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*Prog Hum Geogr* 2014 38: 712 originally published online 8 April 2014

DOI: 10.1177/0309132514530316

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# Mobilities III: Moving on

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## Abstract

While the previous report made a strong case for a focus on historical geographies of mobility, this report is focused on looming future issues for geographies of mobility (and mobilities studies more generally). The report uses the recent scare over the presence of horsemeat mixed in with beef products on European supermarket shelves to consider four important themes. First, it considers the notion of ‘critical mobilities’ – mobilities which interrupt the taken-for-granted world of flows and force us to question how things move and the meanings given to those movements. Second, the report examines the theme of animal mobilities, as the movements of animals, dead or alive, often provide examples of mobilities that upset established orders. Third, it scrutinizes the importance of logistics as a process and logic that moves things, people and animals around the world. Finally, the report reflects on the practices of off-shoring and outsourcing as mobility-based practices that are proving controversial in the current political and economic climate. The conclusion reflects on the centrality of security to all of these themes and to mobility studies in general.

## Keywords

animal geographies, logistics, mobility, off-shoring, security

## I Introduction

As I write today, much of Europe is gripped by stories about how horsemeat entered the food chain under the guise of beef. The way in which food gets to our plate is being opened up to us on a daily basis in the manner of the best kind of geography lecture. Inspectors, police forces and regulators across Europe are involved in a mass exercise in ‘follow the thing’ methodology that encompasses supermarkets across Europe, meat factories in Wales, processing plants in France, abattoirs in Romania and subcontractors in Cyprus (Cook et al., 2011). Maps are appearing on websites and in newspapers with a dizzying series of arrows connecting the dots of the geography of beef/horse hybrids. It is a geography of mobilities and their moorings. All kinds of things are travelling in this story, including

horse, beef, cows, regulations, science, gastro-nomic norms and capital. At the centre of the story is an anxiety about both the movements of horseflesh into cowflesh and the kinds of complicated movements across national borders that the production of profit is increasingly dependent on. It is also a story about the mobilities of narratives of pollution, British and European identity and cultural norms surrounding the consumption of horsemeat.

In this final report of a set of three, I use this story to flesh out some important agendas for both the empirical fact of movement and how

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we might choose to study it. In previous reports, I have been insistent on the importance of a historical perspective in mobilities research and writing – on not giving in to a sense of mobilities being ‘new’ (Cresswell, 2011a, 2012). While I still insist on this, and much good work on historical mobilities is being written (Cidell, 2012a; Keighren and Withers, 2012; Nimmo, 2011), this final report is more focused on future mobilities, recognizing that these rest on the production of mobilities in the past.

## II Critical mobilities

The discovery of horsemeat incorporated into beef products in Europe provides us with an example of mobility that troubles established understandings of how things move. Horseflesh mobilities thus fall into the category of what Söderström et al. (2013a) have recently called ‘critical mobilities’. In the introduction to an important new interdisciplinary collection of essays, they define critical mobilities in three senses. First, as mobilities that appear problematic in the discourses of governments and the media (such as horsemeat moving into hamburgers). Here, critical mobilities are controversial mobilities. Hence the essays in the collection focus on a range of mobile entities ‘such as reproductive health technologies and medical migrants in India, undocumented labor migrants in the USA, road interchanges and shopping malls in cities of the global South, or branch campuses in the United Arab Emirates’ (Söderström et al., 2013b: vi). The second meaning of ‘critical’ is the capacity to provide critical perspectives on the constitution of society through an approach that foregrounds these mobilities. Third, critical mobilities seek to probe the limits of the mobilities approach itself as well as productive encounters with other ways of thinking.

The collection is notable both for the array of problematic mobilities it deals with and for how it includes many of the key arenas with which mobilities work needs to grapple going forward.

Foremost among these is the placing of human mobilities in an entangled web of ‘other’ mobilities that have sometimes been demoted in mobilities research. Particularly welcome is the further development of work on the mobilities of *ideas* that travel alongside humans and things. The first section of the book is devoted to how various norms and forms move between cities – particularly postcolonial cities. Built forms, such as university campuses, move along with planners, policies and the materials of new landscapes (Geddie and Panese, 2013). Robinson (2013), for instance, argues for a focus on ‘ideas in motion’ that draws our attention to how the movement of ideas is linked to their transformation as they ‘arrive at’ new destinations and become connected to new actors and things. These ideas (such as urban policy) become embedded in cities in novel ways. In the process of moving, some elements get lost or translated.

Accounts of forms of mobility that cross national boundaries frequently seesaw between celebratory narratives and a sense of pervasive threat. Indeed, it was exactly this kind of logic that lay at the heart of the citizen figure as ‘he’ came into being in early modern Europe. The citizen was a new model figure for a late medieval world that was produced in relation to the figure of the vagrant who was the citizen’s mobile other (Cresswell, 2011b, 2013). In a modern guise, the citizen continues to provide an ideal type for mobile subjecthood. In the current era, as De Genova argues, we are living in a time that simultaneously celebrates open borders and the right to (global) mobility at the same time as it insists on a ‘hegemonic politics of security’ which he calls ‘securitarianism’ (De Genova, 2013: 103). He outlines how anti-terrorist discourse has figured migration as part of the problem at the same time as the War on Terror relied on and even endorsed a world without (some) borders.

The antiterrorist worldview projects the ideal of a quasi-borderless state formation, global in scope

and planetary in reach. From the standpoint of state power, therefore, it becomes conceivable to exalt mobility even as it comes to be subjected as never before to an intricate overlay of controls and surveillance. (De Genova, 2013: 115)

The spectre of terrorism post 9/11 has been continuously linked to the ‘problem’ of immigration by western governments. In this way, cross-border mobilities – a lynchpin of the post Second World War liberal state – have been subjected to securitization like never before. In Lahav’s (2013) terms, we have seen a process of ‘mobilizing against mobility’.

A similar logic pervades the outsourcing of medical transcription from the USA to India. Outsourcing is a process that connects places through a series of interlaced mobilities. Prasad and Prasad (2012) have revealed a neocolonial logic in the process of outsourcing the transcription of medical data from the USA to India. This process, they argue, rests on a logic that constructs both ideal global citizens of a flat world and potential terrorists bent on undoing that very system. Bodies in this topology (where Bangalore is a suburb of Boston) are coded as both docile (people elsewhere obediently typing data into computers) and dangerous (people who are unaccountable and have access to private and privileged data). The mobility of data rests on the disciplining of bodies at the micro-scale within call centres and data centres in India and elsewhere. Here workers are forbidden from having pens, pencils or papers, and sit, in highly regulated ways, at computers that have no data ports. This particular mode of outsourcing connects mobilities across scales in highly disciplined ways (Prasad and Prasad, 2012).

### III Travelling differently

Mobilities research is notable for the range of modes of travel it considers. A number of subspecies of mobility have populated the literature. The three most prominent have been walking, automobility and aeromobility (Bissell et al.,

2012; Davidson, 2012; Lin, 2012; Nikolaeva, 2012). Recent work has seen a more diverse array of mobilities under examination – both different forms of mobility (even in similar vehicles) and mobilities in different places (work outside the ‘global north’). Driving a car is a very different proposition if you want to do it in Singapore than it is in the USA. Lin’s essay on the regulation and costing of time in relation to car ownership and public transport provision reminds us that mobilities research needs to happen outside the UK, Scandinavia and North America (Lin, 2012). Moving in a car can mean driving or ‘passenger’. There has been a lively discussion of how people actively move as passengers (Adey et al., 2012; see also Adey et al., 2013). One such passenger was the lead character in the Don DeLillo novel, and subsequent movie, *Cosmopolis*, who moves very slowly in the back of a limo across Manhattan (Davidson, 2012). Train travel is experienced, for most of us, as passengers. Moran et al. (2012) consider the role of trains in transporting prisoners in Russia, thus combining the seemingly opposed trajectories of mobilities geographies and carceral geographies in one paper. They remind us that mobility (as driver or passenger) is not easily conflated with freedom. Vaninni’s (2012) monograph on the lives of people dependent on the complicated ferry service of British Columbia, Canada, is an exemplary sustained ethnographic piece of research and writing which shines a light on the complicated time-space routines of ferry passengers.

One way in which groups of people practise automobility together is as a band in a van. The space of the van as used by an American band on a European tour became a kind of moving home from home in which musicians fulfilled, in remarkably banal ways, the requirements of being ‘on the road’ (Novoa, 2012). Another kind of hybrid mobile subject is the motorbike or scooter rider. In some cities, especially in Asia, travelling by motor-scooter is the preferred way of moving and it comes with its own forms of

knowledge, sets of representation and embodied experience (Pinch and Reimer, 2012).

All of these forms of mobility are, of course, mechanically assisted and carbon fuelled, which points towards how mobilities are achievements of hybrid people/thing assemblages. Mobilities are enabled and restrained by the prosthetic relations between human and world. The story of the passenger in *Cosmopolis*, for instance, is not simply one about a freely moving (very privileged) human but a human in a car which brings with it, as Davidson (2012) shows, a history which makes it both 'a transcendent object of desire and a material and ecological disaster' (p. 469). This connection between human/machine hybrid mobilities and ecological disaster has been troubling John Urry. When Urry (2012) asks 'Do mobile lives have a future?', it is clear that he does not mean all forms of mobile lives. Rather, he is referring to the kinds of mobile lives that depend on oil – automobilities, aeromobilities and marine mobilities. Along with the possibility of peak oil production having already passed, he argues, we may also have reached the peak of carbon-fuelled mobility (Urry, 2012). Post peak-mobility is an agenda that is likely to become more prominent sooner rather than later. When such a transition occurs it will necessitate new patterns of movement, new narratives of mobility and new configurations of mobile practice. We will all have to figure out ways of moving differently.

#### IV Animal mobilities

As the horsemeat affair indicates, animals (dead or alive) also move. Animals and animal parts – often recalcitrant – frequently become visible at moments of panic. Many of the moral panics about animals have had mobility at their heart. In the UK, the protests against animal transportation in 1995 come to mind, as do the restrictions on movements of livestock during foot-and-mouth and BSE outbreaks. During the bird flu epidemic of 2007, scientists tracked

the movements of birds across Asia and into Europe, as well as the food chain of imported poultry. At a more local scale, much of what has been written in animal geographies concerns the movements of wild animals, from coyotes to possums, in urban or domestic space. Likewise, there is the issue of the movement of domestic animals outside the home where they are seen as a threat to children or local birdlife (Instone and Mee, 2011). The potential for a productive encounter between animal geographies and the mobility turn has been illustrated by an innovative collection of essays entitled *Animal Movements: Moving Animals* (Bull, 2011a). It would have been useful reading for those investigating the horsemeat scare.

The commodified animal is shipped across the globe. Animals are created and manipulated to operate as standardized units in scientific experimentations. Equally, animal movements can be considered as a fetish as they gain imaginative and capital value for production systems that make capital gains from animals that 'range free' or display 'natural behaviours'. However, in these spaces new combinations and opportunities are made. Such opportunities and reconfigurations range from the extension of the body with prostheses to biotechnology. None of these 'developments' occurs outside the ethical or political structures which legitimize the use of animals in this way, but the animal question can also be mobilized to challenge the limits, directions and potentials of movement in systems of capital, technology, consumption and (post)colonialism (Bull, 2011b: 29).

Something of the origins of the kinds of mobility systems involved in the production and distribution of meat can be found in a lively account of the histories of milk distribution in Britain (Nimmo, 2011). Nimmo carefully delineates how milk (always a recalcitrant actor in this story) was gradually distanced from all traces of its bovine origins through advances in distribution (trains and refrigeration) and the

management of cows with their stubborn milking times. The story of milk is thus a story of the superimposition of logistical/commodity flows over animal flow of milk from the cow.

Very different mobilities were involved, each with its own spatio-temporal logic. On the one hand there was the flow of milk as a vital substance, conditioned by the bodily rhythms of the living animal and the organic properties of its milk. On the other hand there was the social flow of passenger trains, as determined by the spatial organization and temporal rhythms of modern urban life. These mobilities proved more or less incommensurable, and the resulting tension fuelled a long-running conflict between farmers and railway companies over all matters bearing upon milk transportation (Nimmo, 2011: 67–68).

While milk was originally transported in passenger trains, modulated to the mobility needs of mobile humans, the solution to the logistical problem of milk distribution was the advent of special milk trains. As milk was ever more removed from its point of origin, it quickly became associated with the spread of disease – tuberculosis – which flowed from cow to human via milk:

Thus the mass flow of milk from the country to the city was both a flow of matter, of organic material, of fats, proteins and lactose, and a flow of commodities, of economic value; but it was also a flow of bovine animality, of otherness; hence a flow of potential impurities, of ontological insecurity, risk and disease. (Nimmo, 2011: 70)

Change a few words and this could neatly encapsulate some of the issues of horseflesh mobilities.

## V Logistics

The story of milk is the story of the imposition of techno-social space-time onto the animal world. It is a story of the imposition of logistical reason – the kind of reasoning that similarly

made it possible for meat sold in British supermarkets to travel around Europe. It is surely the case that one of the most important arenas for mobilities research in the current era is logistics. Logistics is a process that works through being backgrounded. It inhabits the largely forgotten (by critically inclined geographers of mobility, if not by economists) part of economic systems – distribution. While production and consumption have volumes of work dedicated to them on any theoretically inclined social science bookshelf, work on distribution (outside the specialized worlds of instrumental logistics research) remains as invisible as the distribution process itself. In the capitalist world, distribution of goods largely happens through intricate logistical procedures. This involves complex software which is designed to keep things moving and prevent anything staying in one place for too long. It involves landscapes that we may pass by on the highway but rarely pay much attention to – warehouses, ports, container storage facilities, distribution centres (Easterling, 2005). It also involves high levels of surveillance and security. Over a series of papers, Thrift (2011, 2012) has argued for the increasing salience of logistics in the production of new kinds of urban space. He names logistics as one of the central arenas in which capitalism is finding new ground to extract profit through a constant process of mobilizing commodities, emotions, affect.

One of the central purposes of logistics is to keep things from staying still – to keep them moving. Despite this, logistical mobilities are not without their moments of relative fixity. The kinds of mobilities that are brought into being through logistics produce particular landscapes. One such landscape is that of giant ‘box stores’, such as Walmart and Best Buy, that maximize the flow of goods and use of space in order to produce profit. Parlette and Cowen (2011) have shown how these stores are ‘killing’ shopping malls (once similarly chastised for ‘killing’ main street stores) which have become social

spaces for local communities. They show how this new expression of capital in space is produced through global logistics which constantly, through the mobilities they necessitate, restructure local space (Parlette and Cowen, 2011). Another consideration of what happens when logistical mobilities touch ground is given by Cidell (2012b). She explores the interaction of the flows of containers (the black box par excellence of logistical mobility) and local responses in Los Angeles and Chicago to the sites where these containers inevitably pause. She is concerned to reveal the importance of pauses in a world of logistical flow and to examine what the role of something as apparently mobile as containers can be in producing landscapes at a large scale around the world (Easterling, 1999). Her paper focuses on how local municipal ordinances attempt to regulate or simply hide containers at the moments when they are forced to pause and accumulate. Like Parlette and Cowen, then, Cidell forces us to reflect on the productive tension between the worlds of logistical flow (often characterized as global) and their local effects in the material landscape.

Logistics (and containers) also come to ground at moments when the perfect machine envisaged in logistical reason comes undone. In any mobility system there is inevitably turbulence (some would suggest that this is all there is). Turbulence, or disordered mobility, produces moments when the logistical system's invisibility suddenly and shockingly becomes visible. One such instance was when a shipping container full of 28,000 plastic ducks was lost at sea between the USA and Hong Kong. The bright yellow toys suddenly made the containerized distribution system very visible. It also made it possible to make some innovative studies of ocean currents. Another instance was the breaking up of the container ship *Napoli* off the coast of England leaving containers and their cargo scattered across a local beach. Craig Martin and I recently argued that such instances of mobility (and logistics) out of order can be seen

as productive moments of breakdown that denaturalize and make visible logistical attempts to order the world (Cresswell and Martin, 2012).

Logistics does not just happen at a global scale and neither does it just order the flow of 'things'. Logistical reason is increasingly happening within workplaces in order to produce, track and order the mobilities of workers. There is a long history of the production of bodily mobilities in the workplace – the time-studies of Taylorism simply being the most notable. Recently these logics have been given new energy by the application of technologies such as RFID tags and voice-recognition technologies which are able to track the mobility of workers' bodies from a distance (Kangieser, 2013). Bodily mobilities are also increasingly being colonized by logistics.

## VI Off-shoring

Connected to the logic of logistics in a mobile world are the increasingly controversial and mobility-based practices of 'offshoring' and 'outsourcing'. This is one of the mobility agendas that was highlighted by Urry in a recent transcription of a discussion of mobility futures published in *Transfers* (Merriman et al., 2013). Finance, gambling, waste disposal and a host of other aspects of modern life are increasingly 'off-shored' in a space where such practices exist within different legal frameworks – which are defined territorially rather than in spaces of flow. Here mobility allows the contravention of territorially based laws and norms in ways that are deeply worrying. This has been highlighted in the UK with recent discussions in the media of tax havens (many of which are on British 'owned' territories). Off-shoring and the mobilities that enable it are highly secretive and productive of secret lives. For this reason, Urry has argued for a future practice of 'on-shoring'.

However, it is also possible to think of ways in which off-shoring can open up spaces of transgression in more or less



progressive ways. One such example is the history of pirate radio in which subversive programming has been broadcast from ships berthed outside territorial control. Peters (2011, 2012) has explored the subversive potential of ‘offshoring’ radio through a series of papers that focus on the complicated mobilities of the pirate radio station – Radio Caroline – that broadcast ‘subversive’ music (in the eyes of the BBC and the government) across mainland Britain. Offshoring (as a practice thoroughly entangled with a variety of mobilities) thus provides a number of political and ethical conundrums. Urry’s developing argument is that offshoring is, by and large, a nefarious activity that bypasses legitimate forms of regulation (see <http://en.forumviesmobiles.org/60sec/2013/03/26/double-standards-our-onshore-and-offshore-worlds-680>). Clear examples of this can be found in tax-avoidance strategies. But Peters’ work on Radio Caroline suggests an alternative, even radical, potential in off-shoring that questions territorially defined notions of what is legitimate or illegitimate. Other examples come to mind – such as the provision of abortion services on ships (such as ‘Women on Waves’) off the coast of Ireland.

Given that matter does not simply disappear, all things have to either transform or move (and often both). Mobilities are thus central to the understanding of waste. Waste (as the afterlife of commodities) is an issue of growing importance in the 21st century and much of it is moving from spaces of affluence (where waste is relatively worthless) to spaces of poverty (where waste is relatively valuable). This move is also often a move from places with tight regulations on the disposal of waste to places where there are few or no regulations governing disposal. Frequently this involves mobilities that connect the global north and global south (Davies, 2012). Waste mobilities are often forms of off-shoring.

## VII Conclusion

The recent horsemeat panic in Europe illustrates many of the themes developed here. It is a form of animal mobility, hybridized logistically, which raises questions about forms of motion in a critical way. As with Prasad and Prasad’s (2012) outsourcing and De Genova’s (2013) immigrant citizen, it highlights the paradox of a world that is putatively being flattened and made ‘flow-friendly’ on the one hand and which presents troubling mobilities on the other. Entangled in all of these is the question of *security*. Security has long been at the centre of mobilities literature, as well as writing that comes from outside a mobilities tradition but deals with mobility anyway (Gilbert, 2007; Sparke, 2006; Thrift, 2011; Vaughan-Williams, 2010; Verstraete, 2009). Security has often been envisaged as a function of borders, but borders are no longer clearly marked lines that occur between territories. Borders too are on the move (Rumford, 2010). Borders were the theme of a special issue of *Mobilities* (18(1)). In this issue authors sought to grapple with the coming-together of border studies literature and a mobilities approach. One outcome was to question the wisdom of thinking of borders as moments of immobility which impede free flow. Rather, it was argued, governance and security often take place through the production of mobilities where our borders travel around with us (Baerenholdt, 2013; Salter, 2013). Borders are often productive of mobilities. But borders are not the only form of security. Security is happening in mobile ways through forms of tracking and tracing that seek to insert people (as well as animals and objects) into a logistical epistemology. RFID tags, barcodes, tracking bracelets and airforce drones are all entangled into this mobility/security network alongside conventional and unconventional borders. One thing that the horsemeat saga tells us is that this assemblage of technologies often does not work. People, animals and

things continue to move in unexpected and largely unregulated ways. Wherever there is mobility there will always be turbulence.

In the three years I have been writing this report, mobilities research has grown in significance. Mobilities research inside geography and in partnership with other disciplines has become more confident. One piece of evidence for this is one of the strongest calls yet for an interdisciplinary approach which clearly and unapologetically centres mobility, becoming and process in the explanation of social and cultural phenomena. Drawing on the work of Serres, Lucretius and Bergson, among others, Merriman (2012a, 2012b) suggests that mobility may be all that there is and that perhaps it is time to do away with time, space and time-space as unnecessary fictions. It is certainly a brave statement, if not entirely out of line with recent developments in non-representational theory, new materialism and the like. It remains to be seen if mobilities scholars will be happy to abandon fixity altogether. While it is the case that the world is always in motion at a molecular level, it still presents plenty of immobilities at both experiential and political levels. Molecular vibrations are not much comfort, I expect, to Palestinians who cannot walk through the wall that has been built between their homes and their farmland. Immobilities (and indeed time-spaces) such as these cannot be wished away with a theoretical wand.

Nevertheless, the confidence of such a statement, alongside the other evidence marshalled above, suggests that the health of mobilities research in geography and beyond is robust. While it is clear that some are using the word 'mobility' as a loose term where once they may have used 'migration' or 'transport', it is also clear that, for many, a mobilities perspective has necessitated a deeper theoretical and methodological transformation that signifies a move away from an ontological, epistemological and methodological sedentarism. This is to be welcomed.

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