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Book review

Essay: Complexity and justice in mobilities studies: What's in it for transport geographers?

Mobilities and Complexities, edited by Ole B. Jensen, Sven Kesselring and Mimi Sheller. 2019. Oxon: Routledge. £88 (hardback); £24 (paperback); £15 (e-book). ISBN: 987-1-138-60143-7.

Mobility Justice: The Politics of Movement in an Age of Extremes, by Mimi Sheller. 2018. London: Verso. £56 (hardback); £12 (paperback); £10 (e-book). ISBN-13: 978-1-78,873-092-1.

Mobilities, Mobility Justice and Social Justice, edited by Nancy Cook and David Butz. 2019. Oxon: Routledge. £92 (hardback); £20 (e-book). ISBN: 978 = 0-8153-7703-0.

'What's in it for transport geographers?' This is the question underpinning my review of three monographs from the field of mobilities studies published within the last two years. Attempting to answer a more difficult epistemological question is a prerequisite. What is the field of mobilities studies insofar as it aligns with, differs from, and/or overlaps with transport geography?

Throughout this review, I take an approach informed by Shaw and Hesse (2010). Transport geography can maintain its (slippery) distinctiveness. Yet, in order to productively address the complexity and urgency of some of the most pressing issues today, it is imperative that transport geographers are open to informing their work conceptually by mobilities research. Two of these texts are concerned with mobility justice and issues of power and movement, for example, the injustice caused when transport structures privilege one group of society over another.

To give the reader a grounding in my point of view, I first discuss contemporary academic categorization processes, and my place within the current world of scholarship.

1. A field of epistemological paradoxes

Contemporary academia, increasingly full of contradictions and paradoxes, asks us to be interdisciplinarians, yet, at the same time, to occupy clear, traditional and recognisable homes. This enactment of professional identity entails practices of line drawing, demarcation, border crossing, and boundary transgression. As we will see in the commentary of 'Mobilities and Complexity', this highly productive, open way of scholarly being is something the late John Urry excelled at. To draw on a mobilities concept it may be seen as a kind of dwelling-in-motion. That is, he identified as a sociologist while physically, conceptually and epistemologically roaming and crossing disciplines to form new perspectives. Similarly, it is through the review of these texts that I call on transport geographers to consider the usefulness of concepts from the emerging (and burgeoning) field of mobilities research, without trepidation concerning the subsuming of their 'home base'.

In the interests of transparency, I here acknowledge my own scholarly position for you to understand the *Weltanschaunng* or worldview I bring to the review of these mobilities texts for an audience of transport geographers. Primarily a Germanist, I have taken an interdisciplinary approach by utilising mobilities studies as a framework for the cultural analysis of literature and film.[1] Drawing on the seminal text, 'The New Mobilities Paradigm' (2006) by Mimi Sheller and John Urry enabled me to conceptualise and to apply to literary travel text analysis the contradictory but coexistent forces of dwelling (in a Heideggarian sense), on the one hand, and extreme mobility, on the other. This experience is common among the contributors to the texts reviewed in the present essay. The researcher, somewhat lost (or academically immobilized) searches for a specific type of conceptual vocabulary, then comes across the work of Sheller and/or Urry and becomes unstuck (mobilised). What ensues is an epistemological transition from one scholarly position and approach to another informed by concepts and frameworks from mobilities research.

2. What is the field of mobilities studies and how does it align with, differ from, and/or overlap with transport geography?

> All the world seems to be on the move. […] The scale of this travelling is immense. […] These diverse yet intersecting mobilities have many consequences for different peoples and places that are located in the fast and slow lanes across the globe. There are new places and technologies that enhance the mobility of some peoples and places and heighten the immobility of others, especially as they try to cross borders[.] (207).

In 2006, sociologists Mimi Sheller and John Urry published 'The New Mobilities Paradigm' setting out paradigmatically, a framework for a mobility turn that had been arising in the social sciences since the mid-1990s. Mobilities scholars investigate the movement of people, ideas and things, and the social and political consequences of mobility and immobility. This turn was a critical rejoinder to traditional static social science approaches that had ignored the dynamism, plurality and significant implications of mobility and mobilities. The paradigm, informed by "anthropology, cultural studies, geography, migration studies, science and technology studies, tourism and transport studies" has had a reframing impact on sociology itself, as well as being applied to an ever-increasing number of academic disciplines.

In their 2010 essay "Transport, geography and the 'new' mobilities" authors Jon Shaw and Markus Hesse examine that which they view as:

[1] In 2011, as a doctoral student, I took part in the conference of T2M International Association for the History of Traffic, Transport and Mobility's International Summer School: The Passenger: Mobility in Modernity. Here, while somewhat on the periphery of my academic field of vision, themes linked to transport studies and transport geography piqued my interest, particularly in work of researchers such as Gordon Pirie and Gijs Mom. Thus, I would see myself as a Germanist situated within the wider mobilities family, with transport academics as second cousins.

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"two elements of contemporary geography that are concerned with movement […] 'mobilities' […]and the more 'traditional' approach of transport geography" (305). Hesse and Shaw observe that "Transport geographers might regard mobilities as 'too cultural' and mobilities scholars sometimes see transport geography as 'too traditional'" (307). They do not argue for a total conflation of these two areas (307). However, they do expound the need for a closer relationship and better understanding between both disciplinary areas. Hesse and Shaw set this out in relation to policy-making:

> Transport geographers who overlook the potential contribution of the mobilities literature to their work will miss out on key insights into the underpinnings, experiences or representation of transport and travel. Conversely, mobilities geographers not engaging with policy debates will diminish the likelihood of their work having an impact beyond immediate academic circles. (309).

Hesse and Shaw's work shows us that, on the one hand, disciplinary lines are easily blurred because "in practice there is considerable heterogeneity evident in both approaches" (307). On the other hand, borrowing from and applying methods from the 'other' discipline could have (and, in some cases, is already having) positive practical implications for the way in which transport structures are experienced by people. For example, the authors note, that, in short: "bringing a mobilities perspective to cycling is important because it could lead to better policymaking" (309).

With this in mind, I now turn to the three books emerging from mobilities studies, to see what these texts might offer the contemporary transport geographer. I first consider 'Mobilities and Complexities' edited by Ole B. Jensen, Sven Kesselring and Mimi Sheller. This text pays homage to the late co-founder of the new mobilities paradigm, John Urry, through the voices of scholars with whom he worked or who were influenced by him. I then review two books together that are focused on the topic of mobility justice. 'Mobility Justice: The Politics of Movement in Age of Extremes' is authored by co-founder of the new mobilities paradigm, Mimi Sheller. 'Mobilities, Mobility Justice and Social Justice' is a collection of essays edited by Nancy Cook and David Butz.

3. Mobilities and complexities: reflections on the life and work of John Urry

'Mobilities and Complexities' is a rare kind of academic love letter by scholars from around the world influenced by the presence and work of the late Lancaster University based John Urry. Initially the reader might regard such an approach, underlain with strong affective qualities, as having the potential to detract from substantive rigour. However, my view is that this personification of experience - the authors' tendencies to connect aspects of Urry's scholarship with their own personal career trajectories - adds to the substantive quality of this text. For example, by writing while on the move, Phillip Vannini perceives a greater quality to writing his chapter in terms of connecting with Urry's mobilities work, its influence on his own, and how Urry has impacted his thinking about his own personal journeys.

3.1. Urry's disciplinary openness and frontier setting approach

In their introduction to the book, the editors make note of Urry's wide-ranging impact, both regarding the enormity of the subject matter he took on and his countenance and production of interdisciplinary approaches:

> He helped to identify the deep histories, emergent patterns, and key issues that are reshaping the contemporary world. But beyond that he also made us more excited about sociology as a vital field of study that could move beyond disciplinary boundaries to engage in a more far-reaching social science and humanities perspective. (1).

Geographer Tim Creswell speaks of Urry's open and inclusive approach: "While others appeared stuck in a fervent role of advocacy for some theory or theorist, Urry was capacious in his ability to see something of value in a range of approaches" (11). This, Creswell continues, is likely why Urry's scholarship involved "sparks", "new directions", and "so many productive tangents" (11).

One of Urry's former PhD students, Chia-Ling Lai, makes comment on how Urry's "capacity to incorporate new ideas and challenges" led him to "define new sociological territories", including the creation of "a new framework that converges complexity well" (79). By this I infer Lai to be making reference to Urry's formative role as co-founder of the new mobilities paradigm.

Thomas Birtchnell, whose research interests are on the interface between sustainable urban development and technological innovation, lauds Urry for "the depth that could be given to apparently planar subjects" (13). Of interest to transport geographers may be Birtchnell's comments that: "John Urry's research finds a natural bedfellow with spatial research and has an affinity with the discipline of human geography despite his adamance that sociology was his intellectual home." (17). Further, of Urry's interest in futures, Birtchnell comments: "The futures that originally inspired John Urry were composed from a 2×2 matrix built on two axes of uncertainty: acceptance of / resistance to intelligent infrastructure and high/low impact transport" (16).

Here we might recall the work of Hesse and Shaw who note that transport geographers who close the door on mobilities research might miss key insights into the underpinnings, experiences or representation of transport and travel. Taking this into account, the reader might do well, not only to draw on the extensive and insightful work of Urry's canon, based in sociology, yet highly cross-disciplinary, but also to take a leaf from his productively open academic approach. Following Urry's approach we might hope to widen and mobilise our existing disciplinary views and make new holistically informed connections on the state of the contemporary world and some of the extreme global challenges we face.

3.2. Phillip Vannini's physical and epistemological journey with John Urry

Of particular interest to transport geographers may be the chapter in 'Mobilities and Complexities' written by ethnographer Phillip Vannini. It is entitled 'On a pilgrimage: A journey with John Urry.' In this chapter Vannini describes a physical journey using multiple methods of transport in the harsh Canadian winter involving "a ferry boat, a car, an airplane, a subway train, and a seaplane" (71). He also describes an epistemological journey of transition, inspired by John Urry, whom he never met in person: "And so along the route, I, too, one transport mode after another, will seek a metaphysical connection with someone whose words have left a profound trace on me and my work" (71).

Vannini recalls a sense of liberation from traditional static sociology after reading Urry's 'Sociology beyond Societies' (1999). Vannini had gone on a journey searching for ways to conceptualise his seemingly mundane interests of ferry or plane trips. Urry's work allowed for him to shine an academic light on the experience of these journeys as legitimate objects of enquiry.

> Rather than frozen "institutions", Urry remarked in that book, we should play close interest to attention to the flows of people, goods, and information intersecting at multiple junctions across the world. Sociology until then had understood mobility to be vertical – as in a metaphorical movement across classes – and neglected to examine it as a horizontal phenomenon based on actual physical movement. […] [I] turned to the fledging field of mobilities and its conceptual vocabulary (71).

Vannini provides an example in relation to conceptual frameworks he found highly productive for his ethnography work stemming from mobilities. This concerns Urry's writing on the lived experience in cars,

otherwise termed 'automobility'. Rather than just a mode of transport to get from point A to point B, automobility highlights the significance of lived experiences and meanings created during driving time. Vannini discusses the way in which Urry's writing extended his thinking of ethnographic fieldwork in terms of: "inhabiting today's cars [as] a way of dwelling-in-this-world" (73). Whenever receiving the keys to a new rental car, he recalls Urry's correlation of automobility with the freedom of the road. He explains "Ethnography, like automobility and *thanks* to automobility, gives the same source of freedom to me, the freedom of the road" (73).

Vannini identifies strongly with Urry's popularisation of the use of mobile methods and moving with the object of enquiry. "Increasingly mobile fieldwork for me has also meant mobile writing […] in airports, airplanes, boats, hotels, and terminals of all sorts" (745). Vannini connects this idea to the physical journey of his pilgrimage chapter.

> This is why today I wanted to write this essay in John's memory on the go, like this. […] [B]y being mobile today I feel I can be more open to the ideas of a man who, like me, loved going places and thinking and learning along the way. (75).

3.3. Claus Lassen's transition away from conventional transport research

Another chapter from 'Mobilities and Complexities' which may be of interest to transport geographers is Claus Lassen's whose research analyses changing social relations in the light of international air travel. Lassen's chapter is entitled 'How one book and one meeting shaped my aeromobilities research'. Like Vannini, he writes of the profound influence that Urry's 'Sociology beyond Societies' had on his approach, sparking a transition from conventional transport researcher to being centrally guided by the concepts of the mobilities turn. "[Urry] gave me a new perspective on my own habitus as a transport planner" (169). To Lassen the ways in which Urry "criticizes some of the basic assumptions and approaches in conventional transport research" (170) was revelatory and mirrored aspects of his own thinking. He explains further:

> Through the new mobility paradigm I found a home for my own concerns that transport research placed too little emphasis on the social motives for transport, focused too much on quantitative methodologies and mathematical language, and paid too little attention to interdisciplinarity. (171).

For Lassen, it was a meeting with Urry in 2002 and an invitation to visit him at Lancaster which cemented Urry's place as a figurehead in the work of Lassen. Indeed, it was John Urry's presence and human-centred approach which was at the centre of his legacy according to the authors of 'Mobilities and Complexities' as noted by his Lancaster colleague Lynne Pearce, in the Afterword of this text. She writes:

> For the majority of contributors […] it was seemingly John's ability to keep the human in view, even while confronting the dire consequences of complex inhuman dependencies and their 'path dependencies' that was his biggest achievement. (231).

4. Mobility Justice: the enabling and disabling social and political forces of (im)mobilities

4.1. What is mobility justice?

One of the advantages of mobilities research is that it recognises and makes central experiences of mobility which have traditionally been overlooked. Arguably more important is the fact that this approach uncovers and makes manifest the political, economic and social forces enabling the mobility of some and the immobility of others. It also reveals and highlights the environmental consequences of im/mobilities.

Two texts 'Mobility Justice' by Mimi Sheller and 'Mobilities, Mobility Justice and Social Justice' edited by Nancy Cook and David Butz explore these ideas. In their introduction, Cook and Butz set about painting a picture of what mobility justice is about. They write:

> Mobility is a resource for (non)human agency and the performance of daily life. But mobilities also have differential and troubling consequences, as attested by climate change and those marginalized social groups immobilized in the slow lances of life or forced into the express line. (3).

Sheller sets up a similar context for her monograph highlighting the urgent nature of this issue.

> All around the world people and governments are grappling with a series of crises relating to how we move. […] Mobility justice is one of the crucial political and ethical issues of our day. It focuses our attention on the politics of unequal capability for movement, as well as unequal right to dwell or stay in a place. […] (1).

Sheller relates the benefits of the critical lens of mobility justice in terms of highlighting the unevenness of transport systems. "It allows us to think more clearly about the intertwined relations between bodies, streets, transport systems, urbanization […] regional and transnational infrastructures, national borders and wider planetary boundaries" (1).

While both books look at mobility justice, in general Sheller's text has more of a meta lens. By this I mean she is focused on the way in which issues of mobility justice are embedded in wider social processes. It follows that the crises of today require solutions which bring together a wide range of viewpoints and disrupt historically engrained governance and power structures. It is only in taking such an approach that we might even begin to address the inequality and uneven structures in our increasingly mobile world.

'Mobilities, Mobility Justice and Social Justice' does not necessarily counter Sheller's viewpoint or approach. Rather, it offers something different in terms of its structure. That is, it looks at issues of mobility justice in essays from a variety of authors and viewpoints. Read together, both texts complement each other well insofar as presenting the concept of mobility justice a variety of examples from different contexts and from both close up and big picture vantage points.

Sheller's text is concerned primarily with social and environmental issues (see, for example, Chapter 6: Planetary Ecologies and Climate Justice). Cook's and Butz's text adds to these topics a section on 'Justice and more-than-human mobilities', which includes a focus on animal mobilities.

One contributor to this section, Jacob Bull is a geographer interested in the role of animals in understandings of space, place and identity. He sets out why more-than-human mobilities are critical topic for investigation. Specifically, Bull looks at the movements of ticks and impacts of the negative affect associated with the health risks ticks pose. He writes:

> A complementary step to ecologizing human mobilities involves attending to the mobilities of animals, not only how they facilitate human mobilities and moorings, but also how they themselves are fixed or mobile. […] [T]ick movements are productive in that they contribute to the emergence of vulnerabilities and shifting forms of governance. […] People are not the only powerful actors in the production of mobility. […] I focus on the ways in which ticks 'do work' within the social, biological, technological systems that produce vulnerabilities. (234–5).

By looking at the interrelations between ticks, the transmission of disease, global movements, affective representations and governance structures, Bull provides an unanticipated new perspective on mobility justice. More broadly, to Bull, mobility justice goes beyond a general critical approach to mobilities which "engages how mobilities shape social structures" to examine "more pointed questions about who and what can and cannot move, and how mobility as socially differentiated practice produces and is produced by power" (235).

4.2. New perspectives on mobility injustices in different transport areas

The different chapters in 'Mobilities, Mobility Justice and Social Justice' set out these issues from varying viewpoints. Mobilities geographer Weiquian Lin chapter 'Aeromobility justice' makes note of air travel as one of the most significant examples of where "spatial mobility plays an influential role in differentiating the socioeconomic lives of people structuring society's hierarchies" (41). He points out the way in which scholarship in this area has importantly dismissed "any (false) notion of the ascendancy of a uniformly hypermobile word" (43). Lin gives the example of "[t]he divergence in aeronautical know-how between unequally positioned states in the world's technological hierarchy [as] constitut[ing] another instance of (aero)mobility injustice" (47).

4.3. Conceptualising mobility justice beyond immediate frameworks

Throughout 'Mobility Justice' Sheller presents a holistic imperative: in order to address issues of mobility justice, one must look beyond the immediate system. In other words, the global crises of today require big picture, cross-disciplinary solutions. Thus, while important, it is not enough to look at measures to advocate for "more sustainable and just mobilities" (5) such as vehicle sharing. Rather, she argues, "debates over sustainable urbanism, transport justice, and urban accessibility should be placed in the context of wider transnational mobility regimes, including questions of colonialism, borders, tourism, and migration". (18) The result of such an approach, Sheller sets out, would be: "build [ing] more politically effective alliances and gain[ing] greater leverage over the urgent problems that will ineluctably shape our ways of moving, mobilizing, dwelling and living in the near and distant future" (17).

The transport geographer may be particularly interested in Sheller's chapter 'Beyond Automobility and Transport Justice'. In this chapter she considers the "deeply dominant system of automobility" and the difficulty of moving beyond it (69).

Sheller concludes 'Mobility Justice' with a list of principles of mobility justice which have emerged for her "from this process of rethinking transport justice and spatial justice in relation to the multiscalar crises of our age of extremes" (171). This list is intended to incite discussion and action. It includes the following principle: "Universal design should be required in all public facilities to ensure accessibility to all people and especially access to all modes of public transport and media" (173).

5. So where to now?

From my point of view, these three books on mobilities offer some important lessons that transport geographers and academics more broadly may wish to take on board. From John Urry and those who wrote about his life, work, and interactions, we learn the following. We, as scholars, can occupy a 'traditional' academic home. But we will not grow and be epistemologically well informed unless we are willing to be open to and apply concepts from other disciplines. Here, Hesse and Shaw remind the transport geographer to take on board concepts from mobilities research in order gain important insights into the underpinnings, experiences or representation of transport and travel.

Scholars focusing on mobility justice teach us that it's not enough to simply look at the social and environmental implications of a mobile world. We also need to look at the uneven ways in which this plays out and to address the inequalities, that, for example, the design of a city's public transport system, can produce. Mimi Sheller emphasises the urgency of the global social and environmental crises we face today. She emphasises the need to work together, to looks at these extremes of movement from different disciplines and of the need to uncover and disrupt historically embedded processes creating injustices of im/mobility.

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