

Anthropology of Mobility : Batteries and their Impact on Daily Life



www.argonautes.fr

- Dominique Desjeux
- Professor at the Sorbonne, University of Paris 5
- Head of the Magistère of Social Sciences applied to intercultural phenomena
- Visiting Professor in America and China
- [d. desjeux@argonautes.fr](mailto:d.desjeux@argonautes.fr)



2 - How I proceed as an anthropologist to understand how to develop a product or a service such as a battery

- I don't focus on individuals and their motivation
- which is the psychological — and most widely used — approach in order to understand human behaviors and create commercials and ads.

3 - How to proceed

- I focus my field studies **on practices and social interactions** in daily life in order to understand:
 - What the **forms of mobility** are
 - Cars, buses, bicycles, boats, foot depending on the country in which I carry out my field study
 - In which **social games** they are embedded
 - Hierarchy, power relationships, professional cooperation, family world...
 - What **uses** are linked to them

4 - How to proceed

- In order to determine :
 - The daily life **problem to be solved**
 - The kind of **services for mobility** could be developed
- And so, **among these services for mobility, what is the importance of rechargeable batteries?**

5 - How to proceed

- Looking at mobility in daily life may provide an alternative in order to **target people** based on:
 - **Practices**
 - **Social belonging** (social class, gender, generation, cultural community)
 - **The imaginary**

6 - Example

- Problem to be solved:
how to avoid carrying
many plugs when
traveling abroad
- Service to mobility:
 - All-in-one adaptor
 - Sold in planes



France
China
USA
USA/France

7 – It is assumed there is a link between a specific object, a battery and a social phenomenon, mobility

- Batteries are supposed to help mobility by giving more autonomy to objects and thus to social actors (social groups and individuals)
 - Examples of nomadic objects with batteries:
 - ✓ Mobile phones, laptops, electronic planners, digital cameras, palm pilots,
 - ✓ cars,
 - ✓ electric wheelchairs

8 – « Old » nomadic objects

- But some of these objects were **nomadic objects** 5, 10, or more years ago, **before being battery powered**
 - ✓ such as planners (diary)



9 – « Old » nomadic objects

- Thus, in some cases the **most important change** is not mobility itself
- but rather about the **amount of memory and information** that can be moved.

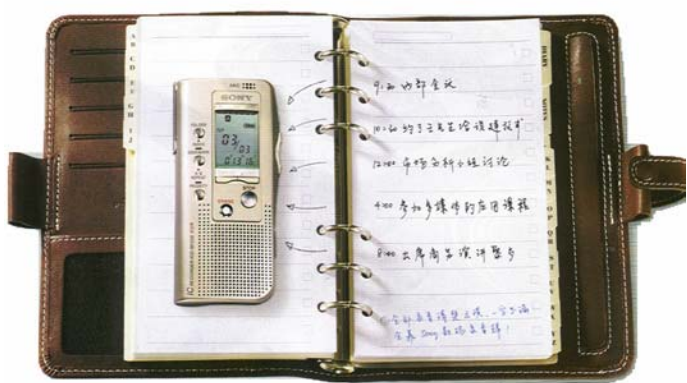
10 - Several types of mobility

- **Social mobility** (upward and downward)
- **Geographical mobility**
 - My focus today is on **geographical mobility**
 - Battery “users” are both **individuals and objects**

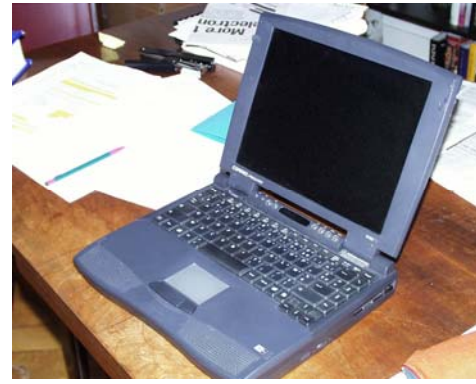
11 New nomadic objects

- Mobile phones
- Laptops
- Electronic planners

特长录音 清晰记录



Sony ad



Chinese ad

12 – New sedentary objects with battery

- Electric toothbrush
- Screwdriver
 - Device to check baby noises



13 – Three types of mobile population

- **Sedentary population** (“soft” mobility: old people, physically impaired people, and so on)
- **Semi-nomads** (daily mobility such as commuters)
- **Nomads** (long distance mobility: traveling salespersons, nomads, migrants and tramps)

- **Thus mobility is an opportunity for some people and a constraint for others**

14 – Classical and new mobility

- Sub-Saharan African nomad
- Businessmen at Hong Kong airport with mobile phone



15 – Two main types of mobility

- **Full mobility**
- **Reduced mobility**
 - Temporary
 - pregnant women
 - ill people
 - Permanent
 - ✓ old people
 - ✓ physically impaired people



First lesson: the uses of batteries depend on all this diversity of mobility

- Depending on the kind of mobility, batteries need:
 - To have a **period of autonomy**, such as for travellers (nomads)
 - To be **near a power point**, such as an electric toothbrush or an electric screwdriver (sedentary objects)

Recharger plug



17 – Mobility depends on the scale of action

- Mobility and time: on a macro-historical, long-term level, **mobility is one of the oldest social phenomena:**
- According to the Bible, **human history starts with a violent conflict** between Cain, a sedentary farmer, and his brother Abel, a shepherd — a nomad

18 – Local and cosmopolitan

- Nowadays, “local” (accounting manager) and “cosmopolitan” (sales representative, executive) are **the new words to describe nomads and sedentary people** in corporations
- It is a **source both of conflict and of alliance**
- **They share information**, thus batteries are part of this cooperation through electronic devices

19 – Mobility and space: the diversification of means of transport

- **Development of big cities** and diversity of mobility based on individual/collective, private/public transport
 - How should all these means of transport be dealt with?
 - How should the space race and ecological issues be decided?
 - Do batteries have a role to play there?

20 – Big cities and diversity of mobility

Rue de Rivoli
in Paris, 1997



21 – Mobility and space

- The **development of consumption and retail sales centers on the outskirts of cities** means **moving more** humans and commodities (more trucks, more cars, more trains, and so on)
- The **development of globalization** is not a new phenomenon — see the 18th century
- It is linked to new problems, from financial issues to **micro-material problems**, such as the **compatibility of plugs and power points** to recharge electronic devices throughout the world

22 - Globalization and micro-material problems

Chinese plugs
Guangzhou, 2000



23 – Mobility and energy

- Energy concerns many types of energies:
 - **Human energy**
 - **Natural energy**
 - ✓ Water, wind, solar energy to be transformed into nuclear or non-nuclear electricity
 - ✓ Coal, fuel, wood and so on

24 Electric energy

- **Energy is something invisible**, only visible through the mediation of objects such as domestic appliances
- Electric energy is seen **through these objects and their uses**
- Thus a battery is more a link in a chain of sedentary, mobility and energy issues than the center of the **problem-solving chain**.

25 – Energy and political power

- There is a link between energy and political power: the more the production of energy is centralized the more political power is centralized (see water issues in semi-arid areas)
- Batteries can be used as a means of diversifying the source of energy and thus decentralizing its access, if the cost is not too high

26 – Battery uses are embedded in society

- As with most technologies, batteries are not socially neutral.
- They are embedded in the workings of society
- That is why attempting to understand their social uses is as important as trying to improve their technical performance
- **Power relationships may be involved when developing batteries**

27 – Mobility and society

- **Social class:** Often in France, the more disadvantaged a social class is, the shorter its range of movement is.
- **Gender:** some women are more sedentary because of the constraints of children and housework, which does not mean that women or men approve of such a situation.

28 – Mobility and society

- **Generation and life cycle** or the “Energy Curve”:
 - When you are between 15 and 25 or 30, **you try to test the limits of your energy** (by drinking a lot, driving very fast, and so on)
 - Between 25 or 30 and 45 or 50, **you manage your energy**
 - After your 50s, **you save your energy**

29 - Ethnic group, culture and way of life

- Some communities use more dry cells than batteries because of the lack of electricity, such as sub-Saharan Africa
- Mobility and diversity are two main strategies for dealing with climate and environmental uncertainty

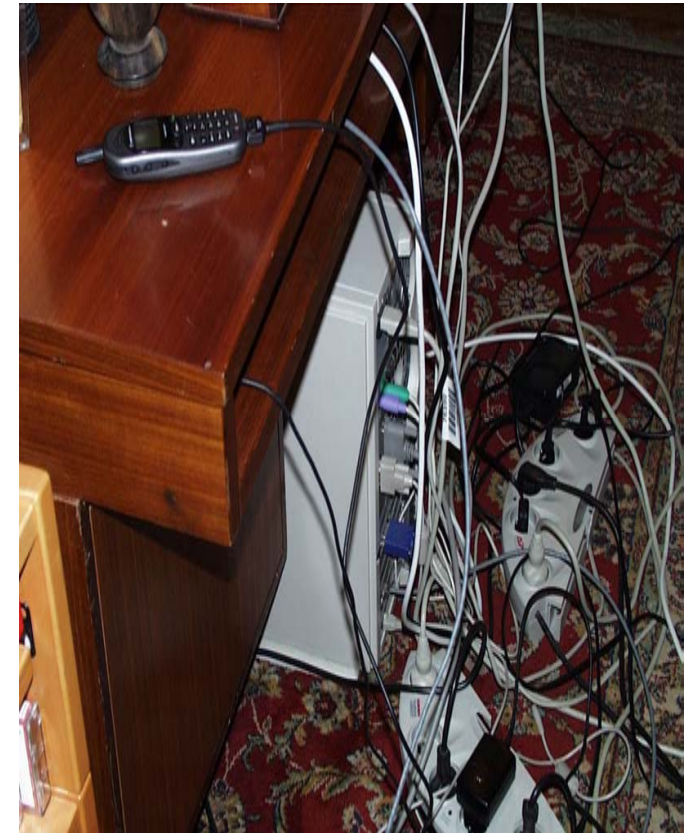
30 – Micro-scale of observation

- **Itinerary method:** The goal of this method is to observe the uses of objects in daily life
- The itinerary is made of several steps based on **the observation of practices, social interactions, space and the symbolic dimension at home:** (1) In-home decision making; (2) trip to shopping center; (3) shopping; (4) storage; (5) use; (6) disposal.
- Thus we are able to understand the system of concrete objects in which practices are embedded

31 – System of concrete objects (nomadic objects): a digital camera



32 - System of concrete objects (nomadic object): a mobile phone



33 - System of concrete objects (sedentary object) an electric toothbrush



34 - System of concrete objects (nomadic object): laptop



- Laptop with its battery and its adaptor plug for home electricity



35 – A new frontier



Mobility at night
is made possible
thanks to energy...
and batteries