

MOBILE LIVES

by Anthony Elliott and John Urry

Routledge, Oxon, 2010. 188 pp. ISBN: 978-0-415-48022-2 (pbk).

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*Mobile Lives* interprets everyday activities, practices and experiences with theory. The authors, Anthony Elliott and John Urry, demonstrate the complexity of modern lives, emphasising the interplay of mobility, personal relationships, technological solutions and global consequences. The sources for their text are varied, with both narrative from research participants and contextual interpretations of the technology and tools used in mobile lives. The authors chose this approach because it allows them to demonstrate the interplay between mobile lives and the processes and systems that support them. This is an engaging read, providing a thorough focus on the mobile lives of affluent, employed people, which the authors portray in a readable, engaging narrative. The narrative is supported by focused theoretical discussion that concentrates on the individual level interests. There is, however, little consideration of the context of long-term and broader health and well-being of families and communities, other than a discussion about the futility of relying on carbon-based consumption for movement and mobility.

The book follows a thematic structure, framed within the ‘mobilities paradigm’ previously established by Urry (2000) and others. This paradigm is described in the first chapter. They explain the 13 components of the paradigm – connections, the processes supporting these connections, physical movement, the emotion associated with mobility, social practices, distance, physical objects, affordance, distribution processes, circulation, the association of time and fixation with mobility, the role of expert knowledge and, finally, the interdependency of immobile structures associated with mobility.

The thematic structure frames each subsequent chapter. Chapter 2, ‘New tech-

nologies, new mobilities,' illustrates how digital technologies and the individual organisational practices required to use them have shaped mobile lives. Instruments such as Facebook or Skype are used to connect and store parts of individuals' lives so that they can manage their connections with others. The next chapter, 'Networks and inequalities,' focuses on the apparent need for people to physically travel to achieve economic and social capital. The fourth chapter, 'The globals and their mobilities,' refers to an elite mobile community known as 'the globals.' The world's richest no longer just own vast land, resources and industries, but are also super-mobile, travelling in conspicuous luxury and exhibiting conspicuous consumption that makes them 'feel "at home"' (p.96) wherever they are in the world. 'Mobile relationships: intimacy at a distance' is examined in Chapter 5. Managing intimacy and familial structures with partners that are physically separate dominates this discussion. Chapter 6, 'Consuming to excess,' concludes the thematic chapters. This chapter links the consequences of mobile lives with consuming the world's resources in high-carbon societies and associated excess and waste. Pertinent photographs illustrate mobility at appropriate places.

I was particularly interested in how the complex mobility of individual lives might have wider community effects. The neighbourhood networks of communities have been positively associated with individual and population health and well-being (Folland, 2007; Mohnen *et al.*, 2011). The influence of mobility on neighbourhoods receives some consideration in Chapter 4, which pertains to the global mobility of the elite and the world's richest people. The authors argue that the excessive consumption of places, as in luxury tourist travel, negatively influences local neighbourhoods, which would in turn strive to match the consumption of the highly visible and mobile elite. Whilst this is a reasonable argument, I would have appreciated some insight in other chapters about the effect on neighbourhood social capital of the families affected by intense mobility. For example, in Chapter 5 on mobile relationships, the authors focus on 'Robert' and 'Gemma' as a couple with children. There is much interesting discussion about the myriad of impacts on their family life because of the distanced relationship, including domestic chores, childcare and sex; but there is little discussion of the effect of these on the broader networks of communities, such as school networks, sports clubs, neighbourhood and work social networks. Chapter 3, 'Networks and inequalities,' touches on the development and maintenance of social capital through physical contact and actual meetings, but there is no association with healthy homes and cities within this theme.

In general, though, discussions throughout the book were thorough within their context. I enjoyed reading this book, especially the theoretical discussions.

For example, in the chapter on new technologies, the authors consider post-Kleinian theory about the processes of normal anxiety and its extension into neurotic anxiety. The discussion offers an interesting insight into understanding the implications of mobility and the engagement with the development of our emotional selves. Similarly, the fifth chapter on mobile relationships provides a broad outline of some of the social theory regarding processes of change affecting intimate relationships, including feminist theories. My preference would have been for more discussion and extension that integrated these theories with the other themes of the book in the final chapter. The authors presented four scenarios in the seventh and last chapter, each predicting what the next forty years for European/North American societies might be like. I would have liked more about the consequences on neighbourhood structures with consumption, miniature mobilities and so on; and perhaps some direction as to how or where to proceed with discussion and research, rather than just starting the discussion. Making sense of the mobile world is not straightforward and this book contributes significant detail and examples of mobile lives.

As a spatial epidemiologist, I was looking for mobility theory to inform issue identification and research design. My research focus pertains to understanding the influences of physical environment features on the health and well-being of individuals. This book alerts me to and informs me of the complex and mobile lives of individuals, but its lack of consideration of less affluent individuals and communities limits its applicability for my work. The populations that I focus on may be quite mobile because of inter-country migration or because they are transient, escaping less desirable aspects of their lives, but the focus of this book on affluent or aspiring affluent individuals within developed societies limits its applicability in a global context.

The authors state that mobility is ignored in much literature and I concur that there has been little discussion in the public health literature that is my normal reading. The mobility of populations – within populations, as well as the migration and movement of whole populations – is worth considering, but is given little significance in this book. Health systems, provision of health services and health funding models often seem to assume a stable population, so insight into how people are living and how their mobility may be associated with wealth and affluence, rather than poverty and hardship, is worth further consideration. Identifying health problems and issues, and undertaking longitudinal studies that will determine links and causes between wellness and disease will require much thought and careful research design and implementation. This book contributes to the social sciences in detailing the contexts of

daily lives, but it also provides valuable, thought provoking themes to shape research paradigms in other disciplines.

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THE CULTURES OF ALTERNATIVE MOBILITES:  
ROUTES LESS TRAVELLED

*Edited by Phillip Vannini*

Ashgate, Farnham and Burlington, 2009.  
279 pp. ISBN: 978-0-7546-7666-9 (hbk).

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Since the so-called 'mobility turn' mobilities research has expanded greatly in the social sciences. However, scholarship thus far has typically been centred on the two foci of 'automobility' (travel in automobiles) and 'aeromobility' (travel by airplane). Accordingly, this edited collection of essays successfully broadens the scope of analysis by 'seeking out alternative and marginal forms and sites of mobilities' (p. xviii). By taking a closer look at relatively unexplored mobile practices – from canoe travel in Minnesota, to Antarctic exploration, to bus travel in Santiago de Chile – through a multi-perspectival lens (the contributors hail from a range of countries and disciplinary backgrounds), the reader gains new and not infrequently unexpected insights into the social performances, identities and materialities of individual and group mobile experiences.

In Chapter 1, 'The Cultures of Alternative Mobilities', Vannini justifies the need for alternative research of this kind. 'By studying routes less travelled ethno-

graphically', he contends, 'we...take up a serious challenge...[yet] [i]t is hoped that a greater understanding of the social conditions, cultural dynamics, and idiosyncrasies, of alternative mobilities will reveal the strength of research grounded in day-to-day experiences and negotiations with transport systems' (pp.10–11). The remaining fifteen chapters in *The Cultures of Alternative Mobilities* are divided into three parts: Performing Space and Time; Mobile Biographies, Identities, and Lifestyles; and The Materialities of Mobility. As there is not room here to detail each chapter, I shall attempt to provide a general picture of what I believe to be the overall (resounding) strengths, and (few) weaknesses, of the text's alternative approach to mobilities research.

One surprising theme emerging from the chapters is an apparent shift, or perhaps extension, from a focus on routes, to a focus on the roots (origins) of routes. By this I mean the tendency toward favouring or rediscovering more traditional forms of travel and the satisfaction of overcoming the *travail*, or toil/labour entailed in the selected journeys (p.33). When canoeing in Minnesota, Waskul and Waskul prefer to use map and compass skills to navigate their way, because they feel that GPS navigation systems would seem disrespectful to the French Voyageurs who journeyed there two centuries ago (Chapter 2: 23). Further, Collis draws our attention to the members of a party of explorers in a 1997 expedition to the Antarctic South Pole who are praised as Australian heroes after rejecting assistance 'in the form of food drops, support vehicles, food caches...[and] the basic technology of sails on their sleds' (Chapter 3: 44). Similarly, Kleinert notes that yachtsmen and women who spend years circumnavigating the globe on sailboats, or 'cruising', enjoy the 'distinctively *decelerated* and peripatetic way of life...[as] an alternative to the "hypermobility" typical of Western societies' (Chapter 10: 160). Importantly, Kleinert reminds us that cruising, and, I would add, the return by some cultures to more traditional methods of travel, 'cannot simply be seen as an expression of a late modern way of life in the contemporary mobile age' (p.161). Rather, this is more usefully conceived of as a desire to find traditions within the history of mobility (or in the roots of routes). Such questions could potentially have been addressed in a summary section to this book.

Befittingly, *The Cultures of Alternative Mobilities* also provides the reader with animated glimpses into the mobile lives of 'others.' Examples include the striking figure of Colleen, in Boshier's chapter on commuting by boat in and around Vancouver: '[she] took the skiff to her workplace at the Greater Vancouver Mental Health Authority [and] [a]fter a high speed dash across the strait...she would get out of wet weather gear and into executive-woman gear' (Chapter 12: 200). Perhaps even more enlightening is the narrative of a young

woman who ran away from home as a child and was taken in by a chapter of the Hell's Angels in San Francisco, as told by Mitchell Jr. and Kubein. '[M]y motorcycle and I grew together', she says of her reflexive relationship with her self-constructed Harley and adds, 'as the machine took form so did I. I was not alone' (Chapter 15: 256). Additionally, this book highlights issues sometimes disregarded in mobility studies such as age diversity, specifically the heterogeneity and sociality of mobility in later life (Chapter 9) and gender inequality, e.g., the associative cluster binaries of house/stasis/femininity vis-à-vis horse/motion/masculinity (Chapter 3).

There are some less convincing aspects of the multi-authored approach to this book. First, I find that the eclectic nature of the various writing styles, ranging from informal to very formal, while somewhat refreshing, detracts a little from the overall cohesion of the text. There is also a small number of typographical errors. Second, there is varying success in the attempts to place the experiences of mobility into a theoretical framework which would significantly advance mobility studies as a whole. For example, I am intrigued, though somewhat dubious, about a particular point in Vannini and Vannini's discussion of ferry boat travel. The authors hope to 'engage the reader with our *description* of our life as islanders first and foremost', the reason for this being that '[o]ur ethnographic fragments are free of interpretation and theory because our everyday mobile practices are too' (Chapter 14: 230). Are description and engagement enough, I wonder?

That said, I regard two chapters in particular to have a particularly laudworthy balance of stimulating description and insightful analysis, namely, Bissell's 'Moving with Others: The Sociality of the Railway Journey' (Chapter 4), and Kidder's 'Mobility as Strategy, Mobility as Tactic: Post-Industrialism and Bike Messengers' (Chapter 11). Overall, I would highly recommend *The Cultures of Alternative Mobilities* to any scholar interested in mobilities research. This text provides an interesting, pragmatic and revealing overview of mobile experiences which are often underexplored or altogether missing from the existing mobilities literature.

THE POLITICS OF PROXIMITY:  
MOBILITY AND IMMOBILITY IN PRACTICE

*Edited by* Giuseppina Pellegrino

Ashgate, Farnham and Burlington, 2011. 157 pp. ISBN: 978-0-7546-7766-6 (hbk).

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The study of mobility encompasses a diverse range of movements, peoples, worldviews and lifestyles. It is a vast, broad and burgeoning area of study that reflects our changing dynamic world where 'mobility' is second nature to many, and for others a necessity imposed through violence, conflict and suffering. Whether we move because we want to travel, to see the world, for work or indeed because our lives have been subjected to some great upheaval, there are still some shared experiences evident across the diversity of 'mobilities' in the contemporary world. *The Politics of Proximity* is an important study that invites its readers to share in this incredible diversity, compelling in its insights and varied in its approach, both challenging and theoretically important. It politicises the issue of proximity, both physical and virtual, by asking important questions about space, time, and people. The essays in the book range from theoretically rich pieces to strongly data-led ones. Both approaches have their merits, allowing the reader to engage with the issue of mobility in a balanced, even handed way. Topics analysed include memorial sites, work and movement, migration, and urban mobility.

Anchored primarily in the earlier work of John Urry, the 'Introduction' provides an important overview of the nexus between mobility, proximity and immobility. Its elegant unpacking of these connections as well as the larger issues of politics and practice gives the reader a very clear map of the core argument threaded through the subsequent essays – that of the need to understand more closely the entanglements of mobility and immobility. The book is divided into three clear sections – all of which span a broad variety of geographical and theoretical contexts. The first section, 'Categories of Proximity/Mobility,' provides a clear, analytical frame for the rest of the book. The largely theoretical essays in this section range in their discussion from the question of redefining space for social action to an interrogation of the concepts of mobility and proximity through the lens of Karl Marx's study of work. The strength of this section is its thorough analytical investigation of the notion of mobility and proximity, however, I feel some of the discussion and points could have been more deeply grounded in relevant data.

The next section, 'Discourse/Identity on Proximity and Mobility,' is also an interesting, varied one, but is much more deeply grounded and data-driven. Discussions of 'automobilities' in Israeli and Sri Lankan migration patterns and issues of belonging at first glance seem at odds with one another, but at a more profound level connect important issues of memory and materiality with ideas of loss and belonging.

The final section, 'Global Firms/Urban Landscapes as Scenery for Proximity and Mobility,' is a current, insightful section that illuminates the complexities of movement amongst individuals working in multinational companies and in urban environments. This section is a rich, detailed one traversing and interconnecting issues of gender, class and ethnicity with ideas of social practice, mobility and proximity. It offers an in-depth analysis of exclusion and accessibility in diverse geographical contexts, finishing off with an excellent essay on mobility practice in Santiago de Chile.

*The Politics of Proximity* is a challenging book proving to be a difficult read in places, but it deals elegantly and forcefully with complex theoretical issues. Creating an edited book on the vast topic of mobility is a challenge given the diverse range of topics covered within this burgeoning area of study. The editor of this book, however, meets this challenge with rigor and exactitude, thereby offering those interested in the subject a fresh, analytical approach to the nexus between mobility, immobility and proximity.

#### MOBILE METHODS

*Edited by* Monika Büscher, John Urry and Katian Witchger  
Routledge, London and New York, 2010.  
206 pp. ISBN: 978-0-415-49242-3 (pbk).

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*Mobile Methods* is a collection of chapters on research methods for scholars focusing on mobility as a subject. In their 'Introduction,' Büscher, Urry and Witchger spell out the aim of the collection: to shed light on the emerging methods in research on mobility. Some of the methods are still in their infancy and methodological backgrounds between the approaches vary to a considerable degree. The editors are quick to point out that the collection is not meant as a definitive guide to one streamlined 'mobile method.' Instead it represents



a spectrum of possible approaches, some of which are theoretically and practically incongruent. Due to this wide variety I will summarise each chapter to give readers a clear overview.

Gillen and Hall explore the use of postcards in Britain the early 1900s. The chapter compares the uses of postcards in the 1900s and today. The authors describe in detail the extent to which postcards were used during this period, largely owing to the efforts of the British post office with several deliveries a day.

Jirón's chapter 'On becoming "la sombra/the shadow"' is a detailed description of the shadowing technique. Jirón's article discusses lifts from friends and the social component of these lifts, as well as the issues associated with using public transport, for a woman without her own car.

In 'Choreographies of leisure mobilities' Haldrup uses time geography, a method long established in geography, to differentiate travellers into those who seek a home away from home and those who seek to view every possible tourist attraction. Haldrup's argument is simple: the new mobility turn in social sciences can benefit from established methods.

Ferguson's article centres on the mobile practices of social welfare workers. He combines ethnographic material with important theoretical questions. The aim of the book set out in the 'Introduction' is to me best achieved in this article. Mobility is the subject at every level of this chapter. Ferguson explores how mobility has to be the focus of attention during every step of social work and therefore during every step of research into social work, a point, he argues, which has been neglected in earlier works. Mobility is the focal point at a client's house when children potentially in need of state intervention are either kept mobile to avoid the gaze of the social worker or the latter is effectively prohibited from moving about to prevent detection of transgressions, such as additional people living in the household. Ferguson then looks at the mobility of social workers to and from the client's house and the role cars and car travel plays within social workers' daily routines.

Molz discusses interactive travelling. She shows ways that travellers explore their destinations online and then add further information to the existing online data, creating a feedback loop between 'travel, technology and knowledge' (p.100). As a result of increased technological capabilities, travel then, according to Molz, has moved away from solitary intrepidity to a more social encounter, both on and off-line.

Watts and Lyons show through the use of a 'travel remedy kit' (p.136) that the perception of travel time during daily commutes is largely dependent on the way the time is filled. The authors argue that the length of time used to commute is secondary to the actual tasks fulfilled during the commute.

Büscher *et al.* describe three different projects, all of which are concerned with public involvement in the processes of technological creation and public awareness of the possibilities and dangers of electronic tracking.

Mondada discusses how geographies are open to interpretation. Using a breakdown service as her example she interprets mobile technology. Mondada dissects the bi-lingual phone conversation to show how geographies taken for granted at the outset of the conversation become increasingly fragmented and are subsequently reassembled with the help of other mobile communication devices.

Morel and Licoppe focus their research on the use of video telephony. The article discusses the use of different video telephony technologies and compares the different possibilities and downsides. After remaining largely on the level of a technological discussion the article finishes with the declaration that mobility studies need to theorise technology as part of mobility not as mere adjunct.

The final chapter, Ahas' 'Mobile positioning,' is a discussion of the different possibilities of tracking cellphones. Ahas uses his own research endeavours in Estonia as examples to delve into the intricacies of active and passive mobility studies through the statistical analysis of cellphone signals.

The openness of *Mobile Methods* is in my eyes a downside. The overarching framework laid down by the editors in their 'Introduction' does not reverberate through the individual contributions. Instead the reader is left to draw the connections or see the disjunctions between the different approaches.

Overall, I would have liked to see more theoretical discussions accompanying the rich practical advice on mobile research methods. Some of the authors, such as Morel and Licoppe, hint at underpinning deeper theoretical issues, then stay well clear of any in-depth discussion. Ferguson's chapter is an exception here, by situating mobile methods in existing research endeavours and drawing out the implications of mobile methods for social welfare research.

In my opinion *Mobile Methods* could have gained further depth if one of the authors had ventured into a discussion of existing criticisms of mobility stud-

ies in general or if a dissenting voice had been added. Part of this criticism could have explored the question of whether mobility as a topic is new or whether the new methods possible due to new technologies have opened up new avenues of exploration thus catapulting mobility into the focus of some researchers.

Lastly, ethical considerations do not seem to weigh as heavily in other disciplines as in anthropology. Few mentions are made of ethical issues involved with such methods as cellphone tracking.

Despite this criticism, *Mobile Methods* is certainly a good introduction into some of the methods in mobility studies. Many of the described approaches show either already existing efforts or opportunities to create mixed methods research. Equally, a number of different disciplines are represented, from human geography, sociology, communication systems, and social work to linguistics and digital literacies. Due to this variety of approaches, methodologies and disciplines, every reader should be able to find something of interest for their own research.

## MOBILITY

by Peter Adey

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267 pp. ISBN: 978-0-415-43400-3 (pbk).

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Within the discipline of geography Peter Adey's work has been closely associated with the emergence of a critically orientated, theoretically sophisticated and empirically nuanced examination of the geographies of airports, air travel and the politics embedded in these places (Adey 2004a, 2004b, 2006, 2009). Much of this thinking has recently been brought together in his book *Aerial Life* (Adey 2010). A reader familiar with Adey's work in this context will be surprised to see how far his new book goes beyond that specific focus in the effort to try and understand the significance and role of mobility as a central element in the fashioning of social worlds.

In writing the book, Adey is clear in its perspective and limits. Notwithstanding the seeming ubiquity of mobility Adey is keen to pay particular attention

to those moments when mobility as idea and as practice have been especially important. Consequently, and in many ways for the better, this is no mobilities omnibus, but rather a more strategically targeted intervention. This is made explicit where, as befits a book written within the Key Ideas in Geography series, Adey frames mobility in the first instance in terms of spatial rather than social displacement. Having clearly staked his ground out, Adey is however at pains to argue that his geographical perspective is a starting point for debate and discussion rather than an end point.

*Mobility* is organised into six substantive chapters whose discussions are explicitly framed around Adey's contention that the book represents both an examination of mobility and an examination of ideas about mobility. In addition to the main discussion each chapter also contains a varying combination of breakout boxes that highlight key ideas, methods and case studies for readers. In Chapter 1 Adey builds on the relational approach signaled in the book's preface. This approach seeks to shift us from regarding mobility as an ontological attribute of people and objects towards a sense of the mobility of people and objects being fashioned through their entanglement and engagement with other people and objects. Squarely located in the 'new mobilities paradigm' that authors such as Urry and Cresswell have begun to identify and perform, this chapter builds an approach that is not only relational, but which requires us to be sensitive to the myriad forms that those relationships take in the fashioning of mobilities. Chapter 2 specifically focuses on the discursive underpinning of mobility studies and the ways in which different examples and metaphors of mobility have been assigned significance. Chapter 3 explores the ways in which relationships of mobility are also political relationships. Chapter 4 shifts focus from ideas about mobility to the doing of mobility. In making this shift the chapter begins by working through methodological ideas about how to grasp practices of mobility, before using these ideas to discuss mobility as a visual and affective activity. Chapter 5 shifts again to reflect on the complex ways in which mobilities are mediated through processes of diffusion, through acting as mediators between things, and via their augmentation by the technologies that accompany mobile things. Obviously the key thread binding these chapters together is the relational approach that lies at the conceptual core of the book. However, weaving in and out of this is a strong sense of the contingent work required to fashion relations of mobility, a sense that stands in stark contrast to celebrations of the frictionless, hyper-kinetic which often accompanies discussion of processes such as globalisation and which seems less appropriate in a world shaken by recession, geopolitical change and the continuing reverberations of 9/11.

By way of a conclusion Adey reflects on the complex mobilities that run through Audrey Niffenegger's *The Time Traveler's Wife*. These are mobilities that on first blush express a relatively straight forward desire for proximity, but which upon further delving reveal the increasingly complex entanglement of multiple mobilities, their conceptualisation, practice and importantly unevenness. In this instance the reading is apt given that what the author has demonstrated throughout the book is the extent to which complex relationships of mobility course unevenly through our social fabric. The book, however, has not simply been about mobility, but also ideas about mobility. In this context Adey concludes in the ecumenical spirit that has animated the whole book by suggesting that what the book has revealed beyond the complexity of practised mobilities is the disparate disciplines, ideas and techniques through which mobilities have come to be understood. On this score Adey does not advocate subsuming these disparate understandings into a pan-disciplinary unity, but rather suggests a process of mutual recognition that recognises the ways in which our different ideas, techniques and findings move alongside each another in varied intellectual trajectories.

A key strength of the book is that it is self-aware of its own intellectual and disciplinary trajectory, without transforming that self-awareness into a disciplinary chauvinism. Indeed in this respect Adey has provided us with a model of integrative, ecumenical, but not assimilative multidisciplinary scholarship. The result is not the conceptual and contextual blancmange that mars some multidisciplinary research, but rather what has been produced is a book that provides a strategic and conceptually incisive introduction to a complex and developing field of study: a field of study that delves into a key set of constitutive relationships framing the social worlds which we inhabit. *Mobility* is a very readable, but complex book that demands attention from the reader. Whilst the chapters can be read individually, they do collectively interlock into something more than its constituent parts. Consequently, it is difficult to cherry-pick bits of the book without losing the thread of the book's wider argument. This might lessen the attraction of the book for undergraduate use where the study of mobilities is less likely to be a standalone course and where students' ability to engage with the ideas and examples proffered is more circumscribed. Nonetheless it is a book that can serve as a foundational text both for students being introduced to the study of mobilities in the social sciences, and for scholars researching in this rapidly growing and evolving field.