



From spatial turn to mobilities turn

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Abstract

This article reflects on the contributions of the late John Urry to sociology and to its spatial turn especially by developing the new mobilities paradigm. The proposition of this monograph issue of *Current Sociology* is that space has not yet been appropriately incorporated into sociology. But although partially true, Urry argued that this misses the significance of ‘the mobilities turn’ that swept through and incorporated the spatial turn within sociology but also within other disciplines. Tracing the spatial turn back to the 1980s, the article describes how the new mobilities paradigm grew out of and extended emerging theorizations of space. It argues that Urry’s work advanced a sociology of space through his focus on mobile spatializations and relational space. This included the distribution of agency between people, places, and material assemblages of connectivity; a broader shift in the spatial imagination of mobilities towards ‘non-representational’ social theory; the emergence of new methodologies that were more eclectic, experimental, creative, and linked to arts, design, and public policy; and lastly a renewed interest in geo-ecologies, the political economy of resource flows, and the global mobilities of energy, capital, and material objects as constitutive of spatial complexity. The new mobilities paradigm furthered the spatial turn in social sciences in many crucial ways, and John Urry’s body of work on mobilities and its influence on countless adjacent research areas have spread that spatial thinking far and wide.

Keywords

Mobilities turn, political economy, spatial turn, John Urry

Introduction

The proposition of this monograph issue is that 20–30 years after the spatial turn, space has not yet been appropriately incorporated into sociology. But although partially true

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this misses the significance of ‘the mobilities turn’, which in some regards has swept through and incorporated the spatial turn within sociology but also within other disciplines. In this article I assess the impact of what John Urry and I first called the ‘new mobilities paradigm’ (Sheller and Urry, 2006) for sociology and its transformational consequences for spatial theory. I seek to show how Urry’s work advanced a sociology of space through his radical emphasis on mobile spatializations and relational space, which he first referred to as ‘mobile sociology’ (Urry, 2000a). The new mobilities paradigm furthered the spatial turn in social sciences in many crucial ways, I argue, and John Urry’s body of work on mobilities and its influence on countless adjacent research areas have spread that spatial thinking far and wide.

When John Urry sadly and suddenly passed away in March 2016 we were just celebrating the publication of our co-written article ‘Mobilizing the New Mobilities Paradigm’ in the new journal *Applied Mobilities*, in which we assessed the impact of the mobilities paradigm in the social sciences over the past decade (Sheller and Urry, 2016). We were also in the midst of writing this article together for *Current Sociology* on the relation between the ‘mobilities turn’ and the ‘spatial turn’, which gave me the chance to talk with John about the origins of his thinking on space and movement. It is in that context of reflecting on our work together, and taking stock of its impact across various fields, that I must now complete this article alone by reflecting on the contributions Urry made to sociology, to its spatial turn, and to its mobility turn.¹

We consider that the spatial turn began in France with Lefebvre’s 1974 *Le Production de l’espace* (translated into English as Lefebvre, 1991). The next key moment in a sociology of space involved British debates especially engendered by Massey’s *Spatial Divisions of Labour* (1984). This seminal text examined the complex and varied movements of capital into and out of place and the resulting forms of geological sedimentation occurring within each place (see Massey, 1991, 1994). Massey’s work influenced the emergence of a relational analysis of space, emphasizing that space was ‘the product of interrelations’ and ‘always under construction’ (Massey, 2005: 9). Massey’s text was rapidly followed by Gregory and Urry’s *Social Relations and Spatial Structures*, which brought together geographical and sociological contributions (Gregory and Urry, 1985, with papers by Harvey, Giddens, Massey, Pred, Sayer, Soja, and Thrift). The collection partly informed Urry’s turn to examining the leisured movements of people into and out of place further developed in *The Tourist Gaze* (1990), as well as analyses of multiple mobilities and their spatial consequences in Lash and Urry’s *Economies of Signs and Space* (1994). From the beginning, one could say, Urry’s work was concerned with space and the social relations of its production, that is to say, space as a ‘set of relations between entities’ not a container or an entity itself (Gregory and Urry, 1985: 25), an approach that would lead Urry to the ideas of ‘mobile sociology’ (Urry, 2000a) and a ‘sociology beyond societies’ (Urry, 2000b).

Interestingly, these developments of spatial thinking coincided with the founding of the journals *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* and *Theory, Culture and Society*, and Polity Press in the early 1980s. Urry described these publications as seeking to develop a post-disciplinary social science and social theory in reaction to the Thatcher government’s attacks on universities and especially cuts to university social science programs (Adey and Bissell, 2010).² He also described his work as oppositional to both

American social science and ‘British empiricism’ (Adey and Bissell, 2010: 13).³ Alongside these intellectual commitments, Urry’s personal stance was thoroughly anti-elitist and anti-neoliberal, as was materially evident in his everyday interactions and symbolically evident in his characteristic monochrome work uniform of a (usually) blue cotton shirt, blue jacket and trousers, always with an open collar and no tie. He was an egalitarian through and through. It was in the making of less hierarchical academic spaces and cross-disciplinary networks, as much as in theorizing space, that this spatial turn in Urry’s work was important. And although I focus here on the influence of the mobilities turn on sociology and the sociological imagination, one could argue that it is even more significant to consider how it influenced and influences our current understandings of and engagements with the social, political, and economic conditions of the contemporary world.

Following on from the early social theorists of space such as Lefebvre and Massey, the spatial turn took root and was deeply connected to global political economy and urban processes in the work of spatial theorists such as Edward Soja (1989), David Harvey (1993), Nigel Thrift (1996), and Saskia Sassen (1991) in the 1980s to 1990s. I will not review all of their contributions here, but understand them as part of the conversations out of which the mobilities turn emerged. By the mid-1990s theorizations of the spaces of ‘flow’ and ‘network’ became especially significant with Castells’ *The Power of the Network Society* (1996), and an increasing emphasis on mobility, circulation, and flow within spatial theories of society. This led to a growing interest in scalar processes, and the new studies of place and nature as socio-spatial relations, envisioned as a ‘power geometry’ of scalar configurations by political geographers such as Erik Swyngedouw (1997a, 1997b), Kevin Cox (1998), and Neil Brenner (1997, 1998). What differentiates Urry’s and others’ work within the mobilities turn was partly its radical emphasis on *complex mobilities* of all kinds as the basis for all forms of relational space, and partly its deeper cultural analysis of how these political economic relational spaces were produced in and through social and cultural practices such as tourism, automobility, or consumption.

At the same time, feminist critiques developed of theories of globalization as too focused on macro-economic processes and too generalizing about the West, on the one hand, and of postmodern theories of ‘nomadism’ as based on blindly masculine understandings of the (white, male, privileged) mobile subject, on the other (Braidotti, 1994; Kaplan, 1996; as well as Benko and Strohmayr’s *Space and Social Theory* which included Cresswell’s early mobilities writing [1997]; and see Cresswell, 2006). Feminist theory helped to convene political economy and cultural analysis into a more multidimensional approach to the *spatial formations* of class, race, gender, and sexuality (e.g., McDowell, 1999), with a strong emphasis on heterogeneity and difference (Massey, 2005). One could not say that gender and race were central to Urry’s work, and he recognized his own limitations by often collaborating with others who could bring other perspectives. Yet Urry’s approach had its own particular qualities of broad theoretical synthesis, omnivorous curiosity about social phenomena, and a culturally fluent accessibility. Although he was a great contributor to social theory, he was also never dogmatic about his allegiances.⁴ That openness is part of why his writing appealed to so many readers, and could be incorporated into many different research questions, including those generated from the standpoint of feminist, postcolonial, and critical race theory.

By the turn of the millennium the concept of ‘mobility’ emerged as a key term within various analyses of changing economies, cultures, and globalization. A major contributor was Bauman, who argued in his book *Globalization* that: ‘Mobility climbs to the rank of the uppermost among coveted values – and the freedom to move, perpetually a scarce and unequally distributed commodity, fast becomes the main stratifying factor of our late-modern or postmodern time’ (Bauman, 1998: 2). Bauman’s influential book *Liquid Modernity* (2000) and Urry’s *Sociology Beyond Societies* (2000b) both appeared in 2000 and helped sediment mobilities as a key concept within an emerging spatial social science (see also Sheller and Urry [2000] for the beginning of our work on cities and auto-mobility). Thus we see the expression of the spatial turn within the discipline of sociology as the emergence of ‘mobile sociology’ (Urry, 2000a). It captured this moment when many analysts were beginning to explore ‘mobilities’ in order to theorize emergent aspects of the social world during and just after the decade of the 1990s that Stiglitz labeled the ‘roaring nineties’ (2004).

This turn-of-the-century mobilities rush generated various events, including the Alternative Mobility Futures Conference in Lancaster in 2003 (and Sheller’s *Consuming the Caribbean*, 2003); the Centre for Mobilities Research founded by Urry and Sheller at Lancaster University in 2004; the journal *Mobilities* (edited by Hannam, Sheller, and Urry) published its first issue in 2006; and ‘The New Mobilities Paradigm’ appeared in the special issue of *Environment and Planning A* that we co-edited on ‘mobilities and materialities’ (Sheller and Urry, 2006). There was a strong emphasis in all of these upon crossing spatial scales, blurring disciplinary boundaries, exploring materialities and temporalities, moving beyond national or societal frameworks and exploring whether ‘mobilities’ could provide a frame for a different kind of social science. In a somewhat parallel development within cultural geography, these multiple characteristics were welded together in Cresswell’s *On the Move: Mobility in the Modern Western World* (2006), and a generation of human geographers became fellow travelers in the emerging mobilities turn (e.g., Adey, 2010; Cresswell, 2011, 2012, 2014a; Merriman, 2012).

Through these publications and events, it has been widely argued that the new mobilities paradigm is ‘transforming the ways in which scholars think about space – especially urban space. ... Relational thinking about cities disrupts an overly containerized view of urban space and opens up new vistas for examining cities and their wider social relationships, connections, and flows’ (Jonas, 2015: 281). It also had a strong impact on many other fields that took an interest in relational space, including migration studies (Blunt, 2007), cultural geography (Cresswell, 2011, 2012, 2014a), design (Jensen, 2013, 2014), and even transport studies itself, in which it seems that ‘there is too much transport in the study of travel and not enough society and thinking through the complex intersecting relations between society and transport’ (Urry, 2007: 20).

In that regard the new mobilities paradigm may have helped to extend earlier spatial thinking to new terrains beyond political geography and political economy, connecting it more strongly to cultural sociology and cultural studies more in the vein that Massey had started (Massey, 2005). Thus it also opened up spatial theory both to new forms of cultural analysis of political and economic processes at bodily as well as global scales, and to new forms of applied research whether on policy arenas such as urban planning, transport planning, and mobile communication, or on practices that were adopting mobile

perspectives such as public art, design, and architecture. The concept that held all of these diverse arenas together was the new keyword of mobilities.

There was a strong emphasis in this foundational work upon thinking across spatial scales, blurring disciplinary boundaries, exploring materialities and temporalities, and moving beyond 'sedentary' national or societal frameworks, all of which the new mobilities paradigm held in common with some aspects of the earlier spatial turn. What truly set it apart, however, was the question of whether 'mobilities' could provide a vision for a different kind of social science: more open to multiple disciplinary perspectives and methodologies, more wide-ranging in its objects of study, more attuned to diverse spatial relations, more speculative and future-oriented. This work was not simply about describing or explaining a more mobile world (as some misinterpreted it), but also about the ways in which contemporary respatializations of the relation between mobilities, immobilities, and infrastructural moorings deeply shaped uneven spatial terrains, as described in *Global Complexity* (Urry, 2003).

The new mobilities paradigm

I now turn to a brief elaboration of the new mobilities paradigm, showing especially how it is connected to relational thinking about space and to spatial thinking about social relations. Above all, I want to emphasize how the mobilities turn highlighted the implications of this spatial (and temporal) restructuring both for the social sciences and for social futures.

With these developments in social theory in the 1990s and into the turn of the millennium, a series of emergent 'facts' came to the attention of sociologists that challenged older paradigms within social sciences. Urry generally argued that the scale of developments seemed to be ushering in a new global ordering: the growth and spread of fast movement around the world especially through new kinds of aeromobilities; the sheer diversity of mobility systems in play; the power and risks of the self-expanding automobility system; novel complex entanglements of physical movement and digital communications; spreading of mobility domains that bypass national societies and the significance of multiple movements for contemporary governmentality; and the importance of mobilities for people's social and emotional lives (Urry, 2000b). As we began our original piece: 'all the world seems to be on the move' (Sheller and Urry, 2006: 208). Large-scale mobilities developed especially during the 'roaring nineties' that were difficult to comprehend within predominantly sedentarist theories of social science. Of course, some critics felt that there was an over-emphasis on the Global North in such statements, and that empirical studies were ignorant of happenings in the Global South (though my own work was deeply grounded in Caribbean Studies; see e.g., Sheller, 2003). Yet the field has constantly expanded in terms of its spatial reach of geographical areas, topics of concern, and practitioners.

However, at the same time, we were acutely aware of the differential movements of people and objects, the uneven systems of (im)mobility, and the changing mobility regimes that shaped the capabilities for movement and dwelling, the experiences of smooth or striated spaces, the frictions and turbulence of mobility (Cresswell, 2014b). This critical approach to the relationality of im/mobilities generated rich debates not only

within British sociology, urban and transport studies, and cultural geography, but also within European social theory concerned with reflexive modernization, cosmopolitanism, and their relation to mobility regimes and 'motility' as a potential (e.g., Canzler et al., 2008). It was sometimes less warmly embraced by feminist and postcolonial theorists, for whom the politics of mobility was always already freighted with histories of patriarchy, colonialism, and racial domination. Yet Urry was open to these critical interpretations and the kinds of questions about power that they generated. As he put it, sometimes it is the mobile elite who move the most, yet 'it's sometimes those with more network capital who are the immobile, who can summon the mobile to wherever they are. ... Who is moving? Who is moving whom? Who has to move? Who can stay put?' (quoted in Adey and Bissell, 2010: 7).

Urry further developed the concept of mobilities through multiple collaborations, including work on systems of automobility (see Featherstone et al., 2004; Sheller and Urry, 2000; Urry, 2004), aeromobilities (Cwerner et al., 2009; Urry et al., 2016), mobile lives and network capital (Elliott and Urry, 2010), and mobile methodologies (Büscher and Urry, 2009; Büscher et al., 2011), among others. Moreover, much of this new development was not so much to do with changes in transportation but involved broader shifts in digital communications, and embodied affect and emotions. Thus his work also linked up with new lines of work on affective geographies, affordances, and atmospheres, exploring the distribution of agency between people, places, and material assemblages of connectivity, especially in tourism studies (Edensor, 1998), cultural geography (e.g., Adey, 2010), and in design thinking (e.g., Jensen, 2013, 2014). Indeed it could be argued that there was a broader shift in the spatial imagination of mobilities towards 'non-representational' (Thrift, 2007; Vannini, 2015) social theory and methodologies that were more eclectic, tentative, experimental, creative, and linked to arts, design, and public policy (Sheller, 2013, 2015). This too set the mobilities paradigm apart from the first generation of the spatial turn: it mobilized social theory in new ways, hailing new assemblages of students, researchers, and practitioners in ways that people found exciting, hopeful, and critically productive.

In sum, like the spatial turn, the new mobilities paradigm challenged the idea of space as a container for social processes, and thus brought the dynamic, ongoing production of space into social theory across many different domains of research. But beyond that it did something more: it also challenged disciplinary containers and allowed sociologists, geographers, anthropologists, media studies scholars, artists and architects, and many others to move with each other in new assemblages that drew in ever-widening circles of interest, intervention, and creative instigation. The categories of separate social science sub-fields and disciplines were destabilized, put into motion, and the new mobilities paradigm spiraled outward, gathering and making possible these broader shifts. What ways of thinking and researching *space* did this new paradigm involve? Let me draw on the characteristic clarity of a list that Urry generated in our initial exchanges and discussions for this article.

First, it involves examining the place of movement within the very workings of social institutions and of social practices, those institutions and practices that form people's lives. They each presuppose multiple, interdependent mobilities. Social relationships involve diverse connections, sometimes at a distance sometimes face-to-face. Mobilities

depend on multiple kinds of material objects, as well as lumpy, fragile, aged, gendered, racialised, and more or less impaired bodies, inhabited as people are intermittently on the move. In this respect it is built upon the insights of Lefebvre (1991 [1974]) and Massey (2005) on the production of space. Being 'on the move' is contingent, uneven, and contested and depends upon differential materialities, spatialities, and temporalities that are involved in movement, meetings, and access, and yet often taken-for-granted and not noticed (see *Mobilities* on all these topics, as well as Adey et al., 2014). So mobilities theory implied that we can investigate relational space from the ground up, as it were, where bodies engaged in walking, running, wheeling, biking, driving, etc., and in everyday social practices such as going to work, minding children, preparing food, queuing, meeting, sending messages, heating a home, or for some crossing a border.

Second, work within the new paradigm examines five different modes of mobilities and their complex combinations that together make possible the institutions and practices of social life and its spatial practices. According to Urry (2007) these are: *corporeal* travel of people for work, leisure, family life, pleasure, migration, and escape, organized in terms of contrasting time-space patterns (ranging from daily commuting to once-in-a-lifetime exile); physical movement of *objects* to producers, consumers, and retailers; as well as sending and receiving presents and souvenirs; *imaginative* travel effected through the images of places and peoples appearing on and moving across multiple print, visual, and social media; *virtual* travel often in real time transcending geographical and social distance using digital media and communicational connectivity; and *communicative* travel through person-to-person messages via texts, letters, telegraph, telephone, fax, mobile, and smartphone. Social institutions and practices presuppose some combination of these mobility forms (Urry, 2007). Thus there is little 'pure' travel as such; it is to be understood as located within the forms in which specific social institutions and spatial practices are organized. These practices and institutions, such as professional work, pilgrimage, post-employment lives, being a refugee or asylum seeker, service work, diasporic lives, tourism, a person's friendship or family group, all presuppose intermittent interrelated mobilities, each with their own particular mobility regimes and forms of control. Notably, the emphasis here on the combinations of human and non-human physical mobilities with communicative, imaginative, and virtual mobilities sets it apart from earlier spatial theory, which really did not encompass all of these dimensions.

Third, these multiple mobilities necessitate distinct exemplars of research to capture and represent various kinds of movement and related spatial practices and mobility regimes. Mobile methods are qualitative, quantitative, visual, and experimental (see on mobile methods: Büscher et al., 2011; D'Andrea et al., 2011; Fincham et al., 2009; Kusenbach, 2012). Some mobile methods that have been recently deployed include walk-alongs (Ingold and Vergunst, 2008; Kusenbach, 2003), ride-alongs (Aldred and Jungnickel, 2012), longitudinal studies of migrants (Kalir, 2013), shadowing (Jirón, 2011), virtual ethnographies (Molz, 2012), mobile positioning studies (Ahas et al., 2010), visual studies of digital images (Larsen, 2008), studies of stillness and waiting (Bissell, 2007), social network analysis (Larsen et al., 2006), biosensing of emotions on the move (Spinney, 2014), and various kinds of textual, sound and visual diaries that respondents keep while 'on the move'. All of the above methods offer entirely new perspectives on the broader political and economic power geometries that the original theorists of the spatial

turn emphasized, offering data that are more small-scale, more intimate, more interpersonal, and more enacted in everyday relations. Though others have noted the need also for historical methodologies (Merriman, 2014) and temporally deeper analyses of genealogies, archaeologies, and geo-ecologies of mobility (Sheller, 2016), which are both crucial aspects of the field.

Fourth, there is a complex assembly of movements *and* moorings within these mobility forms. Mobilities are organized in and through systems and such mobility systems presuppose ‘immobile infrastructures’ that are increasingly ‘splintered’ in terms of access (Graham and Marvin, 2001). Such mobility systems are normally based upon various ‘designs’ that have the effect of circulating people, objects, and information at various spatial ranges and speeds (see Jensen, 2014, on designing mobilities). But these designed mobility systems and routeways can often persist over time. This can be especially seen in the case of the interdependent socio-material systems involved in the automobility system of private vehicles, roads, drivers, passengers, petrol stations, oil drilling, refining, car cultures, and forms of governance (Sheller, 2012; Sheller and Urry, 2000). Such mobility systems of course had important spatial implications for cities, suburbs, and the overall inter-regional transportation system that contributed to the uneven development of capitalist spatiality. This is perhaps where the mobilities turn intersects most closely with earlier studies of shifting power geometries and scalar processes. But their effects were not only on built space, but to use Lefebvre’s terms also on conceived space and perceived spaces of representation, and on the lived experiences of the social practice of space.

Fifth, this paradigm emphasizes how social practices can emerge through ‘unintended consequences’ stemming from the ways people use, innovate, and combine different systems (and their spatialities). New or existing technologies are not bounded to certain sectors or ‘domains’, such as ‘transport’. There are complex processes involved in social innovation, which lead beyond plans and apparent agency. Studies of the history of systems show many kinds of user innovation such as the crucial role played by ‘tinkering’ by women drivers in the early history of the car system (Franz, 2005). Increasingly, mobility systems are based on expert forms of knowledge, but they are simultaneously vulnerable to failure, disruption, and cascading disasters when small things go wrong with big consequences (see Birtchnell and Büscher, 2011). Disasters also generate their own mobilities and immobilities, entrenching uneven spatial structures through the demobilizations and remobilizations associated with emergency mobilities (Adey, 2016; Cook and Butz, 2015; Sheller, 2014a). Here we see a greater sense of non-human agency and complexity informing the new mobilities paradigm, and a less clear cut struggle between agents in processes of spatial structuration – much is out of our hands. This more pessimistic view certainly informs Urry’s last monograph on the future (Urry, 2016).

Sixth, the new mobilities paradigm involves analyzing diverse intersecting networks, relations, flows and circulation, and not fixed places. It suggests that it is crucial to bring in the dynamic, ongoing production of space via everyday social practices into social theory. We argued that all places are tied into at least networks of connections so that nowhere can be an island (Sheller and Urry, 2006: 208–209). Especially significant here is ‘network capital’ that depends upon the degree of access to the following elements: an

array of appropriate documents, passports, visas, money, vaccines, data-readiness, qualifications, and so on; a capability to connect to others (workmates, friends, and family members) at-a-distance; movement capacities in relationship to access to various means of movement; location-free information and contact points; communication devices and mobile data access; appropriate, safe, and secure meeting places; access to technical systems including: cars, roadspace, fuel, lifts, aircraft, trains, bikes, phones, email; and time and other resources to manage all of these, especially when there is system failure. Various studies show how network capital varies between social groups with such capital sustaining relations of power between them (Elliott and Urry, 2010, on the network capital of ‘globals’). Moreover, as societies are more spread out, so scheduled visits and meetings are significant but also occur ‘on the fly’ (see Laurier, 2004). Social networks are accomplished, in process, weaving together material, technical, and social elements. People’s relational commitments to their social networks of work, friendship, and family life are crucial as people visit *and* receive hospitality from others (Larsen et al., 2006). So rather than simply emphasizing the relational production of space as a macro-level process driven by capital and its shifting spatio-temporal fixes, mobilities research has delved into the dynamic, ongoing, day-to-day production of space in everyday lives as they become entangled with material objects.

Finally, the world is *not* simply more mobile than ever, at least not in the sense of there being an enhanced ‘freedom of mobility’. Mobilities are tracked, controlled, governed, under surveillance and unequal, especially because of the increasing power of big ‘mobile’ data. Mobility is relative with different historical contexts being organized through specific constellations of uneven mobilities. These may produce relational effects of heightened intensification of mobility and speed for some relative to others, but there is also a record of coerced mobilities, displacement, and closely controlled tracking, which counters discourses of ‘mobility as freedom’. The larger scale ‘frictions of distance’ (Harvey, 2006: 122) here generate many problems for the sovereignty of states and challenges of governance and control, so mobilities and scales are interlocked and subject to many modalities of struggle. Mobility struggles and contested notions of mobility justice are key notions (see Ilcan, 2013; Sheller, 2013).

Mobility futures

Finally, I turn to Urry’s (2016) arguments that the mobilities paradigm is central in the deciphering of current crises of the future, which are both spatial and social. Here I summarize his work, especially when he became co-director of the Institute for the Future at Lancaster University, on two key areas associated with such crises: fossil fuels and offshoring. The relevance of this futurist theme in Urry’s late work is that it once again highlighted the underlying *spatial processes* that structured not only global economies and capital flows, but also culture, consumption, communication, and everyday social practices. While the political economy of space developed by critical geographers also focuses on resources, such as Swyngedouw’s (2004) work on water in Ecuador, or more recent concepts of ‘planetary urbanism’ (Brenner and Schmid, 2015), Urry’s analysis of social futures encompasses a more holistic cultural political economy and geo-ecology that leads to the ultimate question: *What is the future?* (Urry, 2016).

First, the fossil fuels of coal, gas, and oil came to be deployed over the past two or so centuries and they now account for over four-fifths of the world's current energy provision (Huber, 2009; Tyfield and Urry, 2014). The growth of capitalism thus involved a dramatic decline of local supplies of energy. In the twentieth century the fossil fuel of oil made possible a globalizing mobile society and its liquid lives and loves (Bauman, 2000). Oil almost literally made the world go round, being energy-dense, storage-able, mobile, versatile, convenient, and very cheap (Urry, 2013). But global supplies of this unique source of transport energy are seriously limited. The Chief Economist of the International Energy Authority stated that crude oil production peaked in 2006.⁵ A former UK Chief Scientist stated that the global financial crisis of 2007–2008 was partly an oil price crunch generated by reduced supplies and dramatically rising prices (Murray and King, 2012). Almost every time there are oil shortages and price rises a world economic crisis occurs partly because of rising demand for oil for mobility from almost all countries and especially the BRICS. There are particular issues concerning rapidly rising mobility patterns and the purchase of luxury cars within China (Tyfield et al., 2014). And even if there is not a literal peak it is increasingly unlikely for political reasons that remaining oil could be combusted.

And this is because of the global climate crisis (Urry, 2011). In burning fossil fuel, 2000 billion tons of CO₂ have spewed into the atmosphere and will remain there for hundreds of years (Berners-Lee and Clark, 2013: 26). CO₂ emissions from 1850 to the present increased exponentially and show no signs of slowing down, let alone reversing (Berners-Lee and Clark, 2013: 12). Many now report how the remaining fossil fuel supplies need to be left underground in order to have a good chance of keeping temperature increases within a 2°C limit (Berners-Lee and Clark, 2013; Hansen et al., 2013). Thus 'business as usual' is impossible and there has to be the reversal of fossil fuel based energy systems around the world. This necessitates a most unusual economic, social, and political program, of developing global low carbonness, for the extensive reduction in mobility and other uses of fossil fuel energy. This would involve campaigning for reduced abundance to ensure reasonable abundance in the longer term and for the rest of the globe. Global warming and the need for CO₂ emissions reduction drives a search for new lower carbon ways of moving. Older modes of transportation are no longer viable and many now advocate new low-carbon practices: post-car, walking, biking, off grid living, slow mobility, renewable energy, sharing economy. These practices imply an extensive spatio-temporal restructuring of mobile lives and mobility regimes.

Indeed, there is what could be described as an urban crisis stemming from traffic congestion, air pollution, demographic explosion, and massive inequality generating urgent new approaches to urban planning. This pushes the rise of post-automobility planning, re-makes urban studies, and shifts understanding of what cities are (Dudley et al., 2012; Newman and Kenworthy, 2015). Urbanism is increasingly understood as a complex emergent global system of networked connections, dominant mobility regimes, and critical counter-practices. These new approaches to urbanism have driven shifts in transport policy in cities away from 'predict and provide' and towards a focus on complex socio-technical systems and a whole new range of mobile social practices involving: new fuel systems for cars, vans, and buses; new materials for constructing 'car' bodies; smart vehicles and 'smart-card' technology; deprivatizing cars through city-wide car-sharing, cooperative car clubs, and smart car-hire schemes; street and neighborhood redesign;

worldwide disruptive innovation and the appearance of ‘digital capital’ which begins to disrupt old ‘carbon capital’ through emergent innovation ecosystems (see Dudley et al., 2012). The worldwide move towards car-free cities, or at least reductions in car use, interestingly reflects this trend (Furness, 2010).

But a further, really significant problem here stems from neoliberal deregulation and mass mobility from around 1980 onwards, which is the problem of offshoring (Urry, 2014). This involves most major corporations, many rich individuals and governments systematically evading rules, laws, taxes, regulations, and norms. Offshoring stems from too much mobility, and especially of money which now moves through computerized high frequency trading in millionths of a second (Gore, 2013). In such an accelerating world, financial futures arrive before they have been conceptualized or even talked about by relevant actors. Offshoring entails sustained attacks on governance by national states and international organizations, and especially upon those efforts to regulate and legislate on the basis of democratic control including of present and future energy and emissions. Offshoring is a spatial strategy: an escape from state forms of financial control of territory, taking advantage of spatial loopholes in territoriality as a legal jurisdiction.

Most offshoring practices are engineered to avoid regulations, to keep secret and to ‘escape’ offshore, helping to form an ‘irresponsible’ offshore world. This ‘irresponsibility’ makes it hard to ensure that energy, taxes, economies, and societies are locatable and accountable within each nation-state, this being necessary for a transparent low-carbon world to be set in train (Urry, 2014). Too much mobility of the wrong sort and at the wrong time would seem to be generating a major series of crises in the new century, crises that the new mobilities paradigm needs to grasp with extreme urgency.

Ultimately, the new mobilities paradigm leads to a geopolitical-ecological turn, but one that is premised on the complex cultural co-production of the social, the political, and the natural through mobile spatializations (Sheller, 2014b). Urry pointed out that in his later work on climate change (2011), peak oil, and offshoring (2014) he was thinking about these in terms of the ‘political economy of mobilities’ and suggested that ‘there will develop a “post-mobilities” mobilities paradigm that will be much more resource based’ (Adey and Bissell, 2010: 3). The larger scale ‘distances’ traveled today generate many problems for the sovereignty of states and challenges of governance and control, he argued, so mobilities and scales are interlocked and subject to many modalities of struggle. Mobility struggles and contested notions of mobility justice are key concerns for the spatialities of the future as we come up against the limits of planetary ecologies, and it is apparent that mobilities re-make scale itself.

Conclusion

These are the new sociological questions that John Urry and his many interlocutors have asked, and that generatively continue to move social theory – as a mobile and relational spatial theory – into new public realms. I have argued first that spatial theory has deeper roots that begin in theorizations of the production of space in the 1980s, and the emergence of relational understandings of space and spatial processes in the 1990s that led directly into the emergence of the new mobilities paradigm around the turn of the millennium. However, the mobilities paradigm departs from this earlier tradition in part because of its far more transdisciplinary emphasis on cultural mobilities, meaning, representation,

affect, and embodied social practices as much as the large-scale political and economic geographies that were the focus of the spatial turn. This means that it has found intersections with many other disciplines and a wide range of epistemological approaches (Büscher et al., 2016).

Second, I have argued that the new mobilities paradigm furthered the spatial turn in the social sciences in many crucial ways because of the ways in which it called for new methodologies and generated novel multidisciplinary assemblages of empirical and applied research, and even a move towards artistic research creation. The new mobilities paradigm continues to stand in contrast to the quantified empiricist traditions in American and British social sciences, the hierarchies of academic departments, and their disciplinary closure. It also stands against the market-driven discipline of the neoliberal university. Yet it still offers a useful, transformative, and powerful set of questions and methodologies for a dynamic and international research community. Although it has been resisted, in some ways, by mainstream sociology, it has arguably transformed the sociological imagination by jumping scales and mobilizing new research communities. John Urry's body of work on mobilities and its influence on countless adjacent research areas have mobilized relational spatial thinking far and wide.

And, third, I have suggested that the turn in Urry's late work towards critical theories of fossil fuels, climate change, and offshoring are all instances of an urgent need for thinking through the respatialization of future worlds. While this has always been implicit within the spatial turn and its critical analysis of nature and urban processes, we could say that the new mobilities paradigm has pushed this future-orientation more urgently into the world by seeking to engage more applied fields of planning, policy, and creative intervention. Insofar as it has generated exchanges with transport planners, urban policy makers, designers, architects, social workers, emergency responders, artists, and futurists in collaborative work, it has challenged us to ask: what can social science do?

Having built a vibrant international network of mobility scholars spanning dozens of universities and many countries, having created new journals and new book series, having inspired new research centers and career trajectories, we can say that John Urry created a new kind of mobile space for scholarship: one that reaches beyond disciplines, enables new kinds of intellectual formations, and allows for sociology to renew its relevance in the world at large as it addresses crucial public issues including dark economies, resource extraction, climate disasters, sustainable urbanism, migration conflicts, and mobility justice. It is time for sociology as a discipline to open its own paradigmatic horizons to the assemblage of transdisciplinary spatial and temporal questions that the mobilities paradigm has opened up.

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Notes

1. Peter Adey wrote a comprehensive tribute to John's work for *Theory, Culture and Society*, highlighting his influence on so many others (www.theoryculturesociety.org/a-mobile-life-john-urry-1946-2016-by-peter-adey/), followed by my own piece, 'Moving with John Urry'

- (www.theoryculturesociety.org/moving-with-john-urry-by-mimi-sheller/), both of which I draw on here. Thanks also to Cosmin Popan for comments on an initial draft.
2. Interview available at: <http://epd.sagepub.com/content/28/1/1.short>
 3. From my perspective in the United States, this anti-positivist edge in Urry's work helps to explain the continuing reluctance of the American Sociological Association and many mainstream US sociology departments to engage with the new mobilities paradigm to the extent that it has taken off elsewhere.
 4. E.g., on Urry's self-distancing from the field of tourism studies despite his great contributions, see Keith Hollinshead's amusing essay for *Anatolia* (www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13032917.2015.1085721).
 5. www.good.is/post/international-energy-agency-s-top-economist-says-oil-peaked-in-2006/

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Author biography

Mimi Sheller, PhD, is Professor of Sociology and founding Director of the Center for Mobilities Research and Policy at Drexel University in Philadelphia. She serves on the Scientific Advisory Board of the Mobile Lives Forum and is President of the International Association for the History of Transport, Traffic and Mobility. Her recent books include *Citizenship from Below* (Duke University Press, 2012); *The Routledge Handbook of Mobilities* (2013); *Aluminum Dreams: The Making of Light Modernity* (MIT Press, 2014); *Mobility and Locative Media* (2015); and *L.A. Re.Play: Mobile Network Culture in Place-Making* (2016). As founding co-editor of the journal *Mobilities*, associate editor of *Transfers: Interdisciplinary Journal of Mobility Studies*, and co-author with John Urry of several influential articles, she helped to establish the new interdisciplinary field of mobilities research.

Résumé

Cet article se penche sur les dernières contributions de John Urry à la sociologie et à son tournant spatial spécifiquement en développant le nouveau paradigme des mobilités.

Ce numéro spécial montre que l'espace n'a pas encore été incorporé adéquatement à la sociologie. Cependant, bien que cela soit partiellement vrai, Urry a fait valoir que ce manque ne considère pas l'importance d'un « changement dans les mobilités » qui incorpora le changement spatial dans la sociologie et dans d'autres disciplines. Retraçant ce changement depuis les années 1980, l'article décrit comment naquit le nouveau paradigme des mobilités et comment se développèrent les nouvelles théories sur l'espace. Le travail d'Urry a anticipé une sociologie de l'espace en mettant l'accent sur les spatialisations mobiles et l'espace relationnel. Cela comprend la répartition des agences entre les personnes, les lieux et les mécanismes matériels de connectivité ; un changement plus large dans l'imagination des mobilités spatiales jusqu'à une théorie sociale « non représentationnelle » ; l'émergence de nouvelles méthodologies plus éclectiques, expérimentales, créatives et liées à l'art, la conception et la politique publique ; et, enfin, un regain d'intérêt envers les écologies sociales, l'économie politique des ressources et la circulation globale des énergies, des capitaux et des produits comme éléments constitutifs de la complexité spatiale. Le nouveau paradigme des mobilités a favorisé le tournant spatial en sciences sociales sur de nombreux aspects cruciaux, et l'influence de l'œuvre de John Urry sur la mobilité a propagé cette pensée spatiale à d'innombrables domaines de recherche.

Mots-clés

Changement spatial, changement de mobilité, John Urry, économie politique

Resumen

Este artículo reflexiona sobre las últimas aportaciones de John Urry a la sociología y a su cambio espacial desarrollando el nuevo paradigma de movilidad. La premisa de esta edición especial es que espacio aún no ha sido incorporado adecuadamente a la sociología. Urry argumentó que, aunque esa premisa sea parcialmente cierta, pasa por alto la importancia de un “cambio en las movilidades” que arrastró e incorporó el cambio espacial a la sociología y a otras disciplinas. Rastreado ese cambio desde la década de 1980, el artículo describe cómo nació el nuevo paradigma de las movilidades y cómo extendió nuevas teorías sobre el espacio. Afirma que trabajo de Urry anticipó una sociología del espacio pese a su énfasis en las espacializaciones móviles y el espacio relacional. Esto incluye la distribución de agencias entre personas, lugares y mecanismos materiales de conectividad; un cambio más amplio desde la imaginación espacial de las movilidades hacia una teoría social “no representacional”; la aparición de nuevas metodologías más eclécticas, experimentales, creativas y vinculadas al arte, el diseño y la política pública; y, por último, un interés renovado en las ecologías sociales, la economía política de los recursos y la circulación global de energías, capitales y productos como elementos constitutivos de la complejidad espacial. El nuevo paradigma de las movilidades amplió el giro espacial en las ciencias sociales en muchos aspectos cruciales, y la influencia del trabajo de John Urry sobre la movilidad ha extendido ese pensamiento espacial a innumerables áreas de investigación.

Palabras clave

Cambio espacial, cambio de movilidad, John Urry, economía política