



# Interdependent, imagined, and embodied mobilities in mobile social space: Disruptions in 'normality', 'habit' and 'routine'

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## ABSTRACT

This article draws on ethnographic research of everyday mobilities to further understanding of interdependent mobilities practices in relation to normality, habit and routine. The contention here is that a rethinking of 'normality', 'habit' and 'routine' reveals how mobilities are interdependent, imagined and embodied. We draw from Lefebvre's (1991) notions of social space and rhythm analysis to illustrate the relationality of these aspects of mobility. In doing so, we build on recent theorisations of habit in the field of mobilities, which have opened this concept as a key site for interrogating body–society relationships arguing that both 'routine' and 'normality' have similar potential in revealing the regulation and control of everyday spaces. We consider everyday embodied engagements with mobile space and how these become normalised, habitualised and routinised. This paper draws from a Research Council UK Energy Programme funded project, 'Disruption, the raw material for carbon change', which uses 'disruption' as a lens through which to reveal potential for changes in mobility practices that result in carbon reduction. Our exploration of interdependent, imagined and embodied mobilities concurs with existing scholarship in the mobilities field that argues for a rethinking of individualised conceptions of 'normality', 'habit' and 'routine' in seeking an understanding of mobilities that are socially, culturally and materially contingent.

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## 1. Introduction

Although the sustainability of mobility has been approached from a number of different perspectives (see, for example, Geels, 2012), there is often a lack of attention to relationalities of the social. Yet mobilities are interdependent in relation to families and in relation to wider socialities and spatialities (Jirón and Iturra, 2014; Holdsworth, 2013; Murray, 2009; Nansen et al., 2015). Much work has gone into re-aligning concepts such as habit in demonstrating its potential to effect change (Bissell, 2014, 2015; Dewsbury and Bissell, 2015). This literature has been successful in debunking the notion that patterns of non-deliberative mobility practices need to be undone, that habits are there to be broken. The focus here is most often with the individual and is related to individual behaviour change (Schwanen et al., 2012). However, existing studies tend to underestimate the 'tension between individual and collective mobilities' (Holdsworth, 2013, 2), which necessitates that mobile habits are reconceived within a framework of relationalities, both social and material (Bennett et al., 2013). Alternative socio-technical approaches such as the 'multi-level perspective'

(Geels, 2012) and social practice theory (Cass and Faulconbridge, 2016), similarly underplay socially complex mobile interdependencies and the ways in which they produce mobile space. Here, we suggest that Lefebvre's theorisation of 'social space' (Lefebvre, 1991) and 'rhythm analysis' (Lefebvre, 2004) provide the conceptual tools through which to understand mobile interdependencies in their socio-cultural contexts and attend to the intersections of space and spatial practices, both experiential and imagined; as everyday mobile lives are constituted within 'an enormous range of spatio-temporal contexts within which multiple rhythms are produced and interweave' (Edensor, 2012, 189). We argue that Lefebvre's notion of social space, alongside his unfinished project of rhythm analysis, can elucidate the relationalities of habit formation, placing analytic emphasis on the various social interdependencies that provide not just the context to our everyday movements but that produce them. We are concerned here with the experiential and imagined aspects of routine and habitual movements and how they, together with a range of strategies to coordinate everyday life, become what is regarded as 'normality'. In order to scrutinise these social interdependencies, we argue that it is useful to consider the concepts of 'normality' and 'routine' alongside habit.

Recent scholarship on mobilities (Bissell, 2014; Middleton, 2011; Schwanen et al., 2012) has sought to reconceptualise habit, examining the nature of embodied habit and its role in everyday mobilities. This

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re-examination of habit has arguably followed a broader turn towards embodied mobilities, and epistemological questions about the relationship between cultural and institutional discourses on one hand, and an embodied being in the world on the other (Doughty and Murray, 2016; Jensen, 2010; Martens et al., 2014). We draw from these current debates that move away from the 'reductive' idea of habit in reasserting that it is situated within wider contexts, with the contention that it would be fruitless to call for change in mobility practices by targeting individuals in a way that abstracts them from the networks of interdependent mobilities in which they are imbricated. In these accounts, habit is a permanent change of disposition, while at the same time potentially transformative and forward moving (Bissell, 2014; Middleton, 2011; Schwanen et al., 2012). Notions of 'habit' and 'routine' are interrelated, as habit is considered to be 'intimately bound up with' routine behaviour (Middleton, 2011, 2859). However, a (perhaps overly simplistic) distinction relates to their respective deliberation, with habit associated with embodied and non-deliberative practices. Here, habit is more than an 'external force that somehow drives human behaviour' (Middleton, 2011, 2857). However, as emerged clearly in our empirical data, we also need to consider those for whom habit is an indulgence—those whose embodied dispositions are secondary to their caring responsibilities. Routine on the other hand is deliberated and Middleton sets this out in relation to the negotiation of complex and gendered lives. It is an aspect of the mundanities of everyday life that are situated in social space (Lefebvre, 1991, 2004).

Our heuristic lens is that of 'disruption', with data drawn from an ethnographic element of a Research Council UK Energy Programme funded project, 'Disruption, the raw material for carbon change'. In this project, 'disruption' was used to reveal the potential for changes in mobility practices that result in carbon reduction. The particular aspect of the research that we look to here is an ethnographic investigation of people's everyday mobility practices and the ways in which these practices become disrupted, which was carried out in Brighton between 2012 and 2014. Our methodological approach was inspired by a mobility cultures perspective that incorporates understandings of experiential movement and its meanings, the social and cultural production of mobilities and the political contexts in which these take place (Cresswell, 2006, 2010; Packer, 2008; Sheller and Urry, 2006). The project's focus on mobility cultures (Sheller and Urry, 2006) rather than transport revealed the way differences in personal circumstances affect experiences and responses to disruption and illustrated that a focus on mobilities is an important way forward as part of efforts to transition to lower carbon travel, moving emphasis away from modes themselves and towards the entanglement of travel practices with the interdependencies of daily life that shape and produce them. As such, we contend that changing mobility practices to reduce carbon emissions is rarely situated at the level of the individual, because mobile lives are interlinked. Through our research, we found that striving for lower carbon mobility means accepting that, for certain people at certain times, higher carbon-emitting practices must currently be considered necessary and acceptable. Policies need to take into account the interdependent nature of people's mobilities, and this requires a rethinking of individualised conceptions of habit and routine. Our conceptualisation of disruption therefore incorporates a mobility cultures approach, where disruption is similarly produced and situated, and mobility disruptions are complex interdependencies between different aspects of meaningful movements and the circumstances that sometimes constrain them. Disruption is therefore not a departure from 'normality' but is inherent to 'normal' everyday life, with 'breakdown and failure...no longer atypical and therefore only worth addressing if they result in catastrophe' (Graham and Thrift, 2007, 5). The ambiguous state of disruption (Graham, 2010) can thereby be considered illustrative of the complexities of everyday life. Disruptions to mobilities are framed within everyday mobility practices and their socio-spatial contexts so that the uneven terrain of mobilities

is revealed. Before discussing these complex interdependencies, we firstly expound our conceptual framing and the ways in which Lefebvre's social space becomes mobile social space.

## 2. Situating interdependencies—Everyday and imagined space

Lefebvre's (1991) social space is often conceptualised as a triad of space: spatial practice, the mundane doings of space; representations of space, 'the space of the scientists, planners, urbanists, technocratic subdividers and social engineers' (Ibid., 38); and representational space. Representational spaces are predicated on their history—'in the history of a people as well as in the history of each individual belonging to that people' (Ibid., 41). This aspect of space acknowledges the importance of the past, of individual and collective stories as well as future imaginings, where space is 'occupied by sensory phenomena, including products of the imagination' (Ibid., 12). These aspects of space come together in a dialectical relationship so that 'space may be said to embrace a multitude of intersections' (Ibid., 33). *Mobile* social space is thus the intersection of lived and imagined mobilities and the institutions of power that control and regulate movement. It is the prominence given to imagined space that is particularly relevant to our rethinking of mobility habits and routines. For Lefebvre, the myriad incarnations of space produce the impossibility of comprehension so that the version of space 'embodied in the representational space which its inhabitants have in their minds... plays an integral role in social practice' (Ibid., 93). Thus, mobile space is both socio-culturally produced and imagined. His representational spaces are 'spaces which the imagination seeks to change and appropriate' (Ibid., 39), but that remain dominated by powerful institutions. Lefebvre (1991, 97) viewed social spaces as 'strange: homogenous, rationalised, and as such constraining; yet at the same time utterly dislocated'. For him, mobile space is homogenised through, for example, a lack of boundaries between 'the domain of automobiles and the domain of people'. Bodies become caught up in the spin of 'analogons': images, signs and signals that define their 'needs', where 'even cars may fulfil the function of analogons, for they are at once extensions of the body and mobile homes, so to speak, fully equipped to receive these wandering bodies' (Ibid., 98). For Lefebvre, the 'abstract space' of neo-capitalism is produced through automobilities—where space becomes abstract 'where cars circulate like so many atomic particles'. Driving makes the mobile subject an 'abstract subject' with 'the capacity to read the symbols of the highway code, and with one sole organ – the eye – places in the service of his movement' (Ibid., 313). Mobility and its productive capacities are integral to Lefebvre's vision of social space. In turn, situating habits, routines and normality within the context of mobile social space reveals otherwise overlooked applications of these concepts to enhanced understandings of mobilities.

Furthermore, Lefebvre's analysis yields understandings of embodied experiences, which are associated with habit. Although the dialectic understanding of different aspects of social space, described above, is implicit in recognising the interplay between embodied experiences and their setting within 'abstract space', it is his rhythm analysis that more explicitly theorizes at the level of the body through understanding the tensions between linear and cyclical rhythms. As in his articulation of social space, the body is situated within the capitalist system; there is a 'hierarchy in this tangled mess, this scaffolding? A determining rhythm?' (2004, 43). Conceptualising different aspects of mobility in space as rhythms reveals an understanding of the imbrications of bodies in their socio-political setting: 'rhythm appears as regulated time, governed by rational laws, but in contact with what is least rational in human being: the lived, the carnal, the body' (Lefebvre, 2004, 18), and allows us to make the apparent leap between the micro mobilities of bodies and their assemblage and wider mechanisms of governance. Lefebvre's rhythms do not operate in isolation, but intersect with others, as well as in relation to dominant rhythms (Ibid.); embodied rhythms

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