Chapter 7

Rushing, dashing, scrambling: the role of the train station in producing the reluctant runner

Introduction

This chapter stems from a wider project attempting to rethink contemporary running mobilities in the UK. The current hegemonic discourses about running revolve predominantly around sport, fitness and health (Cook et al, 2015). These understandings are actually quite recent, the increasing ubiquity and normalisation of running not truly occurring until the running boom of the 1960s and 1970s (Latham, 2015). My interest however, was to explore other roles, beyond (and intersecting) sport and health, that running plays in contemporary society.

One which immediately became evident was running's historical but continued role as a means of transport, of which I explored two kinds. First was the growing band people who choose running as their mode of commuting. This represents a purposeful, intentional and planned form of running as transport (Cook, 2016). The second kind of running as transport instances I explored were the unintended, improvised and often undesired moments of mobility that are part of the makeup of everyday life. Pause long enough at any road crossing, bus stop or train station and the sight of people dashing, in what might be considered an everyday emergency mobility, will come along soon enough. These are

undoubtedly little emergencies, where something has gone wrong (such as punctuality) and running is unexpectedly employed in order to avoid a danger (such as missing your train). Unlike bigger, more serious emergencies, like environmental catastrophes, disease or war, the danger here is not too grave and it is resolved by moving towards something rather than away from something. So while more individual and small-scale than forms of emergency mobility explored hitherto in the literature (Adey, 2016), these everyday emergency forms of mobility have much tell us about how mobility actually happens.

It is the aim of this chapter to detail and analyse emergency-running, paying particular attention to the role of design has on the taking place and experience of running in a train station. I will begin by looking at the various ways in which train stations and running spaces are designed, before introducing the case study. The main discussion consists of three aspects of station design – temporal staging, semiotics, and the material site – which affect the production and taking place of emergency-running through their presences and absences. These will be returned to in the conclusion, where their importance in producing certainty and uncertainty to the taking place of emergency-running will be discussed.

Station design and running

Like other mobility hubs, a contemporary train station is designed with many activities and ideas in mind (Jensen, 2014). They function much beyond the simple embarking and alighting of rail passengers, though they certainly are carefully designed to facilitate such flows. Train stations are also spaces of administration, of safety and security, of commerce and capital, of relaxation and sociality, as well as boredom and suspension (Bissell, 2007). They are spaces designed to be inhabited by different bodies and navigated

by forms of mobility, which harmonise this varied functionality and patronage. Namely, train stations are designed to be navigated by the slowed mobilities of walking and waiting.

Running is not one of the range of movements or activities that station designers consider to be likely or appropriate. Mostly out of concerns for passenger safety, the design of train stations tend to demonstrate an attempt to discourage and inhibit running in these spaces. Most certainly, train stations offer none of the design specialisations that seek to make running easier or more desirable (see below). Yet, running does occur abundantly in train stations in a form of everyday emergency mobility. This running is often unintended and improvised but occurs when people lack other means with which to cover a particular spatial distance within particular temporal restrictions. In other words, when running becomes the only means by which to reach a destination on time, as in this case, needing to run to catch a departing train.

The improvised nature of this emergency-running demonstrates an interesting relationship between design, bodies and mobility. It not only reveals insights into encounters between people and design and the ways design affordances enable spaces to be inhabited in different ways. But it also asks how appropriating spaces not specifically designed for running changes how we understand running. Ultimately, this relates back to the differing role running takes on in these scenarios compared to the hegemonic roles we understand running as performing.

The design of running spaces

While not necessarily apparent its everyday emergency form, running more generally is a highly designed practice. These hegemonic ideas about what running is and the role it plays in society, feeds into the practical design of running spaces. They variously seek to optimise either the sporting or fitness aspects of running by facilitating an improvement in speed or by encouraging participation and enhancing experiences.

Take the competitive running space of the athletics track for example, an unmistakably designed sportscape of rationality, artifice and standardisation. With its regulated spatial parameters and continually-refined surface, the athletics track is a synthetic and technological monoculture designed to offer segregated, controlled, neutralised and predictable conditions for optimal sporting performance, replicability and comparability (Bale, 1994; 2003). Fitness running spaces on the other hand, have tended to be designed with a concern for enhancing running's health benefits. For example, Swedish jogging tracks are designed to improve aerobic capacities and take advantage of the restorative role of nature by being built in forests with undulating terrain (Qvistrőm, 2013; 2016). Other designs seek to improve participation and motivation in mass fitness running by experimenting with surface materials, wayfinding and pacing technologies among many other things, such as the case of bark running tracks in Flanders, Belgium (Borgers et al, 2016). These noted, the majority of running in the England actually takes place in spaces not directly designed for it – the shared spaces of public streets and parks (Sport England, 2012). Runners' appropriations of these unspecialised spaces, whether individually (Cook et al, 2016), as part of mass organised events (Cidell, 2014), or through digital activity tracking,

mapping and sharing (Carlén and Maivorsdotter, 2016), is productive of unique social relations and micro-politics.

Running in a train station however, lacks almost all of these specialisations and design ideals for encouraging participation and improving performances/experiences. It is, quite simply, a very different type of running and a very different experience of running to those most commonly considered. This chapter seeks to account for this by exploring the role design has in running in a train station.

The case study: Guildford Station

This was an ethnographic research project of emergency-running in one train station. That train station was in Guildford, Surrey a highly affluent town of around 140,000 inhabitants in the south-east of England (Trott, 2015). Guildford's railway station is managed by the company South West Trains, one of twenty rail franchises which operate on the UK national rail network. South West Trains has a Central London terminus at London Waterloo and provides the majority of commuter services to South West London, as well suburban and regional services to Hampshire, Berkshire and Surrey (as in this case). Guildford station acts as a major hub of mobility flows in the region, with its eight platforms drawing passengers in from and dispersing them to various locations across England's south east, including London Gatwick Airport, Reading, Portsmouth and Central London. The station has around 8 million entrances and exits per year, about a third of which are by commuters using season tickets (Office of Rail and Road, 2016). Indeed, Guildford is the second most popular town for commuters into London, the forty minute journey transporting commuters to and from predominantly professional, office jobs in London. Although chiefly a space of rail

mobilities, the station also serves as a transport interchange with bus stops, cycle parking and limited car parking surrounding the station. It is also a commercial space hosting shops at various locations throughout the station.

The ethnographic fieldwork took place of over five consecutive week days in the summer of 2014. Permission to conduct the research was obtained from South West Trains and a one day pilot study was undertaken to identify critical sites and rhythms of emergency-running. Each day then consisted of spending eight hours observing emergency-running. This was divided into three hours in the morning, from 06:30 – 09:30, two hours in the afternoon, from 12:00 – 14:00, and another three hours in the evening, 16:30 – 19:30, in order to observe the two peak commuting periods as well as the midday lull. I spent a full day in each of the four chosen sites throughout the station, with a final day spent split between them. This resulted in 1,286 counts of people running being made and 542 of those instances being noted down by hand. These jottings were then typed up, coded for particular characteristics of emergency-running, and combined with sketches and site descriptions to ultimately steer the themes of analysis.

These in-field observations brought to light the immense importance of mobilities design to the production of emergency-running. It enabled the grasping of atmospheres, affects, and the less-visible, multisensory elements of emergency-running as well as the moments of transition, physical movements, body language and facial expressions. This led to the development of three key aspects of the station design, which in their presences and absences, played an important role upon running in a station: temporal staging, semiotics, and the material site. These will be used to structure the main discussion.

The four different observation sites identified as particularly influential in the taking place of emergency-running in the station were 1) the Ticket Hall, 2) the Gateline, 3) the Underpass, and 4) Platform Five. Their locations in the station can be seen in Figure 7.1 and descriptions of each are given below, after which the thematic discussion will occur.

[INSERT FIGURE 7.1 HERE]

Figure 7.1. Station plan showing observation sites. Reproduced with permission of South West Trains.

The first site, the Ticket Hall is also the main entrance to the station (Figure 7.2). It is a complex site that must be negotiated in order to gain access to departing trains. Many of the functions of the train station entangle here, and as such, there are many obstacles, distractions and activities which require mobilities to be slowed and the flows of passengers be sorted. The Ticket Hall is designed to be a space of inefficient dispersal, in order to facilitate the administrative, security and commercial functioning of the station. The rail-essentials of ticket-buying (from self-service machines or actual people), time-checking (on real-time digital displays or printed timetables), and ticket-validating (through the Gateline barriers or attendants) sit alongside distractions which encourage people to linger, wait, relax and spend, namely coffee shops, food shops, newsagents and seats. It is thus, a space of conflicting rhythms, where passengers for different trains, with different senses of haste, all intermingle. The platforms can just about be seen from here but no departure

announcements can be heard in the Ticket Hall, so passengers tend to rely on the large display boards for information regarding their train.

[INSERT FIGURE 7.2 HERE]

Figure 7.2. Plan of the Ticket Hall. N.B. not to scale.

The other three study sites are simpler in design and function. The Gateline acts as a bottle neck from the Ticket Hall. It is a linear space, guiding passengers through a security check onto platform two and providing access to the other seven platforms via an underpass or a bridge. It is designed with one solitary but significant obstruction to seamless passage - the ticket barrier. The six gates act to sort passengers with legitimate tickets from those without. In principle, their operation is simple – a passenger enters the gate (they are only wide enough for one person, with the exception of the wide gate meant for those with bikes, pushchairs or luggage), inserts their ticket where it is electronically scanned and codes check its validity before permitting or restricting passage. An attendant capable of manually opening any gate is also present in case issues arise. Once these are negotiated, passengers find themselves on platform two, again a linear space where, unless needing a train from this platform, passengers are channelled towards other platforms. Four electronic displays provide information for departures across the whole station, while another one displays detailed information about upcoming departures from platform two. These were mostly redundant however, only being used in abnormal conditions such as delays or cancellations.

While all platforms can be seen here, only audio announcements for platform two can be heard.

The Underpass (Figure 7.3) is the more popular of the two means of accessing platforms three to eight at Guildford station. It is a subterranean passage, entered by a downhill ramp whose entire function and design concern the efficient and speedy channelling of passenger flows to and from platforms. There are no places to wait or linger here. The artificially lit, cramped and dank main corridor only leads to uphill ramps to other platforms. Small display boards at either end provide the only indication of how 'on time' passengers are. All auditory cues to are muffled and platform-visibility removed.

[INSERT FIGURE 7.3 HERE]

Figure 7.3. Plan of the Underpass. N.B. not to scale.

Platform Five was chosen as it is the station's busiest platform. Only trains on the major trunk line between Portsmouth and London depart from here, offering the quickest transit to Central London. Arriving here on the uphill slope from the seclusion of the Underpass, passengers are met with an open but covered platform with few permanent obstacles to an awaiting train. The platform inefficiently disperses passengers linearly along its length as they sit, and wait for arriving trains. This can produce a space littered with undirected bodies and luggage. All semiotic cues return here. Digital display boards provide information about the progression of forthcoming trains and auditory cues are fully perceptible.

Each site and its design affords something different in producing emergency-running in the station. Yet some cross-cutting and entangled aspects of this diverse design can be identified – temporal staging, semiotics, and material layout. The varied presence and absence of these different elements work to encourage and discourage emergency-running in different ways and helps to understand how mobilities actually happen.

Affordances of design and the taking place of emergency-running

Temporal staging

The temporal staging of rail mobilities undoubtedly had the biggest effect upon emergency-running in the research. Simply, the design of train timetables creates the fixed common points in time by which passengers are judging their progression, and need to emergency-run, against. During the research, the scheduling of departures orchestrated the rhythms of passengers in the station and conducted the patterns of emergency-runners. On the diurnal scale, the fluctuations of emergency-runner rhythms coincided with wider station and commuting patterns, themselves reflecting the wider social and cultural rhythms of work (Edensor, 2011). Perhaps unsurprisingly, this entailed that the morning and evening commuting peaks produced the highest prevalence of emergency-running, with an average of 35.72 runners per hour (RPH) and 44.22 RPH being witnessed respectively. The 12:00 – 14:00 period averaged 23.20 RPH. Such figures are slightly misleading however, as the flow of emergency-runners was anything but steady. A RPH measure hides the impact the rhythm of specific train departures have. This can result mass differences in emergency-runner prevalence from one minute to the next. The fast service to London, which departed Platform Five four times an hour, was the largest stimulus in this regard with the peaks and troughs of emergency-running rhythms seemingly correlating to its departures. In essence, the temporal

design of train departures creates the deadline which passenger must meet, and lays the foundations for the conditions of emergency-running.

Semiotics

Semiotics relates to the signage systems coded into material environments (Jensen, 2013). These can be physical signs, auditory signs or aspects of places interpreted as part of the signifying dimension. The semiotic system is 'read' by those engaging with it in order to make sense of the situation and interpret how they should act. This is where the possibility for emergency-running lies within the semiotic system of a train station. Just as road signs within the Highway Code can help drivers understand the situation on the road and act accordingly, the diverse semiotic system within Guildford train station helped passengers to gauge the need for and possibility of emergency-running. This section will discuss a few of the varied signs apparent within the station and the ways in which their presences and absences influenced passengers' abilities to judge their progression against their intended departure – ultimately affecting the taking place of emergency-running. A key point to note here however, is that the sign system in the station is designed to be read at walking speed, which influences, among other things, the size and ultimately perceptibility of the signs (Venturi et al, 1972), an attribute with interesting results upon emergency-running.

The electronic information display boards were the most directly engaged with aspect of the semiotic system. In the Ticket Hall, they displayed the 'Next Fastest Train To' for all the destinations served by the station. This was accompanied by a platform number, scheduled departure time and expected departure time. Throughout the rest of the station, the boards displayed the same information but organised by the chronologically forthcoming departures.

These displays are the most accurate and direct way for passengers to check their progress and thus can be a source to encourage emergency-running when departures are imminent or a source to discourage and even halt emergency-running when time is plentiful:

> A man in his late 20s wearing work attire and trainers jogs in slowing to eye up the display. He takes his earphones out and scrutinises the board closer before popping them back in and sprinting, slaloming around two others before getting to the barrier.
>
> Ticket Hall 09/07/2014 16.43

> An older woman in a body warmer, walking trousers and running trainers turns the corner into the station running and looking very red in the face. She glances at the board and continues to run. She suddenly stops, looks again at the display and proceeds to walk.
>
> Ticket Hall 09/07/2014 07.54

What is also noteworthy about these incidents is the need for both subjects to slow down in order to properly read the displays. The size of the text requires such slowed mobilities – it is designed for walking speed.

Interestingly, the displays did not impart information regarding the time required to reach particular platforms, as is increasingly common in signage at airports. This is something that would be useful within the station as the actual distance needed to be covered in order to reach a platform from the Ticket Hall is far greater than the visible proximity suggests. This further encouraged emergency-running, particularly by those less habitual travellers. Despite there being a huge reduction in the number of passengers in the station during the midday

hours, the RPH did not reduce by a corresponding rate. This is most likely because passengers departing the station at these times travel less frequently than the daily commuters observed in the morning and evening peaks. Thus, they may be less familiar with the station layout and this semiotic absence has the impact of encouraging emergency-running.

Sounds and auditory clues are similarly part of the signage system at a train station, they provide insight into the imminence of a train and a passenger's likelihood of making it. However, it is a more confusing signifying dimension to interpret. Not only is there range of different auditory cues in the station, but there is an unequal geography to where the clues are present and absent. Speakers on individual platforms make three identical announcements for approaching trains. The first around 150 seconds before its arrival, the second around 20 seconds before arrival, and the third when the train is stationary on the platform. However, unless punctual enough to be present for all three announcements, passengers can be unaware of which announcement they are hearing and can be encouraged to run unnecessarily:

> The first announcement of the 0734 train causes a man and woman half way along the ramp and with perfect vision of the platform to begin to jog with concerned looks. Their heads and torsos immediately drop and lean forward as the uphill slope contorts their bodies. At the crest of the incline, both reduce back to a walk with the train not yet arrived.

> Platform Five 14/07/2014 07.30

Others however, most likely habitual travellers, seemed calm when these announcements were being made, often waiting for subsequent auditory signs of a conductor's whistle,

signalling that the doors are about to close, or even the noise of beeping doors, signalling their imminent closure, before being persuaded to break into a full run:

> A woman with blond hair and in a black suit holds her handbag in her left hand and a newspaper in her right. Despite the train already being on the platform, she confidently walks up three-quarters of the ramp. However a toot of the whistle and the beeping of the doors a few seconds later results in a frenzied head glance to the left, spotting the train and an even more frenzied run. She struggles to accelerate on the incline but on the flat she covers the five metres to the nearest open door more easily.

> Platform Five 14/07/2014 07.06

Along with these presences, once again, absences in the semiotic system can encourage emergency-running. All auditory clues to a train's imminence in the Underpass are muffled and become replaced with the echoing and reverberating sounds of footsteps, chatter and the deep, imposing rumble of suitcases. This noise mirrors the sound of a train engine starting-up above, growling through the roof of the Underpass, before thwacking with an ever-increasing tempo as it pulls away over the tracks. This alternative auditory clue has a significant influence upon emergency-runners, even though there is no clear indication which train is pulling away.

The semiotic system at Guildford train station is a complex and multi-layered aspect of design. The presence and absence of particular signs encourages and discourages emergency-running in different ways, and given the interpretative nature of semiotics, they were responded to by passengers in different ways also. The affordances of design are not universal.

Material site

As already hinted at in the location descriptions, the material site and physical layout of the train station contains within it many affordances for the possibility and impossibility of emergency-running. Three of the sites within the study (the Gateline, the Underpass and Platform Five) are linear spaces. These are design layouts aimed at channelling passenger flows between different areas of the station. They are efficient at dispersing passengers in a directed manner and lend themselves more readily to performing unhindered emergency-running if necessary. The Ticket Hall on the other hand, lacks such linear channelling and directed dispersal. Rather it encourages (and, in cases, requires) the station users to engage in a range of different activities which demand different forms of mobility and immobility, such as standing, queueing, chatting, shopping etc. The promotion of such activities, and the presence of others performing these activities, can hinder emergency-running, evident in the performance of a range of walk-run-stop-run-walk sequences as people navigated the site and requirements of the space.

The design of material objects within the sites also influence the inclination or possibility of emergency-running. The most blatant example of this is the ticket barriers at the Gateline. Despite its simple (in principle) operation as described earlier, negotiating the ticket barrier is a task fraught with human and object deficiencies. The short opening time of the gates (aimed at stopping multiple people entering on one ticket check) means that bags and other accoutrements often get caught when they are closing. A ticket refusing to be read by the barrier is similarly a common problem and the direction a gate is serving (entry or exit) can also be misapprehended. Green arrows or red crosses indicate which are possible to pass

through yet these are too small to be read at running speed, suggesting an object designed with a walking user in mind. Such events can inflict further stillness onto a moving body; something intensified when already moving at speed:

> Three teenage friends run to the barrier shouting 'rush rush rush'. One gets through and begins to sprint but halts when the others' tickets get stuck. The girl doesn't wait long and sprints off towards the underpass as the others shout 'wait for us'. After help from the attendant, their tickets are finally sorted and the other two sprint off.

> Gateline 24/06/2014 16.31

Such is the unpredictability of negotiating the barriers at speed, that the sight of people only breaking into a run once it had been passed was extremely common. In many ways it marked a threshold in navigating the station; discouraging emergency-running before it and encouraging it afterwards.

The topography of the material sites proved a huge affordance in encouraging/forcing as well as discouraging emergency-running. The majority of the station is flat, a topography relatively neutral when considering its impact upon running. However, entering and exiting the Underpass entails encountering both downhill and uphill slopes, a design feature with a major impact upon the experience of emergency-running. Uphill ramps warp bodies grappling its gradient and downslopes increase the pressure exerted on knees, exaggerating balance-reflexes or bodily contours:

> A larger man in his fifties wearing a cream suit and fedora hat sees the train on the platform when half way up the ramp. Through his sun glasses I see his eyes pop wide and he begins to run. Gaining momentum against an uphill gradient proved tough. His legs struggle to get much height and his body rolls heavily from side to side.

A larger woman in her 20s wearing a short blue dress, heels and a trench coat runs awkwardly downhill. She is practically tip-toeing with short steps and an arm that swings in and out like a hinge to counterbalance the heavy bag on her right arm. The running rhythm causes parts of her body to bounce uncomfortably and others to be revealed by her flapping clothes.

Underpass 11/07/2014 08.28

Those entering the Underpass must travel downslope at a gradient at which gravity seems to have an impact on the speed at which one travels. This leads to many people speeding-up downhill, making it easier for those already running, nudging those who are contemplating it and involuntarily forcing some walkers to break into a jog. Contrastingly, an uphill slope causes a slowing effect on bodies. This is both physical, climbing a hill is physically demanding, difficult and tiresome; and mental, the prospect of running up a hill is unappealing to many. This resulted in a marked reduction in the numbers of emergency-runners wanting to, or capable of, running on uphill portions of the station:

Prompted by some passing teenagers, a woman in her fifties attempts to run laden with bags that her body fights to contend with. She slumps, her legs low as she struggles uphill. She walks for a few steps, readjusting the bags she continues her run, walking once more as her bodily rhythms make her bags fall once again.

Platform Five 14/07/2014 18.00

As demonstrated, the material design of Guildford Station both encourages and discourages emergency-running is various ways. Yet, design is not simply autonomous, dictating when running should occur and when it shouldn't. Evident in all of these vignettes

is the importance of people and their engagements with design. Rail passengers inhabit the station as a hybrid mobile bodies. They move through the station with varied accoutrements related to the art and craft of train travel, from clothes, to bags, to bikes and so on (Watts, 2008). These are highly designed objects, but again not necessarily specialised to make running desirable, easy or efficient. Each part of the emergency-runner assemblage impacts a person's ability to simple run if required and thus is a constitutive part in the production of emergency-running in a station. Sadly, there is no space to detail the many ways in which this manifests.

Conclusion: the design of certainty

In rethinking the contemporary role of running, this chapter has taken as its chief concern, the employment of running as an everyday emergency form of mobility in a train station. It sought to interrogate the very mundane details about how mobilities actually happen by paying close attention to the affordances of mobilities design in the taking place of the spatially-discordant act of running in a train station. It revealed that the train station is an extraordinary site of running mobilities, albeit, not necessarily running as we know it, and that running is an integral aspect of rail mobilities, albeit, not one explicitly designed for. In exploring the production of emergency-running in a station, the influence of three aspects of mobilities design were examined. In their presences and absences, the temporal staging, semiotics, and material site of the train station influence the taking place of emergency-running is various ways.

Ultimately, the taking place of emergency-running in a station all relates to the ways in which mobilities design produces certainty and uncertainty. Running in a station only

occurs due to a lack of certitude that people have that they can catch their intended train without increasing the speed of their mobility. Much of that uncertainty emanates from the unpredictability of navigating the station itself and negotiating the various objects, obligations and distractions that it presents, rather than due to pure unpunctuality. Of the one thousand plus instances of emergency-running observed in this study, very few required running to be used for the entire journey through the station in order to make a departing train. Much more commonly, emergency-running either only began once the most unpredictable areas of the station have been passed (such as the Ticket Hall and Gateline), or it stopped once certainty of one's fate has been assured. Emergency-runners, thus, were highly attuned or habitualised, to the affordances mobilities design offered in gauging certainty and uncertainty.

Certainty and uncertainty are both produced in the entangled presences and absences of the three aspects of mobility design discussed above. The temporal staging can produce certainty of a trains departure when everything is running smoothly, yet uncertainty when the delays occur. In various ways the semiotic system at the station enables passengers to gauge their progress against their intended train, most commonly through use of digital displays. Yet the inconsistency and incompleteness of these signs, along with the clarity of them (particular auditory ones) can have the opposite effect, producing uncertainty through an inability to judge progress. Finally, the varied material sites throughout the station produce both spaces which are simpler and more predictable to navigate, and those which are more difficult and unpredictable as requirements, shapes and objects alter the certainty of getting a 'clean run'.

Emergency-running is very much produced in the interaction between people and design. It is, after all, an improvisation. In appropriating a space designed for walking in a hybrid assemblage designed for rail travel, emergency-runners are improvising in an encounter with design. Running in a train station requires the interpretation of the semiotic cues and practical affordances of a site in a judgement of whether running is required or not. Exploring this everyday form of emergency mobility reveals much about the ways in which mobilities actually happen and the impact design has in producing these mobilities.

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