



Containers

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Interviewer: Simone Natale

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Daniel M. Sutko is an Assistant Professor of New Media and Social Media at California State University, Fullerton. Prior to joining Fullerton, he held a Fellowship in the School of Communication and Information at Rutgers University. His research draws on digital media studies, critical theory, and the mobile and material turns in the social sciences. His current project analyzes media piracy and sea piracy together as connected struggles over communications technologies, power, and governance. He has published about social media, mobile technologies, video games, and digital policy. He co-edited, with Adriana de Souza e Silva, *Digital Cityscapes: Merging Digital and Urban Playspaces* (2009).

When did you first become involved with mobilities research?

I first became involved with mobilities research in my first year as a master's student, in the Masters of Communication at North Carolina, when I took a course in mobile communication and technology with Adriana de Souza e Silva. She and I then became very close working on a mobilities project and she was my masters advisor.

How do you use mobilities in your research?

I use mobilities as a way of framing my questions. What I appreciate about the mobilities paradigm and mobilities work, is that it's not centred around a discipline, so much as it's centred around this problematic of mobilities. And so, my interests are very inter-disciplinary as far as methods and objects of study. Using mobilities as a way of problematizing questions is really significant for my work.

How are containers connected to the issue of mobility?

Containers are ways to relativize spatial relations. Consider shipping, for example.

Whether you are containing something in a standardized container, or a barrel, means different relations of mobility, of speed, of slowness required at the port, required on the sea. I use containers in my research as a way of thinking about many media technologies. So I pick up a lot from Innis and McLuhan in thinking about how media technologies reorient relations between people, relations of speed, of slowness, and that's how containers, for me, fit with mobilities. For example, the box shipping container was a way of standardizing cargo mobility on and between sea and land. It was this profound invention in the 1960s, and, for me, it parallels the invention of much of our digital media and how we think about digital media. So intermodal transport is to physical transmission as multimedia and the intermediality of digital technologies are to our symbolic communication.

What do you mean when you argue that a mobile phone is a container?

When I say that a mobile phone is a container, I am using that to think about the multiple relations and mobilities that a mobile phone makes possible. Ports and containers provide a framework for investigating media technologies that we tend to think of as virtual, as immaterial, as sort of disconnected from physical space. When I say that a mobile phone is a container, I mean the relations it presupposes between the user and the space. So, how are you supposed to consume the information that you get from the phone? How are you supposed to access it? The design of the phone creates a subject position for you to inhabit, and this contains you and enfolds you just as it

produces a subjectivity and set of relations with the device, with the space, with your co-located and non co-present friends, family, etc.