# Mobility in Daily Life

## Between Freedom and Unfreedom

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# Preface

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*Malene Freudendal-Pedersen*

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# Chapter 1
# Introduction

On a cold January evening in the beginning of 2007 I was in Oslo participating in a conference on freedom. I decided to take a mental break and went to catch a movie. I cannot clearly recall the movie, but what I do remember was a commercial running before the movie aimed at attracting new tram drivers to Oslo Sporveier (Oslo's public transportation system). The advert went like this: a big large utility vehicle (SUV) arrives at a parking basement in Oslo. Mom is driving and Alexander is sitting on the back seat. Mom is talking on the mobile phone: 'You know Alexander's birthday … I was thinking we might have to postpone it a couple of months … I'm parking right now, can you believe why people in such small cars occupy such a big parking space?' Mom is commenting and honking at a woman fetching her baby son from the back seat of the small car. She continues her conversation on the mobile: 'I want it to be a decent party you know, I have ordered a pony and all.' Alexander and Mom leave the parking basement walking to Oslo city centre. //New scene//Alexander is just about to finish a soft drink and is trying to get to the other side of the pedestrian street to throw the empty soda can in a dustbin. Mom is on the phone again: 'I am in no way interested in having one of those Eastern European cleaning maids … I don't trust those people at all.' While talking, she grabs the soda can from Alexander, and throws it at the feet of a man cleaning the street. They move down the street, Alexander is curiously experiencing the surroundings. Mom makes sure he doesn't get in contact with the homeless man whom she disgustedly mumbles 'hopeless' to, or the peace activist handing out leaflets to whom she snaps 'fool'. Then Alexander tries to give money to the Salvation Army collection for poor people at Christmas, and Mom reacts by lecturing him: 'Alexander what are you doing, how can you even think about giving to someone when you're not getting anything in return? You know it's very important to think about yourself in life. Dad and I always did that. If you are going to waste time on being nice to all these people, who are just feeling sorry for themselves, then you might end up like him.' Mom points towards a tram driver picking up passengers. The driver smiles and waves to Alexander, who smiles back. Mom and Alexander are leaving the scene when Mom says: 'Not all uniforms are equally cool you know.' Across the picture it says 'Tram driver – a job for nice people'.

The direct way in which oppositions between individuality and community are presented in this commercial is unlike anything I have ever seen. The public transport system struggling with private automobilisms is not, in any

way, special to Norway, alhough portraying car drivers as stressed and self-obsessed individuals without community feeling is unique.

Another memorable example of the battle between public transport and the private car comes from one of my visits to New York City. This is more in line with the traditional power relation between the private car and the public transport system. New York City is a huge mix of different people, families of all kinds, buildings, cars and, not least, oversized commercials. An enormous commercial for an SUV is difficult to miss, where it visually roars at Broadway and 58th Street. The text says 'Life, Liberty and the Pursuit'. At the same time I see a bus crawling down Broadway, between yellow taxis and cars of all colours and sizes. On the side of the bus there is a big streamer saying: 'This is a SUV.' This was a commercial for the Metropolitan Transport Authority aiming at attracting more passengers. The contrasts are omnipresent and 'freedom's stronghold in God's own land' contains countless unfreedoms, not least symbolized through the enormous quantity of automobilities which routinely slows movement down to a snail's pace.

This book takes its starting point in the tension between freedom and unfreedom, articulated through the dichotomy between individuality and community: a dichotomy that we, in our everyday lives, vacillate between and navigate through, creating the good life for ourselves and our families. An essential task in this everyday life is to plan and coordinate our own, and our families', activities spread over time and space. Our mobilities, and the places they shuttle us between each day, become an important task to organize and plan. As the title suggests, everyday life choices lie between freedom/unfreedom and individuality/community – extremes we hover between and reside within. This book focuses on everyday life mobilities and our movement between the activities of which our lives consist. It offers a critical view on how mobilities maintain dichotomies, as well as the multitude of unintended consequences of mobility.

**From Transportation Research to Mobility Research**

Transportation research has traditionally been dominated by engineers and planners. The central goal has been to remove impediments to mobility and facilitate mobility for an increased number of people. Research has traditionally been centred on questions of accessibility, risk and optimizing of infrastructure, conditions of noise and other environmental impacts. Increasingly throughout the 1990s, sociologists and psychologists focused on behavioural aspects of transportation, which became a major component of Danish transportation research (Jensen 1997a; 1997 b; Maglund 1997; Læssøe 1999 Freudendal-Pedersen et al. 1999; 2000). Slowly there emerged an entry point to transportation as more than just a question of getting from point A to point B efficiently. Simultaneously an understanding of modernity and

mobility as highly interconnected gained ground internationally. A decisive step in this direction was taken with Urry's book *Sociology Beyond Society – Mobilities for the Twenty-first Century* (2000). Urry illuminates mobility as an integral component of modern societies through which societies should be understood and analysed. This argument is followed up and further developed in his book *Mobilities* (2007).Through exploring modernity/ mobility dynamics, the formation of CeMoRe (Center for Mobility Research) and later Cosmobilities Network, lead by John Urry and Svend Kesselring, placed mobility as a key concept in understanding society.

As opposed to transportation research, mobility research takes its point of departure in recognizing that mobility is not only about distance covered. The potential to be mobile is equally important in understanding mobilities impact on society. Mobility research thus focuses on mobilities' impact on social, cultural and psychological factors which were previously ignored by social science (Urry 2007). Mobility research, like transportation research, is often interdisciplinary and covers a wide range of theoretical and empirical fields. Urry (2007, 10–11) lists 12 main mobility forms, ranging from 'migration' to 'visiting friends and relatives'. This list, however, focuses on the grouping of mobility purpose. Moreover, I would add to the list empirical fields in a different grouping affecting purposes and materialities of the surrounding world. Some of these fields could be: information and communications technology (Dodge and Kitchin 2004; Vogl 2007), politics and planning (Jensen and Richardson 2004; Jensen 2006), the transportation of goods (Hansen 2005; Jespersen and Drewes Nielsen 2005) etc., all from a global and local perspective. Thus mobility research stems from many different traditions and includes a vast array of different approaches. In recent years, a number of anthologies have been published in an effort to show the variety and the formation of a mobilities paradigm (for example, Thomsen et al. 2005; Knowles et al. 2008; Bærenholdt and Granås 2008; Bergmann and Sager 2008; Canzler et al. 2008).

**Mobility as a Challenge to Sustainability**

Mobility is an important part of late modern lives, enabling a vast variety of possibilities which have created the kind of life we know. Mobility also poses many challenges in environmental, social and economic regards. In relation to the environment, automobility is in particular a large source of pollution. Automobile travel today accounts for 15–30 per cent of total trips in the developing world; in Western Europe the amount is 50 per cent and the United States tops the list with 90 per cent (Ribeiro et al. 2007). Automobility is rapidly and steadily growing, most rapidly in developing countries. Between 1950 and 1997 the worldwide car fleet increased from about 50 million vehicles to 580 million vehicles, which is five times faster than the growth in

population (Ribeiro et al. 2007). On an everyday basis, individuals suffer from the discharge of gasoline, hydrocarbons, toxic chemicals and micro particles when moving around the city. Today virtually all transport energy (95 per cent) comes from oil-based fuels and more and more people travel longer distances. Thus transport energy use amounted to 26 per cent of total world energy use in 2004. In recent years more focus has been placed on automobility's contribution to air pollution and $CO_2$ emissions. In 2004, the transport sector as a whole produced 23 per cent of world energy-related $CO_2$ emissions, and 74 per cent of the total transport $CO_2$ emissions came from road transport (Ribeiro et al. 2007). During recent years, traffic noise has attracted focus, as it has been shown that noise has significant health consequences (Miljøstyrelsen 2003). Apart from the environmental consequences, automobility also has a huge impact on the design of our cities. Today, cities are organized according to the architecture of automobility (Scanlan 2004). Contemporary mobility, particularly automobility, takes up a huge amount of space in the city and creates congestion and insecurity. Today 25 per cent of the land in London is a car-only environment (Urry 2007), a figure similar to that of several Nordic cities. It seems that when a car is acquired, most trips are facilitated by automobility. More than 30 per cent of European car trips cover distances of less than 3 km, and 50 per cent are less than 5 km (Ribeiro et al. 2007). One can wonder why and how automobility has been able to take control of our surrounding world. It has done so to a high degree, because of the close connection between mobility and economic growth. Automobility has been very significant for economic development in the western world. It seems, though, that the close connection between economic advantages and automobility have reached a tipping point. An important conclusion of the Eddington Transport Study (2006) was that in western countries, which have a developed infrastructural system, new road spaces do not create growth. Furthermore, automobility entails a vast amount of external costs, which are not related to the maintenance of roads, parking spaces and so on. In 2003, the Danish Ministry of Environment calculated that the cost of transport externalities in Denmark (5.5 million people and 43,000 $km^2$) is around DK33 billion per annum (approximately €4 million). Thus the major consequences of transport are mainly estimated in relation to the private car. This is due to the fact that public transport moves more people, and even though some trains and buses are also massive polluters, they are still more environmentally friendly than the private car. The overall idea when changes of transport habits are discussed concerns moving individuals from private car usage to public transport. Public transport systems are, in many countries, fighting an uphill battle to maintain a certain number of passengers. According to Urry (2007), the public transport system has incited 'three limited responses of the rail system – the speed response, the neo-liberal response, and the integrated transport response' (110). None of these has successfully stopped individuals from preferring the car. One main reason why public transport cannot compete

with automobility is its affiliation to the state. Even if the public transport system is not owned by the state (which is the case in an increasing number of countries) the state still regulates access, price, timetables and so forth (Urry 2007).

When taking a starting point in the material, it becomes important to understand mobility's disadvantages as well as its advantages and to relate critically to mobility as a societal transforming element. The critical perspective is not to be understood as saying that all mobility is bad, but instead as a wish to challenge some of the taken-for-granted ideas concerning mobility. This book seeks to contribute to critical mobility research, to understand mobility and thus to help facilitate changes. The knowledge of how meaning and apparent rationales become built into everyday life are fruitful in understanding how the individual masters everyday life mobility. It is, however, important to underline that the critique is aimed at apparent rationalities and ideas in our surrounding world. It is aimed at theoretical perspectives in which the lived life and the embedded mobilities, in my point of view, are not getting enough attention. The critique is not aimed at the individual and how he or she overcomes everyday life, structured and compounded by mobility. As individuals we master everyday life mobilities in certain ways, so that they give meaning to ourselves and those closest to us. The mastering draws patterns and imprints that we have in common, and it is these that I wish to understand and illuminate, and thus clear the way to examine, understand and perhaps lay out tracks to change mobility preferences. The changes and breaks in the daily rhythms, routines and actions are not merely matter-of-fact, they imprint on the way we construct meaning in our everyday life. The goal is to understand mobility's soul in the light of a sustainable horizon of change and focus on some of mobility's unintended consequences. Sustainability understood in its widest context focuses on lived everyday lives, guided by dreams and wishes for the good life.

**The Sociology of Mobility**

The sociological mobility research works both empirically and theoretically with ideas that can capture the social dynamics of the understanding of mobilities' needs and habits. Thereby the sociology of mobility also comes to deal with the good life, what it can or should include, how it is achieved and at what cost. Mobility sociology constitutes a theoretical and methodological basis for understanding the psychological and social dynamics of mobility. In this way it can be used to build a better understanding of mobility's meaning, and contribute to a better basis for the regulation of, for example, traffic security and traffic demands.

An important characteristic of mobility is the notion that increased mobility provides increased freedom. This is the result of a 'simple equation summed

up thus: mobility is good, because it equals open-mindedness, discovery and experience, and an effort must be made for individuals to maximize mobility for this reason' (Kaufmann 2002, 37). This notion is, as Kaufmann (2002) states, a part of a value system which can only be illuminated by integrating the intentions of the individual and the reason that makes them mobile. Within mobility research a range of voices highlighting different aspects of mobilities inherent consequences also exists. Mobility for some creates immobility for others (Beckmann 2001; Nielsen 2005; Freudendal-Pedersen 2005). Mobility can both be an asset and a burden (Fotel 2006) and mobilities, especially automobility, create an exceptional level of inequalities (Fetherstone et al. 2004; Urry 2007). In this book, the focus is specifically on mobilities' relation to, and the tension between, freedom and unfreedom. When does my freedom create unfreedom for others and, not least, when does it create unfreedom for myself? The pivotal point is the mobilities involved in organizing everyday life, and the often unintended consequences they have. Here, the concept of mobility is used in plural to underline the countless possibilities we have and use in our everyday lives in late modernity. The field of mobility is broad and ranges from information and communications technology to tourism and to everyday life, However, when the word 'mobilities' is used in this book it is limited to everyday forms of transport, namely cars, trains, buses, bicycles and walking.

This book is placed within everyday mobility research where the cultural and social implications and potentials of and in mobility are the pivotal points. The original motivation for entering this field stems from diverse behavioural transportation research, which is based on ideal types, lifestyle categories and travel patterns. Often, everyday life mobilities are split into patterns and functions (work-home, home-leisure and so on) and not analysed as a whole, as mobilities significant to lived lives and their activities (Urry 2007, 19). These analyses provided a picture of different people and their different affection and need for diverse transport modes. My desire was to understand the reasons for these choices, by investigating common reference points for these ideal types. With a starting point in concepts characterizing late modern everyday life such as lifestyle, time pressure, risk, ambivalences, reflexivity, security, freedom etc. I describe how the choice of, and the responsibility for, mobility has become individualized. There are increasing demands on what motivates and inspires the individual to choose different types of mobility, not only in relation to the individual, but also as a production and reproduction of societal mechanisms. Increasingly mobility researchers express a need for '… redirecting the interest of researchers towards the aspirations and plans of those involved, as well as the things that motivate them, and their possible realm of action' (Kaufmann 2002, 37).

Much of the sociological research concerning mobility has centred on the automobile. This is partly due to the fact that this type of mobility is the clearest expression of the conquering of space, and problems of pollution and

risk. This has become more and more prevalent over time as car ownership and mileage has increased. In addition, the car has become a place where one feels at home and can relax. The car is no longer only a medium for coming to and from 'home', it is a home in itself, a place for dwelling (Urry 2000; Bull 2004; Sheller 2004). For many, their social lives would be impossible without a car (O'Dell 2004 in Urry 2007). The car also comes to function as a place where the individual can organize and do things begun earlier in the home (Urry 2000; 2007; Laurier 2004; Bull 2004). The car space moves in what Urry (2000) calls car-only environments such as motorways, parking places, bridges and more. These domains possess a spatial and time dominance over the surrounding environment where they transform everything that we see, hear, smell or taste. 'Such car-only environments or non-places are neither urban nor rural, local nor cosmopolitan. They are sites of pure mobility within which car drivers are insulated as they "dwell-within-the-car"' (Urry 2000,193). Within these 'non-places' the individual lives in their mobile homes constantly searching for places where things happen. This contributes to the (re)production of the automobile as the technology which more than any other provides freedom (Featherstone 2004; Urry 2007) and, thereby, civil society becomes defined by the power of the car. Today, cities are designed on the premise of the car, on an 'autologic' which underlines policy and planning in large parts of the world (Drewes Nielsen 2005; Burdett and Sudjic 2008). It seems there is an understanding that only the car can provide a cocoon or a place to dwell, but studies have been made suggesting that trains also provide cocoons (Watts 2008; Freudendal-Pedersen 2007a; 2007b). With late modern lives' inherent lack of time, the car is seen by many as the only possible medium to attain the flexibility individuals are expected to possess. To examine which possibilities and potentials other means of transportation have for fulfilling the needs of everyday life is, however, also the purpose of this book.

## Mobility in Everyday Life

Mobility is an essential part of late modern everyday life. To go from place to place, to move and to seek out new and old communities plays a large role in an individual's identity. This is in many ways positive, but also contains a wide range of negative consequences for the environment as well as for the sociality of which we, as individuals, are part. We have demands concerning the different aspects of everyday life, which together compose the good life. Often mobility, particularly automobility, becomes the glue that enables and fills these demands. Everyday life consists of numerous competing discourses with significance for our understanding of the good life, as well as for increased mobility (Hagman 2004; Thomsen 2005; Pooley 2005; Oldrup 2005; Freudendal-Pedersen et al. 1999; 2000; 2002; Freudendal-Pedersen 2005). In the search for good life mobility, especially automobilities, negative effects are

often overlooked. Choosing one transport mode over another is not merely a rational reflection on factors such as distance, travel times, costs and regularity etc. The choice is also influenced by a wide range of factors, embedded in everyday life's complex compounding of purpose and priorities. It is precisely this combination – what the individual understands as rational, impacted by social, spatial, timely and behavioural perspectives – which I find interesting to examine.

**Structural Stories**

To illuminate everyday life's mobility I introduce the concept of 'structural stories'. Structural stories are an expression for some of the most common stories about mobility within everyday life conversations. The concept was originally developed in collaboration with Katrine Hartmann-Petersen and Kenneth Roslind, where the structural story was placed at the centre of analysis. (Freudendal-Pedersen et al. 2002). A common example of a structural story is 'when one has children one needs a car'. The structural stories are an expression of how we feel mobility forms everyday life. What makes 'structural stories' an interesting concept to work with is its representation as universal truths, functioning as an apparent rationale when choosing mobilities in everyday life. The structural story frames everyday life ambivalences and serves as a uniting rationality. The starting point in structural stories uncovers conceptions and prejudices that exist about the automobile and public transport. Analytically, the structural story is interesting when it can reveal 'common truths' existing around different types of mobility as well as significant themes valued by the individuals when organizing everyday life. The structural story forms the starting point for understanding considerations and dilemmas behind everyday life choices and priorities. Through the structural stories I pin down elements that constitute the good life. This book is a contribution to empirical analysis of everyday life mobilities, where the construction of meaning becomes examined through qualitative research methods. I will, through the lens of mobility, show how we produce and reproduce the foundation for the good life we desire for ourselves and our families. The goal is to develop analytical tools that can summarize meanings and actions behind everyday mobilities; and thus listening to the voices of everyday life becomes important. The voices of everyday life can reveal the ambivalences or cracks through which mobility patterns can be developed and changed (Drewes Nielsen 2005). This book demonstrates how the structural story can be used to understand apparent rationalities of why and how we use everyday life mobilities. The structural story has the possibility of highlighting concepts and dichotomies which are important focal points in understanding the dynamics of mobilities. The structural stories are mapped and analysed on the basis of extensive qualitative work with individuals interviewed, both separately and in focus