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*en route in the functional city*

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# Towards urban mobility designs<sup>1</sup>: *en route* in the functional city

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## Abstract

Functionalist traffic design aims at a rational organisation of movement from A to B in a segregated and uniform physical environment. Such urban areas have been criticized for being exclusively functional and lacking sensuous and social qualities. Recent research on mobilities challenges the more instrumental understanding of movement that underlies such traffic design. This research indicates that instrumental movement is only one aspect of ordinary journeys laden with meaning and experience to the wayfarers.

In the paper we explore how we could think of the design of transit sites, if we operate insights on functional urban planning, on embodied practices and experiences of wayfaring, and on concrete small scale design concerns. We emphasise an integrated design agenda for those ordinary transit sites which is concerned with functional issues as well as the quality of life on the ground for the wayfarers who use the site.

The data for our work concerns a transit site in the 1970s urban district of Aalborg Øst, Denmark.

- We set out by introducing our approach to the site.
- Second, we examine the functional layout of the transit site in Aalborg Øst and outline the design challenge which we are concerned with.
- Third, we introduce an embodied mobile perspective through insights from the mobilities turn.
- Fourth, through our own journey experience *en route* we present a mapping of the transit site.
- We conclude by outlining a few propositions on the design challenge and design potentials, in relation to re-conceptualisation of the transit site, to mapping, and to design intervention. These propositions form part of our on-going work with *urban mobility designs*.

Key words: mobility, urban design, transit site, functional city, public space

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<sup>1</sup> The paper is framed in the research project "Aalborg Øst – en forstad i forandring" at the Department of Architecture, Design and Media Technology, Aalborg University. The research project is co-funded by Realdania. The notion of 'mobility design' is coined by Jensen and will be described in more detail in Jensen (2013).

## Introduction

This paper is about the design of an ordinary transit site in Aalborg Øst, Denmark. In the paper we address how we can think of the design challenge and design potentials related to transforming such functional fragmented sites of mobility into sensuous public spaces.

To structure our approach to this question we synthesise concerns for the transit site's functional organisation, the practices and experiences related to wayfaring, and the public space as the binding medium of the transit site.



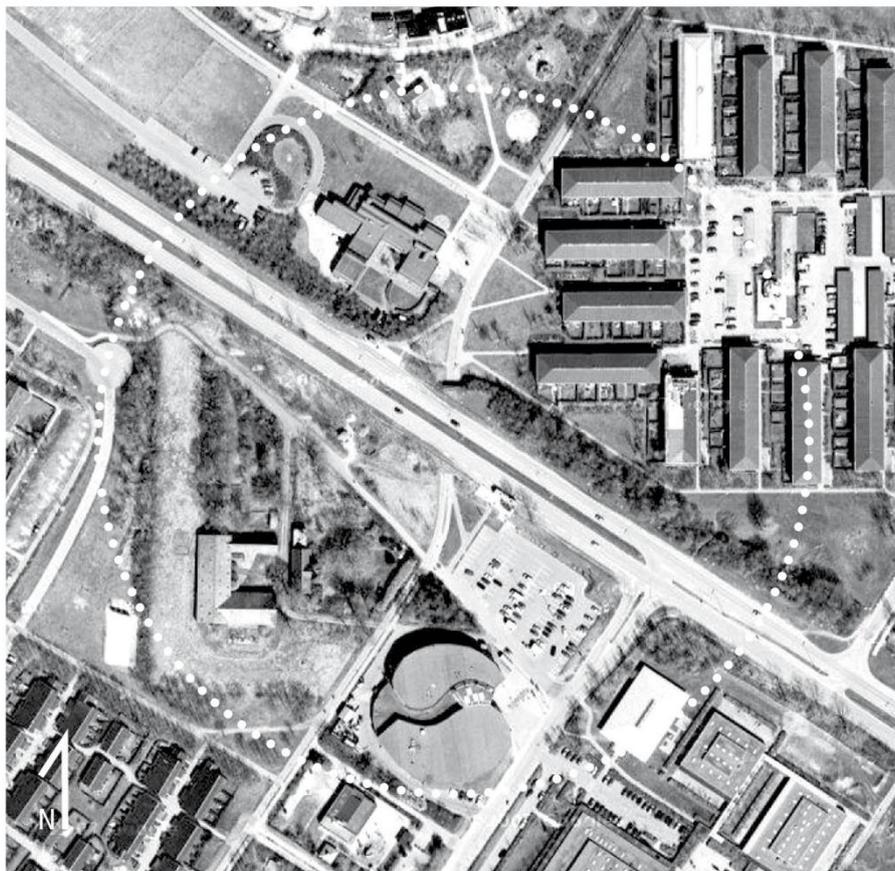
- The spatial organisation of transport infrastructures and service facilities at the transit site is a result of the rational urban functionalism, which was initiated by the CIAM (Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne) movement in 1933. This powerful functional agenda orders urban areas through zoning and segregation of *urban functions* (Mumford 2009). Following the increasing integration of cars in urban areas in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, the transport function in particular has been carefully structured through road planning principles systematising instrumental flows of cars, bikes, pedestrians etc. (Harder 2003).
- Concern for the unintended consequences of this functional planning agenda, such as urban sprawl, spatial fragmentation, and lack of sensitivity to the "human association" (Sert 1956, cited by Mumford 2009), gave rise to the urban design agenda in the 1950s. Urban design as a discipline was brought forward to supplement functional urbanism with considerations for urban life: human scale and the collective urban population (Mumford 2009). Though there is no one general contemporary definition of urban design, one of its preoccupations is the *public space* between buildings (Krieger 2009).
- At the transit site urban life is mainly comprised by people in movement. We find that there is a need to refine our understanding of such mobile practices and experiences in the urban realm to surpass an instrumental understanding of movement. Contemporary mobilities research of the *mobilities turn* shows how there is more to mobile urban life than getting transported from A to B (e.g. Urry 2007). Movements are understood as *wayfaring* (Vannini 2012) in an embodied mobile perspective, which includes ethnographic sensitivity to the social interaction and cultural production of mobile practices (Jensen 2009).

The three dimensions of CIAM, the mobilities turn and urban design are different but overlapping perspectives one may apply in conceptualizing, analysing and intervening in the city. This means, that we are not proposing to abolish any functional considerations. Rather, we would argue, there are insights to combine from CIAM's functional planning, the human/ethnographic sensitivity of the mobilities turn, and the urban design's concrete and small scale understanding of material space.

We use the three dimensions as elements of a frame, and we apply them differently depending on which level we are at in the process. The first level is the conceptual, where we do find reason to be critical of the functional agenda of CIAM. The second level concerns data gathering and mapping, and here the mobilities turn is particularly important. The final level is the design intervention, and here perspectives of urban design will play a main role. So the dimensions are parts of our framework which have different positions of foreground/background depending on if we are at the conceptual, the mapping, or the intervention level.

## Introduction to the transit site and the design challenge

The transit site of our focus is centred on a traffic junction where a large road crosses a bicycle and pedestrian path.



The transit site around the traffic junction where Humlebakken intersects with Astrupstien, Aalborg Øst, Denmark

The transit site is located in the urban district of Aalborg Øst. It is part of the district's main local service centre. The district is located 7 kilometres east of the city centre, its area is 12 km<sup>2</sup>, and it houses 15.000 people.

The original planning of Aalborg Øst, a new modern industrial and residential district, was initiated in the middle of the last century as a means to accommodate the growing population and industrial activities of the city of Aalborg (Rohbrandt et al 1948). The district was built in phases on the basis of a disposition plan (Aalborg Kommune 1967), and partly as the result of town planning competitions (Christensen and Topholm 1990).

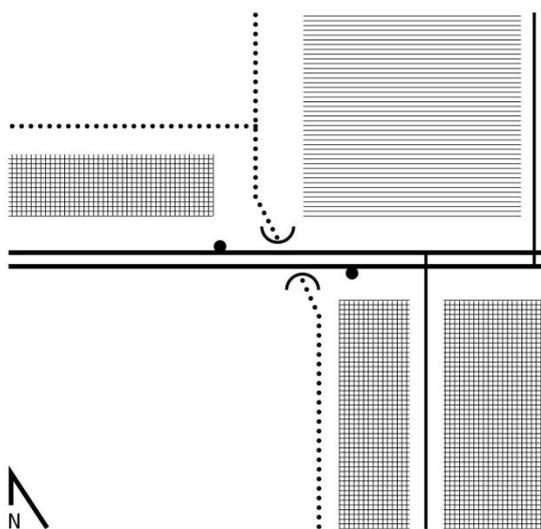
The transit site, as well as the entire district of Aalborg Øst, is built on rational ideals of town and road planning, rooted in the urban functionalism of the CIAM Athens Charter of 1933 with four urban functions constituting the components of urban planning: transport, dwelling, industry, and recreation (Krieger 2009).

Functional road planning foregrounds the parameters of road safety and efficient traffic flow in the layout of urban areas. As shown elsewhere (Harder 2003) this ideal took an extensive form in the Swedish SCAFT guidelines of 1968, explicating the road planning principles of Denmark, Holland and Sweden at that time. The SCAFT guidelines were developed to organise and facilitate traffic flow with a minimum of conflicts and disorder. A thorough road classification scheme based on traffic differentiation was the basis of the guidelines.

The SCAFT guidelines encompass four fundamental planning recommendations: 1) localisation of industries and service facilities in relation to access via primary traffic connections; 2) segregation of motorised traffic from pedestrians and bicyclists in different systems which do not intersect; 3) differentiation of traffic means and speed within each traffic system; and 4) clarity, simplicity and uniformity in the design of the traffic environment (Hagson 2000).

At the transit site in AØ we encounter the material result of these guidelines. It is nearly an exact physical manifestation of the SCAFT guidelines: Traffic is segregated in two systems; local service facilities are located at the junction with easy access from both traffic systems; and forms, spaces and materials are kept simple and with a uniform expression.

Below we have included a plan diagram of the transit site, which we have adapted to the SCAFT traffic scheme (Hagson 2000). It depicts the principle layout of the site around the traffic junction from above.



This principle layout is easily recognisable, and the transit site can be regarded a distinct example of a functional typology.

The transit site is an infrastructural and functional node in the urban district. It encompasses a traffic junction where the path passes under the road in a tunnel. At the road sides just above the tunnel bus stops are located. The site also encompasses a parking lot and connecting roads and paths. A series of local service facilities are located at the site. On the south side of Humlebakken a grocery shopping centre, a public school, and child care institutions are located. On the north side we find a culture house and library, in addition to a newly built health care centre.

Plan diagram of the transit site, adapted from SCAFT traffic scheme 1968

Though CIAM urbanism operated with four urban functions (transport, dwelling, industry, recreation), transport issues were separated from the work with the other urban functions in its own discipline of road planning, following the increasing integration of cars in urban areas during the 20<sup>th</sup> Century (Harder 2003). Still, the layout of urban areas is a shared concern between the two disciplines of urban planning and road planning. Harder (2003) argues that this separation of disciplines and specifically the road planning principles have had decisive spatial implications: urban areas have been fragmented, turning away from the traffic on the streets, as they have been divided into zones of urban functions, and traffic has been segregated.

### The transit site design: Lack of sensuous and social qualities

In this paper we are interested in the functional organisation of the transit site, instrumental understanding of movement, and spatial disintegration, which have repercussions for the sensuous and social qualities of the transit site, as we argue below.

At the transit site flows of people come together. People move through the site - by car, bus, bike, foot etc. The flows of people are dispersed across the large area of the site. Many flows keep to the extensive network of paths and roads, while other flows are crossing the spatial boundaries of those corridors. This mobile inhabitation creates a moderately intense situation in relation to the otherwise rarely found concentrations of people and movements in the urban spaces of the zoned, low density district of Aalborg Øst. As such, this is not merely a technical intersection of traffic arteries and conglomeration of service facilities. It is also a "mobility node" (Hannam et al. 2006) - an intersection of social spaces, where people meet while on the way.

However, according to critical observers of functional car-based urban environments, such environments have significant downsides in relation to the embodied inhabitation and experience. Already in the 1950's CIAM urbanists at Harvard University Graduate School of Design questioned the adequacy of the functional terminology (Krieger and Saunders 2009). They initiated an *urban design* agenda in the search to synthesise modernist functional urbanism with concerns for human scale and the collective urban population (Mumford 2009). The ambition was "to create complex networks of urban form and place that facilitate human interaction and delight." (Krieger 2009: xiv). According to a prominent observer of that time, Jane Jacobs (1961), the "suburbanized anti-city" is one of separation between pedestrians and automobiles with dead borders of parking and huge access roads, which fosters disintegration.

The design of such transit sites is criticised for being exclusively functional and lacking sensuous and social qualities, like "frozen" worlds of asphalt and concrete (Urry 2007, referring Simmel) with a sparse and trivial

transport activity on its surface. In his research on automobilities sociologist John Urry (2007) argues that social life has been locked in to “specialized time-spaces of automobility”. According to Urry, city life is too often organised and orchestrated by people-hostile environments which he terms “dead car-only environments” (2007: 126). Indeed, sites marked by such an abundance of movement might be noted as alienating urban spaces, sites of detachment and lack of meaning, as captured in anthropologist Marc Augé’s term “non-places” (1995).

### Summing up: the design challenge

This brief introduction outlines the transit site as a site of ordinary journeys related to daily life. These journeys are dispersed in a functionally segregated traffic system. The design foregrounds instrumentality of movement: to facilitate effectively and safely flows of people.

The critical voices referred above point in the direction of a design challenge: the transit site is highly functional but there is a challenge related to the lack of sensuous and social qualities in these functional non-places of movement. Urry (2007) states that conventional research on transport systems has tended to deploy a “technological determinism” and leave out studies of the complex social processes of the use of those systems. Urry, who is a prominent exponent of the mobilities turn, calls for mobilities research to transcend the divide between issues of *transport* and issues of *society*.

Our exploration of *urban mobility designs* follows these thoughts. We search to frame the transit site design within an integrated understanding of urban functions, the lived mobile lives on ground, and the design of public space. We do this through an embodied mobile perspective foregrounding sensuous and social qualities of ordinary journeys through the site. In the next section we will go into insights from the mobilities turn which facilitate such a perspective.

### Site of ordinary journeys - more than A to B

In this section we turn to a focus on an ordinary journey through the site. We set out by drawing on literature resources which advocate that an ordinary journey is something else and more than transport from A to B: it involves an embodied practice and experience done by wayfarers. This embodied mobile perspective suggest that the transit site can be regarded a sensuous public space with potential notable repercussions on urban life.

### The journey: an embodied practice of wayfaring

Research on corporeal travel informed by the so-called mobilities turn counters an a priori instrumental understanding of movement (Urry 2007; Jensen 2009, 2010a; Vannini 2012). This research investigates how there is more to urban mobility than transport in the instrumental sense of getting from A to B. Further it suggests that there are unexplored potentials for embodied mobile experiences in the way transit sites are usually designed (Jensen 2009, Urry 2007).

In his research on ferry travelling in West Canada, Vannini (2012) contrasts *transport* with *wayfaring*. He uses the term “wayfarers” about the people travelling with the ferries. According to Vannini, on the ferry journeys, people are not just *getting transported*. Instead what wayfarers do is that they *perform journeys*: “a mundane but meaningfully ritualistic and artful practice which creates occasions for unique interaction settings and relationships” (Vannini 2012: 162). Embodied experiences and interactions are inherent in ordinary journeys. At certain points in time and space (as in the waiting line before entering the ferry) wayfarers stitch together their embodied experiences and interactions.

Vannini arrives at this point as a result of his ethnographic unpacking of the rich stories, feelings, and experiences which islanders unfold when travelling. Wayfarers are not just being passively channelled across the water. Instead, when wayfaring, *life is lived* (Vannini 2012:130). Following this, Vannini makes a point about the material environment of the ferry journey: the sea routes. His extensive material shows that the sea routes are inhabited by a considerable social and cultural complexity of wayfaring. Therefore the sea is not just something to be obliterated. However, according to Vannini, the ferry transport system seems to presuppose that the “value of convenience” is tied to obliterating the very environment that it crosses (Vannini 2012:156).

In this paper we want to apply this interpretation of the material environment of journeys to examining the design of the transit site in Aalborg Øst. Parallel to Vannini's point, our stance is that the transit site is not abstract space to overcome most effectively, a site in which people are carried "as if in a stream, and one hardly needs to swim for oneself" (Simmel, cited by Urry 2007: 23). Rather the transit site is one of its own value inhabited by wayfarers making journeys.

Several researchers of mobilities advocate that making a journey is a matter of social, cultural and experiential complexity. In Merriman's words, for example, journeys are associated with "complex habitations, practices of dwelling, embodied relations, material presences, placings and hybrid subjectivities" (Merriman 2004, 154). And Urry emphasises that: "Movement often involves an embodied experience of the material and sociable modes of dwelling-in-motion" (Urry 2007:11). Arguably, a manifold of embodied practices and experiences are inherent in making journeys. Wayfarers encounter the world with different affordances, "physical travel involves lumpy, fragile, gendered, racialized bodies encountering other bodies, objects and the physical world multi-sensuously" (Urry 2007: 272). Likewise the mode of transport is essential to the experience of journeys. Sheller (2004) argues that our "kinaesthetic investments" such as walking, bicycling, and car-driving orient us towards the material affordances of the world in different ways. Also cultural and historical dimensions are key in shaping the journey experience, not least to mention the actual material environment which the wayfarer inhabits on the journey.

Sheller wraps up these multiple and complex issues when she argues that experiences of car-driving (such as excitement, anticipation, or anxiety) are "neither located solely within the person nor produced solely by the car as a moving object, but occur as a circulation of affects between (different) persons, (different) cars, and historically situated car cultures and geographies of mobility." (Sheller 2004: 227).

Here we are particularly interested in those sensuous geographies of mobility. And if we sum up this introduction to an embodied mobile perspective, we could say that the transit site is a *sensuous geography* as much as it is a transportation facility. The transit site is a site of ordinary journeys made by wayfarers who on their way unfold a wide range of embodied mobile practices and experiences.

The journeys made by wayfarers at this site invoke and enact the site as a sensuous geography. At the same time the material environment organises and orchestrates those journeys. When approaching the design of this transit site, then, we suggest the stand point that sites marked by an abundance of mobility are not just something to be obliterated or thought of as non-places of detachment. Rather, we can think of the transit site as being animated and co-produced by those embodied practiced mobilities. In the words of Cresswell and Merriman (2011), such sites are "continually practiced and performed through the movement and enfolding of a myriad of people and things" (2011: 7).

### **Transit sites: sensuous public spaces**

Jensen (2009) has elsewhere contested the interpretation of transit spaces as above all generic, alienating non-places. There may be many indifferent or alienating experiences related to travelling through generic infrastructures and transit sites of the city. But this is not the only outcome of urban mobilities. As outlined above, there is reason to oppose the implied understanding of urban mobilities as passive and desensitized practices, which per se pose a threat to the social cohesion among the citizens.

Since "[b]eing-on-the-move is a contemporary everyday life condition in the city" (Jensen 2009: 149), the ordinary insignificant journeys should be re-interpreted as cultural, meaningful expressions. The "little practices of mobility" are underestimated to the understanding of mundane transit sites, and transit sites have potential as *social environments* (Jensen 2009). Such sites can be "politicised" as potential public spaces of pluralism, resistance, and meaningful social interaction. We need to surpass the notion that public space is constrained to traditional urban squares, and search for a concept for "the mobile agora" (Jensen 2009: 151). In their *search for new public domains*, Hajer & Reijndorp (2001) also call for the design field to focus more on the connections and in-between spaces, in order to make places of human interaction that re-link the dissected zones of modern planning (Hajer & Reijndorp 2001: 129).

Following these thoughts, transit sites of mobility are more than facilities for effective movement from A to B. They are ambiguous places of rest, activity, meeting, experience and consumption (Urry 2007: 148), which can be conceived of as *sensuous public spaces* where wayfarers can cultivate the precious gift of travel time and develop meaningful social practices and experiences (Vannini 2012: 194ff). In the next section a brief illustrated account on urban spaces at the transit site in Aalborg Øst as captured *en route* on a journey serves to follow and develop these points in this specific context.

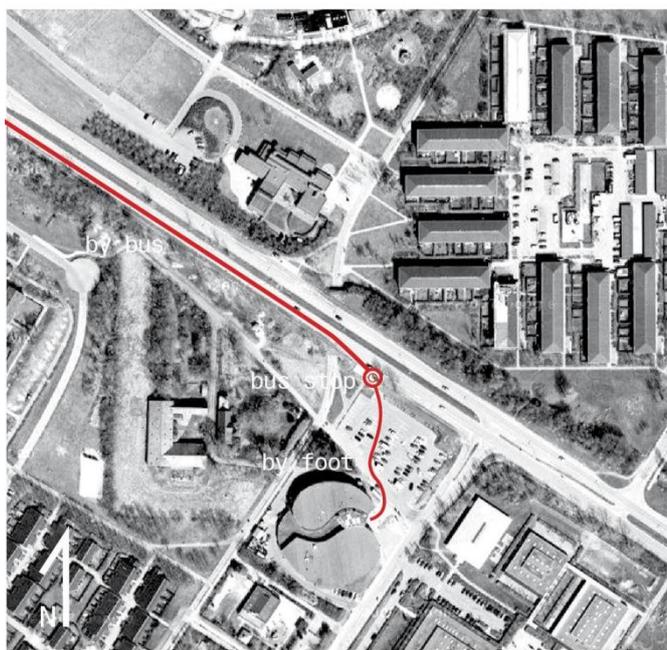
## Mapping the transit site in Aalborg Øst

Above we have pointed to a reading of the transit site in Aalborg Øst as a sensuous public space. The site's apparently indifferent and coercive functionalist time-spaces of automobility are inhabited by wayfarers, who during their journeys experience the site, involve themselves in producing culture and potentially enact the site into a meaningful location.

In the following we will explore this perspective by going on a journey which foregrounds a wayfarer's particular embodied encounter with this site. Our objective is to expand our understanding of the transit site beyond functional issues, and include an understanding of wayfaring and sensuous and social qualities of public space. On the journey we seek to get a sense of the wayfaring ways of life on the site, of how the design of the site organises and orchestrates wayfarers' journeys, and potentials of the urban spaces for experiences and meaningful social interaction for the wayfarers.

## A journey through the transit site

We present the journey as a short narrative account in relation to a series of photos. This is inspired by the "serial vision" of Gordon Cullen (1961), developed as a method to map and communicate the architecture of an experienced sequence through the city. Though we cannot do full justice to the complexity of inhabitation of this site, we have sought to approach the *serial vision* with a particular sensitivity to the lived lives along this route, inspired by the mobile ethnographic approaches of Jensen (2009, 2010a) and Vannini (2012), in addition to a "visual ethnography" of movements in the city (Larsen & Meged 2012). This implies immersing ourselves in the activities of the transit site, studying it *in situ*. We have strived to



The route followed across the site

acknowledge transient qualities of wayfaring, such as friction and experience (inspired by Jensen 2006 and 2010), but our account also includes "facts of movement" (Cresswell 2010), such as speed and rhythm.

Observations of wayfarers and flow routes have been carried out at recurrent site visits in the fall of 2011 and the spring of 2012. These studies show that flows of people crisscross the site. The flows are connected to ordinary daily activities of driving by, walking to the grocery store, catching a bus, biking to school, parking a car etc. On the journey we follow one of the observed routes, marked on the map to the left. This route is regularly travelled by wayfarers of the site, when they arrive with the bus from the city centre to the site and head for the grocery shop entrance. Below our experienced account is shown.



1

We roll down the hill of Humlebakken without effort. Looking out the window we see other cars, and lots of blurred greenery, rushing by. It all seems distant. Inside the bus, in contrast, everything is close up [photo 1]. We listen to somebody's mobile phone conversation in a foreign language, and are inquiringly eyeballed by a couple of young guys who might be wondering what the photographs and note book are for on this ordinary bus journey.



2

As the bus comes to a halt we follow a few other people and get off. They are quickly dispersed in two different directions [photo 2].

A few steps away from the neatly designed road side bus platform, we take a moment to look at the place we got off. From the small strip of grass there is a wide view of the open spaces of the southern part of the transit site, lying lower in the terrain than the road [photo 3]. Colours are grey and green, with lots of concrete and asphalt surfaces, and grass, some bushes, and a few trees. The car park is dotted with cars, and a few people trot across it.



3

We hurry on to follow another wayfarer who got off the bus. As we stumble down a worn concrete staircase [photo 4], the noise of fast driving cars behind us fade, and we strike out across the parking lot. We keep to our fellow traveller and head directly for the grocery shop.



4

The huge asphalted surface of the carpark is far from filled up. Only a few cars are arriving or departing right now. The sparse flow of cars and the sparse flow of pedestrians across the parking lot seems not to be in any pressing conflict. Rather these diverging wayfarers seem to negotiate subtly and without trouble their routes, so they do not intersect. We notice that the east side of the parking lot, closer to the access road and shop entrance, is slightly more busy and filled up with cars.

Two kids giggle and playfully act out a clownish scene as one of them tips over on his bike when crossing the kerb edge of the parking lot [photo 5].



5

As we pass some sheds with shopping trolleys, we see our destination: a smaller plaza in front of the shop entrance [photo 6]. The plaza is faced towards the local school and access road. It is paved with concrete tiles. A few flags show off the shop brand.

On the plaza a group of three young girls pass by us, and a dog is barking. While a guy is about to start his moped he is greeted by another man, and they exchange a few words.



6

Illustrated account: an ordinary journey across the site

The brief narrative account above extends our understanding of the functional organisation, the wayfaring practices and experiences, and the public space design of the transit site. It points us towards the design challenge of this site, as well as to spatial potentials for enhancing the sensuous and social qualities. We will go into these issues below, where we sum up our analysis of the transit site design on the three dimensions, introduced in the beginning of this paper.

### Organisation of transport and other urban functions

The service and transport facilities of the site are systematically organised according to the functional principles. Infrastructures work to pass off flows of people. Service facilities are important motive forces for wayfarers, catalysing and orchestrating many journeys.

This functional organisation facilitated journey, which was our smooth and short and lasted no more than 4 frictionless minutes. We chose to walk in the footsteps of a fellow wayfarer across the parking lot, and thereby did not follow the designated paths from the bus stop to the shop entrance. Stepping out of the systematised pathways did not, however, cause any trouble. It rather seemed like the rational choice in terms of efficiency.

On our journey we did recognise the logics of the functional organisation: service facilities are within easy reach of the traffic junction. Yet, from our wayfaring perspective this local functional centre does not appear as much else than solitary volumes spread out on a surface, and rigid traffic barriers. At arrival we were met by the parking lot and by infrastructures, whereas the other urban functions are drawn back: the shop entrance turn away from us, and the school and library are not even visible.

### Wayfaring practices and experiences

On our journey we got a sense of the wayfaring of the site. Though most people seem to perform their ordinary journeys without much deflection, lives are lived along the routes and *negotiated mobilities and interactions* (Jensen 2010a, 2010b) are performed with a considerable social and cultural complexity. Some wayfarers travel alone, others as “mobile withs” (Jensen 2010a, 2010b) in small groups, such as the two kids who play on the kerb side of the parking lot. Together they take in the public space of the transit site, use and appropriate it for their own particular, situated and personal experiences of the journey. The route, we travelled, is one out of many. Though the site is sparsely inhabited, and wayfarers are dispersed across a rather large area, each journey is part of a pulsating network of co-existing mobile situations. At the localities where routes intersect or overlap, they shape temporary “social condensers” (Jensen 2009) for the wayfarers who flow in and out of different *mobile withs*. These include the social situations in the bus, the subtle “negotiation in motion” (Jensen 2010a, 2010b) between pedestrians and car-drives on the car park, and the accidental meeting on the way between acquaintances at the plaza.

### Public space design

People move around all over the public space between the buildings, but there seems to be an excess of space in relation to the rather sparse wayfaring activities.

The account above shows a series of diverse urban spaces, assembled in a distributed, polycentric public space. The potential distinct differences and interplay between these spaces are not addressed in the current design. Regardless of different functions, users, and topographical qualities, these spaces are universally directed towards facilitating frictionless flow, or indifferent leftover spaces.

On our journey we found that architecture of this route is poor in material diversity, as well as it has a derelict and standardized expression, with very little caress for detailing the wayfarer’s tactile encounter with forms and materials. So we do recognise that the public space design lacks sensuous qualities, and that this might very well be one of those ordinary, indifferent experiences of travelling. In some situations it might even appear alienating or unsafe.

Still, a series of spatial qualities and potentials of the transit site come forward:

In spite of the layout of the transit site in mono-functional and dissected areas, some spaces get a distinct ambiguous character when they are inhabited by wayfarers. On our journey the car park surface turn out as such an ambiguous urban space which does not keep strictly to its functional category. Here multiple

routes intersect, with various travel forms, rhythms, activities etc. It might be a design potential to cultivate this ambiguity in order to facilitate wayfarers' encounters and diverse experiences.

The terrain variation, created as an effect of traffic segregation, is a significant example of an underused spatial potential: it establishes a spatial diversity and poses a somewhat dramatic view on the wayfarer, but is treated as nothing else than an obstacle to overcome.

Also the several small in-between spaces, passages and thresholds, such as the strip of grass and the staircase seem to hold potential for re-design. These work as small material frictions to the wayfarer. Such spaces seem to be a hallmark of the functional transit design, which produces multiple transitions and in-between spaces in order to re-connect the divided areas of horizontal functional zoning and vertical traffic segregation. These might be regarded leftover areas open to design intervention.



Terrain variation produced by traffic segregation – an obstacle to overcome and a spatial typology with potential for re-design

### Concluding remarks on the mapping of the transit site in Aalborg Øst

In this section we have used insights from mobilities research to approach the transit site in an embodied mobile perspective. Thereby we question if the transit site must be mono-functional and indifferent to the experiences of the wayfarers. And we question whether the design should seek to obliterate the space, that wayfarers inhabit, or of it should rather integrate notions of sensuous public space, and approach it as a site where wayfarers live part of their mobile lives and weave their journeys together. This way of re-reading and potentially re-designing the transit site embraces our concept of *urban mobility designs*.

Our point is that the transit site is not an enclosed site with a static urban life of stand-still encounters. It is rather a highly permeable place, criss-crossed by flows relating to the infrastructural systems of the site, the interchange facilities, and the local destinations for everyday activities. This corresponds with a mobile and relational understanding of place, opposing the myth of places as bounded containers (Jensen 2009, Vannini 2012). Following Jensen (2009), it is through such a relational and mobile approach that we can

surpass the sedentary notion of non-place, and arrive at a dynamic and networked gaze on the city. In this gaze the transit site is part in urban, regional, and global networks of nodes which are connected. The embodied journeys which we have foregrounded here are part of continuums in those wide networks, and not constrained or limited to the small site in focus here.

In such a transit site, two journeys are never exactly the same. The mundanity of mobility is always potentially otherwise (Vannini 2012: 171), and wayfarers might cultivate their embodied mobilities differently from time to time. This calls for concrete design interventions which combine the functional criteria of transit facilities with design for sensuous and social qualities. Examples of such design interventions are Måløv Aksen in Denmark, and Urban Lounge in Switzerland, where functions of flow are interweaved with other activities and local services through playful and artistic design gestures. Due to space limitation we cannot go further into these examples here.

## **Conclusion: towards urban mobility designs**

In this paper we have suggested that transit site design is a multi-faceted endeavour, which integrates functional, social and spatial dimensions. We have sought an approach to the design of the transit site in Aalborg Øst, which combine functional concerns, an ethnographic sensitivity to wayfaring ways of life, and concrete and small scale concerns for public space design.

We are aware that we have not at all given full justice to the manifold challenge of re-reading and re-designing the transit site. A concrete example of the shortcomings of the paper is that we have not empirically nor theoretically explored the contrasting, at times even competing, rationales and needs for different design solutions, which are present at such a site where multiple wayfarers intersect. It is not our intention to background the fact that transit sites must be highly functional, and that design of these urban areas needs to offer answers and solutions to specific problems and demands, related to the co-existence of different transport modes, speeds etc.

We conclude this paper by outlining a few propositions on the design challenge and design potentials, in relation to re-conceptualisation of the transit site, mapping, and design intervention. These propositions form part of our continuous work with *urban mobility designs* in which we seek to develop concrete design tools.

- **Re-conceptualising the transit site: sensuous public space**

With basis in our three dimensions of CIAM, the mobilities turn, and urban design, we have found that the transit site can be regarded much more than an instrumental facility for transport. It is also a realm for lived lives *en route*; a relational and mobile place with potential notable repercussions on urban life. Transit sites are potential sensuous public spaces which organise and orchestrate wayfarers' practices and experiences.

- **Mapping the transit site: the design challenge unfolded**

Through our mapping of the transit site, we have found that the functional layout play a very important role in rationally organising the transit site functions and pass off traffic. We have gathered empirical insight into the wayfaring practices and experiences via our own journey which is part of a sparse but pulsating network of co-existing mobile experiences and interactions. On our journey we did recognise that the public space design lacks sensuous and social qualities in relation to the wayfaring practices: though we are dealing with a series of diverse urban spaces, assembled in a distributed, polycentric public space of different functions, users, and topographical qualities, these spaces are universally directed towards facilitating frictionless flow, or they are indifferent leftover spaces.

Our conclusion is that the current design does not accommodate the relationships between people and between functions through a public space which works as the binding medium of the site. The design challenge of the site then concerns transforming the functional fragmented non-place of frictionless movement into sensuous public space.

- **Design intervention at the transit site: some potentials**

In our approach we emphasise a design agenda for those ordinary transit sites which is concerned with the quality of life on the ground for the wayfarers who use the site. We find that design of transit sites must satisfy more diverse criteria than functionality of traffic alone. Through our inquiries in this paper, we have found that there are underused design potentials of the transit site for embodied experiences, and for inviting wayfarers to take part in social life:

Design of transit sites is not limited to functional concerns. Instead it is also a fundamental design concern to shape grounds for varied and meaningful journeys for wayfarers. There could be a general potential in the overlaps of journeys, in order to strengthen the site as a distributed, polycentric urban space of temporary public domains. Our account *en route* has given indications of concrete localities and spatial typologies where the functional layout may be complemented with sensuous and social qualities: the in-between spaces are open for new activities; the intersections of wayfarers' routes are social condensers; the topographical differences shaped as a result of traffic segregation pose the potential for dramatic spatial experiences and visual relationships. Further there is a highly underused potential in a careful caress of forms, spaces and materials of the infrastructures and transitions in order to facilitate tactile and rich experiences, and invite wayfarers to use and appropriate the site for their own situated journeys and other activities.

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