

Flows of Meaning, Cultures of Movements – Urban Mobility as Meaningful Everyday Life Practice

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ABSTRACT *Contemporary cities and places are defined by mobility and flows as much as by their sedentary and fixed properties. In the words of Shane the city may be seen as configured by ‘enclaves’ (fixed and bounded sites) and ‘armatures’ (infrastructure channels and transit spaces). This paper takes point of departure in a critique of such a sedentary/nomad dichotomy aiming at a third position of ‘critical mobility thinking’. The theoretical underpinning of this position reaches across cultural theory, human geography and into sociology. It includes a notion of a relational understanding of place, a networked sense of power and a re-configuring of the way identities and belonging is being conceptualised. This theoretical framing leads towards re-conceptualising mobility and infrastructures as sites of (potential) meaningful interaction, pleasure, and cultural production. The outcome is a theoretical argument for the exploration of the potentials of armature spaces in order to point to the importance of ‘ordinary’ urban mobility in creating flows of meaning and cultures of movement.*

KEY WORDS: everyday life, cultures of movement

Introduction

Cities have long been understood in the light of their capacities to host and shelter immobile human practices (from storage to housing), as well as they are internally and externally criss-crossed and linked by the circulation of people, vehicles and objects. In the words of Shane the city may be understood as configured by ‘enclaves’ (fixed and bounded sites) and ‘armatures’ (infrastructure channels and transit spaces) (Shane, 2005). Cities are indeed marked by the physical ‘traces of dead’ and passive layered morphologies. But they are equally constituted by the multiple flows, interactions and linkages from the local to the global. As humans interact bodily in time-space relations (where stasis and flow are the two basic modes of experience) it is the mobile sense-making, experiencing and meaningful

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engagement with the environment that ‘makes mobility’. The paper explores this mobile sense-making that ‘makes mobility’. The route to exploring this issue is taken via an argument around the importance of understanding politics and pleasure in inhabiting the armatures of the city.

The paper is structured in five sections. Section two deals with the tension between seeing the city as a site of enclosed spaces (enclaves) or as marked by mobility lines (armatures). In section three we aim to move beyond the dualisms of such sedentary and nomad thinking, arguing for a third position of ‘critical mobility thinking’. The fourth section illustrates how the practices of the city of armatures may suggest a new thinking of the mobile city. This is a thinking in which the political production of identities, meanings and cultures is linked just as much to fluids as to fixity. The paper ends with a discussion and concluding remarks in section five.

The City of Armatures and Enclaves

In his discussion of urban theory Shane argues for the use of the concepts of the ‘armature’ and the ‘enclave’ as important urban categories (Shane, 2005). According to Shane, the main features of armatures are that they are ‘linear systems for sorting sub-elements in the city and arranging them in sequence’ (Shane, 2005, p.199). Accordingly, armatures are channelling flows and linking nodes in complex networks of distribution. They work as sorting and sequencing devices and may come as linear, stretched, compressed or *Rhizomic* armatures. The armature resembles the notion of ‘path’ developed by Lynch:

Channels along which the observer customarily, occasionally, or potentially moves. They may be streets, walkways, transit lines, canals, railroads. For many people, these are the predominant elements in their image. People observe the city while moving through it ... (Lynch, 1960, p.47).

Here, however, a more radical stand shall be taken. People not only observe the city whilst moving through it, rather they constitute the city by practising mobility. The meaning of places in the city is constituted by the movement as much as by their morphological properties. The armature is the backbone of the network and is scalable from the sidewalk to the global flight corridors. Opposite the armature we find the enclave which functions as a bounded territory and is defined by its ability to add friction to mobility (Shane, 2005, p.176). The enclave is a bounded unit and comes in the form of an isolated district, or enclosed site and territory. However, enclaves also differ in their relative openness towards their context. They are found from hermetically sealed off sites to permeable places criss-crossed by the flows of armatures. Enclaves are sites of friction and relative slowness. Like the armatures they may perform in various guises; as linear, stretched and compressed enclaves. The question is: what is the meaning of the enclave/armature relation and how might we re-think the relation between these? We are not denying that cities are sites of static structures, or that they host encounters at a stand-still. What is contested though is a notion of cities as if their essence is morphological structures and static enclaves alone. And related to this is the problem that the armature seems to be a priori understood as a generic non-place (Augé, 1995) creating an interpretation of

urban mobility practices threatening the social cohesion amongst the citizens (Sennett, 1994). What is missed in this interpretation is that urban mobility is an important everyday life practice that produces meaning and culture (as well it of course may create inhuman conditions and environmental problems).

Mostly, we hear about the downside and the cultural degradations emerging from generic infrastructures and ‘non-places’. The discussion of any potential for meaningful interaction within armatures is thus facing a rather severe cultural resistance, as here in the words of Ian Christie: ‘The motorway system takes us from place to place via a kind of limbo: it suppresses awareness of what lies either side of the tarmac ribbon along which we move’ (Christie, 2002, p. 3). This may be the case, as there clearly are many such alienating armature-experiences. But are they the only outcome of e.g., motorway mobilities? And furthermore, is such condemnation not overshadowing the fact that all mobility practices are producing meaning, identity and cultural signification?

Critical Mobilities Thinking– Beyond Sedentary and Nomad Thought

The tension between seeing the city in the light of armatures and enclaves draws upon a wider discussion captured in the dispute between sedentary and nomad thinking. According to Cresswell (2006) there is a fundamental division line between, on the one hand, theories seeing mobility through the lens of place, roots, spatial order and belonging. Such thinking is termed sedentary and understood as based upon a distinct ‘sedentary metaphysics’ (or ontology). Opposed to this we find the nomad conception of mobility. In this line of thinking the optics are related to a ‘nomad metaphysics’ focused on flow, flux and dynamism. As the space within this paper cannot do justice to the complex sedentary-nomad dispute only a few short examples will be mentioned here.

The most well-known of all sedentary theory positions may well be the ‘Chicago School’ of urban analysis (Park & Burgess, 1925). The founding manifesto written by Park & Burgess exposes an ambivalent understanding of mobility as they, on the one hand, saw mobility as the lifeblood of ‘urban metabolism’ (ibid., p. 59). On the other hand, they considered mobility as a key factor in moral decay; ‘the mobility of city life, with its increase in the number of and intensity of stimulations, tends inevitably to confuse and to demoralise the person’ (ibid.). They saw mobility flickering between the ambivalence of being a growth condition and a pathological condition. When it comes to mobility thinking the moral geography of the Chicago School is perhaps best illustrated by the short essay titled ‘The Mind of the Hobo’ (Park & Burgess, 1925, pp. 156–160). The moral assessment of the nomad ‘Hobo’ is undisputable:

All forms of association among human beings rest finally upon locality and local association ... he [the hobo] is not only a ‘homeless man’, but a man without a cause and without a country (Park & Burgess, 1925, p. 159)

Another example of sedentary thinking is the analysis of urban mobility conducted by Richard Sennett in his book *Flesh and Stone*. Sennett argues that the modern preoccupation with ‘circulating bodies’ has led to a situation of alienation from the more authentic relations to the environment as ‘the modern

mobile individual has suffered a kind of tactile crisis: motion has helped desensitize the body' (Sennett, 1994, pp. 255–256). Here we find articulated the idea that mobility leads to a de-sensing, disembodiment from the real or authentic. According to Sennett mobility destroys identity:

As urban space becomes a mere function of motion, it thus becomes less stimulating in itself; the driver wants to go through the space, not to be aroused by it ... the body moves passively, desensitized in space, to destinations set in a fragmented and discontinuous urban geography (Sennett, 1994, p. 18).

Putnam's analysis of the 'bowling alone' phenomenon (2002) is another example of contemporary sedentary thinking. In his analysis of American cultural transformation he sees sprawl and mobility as the main eroding forces of community.

At the other end of the sedentary/nomad dichotomy we find the preoccupation with the fluid and the mobile. Thus we now turn to the nomad metaphysics. Some speak of nomad ontology (Natter & Jones, 1997) and others of fluid geography (Fuller, 1963). According to Deleuze & Guattari (nomad theorists par excellence) the key feature of the nomad is exactly the importance of the 'in-between', the path and the intermezzo:

The nomad has a territory; he follows customary paths; he goes from one point to another; he is not ignorant of points (water points, dwelling points, assembly points etc.). But the question is what in nomad life is a principle and what is only a consequence ... A path is always between two points, but the in-between has taken on all the consistency and enjoys both an autonomy and a direction of its own. The life of the nomad is the intermezzo (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987/2003, p. 380)

Fuller, for instance, distinguished between the 'sailor' versus the 'landlubber' and found the sailor embedding a dynamic sensibility whereas the landsman is static-minded: 'to the landsman "the East" and "the West" are places, to the sailorman they are directions in which he may move' (Fuller, 1963, p. 120). In a radical praising of the business potential in the new hybrid and global forms of identity constructions Zachary argues for a notion of a 'global Me' (Zachary, 2000, p. xv). There is a certain ring of methodological individualism to this perspective of Zachary when he claims that 'the freedom to choose one's identity is critical, since the sources of identity are shifting from "belonging" to "achievement"' (ibid., p. 49). In an equally individualised and free-floating fashion Poster argues that the individual is dissolved into the networked and electronically mediated virtual realm: 'In the mode of information the subject is no longer located in a point in absolute time/space, enjoying a physical, fixed vantage point from which rationally to calculate its options' (Poster, 1990, pp. 11–15). Such radicalised nomad metaphysics do seem a far cry from the everyday realities of most people living in contemporary cities.

However, none of the poles within the sedentary-nomad polarisation can claim to understand the contemporary mobility phenomenon. Instead of moral condemnation or uncritical enthusiasm of contemporary mobile practices we need to 'think mobilities' critically. We may be inspired by the sedentary and nomad theories, but

in order to capture the mobility practices of contemporary urbanism we need to go beyond these dualities. In the words of Casey; ‘as between nomadic and sedentary space, we cannot simply choose; it is a matter of “not better, just different”’ (Casey, 1997, p. 308). But what is crucial here is that ‘all discussions of mobility necessarily tend to have moral overtones of one sort or another’ (Morley, 2000, p. 228). Critical mobility thinking means addressing mobility without a moral pre-judgement as a third position moving beyond the sedentary and nomad metaphysics. This attempt to reflect mobilities beyond the sedentary/nomad dichotomy correlates with the insights of relational geographical theory (Massey, 1994, p. 154). This is for example the case when the ‘trajectory’ and the ‘route’ comes to the foreground in Massey’s conceptualisation of the way spatio-temporal practices constitutes places in a complex web of flows: ‘You are, on that train, travelling not across space-as-surface ... you are travelling **across trajectories**’ (Massey, 2005, pp. 118–119, emphasis in original).

An example of transgressing nomad/sedentary thinking is found in an empirical survey of 200 residents in Manchester where Savage *et al.* (2005) coin the notion ‘elective belonging’ to show how a relational understanding of place implies that identities are constituted via mobile practices. Accordingly, there is no fixed and nested sense of place but rather geographies of material, emotional and imaginary sorts created through networks of connectivity that transcend place as an enclave. What is not denied, however, is the importance of settlement, place and fixation. The study points to the conclusion that people do ‘put down roots’. But simultaneously ‘identities are developed through the networked geography of places’ (Savage *et al.*, 2005, p. 207). Thus this empirical study is a window into the difficult but necessary work it takes to unlock the dichotomous notion of fixity or flow, nomad or sedentary thinking.

From Enclosure to Tracking – Towards a New Face of Power?

Exploring the potentials for mobile practices within armatures does not per se point at liberating and interesting, social or aesthetically stimulating experiences. The new mobility practices and infrastructures indeed offer new means of control and power. In accordance with the shift in understanding of mobility advocated so far we might also want to explore alternative notions of the role of power and its relationship with mobilities. In the ‘disciplinary societies’ of the eighteenth and nineteenth century, power, according to Deleuze, manifested itself by means of enclosure, concealment and boundedness (the enclave symbolising confinement par excellence). However, as Deleuze argued, we may now describe the contemporary social formation as ‘societies of control’ (Deleuze, 1992). Accordingly we are witnessing a new form of power, which arguably is immanent to mobility and flow as the notion of ‘tracking’ overlays the notion of enclosure. One needs to say ‘overlays’ due to the fact that enclosure has not vanished as an expression of power but rather has been supplemented with the technique of tracking. With a reference to Guattari, Deleuze argued that ‘what counts is not the barrier but the computer that tracks each person’s position ...’ (Deleuze, 1992, p. 312). The new face of power is, in other words, related to the attachment of data to ‘particles’ (that being humans, goods, or signs) in a global networked flow system. Thus the shift from enclosure to tracking is

an indication of a new mediated notion of power being immanently related to fluids, movements and mobility. This should be seen within an analytical frame arguing that ‘power is not some “thing” that moves, but an effect that is mediated, and such effects may mutate through relations of successive or simultaneous reach’ (Allen, 2003, p. 37). Or as Amin & Thrift argue, power should be understood as ‘...a mobile, circulating force which through the constant re-circulation of practices, procedures self-similar outcomes, moment by moment’ (Amin & Thrift, 2002, p. 105). Such an understanding of power and its relation to mobility and place is precisely articulated within the frame of a critical relational geography (e.g., Amin & Thrift, 2002; Massey, 2005; Thrift, 1996).

A Mobile Re-configuring of ‘The Person Called I’ and ‘The Place called Home’

The new mobility dynamics discussed so far does not make physical place and subjectivity wither. Rather new fluids and flows influence the practices, experiences and perceptions of place, subjectivity and identity (Kellerman, 2006, p. 57). An increase in movement makes us re-consider familiar sites of belonging and the relational geographies making up the near and the distant. This is hardly a new experience. The ‘art of travel’ (De Botton, 2002) and its impact on human perception is therefore widely recognised. However, there is a new dynamic and intensity to be noticed as the first point (e.g., due to faster mobility technologies and changed network relations).

To open up the analysis of the mobile re-configurations of identity and place let us see it through the eyes of German cultural theorist Walter Benjamin. Benjamin’s urban writings are not a homogenous body of thought and neither is the reception hereof (Savage, 2000). The main source of inspiration in this context is Benjamin’s interest in the embodied practices of the strolling urbanite. Particularly relevant is the preoccupation with the chaotic city and the ‘labyrinth’ rather than the rational order superimposed on the city dweller. To explore this Benjamin coined the notion of the ‘Flâneur’. To Benjamin the streets of 1860s Paris were indeed a political space as exemplified by Hausmann’s project on demolishing housing blocks and paving the way for the ‘grand boulevards’ to secure the city against civil war and the rioting masses (Benjamin, 2002, p. 12). In Benjamin’s analysis of Paris in particular but the modern city in more general terms he develops the notion of the ‘Flâneur’ as the modern urbanite enjoying the freedom and cultures of the metropolis (for a critique of the gender bias in the ‘Flâneur’ see Wilson, 1991). The ‘Flâneur’ is a drifter in the metropolis consuming the city with an aesthetic gaze. But the ‘Flâneur’ also embeds a subversive relation to the prevalent notion of urban circulation:

Trade and traffic are the two components of the street. Now, in the arcades the second of these has effectively died out: the traffic there is rudimentary. The arcade is a street of lascivious commerce only; it is wholly adapted to arousing desires. Because in this street the juices slow to a standstill, the commodity proliferates along the margins and enters into fantastic combinations, like the tissue in tumours. – The flâneur sabotages the traffic. Moreover, he is no buyer. He is merchandise (Benjamin, 2002, p. 42).

Pinder points to a similar subversive practice in the situationist movement and its practice of drifting through the city – the ‘*dérive*’ (Pinder, 2005, p. 150). So if the streets were populated with ‘ordinary’ citizens as well as the subversive and joyful ‘*Flâneur*’, the armatures themselves also meant more than mere flow channels to Benjamin:

‘Street’ to be understood, must be profiled against the older term ‘way’. With respect to their mythological natures, the two words are entirely distinct. The way brings with it the terrors of wandering, some reverberation of which must have struck leaders of nomadic tribes. In the incalculable turnings and resolutions of the way, there is even today, for the solitary wanderer, a detectable trace of the power of ancient directives over wandering hordes. But the person who travels a street, it would seem, has no need of any waywise guiding hand. It is not in wandering that man takes to the street, but rather submitting to the monotonous, fascinating, constantly unrolling band of asphalt. The synthesis of these twin terrors, however – monotonous wandering – is represented in the labyrinth (Benjamin, 2002, p. 519).

This resonates with the way Jacobs (1961) saw the street as a site of social interaction as much as a space of circulation. Beyond the bodily movement through the city and thus the sensory experience of urban mobility the armature also carried the potential for interaction and culture as the streets to Benjamin were dwelling places of the collective:

Streets are the dwelling place of the collective. The collective is an eternally wakeful, eternally agitated being that – in the space between the building fronts – lives, experiences, understands, and invents as much as individuals do within the privacy of their own four walls ... More than anywhere else, the street reveals itself in the arcade as the furnished and familiar interior of the masses (Benjamin, 2002, p. 879).

Here we find an interpretation of the armature as a predominant space of interaction and meaning – a site of cultural expression and performance. Lack of space here prevents deeper explorations into Benjamin’s analysis but he had a clear awareness of the Parisian’s ‘techniques of inhabiting their streets’ and how these made the street an interior (Benjamin, 2002, p. 421). The lived armature collapses the interior/exterior and the public/private distinction upholding a promise to become a space of political articulation.

Coming from a perspective like Benjamin’s it becomes clear that there is a need to recognise that the impacts of mobility to our understanding of place, identity and subjectivity have just as much to do with our mundane everyday life experiences as with the exotic and heroic traveller’s tales that makes up the cultural stereotypes of the meaning of mobility. In the words of Patton, mobility offers particular ‘subject positions’ facilitating the construction of mobile subjects:

People’s subject positions are mediated by their habitual activities in moving about the city. The common practice of walking, bicycling, bus-riding, or

driving constitute distinctive forms of urban life, each with characteristic rhythms, concerns, and social interactions (Patton, 2004, p. 21).

What should be acknowledged is therefore the dialectic relationship between place and flow, between the global movements and the local relationships (e.g., Massey, 2005; Morley, 2000). In the words of Girot: 'a landscape seen in a variety of speeds and motions introduces a strong sense of relativity to our understanding of established identities' (Girot, 2006, p. 97). Rather than the dichotomy of sedentary/nomad we would argue that the fluid and the fixed are relationally interdependent as mobile humans still need fixed enclaves of shelter and home (Mitchell, 1999). Furthermore, critical human geography and cultural studies point to a different way of conceptualising identity and its spatio-temporal embedding. Thus some argue for a 'non-essentialist notion of identity' (Natter & Jones, 1997) and a 'fictional status of the subject' (Game, 1991, p. 66). To Thrift 'the subject's understanding of the world comes from the ceaseless flow of conduct, conduct which is always future-oriented' (Thrift, 1996, p. 37). Thus the embodied, situational, spatio-temporal and contextual practices create and re-create a sense of self and other. Drawing on the works of Foucault and Bergson, Game argues for a materialist, relational and mobile conception of the subject (Game, 1991, p. 61). Accordingly, meaning-generating processes are temporal as well as they are embodied. When the subject is a relational entity, mobility becomes crucial to notions of identity as 'the self-other relation is constituted in movement [and] ... movement is bodily' (Game, 1991, pp. 11 and 89). There is a complex and deep relationship between the fact that we are 'moving animals' and how we understand self and other:

Certainly in a world of mobility, the subject is a problematic category. If subjects are nomadic, fractured, heterogeneous and indirectly connected, then how can they be understood as agents at all? The answer would appear to be to refigure subjectivity as nomadic points, constantly shifting through strings of subject positions/contexts, in some of which it is possible to speak, in others not, according to the prevailing regimes of power (Thrift, 1996, pp. 288–289).

Likewise Foucault notices this intimate relation between power, the body and mobility when he remarks that 'the individual, with his identity and characteristics, is the product of a relation of power exercised over bodies, multiplicities, movements, desires, forces' (Foucault, 1980, p. 74). What is taking place is a complex process of sense-making and identity-interpellation. Social agents appropriate places in a process of 'social spatialisation' (Shields, 1991) where they use the environment and artefacts as requisites for the complex identity-building process. Furthermore, the physical environment may be coded with explicit or implicit messages of how to conduct sociality in the attempt to produce mobile subjectivities (Foucault, 1980; Scott, 1998). In the words of Sheller & Urry '...a technoscape also performatively produces particular subjectivities (such as "the driver", "the pedestrian", "the biker" etc.)' (Sheller & Urry, 2006, p. 9). Identity-production therefore relates to the environment in both motion and stand-still, as well as culturally and socially negotiated norms and powers. The question now becomes how to understand the social production of contemporary subjectivity? Clearly we are not beyond the

confinements of societal norms and structures, and we may even think of the production of subjectivity as something materialising within ‘machinic systems’ (Guattari, 1989, p.16). According to Massey we should think of identities as relational in ways that are spatio-temporal. Seen this way we cannot engage with the past without the present influencing our understanding, just as we cannot engage with the near without influencing the distant (Massey, 2005). In other words, life is the fluid becoming and such becoming is a spatio-temporal endeavour. Seen this way, place is a mobility-defined spatio-temporal event that relates to the way we configure narratives of self and other. So the position on place and its relationship to mobility advocated in this paper becomes one of seeing place as constituted by flow within a relational geography. This is an ontology that reaches beyond the sedentary/nomad dichotomy in its attempt to realise that ‘... places, for example, are best thought of not so much as enduring sites but as **moments of encounter**’ (Amin & Thrift, 2002, p. 30, emphasis in original). The sedentary notion of place as fixed and static is therefore less helpful in our understanding of how mobility makes place:

What is place in this new ‘in-between-world’? The short answer is – compromised: permanently in a state of enunciation, between addresses, always deferred. Places are ‘stages of intensity’, traces of movement, speed and circulation (Thrift, 1996, p. 289).

The rhythms of people in everyday circulation becomes an indicator of that ‘people are placed by power’ (Allen, 2003, p. 188) and that such ‘placement’ has to do with the profound relationship between the social and the material. The relational geography and the understanding of place as constituted by flow have obvious repercussions for the understanding of the city. The city in this perspective becomes a ‘whole series of circulating networks of command and control’ (Amin & Thrift, 2002, p. 92).

In a global world of multiple fluids and mobility networks, notions of home easily run the risk of being captured by regressive notions of belonging and identity (Morley, 2000, p. 47). On the other hand, Morley also warns against what he sees as the post-structuralist tendency to ‘romanticise all form of mobility, flux and destabilisation as ipso facto liberatory’ (ibid., p. 51). Again the lesson is one of staying clear of the poles of the sedentary/nomad dichotomy. Our lives are not just what happens in static enclaves, but also in all the intermediaries and circulation in-between places. The issues of mobility and how different practices re-configure notions of self and home are intimately linked to the ordinary routine-oriented everyday life (Pooley *et al.*, 2005, pp. 14–15). The fluid and non-essential ontology that substantiates a different gaze on mobility and the construction of subjectivity needs to be re-framed in such a manner that it avoids the sedentary pitfall of inward-looking and static notions of meaning and identity. Equally, the totally ephemeral and a-spatial notion of subjectivity dispersed into the virtual realm needs ‘grounding’ (McCullough, 2005). What is needed is a dynamic gaze on the city in such a way that it is not the enclave alone (e.g., the bounded ‘home’) that works as requisite for identity building, but rather that we understand that sense-making and identity construction take place in a fluid relationship facilitated by urban armatures that we may think of as intrinsically ‘political’.

Politicising the City of Armatures – Re-thinking the Mobile City

Mobility practices can be understood as ‘communities of practices’ relating to underlying rationalities (Patton, 2004; Jensen, 2006). To Patton the situation is often one of ‘incommensurability’ between the competing and divergent rationality forms (Patton, 2004). Convincingly this is captured by the notion that car drivers long for the open road with as few ‘obstacles’ as possible, whereas, e.g., the pedestrian is attracted to streets full of people – and thus ‘friction’. However, seen from a political point of view the question is what does it take to make them ‘commensurable’, to make dialogue possible? In Patton’s analysis the direction to mutual understanding goes via a notion of ‘technological pluralism’ in an attempt to design infrastructures for social heterogeneity (Patton, 2004, p. 211). Here we do not disagree; however, major challenges lie in what Patton defines as ‘inertias’ – physically, institutionally, economically, socially and culturally (Patton, 2004, p. 205). The philosophical underpinning of a mobility politics of multiplicity must be one that acknowledges the ‘Other’ without necessarily reaching consensus. A new politics of the armature may thus have to be formulated within the vocabulary of an ‘agonistic’ notion of political articulation (Mouffe, 2005). However, before aiming at articulating a mobile politics we should pay attention to the intricate way mobility relates to politics in everyday life:

Much of what goes on in the everyday spaces of the city is not about participation in politics with a conventional capital P. Rather, it is about new kinds of molecular politics which vie for public attention, sometimes succeeding in creating wider social and political effects (Amin & Thrift, 2002, p. 158).

Mobility becomes related to a ‘molecular politics’ in this perspective as the practices and movements are placing and displacing actors, making connections and disconnects, constructing experiences or dispensing with experience all dependent on how and where we move. Thus the armatures and the vehicles operating within them are sites not only of identity-making and culture but also of contestation and politics. Multiple examples from the literature show the armatures and the flows they host as fields of contestation. For example, the case of the LA Bus Riders Association (Soja, 2000), the social construction of the ‘tramp’ (Cresswell, 2001), graffiti as subversive and political action in the street (Cresswell, 1996), the socially segregating effects of the Bangkok Sky Train (Jensen, 2007), the phenomenon of transportation racism in America (Bullard et al., 2004), and the contested forms of automobility (Böhm *et al.*, 2006). Some authors notice the bottom-up character of some types of mobile politics and speak of ‘grassrooting’ the practices of mobile politics (Castells, 2005), and how an intricate relationship between bodies, networks, flows, identities and protest surfaces in the People’s Global Act (PGA) in India (Routledge, 2005).

De Certeau pointed to the relationship between everyday life practices and the political. He distinguished between ‘tactics’ and ‘strategies’ seeing the former as the ‘other’ and often subversive everyday life response to the latter that springs from political, economic and scientific rationalities. Furthermore, to de Certeau the many

ordinary practices of everyday life like walking, talking and moving about are tactical in their character (de Certeau, 1984, p. xix). This perspective also leads towards an understanding of mobility linked to the political, or in de Certeau's words: 'The act of walking is to the urban system what speech act is to language or to statements uttered' (ibid., p. 97). Furthermore, Bonham (2006) talked of 'dissonant travellers' and how the restriction of the study of urban travel to a story about transport has 'silenced a multiplicity of travel stories which spill out and are beyond the origin and destinations of each trip. Travel stories might be told in many different ways' (Bonham, 2006, p. 7).

These perspectives on mobility and politics suggest that urban armatures are diverse and subject to many different underlying rationales. Meeting points, exchanges and flows of communication may be commercial and less oriented towards building public spheres (like the commercial billboards alongside the urban freeway). However, this does not rule out a potential for re-thinking the relation of armatures to notions of the public realm. Furthermore, the multiple mobile and electronic agoras that the moving urbanite may be engaged with during the travel makes the need for a new vocabulary even more urgent. We are linked-in-motion and thus not just passively being shuffled across town. There is a basic assumption behind this way of thinking about urban mobility that is very important. Being-on-the-move is a contemporary everyday life condition in the city and should as such be re-interpreted. We must think in terms of 'dwelling in motion' (Urry, 2007) rather than dwelling as static phenomenon drawing its connotation from notions of lingering, staying and remaining (Norberg-Schulz, 1976, p. 135). In the mobile everyday life practices we even inhabit the car as a site of work and interaction (Laurier, 2004). At present there is a risk of only seeing the rationalistic and logistic potential in the new infra-scapes of contemporary mobility (Jensen & Richardson, 2004, p. 51). But urban mobility is much more than transport. Furthermore, we would argue that not only does a large part of our contemporary urban everyday life take place in armatures and between nodes but also that the quality of the interaction (or its potential) is underestimated, both as a social environment of meaningful interaction but also as a new public domain creating cultures of movement. The notion of 'public domain' is here understood as: 'places where exchange between different social groups is possible and also actually occurs' (Hajer & Reijndorp, 2001, p. 11). The political potential of the armatures transforms the notion of the 'Polis' and opens up an understanding of the city as a 'difference machine':

The city is not a container where differences encounter each other; the city generates differences and assembles identities ... the city is a battle-ground *through which* groups define their identity, stake their claims, wage their battles and articulates citizenship rights, obligations and principles ... The city as a difference machine relentlessly provokes, differentiates, positions, mobilizes, immobilizes, oppresses, liberates. Being political means being of the city. There is no political being outside the machine (Isin, 2002, p. 26, italics in original).

Ideas of the 'good city' hinge not only on mobility as a public good but more profoundly on the understanding of flow spaces as potentially political and

meaningful. As Amin argues, the public arena and public culture in general have not been reducible to the urban for a long time (Amin, 2006, p. 1011).

Let us against this theoretical background consider examples of political valorisations of the armatures and flow spaces in the contemporary city. Here we find a different understanding of cities and the political that shifts from the 'static agora' to an understanding of the potentials of the multiple arenas of flow that the city is made up of – from trams and buses to subways and airports. Seen in this perspective, 'streets' are as important as 'squares'. One example of such re-configuration of the armature spaces is the Pearl River Delta freeway, China. Here, in the shadow of the highway, lies the world's biggest market:

A large open market exists under the highway. It is the world's biggest market where you can find anything: World Cup medals, American flags for the commemoration of 9/11, designer T-shirts, Nike shoes, Burberry Bears, DVDs, furniture, cars, toys, etc. This frenetic rhythm of consumption and continuous turnover of products emphasises the ephemeral condition – a cult of desire ... In the shadow of the highway, economic activities interact freely with social patterns (Guitierrez & Portefaix, 2003, p. 227).

In the city of flows armatures may have potential as 'public domains' and thereby sites of meaningful interaction. The challenge is to understand armatures as *potential* supporters of civil society, and politically to re-valorise armatures as sites of social interaction, or in the words of Calabrese:

Today's spaces of mobility are 'rooms' which users and participants can identify with and even take psychological possession of without the need for legal ownership. Spaces of mobility need to go beyond the boundaries of standard democratic formality. They could become sites of the city's contested spaces of heterotopias. To empower the grassroots communities (and) to nurture the capability of reflection ... In the final analysis, it is about pluralism. It is about the tolerance of difference, about creative rebelliousness. This is the essence of those spaces (Calabrese, 2003, p. 349).

The whole point about re-interpreting the armature is to see potentials for new public domains within the armatures. What could be termed 'politicised armatures' are then understood as potential sites of resistance, meaningful social communication and interaction – not just generic non-places. This potential seems to exist as this analysis of the ring road of Beijing suggests:

The highway has become a public space full of business opportunities. It is inevitable that media gradually infiltrate this space ... There are plenty of possibilities in which the media can promote the ring road space, with more than commercial intentions. As we drove around the ring roads to shoot the film, we noticed that there were many political slogans and publicity slogans ... Business, politics and culture are mixed together to produce an urban ramble (Yan *et al.*, 2003:, p. 97).

There is a need for letting go of the understanding of the agora as something static and fixed. We need a concept for the mobile agora so to speak, or put differently:

The expanded and mobile city implies a new agenda for the design of public space, not only in relation to the urban centres or in the new residential districts, but especially in the ambiguous in-between areas ... Furthermore, we seem to think too much about public space in the sense of fixed and permanent physical spaces, and we give insufficient consideration to the way in which public domain comes into being in flux, often extremely temporarily (Hajer & Reijndorp, 2001, pp. 14 and 16).

There seems to be a general understanding of the airport as a particularly significant symbol of the new mobilities configurations (Adey, 2007; Hannam et al., 2006). Augé found the airport as the site par excellence of the much quoted 'non-place' (Augé, 1995). Koolhaas (1995) see the airport as the epitome of the 'generic city' and as an indication of a situation where the airport may come to resemble the city, but more significantly where the city resembles the airport. Accordingly, the 'Aviopolis' makes for ideal laboratory conditions (Fuller & Harley, 2004, p. 11). This case is illustrative of the need for a more nuanced understanding than the 'non-place' notion. Hannam et al., claim: 'the airport does in fact possess a specific contingent materiality and considerable social complexity' (Hannam *et al.*, 2006, p. 6). Adey argues for seeing the airport as configured by a well-planned relationship between mobility and immobility (e.g., waiting, shopping, airplane watching) (Adey, 2007). In this context the interesting theme is the quality of interaction with technologies and co-travellers from the point of a meaningful transit space. As Adey rightly claims, many types of activities that do not per se relate to travelling take place at the airport. Thus, the airport holds the potential to become a public domain where not only consumerist behaviour takes place. Needless to say, airports also function by means of highly complex and sophisticated systems of selection, exclusion, power, and control (Graham & Marvin, 2001). What have not been discussed much in the academic literature though are the potential for such armatures to become politicised and filled with meaning that transcends the cool business-rationales or the pervasive state power and control. Read makes the following observation on the practice of talking to colleagues on the train as another example of a public domain created in an armature:

I inhabit simultaneously many spaces, many complex relations, and it is no longer obvious that the space of my most social and personal life will be most local. Many – no, all – of these spaces I inhabit adhere to and merge with coherent movement or communications networks, and clearly this is where many new social condensers will be emerging – at the urban, regional and even international nodes, as well of course as in telephonic and electronic space (Read, 2005, pp. 202–203).

The notion of 'social condensers' in relation to urban travel is highly important and points in the direction of a less bounded and territorially delimited way of relating to places and other fellow humans. As argued, the notion of 'elective

belonging' (Savage *et al.*, 2005) also proved useful to show how the network and mobilities are reconfiguring our 'sense of place' and belonging. Another case in point would be the 'Tokyo Ring' where a distinct mobility culture is created as the trains make up another 'room' for the everyday life in Tokyo (Ohno, 2003, p. 167). Not at all like other Japanese cities, Tokyo has its own distinct mobility culture where the subway dominates over the use of the car due to the way the city is configured (*ibid.*, p. 165). The metro expands the 12 million-inhabitants urban core into a 32 million-inhabitants commuting area. Next to cell phoning, emailing, sleeping and reading the easiest way of spending time in the train is appreciating the ads which are pasted everywhere (*ibid.*, p. 168). In Tokyo the rails have not only become the ordinary scene for the everyday life of the inhabitants, but, just as important, have become the chief navigating icon and structure that any mobile urbanite would orient her or himself towards:

Railway lines seem to have become the most appropriate spatial reference frame for this huge city. In Tokyo the train system is more than mere transportation infrastructure. It provides a communicative framework for the geographical space. Train lines can be seen as boulevards in contemporary Tokyo life ... The railway system allows the Tokyoites to skip the hierarchical territory structure completely. Amazingly, the system is open to everyone, and it can be accessed from almost any point in Tokyo. Its rhizomatic structure allows routes to be travelled in an infinite number of combinations (Ohno, 2003, pp. 170–178).

What is being challenged is the sedentary logics of such thinking as 'all kinds of things happen at motorway interchanges, at airports, or at points that are attractive' (Hajer & Reijndorp, 2001, p. 32).

Pleasure, 'Fun' and Flow – From Urban Transport to Urban Travel?

Urban travel is not just about getting from point A to point B. It is about producing and re-producing the city and the self in a complex relationship involving mobility cultures and different types of mobility knowledge (Jensen, 2006, p. 161). But there is more to urban travel than increased knowledge mastering. The mobility practices are part of the daily identity construction of the mobile urbanites as well as there are aesthetic experiences and emotive attachments to be made.

In the words of Ascher 'Transport, is no longer simply a means of getting from A to B: it is a part of life in its own right, which deserves to be valued as such. Movement should also be a pleasure' (Ascher, 2003, p. 23). Much has been written on mobility as 'right' (Urry, 2000) but the mobility as pleasure seems to be a less discussed dimension to it (at least when the issue is non-exotic everyday life travels). There is an overlooked affective principle at work when urban travel works at its best. This was in fact noticed by Lynch as an important impetus to city planning and design:

Travel can be a positive experience; we need not consider it pure cost ... Travel can be a pleasure, if we pay attention to the human experience: the visual

sequences, the opportunities to learn or to meet other people (Lynch, 1981, p. 274).

Sociologically speaking, the experiential dimension in the 'travel argument' hinges on mobilities based upon other types of rationalities (Jensen, 2006, p. 154). Kaufman writes about 'sensorial qualities' of the travel times (Kaufman, 2002, p. 51) and Lynch & Hack notice that the social as well as the aesthetic effects of travel must be understood and considered in city planning and design (Lynch & Hack, 1984, p. 202).

In the attempt to politicise the armature the shift from transport to travel might be indicative of the fact that we are doing 'meaningful things' on our way. Lynch noted; 'City trips are enjoyed or suffered, but they are remembered' (Lynch, 1990, p. 503). The knowledge of urban travel as an important and potentially enjoyable experience has been addressed within the approach to urban design and planning termed 'landscape urbanism' (Waldheim, 2006). This approach has grown out of dissatisfaction with the established notions of cities as single-nucleus and bounded sites. It is a critique of the city as an enclave and opens up to the understanding of cities as integral to their armatures since: 'the importance of mobility and access in the contemporary metropolis brings to infrastructure the character of collective space' (Wall, 1999, p. 238). Urban designers within the realm of landscape urbanism have thus argued for seeing a positive value in roads and infrastructures. Wall offers two examples of how urban design can contribute to a positive valorisation of the armature and how infrastructure may become a collective space. One is the second beltway of Barcelona completed for the 1992 Olympics. The other is the 1995 trolley line running between St Denis and Bobigny in Paris (Wall, 1999). Thus the perspective of landscape urbanism seeks to integrate transportation infrastructure into public space (Mossop, 2006, p. 171; Tatom, 2006, p. 189; Waldheim, 2006, p. 41).

What is emerging is a new 'aesthetics of mobility'. Such new aesthetics of mobility paves the way for an understanding of the potential of armatures to be appropriated by social agents creating alternative meanings, cultures and identities. They carry the potential to become 'heterotopias' (Foucault, 1997). Ingersoll points towards the immanent meaningfulness of mobility and its facilitating infrastructures by referring to the 'new sensations' of automobility based upon the legacy of Appleyard *et al.* (1964) and Venturi *et al.* (1972). Accordingly, car driving transgresses instrumental wishes to go from A to B. Ingersoll claims, 'driving a car is somewhat like editing a film' (Ingersoll, 2006, p. VII). To Ingersoll the driver resembles the film director, assembling bits of disconnected shots (*ibid.*, p. 80). With a reference to the Soviet cinema icon Dziga Vertov's notion of '*Kinopravda*', Ingersoll points to the fact that montage and 'jump-cut urbanism' may be seen as a modern liberation from human immobility (Ingersoll, 2006, p. 84). Seen from the perspective of Vertov, jump-cut urbanism and the fragmentation by way of the montage may be understood as a new code of perception surpassing the norms of the perspectival code (Ingersoll, 2006, p. 85). Jump-cut urbanism is an argument in favour of a mobile perception that does not understand mobility as pathology. However, Ingersoll does not advocate a mindless jump-cut without regulation and intervention but rather a 'coordinated montage' where the 'cuts' are orchestrated by planning and design narratives (*ibid.*, p. 89). This comes out of recognising that 'movement becomes the most reliable

point of reference' (ibid., p.95). The point of departure is the question: can infrastructures be understood and comprehended within the realm of aesthetic pleasure? In this perspective infrastructures are awaiting a new form of understanding or a re-interpretation based upon de-contextualisation:

Transportation infrastructures continue to be designed with the positivist ethos of government institutions and thus elicit a certain inevitable determinism that corresponds to the economics of increased mobility ... To approach infrastructure as art can provide a way of dealing with the violence it interjects into the urban system and become a means of creating civic meaning (Ingersoll, 2006, pp. 123–124).

Creating 'civic meaning' means both to take stock of the meaningfulness of circulation but also of the fact that subjectivity and culture is being created in these arenas. So the point of seeing infrastructure 'as art' may be enlarged from looking at the armatures in isolation to cover the multiple mobility practices carried out at various scales. We need to 'see more' than instrumental and utilitarian goal satisfaction in the hardware supporting and sustaining mobility as well as in the fluid practices themselves. It may be unintentional, but mobility practices are inherently also practices of identity and meaning construction (Ingersoll, 2006, p. 125).

Discussion and Concluding Remarks

The main focus of this paper was to explore the mobile sense-making, experiencing and meaningful engagement with the environments that 'makes mobility'. The route taken was by understanding the importance of politics and pleasure in inhabiting the armatures of the city.

The paper has argued for an understanding of 'place' as constituted by flow as very few enclaves, sites or territories can be comprehended in splendid isolation. Only by inserting them into an analytical framework sensitive to their relational geographies, can we claim to have understood the complex relationship between flow and fixity. Furthermore, we must move beyond the 'instrumental' understanding of mobility and realise that mobility is movement that produces cultures. This opens up to a discussion of what to do with the spaces facilitating everyday life mobility in the contemporary city. But it has further repercussions as the critique of sedentary notions of identities and regressive territoriality (may) open up to a new understanding of fluid identities. Equally, the notion of power understood as 'tracking' is yet another dimension layered upon the classic ways of exercising power as confinement that becomes the new context of contemporary mobility.

From the discussion of the position termed 'critical mobility thinking' we have come to see that our lives are not just what happen in static enclaves, but also in all the intermediaries and circulation in-between places. There is an intricate link between identification processes and the way we engage with the physical environment. Needless to say, multiple layers of identity production may have no spatial component. However, the way we bodily engage with places through multiple ways of circulating in, out of and across them shape an important part of the practical engagement with the world that ultimately constructs our understandings

of self and other. Valorisation of the socio-spatial relation depends on the bodily experience of mediated practices in time-space. Identities do not solely reside in place (be that home, neighbourhood, or nation) but rather places are coded and de-coded in a complex valorisation process where the networked connections to multiple communities of interests and practice offer new layers of relational connectivity. However, identities, fluid as they may be, both in relation to the individual's subjectivities and collectives, are constructions made up by material and immaterial 'requisites' of more or less durable sorts. These requisites work as identity markers that continually are being re-produced and re-negotiated. As we are linked-in-motion and thus not just passively being shuffled across town such 'being-on-the-move' is an important contemporary everyday life condition in the city and should as such be re-interpreted. 'Critical mobility thinking' thus attempts to provide a vantage point for exploring this condition that moves beyond the sedentary and nomad conceptualisations.

Furthermore, the discussion of 'politicising the city of armatures' has pointed the argument in the direction of a fluid and non-essential ontology that substantiates a different gaze on mobility. Accordingly, the construction of subjectivity needs to be re-framed in such a manner that it avoids the sedentary pitfall of inward-looking and static notions of meaning and identity. Equally, the totally ephemeral and a-spatial notion of subjectivity dispersed into the virtual realm needs grounding. What is needed is a dynamic gaze on the city in such a way that it is not the enclave alone that works as requisite for identity building, but rather that we understand that sense-making and identity construction take place in a more and fluid relationship facilitated by urban armatures that we may think of as intrinsically 'political'. In this respect the armatures of the contemporary city are potential venues for new articulations of politics and do as such deserve particular attention. This is not at least the case when new mobile technologies and mediated networks over layer sites of mobility and opens up to new types of public domain formation as well as they may offer new opportunity for surveillance and control.

To better understand what it takes to create significant political spaces the paper has pointed to a need for refining the analysis and conceptualisation of the way contemporary mobility practices challenge the established understandings of politics, meaning and identity. Needless to say this should not be done in an un-critical applaud to the unsustainable mobility practices where environmental hazards are the immediate outcome. Neither should we neglect that mobility practices (or armatures structuring these) may have socially exclusionary repercussions. However, we must rid ourselves of pre-understandings of mobility as a simple and rational activity that merely can be technically optimised. Only by understanding the important role of mobilities in creating new relations to our consociates and the physical environment, can we hope to start comprehending the way circulation shapes and moulds flows of meaning and cultures of movements.

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