

WHAT ARE MOBILE METHODS?

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Overview

1. Mobilities Turn in the social sciences
2. Materialising Mobilities
3. Examples of personal projects
4. Critique

Question | Challenge

- Can existing social scientific research methods that slow down and freeze experiences (interview, focus group, survey) adequately capture mobile experiences, practices where the context of movement itself may be crucial to understanding the significance of the event to the participant, rather than simply being 'read off' from destination points and origins?
- How do we research and represent mobile experiences?
- 'Being there' and 'Seeing there': Can we get close to the mobile practice itself without being present?

**'Research methods
need to be *'on the move'***

Sheller and Urry (2006)



Natalia Goncharova |The Cyclist | 1913.
Oil on canvas, 78x105 cm | The Russian Museum | St.Petersburg.

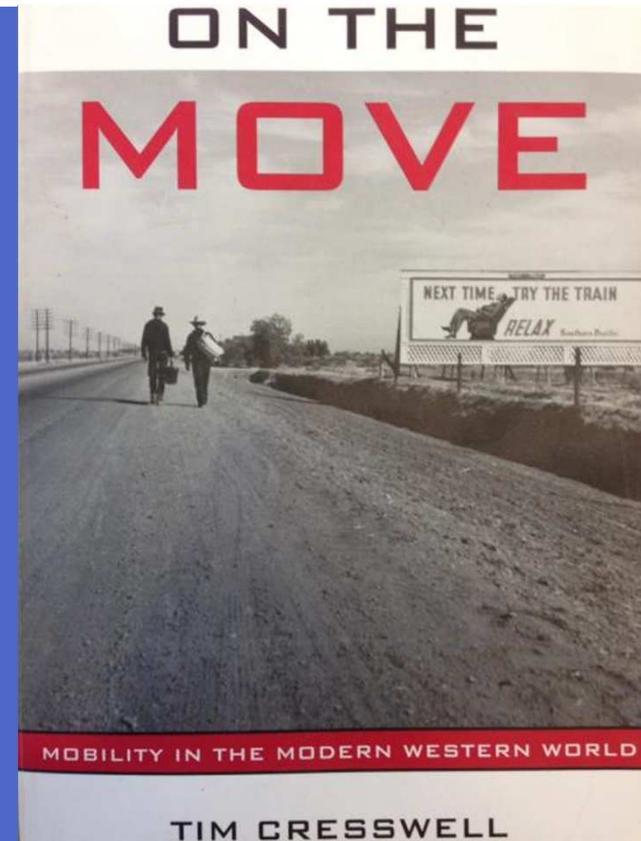
The Mobilities Turn

sociology



'New mobilities paradigm' places mobile practices and cultures at the centre of social processes and to explore mobile bodies in mobile contexts requires a range of approaches that diverge from traditional methodological approaches. Sheller and Urry (2006a, 2006b)

geography



Mobility not just merely movement between point A and B. Mobility is inscribed with meaning by those who interpret and make sense of it. Constructed through different contexts and positions. (Cresswell, 2006)

New Mobilities Paradigm [1]

In order to accurately interpret, represent and understand a world increasingly constituted through mobilities the social sciences need to develop effective techniques for studying such a world.

Mobilities research in broadest sense concerns not only physical movement but potential movement, blocked movement, immobilisation and forms of dwelling and placemaking.

Interest in affect, place, meaning, culture and representation – typically concerns of the humanities.

A way of researching ordinary, mundane practices and gestures, conversations and experiences in different contexts.

New Mobilities Paradigm [2]

Roots in early writings of Georg Simmel late 19th century | one of first urban sociologists | anti-positivist stance | *The Metropolis and Mental Life* (1903)

Developed further by the Chicago School of Urban Sociology – see the work of Robert Park in particular | development of the symbolic interactionist approach | human behaviour determined by social structures and physical environmental factors rather than genetic and personal characteristics.

Productive relationship between research and context: research is not a passive act of collecting ready-made data waiting to be discovered and analysed by experts, but an active form of knowledge production.

Emphasise the use of qualitative and mixed methods approach in contrast to the scientific objectivity and quantification (typically deployed in transport studies/transport geography).



Georg Simmel



Robert E. Park

New Mobilities Paradigm [3]

Involves efforts to deal methodologically with the fleeting, the distributed, the multiple, the non-causal, the sensory, the emotional and the kinaesthetic.

Prioritising 'being there' – either through co-presence or capture - and the immediacy of experience.

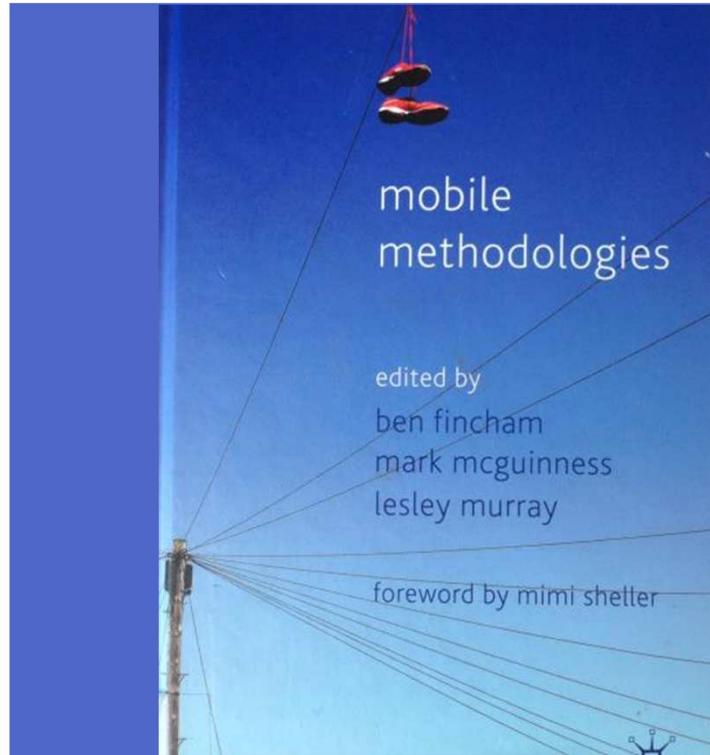
Explores the kinaesthetic and sensory aspects of movement. Embodied experiences and accomplishment of movement. Also the less animated passive mobilities.



Giacomo Balla | Abstract Speed + Sound (Velocità astratta + rumore) | 1913–14 | Guggenheim Museum | New York

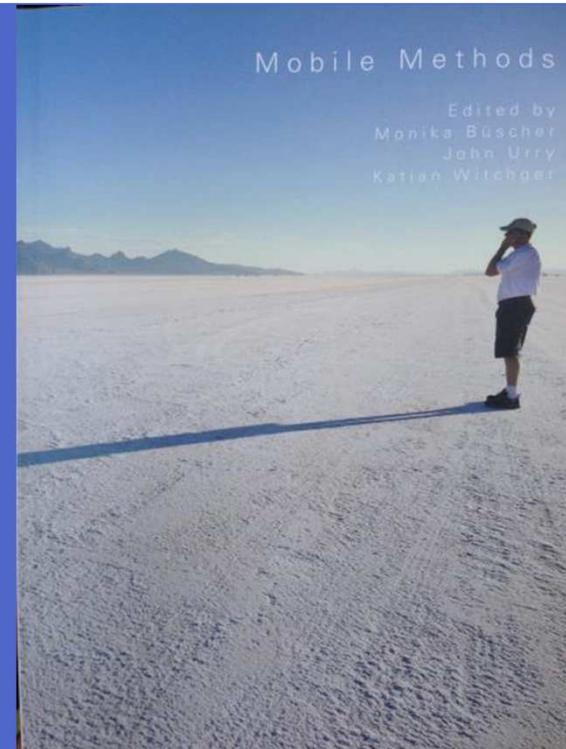
MOBILE METHODS IN PRACTICE

Key Books



2010

First book to interrogate diverse methodologies for mobilities research and consider problems including limits to representationality, dilemmas in research ethics, epistemological challenges.



2011

Mobility-oriented social science highlights the importance of investigating how worlds (and sense) are made in and through movement...[and in so doing not only]...illuminate important phenomena but provide compelling new modes of knowing” (Buscher, Urry & Witchger, 2011; p13)

Methods

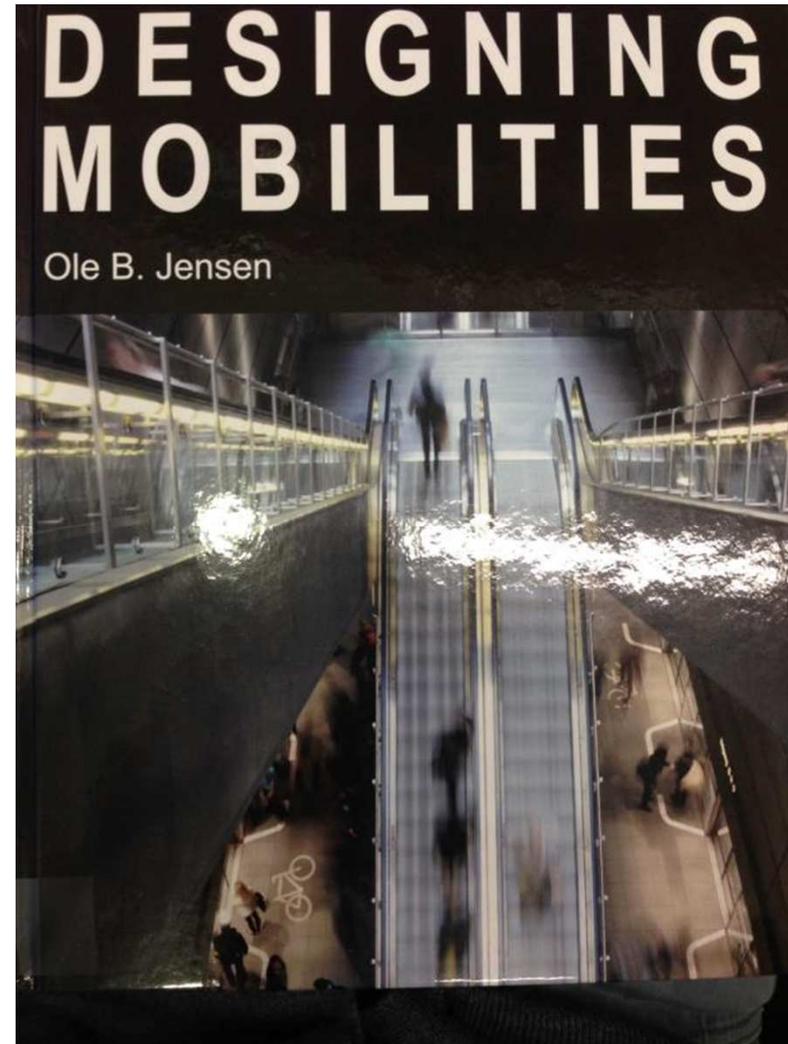
- Observing (people and things)
- Participating | ethnography | autoethnography
- Activity | time-space diaries
- Virtual mobility
- Conversations | interaction analysis
- Imagining | envisioning
- Mobile positioning | mapping | tracing
- Capturing atmosphere | multi-sensual | emotional mapping
- Memories | biographical interviewing
- Plotting, monitoring, juxtaposing places on the go/no longer on the go
- Focus on interspaces

Examples of Mobilities research

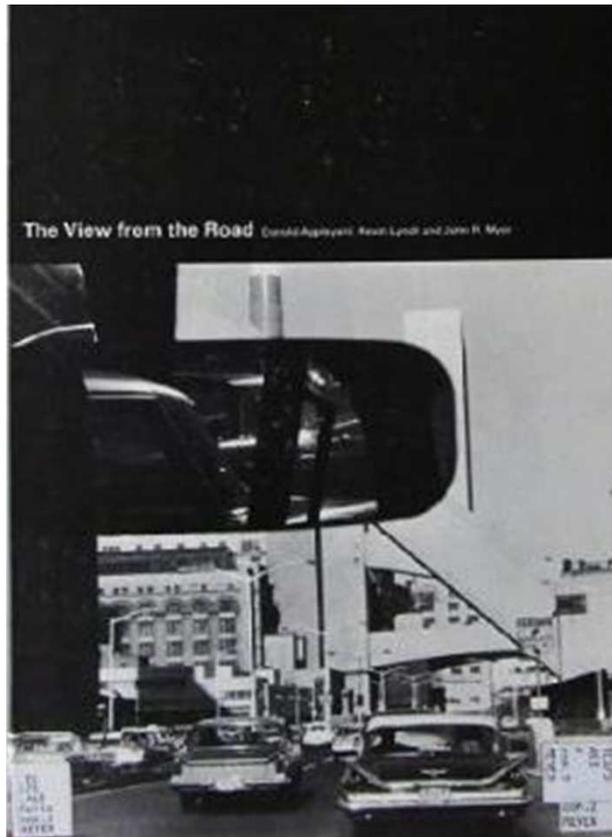
- **Walking** [Kusenbach, 2003 | Anderson, 2004 | Middleton, 2011]
- **Driving and passengering** [Laurier, 2008]
- **Cycling** [Spinney, 2009, | Fincham, 2006 | Pooley et al. 2013]
- **Coach travel** [Edensor and Holloway, 2008 | Jain, 2011]
- **Ferry** [Vannini, 2012]
- **Train travel** [Watts, 2008]

MATERIALISING MOBILE METHODS

Ole. B. Jensen (2014) Designing Mobilities



Donald Appleyard, Kevin Lynch & John Mayer (1964) *The View from the Road*



Highways considered as vantage viewpoints for urban landscapes. Windscreen as frame – ‘windows on society’ and understand the city.

Use cinematographic techniques and visual sequences of routes (sketches or photographs) to simulate the motion of the viewpoint of the driver.

Question aesthetics of highways in USA and role of highway engineer.

Video at <http://mit150.mit.edu/multimedia/view-road-1958-kevin-lynch>

William H Whyte (1980)

The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces



STREET BALLETS ON FILM

Time-lapse studies of small scenes in public space

Who: William H. Whyte
Where: Street life project, New York, USA
When: 1971-1980
Method: Time-lapse photography
Published: William H. Whyte, *The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces*, New York: Project for Public Spaces, 1980

Life in public space consists of numerous small, unremarkable situations, but how can we register and illustrate these small everyday happenings?

Anyone who has ever tried to photograph telling situations in public space knows how much patience is required to capture the narrative moment one has just witnessed, if that is even possible. Many moments are exactly that: moments. Or perhaps situations cannot be reduced to a single photograph, because while the situations may play out in a split second, over time they are sequences that cannot be frozen into a single snapshot.

William H. Whyte had an eye for the way that small everyday situations provide much information about how people use public space. He used time-lapse photography to reproduce what Jane Jacobs called small street ballets, which are performed on the city's streets, squares and sidewalks, particularly street corners.

On this page and the next is shown one of the scenes Whyte captured with time-lapse photography on a street corner in Manhattan in the 1970s: A businessman is showing another how to swing a golf club. The first businessman adjusts the position of the second man's arm, the invisible golf club swings through the air, and the golfer finishes the swing with final adjustments being made to his back leg. Whyte was in the city to capture and describe situations that take place and to understand why it was precisely this corner and not in the middle of the sidewalk that the two men stopped to talk.

Whyte's point is that this type of situation does not happen just anywhere, and he describes what characterizes the best street corner: "One of New York's best corners is 49th Street

Two small photographs showing street scenes. The top one shows a group of people sitting on a bench. The bottom one shows two men standing on a sidewalk, one of whom is adjusting the other's arm.

PERSONAL PROJECTS USING MOBILE METHODS

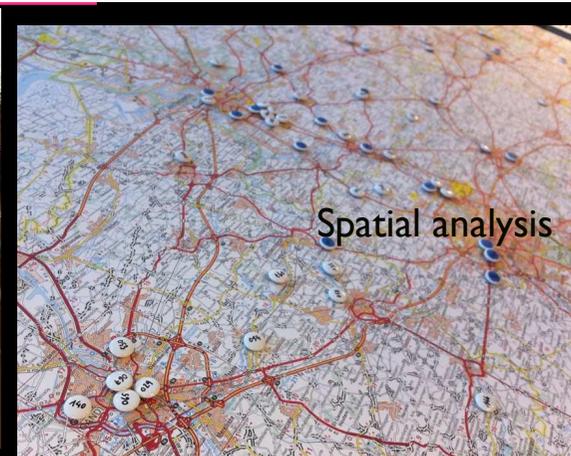
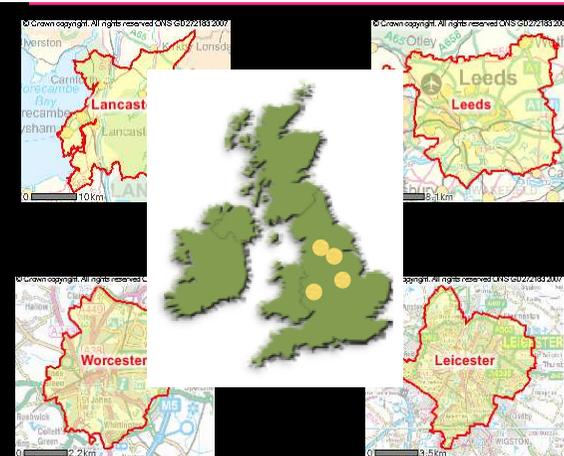
EPSRC Understanding Walking and Cycling 2008-2011



**PROMOTING
WALKING AND
CYCLING**

New perspectives on sustainable travel

Colin Peoley with Tim Jones, Miles Tight, Dave Horton,
Griet Scheldeman, Caroline Mullen, Ann Jopson
and Emanuele Strano



Advantages of walking interviews

Participant has greater control over the research process

- Fit in research with their everyday life
- Demonstrate practices
- Articulate thoughts better

Situate experiences in their wider context

- Show at first hand (rather than describing) the environments
- Multi-sensory and more intimate experiences of landscape

Clark and Emmel (2010, p.2)



<http://www.cycleboom.org/>

@cycle_BOOM



cycle BOOM is a study to understand cycling among the older population and how this affects independence, health and wellbeing. The ultimate aim is to advise policy makers and practitioners how our environment and technologies can be designed to help people to continue to cycle in older age or to reconnect with cycling. [\[Read more\]](#)



About the study



Meet the team



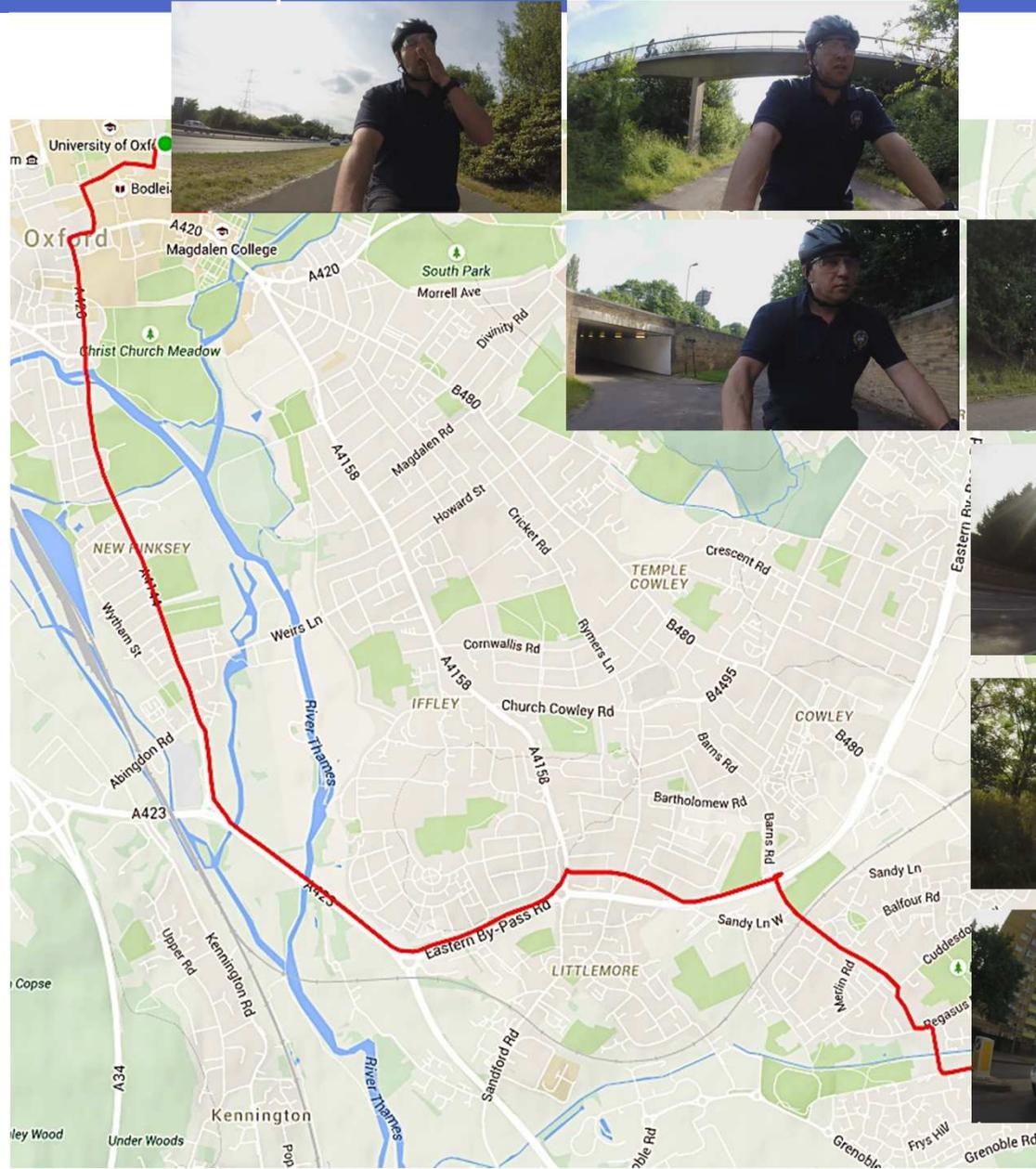
Outputs



Read our blog



Example of velomobile method in practice

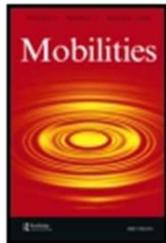






CRITIQUE

Merriman's Critique



Rethinking Mobile Methods

DOI: 10.1080/17450101.2013.784540

Peter Merriman^{a*}

Publishing models and article dates explained

Published online: 07 May 2013

Article Views: 399

Abstract

Over the past, few years methodological innovation in research methods, this paper calls for mobile methods, methods have failed. I discuss 'mobile methods' – including the innovation and political practices – before identifying research is necessarily a and objects, the prioritising certain kinds of technology.

theories of practice in mobilities research, wherein academics frequently suggest that we must adopt certain performative, participative, or ethnographic techniques to enable researchers to be, see or move with research subjects, and to more effectively or accurately understand those practices and subjects. In the final section, I draw upon historical research on early driving practices to highlight the diverse methods and sources that can be useful for mobilities scholars seeking to apprehend particular practices, events, subjects and spaces.



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Key Words

Mobilities, Mobile methods, Non-representational theory, Practices, History, Geography, Sociology

“[problem with mobile methods is]...the assumption that mobilities research is necessarily a branch of social sciences research; the production of over- animated mobile subjects and objects; the prioritising of certain kinds of research methods and practices; and the over-reliance on certain kinds of technology.”

“I almost cannot think when I stay in place; my body needs to be in motion for my mind to be there.”

Jean-Jacques Rousseau

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