

*Aharon Kellerman*

# Daily Spatial Mobilities

Physical and Virtual

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Physical and Virtual

AHARON KELLERMAN

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# Preface

This book attempts to explore a facet of our lives that we often take for granted, namely our daily spatial mobilities, whether it is commuting to work or e-mail exchanges. The wide spectrum of daily spatial mobilities, including both corporeal and virtual mobilities, requires, I believe, some systematic treatment looking for their roots, expressions, potential, media, meanings and impacts, and this is what I tried to develop and offer in this book.

In some ways this book constitutes a continuation of my previous book entitled *Personal Mobilities* (2006a), which at the time continued my *The Internet on Earth: A Geography of Information* (2002). *Personal Mobilities* attempted to present the case of personal mobilities, both corporeal and virtual, defined as “moving of the self by the self” (p. 1), such as in driving and in the use of the Internet, whereas *The Internet on Earth* proposed a systematic geography for information focusing on the Internet. This book treats, like *Personal Mobilities*, both physical and virtual mobilities, but this time within the wider context of routine daily spatial mobilities. As such it discusses not only personal mobilities but public transportation as well, as part-and-parcel of daily spatial mobilities at large. This volume might be considered a first attempt to treat daily, routine spatial mobilities as such, and thus distinguish them from the non-routine mobilities, notably tourism and migration.

Following my interest in mobilities at large, and in personal mobilities in particular, I have focused my research since 2006 on a variety of aspects which have formed the basis for most of the following chapters. When reflecting, some time ago, on the common thread among all these mobility aspects, I noticed that the common denominator was routine mobilities, bringing me to the need to examine this large and varied family of mobilities in a more systematic way, and hence produce this book.

In the writing of some of the chapters I was able to enjoy the criticism and advice of Sven Kesselring and Maria Paradiso who read them as draft articles. Obviously, responsibility for the writings is mine alone. The Editors for the Ashgate *Transport and Mobility* series showed a keen interest in the topic and the book idea and provided valued comments and support for its advancement. The Research Authority of the University of Haifa assisted the completion of this book through the funding of index preparation.

Special thanks go to my wife, Michal, and to my entire family, for their bearing with me with great patience and understanding at intensive and sometimes unusual times and places of study and writing. The book is dedicated to my grandchildren Itai-Baruch, Shaked, and Nadav-Yehuda, who were born during the various phases of its development and writing.

Aharon Kellerman  
November 2011

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*Dedicated to Itai-Baruch, Shaked, and Nadav-Yehuda*

# Chapter 1

## Introduction

This chapter will begin with a brief presentation of mobility at large as a contemporary field of study. It will then explore the two major branches of mobility studies, social and spatial, and the interrelationships between them. The chapter will then move to a focus on the specific class of daily spatial mobilities as compared to non-daily mobilities. Daily mobilities include, among others, mobilities for commuting, shopping, social ties, information, banking, news, studies, business meetings, etc. These mobilities are typified by their being two-way mobilities, frequently performed and constituting a major element of our daily, routine lives, inclusive of both corporeal and/or virtual mobilities. Non-daily mobilities, on the other hand, include the two-way mobility of pleasure tourism and the one-way mobilities of residential change and migration which normally involve social change. Next in this chapter will be elaborations on key concepts for the study of daily spatial mobilities. The chapter will conclude with a brief presentation of the chapters that follow.

### **Mobility**

Human mobility in its most general and basic sense may be referred to as shifting, or the human ability to shift. Such shifts may refer, first, to the ability of the human body to move across space, or to the ability of humans to move their limbs. It may further relate to the ability of humans to move themselves using either ancient or contemporary mobility technologies. The shifting of humans over space always involves displacement, whether minor and repetitive as in daily commuting, or whether major and one-way one as in migration. These shifting abilities, which are mainly spatial, or 'horizontal' in nature, have been extended to various other senses, including social, or 'vertical', mobility, namely the shifting of people from one social level or occupation to another (see *Oxford English Dictionary* 2010, Cresswell 2006a: 20). Social shifting or mobility always implies change, whether in social position or in social status, as compared to displacement which constitutes the essence of spatial mobility, in which change may frequently emerge as cumulative, through numerous movements. Mobility is, thus, a multifaceted term. For human mind and action it was described as including:

From displacement from one location to another to the freedom of movement which is symbolically equated with social mobility, to the feelings of pleasure in effortless flight which has roots in infancy, to the fundamental psychic link

of motion with causality and subjecthood first described by Aristotle. But mobility also suggests the opposite of subjecthood, the freely displaceable and substitutable part, machine or human, which enables mass production and a consequent standardization brought to the social as well as economic realm (Morse 1998: 112; see also Buliung 2011).

The study of mobility is not just interested in the shifts themselves, but no less in their contexts and significances. As such it goes beyond the traditional study of transportation geography (Shaw and Hesse 2010; Bissell *et al.* 2011). Any shift or mobility “is *given* or inscribed with meaning. Furthermore, the way it is given meaning is dependent upon the context in which it occurs and who decides upon the significance it is given” (Adey 2010: 36).

### **Social mobility**

As we just mentioned, the term mobility has received a sociological connotation within the context of *social mobility*, referring to status transitions of individuals and social groups along societal strata. The study of social mobility is beyond the scope of this volume, but one may potentially argue that social and spatial mobilities are interrelated, in the sense that upward social mobility may imply extended and increased spatial mobility *vis-à-vis* an enhanced ability to purchase and use automobiles and telecommunications services. Also, one could assume an extended ability to use and benefit from these mobility technologies, notably the Internet, if elevated social status is accompanied by additional education. Such a relationship may potentially also go the other way around: increased physical and/or virtual spatial mobility may imply wider information and physical reach, thus providing stimulation and opportunity for social mobility. However, the mutual relationships between spatial and social mobilities are complex (Urry 2007: 8, Adey 2010: 37-8), bringing some to suggest that there is no connection anymore between the two mobility forms (Kaufmann 2002: 12-3, Bonss and Kesselring 2004), at least as far as physical mobility is concerned. For virtual mobility, via telecommunications, however, it was argued that “it is no longer geographical space that differentiates but virtual space”, and “the more telecommunications there is, the more social mobility” (Kaufmann 2002: 29).

### **Spatial mobility**

The mobility of human beings, in the sense of humans moving over ‘horizontal’ space, rather than the more veteran notion of ‘vertical’ social mobility, has received growing attention in recent years, frequently blurring a clear distinction between ‘spatial mobility’ and ‘mobility’ at large. Spatial mobility has been viewed as a positive societal trend and force and as an integral part of the second modernity,

involving wide social implications (see e.g. Urry 2000, 2007). Spatial mobility was variously defined as an activity or social dimension: “geographical displacement, i.e. the movement of entities from an origin to a destination along a specific trajectory that can be described in terms of space and time” (Kaufmann *et al.* 2004: 746). “Spatial mobility is not an interstice, or a neutral liaison time between a point of origin and a destination. It is a structuring dimension of social life and of social integration” (Kaufmann 2002: 103, see also Urry 2000, 2007). Also, “*mobility is polysemic and does not itself reveal what underlies it*” (Kaufmann 2002: 101-3). Thus, for Baudrillard (1966: 66) “effortless mobility entails a kind of pleasure that is unrealistic, a kind of suspension of existence, a kind of absence of responsibility”.

A basic definition for spatial mobility, from the perspective of transportation geography, views mobility as ability: “*Mobility* refers to the ability to move between different activity sites” (Hanson 1995: 4). By the same token, *movement* was described as “the idea of an act of displacement that allows objects, people, ideas – things – to get between locations” (Cresswell 2001a: 14). It is interesting to note that movement, or the mobile, was defined here through displacement which is a negative form of the term place, a term which traditionally describes the fixed or the sedentary rather than the mobile! This physical connotation for movement/mobility is typical within human geography, referring to the very human ability to move oneself in the sense of daily physical spatial mobility (see e.g. Ogden 2000, Urry 2004a). Others, notably sociologists, preferred to refer to mobility over space as *spatial mobility* (Kaufmann 2002). Bonss and Kesselring (2004: 5), on the other hand, provided a rather social and more restricted definition for mobility: “an actor’s competence to realize certain projects and plans while being ‘on the move’”.

Spatial mobility, stemming from ‘push and pull’ motivations, which we will discuss in the next chapter, constitutes foremost a constant, omnipresent “displacement of something across, over and through space” (Adey 2010: 13, see also Cresswell 2006a: 1-2, Morse 1998: 112). From the perspective of *homo viator* [mobile person] (Eyerman and Löfgren 1995), this displacement is practiced, experienced and embodied (Cresswell 2006a: 3). As such, spatial mobility is a meaningful condition, implying progress, freedom, opportunity and modernity (Cresswell 2006a: 1-2), as well as speed (Prato and Trivero 1985: 40, Virilio 1983: 45) and extensibility (Adams 1995, Kwan 2001).

The recent telecommunications/information revolution has loaded the term *mobility* with yet another meaning, namely the human ability to make a rather abstract entity, information, flow electronically. Such electronically-transmitted information may constitute a virtual extension of the self, through a phone call or an e-mail, or it may constitute more public pieces of information available through websites, and thus not transmitted as one-to-one or one-to-specific several receivers by an end-user. The mobility of information constitutes *virtual spatial mobility*. The mobility of information may be viewed as mobility for itself, or it may be defined in light of physical mobility. “*Virtual mobility* refers to the substitution of electronic transfers and exchanges for physical transport activities”

(Janelle 2004: 86). Urry (1999) named the virtual information flows through the Internet *weightless traveling*, whereas *imaginative traveling* refers to such flows through television broadcasting. Though television broadcasts amount to one-way public transmission of predetermined information, they were compared to personal physical mobility via automobiles by Bachmair (1991) who claimed that “television succeeded because it broadened and extended lifestyles associated with the motor-car; primarily those concerned with *mobility* as a shaping principle of communication” (522). Others named mobility *vis-à-vis* television, as *transport of the mind*: “Television turns out to be related to the motor car and the aeroplane as a means of transport of the mind” (Rudolf Arnheim, quoted in Morse 1998: 99).

Displacement is possible for three sorts of movables: people, objects and information/knowledge (Urry 2007: 7-8, 47, Kaufmann 2002), and these three movables may be differentiated by their mobility flexibility using a state of matter metaphor (Kellerman 1993: 160). Moving information is as flexible as gas, easily changing modes, shapes and volume, and its transmission being instant. People’s corporeal mobility is like liquids, in people’s ability to change travel modes, and in their ability to be partially self-motored, though mobility usually requires some preparations. Moving objects is the moving of solids and is thus slower, always requiring handling for the very mobility of objects. All three movables are human in some way, since objects and information are sent by people and for people, sometimes replacing human corporeal mobility. The mobilities of people and information have become integrated, as communications permit the coordination and management of physical mobility. Furthermore, it has become possible for individuals to move corporeally while communicating virtually. Still, the mobilities of people and objects are also interrelated: “There are objects that enable people to travel across distance; there are objects that enable people to travel forming complex hybrids... there are objects and people that move together” (Urry 2007: 50). The mass moving of objects has become increasingly organized and controllable through logistics and modal transportation, side by side with the opposite trend for the daily mobilities of humans who prefer to move individually and, thus growingly possess personal mobility technologies.

As we have noted through its various definitions, *spatial mobility*, physical as well as virtual, constitutes a double phenomenon. On the one hand, it relates to the *ability* to cross certain distances within certain time units. By human nature this ability is performed physically through walking or running, and virtually by speaking or shouting. However, in its more contemporary context, this ability may be measured through access to, and availability of, transportation and communications means. Personal spatial mobility, as compared to public spatial mobility, may be measured by the rate of *adoption* of transportation and communications means by households. Side by side with spatial mobility constituting a human ability, spatial mobility also relates to the very *use* of technology-based mobility media, or the performed *movements* by actors. Three possible relations may potentially develop between physical and virtual personal mobility media, when virtual mobility media become available next to physical

mobility: substitution (i.e. virtual mobility replacing any physical movements, such as performing banking actions through the Web instead of at the bank branch), complementarity (i.e. physical mobility is complemented by virtual ones, such as phone calls preparing for any physical movements), or additivity (a new movement is added through virtual mobility, such as information search through *Google*, or the use of mobile phone while driving or riding a car) (see Kellerman 2006a). In line with the fluidity metaphor, Urry (2000: 32; see also Shields 1997) pointed to the possible distinctions among mobilities by their rates of flow, their viscosity, depth, consistency, and degree of confinement.

### Daily spatial mobilities

As mentioned already, spatial mobility includes both routine cyclical rides and walks, as well as long-distance (in space) and longer range (in time) human movements of migration, tourism (or travel), residential change, mobile resistance movements, and the wandering of youngsters, etc. (see e.g. Verstraete and Cresswell 2002, Kaufmann 2002: 35, 2004, Urry 2000: 145-7). Some of these longer range and non-daily mobilities might be two-way, notably tourism, whereas others are one-way, notably migrations. In a slightly different way, spatial mobilities may be divided into reversible (daily trips and travel), and irreversible (migration and residential change) (Kaufmann 2002: 24-6). Thus, Kaufmann (2002: 40) sees spatial mobility in a seemingly wider sense of purpose, consisting not only of travel and daily mobility, but of migration and residential mobility, as well. His view of spatial mobility does not include virtual mobility in it (as stated explicitly on p. 46, but see also p. 35), but he treats jointly one-way or irreversible mobilities, such as migration and residential mobilities, with two-way, reversible movements, such as daily movements and travel. To some degree, the analyses of migrations and mobility in films advanced by Cresswell (2001b, 2002) follow a similar line. Spatial mobility in the form of migration has been shown by Cresswell (2006a) to constitute a major cultural experience.

All four categories of spatial corporeal mobility (daily, travel, migration and residential change) were viewed as sharing some similarities:

None of the four areas of spatial mobility analysis has entirely done away with the dual definition of mobility. However, they generally make *social change* (understood as change in social status or role) correspond to *movement*: we move about on a daily basis in order to change roles; we travel to confront otherness and escape our daily grind; we move house when our lives are touched by change. With the development of rapid transport and telecommunications networks in the 1990s, the parallel between movement and change generally dissipated (Kaufmann 2009: 49).

The basic assumption for this proposed volume is that human spatial mobilities may be divided into two major types. One, which this book attempts to address, includes daily mobilities, such as for commuting, shopping, social ties, information, banking, news, studies, business meetings, etc. These mobilities are typified by their being two-way; frequently performed; constituting a major element of our daily routine lives; and inclusive of both corporeal and/or virtual mobilities. The other type of human spatial mobilities consists of non-daily mobilities which include both two-way and one-way mobilities, some of which reflecting structural-social change. This second type of mobilities includes the two-way mobility of pleasure tourism and the one-way mobilities of domestic residential change and international immigration, both of which involving social change. Following McKenzie (1927), Kaufmann (2009) suggested a distinction between daily movements which he termed *fluidity* and non-daily movements which he called *mobility*. Fluidity is supposed to have no effect on one's life as compared to non-daily mobilities. As we will see in the next chapter the roots for this differentiation might be deeper, but repeated daily movements have strong impact on one's life as a mobile person, in terms of a person's extent of activity space, accessibility and extensibility, potentially bringing about non-daily movements of residential change, travel, and even migration.

Much of our daily spatial mobility is fully virtual, including telephone calls, e-mails and Internet surfing, whereas non-daily mobilities are foremost corporeal, though aided by virtual ones, for instance through hotel reservations for a vacation made over the Internet. The motivations and triggers for daily mobilities are different from those of non-daily ones, and so are the preparations for movements, which for non-daily mobilities may be much more extensive. Behavior while on the move might again be different for daily mobilities than for non-daily ones, when being, for example, on vacation and travelling longer hours. In general, Bán (2007: 289) suggested that "with all of his or her everyday movement, *Homo sapiens* transformed into *Homo mobilis*".

Daily spatial mobilities, like any other human mobilities and activities at large, may be differentiated along major demographic dividing lines such as gender (see e.g. Blumen and Kellerman 1990) and age (see e.g. Burnett and Lucas 2010), and obviously along income. However, these differentiations will not be explored in this volume as they require separate and rather distinct conceptual settings.

### **Key terms for daily spatial mobilities**

Before proceeding to the following chapters we will get briefly acquainted with some twelve key terms for the study of daily spatial mobilities. Their order of presentation follows three spheres: context-environment; movement; and spatial extent: