Visualising speed and injustice at an urban edge: Havana, Cuba and Brighton, UK

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The celebration of speed underpins the culture of the car, which produces unevenness in the mobile landscape, resulting in mobility exclusions and injustice. Urban seafronts are 'natural' urban edges, where architecture, often of significance, meets the sea and produces particular tensions and possibilities. These architectural landscapes, in which the vertical meets the horizontal, produce spaces of contested mobilities, including performances of speed and of slowed-downness. These seaside mobile practices are exemplified in two contrasting seafronts and cities, the Malecón in Havana, Cuba and the Victorian seafront of Brighton, UK. In Brighton, the Kings Arches, built in the late nineteenth century, are a key tourist feature and support for the main coastal road along the south coast of England. They are currently in a critical state of disrepair, with various stakeholders contesting their future. In Havana, political, social and economic circumstances over the last 60 years, pre- and post-revolution in Cuba, have led to creative adaptations, developments and co-productions of urban spaces that display resilience and creative design. The speed and longevity of change in the circumstances that result in the infrastructural spaces for mobile practices, of prowess and aesthetic and
mechanical expertise, correlate with the speed and clarity of their visibilities and other sensory registers. This research continues and develops the focus of our ongoing work on architectural and urban mobilities, developing new connections between mobilities and urban infrastructures such as elevated highways (Robertson 2007, 2011 and 2014), more recent publications on the relationship between urban design and mobilities in street spaces in Brighton (Murray and Robertson 2016, 2017) and ongoing work on illumination and re-construction of territorial edges through photography (Murray and Robertson, 2019). In this paper we look specifically at the impact of the seafront as an urban edge and the social and spatial practices that this generates.

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Dr Lesley Murray is an Associate Professor in Sociology in the School of Humanities and Applied Social Science at the University of Brighton, where her research centres around the social and cultural aspects of transport and urban mobilities. Her research interests are in mobility cultures, including the ways in which mobilities are represented in images and text; and in gendered and generationed aspects of mobilities. Lesley has 25 years' experience in urban mobilities research in government (Greater London Authority and Transport for London) and academia. She has published widely in the field of mobilities, including on urban mobilities and mobility inequalities and injustice, on the intersections between mobile and visual methods and on gendered and children’s mobilities with a co-authored book: Children’s mobilities (Palgrave MacMillan 2019) and co-edited books: Families in Motion: Space, Time, Materials and Emotion (Emerald Press 2019) and Intergenerational mobilities: relationality, age and lifecourse (Routledge 2016), Researching and Representing mobilities: transdisciplinary encounters (Palgrave Macmillan 2014) and Mobile methodologies (Palgrave Macmillan 2010). Her research is transdisciplinary and includes collaborations with artists, architects, and creative writers.

Susan Robertson is a Principal Lecturer and Academic Programme Leader for Architecture and Planning at the University of Brighton. Her research is concerned with urban and architectural mobilities. This research has centered on the spatial and social aspects of urban infrastructures and specifically streetspace, investigating relationships between design thinking, representations, mobile practices and experiences of users and observers. Susan practiced as a senior architect with Denys Lasdun and as principal in her own practice, completing a number of projects in the UK and mainland Europe. She has been in academia since 1998 and completed an MRes in Cultural Geography in 2001. Her research is transdisciplinary and often collaborative with social scientists and artists. She has published articles in Cultural Geographies, Literary Geographies and Mobilities journals, contributed chapters to a number of books including Hauck, T., Keller, R. & Kleinekort, V. (eds) Infrastructural Urbanism: addressing the in-between (DOM 2011) and Researching and Representing mobilities: transdisciplinary encounters (Palgrave Macmillan 2014). Susan co-edited, with Lesley Murray, Intergenerational mobilities: relationality, age and lifecourse (Routledge 2016).