

## 1. Dictionary

# Mobilities paradigm

By Javier Caletrío (Sociologue)

The mobilities paradigm is a way of seeing the world that is sensitive to the role of movement in ordering social relations. It serves to legitimize questions about the practical, discursive, technological, and organizational ways in which societies deal with distance and the appropriate methods for their study.

---

*Acknowledgement: I am grateful to the late John Urry for his comments in November 2014 on an early version of this text focusing on Kuhn's notion of paradigm and whether mobilities research deserves the status of paradigm.*

## Long definition

### Dealing with distance

Dealing with distance is a vital dimension of social life. This is a foundational tenet of the mobilities paradigm. Societies have dealt with distance in different ways in order to seek shelter and security, exert and defend themselves against violence, control territories and populations, obtain food, water and other resources, trade, manufacture, organize collective action, cultivate friendship, maintain family life, gain knowledge, experience pleasure, and satisfy spiritual needs. A fundamental aspect of living is learning to deal with distance and this learning process is socially organized, taking different forms in different social groups and moments in time. As an object of study, this issue was explicitly addressed during the twentieth century by only a few rather scattered and isolated researchers and, in general, the social sciences largely overlooked the role of distance (and the movement to overcome that distance) in social life <sup>1</sup>.

### A new synthesis

In the 1990s and 2000s some of this early work began to be retrieved and synthesised along with a wide range of new contributions inspired by, and responding to, the new condition of 'globalization'. This work has expanded considerably and now constitutes what is known as the 'new mobilities paradigm' <sup>2</sup>. The term paradigm was first applied to mobilities research by Mimi Sheller and John Urry in their 2006 paper and many scholars have since agreed (at least tacitly) upon the existence of a new way of seeing social life with distinctive concepts, methods and research exemplars. It is the synthesis proposed by Mimi Sheller and John Urry that is discussed in this text.

## Studying movement and distance in social life

One can begin to explain the mobilities paradigm by saying that it is an analytical approach that puts distance and movement at the centre of the study of place (geography), solidarity (sociology), scarcity (economics), violence (politics) and ecologies (environmental studies). Central to the mobilities paradigm are questions about who and what moves and the implications for a number of issues in contemporary societies such as identity, lifestyles, social cohesion, wealth creation and distribution, ecological and territorial dynamics, and environmental justice across social groups and generations. In addressing these questions researchers often begin with a focus on the fact of movement using mobility practices, narratives and meanings of mobility as a way of examining how social relations are constituted. There are differing views about the power of the mobilities paradigm to transform the social sciences. Mimi Sheller and John Urry argue that 'The new mobilities paradigm seeks the fundamental recasting of social science <sup>3</sup>' while other authors may feel more comfortable with viewing it simply as a heuristic device opening new angles to reveal hitherto hidden or unnoticed connections, patterns and dynamics.

The mobilities paradigm connects with and borrows insights from related fields such as globalization and media studies, migration research, and transport geography, but from its inception a distinct concern has been the inter-related movements of people, objects information and ideas, and the different scales and infrastructures through which such movements occur. This opens up opportunities for linking seemingly disparate disciplines and fields of study in a wide spectrum from the sciences and the humanities to the physical sciences. This intellectual openness also concerns an orientation to experiment with methods that could generate new insights by virtue of literally following the object of inquiry and the multiple traces and connections of that movement. A lively discussion has developed in the field of mobilities studies concerning the use and development of these 'mobile methods'.

Video: Monika Büscher on Mobile methods for a mobile world.

## Development

### The language of 'mobilities'

'All societies', John Urry argues, 'deal with distance but they do so through different sets of interdependent processes (...) these processes stem from five interdependent 'mobilities' that produce social life organized across distance and which form (and re-form) its contours. These mobilities are:

- The corporeal travel of people for work, leisure, family life, pleasure, migration and escape, organized in terms of contrasting time-space modalities (from daily commuting to once-in-a-lifetime exile)
- The physical movement of objects to producers, consumers and retailers; as well as the sending and receiving of presents and souvenirs
- The imaginative travel effected through the images of places and peoples appearing on and moving across multiple print and visual media

- Virtual travel often in real time thus transcending geographical social distance
- The communicative travel through person-to-person messages via messages, texts, letters, telegraph, telephone, fax and mobile <sup>4</sup>

The mobilities paradigm 'emphasises the complex assemblage between these different mobilities that may make and contingently maintain social connections across varied and multiple distances <sup>5</sup>'.

Further reading: review of Urry's book Mobilities.

## **Mobilities in the plural**

This emphasis on mobilities in the plural directs attention to the multiple and varied conditions of possibility, meanings, practices and forms of life associated with movement. Much of the conceptual work being undertaken in the mobilities paradigm concerns how to account for mobilities as a phenomenon which is relational, multifaceted and context dependent. For example, in one of the most celebrated conceptual accounts of mobility, cultural geographer Tim Cresswell invites us to pay attention not merely to physical movement from A to B, but also to culturally embedded ideas of mobility (e.g. mobility as freedom, as a sign of modernity, as a threat and lack of commitment) and embodied practices (e.g. jogging, dancing, walking in the countryside, driving) through which the physical movement from A to B is realized. In so doing we gain a more nuanced understanding of mobility and its role in sustaining social connections across multiple distances.

In another important contribution Peter Adey, also a cultural geographer, has underlined the importance of understanding mobilities relationally. This involves acknowledging that 'One kind of mobility seems to always involve another mobility. Mobility is never singular but always plural. It is never one but necessarily many. In other words mobility is really about being mobile-with <sup>6</sup>'. This also involves acknowledging that 'mobilities are commonly involved in how we address the world. They involve how we form relations with others and indeed how we make sense of this. In this way mobility may mean an engagement with a landscape; it could be deployed as a label to make sense of an act of transgression; mobility may be engaged as a way to govern <sup>7</sup>.' To illustrate this we can think of highly nationalistic cultures that privilege reactive forms of attachment to place. In these places people who engage in other forms of dwelling such as travellers and gypsies may be regarded as transgressing the 'natural' order and conceived of as a threat. Mobility in this case acquires a negative connotation. Regulating who can move, with whom, where, how often, how fast, can be an effective way to control a population. All societies regulate mobilities and this regulation is often stricter in authoritarian regimes. During the Franco dictatorship in Spain (1939-1975) a woman needed her husband's signature to get a passport.

Another key contribution to this literature is the concept of motility as elaborated by Vincent Kaufmann. Kaufmann defines motility as 'the capacity of entities (e.g. goods, information or persons) to be mobile in social and geographic space, or as the way in which entities access and appropriate the capacity for socio-spatial mobility according to their circumstances <sup>8</sup>'. An interesting aspect of this way of thinking about mobility is the emphasis on the potential to be mobile and not just the actual movement of people. This gives scope to think about mobility in relation with the plurality of life projects,

expectations and aspirations that characterise any society.

These are only three of the many contributions being made by academics to develop a conceptual understanding of the way individuals and social groups deal with distance. Taken as a whole these concepts constitute a set of 'nuts and bolts' for understanding social life rather than a grand, overarching narrative of social change <sup>9</sup>. Although the work of these and other authors may sound abstract at some points, conceptual frameworks can make explicit how new insights relate to existing bodies of knowledge and how new research proposals can be narrowed down to produce original results.

Further reading: review of Cresswell's book On the Move, Kaufmann's concept of Motility.

Video: Cresswell on Mobility between movement, meaning and practice.

## **Systems**

Conceptual understandings of mobility often emphasize its systemic nature. Newcomers to the mobilities field may notice an intriguing emphasis in many (but not all) mobilities texts on the way in which social life is dependent upon, and ultimately inextricably entangled with, technologies and infrastructures such as cars, phones, roads, planes, and computers. For readers unfamiliar with certain strands of social science (e.g. poststructuralism, social studies of science) this may seem a bit counterintuitive. After all one tends to think of 'society' or 'the social' as a collection of inter-subjective relations happening in a physical setting. These combinations of what are generally understood as the social (i.e. inter-subjective interactions) and material elements are analyzed under the conceptual perspective of 'systems', which in the field of mobilities has been developed most prominently by John Urry partly drawing on the work of Bruno Latour and Manuel Castells <sup>10</sup>.

The significance of systems can be illustrated by attending to how ways of dealing with distance are discreetly embedded in daily routines. At home one hardly ever thinks that the water running from the tap is making a journey from a dam in mountains hundreds of miles away, that the Skype meeting between Paris and New York is enabled by submarine communication cables crossing the Atlantic, or that the humble mouse with which one commands the computer made the journey from China through a vast network of roads, ports bigger than cities, colossal merchant vessels, and transoceanic maritime routes signaled by satellites orbiting in the stratosphere. When seen through the lens of the mobilities paradigm, the quality and texture of daily life (including the very understanding and experience of what is distant and proximate) appear as directly or indirectly shaped by immense technological systems literally enveloping the Earth. Crucially, so too are one's identity and subjectivity to the extent that immersion in, or exclusion from, these technologically mediated worlds condition the range and quality of social relations, information, and aesthetic experiences available to different individuals and social groups. People conceive of themselves and their relation to the world in relation to these global networks that form the background and the backbone of everyday life.

## **Ways of sensing and aesthetic sensibilities**

The body and the senses therefore become central in the analysis of mobilities. In considering this aspect of mobilities conceptually, the mobilities paradigm draws partly on

sensory studies, a well-established, inter-disciplinary field, starting with the premise that the ways in which the senses are used is primarily influenced by socio-cultural factors. John Urry's seminal book *Sociology Beyond Societies* (2000) devotes a whole chapter to mobility and the senses and his writings on this topic can be traced back to his book *The Tourist Gaze* (1991) in which he argued that the visual sense has been significant in organizing the development of modern tourism, one of the most significant forms of contemporary mobilities <sup>11</sup>. A historical sensitivity is crucial in understanding changes in sensoriums and this relationship between technology and ways of sensing the world has been examined by cultural historians; directly related to technologies of movement is the way in which railways enabled a new way of experiencing landscape based on speed as the source of aesthetically pleasing experiences (see Schivelbusch's *The Railway Journey*, and Marc Desportes' *Paysages en mouvement*). Yet it is the development of information and communication technologies, and nano- and biotechnologies that is today being identified as the key constitutive element of new perceptual experiences. For example, the US Air Force is funding research on contact lenses that can display video and detect health problems, the aim being to use those lenses to display in-flight data and monitor fatigue levels in the pilot. Although this innovation is still in the lab and may never become commercially available, it suggests the kind of transformations that are being adumbrated in the twenty-first century and which are transforming our capabilities to relate to and move around by virtue of being connected to networked environments.

This way of conceiving of human bodies as being part of, and augmented by, 'multiple and intersecting mobility systems' is, John Urry argues, 'an example of post-human analysis <sup>12</sup>'. Posthumanism refers to an age of high technology which is blurring the boundaries that secured the notion of 'the human' as a self-contained being (i.e. boundaries between humans and animals, organisms and machines). In this condition of uncertainty humans are seen as part of a continuum of hybrid forms of life which are both organism and machine.

For further reading on mobilities and the senses see John Urry's *Sociology Beyond Society* chapter 4. Blog entries on [mobilities and vision I](#), [mobilities and vision II](#)

## **Fragility, disruption and resilience**

These transformations can offer benefits but a growing dependence on technology does not come without costs. Today virtually every social group in the world deals with distance in organizational and technological ways that combine both the old and the new. Letters, sailing and homing pigeons have been around for 2400, 5000, and 1150 years respectively, while the generalized use of mobile phones happened just a few years ago. As new ways of dealing with distance develop others may be neglected or forgotten, their reassuring robustness and reliability only being realized when the new digital technologies are blacked out by, for example, an anomaly in the weather. In these situations, personal agency is severely diminished, showing how human action is strongly bound up with these systems. In line with these insights an important area of research in the mobilities paradigm looks at mobilities and crises. Further information: videos by [Monika Büscher on "What happens to mobilities in crisis"](#), [Peter Adey on "Evacuation"](#), [Mimi Sheller on "Natural disasters, mobility and inequality"](#).

## **Futures and the good life**

Despite recurrent hype about innovation in communication and transportation systems, technologies rapidly adapt to everyday practices and, as noted, dealing with distance is mostly a matter of habit. These socio-technical systems lay out a map of propensities (practical and aesthetic) that people quickly internalize as second nature. However, this does not mean that people passively accept and adapt to the possibilities afforded by these systems. Individuals also deliberate and make decisions about ways of dealing with distance guided by ethical, social, cultural and environmental criteria, often synthesized in culturally specific images of the good life. Dealing with distance has emerged as one of the critical issues of the twenty-first century as global warming has radically brought into question the viability of current, extensively mobile lifestyles and shown the urgency of transitions towards low carbon societies.

## Criticisms

The mobilities paradigm has been widely discussed in the social sciences, often sympathetically, yet sometimes more critically both by external observers and self-confessed mobilities researchers. Many of these criticisms have been made specifically in relation to those texts by John Urry and Mimi Sheller that outlined this approach most explicitly. Some of these criticisms include:

- **Paradigm:** Some observers have raised doubts as to whether the status of paradigm is deserved or appropriate <sup>13</sup>. Despite the difficulties of mapping a debate that largely happens, so to speak, 'off-record' –in conversations rather than in printed media–, one may suggest that these doubts may be partly related to the ambiguity with which the term paradigm is generally applied. For example, in his influential book *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* Thomas Kuhn uses the term paradigm in at least twenty-one different ways. These include shared theoretical assumptions, shared standards for evaluating explanations, an acknowledged past achievement that guides subsequent practice, an accepted view of the subject matter (ontology), or a metaphysical view of the world. Moreover, in the second edition of the book he proposes to substitute the term paradigm in the broader sense used here for 'disciplinary matrix' and to reserve the term paradigm for 'research exemplar' in the narrower sense of a concrete solution to problems or puzzles <sup>14</sup>.

It should be noted that amongst those who have accepted, at least tacitly, the existence of a mobilities paradigm there still are differing views about its full interpretation and rationalization. Scholars in fact disagree about, for example, basic units of analysis, philosophical approaches, key authors that have inspired it, or its potential to transform the social sciences. These differing views (which relate to some of the criticism below) reflect for some the richness and promising developments of this strand of research while for others it simply reflects its lack of a clear, coherence subject of study and its loose boundaries.

- **A simplification of mainstream sociology:** In 2000 John Urry published *Sociology Beyond Societies*, a landmark in the development of the mobilities paradigm. His call for a sociology of mobilities was premised on the critique of the notion of 'society' as a territorially bound entity. Some sociologists saw this as an oversimplification and argued that sociology examines social processes which are not conceived of as being physically bounded and that this therefore renders the call for a paradigm shift

unconvincing <sup>15</sup>.

- **Epochalism:** Related to the previous point, sociologist Mike Savage regards the mobilities paradigm as an example of sociology's tendency to periodically announce radical changes <sup>16</sup>. This tendency towards 'epochalism', he argues, has been particularly prominent in British sociology in the 1990s and 2000s. Reflecting on the quick succession of 'new' social conditions identified during this period such as reflexive modernity, globalization, post-Fordism, individualization, or disorganized capitalism, Savage writes: 'What does it mean for the credibility of social scientific knowledge itself when it seems to so readily embrace a culture of inbuilt obsolescence, where announcements about the arrival of fundamentally new conditions are no sooner made than they are dissipated by the next version <sup>17</sup>?' On a different but partly related note, Peter Merriman has called for caution about the tendency to restrict discussions about mobile methods to new technologies and tacitly presume that more traditional research methods are outdated or ill-suited for mobilities research. There is a risk, he argues, of 'over-animating' mobile subjects and missing important historical dynamics <sup>18</sup>. This criticism would apply also to over-enthusiastic calls for 'live sociology' requiring researchers to work on the move as the future direction for the sociology of mobilities in an era of 'big data' <sup>19</sup>.
- **Limits of the mobilities paradigm:** While the possible contribution of the mobilities paradigm to the study of subjects such as transport and tourism may be more or less obvious, its potential impact in other fields and disciplines may be less so. It has been argued that the mobilities paradigm should have made clearer the areas of social life to which it applies and, more specifically, those to which it makes only very indirect or no significant difference <sup>20</sup>. For example, writing about the mobilities paradigm's tendency to grant too much explanatory power to mobilities, Gerard Delanty argues that 'cosmopolitanism cannot be entirely separated from the normative vision of an alternative society and (...) this imaginary is also present as a cultural form of immanent transcendence. Identities and modes of cultural belonging, while being influenced by global mobilities, are not reducible to mobility' <sup>21</sup>.
- **Fluidity:** Particularly in the early 2000s the mobilities paradigm was understood by some as arguing that in conditions of globalization everything has entered a state of chaotic fluidity that has made the state redundant. This misinterpretation of the mobilities paradigm has been accompanied by the observation that the opposite is actually the case. For example, Bryan Turner observes the spread of an 'immobility regime' exemplified by the proliferation of walls and enclaves across the world due to a growing concern with security <sup>22</sup>. 'Sociologists', Turner argues, 'need to re-conceptualize globalization not as a system of endless and uncontrolled liquid mobility but as a system that also produces closure, entrapment and containment' (2010: 19). Partly related to this argument Noel Salazar has argued that 'The question is not so much about the overall rise or decline of mobility, but how various mobilities are formed, regulated, and distributed across the globe, and how the formation, regulation, and distribution of these mobilities are shaped and patterned by existing social, political, and economic structures <sup>23</sup>'.
- **Post-humanism:** Turner and Rojek have warned against the 'posthuman turn' in the social sciences referring specifically to the mobilities paradigm:

\*Urry argues that a reconstituted sociology should be founded around 'mobilities' rather than 'societies'. (...) It is easy to see why mobility, contingency and velocity are 'in the air' for social and cultural theorists. Our argument is that there are obvious dangers in identifying mobility as the primary defining feature of being in the world today. (...) Perhaps somewhat against the grain of fashion, we insist on the necessity of developing a reconstituted sociology with the embodied actor at its centre. There are serious dangers in responding to the challenges posed by new technologies with a post-human sociology. Our critique of decorative sociology is precisely that, through creating a privileged position for the cultural and aesthetic, it has undermined the significance of the economic, political and social dimensions of life. Questions of style and symbol have been permitted to overshadow matters of money (exchange), blood and bread. We contend that these matters are the indispensable foundations of being in the world at all times and in all places' <sup>24</sup>. \*

- **Optimistic view of globalization:** Another criticism, related to the previous one, holds that mobilities research has largely participated in an optimistic view of the world as the quote illustrates:

*In the euphoric fin-de-siecle of the last century, the possibility of peaceful globalization and expanding democratization had never looked more promising. In response to these political changes, there was a general sense that political borders and cultural boundaries were disappearing. This view of modern societies is closely associated with the work of sociologists such as Zygmunt Bauman, Ulrich Beck, Anthony Giddens, and John Urry who have often criticized mainstream sociology for its alleged focus on nation-states as its central topic. This optimistic vision of a changing social world was widely shared in the late 1990s* <sup>25</sup>.

The 1990s were certainly a period of relative optimism regarding global politics and this was partly reflected in theories of global change as globalization theorist Arjun Appadurai has explicitly acknowledged <sup>26</sup>. However, this criticism simplifies Urry's views in, for example, his book *Economies of Signs and Space* (with Scott Lash) <sup>27</sup> which explicitly discusses the dark side of globalization. Nonetheless it is fair to say that war and violence are underrepresented in the mobilities agenda.

- **Neglect of history:** Mimi Sheller has written inspiring historical accounts of mobilities such as in *Consuming the Caribbean and Aluminium Dreams*, and there are other good historical accounts or works that show sophisticated historical sensitivity such as those by human geographers Tim Cresswell, Peter Adey, Peter Merriman, or by cultural studies scholars such as Mirian Aguiar, Charlotte Mathieson, and Lynne Pearce. However, as Colin Pooley has persistently argued, mobilities research has not taken history seriously and, in general, there is a dominant focus on the new. <sup>28</sup> This is preventing a richer understanding on how long term trends shape emergent realities <sup>29</sup>.
- **Anglo and eurocentrism:** The mobilities paradigm was initially criticized for its strong reliance on experiences of European and North American societies, neglecting issues which are central to everyday experiences in other parts of the world such as chronic violence, insecurity and weak states <sup>30</sup>. Scholars have also noted a wider set of possible antecedents in the mobilities paradigm from other linguistic areas. In the



Francophone world this includes Michel Bassand and Fernand Braudel.

- **Eclecticism:** The mobilities paradigm is partly a synthesis of concepts and empirical insights from a wide range of disciplines. While this has been praised as a virtue, some commentators have seen this as a forced attempt to put together conflicting methodological and theoretical resources <sup>31</sup>.
- **Critical sociology:** Some commentators have expressed their difficulties in seeing in mobilities research the kind of critical outlook that is supposed to characterize mainstream sociology <sup>32</sup> and which, in their view, may have been more clearly outlined in texts that prefigured it. For example, the relationship between mobilities, capitalism, collective action and new class formations is central to Urry's books *The End of Organized Capitalism* (1987) and *Economies of Signs and Space* (1994; both with Scott Lash). However, subsequent work focusing on these issues remains too implicit, at least until more recent publications such as *Societies Beyond Oil* (2013) and *Offshoring* (2014). It should be clarified that a concern with questions of power and inequality is at the centre of mobilities research. Mimi Sheller has observed that 'Mobility may be considered a universal right, yet in practice it exists in relation to class, racial, sexual, gendered, and disabling exclusions from public space, from national citizenship, and from the means of mobility at all scales <sup>33</sup>.'
- **Migration:** The dialogue between mobilities research and migration studies is at best still very partial <sup>34</sup>. Migration scholars have wondered why this body of research has been ignored or dismissed while mobilities researchers have noted the tendency in migration studies to apply the term mobility almost exclusively to the movement of people while ignoring the interrelations with objects, infrastructures and flows of information.
- **Mobility, forms of capital and neoliberalism:** An interesting debate emerged in mobilities research about the possibility to conceive of mobility as a form of capital relatively autonomous from cultural, social and economic capital <sup>35</sup>. This form of capital constitutes a resource that enables people to navigate the many spatial constraints encountered in daily life. Mobility capital may enhance other forms of capital and other forms of capital may also enhance mobility capital. This idea of mobility as capital has been criticized by Borja, Courty and Ramadier who see it as tacitly subscribing to the neoliberal understanding of mobility as flexibility and underplaying the fact that mobility is most often imposed by the dominant neoliberal economic order. These authors also question the idea that mobility can be understood as a new form of capital and argue instead that it is 'an effect' of economic, social and cultural capital <sup>36</sup>.

## Responding to critics

Many of these criticisms were made in the early 2000s, particularly following Urry's *Sociology Beyond Societies* (2000) and Urry's and Sheller's *The New Mobilities Paradigm* (2006). Some of them were clearly misplaced and based on a shallow reading of the literature. Others rightly pointed to areas that needed further elaboration and some of these have subsequently been more thoroughly addressed as shown in the *Handbook of Mobilities* <sup>37</sup>.

## **A house of many mansions**

With its concern for culturally and historically specific ways of dealing with distance, the mobilities paradigm stands out as an intellectual lighthouse for scholars of different provenance venturing beyond established disciplinary boundaries and seeking to incorporate in their work more explicit analyses of the spatial patterning of social life. As this body of research grows, specialized subfields or niches are emerging, each one providing a space for the development of lifelong careers with their specialized publics (e.g. cycling, disaster mobilities, work mobilities, transport-related social exclusion). Some authors by contrast are also pursuing transversal agendas that resist those specializations. The mobilities paradigm loosely encompasses scholars not just with different backgrounds but also with different understandings of mobility and a mobilities oriented social science <sup>38</sup>. In this respect the mobilities paradigm may be seen as ‘a house of many mansions’, many of them pursuing increasingly specialized agendas but all aware of the same foundations.

## **An evolving field**

Partly because of this growing specialization, keeping abreast with new publications in the field of mobilities has become a cumbersome task and the list of recommended works below includes only a small part of the existing literature. Newcomers to the field are advised to devote time to authors who have prefigured the field as well as to those who have elaborated some of the more recent seminal texts. Early antecedents of the mobilities paradigm often mentioned include Georg Simmel, the Chicago school of sociology in Anglo-American academia and Michel Bassand in the Francophone world. Authors writing in the 1990s, in the midst of what is known as globalization processes, include James Clifford, Arjun Appadurai, Marc Augé, Manuel Castells, Caren Kaplan, John Urry, and Zygmunt Bauman among others. These scholars are regarded as having adumbrated the mobilities paradigm as part of a critique of ‘society’ as a set of physically bounded institutions. The 2000s have seen the proliferation of many important texts explicitly proposing or acknowledging a mobilities paradigm. These include major works of synthesis by Peter Adey, Tim Cresswell, Ole Jensen, Vincent Kaufmann, Peter Merriman, Mimi Sheller and John Urry, to name but a few. A list of recommended readings is included below. Over the last ten to fifteen years diverse initiatives have helped to institutionalize mobilities as an academic field. These include academic journals such as *Mobilities*, *Transfers*, *Applied Mobilities* as well as other journals with a strong emphasis on mobilities such as *Tourism Studies*, *Hospitality and Society* and *Journeys*; and research associations such as the International Association for the History of Transport, Traffic and Mobility (T<sup>2</sup>M), Anthromob (linked to the European Association of Social Anthropologists), the Cycling and Society Network, the Panamerican Mobilities Research Network, the Cosmobilities Network, the Mobilities Network for Aotearoa New Zealand, the Transport Research Group at the Institute for British Geographers. Last but not least, in the Francophone world there is the network MSFS – Mobilité spatiale, fluidité sociale. This kaleidoscopic landscape of initiatives is set to grow as the field expands thematically and geographically.

## **Recommended bibliography**

- Adey P (2009) *Mobility*. London and New York:Routledge.

- Adey P (2010) *Aerial Life: Spaces, Mobilities, Affects*. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Appadurai A (1996) *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Bassand M and Brulhardt M-C, (1980), *Mobilité spatiale*, Georgi, Saint-Saphorin.
- Bauman Z (2000) *Liquid Modernity*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Bergmann S and Sager T (eds) (2008) *The Ethics of Mobilities: Rethinking Place, Exclusion, Freedom and Environment*. Aldershot: Ashgate.
- Büscher M and Urry J (2009) Mobile methods and the empirical. *European Journal of Social Theory* 12(1): 99–116.
- Büscher M, Urry J and Witchger K (2010) *Mobile Methods*. London and New York: Routledge
- Canzler W, Kaufmann V, Kesselring S (eds) (2008) *Tracing mobilities*, Ashgate, Burlington.
- Castells M (1996) *The Rise of the Network Society*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Clifford J (1997) *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Cresswell T (2006) *On the Move: Mobility in the Modern Western World*. London: Routledge.
- Cresswell T and Merriman P (eds) (2011) *Geographies of Mobilities: Practices, Spaces, Subjects*. Farnham and Burlington, VT: Ashgate.
- Cwerner S, Kesselring S and Urry J (eds) (2009) *Aeromobilities*. London: Routledge.
- Dennis K and Urry J (2009) *After the Car*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Desportes M (2005) *Paysages en Mouvement: Transports et Perception de l'Espace XVIIIe-XXe Siècle*. Paris : Gallimard.
- Dodge M and Kitchin R (2011) *Code/Space: Software and Everyday Life*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Dudley G, Geels F and Kemp R (2011) *Automobility in Transition? A Socio-Technical Analysis of Sustainable Transport*. New York and London: Routledge.
- Elliott A and Urry J (2010) *Mobile Lives*. New York and London: Routledge.
- Faulconbridge J, Hui A (2016) *Traces of a mobile Field: Ten Years of Mobilities Research*. *Mobilities* 11 (1): 1-14.
- Fincham B, McGuinness M and Murray L (2010) *Mobile Methodologies*. Farnham: Ashgate.
- Graham S and Marvin S (2001) *Splintering Urbanism: Networked Infrastructures, Technological Mobilities and the Urban Condition*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Hannam K, Sheller M and Urry J (2006) *Mobilities, immobilities, and moorings*. *Mobilities* 1(1): 1–22.
- Hannerz U (1996) *Transnational Connections*. London, Routledge.
- Jensen O (2013) *Staging Mobilities*. Oxon, Routledge.
- Jensen On (2014) *Designing Mobilities*. Aalborg, Aalborg University Press.
- Jessop B (2006) Spatial fixes, temporal fixes and spatiotemporal fixes. In: Castree N and Gregory D (eds) *David Harvey: A Critical Reader*. New York: Blackwell, 142–166.
- Kaplan C (1996) *Questions of Travel: Postmodern Discourses of Displacement*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Kaufmann V, Bergman M and Joye D (2004) *Motility: Mobility as capital*. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 28(4): 745–756.
- Kaufmann V (2002) *Re-thinking Mobility*. Aldershot: Ashgate.
- V. Kaufmann (2008) *Les paradoxes de la mobilité*. Lausanne : Presses Polytechniques et Universitaires Romandes.
- Canzler W, Kaufmann V and Kesselring S (eds) (2008) *Tracing Mobilities: Towards a Cosmopolitan Perspective*. Farnham and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 163–180.

- Knowles R, Shaw J and Axhausen K (2006) *Transport Geographies: Mobilities, Flows, Spaces*. New York: Blackwell.
- Lee J and Ingold T (2006) Fieldwork on foot: Perceiving, routing and socializing. In: Coleman S and Collins P (eds) *Locating the Field: Space, Place and Context in Anthropology*. Oxford: Berg, 67–86.
- Massey D (1993) Power-geometry and a progressive sense of place. In: Bird J, Curtis B, Putnam T, Robertson G and Tickner L (eds) *Mapping the Futures: Local Cultures, Global Change*. London: Routledge.
- Merriman P (2007) *Driving Spaces: A Cultural-Historical Geography of England's M1 Motorway*. Malden, MA and Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Mountz A (2010) *Seeking Asylum: Human Smuggling and Bureaucracy at the Border*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota.
- Salazar N, Jayaram K (2016) *Keywords of Mobility*. Oxford: Berghahn Books
- Sheller M (2004) Automotive emotions: feeling the car. *Theory, Culture and Society* 21(4/5): 221–242.
- Sheller M (2009) Infrastructures of the imagined island: Software, mobilities and the architecture of Caribbean paradise. *Environment and Planning A* 41: 1386–1403.
- Sheller M and Urry J (2000) The city and the car. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 24(4): 737–757.
- Sheller M and Urry J (2003) Mobile transformations of 'public' and 'private' life. *Theory, Culture and Society* 20(3): 107–125.
- Sheller M and Urry J (eds) (2004) *Tourism Mobilities: Places to Play, Places in Play*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Sheller M and Urry J (eds) (2006a) *Mobile Technologies of the City*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Sheller M and Urry J (2006b) The new mobilities paradigm. *Environment and Planning A* 38: 207–226.
- Thrift N (2003) Movement-space: The changing domain of thinking resulting from new kinds of spatial awareness. *Economy and Society* 33: 582–604.
- Urry J (2000) *Sociology beyond Societies: Mobilities for the Twenty-First Century*. London: Routledge.
- Urry J (2007) *Mobilities*. London: Polity.
- Urry J (2008) Climate change, travel and complex futures. *British Journal of Sociology* 59: 261–279.
- Urry J (2011) *Climate Change and Society*. London: Polity.
- Uteng TP and Cresswell T (eds) (2008) *Gendered Mobilities*. Farnham and Burlington, VT: Ashgate.
- Vannini P (ed.) (2009) *The Cultures of Alternative Mobilities: The Routes Less Travelled*. Farnham and Burlington, VT: Ashgate.

## References

- Adey P (2010) *Mobility*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Adey P et al. (2013) *Handbook of Mobilities*. Oxon, Routledge.
- Appadurai A (1996) *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Bogard W (2009) Book review: *Mobilities, Surveillance & Society* 6(2), 188–189.
- Elliott A and Urry J (2010) *Mobile Lives*. New York and London: Routledge.
- De Coninck F (2007) Book review: *Sociologie des mobilités, Une nouvelle frontière pour la sociologie ?*, John Urry, Armand Colin, 2005. *Flux* 2 (68).
- <https://www.cairn.info/revue-flux-2007-2-page-114.htm> Accessed 21 June 2016

- Delanty G (2009) *The Cosmopolitan Imagination*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- Divall C, Hine J, Pooley C (2016) *Transport Policy: Learning Lessons from History*. Farnham: Ashgate.
- Ferentzy A (2009) Book review: *Mobilities*, *Canadian Journal of Sociology*, 34(1), 188-190.
- Kaufmann V (2002) *Rethinking Mobility*. London: Ashgate.
- Kaufmann V, Bergman M, Joye D (2004) Motility: Mobility as capital. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 28(4): 745-756.
- Lash S, Urry J (1994) *Economies of Signs and Space*. London: Sage.
- McKinnon A (2001) Book review: *Sociology Beyond Societies*, *Sociological Research Online* <http://www.socresonline.org.uk/5/4/urry.html> Accessed 12 December 2015
- Merriman P (2014) *Rethinking Mobile Methods*. *Mobilities* 9, 2: 167-187.
- Park E, Burgess, W, McKenzie, D (1925). *The city*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Peters M (2000) Book review: *Sociology Beyond Societies: Mobilities for the twenty-first century*, *The Sociological Review*, 480-482.
- Salazar N (2013) *Anthropology*, in Adey et al, *Handbook of Mobilities*, Oxon, Routledge.
- Savage M (2009) Against epochalism: Numbers, narrative and socio-cultural change. *Cultural Sociology* 3(1): 217-238
- Sheller M (2014) *Alluminium Dreams: The making of light modernity*. Cambridge: MIT Press
- Sheller M (2016) Uneven mobility futures: A Foucauldian approach, *Mobilities* 11 (1): 15-31.
- Sheller M, Urry J (2016) Mobilizing the new mobilities paradigm, *Applied Mobilities* 1 (1): 10-25.
- Turner B (2007) The enclave society: Towards a sociology of immobility, *European Journal of Social Theory* 10 (2): 287-303
- Turner B (2010) Globalization and its possible futures, in Turner, *International Handbook of Globalization Studies*. Oxon, Routledge.
- Turner B, Roject C (2001) *Society and Culture: Principles of Scarcity and Solidarity*. London, Sage.
- Urry J (2003) *Global Complexity*. London: Polity.
- Urry J (2007) *Mobilities*. London: Polity.
- Waldby S (2000) *The Visible Human Project: Informatic Bodies and Posthuman Medicine*. London, Routledge.

## Notes

1 Some disciplines such as anthropology, migration, transport and tourism studies have focused on movement but not explicitly in the sense outlined here, as a vital dimension of social life.

2 It may be argued that an early, but short lived, mobility paradigm was outlined by the Chicago School of urban sociology of the 1920s. The mobilities paradigm identified by Urry and Sheller shares with the Chicago School the notion of mobility as a condition of growth, a generative force in urban life, but differs from it in that mobility is not regarded as an inevitable source of moral decay and social disintegration. The following quote from Park and Burgess (1925: 59) illustrates this point: 'the mobility of city life, with its increase in the number and intensity of stimulations tends inevitably to confuse and to demoralize the person.'

3 Sheller, Urry 2016: 11

4 Urry 2007: 47

5 Urry 2007: 48

6 Adey 2010: 18

7 Adey 2010: 19.

8 Kaufmann et al. 2004: 750

9 The expression is borrowed from Jon Elster's book *Explaining Social Behavior: More Nuts and Bolts for the Social Sciences*.

10 See *Economies of Signs and Space* pp. 320-321, *Complexities* pp. 7-12.

This notion of 'system' is similar to that used in transition studies. Note however that there is a difference between 'regime' and 'system' in the Multi-Level Perspective. See : <https://en.forumviesmobiles.org/arguing/2015/11/25/multi-level-perspective-and-theories-practice-mistaken-controversy-2972>

11 The notion of the gaze does not refer to the obvious fact that tourists 'see places', but to the fact that the gaze of tourists is socially organized, that is that people learn to look at places in specific ways and that those sights and ways of seeing are imbued with historically shifting meanings about taste, distinction and ideology. Central to the formation of those ways of seeing and sensing were different technologies, most notably the photographic camera.

12 Urry 2007: 44

13 e.g. de Coninck 2007

14 Doubts about the paradigmatic status of mobilities research may also spring from more fundamental concerns as to whether the term paradigm can be legitimately applied to the social sciences. This is a misunderstanding that Kuhn himself was keen to dispel. While his book explicitly explains what is specific about progress in the hard sciences, the actual inspiration for the notion that science progresses as 'tradition-bound periods punctuated by non-cumulative breaks' actually had its origins in the arts and humanities:

Historians of literature, of music, of the arts, of political development, and of many other human activities have long described their subjects in the same way. Periodization in terms of revolutionary breaks in style, taste, and institutional structure have been among their standard tools. If I have been original with respect to concepts like this, it has mainly been by applying them to the sciences, fields which had been widely thought to develop in a different way. Conceivably the notion of a paradigm as a concrete achievement, an exemplar, is a second contribution. I suspect, for example, that some of the notorious difficulties surrounding the notion of style in the arts may vanish if paintings can be seen to be modelled on one another rather than produced in conformity to some abstracted canons of style. Thus while acknowledging these similarities, it is also crucial to clarify that whereas in the hard sciences there is a scarcity of competing paradigms, in the social sciences the norm is a multiplicity of paradigms. Far from being a disadvantage, this multiplicity of paradigms can be seen as facilitating a sense of freedom to experiment due to both an absence of rigid paradigmatic allegiances and also the difficulty in disproving a

paradigm through controlled laboratory research, as can be the case in the hard sciences. This sense of freedom is one of the characteristics of the mobilities paradigm. Mobilities research has partly developed through creative exchanges with adjacent fields and disciplines, providing both depth and versatility to the field. In this sense the syntheses proposed by John Urry and others in the early 2000s have been both sufficiently novel to attract an 'enduring group of adherents' and sufficiently broad to allow new issues to be researched in further detail. At least in principle these fit with what that Kuhn identified as two defining elements of a paradigm.

15 e.g. de Coninck 2007; Ferentzy 2009

16 Savage 2009

17 Savage 2009: 220

18 Merriman 2014

19 see Sheller 2014: 804

20 e.g. Ferentzy 2009

21 Delanty 2009: 64

22 Turner 2006; 2010

23 Salazar 2013: 60

24 Turner, Rojek 2001: 198

25 Turner 2010: 663

26 Appadurai 2006

27 Lash and Urry 1994

28 Divall et al 2016

29 See also Sheller 2016

30 Salazar 2013

31 e.g. Bogard 2009

32 e.g. Peters 2000

33 Sheller 2016: 15

34 e.g. McKinnon 2001

35 See Kaufmann 2002, Kaufmann et al 2004, Urry 2007.

36 <https://en.forumviesmobiles.org/arguing/2012/12/11/mobility-capital-sketching-arguments-533>

37 Adey et al. 2013

38 This text should therefore be understood as one possible interpretation of the field.

## **Movement**

Movement is the crossing of space by people, objects, capital, ideas and other information. It is either oriented, and therefore occurs between an origin and one or more destinations, or it is more akin to the idea of simply wandering, with no real origin or destination.

[En savoir plus](#) x

## **Mobilities paradigm**

The mobilities paradigm is a way of seeing the world that is sensitive to the role of movement in ordering social relations. It serves to legitimize questions about the practical, discursive, technological, and organizational ways in which societies deal with distance and the appropriate methods for their study.

[En savoir plus](#) x

## **Mobility**

For the Mobile Lives Forum, mobility is understood as the process of how individuals travel across distances in order to deploy through time and space the activities that make up their lifestyles. These travel practices are embedded in socio-technical systems, produced by transport and communication industries and techniques, and by normative discourses on these practices, with considerable social, environmental and spatial impacts.

[En savoir plus](#) x

## **Motility**

[En savoir plus](#) x

## **Mobile methods**

Mobile methods produce insight by moving physically, virtually or analytically with research subjects. They involve qualitative, quantitative, visual and experimental forms of inquiry, and follow material and social phenomena.

[En savoir plus](#) x

## **Transition studies**

Transition studies are concerned with long-term processes of radical and structural change to sustainable patterns of production and consumption. It involves different conceptual approaches and adherents from a wide range of disciplines.

[En savoir plus](#) x

---



## Theories

- Concepts
  - Methods
- 

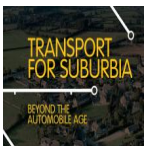


Javier Caletrío

### Sociologue

Javier Caletrío is the scientific advisor of the Mobile Lives Forum for the English-speaking world (BA Economics, Valencia; MA, PhD Sociology, Lancaster) . He is a researcher with a background in the humanities and social sciences. In addition, he also has a strong interest in the natural sciences, especially ecology and ornithology. His research lies broadly in the areas of environmental change and sustainability transitions, especially in relation to mobility and inequality. Javier was based at the Centre for Mobilities Research at Lancaster University from 1998 to 2017.

The same author [See all publications](#)



### **Transport for Suburbia: Beyond the Automobile Age, by Paul Mess**

Publication by Javier Caletrío



### **Harnessing social tipping dynamics for the ecological transition: the case of the electric car**

Javier Caletrío



## **Ecotourism: Is my flying saving the planet?**

Javier Caletrío

---

To cite this publication :

Javier Caletrío (02 September 2016), « Mobilities paradigm », Préparer la transition mobilitaire. Consulté le 17 May 2025, URL:

<https://forumviesmobiles.org/en/dictionary/3289/mobilities-paradigm>

---

Other publications



Bauman (Zygmunt)

Javier Caletrío

- 1 <https://en.forumviesmobiles.org/publication/2012/12/11/book-review-502>
- 2 <https://en.forumviesmobiles.org/marks/mobile-methods-697>
- 3 <https://en.forumviesmobiles.org/video/2013/04/02/mobile-methods-mobile-world-686>
- 4 <https://en.forumviesmobiles.org/publication/2013/02/25/book-review-616>
- 5 <https://en.forumviesmobiles.org/publication/2013/03/11/book-review-517>
- 6 <https://en.forumviesmobiles.org/marks/motility-461>
- 7 <https://en.forumviesmobiles.org/video/2013/09/13/mobility-between-movement-meaning-and-practice-1164>
- 8 <https://en.forumviesmobiles.org/publication/2013/11/12/book-review-1815>
- 9 <http://www.gallimard.fr/Catalogue/GALLIMARD/Bibliotheque-des-Histoires/illustree/Paysages-en-mouvement>
- 10 <https://en.forumviesmobiles.org/caletrio/blog/2015/05/15/mobile-lives-screens-and-vision-i-2841>
- 11 <https://en.forumviesmobiles.org/caletrio/blog/2015/05/28/mobile-lives-screens-and-vision-ii-2876>
- 12 <https://en.forumviesmobiles.org/video/2013/01/29/what-happens-mobilities-crisis-600>
- 13 <https://en.forumviesmobiles.org/video/2015/09/30/evacuation-crucial-type-mobility-peter-adey-2940>
- 14 <https://en.forumviesmobiles.org/video/2013/09/27/natural-disasters-mobility-and-inequalities-1308>
- 15 <https://en.forumviesmobiles.org/marks/transition-studies-2839>
- 16 <https://en.forumviesmobiles.org/marks/bassand-michel-458>
- 17 <https://en.forumviesmobiles.org/admin/blog/2016/01/04/braudel-mobilities-scholar-avant-lettre-3054>

18 <https://en.forumviesmobiles.org/arguing/2012/12/11/mobility-capital-sketching-arguments-533>