

EDITORIAL:

TOWARDS A MOVEMENT-DRIVEN SOCIAL SCIENCES
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‘Mobility’ has arguably become ‘an evocative keyword for the twenty-first century’ (Hannam, Sheller & Urry, 2006:1), along with associated terms such as ‘globalisation’ and ‘transnationalism’. As Sheller and Urry (2006:207) suggest, ‘all the world seems to be on the move’. A key question for social science researchers is how to engage with a world marked by unprecedented levels of movement: of people, information, ideas, objects and capital (Adey, 2010). Contemporary social scientists often refer to the increased interest in mobilities, comprising both metaphorical and physical movement occurring at multiple scales, as the ‘mobilities turn’ (Hannam, *et al.*, 2006; Wilson, 2009) or the ‘mobilities paradigm’ (Sheller & Urry, 2006). As this special issue attests, attention to mobilities in a physical and conceptual sense offers a starting point for rich transdisciplinary conversations.

In his seminal sociological texts, Urry (2000, 2007) discusses the centrality of mobilities to the contemporary world in relation to globalisation, the collapse of distance, the erosion of nation-states and the ordering of the social world beyond society. In these texts, Urry focuses on how sociality and identity are produced through contingent networks of moving people, ideas and material goods rather than the fixity of such people or goods within a place, region or country. While mobilities scholars suggest a need for research that ‘starts with the fact of mobility’ instead of taking ‘certain kinds of fixity and boundary for granted’ (Cresswell, 2011: 551), they also highlight a need to subject both mobilities and the study of mobilities to ‘more critical investigation’ (Robertson, 2010: 643). Such critical investigation could involve, for example, attention to the politics of mobilities as ‘an entanglement’ of movement, representation and practice (Cresswell, 2010:17) and to the politics of fixity, stasis and immobilities (Cresswell, 2010; Robertson, 2010). It could also involve attention to broader ontological, epistemological and ethical questions, including: (1) what we should think about mobilities as both a ‘social and political project’ and a ‘way of thinking about wider...spatial, infrastructural, and institutional’ transformations; (2) how we can think about mobilities ‘beyond simple human

capital accounts, on the one hand, and an overly-romantic engagement with movement, on the other'; and (3) what 'ethical and social justice issues' are inherent in the connections between mobilities and 'everyday life' (Robertson, 2010:643, also see Fahey & Kenway, 2010). Put simply, a key question for mobilities scholars is how their research might offer a means for confronting social, and necessarily environmental, issues 'rather more inventively' (Massey cited in Law, 1999:584; also see Robertson, 2010).

The international growth in research aiming to understand social and non-human phenomena through movement may be undeniable, but contemporary mobilities research 'builds upon long-established and broader-reaching developments in the social sciences' (Merriman, 2009:134). As examples, Merriman (2009:135) cites the founding of a number of transport-related journals in the 1950s, 1960s and later in the 1990s. Cresswell (2011) takes this further to suggest other precursors to the 'mobilities turn'. For example, he argues that Clifford's (1997) call for an engagement with 'routes', Castells' (1996) network society that now revolves around the 'spaces of flows' rather than the 'spaces of places', Augé's (1995) consideration of 'non-places' and Kaplan's (1996) expansion of these ideas to encompass a gendering of mobilities illustrate how scholars prior to the 'mobilities turn' were already 'arguing for a kind of thinking that takes mobility as the central fact of modern or postmodern life' (Cresswell, 2011:551). Similarly, Salazar (2010) highlights a long anthropological interest in the literal mobilities of peoples through migration, return migration and travel and the cultural understandings of mobility. Anthropology has generated insights into the way culture itself moves and traverses locations, contesting foundational assumptions of modern/mobile and traditional/territorial cultures (Salazar & Smart, 2011). The role of media images and technologies has also been studied in terms of transporting culture across borders of nationality as much as domesticity (eg., Morley, 2000). The new global privatisation of identity arising in part from such mobilisations of media focuses further areas of work (eg., Elliott & Lemert, 2006). Feminist geographers have, in contrast, critiqued transportation and planning scholars' inattention to the ordinary practices informing the everyday since the 1970s (eg., Law, 1999, 2002). And disability scholars have long raised questions about the accessibility of cities, built environments and transportation (eg., Gleeson, 1999a, 1999b; Imrie, 1996).

It is Cresswell's (2011) final point in his first review of mobilities for *Progress in Human Geography* that provides a backdrop for this special issue. He states that 'it is important that the mobilities turn does not become identified with a small group of mainly British writers and researchers' (Cresswell, 2011:555). Robertson (2010) also cautions that there is a risk that in mobilising and

fetishising mobilities as a kind of transdisciplinary, transnational ‘catch all’, we lose sight of the ongoing salience of place. How (im)mobilities and their representations reveal and perpetuate social stratification and inequalities in particular, localised contexts is a critical question. And so we turn now to the New Zealand context.

As is the case elsewhere, social sciences research in New Zealand has considered people’s everyday lives in relation to both geographical movement and shifting social policy since long before the ‘mobilities turn’. For example, migration, welfare and education have been the focus of extensive work by Bedford, Ho and Lidgard (2001), Ip (1995), Ip and Pang (2005), Leckie (1995), Spoonley (1993) and Tarling (2004) among others. Explicitly mobilities-focused New Zealand research is also, arguably, not new. During the 1990s, Robin Kearns, Robin Law and Brendan Gleeson, all geographers, published work within the subdisciplines of health, gender and disability geographies respectively. Notably, their explicitly mobilities-focussed research was broad in both scale and scope; it acknowledged the entanglement of movement, representation and practice (Cresswell, 2010) and considered the connections between specific (im)mobilities and ‘real’ social inequalities (Robertson, 2010). We will elaborate briefly.

Kearns’ (1990) very early work, conducted during state moves toward deinstitutionalisation, examined the ‘migration’ of people with mental illness from state institutions to community care and often homelessness. Then, funded by the Foundation for Research, Science and Technology, Kearns and co-authors contextualised their attention to ‘residential mobility experiences’ in relation to broader changes in urban demographics shaped by globalisation, deregulation and new consumption patterns (for example, see Kearns & Smith, 1994; Kearns, Smith & Abbott, 1991). Later work studied the mobility experiences of Maori leaving the city, and in one case, of a Maori population ‘returning home’ to a rural locality and negotiating housing and employment there (Scott & Kearns, 2000). More recent work has highlighted the interrelationships between the city, families and children’s ‘independent mobilities’ (see Bean, Kearns & Collins, 2008; Collins & Kearns, 2001; Collins, Bean & Kearns, 2009). This research has considered the spatiality of health, risk and danger in order to develop a more intricate analysis of the social environments of walking and driving in Auckland, New Zealand, and to examine the more coercive mobilities effects requiring car-dependence to maintain more dispersed social activities and networks.

Brendan Gleeson’s early New Zealand-based mobilities research was, like

Kearns, concerned with networks of social and collective interests. While located at the University of Otago, Gleeson (1999:173) wrote his *Geographies of Disability* to contribute to the broader project of analysing ‘the production of social space’ in Western urban capitalist sites. In particular, he considered the ‘mobility needs’ (Gleeson, 1999:173) of people with impairments in disabling environments and devoted one chapter to a case study of accessibility regulation in the city of Dunedin, New Zealand. Gleeson (1999:152–172) accedes that disability exclusion cannot be studied apart from the broader inequalities resulting in poverty and disenfranchisement and draws on Kearns’ earliest work (see above). He concludes that the more complex systems marginalising disabled people are tied to the commodification of land use rather than the commodification of mobility itself. Gleeson’s detailed documentary and empirical investigation of disabled people’s everyday mobilities highlights the value of focussing not only on mobilities *per se*, but also on competing mobility effects and their social consequences.

Finally, Robin Law’s (1999) striking analysis of ‘daily mobility’ as a framework for acknowledging the ‘cultural turn’ in human geography produced a new mode for feminist investigations of ‘women and transport’. Like Gleeson, Law’s work was conducted while she was based at the University of Otago and her groundbreaking 1999 article is still cited in contemporary mobilities publications (eg., Cresswell, 2011; Cresswell & Uteng, 2008; Vannini, 2009). Importantly, Law (1999:583) pre-empted later mobilities scholars’ caution that ‘the insights that the new literature sheds on the practices and meanings related to mobility should not distract us from the *politics* of mobility’ (original emphasis).

Robin Kearns and Brendon Gleeson remain active researchers, the latter no longer in New Zealand, and influential in the wider field of mobilities in the city. Despite her untimely death in 2003, Robin Law’s work has left us a powerful legacy. We dedicate this special issue to her.

This special issue of *Sites* grew out of the first and second New Zealand Mobilities Symposia. On one level, it exemplifies the promise of mobilities as a framework for promoting interdisciplinary conversations. At the same time, the issue functions to ‘test, stretch and add layers’ to mobilities as a conceptual framework (Newman & Falcous this issue). It considers diverse forms of mobility (human and non-human, everyday and occasional, physical and imaginary mobilities), reflects both the disconnections and connections between disciplinary perspectives (planning, public health, sport studies, geography, sociology, anthropology and the social studies of science), and attends

to immobility and stasis as well as movement and motion. While highlighting the interdisciplinary interchange (or conceptual mobilising) made possible through a mobilities focus, the articles in this issue also highlight some important political and ethical questions in relation to both bodily and imagined mobility, and the entanglement of movement, representation and practice (after Cresswell, 2010; Law, 1999; Robertson, 2010). These include: who wins and who loses (Newman & Falcous; Borovnik this issue); who defines mobility or immobility, in what ways and with what effects (Mansvelt & Zorn; Bell this issue); and how are the legacies of mobility habits and practices left in tangible and tacit traces? (Henry; Kearns, Boyle & Ergler this issue).

Henry's contribution takes up Cresswell's (2010:2) argument that much mobilities research has been conducted in the present and thus 'has implicitly contrasted a mobile now with a sedentary past'. By looking at the mobility of one person, in this case the twentieth century botanist Leonard Cockayne, Henry shows how the rhythm of movement in a life illustrates the significant rather than abstract ways in which mobility (and immobility) in the past are always embedded in our present. Henry's paper, as with Newman and Falcous', is thus stretching and adding breadth and depth to mobilities as a conceptual framework. Highlighting social, professional and physical mobilities, Henry's article illustrates the tensions often inherent within movement and concludes by suggesting that looking back to 'glimpse an intricate and intimate community with its own varied dynamics of mobility' enriches our understanding of mobilities in New Zealand today.

The contributions by Newman and Falcous and Mansvelt and Zorn both take up Robin Law's challenge that we focus on the politics as well as the practices and meanings of mobility. Newman and Falcous raise the question of 'who wins' in relation to sporting (im)mobilities, describing as a 'mobilities paradox' the way in which some bodies' freedom of movement within globalised sporting relationships contributes to (or rests upon) other bodies' immobility. Newman and Falcous highlight sport as an area that has received little attention in the mobilities literature and demonstrate its usefulness as a lens for considering both physical and geopolitical (im)mobilities and inequalities.

Borovnik's contribution also builds on the influences of Cresswell (2010) and Law (1999). Her paper concentrates on the mobilities and immobilities of workers on board container ships, highlighting the political and economic imperatives that influence their embodied movement and how they perform, narrate and share their understandings of their often closely enforced (im)mobility. Borovnik suggests that the very neoliberal processes that have allowed

a greater flexibility in who works on container ships have, at the same time, limited these workers' movements. Through her examples, Borovnik's paper recognises the fluidity of the shipping industry, yet emphasises that this very fluidity reveals the immobilities, inequalities and moorings inherent in the lives of those working in this industry. Her work informs an emergent body of investigation into maritime mobilities – or what could be called 'watery mobilities' (Cresswell, 2011: 555).

In contrast, Mansvelt and Zorn consider the flows of mobilities in the home, examining what constitutes mobility versus immobility for a group of home-based older people living with impairments in a semirural New Zealand city. While acknowledging that physical mobility limitations can result in both 'social and spatial exclusion', Mansvelt and Zorn discuss the ways in which their study participants talked about mobilities as 'more than' physical, highlighting different understandings of mobility (for example, as connectedness and predictability) and the flexibility of non-human entities in facilitating mobility for older people.

The contribution from Kearns, Boyle and Ergler also engages mobilities at a personal level informing more structural mobilities investigations of 'auto-mobilities' (eg., Beckman, 2001; Sheller & Urry, 2000; Urry, 2004). Kearns *et al.* report on an interpretive study with adolescents who had had childhood experiences of supervised walking in local neighbourhoods on school days. The words and images used by the participants belie lingering 'traces' of their earlier experiences; the conceptual framework for data analysis yields a more interrelated set of influences on personal mobilities decisions that will be of interest to other empirical researchers.

Bell's contribution examines the sociology of mobilities' extrapolation of the social order produced by human movement in and out of social interaction. She argues that the privileging of independent modes of physical movement immobilises the more dependent, and sometimes motionless, social actors. Bell's paper turns to anthropological perspectives on sensory, kinaesthetic movement to show that sociological and anthropological claims intertwine on the way mobile bodies shape interactions when people make contact.

Two short articles complete this issue. One (Perkins) is a research note on the views of contemporary mobilities researchers in various disciplinary locations. The second (Clery) is a report on an interdisciplinary development that challenges conventional disciplinary approaches to studying migration, transnationalism and travel and may offer new possibilities for exciting mobilities

research in the Asia Pacific.

Finally, this special issue would not have been possible without the support of the Building Research Capability in the Social Sciences (BRCSS) network. Through a Seeding Social Sciences Research Initiatives (SSSR1) grant awarded to the University of Otago in 2010, the guest editors were given the opportunity to work together on a number of mobilities projects. This culminated in a 1½ day Symposium held at the University of Otago in November 2010. The collective contributions of 23 speakers from around New Zealand (and a post-graduate speaker from Australia) and a very interactive audience resulted in a successful symposium. With keynote speaker Monika Büscher on video link from the Centre for Mobilities Research (CeMoRe), Lancaster University, UK, the 1st Mobilities symposium focused on Mobile Methods. It highlighted the breadth of mobilities research being undertaken in New Zealand – and across the Tasman. It aimed overall to respond to Elliott and Urry's (2010:21) call for 'a rather different kind of social science'.

A 2nd Mobilities Symposium was hosted by Maria Borovnik, Matt Henry and Imran Muhammad at Massey University in 2011, also supported in part by BRCSS, and focused on Neighbourhoods. Again, it featured CeMoRe at Lancaster, this time with Prof John Urry as one of two non-flying keynote speakers and with Dr David Bissell flying in as the second from across the Tasman. By the time of publication of this special issue of *Sites*, the 3rd Mobilities Symposium will have been held at the University of Auckland, hosted by Robin Kearns, Francis Collins and Christina Ergler, and by Karen Witten of Massey University. It has been promoted by BRCSS and supported by the New Zealand Geographical Society, SHORE and the 'Transforming Cities: *Innovations for Sustainable Futures*' Thematic Research Initiative at the University of Auckland. Once again, a non-flying keynote address will be presented from Lancaster University, by Prof Tony Gattrell who will address the theme of Mobilities and Wellbeing. Dr David Conradson will give the second keynote address, flying in from post-quake Christchurch.

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Martha Bell, Tara Duncan and Vivienne Anderson (Guest Editors)

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