

Federica Timeto

**Susanne Witzgall, Gerlinde Vogl and Sven Kesslering (eds.), "New Mobilities Regimes in Art and Social Sciences". Farnham: Ashgate, 2013, 394 pp.**

(doi: 10.2383/75783)

Sociologica (ISSN 1971-8853)

Fascicolo 3, settembre-dicembre 2013

**Ente di afferenza:**

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## Book reviews

**Susanne Witzgall, Gerlinde Vogl and Sven Kesselring (eds.), *New Mobilities Regimes in Art and Social Sciences*. Farnham: Ashgate, 2013, 394 pp.**

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The book is an edited collection that gathers a selection of essays presented at the 2008 conference “Tracing New Mobilities Regimes” at the Academy of Fine Arts in Munich. The originality of this work, which is a review of the state of the art about the complex theme of new mobilities after the mobility turn [Sheller & Urry, 2006] in both academic and artistic fields, is its creation of a dialogue between essays written by social science researchers and visual arts practitioners, in which the calculated distribution of the artwork illustrations throughout the book also contributes to the interchange between mobility theories and practices.

The two introductory texts by the editors explain how the arts [Witzgall] and the social sciences [Kesselring & Vogl] confront the issue of new mobilities and can benefit from a reciprocity which, first of all, pertains to the adoption of a conjoined methodology. In fact, on the one hand, the visual artists involved in this project all assume an “ethnographic” approach, making wide use of the traditional instruments of social analysis such as participant observation, collaborative fieldwork, interviews, and other forms of document recollection; at the same time, they disclose and foreground the process of fabricating reality which is at the core of any post-social account of the social [Knorr-Cetina, 2001; Latour, 2005], through which they self-reflexively try to give up the privileged position usually attributed to the artist or the scientist and, instead, employ their working process performatively, as a productive way to unmask the enmeshing of fiction and reality inherent in observation and documentation. On the other hand, as Mimi Sheller highlights in the essay that stands out as a theoretical epitome of the book, social theory has to learn both methodologically and operationally from the “organizational forms, constellations, and situations” that mobile cultural practices develop nowadays. Only if social theory is, so to speak, “augmented” by acquiring an equivalent “mobile mediality,” can the theories and practices of mobilities benefit from their reciprocal encounters and hybridizations [pp. 322-323].

*New Mobilities Regimes* is divided into four sections, introduced by a Prologue and concluding with an Epilogue. Each section focuses on a specific theme, although all the sections appear interconnected and share many recurring references. The common thread regards the ways new mobilities can be defined and approached in second modernity, which is characterized by what Anna Tsing defines as “supply chain capitalism,” a new type of capitalism based on the worldwide mobilities of people and goods, as well as flows of information and communication [in Kesselring & Vogl, p. 19].

The mobile subjects that the volume discusses are different kinds of travellers, tourists, workers, migrants or refugees whose routes are not only global, in that they take place across transnational borders, but are also hybrid [de Souza e Silva, 2006], in that they continuously traverse the borders of real and virtual spaces thanks to new communication infrastructures and the massive diffusion of mobile technologies. Overall, what

emerges through the written and visual accounts in the collection is a commonality of several aspects of their experiences of mobility and, at the same time, the impossibility of defining mobility in the singular.

Let us take the first section of the book, “Work in Motion:” whether the focus is on German and Swedish female teleworkers [Lanziger], German commercial aviation personnel [Huchler& Dietrich], the mobility of multinational corporation employees [Bozkurt], or Ukranian migrant women [Tolstokorova], the reader confronts the ways in which, in all the cases, mobility entails new opportunities, such as increased flexibility, better incomes, a sense of emancipation from oppressive realities and the responsibilities of the everyday, but also requires a higher level of adaption and negotiation, for example, with localities either of departure or arrival, as well as a continuous struggle for life-work balance, often implying the loss of contact with family members and, eventually, a more lonely existence. In sum, these mobile subjects engage in a constant “individualized boundary creation” [Huchler& Dietrich, p. 81] through which they can cope with their personal mobilities rather than the dissolution of boundaries, contrary to what one might believe.

The second section is an overview of different “Modalities of Migration” as seen by artists and theorists examining artistic projects that employ different media, such as ethnographic architectural projects [Hieslmar & Zinganel], film, video and videoessays [Karentzos; Karamustafa; Biemann]. Particularly interesting, here, is the analysis that Alexandra Karentzos dedicates to the films of Lisl Ponger, specifically focusing on the 35 mm *Passagen/Passages* (1996) and its sequel, *Dèjà vu* (1999). In these short films, the Austrian director combines found footage sequences of Super-8 home movies documenting holiday cruises with audio narrating the experiences of refugees, which the spectator very slowly but steadily perceives as being incongruent with the touristic images shown. This creates a friction between the somehow familiar images of touristic experiences and the alienating experiences of refugees, further emphasized by the use of a rapid editing technique that impedes any smooth identification or the possibility of assuming a unified perspective. Moreover, in her films, Ponger frequently inserts images of people caught in the act of filming, as if to highlight the regimes of the gaze and her non-innocent scopic position. Analogously, in the already widely-circulating essay in which the videoessayist Ursula Biemann discusses her project *Sahara Chronicle* (2006-2009), the artist foregrounds a self-reflexive awareness of her shooting and editing techniques, affirming that the non-linear narrative of the videoessay, “arranging the material into a particular field of connections,” is a way that the artist can practice dislocation along with the transnational condition of her “subjects” [Biemann, p. 173].

The third section regards “Camp Politics,” including essays on the demilitarized border zone between North and South Korea [Heuck & Yoo], another intervention by Biemann on her videoessay *X-Mission* (2008) which explores life conditions in the Palestinian refugee camps, a very original explanation of the Campervan Residency Program made by the artists Amtoft & Vestergaard, who offer scholars and artists a residence-on-wheels to create a collective platform for critical inquiry, plus two more theoretical essays, revolving around the philosophy of Giorgio Agamben, on the camp as a paradigm of the contemporary Western condition. In fact, both Diken & Bagge

Laustsen's essay on mobility and the camp and Frenzel's study of protest camps affirm that the camp, generally associated with a condition of exception, has now become a rule characterizing contemporary societies of control, being both "normalized" and "generalized" [Diken & Bagge Laustsen, p. 211] and working as a sort of heterotopia of society in foucauldian terms, in which inside-outside limits frequently overlap and blur.

The fourth and final section, entitled "Spacing Mobilities–Mobilization of Space," is more heterogeneous, gathering very different approaches to the theme of mobility. It includes essays on experiments with "Rundum" photography and the mobilization of the observer [Keller], on the mobility regimes and spatial politics of the Jakarta airport [Kloppenburger], which is echoed by a visual essay illustrating Voigt's graphic airport studies, on the experience of biking in Copenhagen [Jensen], along with two more theoretical works: the already-mentioned essay by Sheller on mobile mediality and Bærenholdt's essay on the mobilization of the notion of experience. As Sheller underlines, we cannot conceive of spatiality independently from the practices of mobile mediality that pervade many contemporary urban cultures and challenge existing mobilities regimes. Spatiality actually comprises a constellation of mediated technospaces and networked places [Varnelis & Friedberg, 2008] in which mediation is what renders space the mobile and generative environment of the social and the technological, "concerning itself [...] with mobility, connectivity and flow" [Grusin cit. in Sheller, p. 316]. Bærenholdt very interestingly elaborates on his notion of "governmobility" and its implications for mobility studies: this, starting from Simmel's sociology via Urry and arriving at Actor-Network Theory, is a concept that draws on but is differentiated from that of governmentality [Foucault, 1984], in that, according to the author, it works without a unitary idea of subjectivity and, instead, through connections, offering an account of what it means to conceive of situatedness in terms of contingency and relationality today.

The collection closes with an Epilogue by Kingsley Dennis on the futures and criticalities of mobility (the Prologue, by Jordan Crandall, focuses on his classical topics of tracking and predictability in space). Here, Dennis reviews all the vulnerabilities of the contemporary global networks of mobility, from energy supplies to food, from urban growth to surveillance, wishing for a return to a more localized, community-centered lifestyle based on a commonality and equal distribution of resources that, although provocative in tone, sounds somehow too utopian when confronted with the more practical approaches of the collection, whose originality and strength ultimately resides in the way it puts artists and theorists into dialogue, showing the necessity of dealing with new mobilities through a mobile, effective methodology in which theory and practice necessarily intermesh.

*Federica Timeto*

Plymouth University, Faculty of Arts, Ph.D.

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