



# Shelley Smith: Bodies in Movement in Public Space

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Interviewer: Kendra Besanger

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# Bodies in Movement in Public Space

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Interviewer: Kendra Besanger

Shelley Smith is an Associate Professor teaching and researching in the Urban Design Department at the Institute for Architecture and Media Technology, Aalborg University, Denmark. Shelley has a Bachelor of Applied Arts in Interior Design from Ryerson University in Toronto, a Bachelor and Masters in Architecture from the Aarhus School of Architecture, Denmark, and a Ph.D. in the 'beyond big' large scale spaces of contemporary urbanity. Shelley has made films and been a practicing architect for many years. The course of her education, teaching and practice has lead to a research focus on contemporary urban transformation. More specifically, on the sensorial and conceptual perception of space and time, in an urbanity defined by urban life and urban form in movement and flux. She has a particular interest in what public spaces and domains can be in contemporary societies and how these can be designed and developed.

## **When did you first become involved with mobilities research?**

I first became involved with mobilities research during my PhD, which I started around the year 2000. In that, I had a case study on airports – the project itself had to do with large-scale space. I was particularly interested in the perception of large-scale spaces and I used airports as a case-study. So, I think it kind of started there and that grew into public space research but I mean this specifically in terms of what public space is in contemporary urbanity. That, for me, has more to do with, for example, spaces of mobility, spaces of transit. I've also gotten involved in parkour – not actually doing it – but looking at it as kind of a lens through which to view urban design and mobility or bodies in movement in public space.

## **What does the materialization of the city mean to you?**

Work with parkour has been an eye opener. I did a lot of reading for one of my research projects which charted the theoretical territory of public space and, through that, I became familiar with parkour and saw it as a kind of physical manifestation of the readings – an unfolding of the theory. What's very interesting with parkour and contemporary mobility studies is our relation to time and space. If I look at where our contemporary society is, we have this fixation with time. We always want to be on time, get to places on time. We are very fixated on destinations. It makes me think that maybe we're not really looking at the journeys. We're not really looking at where we are in space but where we are going in time. So, if I think of it in those terms, I think space becomes dematerialized – it kind of disappears. And I think the dematerialization for me is partly the disappearance and the materialization is the appearance of space but, quite literally, materialization through the materials of what defines space and how rich or poor the experience of those are. I'm interested in spaces that have a tactility – that challenge us and our senses or that give us something that we can anchor ourselves in, in physical space. The materialization of space is making and doing things as designers or architects that make people not less aware of time, but more aware of space and that, through this 'materialization', space comes into being again.