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Book review

A Jensenian approach to mobilities: (1) Staging Mobilities Ole B. Jensen. 2013. Routledge, Abingdon. (£85.00 (hardback). ISBN: 978–0-415-69,373-8). (2) Designing Mobilities Ole B. Jensen. 2014. Aalborg, Aalborg University Press. (£37.00 (hardback). ISBN: 978–87-7112-098-1)

Ole B. Jensen is an important figure in mobilities studies whose research over the past decade has pushed the frontiers of the field. The two companion texts discussed in this review — *Staging Mobilities* and *Designing Mobilities* — represent a culmination of his intellectual endeavours to date. They bring together some of Jensen's most important arguments, conceptual ideas and empirical materials in the development of an innovative approach to understanding contemporary mobilities. Assembled under the rubrics of 'staging' and 'designing', the Professor of Urban Theory and Urban Design forges the agenda for research into mobile situationism and mobilities design. In Jensen's conceptualisation, mobile situationism is an investigation of how ordinary and concrete mobilities actually take place and is Jensen's attempt to unpack the "physical, social, technical, and cultural conditions … of contemporary urban mobilities" (Jensen, 2013: p.4). Departing from this question of what makes mobile situations happen, the second part of this intellectual project is to link the analytical and theoretical sensibilities of mobilities research with the practical and interventionist approaches of design. In his call to arms for mobilities design research, Jensen urges the exploration of how the layout and physical design of transport infrastructure and transit spaces create, afford, enact, confine, obstruct and prevent particular mobile practises and experiences.

Together these texts outline of what we might term a Jensenian approach to mobilities. *Staging Mobilities* and *Designing Mobilities* offer some thoroughly innovative, original and intriguing ideas for the study of mobilities and it is the aim of this essay to provide an overview of these along with an assessment of their value for transport geography. I will deal with each book in turn, but in essence, *Designing Mobilities* provides further empirical case studies to the theoretical arguments outlined in *Staging Mobilities*, which is where I turn my attention first.

Staging Mobilities is a traditional academic book in terms of aesthetics and format. It sits within the International Library of Sociology series published by Routledge and follows a familiar structure of introducing and positioning an idea, which is then expanded upon and illuminated with case studies throughout the book, leading to an evaluative conclusion which re-assesses the original argument and makes suggestions for advancing work around such thoughts. The idea at the centre of *Staging Mobilities*, and the Jensenian approach to mobilities, is that mobilities do not just happen, rather they are meticulously staged. In seeking to elucidate the complex workings of such staging, Jensen develops a novel heuristic termed the staging mobilities framework, something which offers considerable value to scholars of movement. This framework consists of two layers. The outer layer sets up an operational binary between aspects of mobilities which stage from above, and those which stage from below. The framework then branches out to three more concrete and tangible themes: physical setting, material spaces, and design (staging from above); social interactions (staging from below); and embodied performances (staging from below). Such a dualism does not indicate any sense of power relationship or simplistic structure-agency however; Jensen sophisticatedly outlines the complex interrelatedness between the three themes, drawing on theories of assemblage and relational approaches to place in doing so. Conceptualising mobilities as being assembled into complex networks of social actors and technical systems not only avoids Jensen's overarching concern, the question of how do mobilities happen, from being a purely instrumental affair but also facilitates a shift towards understanding the role of design in mobilities research. In essence, the book engages with the micro-ecologies of *in situ* mobile practises and asks "who stages mobilities, and how, why, where and by which technologies, artefacts, and design principles does staging take place … [and] who are staged, how they perceive staging, how they enact or react in accommodating or subversive ways, how they feel about being staged and moved in particular ways and using particular modes of mobilities" (Jensen, 2013: p.7).

This framing, and the questions which underpin it, provide an incredibly rich source for transport geographers and mobility scholars alike. Not only does it enable intricate and comprehensive ways of grappling with mobilities but *Staging Mobilities* provides the opportunity to engage with a great diversity of thinkers, debates and disciplines as well. The book discusses the work of an impressive number of thinkers with diverging disciplinary backgrounds, from sociologist Georg Simmel, landscape architect Lawrence Halprin, and urban planner Kevin Lynch to the non-representational theories of Nigel Thrift and Actor Networks of Bruno Latour. As one may expect from the dramaturgical metaphors however, Erving Goffman is the conceptual figure whose influence is most greatly felt in *Staging Mobilities*. Here Jensen is seeking to extend and adapt Goffman's ideas for contemporary society. Enrolling these thinkers together in discussions of mobility also allows readers to engage with a wider set of debates in human geography, including the more-than-human and materialist turns (Whatmore, 2006), the role of virtual matter (Kinsley, 2014) and theoretical ideas on relational approaches (Anderson et al., 2012). Jensen's engaging and sympathetic writing style makes these multiple and often complex ideas extremely approachable, further facilitating the increasing interdisciplinary nature of transport geography (Schwanen, 2016) by offering contact points not just with mobilities studies (Shaw and Hesse, 2010) but design, urban planning, architecture, interaction design, and engineering to name but a few.

The staging mobilities framework operates not only as a heuristic for exploring how mobilities happen but also serves to structure the book, with each chapter functioning to make the case for, or exemplify the use of, this framework in practise. To do so the book is divided into four parts. Part One introduces the staging mobilities framework and positions the approach within the mobilities turn through a thorough literature review, a critical discussion of its reception and the repercussions for our understandings of the contemporary city. Here Jensen also

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introduces a whole host of other concepts which overlay the central framework of the book and contribute to an expanded lexicon of mobilities — something of much use to other mobility researchers. Critical mobilities thinking is one such tantalising concept and something that I deem to be a standout contribution of the book. Jensen conceptualises critical mobilities thinking as a two-edged sword. One edge is the dark side of mobilities relating to critical issues such as social exclusions, power relations and differential justices bound up in and that result from mobilities. The other edge is potential mobilities thinking. This departs from traditional critical thinking around transport and takes heed from the productive coming together of analytical and interventionist disciplines in *Staging Mobilities* to argue that mobility scholars can use their critical thinking skills to identify the potential particular mobilities, ideas about mobilities, or schemes/policies may have for societies. I find this potential mobilities thinking a refreshing and stirring notion for mobilities scholars, yet am disappointed that the lineage of research into the dark side of mobilities has not been acknowledged here (see Lucas, 2004).

In Part Two, successive chapters establish the theoretical framing behind the staging approach by presenting the ideas underpinning each of the three key themes. Chapter Three draws heavily on the work of Lynch to demonstrate the synergies between current mobilities thinking and urban design thought. In doing so he demonstrates how fertile collaborations between mobilities and design could be before taking forward this mantle in a theoretical exploration of the staging that physical settings, material spaces, and design do. Chapter Four — 'Facework, flow and the city' — draws on Simmel and Goffman in traversing the intellectual terrain concerning mobile social interactions in the city. Finally, in Chapter Five, Jensen draws on Thrift and other non-representational approaches to provide the theoretical background to embodied, emotional and affective experiences in mobilities research. Though I must admit I did not feel that 'affect' was dealt with particularly well. It is a slippery term and not one we get much of a handle on here.

From these theoretical justifications, Part Three moves on to explore empirical examples through some novel and fascinating contemporary case studies which demonstrate the staging of the three themes do in practise. Chapter Six discusses networked technologies and mobile practises which are afforded by matters of the virtual. Chapter Seven explores negotiation in motion through an ethnographic account of transit spaces in Nytorv — a public square in Copenhagen, and Chapter Eight seeks to shed light onto metroscapes and mobile interaction through case studies of the Copenhagen Metro and the Bangkok Sky Train. Part Four is the stock-taking section. Jensen synthesises the work presented in the book and re-emphasises the value he sees in the staging mobilities framework. This also functions as the cross-over section with *Designing Mobilities* (even citing it) in readdressing the importance of integrating ideas of design into mobilities and laying down an agenda for doing so.

Staging Mobilities is undoubtedly a triumph. Jensen outlines a highly-convincing approach to mobilities that is theoretically informed and rich with empirical case studies to exemplify the value the idea of staging has to mobilities research. This is an accomplished book and should become a key text for students and scholars of mobility and transport. To my mind, there were only three areas in which I had cause for criticism. Firstly, Jensen's book is urban-centric. He readily admits this in the introductory pages, justifying it partly in relation to his institutional placing and disciplinary upbringing, and partly in relation to the urbanised (and continually urbanising) nature of the world. Whilst true, some of the most pressing transport needs are in non-urban areas which could substantially benefit from the sort of the analysis Jensen suggests. There is no reason his framework could not work in studying rural transport and engagement with some non-urban mobilities would have been appreciated to demonstrate this. Secondly, Jensen tends to focus on snapshots of journeys in his analyses - a moment in time, a reified encounter. Whilst necessary to allow for the depth of analysis presented, there was little sense of how this framework could be applied to a whole journey to help inform door-to-door approaches to transport. My final remark on *Staging Mobilities* is both a critique and an opportunity as it relates to the lack of engagement with transport geography. Many of the ideas discussed in this book are firmly established on the radar of transport geography yet the name of a transport geographer was a very rare sight in the reference list. For a book and an approach which displays so much potential to enrich transport geography, it was surprising to see the lack of cross-fertilisation in this regard. The gauntlet has now be thrown down however for transport geographers to run with Jensen's ideas and demonstrate the value they can bring in analysing the staging of mobilities.

Designing Mobilities is anything but a traditional academic text in terms of aesthetics or format. The book is immediately striking in its beauty and size. It is part academic-, part coffee-table book. The stylish layout and strong use of visual imagery function much beyond pleasing aesthetics however; they cut to the very core of why this companion text exists and what it is about. *Designing Mobilities* takes on the agenda for mobilities design that *Staging Mobilities* ended with and the book aims to fulfil the promise Jensen argues for in integrating the analytical and theoretical sensibilities of mobilities research with the practical and interventionist approaches of design – an intriguing prospect.

Although a companion book, *Designing Mobilities* is written as not to require the crutch of *Staging Mobilities*' theoretical exegesis. Parts one and two of the book set up the framework whilst also setting out the very convincing reasons why those interested in mobilities should engage with design and *vice-versa*. Unfortunately, the four detailed case studies that work through these ideas in part three don't pack quite the same punch and I was often left desiring something more than what was provided. In many ways this was down to just the sheer quantity of work that has gone into the book. While this should of course be applauded, it actually had a detrimental impact on the innovative and provocative ideas Jensen has advanced over the two books; they fail to flourish in these case studies. The four mobile practises of walk (chapter 4), bike (chapter 5), train (chapter 6) and car (chapter 7) each attend to the three themes of the staging mobilities framework along with the fourteen designing mobilities operating concepts introduced in the early parts of the book. On top of this there are case-study-specific concepts such as the eight analytical spatial topologies of the motorway, all of which are exemplified through multiple examples. It is overwhelming in parts — a quagmire of concepts. In desiring to show the breadth and applicability of mobilities design, Jensen has foregone the richness of insight from a narrower but deeper analysis which would have revealed the true value of mobilities design. This is perhaps no more evident than in the fascinating but fleeting global references in the appendix.

The chapter most well executed, that on cycling, performs an excellent job in demonstrating the great potential of the staging mobilities framework and the value of engaging with design. By using the assemblage concept to explore cycling in three Danish cities, Jensen foregrounds cycling's 'systemness', illuminating the socio-cultural frameworks, legal systems and material sites that cycling practises are nested in. In understanding how cycling is staged in each city, Jensen studies the 'from above' aspects of policies, infrastructures, pavement design, parking, lighting, mobile semiotics and the divisions between transport modes. Coupled to this are the 'from below' aspects of user interaction, hierarchy, art, speed, crossing the road, avoiding obstacles, cycling on the pavement, socialising, and negotiation in motion. The staging mobilities framework truly comes into its own here and this chapter will be lofted to exemplary status for those wanting to take up the mobilities design baton.

A key aspect of Jensen's approach in *Designing Mobilities* is the use of diagrams to not only capture, represent and report mobilities but also as a vehicle for thinking. It is for the latter than I most appreciate the heavy use of diagrams in *Designing Mobilities*. All methods pose particular ways of understanding mobilities and as such, presence some aspects whilst absencing others. Wanting to uphold a focus on the design of

mobile situations, the diagram seems to be a very effective tool here and one that could be used much more fruitfully in mobilities research. That said, it is not just a case of producing diagrams, it's about understanding them also. There were times when I struggled to comprehend the diagrams, not helped by the lack of figure references, lack of captions, compactness of diagrams and the complexness of the situations being portrayed. Jensen is also guilty of overdoing the diagrams – some things were better said with words and other diagrams were just unnecessary.

There is much to admire in this book. The layout is beautiful, the arguments are thought-provoking, and chapters logical and neatly summarised. The four case study chapters all begin with a contextual overview of how these mobile sites have been understood and theorised in academia and practise — drawing out some of the geographies of these transport sites in the process. The book has its flaws however. Rightfully, Jensen adopts a broad notion of who designers are and what the processes of design are. They include planners, legislators, architects, engineers, computer programmers, software engineers and many more. But without any concrete definition, or at least a sense of what design isn't, the risk is run of design becoming everything, and therefore nothing (see Adey, 2006). There was also little mention any politics associated with designing mobilities, despite carrying through an interest in critical mobilities thinking from *Staging Mobilities*. Similarly, I was surprised by the omission of the actual objects of mobility themselves in Jensen's analyses – he explored cycle infrastructure but not the bike, train stations but not the carriage. The spectacular was being prioritised over the mundane. Although engaging, I found the writing style in *Designing Mobilities* to be quite wasteful. There was much repetition of frameworks, concepts and definitions as well as lengthy methodological sections. Whilst I am not opposed to this fundamentally, they are all things that could be foregone given the lack of depth in some of the analyses.

Designing Mobilities is an excellent intellectual project but one where the intent may be more valuable than the execution. The implementation of the meaty ideas introduced in *Staging Mobilities* seems to have fallen a little flat. Yet perhaps this, and the other criticisms I note, will act as an invitation for anyone interested in mobilities design — a field with much potential. Whilst I feel *Designing Mobilities* falls short of the 'must read' it claims to be on the blurb, it does represent a highly intriguing text that is well worth a read for scholars and students alike, offering a creative and critical gaze on the less-mobile aspects of mobilities.

So what fortune do these books suggest for a Jensenian approach to mobility? Well the outlook is certainly positive and I doubt it will be long before the notions of staging and designing become common parlance within mobilities research. While there were some shortcomings to their execution in these texts, the strength, originality and persuasiveness of Jensen's core ideas will certainly galvanise more research of this genre. They are extremely inviting, refreshing and flexible as to be adaptable to many research agendas. For transport geographers in particular, the Jensenian approach to mobilities offers not only a comprehensive and enlivening framework for understanding contemporary mobilities, but it also it offers a great opportunity to further the interdisciplinarity of transport geography and to engage transport geographers with wider debates in human geography, furthering its return back to the centre of the discipline.

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