly. Through ubiquitous use, the card becomes objectified into Swedish society. It attracts around itself more functions and everyday financial practices. The more entangled the card becomes, the more relations it is able to gather, until these relations can no longer be contained in its current material form. The card as a material thing might, in the end, not be able to sustain the actions and consequences of cashless, "frictionless" commerce and customer demands on flexibility and movement it has introduced. Thus, objectification does not necessarily entail that it is the material thing itself that becomes increasingly important, but that its entanglements do. By giving attention to the relations of a thing, objectification might be extended by taking seriously the idea of the thing as open and gathering (as discussed in the theory section above).

New Media Technology – Laptop and smartphone

As in the previous two chapters, I approach new media technology through theories of objectification and entanglement. In contrast to the device and the card, things such as laptops and smartphones are used for many other reasons and practices than private finance and banking. Because of this, I also intend to analyze how such things link private and public life, as well as drawing on Ingold's (2011) discussions on movement. The main issue I will address is what happens with banking practices when things such as laptops and smartphones become the center of practice, both as things through and with which banking is accessed. I will begin by introducing the purpose and use of new media technology to banking. After that I will analyze what movements they elicit and how they relate private and public spheres, before ending on how places of banking are made and framed by practicing banking with them.

As with card transactions, Sweden is the leading country in Europe in online banking.[16] Sweden has gone through an increase in online banking payments, from 9 percent in 1999, to 79 percent of all customers over 15 years of age in 2012. In the 15-34 age bracket, that number is 96 percent (Swedish Banker's Association, 2012: 13). This was reflected in the research, where all participants without exception engaged in online banking. For the younger participants, this was the only banking they had experienced. This implies that when discussing banking, online and mobile banking is really what participants are referring to. While most participants used laptops for banking, very few used stationary computers, while some of those 45 years and younger also used smartphones or tablets. These are complex

digital, internet accessible things which, following Horst (2012), I refer to by the collective term *new media technologies*. While there is no lack of analyses of the practices and materiality of new media technology things (e.g. Miller and Horst, 2006; 2012; Palfrey and Gasser, 2008), they are relevant to banking practices for the same two reasons. The first is that they provide customers access to digital, ephemeral places of banking: the online and mobile sites and apps *through* which banking is practiced. As they supply this access, they become nodes around which banking materializes, constituting place-events and creating the potential for places of banking. This is their second relevance, that they are material things *with* which banking practices are made. Though the online site (e.g. its interface, design, tabbed choices), may be virtually the same on a laptop as on a stationary computer, the material thing itself remains the thing with which these sites are accessed in space and time.

Throughout this analysis, new media technology things have already featured prominently, for instance in the entanglement of Chloë's Wi-Fi connection through her phone and her use of the laptop. Of interest has been how these things define movements, make places and thus frame practices. Chloë could never have performed her banking away from home had it not been for the mobility of her laptop and the internet connection of her phone. The fact that she can move around with these things (and have bags to carry them in) may be seen as a foundation of emerging public practices of banking. Even though movement between locations is noticeable, there are also important micro movements in relation to new media technology, such as Chloë's rhythmical typing on her laptop and (though not mentioned in the narrative) the movement of her fingers on the touch pad to move the cursor across the screen. Though some of these movement take place in ephemeral, digital space, they remain grounded in the physical movements of fingers on the laptop and smartphone, reminding that digital things constitute, as digital humanist Matthew Kirschenbaum notes: "a premeditated material environment built and engineered to propagate an illusion of immateriality" (2008: 135). In his work on an anthropology of lines, Ingold (2007: 98-99; 135-137) note that the hand that moves, writes or draws can be understood as a hand that knows, and which through movement creates lines of progression. And though typed or printed text on a page or screen can be considered to be "wrapped up in itself, totally detached from its neighbours left and right" (2007: 93), the rhythm of Chloë's movement seem to suggest a more or less continuous line, a progression where one finger tapping a key is followed by another, punctuated by the emphasis of hammering down on "enter", or the tracing of the cursor moving between icons and tabs on the screen. These movements, often minute and precise, are part of how we use new technology things, by typing, touching, clicking and tapping on keyboards or screens.

Returning to Kristine's go-along in the chapter on the device, her typing is more deliberate, but there seems to a rhythm to it as well, a movement along which a material thing becomes objectified and turned into an extension of the customer.

As new media technology becomes objectified, it entangles. An example of this is the smartphone, which in a very short period of time have extended our reach and changed how we act, move and experience ourselves and the world around us (cf. Horst & Miller 2006; Miller & Horst, 2012). In everything from public transport to being able to access work email at all times during the day, the smartphone facilitates access, use and availability. If the use becomes great enough, more and more services are transferred onto smartphone platforms. Extending banking, just like any other service onto the smartphone is a natural step in this process. Yet, even though mobile banking platforms are readily available for Swedish customers and becoming more common, there is still a lingering apprehension with using them. Chloë, for example, used her smartphone as a modem, while using the laptop for her banking. Presumably, she could just as well have used the smartphone for banking, not having to use the laptop at all (Go-along: Chloë, 2013). Maria is one of many participants who expresses this notion when talking about the possibility of banking on her smartphone:

> Everything becomes too simple in some way. Like the phone is the only thing I have to carry around in order to spend, and call, and everything. It's too simple. /.../ You are supposed to feel like [banking] is something. It's going to feel like I send a text to someone. (Interview: Maria, 2013)

Mobile banking is something Maria has never tried, even though she commented earlier on in the interview how she constantly uses her phone. When she explains what she uses it for, it is mostly for private actions, sending texts, calling, checking Facebook. Banking through the phone for Maria is "too simple" and she believes it is going to feel like sending a text. Banking is supposed to feel like "something". Using her phone for banking could then be understood as meshing her private life with more "serious" actions. Horst (2012: 62-63), argues that new media technology things can be understood through their capability of *double articulation*, meaning that they allow and link communication between public and private life and gain meaning through use in both of these spheres. Through the processes of objectification, new media technology becomes parts of a social ecology of family or selves for communication, but also other purposes. They are multi-purpose things and it seems that they become increasingly entangled in everyday actions and activities, such as information

searching, entertainment, work, and moon-lighting as alarm clocks, schedulers, phone books, *et cetera* (Horst, 2012). Maria's reluctance towards mobile banking might then be understood as her phone not yet being "articulated" enough towards public use, since she seems use it mostly for private actions. Andreas, the 29-year old municipal administrator, further emphasizes a concern over having too many functions on one thing. During a Facebook focus group discussion on smartphones as platforms for banking, he comments that:

> Initially I think I like the idea of being able to pay with your phone. It's not often I feel like that with new technological devices. At the same time it means that even more eggs are in the same basket: phone, music, film, mail, and now dishing out for milk at the store. I still have this paranoid feeling of wanting to separate some activities from each other. For example, I still have my iPod because I don't want to have to take any calls when I'm out for a run and have music in my ears. (Facebook focus group, 2013)

Like Maria, Andreas expresses a desire to use different things for different purposes. Different parts of his life should not mix and disturb each other. During his interview, he is very clear on that point. Private and public, home and work, have to be divided to ensure quality of life. Andreas allows for a measure of acceptance towards mobile banking, but ultimately practices a degree of separation for different functions on different things. In terms of objectification, for both Maria and Andreas the addition of mobile banking to their smartphones runs the risk of alienating these things from them, articulating the thing itself, which they which to be private, towards public use. As mobile banking encroaches on online banking, it challenges perceptions of what the phone is and can be. Consequently, it puts into question the practice of banking itself and reveals along the way the other things it makes redundant, such as the authentication device, or even the laptop (cf. Miller, 2012: 3-4). Inger, describes it like this:

> I have none of my bank services through my phone, yet. /.../ So far I haven't gotten a hang of it. But it will. I'll be there soon. Because my phone replaces my laptop. I hardly need it anymore. (Interview: Inger, 2013)

Inger acknowledges that through a process of continuous use, the phone will eventually replace her laptop. This echoes a quote from Miller (2012) that "... perhaps the most astonishing feature of digital culture is not this speed of technical innovation but rather the speed by which society takes all of these for granted and creates normative conditions for their use" (2012: 28). Such "normative conditions" of use can be seen with the stationary computer and the laptop relative to banking, which in contrast to the smartphone are

unproblematic for most participants' in relation to their banking. If the phone, for some, is not articulated enough towards public action, the computer, stationary or laptop, seem to have achieved this double articulation. They are used with relatively little friction both for public and private actions, possibly because computers for a long time have been associated with work and achieved their private articulation relatively recently (Horst, 2012).

With the analysis of my go-along with Chloë I discussed how the laptop plays a part in making a place of banking in public. But what of the home? Nearly all participants mentioned the home as their preferred place of banking, whether in sofas, at their desks or kitchen tables. When asked to take photographs of the places they most associated with banking, there was striking similarity in what was shown (Img. 3-6):
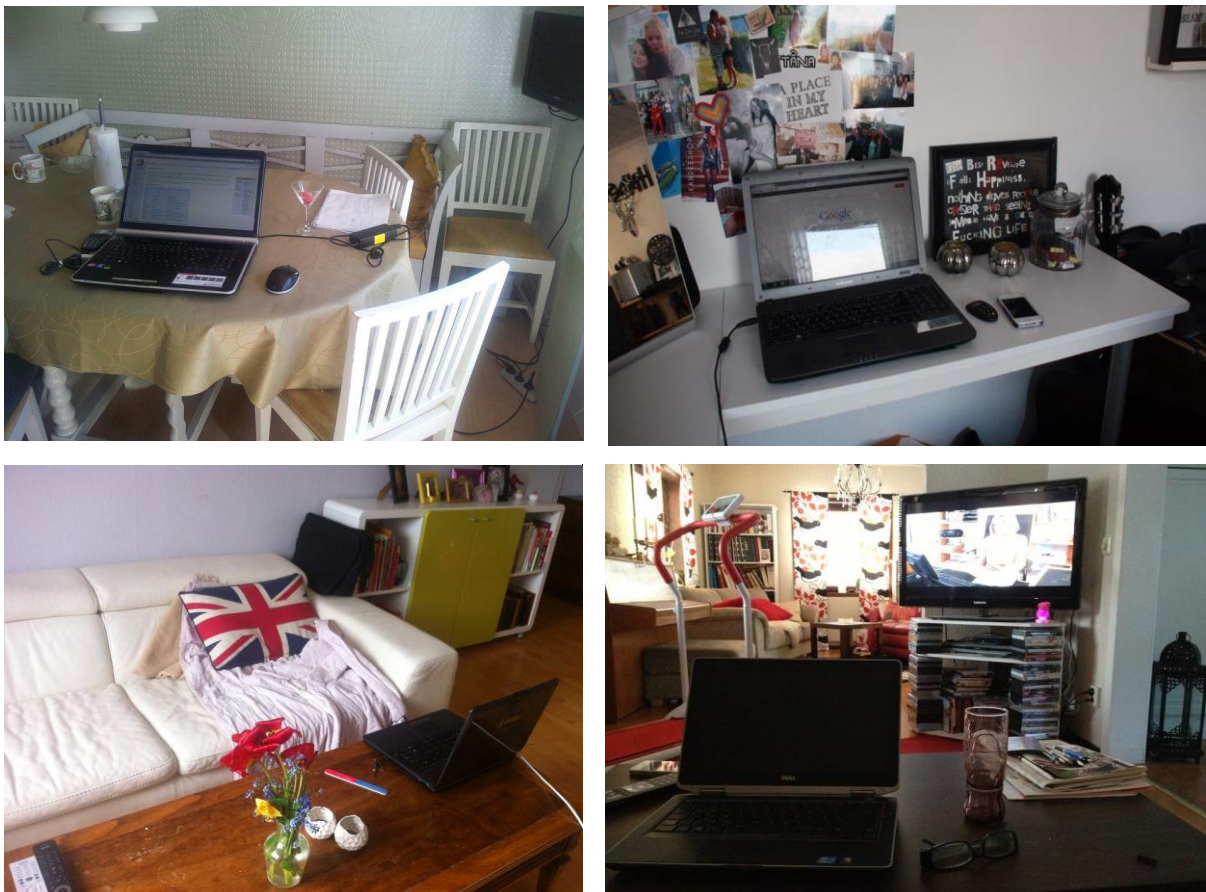
(*Img. 3-6 [left to right]: Participant photographs of places associated with banking.*)

The photographs above are a selection of 30 participant photographs and should be understood as representative of the material. Through the framing and staging in the photographs, the laptop is placed at the focus of attention. Through few participants showed

stationary computers and in two cases, places with no new media technology present, no participant focused on a smartphone, stacks of papers, folders or an authentication device.

In the photographs, laptops are open, usually active. They are placed on hard, flat surfaces. From left to right, a laptop is displayed on a table with mugs and a cocktail glass (Img. 3), with an authentication device and an iPhone in front of photos and handwritten messages (Img. 4), next to flowers in a vase by a ruffled blanket (Img. 5), on a living room table with other papers, remote controls and glasses, in front of a treadmill and a running flat-screen tv (Img. 6). Laptops appear situated in the midst of everyday life. Because of this, banking practices become situated there as well. Illustrated by these photographs is the connection between the home and banking. Since the laptop is the most central thing to these practices, it thus becomes central to the making of places of banking in the home. It is likely that the laptop has achieved this centrality and become a normative thing around which banking may assemble because it, in contrast to stationary computers which usually stay put in one place, can be used while sitting at, for instance, the kitchen table. The laptop offers a certain amount of mobility, relative to the stationary computer on which online banking was first introduced. The transition of banking from stationary computers to laptops offers flexibility of movement, while keeping with the double articulation of private and public. Through Wi-Fi, places of banking can be made all around the home.

In the Facebook focus group, Jasmin, a 31 year old Swedish social worker working in Denmark, explains when, where, with what and why her banking takes place:

> I pay my bills at the start of the month because I work in Denmark and get my salary on the last week-day of every month. I'm often on my Mac in the kitchen or on the living room floor when I pay my bills. Sometimes I pay them through the app in my phone, usually at home. Though, I often transfer money between accounts when I'm on the train home from work. But then using the internet on the phone, and not a public internet. I don't feel like doing my banking by, for instance, paying bills in public places (except for transfers and possibly bills that are somewhat pressing and have for example come through mail) because I believe that it's part of it, to pay your bills at home so you can see your physical bills and have your things. (Facebook focus group, 2013)

Jasmin's narrative reveals a common thread, especially among younger participants: the multiple places and multiple things of access that make up their banking practices. There is no fidelity to things in Jasmin's banking. Her laptop is featured as a central thing in the making of a place of banking, but as Jasmin mentions, it is not the only thing with which she makes such places. She has preferences, but depending on her reasons or needs at the time,

her banking is practiced on multiple things in multiple locations. Her smartphone, as well as the bills she gets sent to her home and through e-mail, also play part in her making places of banking. Jasmin mentions having "pressing" bills to pay, and transfers to make between her accounts. She does not mind doing these while on the train, but only as long as she can establish her own internet connection (see the security issues discussed in the "device"-chapter). The objectification of the smartphone as a mobile, flexible thing to banking practices becomes clear in her narrative. By being able to make secure connections, reliable banking practices and places of banking both in and outside of the home are made possible with the use of smartphones. Through repetition, such practices most likely become routinized over time. But even if she can perform banking in public if she has to, the home is where Jasmin prefers to make her practices. Whether for reasons of tradition or practicality, paying bills in the home is something she believes is "part of it". The connection of banking and the home is in fact so strong, that even when using the smartphone app, Jasmin prefers to use it while at home. It makes sense, seeing that the home, which itself can also be understood as a thing (Miller 2010: 79-110), assembles vast quantities of other things central to the making of the material culture of lived, everyday life. The things we surround ourselves with can make us comfortable, help us feel secure and in control (Miller, 2008). For Jasmin, the home is the location where you "have your things" and can "see your physical bills". Sweden's transition to online banking considered, "physical bills" and important forms (e.g. pension, tax, insurance) are still being sent out through the post office. Some important things related to banking still gather physically in the home. Such things might entangle with the laptop and even the smartphone, tying them to locations in the home and making places of banking appear more natural, secure and comfortable there. As contemporary and digitally advanced as online and mobile banking is, as flexible and mobile the things that make it can be, it is wise to acknowledge the persistence and ingrainedness of "older" things and their entanglements with banking. The postal system, letters and the comfort and security of the home also play part in shaping how new media technology things frame, as well as are framed by, the material culture of earlier banking practices.

Concluding this chapter, it would appear that even though new media technology are powerful in framing banking, that is, how, where, when and with what such practices are performed, these things are affected by other things and their respective material cultures and have to be considered in light of these. This is the dialectic process of their objectification (cf. Miller, 2010). Online and mobile banking are practiced with new media technology things.

These things, being entangled in double articulation processes of everyday life and kept intimately close the people who use them, are subject to existing material cultures in which they are inserted. In order to become objectified, they are domesticated (Horst, 2012: 68), made normative in order to become extensions of their users. This is where banking enters into the everyday, through things that serve multiple purposes for multiple reasons, private and public. New media technology is also how banking ingrained itself by being made accessible and flexible to customers. If banks, through how they make their private banking accessible to customers, would force a customer to use their new media technology things in ways which challenges their relative material culture, they risks making the thing itself appear alienated for the user, causing feelings of discomfort or dislike towards the bank as a result. If I use my phone mostly for private actions, being forced to use it for banking will not be practice I would appreciate.

It is worth pointing out, that since banking becomes associated with new media technology, traditional places of banking such as branch offices, become more remote in relation to the customer and, consequently, less associated with banking practices themselves. New media technology things allow movements between different locations, but also form practices through micro-movements on and with the things themselves. As such, movement is with the things, entailing that when attending to banking, attention is gathered on the thing with which it is accessed. As with money, where there is a material shift in attention from cash to cards, contemporary banking itself is becoming more associated with the things with and through which banking is accessed, than bank offices or bank staff. This change is natural, considering that the individual never sees the work banks do, except when breakdowns occur, as with the example mentioned in the "cards"-chapter. I will now move on to conclusions and discussion of this analysis, before addressing the potential application of the knowledge gained from this inquiry.

Conclusions and discussion – **What are contemporary Swedish banking practices?**

Simply put, private banking is a practice that connects an individual to their financial resources, held, managed or supplied by a bank. In contemporary Sweden, this practice is most usually performed by accessing online and mobile banking platforms through digital, internet connected things, or using a credit/debit card for transactions. As has been revealed in this thesis, banking practices are in a process of change, becoming more individualized while at the same time becoming perceived as more immaterial. The material culture of the things

with which it takes place are used and located closer and more intimately to the individual, physically as well as emotionally and hide many of their complex entanglements from the reach of the individual who practices. The distance between the individual and their financial resources held in banks is also decreasing, becoming more immediate in place and time as money itself has become more "immaterial" through, for instance, the increased dependence and dependency of cards, or the flexibility and mobility of things with/through which banking is accessed. Banking increasingly becomes situated in the hands of the customer and as a result, ingrains itself into everyday life. But in order to engage successfully in banking practices, a staggering amount of things, not only the ones that surround the individual practitioner, have to assemble and work simultaneously. The individual practitioner has to have specific knowledge of how to use these things, as well as knowledge of what banking is. Taken as an everyday practice, as I have attempted in this thesis, the face-value of this practice, where people sit in homes or coffee houses, navigating through their online banking sites on laptops, using small, plastic devices for authentication or inserting their card in terminals at local corner shops, soon dissolves into complexity. The things with which banking is made possible have multifold relations, complex entanglements that relates the individual practitioner to locations, actors and events far outside of their reach.

In a way, contemporary banking is *everything* and its material culture *everywhere*. In order for it to work as intended, one could argue that the whole of society, locally and globally, from the manufacturing of plastic for cards, devices, laptops and smartphones, to bank servers, financial policy, communications satellites and the people who work with, manage and sustain all these things, have to come together. From an individual perspective, banking is needed in order to buy milk, receive salary, save and loan, in other words, to uphold the kind of everyday we have become used to. It is, thus, ingrained in the activities of the everyday and in the center of the prerequisites of contemporary life in Sweden. For the participants in the research, these factors are rarely reflected on while they actively engage in banking practices. In everyday life practices, entanglements and the dialectic of objectification tends not to be reflected on, merely something worked around, such as with Chloë's internet connection. Yet in interviews, consciousness and reflection of standing in relation to such wider complexities become more apparent. Far from entailing a contradiction between what participants *say* and what they *do*, I argue that this reveals the dual side of banking practices in an age of information, complex digital things and mass entanglement. There are general perceptions about banking, but while it is practiced, it is normalized and, like most of the things which make it possible, humble. The practice itself, through its things,

becomes objectified by the individual. This works until things break, resulting in negative reactions of apprehension and sometimes anger. In analyzing the material culture of banking practices, the entanglements of the things that make it become necessary factors to consider and are powerful in defining what banking can be, but it is also individual practices, biographies and skills that define their use and place in everyday life. The material culture of banking springs not only from the material things in themselves, but through our history with them, how they fit into other established material cultures of everyday life and our embedded skills in using them. In other words, this does *not* mean that banking practices simply happen everywhere and any time. Through processes of objectification, the things that frame banking and their entanglement are themselves also framed by everyday life, domesticated, articulated and made humble. Thus, the complicated answer to what contemporary banking practices in Sweden are, is that they are meshworks, where greater local and global movements and everyday life entangle, ending up in homes, in kitchens, on living room floors, trailing along with people as they move through everyday life, as well simultaneously taking place in a multitude of other places. I do not wish to suggest here that the power relation between individual and "system" is symmetrical. In contemporary Swedish society, banking is after all necessary in order to sustain an ordinary enough everyday life. But even so, banking, how, when and where it takes place, adapts to the practices of the individuals who engage in it and their relations to the things used.

This seems to indicate that Swedish banking in the first decade of the twenty-first century cannot be defined as any single practice. Neither is it contained in any single thing, or even in any handful of things. It cannot be solely explained as the resistance or compliance of individuals to powerful systems imposing on them from above. Thus, defining any single culture of banking practices is perhaps impossible. Yet, there are patterns hidden in the texture of the practices and the things which frame them. These become more visible through cultural analytic inquiry. By opening up banking as an everyday practice, involving embodied skills, place and the things that make and frame it, banking practices can be understood relative to the practitioner and *vice versa*. Focusing on the material culture of banking through the objectification and entanglement of the things that make it, further reveals how banking practices are framed by the relations these thing bring to the table. In other words, how the things relate to each other and the individuals who practice with them. Thus, objectification is not only a process through which we extend our reach, it is also how the things themselves extend their reach through us. A dialectic of individuals and things entangled.

In the final chapter, I will discuss some of the benefits of the research and how these can be applied. How can cultural analysis further approach these issues from social science, bank or activist approaches and what is its contributions?

5. Benefits and application

Applied cultural analytical research of private financial practices

In the essay *Has critique run out of steam?* (2004), Bruno Latour phrases the role of the critic as being: "... not the one who debunks, but the one who assembles. The critic is not the one who lifts the rugs from under the feet of the naïve believers, but the one who offers participants arenas in which to gather" (2004: 246).

This seems an apt starting point and motto for future cultural scientific investigations into "the field" of private finance and banking. Applied cultural analysis offers a two pronged benefit to such investigations. Firstly, applied analytical work may bring the cultural analyst closer to the heart of the businesses that supply the products and services of private finance, for instance banks or financial institutions. By working with such actors to develop, refine or even redefine products and services through qualitative ethnographic research, such as the material that makes up the foundation of this inquiry, analysts may gain knowledge of the intricacies involved in private finance, helping clients and customers to relate better to each other while at the same time gaining valuable insights both into private and professional experiences, to learn from a client's perspective. This might result in informed research on the entanglement of individuals, business, legislation and what happens with financial theory when it is turned into products for public use and consumption.

Secondly, applied cultural analysis is inherently an interdisciplinary mode of research which puts emphasis on teamwork and applicability of research (O'Dell, 2009; Ehn & Löfgren, 2009; Jordan, 2013). This opens the possibility of cultural scientific researchers to work and engage with researchers from other disciplines, such as marketing, social sciences, management, organizational studies and perhaps primarily, economics. By giving cultural analytical attention to private financial activity such as banking, cultural studies can approach the fields of finance and economics, to understand the relations of these to culture and the everyday lives of individuals. In a time where finance and economics are cultural (cf. Löfgren and Willim, 2005) and where questions of income inequality are becoming central in a way

not seen in a hundred years (Reich, 2010; Piketty, 2014), can cultural studies really afford not to attend to private financial practices? This is not a call for cultural scientist to become economists, or even cultural economists. It is a call for more cultural attention to the field of private finance, and for more interdisciplinary cooperation. What applied cultural analysts explicitly may bring to the table is to be gatherers, to through research projects make the arenas in which banks, finance and culture, practitioners and researchers of different disciplines can come together to build relations and create new knowledge. Most importantly, this knowledge does not have conclude with the sort of negative cultural critique that traditionally has framed much of cultural science's attitude towards economics and financial institutions (see for instance Ritzer, 1995; 2001, or Sennett, 1998 for examples).

Banking, as I have ventured to show, is not only a financial practice. It is a cultural practice, a cultural genre, suitable and relevant to cultural scientific inquiry. By analyzing private banking as everyday practices, I hope to have shown how a practice commonly associated with economic theory is tied up in the culture of everyday life and is possible to analyze through cultural research. It is not something that stands outside of culture, of exists beside it, it is a part of culture. Engaging in banking is not a mere practical, rational or irrational activity, it is performing a cultural practice. The things that frame it are not delimited by design and practicality, ready to be used in correct or incorrect ways, they are open, able to gather knowledge, experience and transmit skill for those who engage with them.

Both from a perspective of practice and of material culture, the field of private finance opens up for interesting topics of research. For instance, focusing on Swedish ethnographic research there is a striking lack of research on private financial practices, such banking from a historical ethnographic standpoint. How have banking practices changed and why? By deploying qualitative ethnographic research methods, this field may be addressed and generate new knowledge on, for instance, the relevance of banking relative to the field of Swedish modernity research. Who has been able to do banking and what happened once it became accessible to one and all? What is the relationship between banking and privacy and why does this seem important to Swedish banking? Are there gender differences in how banking, a system conceived to be traditionally male, is practiced by men or women? What does banking mean in terms of social orders? Who was allowed to bank and who was not?

On a more contemporary note, investigating further how changes in banking practices and the related things change the material culture of money would offer intriguing research that might result in opening up multiple layers of everyday life and the relevance, value and status of financial wellbeing. What is the material culture of money, now? How is it measured

and how is it handled? If money in everyday settings is becoming digitized (through cards, phones and recent innovations such as Bitcoin), what sort of material culture of money can we analyze and how might it be approached?

Finally, I would suggest research which aims at following and investigating the changes, translations, gains and losses that banking products go through, from their development or innovation by a bank, to how they are sold or serviced to customers and ingrained into everyday life before potentially, inspiring new innovation and products. A circulatory system of banking products, if such a thing can even be said to exist, offers rich possibilities to investigate objectification, entanglement, meshworks, movements and practices involved in making and remaking everyday life through financial means.

The rise of banking – **The end of banks?**

Having considered how the research and insights of this thesis may benefit future academic research, especially within cultural science, I will now address a more business side of the matter. As has been shown through the analysis, banking is changing. The present material culture of banking does not only impact practices, but also the bank-customer relationship. The material culture of banking is increasingly moving towards flexibility and mobility and individualized practice and place. In a few years from writing this thesis, banking and commercial transactions will most likely be performed almost exclusively with mobile technology and the material things that will embody them. This ongoing transition of banking into handheld devices, for instance smartphones, will among other factors, entail a phasing out of hardware tokens such as devices, in favor of enveloped software options. Credit/debit will most likely migrate onto handheld devices as well. This conclusion is also drawn by financial analyst Brett King (2013) when arguing that banking is no longer somewhere customers *go*, but something they *do*. As catchy as such a tagline is, this thesis has shown that banking is more than "doing". If nothing else, then because "doing" necessarily entails a *place* where different forms of doing are engaged in, as well as being situated through *skills* and *things*. Rephrasing King's statement, banking is not something customer do, but potentially, *banking is anywhere customers are*.

During the research projects with the bank client in Lund, it became evident that questions of development and implementation of flexible, mobile platforms was a pressing issue the management had to address. For a small actor that wants to get into the full service bank market, how this issue is approached can be a make or break decision and entail serious

risks. The same goes for deciding how to gain the most out of credit cards. Should deals be made with credit card companies, or should banks begin developing their own software "cards" or mobile payment methods? Such material shifts in products and services can been seen in small niche banks in the United States, but their success is still to be determined.

Banks are complex entities, entangled in financial law, state and global policy while being also being profit seeking businesses. Application of the insights around the material culture of banking and banking practices I have made in this thesis need to be made into concrete practice and inserted into the everyday running of banking itself. How such measures can be made tangible, what can and cannot be done within the frame of the organization, is up to the banks themselves, their management and staff. But I argue that banks could endeavour to take the following steps:

Firstly, banks need to engage and understand how their customers do banking and appreciate the role they, as mediators and definers of financial practices, play in their customers everyday lives. By understanding not only that online and mobile banking is important from a service standpoint[17], but primary to customer-bank interaction, banks can develop better customer support and services. The question of how to get money to customers if servers break down or connections fail will become even more essential as things become more entangled. If banking is where customers are, then banks have to make sure they are ready to be where customers are as well. *Attention needs to be paid to how banking is practiced and how this understanding becomes a part of a bank's strategy and organization.*

Secondly, banking is not changing out of technological innovation and adoption only. It is connected to cultural trends and histories relative to the culture where it is practiced. New systems of banking, if they are successful and useful to customers, relates customers with earlier practices, systems and material cultures. This means that great care has to be paid as to how innovations play into pre-existing practices and material culture. *Cultural understanding and research into the material culture of banking practices is essential to minimize financial risk in development and innovation of products and services.*

Finally, with the ingrainedness of banking having become a necessity of everyday life in Sweden, things should be looking good for banks. But what if new innovations, practices and the everydayness of banking means that something comes along which makes banks superfluous to banking? Could the rise of banking entail the end of banks? To quote Bill Gates from 1994: "[b]anking is necessary, but banks are not." The material culture of banking as analyzed in this thesis seems to suggest a growing perception among customers of money and of customer-bank relations as immaterial. If banks do not take steps towards *transparency*,

actively showing customers the real work needed to make banking happen, they run a risk of being perceived as mere mediators of financial resources. This is not to say that banks have to be their customers' friends, but that they should strive to educate customers in what it is they do for them on a day-by-day basis. This can be achieved through marketing strategies, but this understanding should also permeate the organizational culture of banks themselves, from customer service, to personal bank assistants and CEO's. If such actions are to be successful, they cannot come in the form of pedagogical lecturing, but have to run through the entire philosophy of what the bank is to a customer's everyday life. The concluding thought to such application is that banks have to be careful with customer service, marketing, product development and in-house education of staff, as to not make themselves seem unnecessary, leading to customers looking for other, non-bank options of banking once these arrive on the scene. *Banks have to engage in transparency of their own practices, and find ways of showing customers the work they do, to avoid being taken for granted.* Through working with applied cultural analysis aimed at practice and material culture, digging into bank-customer relations from an ethnographic perspective, banks might gain a feel of where the ropes are in relation to suggestions such as those I have mentioned here.

The material culture of banking practices to activism

If this research can be conceived as relevant to product development, marketing and the organizational culture of banks, then it would seem only fair to suggest its relevance to more activist approaches to banking. As Sarah Pink (2012: 4-11) notes, ethnographic research is suitable to the study of activism in that it approaches the world from the vantage point of individuals involved in the everyday actions from which much of activism springs. But ethnographic research can also involve itself directly in activist processes, in striving towards, for instance, different kinds of sustainability on communal and local levels (2012: 141-151).

Banking is not an isolated practice. It is ingrained in everyday life, and the things that make it are entangled in ways which might be academically daunting, as well as personally frightening. It seems that the more we use the benefits of our current financial practices, such as the credit card, mobile banking and so forth, we just increasingly entangle in global financial systems, financial theory and technological dependency. I might seem as we cannot escape the hold we, our governments and corporations have locked ourselves into. We might also perceive, as political theorist William Connolly (2013: 20-25), that Western neoliberal states (such as Sweden, arguably) function as activist states, continuously acting and working

to free finance from state control and placing the financial dependency of individuals in the hands of the so called free market. Such a case can be argued relative to Swedish law and policy making on credit/debit cards, where state support of increased card use seems obvious. Banks and credit card companies are central and powerful entities and might become more powerful still as cards become ingrained and now go largely unquestioned in everyday life. In these cases, it is important to note, as Hodder (2013: 210-212) argues, that entanglement is first and last dependent of human action, through use, management and support. This leaves a measure of space for activism.

In gaining a cultural analytical understanding of banking as everyday practice, the central position it gives to banks and businesses in contemporary life, the material culture that frames it and the wide reach of its entanglement, steps can be taken to attempt to create other "banking" practices which circumvent banks and their respective entanglements. This might be done by, for instance, establishing other practices of loans, credits, commerce or saving. Such change does not have to be reactionary or luddite in nature, reduced to people hoarding bundles of cash in mattresses and pillows. Non-bank banking, in the sense of savings, transactions and transfers, already exist and use new media technology to function. In Kenya, a mobile phone based transfer and savings service, the M-Pesa, offered by the leading telecom provider, Safaricom, has quickly risen to become ubiquitous to how Kenyans transfer money, but also how they purchase and save. Because of underdeveloped networks of bank branch offices and non-existent internet connection in rural areas, drawing on the superior reach of the mobile coverage, Kenyans today practice banking largely without needing banks (King, 2013: 200-203). Another example from the African continent, especially in emerging economies where a large part of the population have an unsteady flow of income, is ISG's, or *Informal Saving Groups*. These are collectives of individuals coming together to save and lend money within the group. ISG's have become viable alternatives to saving in a bank, which is usually both more costly and far less accessible. While ISG's seem to be a recent field of study in economics, they seem to be connected to far older communal traditions of economy, predating the now dominant Western model of banks and coinage. Some of these systems are also practiced through new media technology, using phones and internet connections to facilitate access and communication.[18] Taken as a whole, in Sweden, where loans play a dominant part in the housing market as well as consumption, systems and practices such as the M-pesa and ISG's might not be sufficient to cover public needs and wants. But on local, communal levels, similar systems could make a difference.

In the end, an understanding of how the ingrainedness of banking, together with an appreciation of the things that make it possible, might open possibilities of financial practices that do not depend on financial institutions, though they might have to lean on other businesses, such as communications operators or internet providers. Through understanding the cultural salience and ingrained nature of private banking practices to contemporary Swedish society, activist actions may be taken which serve to make it easier for individuals to separate from bank-based systems and create viable alternative practices for the future.

6. Concluding reflections

Concluding the final chapter, as well as this thesis, some comments are at hand to reflect on what has been gained by my inquiry. Primary gains are twofold. First, by attending to a cultural analysis of private banking as a practice of everyday life, based on ethnographic material, I have established that private finance can indeed be approached as a topic of cultural research. Second, by investigating private banking as a practice and the centrality of material culture to this practice, knowledge has been gained regarding what contemporary banking in Sweden is, its ingrainedness in everyday life and in what ways it is framed by the things that make it. Banking has been revealed as a meshwork of movements of private and public spheres, coming-together to form a complex practice that gathers multiple things and resources both within and outside of the practitioner's reach and location. Banking practices are a gathering of embedded skills, place and things in spatio-temporal events, which means that although they might appear delocalized in terms of their history, where, how and when they take place is very localized indeed. Furthermore, through ethnographic accounts, I have shown that banking practices are changing as they become embedded in the material things which we surround ourselves with on a daily basis. This does not mean that banking has become any more or less material, but is does mean that the material culture of banking is changing. For instance, the increased use of debit cards to access money in bank accounts changes conceptions of the materiality of money, and no matter how mobile and flexible new technology makes banking, because of already existing material orders, the practice is still mostly performed in the home. By attending to these things, analyzing their material culture and their effects on banking practices, the material cultural frames of contemporary banking practices have been opened to scrutiny.

Finally, by addressing the possible applications of these insights into how banking as a practice is framed and made by material culture, I have pointed out that further research into financial practices is beneficial to cultural science and that results of such research might be useful for banks and financial institutions and activist approaches alike. Hopefully, there is a place in cultural analysis for wider cooperation and contribution to this field in the years to come. As this research suggests, private finance and banking practices will not become less important to everyday life, but possibly only more. The rise of digital currency, the increasing amount of critique, academic and activist, regarding financial inequality, the continuing entanglement of private finance with global economies and markets, they are all calling for deeper commitment from cultural research towards private finance, the entanglement of the individual and society with financial resources and the things that make them materialize.

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[1] Written from memory, this narrative has been corroborated by my mother after its completion.

[2] A "niche bank" is a financial institution that caters to a specific customer base with a specific range of products and services, such as consumption loans up to 250,000 Sek and credit cards for teachers, home owners, *et cetera*. Niche banks are not full service banks, in that they rarely offer savings products or investments. Because of non-disclosure agreements, the client's name will be kept out of this thesis.

[3] A note on translation: since the context of this thesis is Swedish banking, and communication with participants was made primarily in Swedish, it is worth pointing out that "banking" does not hold a direct translation between English and Swedish. The Swedish phrase is "bankärenden/tjänster" which translates directly to "bank errands/services". It might be worth keeping in mind that in Swedish, errands and services are directly implied by the phrase, in contrast to English, where the word itself can be understood as more general.

[4] See Svenskt kvalitetsindex for more information: www.kvalitetsindex.se/component/k2/item/403-bankerna-2013 (obtained 18/05/14; in Swedish).

[5] It should be duly noted here, following Ingold (2011: 103-104) and Hodder, (2013: 92) that Latour's initial French phrasing for ANT suggested that relations reside in something quite different from a network metaphor with connected points, instead resembling something which is more like a meshwork.

[6] This point is furthered by the same material resulting in three different theses from each student respectively, *Det goda lånet: En tillämpad kulturanalytisk studie av låntagarens föreställningar om lån i Sverige*. by Julia Knutsson, *Banking and Quality of Life*, by Eyrún María Snæbjörnsdóttir, as well as this present thesis.

[7] Of which most films related to the recent/current financial crises from an American point of view, such as *The Flaw* (2009), *The Pit* (2009), *Inside Job* (2010), *Too Big to Fail* (2011) and *Hank: 5 Years from the Brink* (2013).

[8] For an example of this, see Skandiabanken's marketing campaign from 2012-13, *Sveriges bästa mobilbank*, might serve as visual illustration: www.youtube.com/user/SkandiaSE (obtained 18/05/14; in Swedish).

[9] For more on how thrift and toil can be seen as essential elements in the construction of the citizen in Swedish modernity see Berggren & Trädgårdh (2006: 38).

[10] There is no direct way of translating the noun "dosa" from Swedish to English. "Dosa" is typically used to refer to small, handheld objects with limited but specific function, the most common being the tv-remote, which in Sweden is called "tv-dosa". The other common occurrence for "dosa" is a small container of Swedish snuff. Except for the shape of the snuff container being a small, flat cylinder, this similarity is neither here nor there.

[11] Though it might seem that customers would prefer one device over the other, there is no evidence of this being the case and the benefits or detraction of either system is presumably best left for a usability or design centred paper, such as Weir, *et al*. (2009).

[12] If this difference has any impact on how customers from different banks move around with their banking, it was not observable during the research. Quantitative research into customer satisfaction with devices, seem to indicate that there is only marginal differences between devices that themselves are tokens and those that use the card. Compare for instance, Weir, *et al* (2009) or Gunson, *et al* (2010).

[13] Written on April 7, 2014. Presumably, the thesis is finished by the time of reading this comment.

[14] For more detailed information see the Swedish Consumer Agency: www.konsumentverket.se/Lagar--regler/Din-ratt-som-konsument/Kortavgifter (obtained, 18/05/14; in Swedish).

[15] During the writing of this thesis, the Carlton Lab at New York University revealed findings from their "Dirty Money" project, analyzing the amount of bacteria of $1 bills in circulation, revealing over 3000 different varieties as well as microbes growing on the money itself. For more, see Doucleff (2014).

[16] www.swedishbankers.se/web/bf.nsf/$all/294C19C4EC9D7C50C12578690052EFA5?OpenDocument (obtained 18/05/14; in Swedish).

[17] Presumably, few would suggest otherwise, but as King (2013:121) reveals, at least in the US only a small fraction of banks budgets go to online systems. If that goes for Swedish banks is unknown, but might be assumed.

[18] For more information, see: investeddevelopment.com/blog/2012/04/the-benefits-of-informal-savings-groups (obtained 18/05/14).