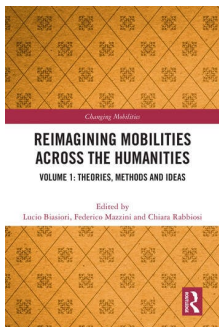


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Reimagining Mobilities across the Humanities. voll. 2

Review by: Richard Ansell



Editors: Lucio Biasiori, Federico Mazzini, Chiara Rabbiosi

Title: Reimagining Mobilities across the Humanities 1. Theories, Methods and Ideas

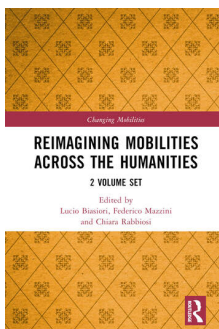
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Editors: Lucio Biasiori, Federico Mazzini, Chiara Rabbiosi

Title: Reimagining Mobilities across the Humanities 2. Objects, People and Texts

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REVIEWER Richard Ansell - Birkbeck, University of London

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Mobility has become a prominent theme across academic disciplines in recent years, and we continue to grapple in daily life with the memory of covid lockdown and the politics of migration and (anti-)globalisation. This two-volume collection is consciously timely, presenting work by members of the Centre for Advanced Studies in Mobility and the Humanities (MoHu) at the University of Padua. It aims to show that the humanities can make important contributions to our understanding of mobilities (usually pluralised) and to explore what mobilities studies can, in turn, offer researchers in the humanities. As such, the book builds on important scholarship in the «mobilities turn», especially Mimi Sheller and John Urry's establishment of mobility as movement imbued with meaning, and Tim Cresswell's exploration of constellations of mobility (that is, entanglements of movement, meaning and practice). *Reimagining Mobilities* applies these approaches over two volumes. The first is divided into two sections, «Theories and Methods» and «Ideas», and the second into three, «Objects», «People», and «Ideas», each representing one of MoHu's research clusters. The sections cover a range of methodologies, chronologies, and themes; they also feature several efforts to move beyond Eurocentrism. As an early contribution to the new Routledge series, «Changing Mobilities», the book bodes well.

A brief introduction to the first volume explains that a series of case-studies will showcase the potential of a «mobilities and humanities» perspective, «an elastic and inclusive concept» that should encourage innovation. The «Theories and Methods» section then explores diverse meanings of «mobility», ranging from early modern library catalogues and newsletters («moving textuality») to the place of aluminium in twentieth-century commodity chains. Elena Canadelli's chapter considers the theory and terminology of mobility (and circulation) in stimulating ways and explores their applicability to the history of science, showing a path beyond disciplinary boundaries and Eurocentrism. Canadelli also insists on studying «failures to move», as well as mobile subjects. Teresa Bernardi and Silvia Bruzzi's exploration of gendered mobilities might have engaged with transgender themes, given their interest in boundary crossing, but their contrasts between male and female mobilities in the Mediterranean introduce immobility, short-distance mobility and source criticism as concerns. We then have chapters on how space is constructed and managed, the relationships between experienced and cartographic space, and the intersections of mobilities with literature. Among other insights, Peter Merriman's afterword warns of overlooking «stillness, slowness, waiting and boredom».

Beginning the «Ideas» section, Lucio Biasiori offers a perceptive history of the word «mobility», from its negative classical associations and early modern ambiguities («the mob») to its application to the humanities by Henri Bergson. Other chapters look at the circulation of political ideas, from Ancient Greek tyranny and Roman dictatorship, to exchanges between early modern England and Venice, to European paramilitarism either side of the First World War. Ferdinando Fava and Andrea Savio's contribution on early modern Aristotelian philosophy is compelling, studying scholarly mobility and the circulation of ideas alongside contemporary interest in the mechanics of motion. In some senses, might the «mobilities turn» - which sees kinetic movement as part of a social fabric - represent a revival of Aristotle? An afterword by Aristotle Kallis raises further questions: are pre-modern and modern circulations of knowledge fundamentally different, if the latter is decoupled from human movement? And, recalling Canadelli, should we pay more attention to «friction» (that is, to spatial, cultural, and temporal contexts) when explaining the movement of ideas?

After another brief introduction, the second volume begins with «Objects». The section's chapters range from Assyrian textiles to luxury garments in Renaissance Florence to political tokens in nineteenth-century Europe. The mobility of objects and their meanings is a well-established topic, as Laurent Feller's afterword implies, but the section also includes two chapters on timely themes. Maria Teresa Milicia addresses the repatriation of indigenous ancestral remains: while their violent expropriation helped to construct whiteness, it is hoped that their return might accompany post-colonial renewal. Yet so many people's remains are in a state of waiting, no longer treated as specimens but not yet returned to their communities. Chiara Gallanti and Mauro Varotto then use mobile items in the University of Padua's Museum of Geography to consider the role of collections in an environment now shaped by digitisation, sustainability, and «immaterial» heritage.

The section on «People» is exclusively modern, including military judges in the Italian Empire, circular letters among communities of German expellees after 1945 and Italian repatriates from Libya after 1970, and the migration of business from Italy to Argentina. Especially interesting are two chapters on «slow mobility». In the first, Giovanna Palutan and Donatella Schmidt's ethnographic study of African refugees in Rome lays out voluntary and forced trajectories within the city, all in a context of waiting. Margherita Cisani and Chiara Rabbiosi take a very different subject, introducing «slow tourism» as an emergent way in which people distance themselves from the mainstream, though still encountering destinations with technological supports and prepared scripts. A new twist, perhaps, on the old traveller/tourist distinction? Mimi Sheller's concluding thoughts on the war in Ukraine invite us to add an affective dimension to mobilities studies.

By contrast, the «Texts» section is entirely pre-modern, even if Luciano Bossina's discussion of the ancient Greek translation of Exodus 21 holds significance for present debates over reproductive rights. The section also includes chapters on the circulation of laws in early medieval Italy, the changing uses of a thirteenth-century Arabic-Latin-Arabic

dictionary, the migration of Byzantine manuscripts to the Biblioteca Marciana in Venice and – with equal relevance to the «People» section – Elizabeth I of England's continental intelligence network. Guglielmo Cavallo's afterword unites the linguistic, geographical and temporal mobilities of texts, as well as crossings between oral and written textuality.

The book ends here, without a general conclusion. I have mentioned every chapter to show the diversity of subject and approach across the two volumes, and it is worth adding that all the contributions do well to lay out complex fields of scholarship for the non-specialist. Inevitably, readers will find some contributions more pertinent to their interests than others, and omissions more or less concerning. As a social and cultural historian of the long eighteenth century, I would have liked to read more about social mobility and the forced mobility of Atlantic slavery, for example. But as a statement of the interdisciplinary range of MoHu and the vibrancy of mobilities studies as a whole, this is an impressive collection.

Indeed, a conclusion may be the one thing that is incontrovertibly missing: an opportunity to draw together the book's sections and reflect on what they tell us in combination. What are the pay-offs of juxtaposing mobilities – of ideas, objects, people, and texts – that are usually treated separately? What can scholars in the humanities do now that we could not do with older vocabularies? Some chapters mention passage through time as a form of mobility, for instance, but what do we gain by seeing historical change as temporal mobility? Equally, a conclusion might have included a clear statement on how we can now «reimagine» mobilities in the light of the humanities. The existing contributions nevertheless show that the authors and editors have compelling answers to these questions, and indicate plenty of routes for scholars to pursue; the most successful also nuance the mobilities paradigm, pointing towards frictions, forced mobilities, and immobile subjects. In any case, mobilities studies is clearly flourishing at Padua and elsewhere, promising exciting times for humanities scholars interested in new ways of explaining change.