Mobilities Design
— an emerging research field

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I. Introduction
Who am I to stand here before you?

Ole B. Jensen

- Professor of Urban Theory & Urban Design
- Department of Architecture and Media Technology, Aalborg University, Denmark
- BA in Political Science, MA in Sociology, PhD in Planning, Dr. Techn in Mobilities
- Co-founder and board member at the Center for Mobilities and Urban Studies (C-MUS), Aalborg University
- Co-founder and Coordinator of the Mobilities Design Group (MDG) and the Research Cluster for Mobility and Tracking Technology (MoTT), both at C-MUS
- Main research interests are: Urban Mobilities, Urban Networked Technologies, and Mobilities Design
- Homepage: [http://personprofil.aau.dk/Profil/104214](http://personprofil.aau.dk/Profil/104214)
Research projects and themes

- Airport City Futures (AirCiF)
- Driverless Bus Aalborg East (Interreg)
- Dark Design - social exclusion by design
- Pedestrianism
- Multi-method studies of Mobile situations
  (observation, interviews, thermal cameras, eye-tracking glasses, and design interventions) ... Copenhagen Airport (PhD) and Copenhagen Metro (PhD)
- **Mobilities Design as Material Pragmatism**
- Books in process
  - *Material Mobilities* (Routledge, in press)
  - *Handbook of Urban Mobilities* (Routledge, in press)
  - *Latour for Architects* (Routledge, deadline November 1)
2. More than A to B: From transport to Mobilities Turn
Cities as networks - places as assemblages
THE CITY AS AN EGG

boiled

17-19 CENT.

scrambled

MODERN

ANCIENT

Cedric Price
From Transport ... 

... to Mobilities
Staging Mobilities/Situational Mobilities

Mobilities AS Theatre
Staging from above

- **Planning**
  - Documents, procedures, **plans**

- **Design**
  - Design manuals, **design codes**, architecture

- **Regulations**
  - Legal frameworks, **laws**

- **Institutions**
  - Policy arenas, **economic interests** and actors
Staging from below

• Consociates in interaction
  – The meeting and passing by on the everyday street

• Individual performances
  – The **body** and its movements

• Mobile self presentation
  – Social dynamics of interaction on the move
10 pointers for mobilities research

1. Mobilities must be thought of in plural
2. There is no singular discipline for understanding mobilities
3. Thinking mobilities does NOT turn everything into flows
4. Think relationally about place
5. Rehabilitate and Politicise the armature
6. Encourage Mobilities Potential Thinking
7. Understand the 'Dark Sides' of Mobilities
8. Explore ‘Mobilities Design’
9. Mobile pragmatics
10. It all comes together ‘in situ’

Mobilities research is at the forefront of developing new ways of thinking about the politics of matter. Whilst people are mobile, the equally differentiated mobilities of information, capital, goods, and services that are essential for contemporary life are a sustained feature of mobilities research. Indeed one of the defining characteristics of mobilities research is its attention to the mobilities of multiple materialities, both human and non-human ... materialities that have different qualities, different properties, different capacities, and are formed of different relations ... A focus on mobile materialities problematizes simplistic distinctions between humans and non-humans and instead retunes attention towards the assemblages of matter that moves (Adey et. al 2014, p. 265 & 267)
Ole B. Jensen describes mobilities as outcomes of elaborate staging . . .

“Mobilities do not ‘just happen’ or simply ‘take place’ . . . we should think of mobilities as carefully and meticulously designed and planned ‘from above’, as one might say. However, they are equally importantly acted out, performed and lived from below.”


Jensen’s model of staging mobilities highlights links between sociologies and concrete outcomes such as the design and experience of streets, buildings, transit centers, etc. In presenting his work Jensen places emphasis on the influence of situational sociology, with special attention to the work of Erving Goffman.

In Designing Mobilities Jensen declares the central question of his mobilities work to be:

“How is design affording and/or preventing particular mobile practices in everyday life?”
3. From Architecture VERSUS Engineering towards Mobilities AND Design
TRAFFIC

ARCHITECTURE

TRAFFIC ARCHITECTURE
(Buchanan 1983)

MOBILITIES DESIGN

© Diagram Ditte Bendix Lanng, in Jensen & Lanng 2017
Design is ....

- ‘Design’ reaches back to the Latin word ‘designare’ which means to ‘mark out or designate’ (Websters Dictionary)

- ... a verb implying ‘to set something apart for someone, to intend, to make an imaginary sketch’ (Oxford dictionary)

- The deliberate shaping of the environment in ways that satisfy individual and societal needs (Norman 2007:171)

- The conscious process to develop physical objects with functional, ergonomic, economic and aesthetic concern (Rune Monö, in Molotch 2005: 263, note 1)

- Designing means devising a form for an object without having that actual object in front of you (Gänshirt 2007:57)
Assembling and enacting the social ...

... a way of producing additional attachments that make a variety of actors congregate, forming different groupings and assembling social diversity. Tracing networks with wood, steel, polished surfaces and blinking signals, bip-bing doors and blinking elevator buttons, design connects us differently, linking disparate heterogeneous elements and effects, thus entering a game of producing, adjusting and enacting the social.

Design as environmental affordances

... moments are made possible by specific conjunctions of experiential corporealities and material surroundings. The physicality of the city constantly interacts, supports and collides with our bodies. And our bodies respond, go along with, or ignore these environmental affordances.

Degen, Rose & Basdas (2010) *Bodies and everyday practices in designed urban environments*, p.60
Agency ...

• *Anything* that does modify a state of affairs by making a difference is an actor ... Thus, the question to ask about any agent is simply the following: Does it make a difference in the course of some other agent’s action or not?

Distributed Agency and Mobility Affordances

Long tiles = no bump = driving in line

Small stones = bumpy ride = no use (or overtaking)
What’s relevant, is what defines the situation – i.e. what ‘modify the state of affairs’?

Figure 9.1: How Fast Must Grandma Run?

This is the speed pedestrians must cross the road when the light is green

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City</th>
<th>Speed (Km per hour)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hamburg</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kassel</td>
<td>9.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Seifried (1990)
What’s relevant, is what defines the situation – i.e. what ‘modify the state of affairs’?

**Figure 9.1: How Fast Must Grandma Run?**

*This is the speed pedestrians must cross the road when the light is green*

- **Hamburg**: 2.3 Km per hour
- **Kassel**: 9.3 Km per hour

*Source: Seifried (1990)*

... here algorithms and traffic-light-coding are relevant situational design parameters!
The Mobilities Design Group

• Research in ‘mobilities design’ poses these pragmatic questions;
  – What makes a given mobile situation happen?
  – How are specific mobile situations enabled and afforded (or prevented) by design decisions and interventions?
The two most important questions in mobilities design

**WHAT IF ...?**
Imagining and opening up of utopian re-thinking of multiple possible futures

**WHAT NOW ... ?**
Closing in on concrete actions, hard choices, and ethic responsibilities

© Ole B. Jensen & Monika Büscher
WHAT IF INTERSECTION CROSSINGS WERE DESIGNED FOR PEDESTRIANS NOT VEHICLES?

IMAGE SOURCE: Dhiru Thadani (author)
‘Doings’ as an experimental mindset

• Experiments have never been a big thing in the social sciences – with some exceptions. But they could be. And that could be very interesting ... I would love to see Master’s courses which gave people the ability to do these kinds of things [experiments]. For example at the moment we do not often teach Master’s students to construct things, to make things. We don’t teach them to draw: we don’t teach them to program; we don’t teach them all sorts of things which might be interesting if you believe that what we need is an experimental social science (Nigel Thrift in Farias 2010, p. 111-112)
Experiments that makes a difference

- Experimentation, for both Dewey and James, was intimately associated with experience and the articulation of a more tolerant, democratic future which rested upon people being able to bring about change and make a difference in the world (Allen 2008, p. 1620)

Jeppe Hein ‘Socially modified bench’
Why pragmatism fits mobilities design

• ‘Pragma’ – Practice
• Situational / *In Situ*
• *What if* ... ?
• Focus on actual consequences
• 1:1 experiments
• Multi-sensorial
• Embodiment
• Materials
• Non-representational
• Testing and trial-and-error
• ...
4. Concluding remarks
More than A to B

• Firstly, we need to understand than Mobilities is ‘more than A to B’. Mobilities cannot be reduced to secondary activities, to derived demands, to instrumental acts of physical displacement, or to costs alone. Rather, the Mobilities turn suggests, we are alive as we move and increasingly the way we move must be understood to have profound repercussions for the ways we think of ourselves, social others, and the material world. Not being ‘switched off’ as we move, we need an analytical vocabulary that accepts the multi-sensorial, affectual, and emotional relationship to the world.

© Diagram by Hans Bruun Olesen, in Jensen & Lanng 2017
Designerly ways of thinking

- Secondly, we need to understand this mobile complexity through a framework of multiple disciplines. Mobilities design lends itself to a cross-disciplinary re-thinking of the ‘meaning of moving’. In particular the designerly ways of thinking with their immanent problematization of the ‘taken-for-granted’ and their capacity to challenge this through a constant probing and entertaining ‘what if ...? questions

© Diagram by Hans Bruun Olesen, in Jensen & Lanng 2017
‘How does it feel to be moved?’

• Thirdly, the concrete and specific focus of the situated Mobilities perspective that comes with the Mobilities design approach works as an important supplement (and at times corrective) to the generic predict-and-provide transportation surveys that tend to only frame the world through quantitative and model-based investigations. The situational perspective of the material and concrete Mobilities of the everyday life world comes much close to ‘real life’ and ‘how it actually feels to be moved’ within the complex Mobilities landscapes and transport infrastructures of the contemporary city.

© Diagram by Hans Bruun Olesen, in Jensen & Lanng 2017
Affect and multi-sensorial experiences

• Fourthly, the Mobilities design approach carries a much more spatially and materially sensitive understanding of urban mobilities than any other transportation approach. The inclusion of affect, multi-sensorial experience and the body coupled to a vocabulary of materials, surfaces, voids, volumes, and colours means that we are standing with an analytical raster that is much more fine-grained and well-equipped to understand the complex relationships between moving, sensing and feeling bodies, and material spaces and design.
Material Pragmatism

• Fifthly, all this comes together in a perspective and a position that we may term ‘material pragmatism’. The analytical position of material pragmatism points to the actual effects and situations and not some abstract and generalised perspective. Material pragmatism asks ‘what enables this particular mobile situation?’ and in answering it seeks to move beyond subjects standing before objects, humans before spaces, people before infrastructures. Rather, material pragmatism argues for a situated, holistic, materially sensitive understanding of Mobilities.
Future mobility systems needs to become

• More socially inclusive
• Less environmentally restraining
• More resilient and risk adverse
• More flexible and less vulnerable
• More inspiring and attractive
• More open-minded and fun
• More ......
The understanding of everyday Mobilities through the perspective of material pragmatism and Mobilities design means rendering the well-known open to radically new interpretations and understandings; it means connecting fields of enquiry and thought that normally stays separated in academic disciplines or administrative insular domains; it means seeing Mobilities as much more than simple acts of movements, and rather to start appreciating the profound mobile dimension of life; it means connecting across mental barriers separating ‘stuff and things’ from humans; it means creating publics and creating critical discussions about ‘matters of concern’ that need new perspectives to be appreciated; and it means opening up to a deep and profound understanding of the limits to human agency, human exceptionalism, and human omnipotence.
FIN!