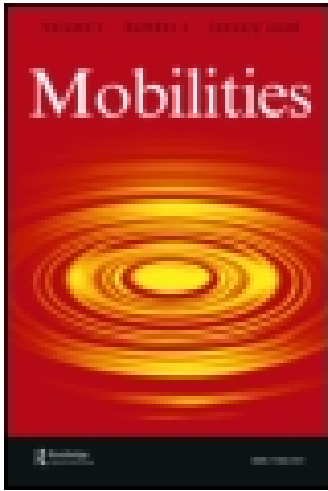


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### Discourses of Mobility: Institutions, Everyday Lives and Embodiment

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# Discourses of Mobility: Institutions, Everyday Lives and Embodiment

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**ABSTRACT** *This article seeks to contribute to the growing body of literature on the politics of mobility, revealing the ways in which the governing of mobility intersects with everyday mobile lives. We suggest that dominant and enduring institutional discourses of mobility, which are pervaded by a privileging of individualised automobility, can be conceptualised around a framework of morality, modernity and freedom. By examining everyday discourses of mobility in this context we highlight the ways in which these discourses reflect and resist normative sets of knowledge and practices. It is argued that by emphasising the everyday and mundane in an analysis of discourses of mobility, and acknowledging their situatedness in prevailing normative discourses, we are then able to focus on how movement is a social and cultural practice in constant negotiation and (re)production.*

**KEY WORDS:** Mobility, Governmentality, Discourse, Institutions, Embodied experience, Everyday mobilities

## Introduction

Within the field of mobilities attention has been drawn recently to the lack of macro level studies compared to the numerous micro level studies (Bærenholdt 2013; Salter 2013). However, whilst acknowledging that there remains gaps in understanding of the ways in which societies are ‘governed *through* mobilities’ (Bærenholdt 2013, 26), the existing wealth of transport policy literature that focuses on the governing of mobilities (for example, Docherty and Shaw 2011) is often overlooked by proponents of the ‘mobilities turn’, which is often more circumspect in recognising the governing of transport in ways that are productive of time and space. Manderscheid (2013), in a recent paper, argues for mobilities research to take into account both the discursive, spatial and structural foundation of mobilities and everyday subjective experiences. This article acknowledges the need for mobilities research to analyse both wider structures of governance and experiences of mobility and thus examines the relationship between broader institutional discourses of mobility and ‘everyday’

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embodied accounts of mobile lives. The paper interweaves ‘mobilities’ literature and more traditional transport studies literature with theories of discourse, in order to trace the different investments and trajectories that maintain sets of knowledge and practices around mobilities at different levels. These discourses of mobilities, in turn, both produce and determine cultures of mobility. In this article, we trace everyday engagements back to the broader trajectories of power, identifying where they root in institutional discourses and highlighting the interaction between the macro and micro levels.

We aim to contribute to a conversation with policy-makers by providing a critical framework, which draws from the ‘mobilities turn’ in social science, for understanding contemporary mobilities and challenging normative discourses of mobility (as a broader concept of movement than transport/travel). Here, we set out some of the key discourses of mobility that dominate Western and, in particular, Anglo-American societies; interrogating the ways in which they emerge on a macro level, permeate society and embed in the everyday. Whilst appreciating the relationality of ‘micro’ and ‘macro’ levels and the blurred boundary between the two, we also consider the emergence of discourses at the more local level that both challenge and maintain these more global, powerful and embedded discourses of mobility. Our analysis draws from Foucauldian discourse analysis, in that it seeks to identify dominant discourses of mobility through textual analysis of policy and institutional practices: focusing on power, regimes of truth, inherent contradictions and also what is not visible (Foucault 1972, 1977). We identify spaces of potentiality for the emergence of resistant discourses through this analysis and interrogate these through an exploration of more localised narratives of mobile practices. In doing so, we illuminate the ways in which dominant discourses filter through to the everyday, and back again, within existing networks of power. Discourse analysis emphasises complexity and contradictions. We recognise that these discourses are overlapping and the boundaries between them are often blurred. However, for the purposes of the study, they are separated and considered discrete. It is assumed that each of the discourses can operate in isolation as well as together, whether in unity or in discord.

### **Discourse, Embodiment and Space**

In order to understand the interaction between macro and micro discourses of mobility we need to elaborate on the relations between discourse, embodiment and space. The term ‘discourse’ has been commonly taken to refer to the ‘system of language which draws on a particular terminology and encodes specific forms of knowledge’ (Tonkiss 1998, 248). However, in Foucault’s (1972, 1977) writing, we find a gradual shift towards conceptualising discourse more broadly as particular collections of knowledge and practices that shape society. In the seminal works of the later part of his career, *Discipline and Punish* (1975) and *A History of Sexuality: An Introduction* (1976), Foucault was interested in much wider phenomena than language; embodied practices are taken into account, as well as an abstraction that he terms *dispositif*, sometimes translated into English as ‘apparatus’, by which he means a totality of discourses and practices, taking into account the workings of power and materialities. Foucault’s poststructuralist antihumanism makes itself visible in his later writings where discourse is increasingly abstracted from the subjects that supposedly produce and reproduce it through language and practice, something Thrift (2007) has argued constitutes a blind spot for Foucault. At the same time, his

antihumanism has been embraced by others (e.g. Braidotti 1994; 2002; 2013; Barad 2003; 2007), whose readings have sought to remedy Foucault's reluctance to theorise subjectivity and affect. These readings have contributed to more materialist conceptions of discourse, within which the human body is 'a point of overlapping between the physical, the symbolic, and the sociological' (Braidotti 1994, 4), and where locating subjectivity in the body is not an essentialist position but an understanding of subjectivity as arising from lived and complex experience within multiple discourses and physical positions.

In recent years, we have seen a shift away from language; 'language has been granted too much power' as Barad (2003, 801) writes. This turn away from language, where 'matter matters', has also brought with it new readings of Foucault's work that emphasise discursive practices and the materiality of the body. However, it has been pointed out (e.g. Barad 2003) that Foucault's project of linking discourse and materiality was only partially successful in that it precludes 'an understanding of precisely *how* discursive practices produce material bodies'. If Foucault positions the body as the locus of productive forces, 'the site where the large-scale organization of power links up with local practices' (Barad 2003, 808), it would follow that the materiality of the body, its physiology and anatomy and the various other material forces that intertwine with everyday embodiment, also matter in the process of materialisation (Barad 2003). That is to say, that discourse and material embodiment must be engaged in a two-way interaction, and as such implicated in a co-production of knowledge, the biological and the historical. Elden and Crampton (2007) argue that, for Foucault, power is productive and negative and therefore the relationship is one of contestation rather than domination, one at the intersection of technologies of domination and technologies of the self. However, Foucault fails to clearly account for how the body's materiality plays an active role in the workings of power, and thus fails to theorise the relationship between discursive and non-discursive practices. 'Words and things', writes Foucault (1972, 49), 'is the entirely serious title of a problem'.

There have certainly been attempts, following Foucault, to illuminate the relationship between words and things, and indeed there have been questions about the necessity to ontologically separate the world into these oppositional domains at all; with calls for a move away from representation to 'a different starting point, a different metaphysics' (Barad 2003, 812). Such a metaphysics has been proposed under the umbrella of non-representational, Deleuzian neo-vitalist and 'new-materialist' ontologies in the work of a range of scholars across the humanities and social sciences (e.g. Thrift 1996; Braidotti 2002, 2013; Barad 2003, 2007). We are concerned here, however, not only with this relationship but also with its situatedness. This calls into question the applicability of Foucault to issues of power and space as detailed in Crampton and Elden (2007). In this collection, both Harvey and Thrift take issue with Foucault's spatial imagination. For Harvey, the problem relates to Foucault's engagement with space, which he outlined in a 1976 interview with the editors of *Herodote*. When Foucault discussed geography as 'condition of possibility' in relation to an archaeology of knowledge he referred to space as absolute, rather than relative and relational. Harvey is critical of this reliance on a Kantian, and therefore undialectical, notion of space and time and therefore precludes it as a 'condition of possibility'. Thrift takes this further in adding an additional three 'blind spots' to this lack of spatial imagination, which include the previously discussed lack of attention to phenomenology; a lack of explicit focus on affect; and a lack of focus

on ‘things’ Crampton and Elden (2007). This understanding of ‘things’, subjective experiences and their situatedness is a prerequisite for making sense of mobilities.

### **Mobilising Discourse**

A number of proponents of the ‘mobilities turn’ have sought to develop thinking on the relationship between words and things in their spatial context; ‘the challenge of changing driving behaviour becomes evident when this practice is conceived of as a bodily habit that is co-constituted within an automobile assemblage’ (Harada and Waitt 2012, 145). Work on mobilities that takes the body seriously has drawn on affective ontologies associated with non-dualist relational philosophies, including Latour’s (2005) actor-network theory; Thrift’s (2008) non-representational theory and Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987) concept of ‘assemblages’. Along with other literatures from the ‘mobilities turn’ such as Ole Jensen’s (2006, 2010) interactionist theories of mobility, these often emphasise the unconscious or pre-discursive dimensions shaping politics of mobility, a shift towards the ‘beings and doings’ of mobilities. However, there is much scope to incorporate an understanding of the embodied nature of mobile life with a discursive analysis that takes a broader view of discourse as practice; ‘representation not as a code to be broken or an illusion to be dispelled rather representations are apprehended as performative in themselves; as doings’ (Dewsbury et al. 2002, 438). Thrift’s (2004) writing on driving in the city offers what could be termed a ‘new materialist’ reading of mobility. He examines the materialising forces of automobilities as a pervasive discourse on how to be mobile; ‘around a relatively simple mechanical entity ... a whole new civilization has been built’.

Urry (2000, 59) similarly signalled the powerful materialities involved in the constitution of an automobile world; ‘the car’s significance is that it reconfigures civil society involving distinct ways of dwelling, travelling and socialising in and through an automobilised time-space’. The material configuration of automobility is here thought to be actively implicated in the production of a range of mobile practices emerging around it, anchoring discursive knowledge production in materiality. It is in the metaphysical merger between the human body and the car that we can see the coming together of a series of reflexive knowledges that are both technological and embodied (Thrift 2004). Through the human-car hybrid, ‘objects are increasingly allowed their own place in the solicitations of a meaningful world. They become parts of new kinds of authority’ (Thrift 2004, 49). Attending to the embodied and unwilling aspects of mobility practices (Cresswell 2010) places into question the assumptions made by policy-makers and transport planners that drivers are acting rationally. Simultaneously, the contrasting assumption in behaviour change research that individuals are ‘lifeless’ or trapped by habits also comes into question when foregrounding the vibrancy of experience of the sensuous body as it engages in mobile practices (Sheller 2004). Thus, to think the materialities of everyday embodied engagements with mobile objects such as cars, as unimportant for an understanding of dominant discourses of mobility would be a serious omission. Of equal importance, however, are relations of power and governance.

Scholars have differentially drawn from Foucault, both implicitly (Shove and Walker 2010; Shove, Pantzar, and Watson 2012) and explicitly (Richardson and Jensen 2000; Jensen 2011, 2013; Bærenholdt 2013) in seeking to understand the dynamics of power that characterise the labyrinthine relations between political

processes at macro and micro levels. Paterson (2007) details Foucault's early engagement with mobility and governance in *Madness and civilization*, where he talks of 'the problem of movement' in governing populations. The state becomes embroiled in a battle to maintain order through constraining mobility, but at the same time promoting mobility in order to generate economic growth. Indeed, as Paterson (127) argues 'the tension between these two elements in governors strategies plays itself out to the present day', a tension that leads to the contradictions inherent in the institutional discourses discussed later. Paterson suggests that Foucault recognises the states privileging of 'disciplinary forms of power' over 'sovereign forms of power' in shaping rather than restricting mobility in a bid to reconcile this divergent aims. Packer (2008) identifies an apparent shift in Foucault's analysis of power, evident in his final interview, where Foucault discusses a shift from disciplinary to sovereign power as evidence through outright dominance and restriction of mobile subjects in contexts such as Guantanamo, where prisoners are rendered immobile and thereby become devoid of any means of challenging in the field of power. However, in drawing from Deleuze, Packer understands power in both constraining mobile freedoms and in facilitating freedoms, both in order to control.

Paterson illuminates the ways in which bodies become entwined in mobile governance, drawing from Foucault's notion of 'bio-power', where the state governs mobile bodies through 'active' rather than 'passive' discourses. Such active discourses are considered by Packer (2008) who explores discourses of safety that become dominant through representations of the mobility of particular 'deviant' groups in mass-mediated popular culture such as film, television, magazines and newspapers in the USA. He argues that government policy is focused on transforming mobile populations to passive populations and that Foucault's notion of biopolitics allows us to understand this in relation to the construction of particular groups: hitchhikers, youth, as coherent units that can be disciplined. However, Diken and Lausten (2013) suggest that Foucault's use of the term biopower in his later work was contrasted with disciplinary power as this form of power becomes 'deinstitutionalised', a notion that is taken forward in Deleuze' postdisciplinary 'societies of control'. This dispersal of power is recognised here, to some extent, in our discussion of embodied experiences of mobility in challenging dominant discourses but at the same time we acknowledge the accumulation of power in the institutions of governance. We therefore seek to understand the ways in which disciplinary power traverses 'biopower', where state discourses intersect with embodied discourses. Taking direction from Foucault's own attempt to reconcile discourse and lived materialities through the notion of *dispositif*, we seek to elucidate the intricate ways in which institutional discourses and embodied practices are enmeshed and co-produce mobilities. Here, we seek to contribute to understandings of the discursive underpinnings of a society considered 'hypermobile' (Adams 1999), by foregrounding both institutional and everyday embodied discursive practices. Our approach complements Jensen's (2011) conceptualisation of power, mobility and space, which seeks to demonstrate processes of governance at both macro and micro levels synthesising a governmentality approach with a perspective based on sensory experience. Rationalities of governing bodies are seen to be socio-historically produced and provide direction for governing practices, which are then transferred onto citizens through 'forms of knowledge, framings and practices' and 'become enmeshed with the daily practice of urban citizens (Jensen 2011, 259). In parallel, power is distributed through emotional experiences and cultural differences are productive of particular mobile



emotions. We place our emphasis on the ‘interpretative repertoires’ (Potter 1996), the sets of thinking and embodied practices that underlie all mobilities and the ‘conditions of possibility’ (Foucault 1972) for the emergence of knowledge.

### **Institutional Discourses of Mobility**

We firstly explore collections of knowledge about mobilities – identified as a set of key discourses – which have become institutionalised and therefore obscure the possibility of other knowledges. Dominant discourses of mobility claim scientific truth as embedded in the powerful academic traditions of engineering and economics. These dominant discourses mobilise certain ‘regimes of truth’ (Foucault 1977), which establish particular ways of thinking about mobilities that claim to unilaterally make sense of the world we live in. The ‘framing’ of mobility in policy discourse refers to the way in which accepted ‘facts’ about travel, transport and communications only make sense when embedded in a ‘frame or story line that organize them and give them coherence, selecting certain ones to emphasize and ignoring others’ (Gamson 1989, 157). Notions of everyday mobilities become framed within a general ‘story’, which espouses some key normative assumptions about mobility in the twenty-first century in contemporary Western societies. Gubrium and Holstein (1990) argue that these stories become ‘organisationally embedded’ in that a particular discourse is ascribed to a particular organisation, be it a discrete unit such as an institution, or more broadly, a particular social group. Institutions prescribe ‘regimes of truth’, which set the parameters for both how we understand and practise mobilities at various scales. These discourses are powerful and less powerful depending on where they emerge, become embedded and are sustained. They are also spatially as well as socially and politically situated and become transformed according to spatial context (see for example Crampton and Elden 2007). Following on from a previous study of institutional discourses of ‘family’ (Murray and Barnes 2010) and a review of literature across both transport policy studies and mobility studies, the following suggests that five pervasive institutional discourses or sets of discourses of mobility can be identified: technocratic; rights to mobility; mobile riskiness; speedy connectivity; and sustainable mobility.

Firstly, *technocratic* discourses of mobility are powerful set of discourses, which have become embedded in western countries, particularly the UK and the USA, where traditional approaches to mobility (transport studies) are grounded in the interpretative repertoire of transport economics and engineering (Goodwin et al. 1991; Adams 1999; Bannister 2002). In the UK and USA, since the mid-twentieth century, this has been the dominant culture of transport professionals (Bannister 2002). Associated with the era of ‘predict and provide’, a process of policy-making premised on mathematical modelling and forecasting, these discourses give precedence to technical fixes and technological innovations, a key feature of Adam’s (1999) hypermobile society. Closely linked to technocratic discourses through ideologies of neoliberalism, are the *rights to mobility* discourses (Patterson 2007; Adey 2009; Cresswell 2010). This set of discourses emanates from neoliberal values of responsibility, freedom, autonomy, independence, choice, rights and duties. Unrestricted mobility is considered a fundamental right of the contemporary Western citizen and obstructions to mobility networks are seen as an affront on liberty and freedom of citizens. This right is an individual one and the car continues to both represent and provide a means to practice this right (Paterson 2007; Cresswell 2010), despite evidence



(although conflicting) that western countries are reaching ‘peak car’ (Goodwin 2012). In the UK, in particular, this relationship between rights to mobility and the car is considered to have become deeply embedded in mobility culture during Margaret Thatcher’s government (1979–1990) and is epitomised in a quote widely attributed to her: ‘a man who, beyond the age of 26, finds himself on a bus can count himself as a failure’ (HM Government 2003). The extent to which this discourse is embedded in mobility policy in the UK is demonstrated in the emphasis on individualised solutions to sustainable mobility problems such as ‘choice architecture’ (Barr and Prillwitz 2014).

Whilst technocratic and rights discourses correspond to Foucault’s conflicting governance objectives of mobility for control and growth (Paterson 2007), *discourses of mobile riskiness* can be more expressly associated with Foucault’s biopower as both Paterson (2007) and Packer (2008) suggest. The notion that those on the move, especially young people, travellers, ‘tramps’, etc. (Cresswell 2006; Urry 2007) are considered risky. Mobile spaces are transitional spaces as they are neither settled nor secure and this is considered risky (Urry 2007) as reflected in policy discourses of home, where ‘home’ is a contested space of both confinement and freedom (Settles 2001). Nevertheless, the ‘spatial fear paradox’ (Valentine 1989), where home is considered safe and public space as fearful, is reinforced in policy discourses. This construction of the ‘safe’ and ‘secure’ home is an enduring discourse set against a discourse of mobile riskiness, despite this false dichotomy (Sheller and Urry 2003). Packer (2008) uses Foucault’s notion of ‘dangerousness’ to reveal the embeddedness of this discourse, where particular groups are considered risky even though this is not borne out in practice. He applies this, for example, to explain the way in which racial profiling operates through the identification of riskiness and criminality in particular mobile practices such as driving particular cars such as a Cadillac. Similarly, Bonham and Cox (2010) discuss the ways in which cyclists are constructed as disruptive or deviant travellers.

Of course, these discourses, which are presented here as distinct, are highly interconnected and their boundaries blurred. For example, the individualism of the rights to mobility discourse also extends to responsibilities to effect change and this allows mobility at a wider scale to continue as a means and necessity for economic opportunities and development. Hence, the UK Government continues to promote unpopular and costly infrastructure projects such as HS2, the high-speed rail link between London, Birmingham and Leeds, with a rhetoric that speaks to wider notions of national pride and progress, a privileging of a discourse of *speedy connectivity*. The rationale for the £32.7bn investment required is based on economic growth and ‘bring[ing] communities and businesses in and around those areas closer together with each other’ (DfT 2013). However, echoing Foucault’s (1977, 95) concatenation of power and resistance, there has been much opposition to the proposal from various political standpoints (BBC 2012; Williams 2012) who argue that not only is the scheme economically but also environmentally questionable. Thus, there is evidence of an engendered resistance at an institutional level, in the manifestation of a fourth institutional discourse of *sustainable mobility*. This discourse has been influential in UK transport policy since the 1970s and particularly since the late 1990s Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution (1997) and the policy document ‘A New Deal for Transport’ (DETR 1998), with the subsequent introduction of the congestion charge in London and broad-scale sustainability policy instruments at a local level. However, at a policy level, firstly the previous Labour government’s

backtracking on sustainability (Docherty and Shaw 2011) and then the current coalition government's more fervent convergence of sustainability with economic development indicate that discourses of sustainable mobility are relatively fragile.

As the boundaries of discourses are blurred, discursive relationships and trajectories of resistance are messy. For example, apparent tensions between the 'rights' and 'sustainability' discourses are mitigated through market-led instruments of environmental management. Indeed, as discussed, the UK government is attempting to bring together these discourses in its two-pronged focus on economic development and climate change (Butcher and Keep 2011). Looking towards silences or gaps in discourses of mobility makes visible the exclusion of alternative accounts and highlights those normative accounts that are conveyed by rhetoric (Tonkiss 1998). A notable gap is a seemingly integral part of sustainability, mobility justice, which is often positioned as both tangential and subordinate. Issues of mobility justice are often underplayed in relation to technocratic and rights discourses that produce projects such as HS2 even though a significant number of those living alongside the proposed HS2 rail link will not be able to afford to use it. Transport policy in the UK, particularly on a national scale, did not significantly acknowledge mobility injustice until the late 1990s (Church, Frost, and Sullivan 2000) with the subsequent publication of the Social Exclusion Unit's (2003) seminal report linking mobility and social exclusion. There had been a number of attempts to recognise the potential mobility exclusion of particular social groups particularly by gender and disability (DETR 1998) and indeed the agenda gathered momentum through the 2000s (DfT 2005, 2006). However, not all of this work was coordinated into a coherent set of ideas, and more recently, with a change of government and shift in national priorities, interest has faded with almost sole focus on mobility measures that are required through European Union legislation and apply to the physical barriers to access (DfT 2012). Resistant discourses of mobility justice become obscured by notions of responsibility towards particular groups through the lens of morality rather than justice.

Mobility injustices are similarly shadowed by discourses of speedy connectivity (Urry 2007; Miele 2008; Wacjman 2008), again intertwined with notions of progress and modernity, in which, it appears, mobility is firmly embedded. These, in turn can be related to individual freedoms, and in particular the rights to individual automobility. HS2 is considered an appropriate alternative to such individual mobility precisely because of its speed. These interweaving and often discordant institutional level discourses reflect the 'regimes of truth' that dominate mobility policy in western societies. Some of these discourses sit well together whilst others contain inherent contradictions. Some are made visible, whilst others are purposefully obscured. It seems apparent that the more powerful and more visible discourses centre on 'morality': mobility as a right, but to be earned; 'modernity': mobility as economic progress; and 'freedom': mobility as individual freedom and responsibility. We now use this emerging typology to reveal the sites of convergence of institutional and local discourses, exploring how institutional knowledge and practices are played out and what alternatives come into play through resistance.

### **Everyday Discourses of Mobility**

This part of the paper concerns itself with an exploration of mobility discourses at the everyday level, and their interaction with the institutional discourses outlined above. We investigate everyday discourses of mobility through an ethnographic

study of mobile experiences and everyday practices. We take the position that this data produces narratives that are personally meaningful constructions of life stories that shape experiences and interpretations of the world, and through which we can trace the embodied and emotional dimensions of everyday mobile practices. The following explores the social, spatial and material context of subject positions, everyday practices and relations of power in and through which everyday mobilities are generated. We seek to understand everyday mobile practices as ‘social texts’ and as processes by which governmental and institutional framings become accepted and embodied. We also explore how these framings are contested, become diluted or transformed in the context of everyday flows and disruptions of mobilities. Our ethnographic data is part of a larger study that seeks to understand the ways in which mobility practices can be changed to reduce carbon emissions.<sup>1</sup> In reflecting the importance of relationships in mobile lives, the research focused on families rather than households. Thirty-five participants were recruited from 18 families in Brighton, a city on the south coast of England. The ethnographic study has been underway since spring 2012 and data will be gathered until spring 2014. Participants are interviewed approximately every six months about their daily mobilities, with interviews being both static and mobile. The first interview mapped a life history of the participants, in order to understand how they narrate their mobilities throughout their lived and geographical histories. The second interview focused on everyday practices, to emphasise how mobilities pervade all daily activities and how both mobilities and disruptions are relationally constituted and embodied. In between interviews participants produced their own data for the project using a ‘toolkit’ of visual and textual methods, such as writing journey diaries, taking photos or videos. For the purposes of this paper, we use the interview data as the primary empirical material for the discourse analysis. The everyday discourses we discuss in this section were identified through a careful coding and analysis of interview data using NVIVO qualitative coding software.

Following Wodak (2008), local discourses are contextualised in institutional, social, spatial and temporal (historical) frames. In setting out some of the key institutional discourses above we have established the institutional context within which local discourses emerge. In particular, we are interested in exploring the extent to which discourses of modernity, freedom and morality become part of the vernacular. We understand discursive practice on the local level as a system for the formation and articulation of ideas about mobilities at this particular time in history. At the same time, mobile practices are mediated through memory (Degen, DeSilvey, and Rose 2008) and so it is understood that participants’ biographies as well as collective memories are key elements in forming local mobility discourses. Discourse is understood as both that which constrains and enables what is said, thought, written and acted upon and works in both inhibiting and productive ways, implying both exclusions and choices. Processes of formation, constraint, production and exclusion are inseparable in Foucault’s (1972, 1977) reading of the workings of discourse, and intimate the workings of power through the means of discourse. As discussed, in a Foucauldian approach to discourse, discourse defines and produces the objects of our knowledge. It governs the ways a topic can be meaningfully talked about; it also influences how ideas are put into practice and determines what constitutes possible action. But at the same time, discourse is the practice itself. The following sections explore embodied discourses of mobility where these discourses are understood

to reflect relations between bodies and social and material infrastructures that constitute the ‘conditions of possibility’ for the development of certain types of mobile practices.

### **Embodied Discourses of Modernity, Freedom and Morality**

The element of contradiction within institutionalised discourses of mobility is evident at the level of everyday practice where individuals must negotiate these multifaceted discourses in relation to their everyday mobile practices. As we have seen above, prevailing discourses of sustainability in relation to climate change cast individuals in a position of responsibility for reducing carbon emissions, whilst the neoliberal agenda simultaneously positions mobilities (especially automobilities) as central to the exercise of individual rights of freedom, economic success and citizenship. As a result, in daily mobility practices, individuals must navigate a complex terrain of subject positions, choices and perceptions of responsibility. As such, individual discursive narratives about mobility often reflect an element of ambivalence and conflicted emotions; themes of legitimacy and freedom are often set against perceptions of moral responsibility, and feelings of guilt when pressures to reduce car travel are not met. We identify three prevalent ways that mobility is narrated by participants; as an emblem of modernity and freedom but also increasingly as a moral choice. We discuss these discourses in turn, whilst acknowledging their inevitable overlaps, and consider how these interact and intersect with institutional discourses of mobility.

#### *Modernity*

Previous work on mobility (e.g. Cresswell 2006; Urry 2007) has highlighted how unfettered movement has become ‘a general principle of modernity’ (Kesselring 2012, 90). The foundational role of mobility in contemporary notions of modernity has worked to naturalise high frequency and high-speed movement as something that barely needs justification, and as we outlined above, there exists a pervasive discourse that upholds the individual ‘right’ to mobility as a key to economic success and social mobility. This institutional discourse is mapped onto the lifecourse in our interview data, where the car was often narrated by participants as symbolic of a transition into adulthood and working life, and thus positioned as central to the pursuit of success. The following quotes from participants illustrate the ways in which driving is normalised as part and parcel of modern life. Roger, despite living in a city with myriad transport networks, still felt justified in using his car:

I never even questioned the idea that I had to have a flat with good free on-street car-parking outside, and that I’d drive across London to go to work every day. (Roger)

Siobhan, similarly, posited a driving licence as key to her future employability;

I want to get my driving licence before I finish my doctorate ... I don’t necessarily want the car but it’s more for employability. (Siobhan)

Car travel was also often justified in participant narratives as a way of helping one to be efficient in managing the many demands of modern life, linking to pervasive

institutionalised discourses of connectivity and speed (Urry 2007; Miele 2008; Wacjman 2008). Alongside the increasing time pressures and speed of modern life in general (Hassan 2009; Hylland Eriksen 2001), participants placed a great deal of value on the car as a means to optimise the productive use of one's time;

Time is a big factor because I'm already bound by the routine of having a small child ... I always feel like I've got a lot of specific things to fit in a day at specific times. And I kind of feel like there would be situations where I would choose not to do something if, for example, I had to walk there or if I had to take lots of buses, because of the time and also how easy something is, as well, you know, again, if it's easy to jump in the car and drive ten minutes as opposed to take half an hour catching two buses with a buggy and a small child that is tired. (Edith)

Thus, the car was represented as a justified means of coping with the demands of everyday life. However, such narratives also serve to highlight a broader politics of mobility (Cresswell 2010), where representation is entangled with the materialities and bodily habits constituted within practices such as working and caring for children. More broadly, participants' accounts reflect the ways in which discourses of modernity produce pressures associated with both being 'good' parents (Murray 2009) and 'enjoying' the 'freedom' of speedy connectivity.

And then on a Tuesday night Emmeline swims as well so she goes to the earlier session, so it's quite complicated maybe for, so she starts swimming at 5:30 which means we have to leave at 5 because it takes longer in the evening because it's traffic-y. So we leave at about five to 5 if we can and we drive all the way [...], Emmeline swims from half past 5 to half past 6 and then I drive two of her friends [...] we leave at about half past 6 and generally I get back about quarter past 7 or something [...] but last night it all changed because my friend had to have a massage because she was very stressed, so I did the late pickup and she did the early one [...] I dropped them [...] at 5 and I went straight back to work...And then I just whizzed across, no traffic, lovely sunny evening [...] pick up the girls [...]. (Audrey)

### *Freedom*

Wider neoliberal discourses of mobility as a right of the modern citizen are reflected at the everyday level by discourses of freedom and independence. Driving, in particular, is positioned as the zenith of independent mobility. As Freudendal-Pedersen (2009, 20) put it, 'mobility makes the late modern individual's autobiographical narrative possible'; passing driving tests and getting first cars were often narrated as significant milestones in terms of independence of movement:

When I was in the sixth form I had my own car, which in Brighton just seems crazy but where I was in Essex my car was the worst car in the car park, everyone had really nice cars and mine was this sort of second-hand Peugeot [...] I was desperate to learn to drive, absolutely desperate, couldn't wait till I was 17, everyone drove. (Evelyn)

I think it's a kind of combination of the freedom of having a car and also the freedom of finally being able to get out of where you live without the help of your parents for the first time [...]. (Cilla)

These participant quotes exemplify the discourse of automobility as freedom and also, perhaps, gendered automobility (see Priya Uteng, and Cresswell 2008). Narratives of freedom and independence are also closely linked to embodied experiences of driving – feelings of enjoyment at the possibilities presented by independent mobility – an aspect that is often overshadowed by increasingly pervasive narratives that posit driving as environmentally harmful and irresponsible. Here, the enjoyment of mobility shapes the social:

My first car was a convertible and it was great fun driving up and down the motorway to go and see [my boyfriend]. (Edith)

I just loved driving so much sometimes I would just drive around like it's just nice having that freedom really. (Anna)

The material containment of the car also provides an environment that is experienced to afford a sense of control:

I feel like in the car I've got control over my environment, that I can stop when I need to stop, I can, I feel like it's an extension of my home, so you can take what you want to take, you can play music when you want to play music, you can, you know, I feel like I can interact with my daughter in a kind of more open and freeing way, we're not in public. (Edith)

The car also alleviates experiences of being 'encumbered', which pose a significant constraint on getting around, especially for parents with children:

If we had to do longer journeys we just went by train or bus, but then it did become more difficult when we had a third child. I think we got a car then because we just couldn't get on the bus anymore, it was a bit difficult with three because they were all quite close in age. (Dana)

Thus, at the everyday level, the car was often posited as the ultimate symbol of freedom, whilst it was also clear that mobility choices involved a negotiation of a complex terrain of intimate relations, responsibilities and daily practices.

### *Morality*

Whilst championing the individualism of automobility, an emerging moral landscape of transport has seen car travel constructed as immoral. As we discussed above, the emerging institutional discourse of 'sustainable mobility' has cast cycling and walking as conscientious forms of personal transportation, which meet a number of citizenship responsibilities, amongst them responsibility towards environment (and locality) and personal health (see, for example, NICE 2012). Institutional demands for individual responsibility can be traced to the emergence of a strong local discourse surrounding the morality of automobilities. This is particularly evident



amongst the younger participants recruited in Brighton and Hove who have already been positioned as responsible agents in relation to their travel through policies like the School Travel Plan, which encourages schools to devise a package of measures to reduce car travel to school and increase 'active travel' such as walking and cycling. Eight participants, aged 12 or 13 at the time of the first interview, were recruited from a local secondary school in 2012. All eight participants regularly walked to school and the discourse around responsible travel was one that was already familiar:

[My school] had a scheme which is 'walk on Wednesday' which tried to encourage more and more people to walk and even if it was like they lived really far away and they'd take the bus or the car, get off like a stop or two earlier and then walk the rest. (Anton, 13)

Discourses that emphasise individual responsibility can be seen to produce certain affective stakes, such as feelings of guilt associated with car travel. For example, another young participant, Laurie (13), mentions feelings of guilt when she travels by car:

If I'm going on long journeys or even short journeys I always do feel a bit guilty [about travelling by car ...] I just think we could be walking, we could be doing more walking.

However, it is generally acknowledged (Whitmarsh et al. 2011) that knowledge and concern about climate change science in itself is often not enough to trigger a change in mobility practices, such as encouraging people to drive less (Harada and Waitt 2012). Participants' narratives also strongly brought to the fore the material and social constraints which often blocked efforts to use the car less. This was particularly evident in interviews with participants with caring responsibilities, particularly those with younger children and those who lived in suburban or rural locations where public transport was not a viable option. One participant, a mother of two children in primary school, felt conflicted about her decision to learn to drive:

I feel a lot of responsibility for the environment and I want to do the right thing by the environment and by my kids [...] driving feels like a step in the wrong direction, but I feel like I'm almost being forced into it living where we do. (Eleanor)

The school run has often figured as a key concern for transport policy as it is often associated with unnecessary peaking of traffic flows. It is also an arena in which discourses of individual (parental) responsibility and morality are played out (Murray 2009). However, as the above quote exemplifies, families are often pushed into car use from a lack of access to more 'sustainable' travel options. The ambivalence around responsibility towards the environment and the ease of car travel was also prevalent in narratives of participants who lived in central urban locations. Another family's narrative exemplifies these moral negotiations. They drive a hybrid car, a decision that points towards an awareness of dominant discourses around sustainability, climate change and personal responsibility towards the environment:



We bought the car before we did anything else and thought yes well we're gonna need that with family things and the rest of it and we decided we'd go for the hybrid, partly to make a statement even though it was going to cost us more to do that and I think we were happy with that, with that choice. (Bob)

However, their sensitivity towards the morality of car travel had not necessarily translated into less use of their car:

I shuttle to work sometimes; I do the shop with the, the family shop with it most of the time if I'm the one that does that and our B&Q runs and recycling centre runs. (Bob)

Nevertheless, their frequent use of the car for the father's commute to work and for various after-school activities for the daughter compromised their efforts to be, or appear to be, sustainable. The following excerpt (with daughter Amy) exemplifies the discrepancy that sometimes arises between 'saying' and 'doing', as the car and their use of it becomes an object of contention:

Bob: [My commute] hasn't changed, I basically either train it or drive it and it works out about the same in terms of time but we have a car that doesn't get a lot of use so I do use it for that just to run it.

Amy: Otherwise the battery runs down.

Bob: Yeah, to charge the battery, because it's a hybrid car for what it's worth.

There was often a degree of ambivalence incorporated in participants' responses to the discourse of moral responsibility. The discourse surfaced in most participant narratives, but was not always embraced as a key consideration when it came to their daily mobilities. The morality discourse was frequently resisted from below by everyday efforts to manage daily life within personal, financial, institutional and environmental constraints. Thus, discursively constructed positions of responsibility in relation to the environment were easily overshadowed by more mundane realities. The following quotes illustrate quite aptly the negotiation between wider notions of responsibility for the environment and more immediate personal concerns:

I think because I come from Essex and in Essex everyone drives, because everything's so far away that you have to drive to everything, so I already feel smugger that I don't drive my car anymore [...] in terms of cars versus non-cars, I would not use a car if I had the choice in terms of small journeys. But getting into town, the walking thing, if I thought about it in terms of priorities, it's saving money, doing some exercise, nicer experience, environment, in that order [...] People always say that the Green Party want to kill off the car because they don't want people to drive into Brighton, but I don't think that's necessarily a bad thing. (Evelyn)

How much discomfort can you take to help the environment, you know what I mean, like for example when I go and see my mum and dad I know I should take the train but that takes eight hours and if I fly it knocks half the time off, ... so I make my excuses and I take the plane and that's really bad for the environment ... so although like I'm going you know, oh it's good because I

use the bus and even better when I cycle, cycling is good exercise for you, yeah, you wonder how much discomfort you can put up with to help the environment, yeah, no, I do say it's important to me. (Anna)

The morality discourse surrounding mobility emerged as a pervasive narrative produced at the local level, and can be linked to wider institutional discourses that emphasise individual responsibility however, it highlights some of the complexities between the gradual emergence of new 'sustainable mobility' rationales and more established 'structural stories' that cast mobility as freedom (Freudendal-Pedersen 2009) and as a fundamental right of the modern Western citizen. However, as discussed, dominant institutional discourses are tempered by an often unacknowledged complexity at the level of lived experience, that offer the potential for these discourses to be resisted or disrupted from below.

### **Disrupting Discourses through Embodied Resistance**

As we have demonstrated throughout the paper, discourses of mobility that prioritise specific forms of movement and mobility and cement their sociocultural valorisation can be made visible and challenged both at macro and micro levels. Institutional discourses have produced a moral economy of transport which transfers responsibility away from the planning and policy arena onto the environmentally responsible and 'good citizen' (Green, Steinbach, and Datta 2012), which has translated into everyday negotiations of the emotional terrain of choices, freedoms and responsibilities. However, discourses are entangled with affective and sensuous geographies that, at the level of everyday practice create embodied dispositions towards certain mobile practices that have the potential to either affirm or resist institutional messages in a way that is not entirely rational. Daily negotiations of like and dislike which in the end come down to emotional and embodied geographies of exertion, riskiness, boredom and enjoyment are often excluded from institutional discourses and policy responses that cast individuals as agents acting based on rational choice. As one participant relates, levels of bodily exertion and comfort play a significant role in the likelihood of using a more sustainable mode of transport, such as cycling:

I discovered I don't cycle if I have to go uphill to get somewhere, I only cycle if it's downhill to get somewhere and then I have no choice but to go uphill to go home, so this is the way round it has to be. (Cilla)

In this way, embodied dispositions can play a significant role in counteracting discourses of morality and responsibility by enforcing the comforts and ease of car travel. In a world more or less designed with automobility as a given, the affordances of the car make it very difficult to give up:

Pop the kid in the car and listen to music on the way and have a bit of freedom and then you can like stop off at the supermarket on the way home or whatever and like build in what you need to do for that day around your trip [...] It does make life so much easier and I think like if you're already kind of feeling a little bit stressed out it would be much easier to not bother doing things because of the faff of getting there rather than kind of go, oh right, it's no bother, you just nip in the car. (Edith)

As we have seen, there is a pervasive discourse where the car comes to represent the ultimate in freedom, independence and convenience. Material conditions, constraints on time, caring responsibilities and the various stresses of modern life are felt ameliorated by the comfort and ease by which one can transport oneself speedily from one place to another in the car. Daily mobilities are enmeshed in bodily and sensate relationships with both modes of mobility and mobile spaces. Participant Mary exemplifies this in her narrative about taking the bus to work, which shows how she actively negotiates the relational space of the bus to avoid disturbances from fellow passengers:

Where do we begin? I have a real thing about sniffers, and the sniffers always find me, it's always been the same, because they sit down next to you and just go (*makes exaggerated sniffing noise*). No! And people who have their Walkman's on so loud that you can not only just hear the bass beat, you can hear every single thing, and you do feel like saying, 'Do you realise what you're doing to your hearing?' (Mary)

These findings to a large extent reflect existing literature on mobile justice; for example, literature that emphasises the more material aspects of mobility justice (Church, Frost, and Sullivan 2000; Hine 2008) as well as wider social aspects of 'network capital' (Urry 2007) and contributions to thinking that take into account notions of immobility and potential mobility (Kaufman 2002; Kellerman 2012). In our daily mobilities we develop embodied dispositions and cycles of repetition, which often challenge institutional discourses because they emerge from the ground up. These are also discourses that are ignored by institutions and policy-makers because they do not conform to highly held assumptions about either the nature of habit or rational behaviour.

## Conclusion

In this paper, we have examined the relationship between broader institutional discourses of mobility and 'everyday' accounts of mobile lives. We have traced key institutional discourses of modernity, freedom and morality to everyday embodied engagements with mobilities by people in Brighton. Everyday embodied discourses of mobilities have been found to both reinforce larger institutional discourses and determine everyday cultures of mobility, but also to challenge these discourses. The car is positioned as central to a neoliberal agenda in which policies promote progress and choice in the pursuit of modernity and engender a culture of individual freedom and rights that can be played out through individualised mobility. In turn, citizens are encouraged to take responsibility for curbing the unsustainable elements of car use. The car represents a means to live up to the myriad expectations of modern life. It is not only a metaphor for freedom, but an embodied mobility practice that enables freedoms, especially for those encumbered with the gendered responsibilities of life in the modern family. However, such demands produce ambivalence, in relation to embodied responses to discourses of moral responsibility in particular. Here, we have endeavoured to highlight the potential of embodied experiences of mobilities to disrupt or dislocate key institutional discourses from the ground up because these discourses tend to ignore the primacy of embodied experience. The article emphasises that the broader discourses of morality, modernity and freedom can be traced

back to everyday narratives, but that the policy drive towards more sustainable mobilities is resisted at the micro level of everyday embodied engagements because it is easily overshadowed by mundane social and material constraints and affordances; and by bodily dispositions and disabilities. It is the often overlooked and obscured mundane sensate relationships that people have with mobilities and mobile spaces that hold the most significance in constituting mobile behaviours.

The key contention within the ‘new mobilities’ paradigm (Sheller and Urry 2006) that people’s mobilities are embedded in their spatial, cultural, political and economic, social and personal context (Manderscheid 2013) has not been adequately reflected in transport policy literatures to date. The idea that the behaviour change of a solitary mobile subject holds the key to solve the problems caused by increasing car use has to be abandoned for the understanding that mobile lives are socially, culturally and materially relational (Manderscheid 2013). For example, prevailing thinking needs to take into account the ways in which local cultures of mobility intersect with lifecourse issues and how both have particular material manifestations. Life is experienced and embodied in the micro level, whether this is influenced predominantly by global or local discourses. In order to successfully plan for socially and environmentally just mobilities, future transport policy needs to acknowledge political and economic structures, but also the embodied, material and social conditions that govern mobilities.

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