

Mobilities and Foucault

Edited by
Katharina Manderscheid, Tim Schwanen and
David Tyfield



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Although Foucault's work has been employed and embraced enthusiastically by some 'mobilities' scholars, discussion across these two traditions to date has mostly been partial and unsystematic. Yet Foucault's work can make critical contributions, for example, to thinking about governing mobilities in contemporary societies, while conversely mobilities research opens up new perspectives on Foucault. In combination these bodies of work can illuminate issues as diverse as: the greater interdependencies between mobility systems (e.g. transport, tourism, trade, internet use); the proliferation of the undesired mobilities of viruses, of natural phenomena like fire, of (what is taken to be) criminality and other seemingly inevitable by-products of globalisation; the perceived threats to desirable forms of mobility as constituted by climate change, peak oil and energy security, and terrorism and warfare; and the increased popularity of logics of governance premised on choice, responsabilisation and the (re)coding of phenomena in economic terms under neo-liberalism.

Against this background, this book brings together the first major collection of contributions from across the social sciences with a shared interest in both mobilities and Foucauldian thinking.

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Chris Philo

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Nathaniel O’Grady

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Prison and (Im)mobility. What about Foucault?

Christophe Mincke & Anne Lemonne

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Veins of Concrete, Cities of Flow: Reasserting the Centrality of Circulation in Foucault’s Analytics of Government

Mark Usher

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Introduction

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Introduction

The past few years have witnessed an increased interest in the work of Michel Foucault among mobilities researchers. For instance, taking this journal as the key representative of research trends in the field, 2013 saw the publication of eight articles referring to Foucault, as against 10 in the previous four years combined. Moreover, after being sorted by ‘relevance’ on the journal’s website, six of the top 20 articles discussing Foucault appeared in 2013. Based on the number of downloads and citation scores, at least two of these are being read or at least looked at widely (Bærenholdt 2013; Salter 2013). The increasing interest in exploring questions of mobility from a Foucauldian perspective also became evident during the organisation of a workshop on ‘Mobilities and Foucault’ at the University of Lucerne in January 2013. It is from that workshop that this Special Issue hails.

Interaction between the Foucauldian and mobilities traditions may appear, *prima facie*, unlikely, at least on a particular (and common) reading of both ‘Foucault’ and ‘mobilities’ that stresses the focus of the former on institutions of spatial *immobility* (the lunatic asylum, prison) as against the latter’s supposed fascination with movement, fluidity and flux. Indeed, turning to seminal statements of the ‘new mobilities paradigm’ we see no mention of Foucault (e.g. Featherstone, Thrift, and Urry 2004; Urry 2004; Sheller and Urry 2006; Cresswell 2010). Similarly, mobility has not been a major point of discussion amongst scholars of Foucault, even though Foucault’s work has proven fruitful for analysing (urban) space, spatial practices and territoriality (e.g. Philo 1992; Crampton and Elden 2007; Elden 2009).

Yet both ‘Foucault’ and ‘mobilities’ refer to diverse and wide-ranging literatures that present multiple possible points of intersection. As discussed further below, Foucault’s writings covered many themes, introduced and redefined a wide range of

concepts, and focused on different scales of analysis, including – but not limited to – the subject, the institution, the city and the state. Likewise, mobilities refers not only to a specific approach on issues of concrete movement and mobility (e.g. automobility and aeromobility), but also a broader social condition and imperative (e.g. globalisation or cosmopolitisation) and an ontological-cum-epistemological approach of ‘mobilized’ social science tackling dynamic complex sociocultural systems and their emergence.

It is no surprise, then, that there has already been varied, more or less systematic interaction between the two traditions. As far as the anglophone literature is concerned, this interaction is evidenced by published work on automobility (Böhm et al. 2006; Dodge and Kitchin 2007; Huijbens and Benediktsson 2007; Merriman 2007; Paterson 2007; Seiler 2008), tourism (Molz 2006; Ek and Hultman 2008; Newmeyer 2008), cycling (Bonham and Cox 2010; Stehlin 2014), aeromobility (Adey 2007; Salter 2007), children’s mobility (Barker 2009; Barker et al. 2009) and international migration (Shamir 2005; Fortier and Lewis 2006; Gray 2006; Nowicka 2006; Frello 2008; Buscema 2011; Hammond 2011; Bærenholdt 2013; Salter 2013). Also relevant in this context is recent research on the production of physical spaces of movement through planning practices (Jensen and Richardson 2003; Huxley 2006; Jensen 2013), bodily movement (Turnbull 2002; Jensen 2011) and new media practices (Brighenti 2012), as well as the production of mobile bodies and subjects (Bonham 2006; D’Andrea 2006; Seiler 2008; Jensen 2009; Haverig 2011; Manderscheid 2014) and issues of state politics, borders, surveillance, security and terror (Amoore 2006; Molz 2006; Packer 2006; Walters 2006; de Goede 2012; Moran, Piacentini, and Pallot 2012).

Engagement with this literature, however, reveals not just significant points of common interest but also key aspects of methodological and theoretical overlap. In their cross-disciplinary ambition and vision, their relational ontology, their broadly critical but post-structural projects and attention to concrete multiplicity, governance and power, it is clear that there are strong bridges between the two traditions. Nonetheless, there is room for engaging more systematically with Foucault’s work among mobilities scholars – particularly in areas that would be illuminated by his concerns – despite well-known blind spots and weaknesses in Foucault’s thought. For instance, as Law (1994) has suggested in a sympathetic critique, ‘much of Foucault’s writing is synchronic’ meaning that the ways in which discourses reshape and renew themselves are insufficiently clear from his original text. Harsher criticism is exemplified by Thrift’s (2007) observations that Foucault offers little that advances our understanding of (human) sensation and perception, emotion/affect, space and technological artefacts.

Clearly, then, a Foucauldian perspective on mobilities is anything but sacrosanct. It is nonetheless capable of offering distinctive insights, even with regard to the more abstract conceptualisation of ‘mobility’ itself. Consider, for instance, Cresswell’s (2006, 3; 2010, 27) discussion of mobility as: the entanglement of *movement* or ‘mobility as a brute fact – something that is potentially observable, a thing in the world, an empirical reality’; *representation* or ‘ideas about mobility that are conveyed through a diverse array of representational strategies’; and *practice* – mobility as practiced, experienced and embodied. Yet, drawing on Foucault’s discursive production of objects of knowledge, Frello (2008, 31) has argued that:

not just ‘mobility’ but also ‘movement’ is discursively constituted. [...] Certain conventions govern the conditions of possibility for speaking about mobility but neither materiality nor convention determine exactly what, whether and how an activity is given meaning in terms of ‘mobility’.

The (Foucauldian) point to be made here is that labelling something as mobile or movement is not only a performative act that co-constitutes what it claims to portray but also a technique of power for making that something knowable and governable.

Nevertheless, the question still presents itself: bearing in mind its limitations, what is to be gained by a more concerted engagement with his work? Or, more succinctly, why use Foucault in mobilities research? And why now? Moreover, given that a Foucauldian approach is characterised by ‘how’ questions, *how* are (or should) these traditions (be) brought together? The task of this introduction is to tackle these three questions in turn.

Why Foucault?

Foucault’s oeuvre has offered a range of new concepts and ideas regarding discourse, knowledge, power, government and subjectivity; covering even those with the greatest relevance to mobilities research is beyond this editorial piece. Suffice to say that Foucault’s thinking and many of his concepts changed over time and *moved* along with his thinking, meaning that any attempt at creating closure about their meaning or definition is bound to fail. Consider one of his neologisms – governmentality. If what is commonly known as the governmentality lecture from 1978 (Foucault 2007) had already offered three different descriptions¹ that all pertain to a particular style of governing populations and states, then later understandings exhibited a clear shift in focus and scale of analysis. For instance, in another well-known lecture on technologies of the self at the University of Vermont in 1982, governmentality was defined as the ‘encounter between the technologies of domination and those of the self’ (Foucault 1997, 225). Perhaps this is not surprising given that Foucault considered himself as an ‘experimenter’ who wrote in order to change his own thinking:

I’m perfectly aware of always being on the move in relation to the things I’m interested in and to what I’ve already thought. What I think is never quite the same, because for me my books are experiences, in a sense, that I would like to be as full as possible. An experience is something that one comes out transformed. If I had to write a book to communicate what I’m already thinking before I begin to write, I would never have the courage to begin. (Faubion 2000, 238)

Not only in this sense, mobility, understood as ‘a relational concept characterized by ... the transgression of a state or condition’ (Frello 2008, 32), is at the heart of Foucault’s approach and methodology.

For commentators, a common way to reduce the complexity and mobility of Foucault’s thought is to identify phases in his career and interests. Narratives of phases typically revolve around the – often exaggerated – difference between an earlier archaeological and later genealogic method (e.g. Foucault 1980), and around the shift in research topic from madness (Foucault 1965) via the clinic (Foucault 1973) and human sciences (Foucault 1970) to criminality and punishment (Foucault 1977)

and finally, sexuality (Foucault 1978, 1985, 1986). The idea of a linear sequence of phases has, however, been disrupted by the translation into English and subsequent publication of Foucault's lecture series at the *Collège de France* between 1970 and 1984. For instance, while the 1972–1973 series anticipated *Discipline and Punish* (henceforth *D&P*), the subsequent series harked back to his 1960s' work on madness, albeit through a *D&P* lens.

The lecture series not only fill in many of the gaps between Foucault's major books, they also offer a new and 'vital Foucault' (Philo 2012, 498) – a thinker who was not simply focused on words, discourse and institutions but rather on how the forces of life become (temporarily) canalised and tamed through discourse-based and other techniques and procedures (see also Philo, this issue). Together with the texts bundled as *Essential Works* (Faubion 1997, 1998, 2000) and some other publications (Rabinow 1984; Deleuze 1988), the lectures have opened up an understanding of Foucault as one of Nietzsche's greatest heirs in recent times, only rivalled by his friend Deleuze.

At the beginning of the 1982–1983 lecture series at the *Collège de France*, Foucault himself (2010, 2–3) suggested that his intellectual project was to create a 'history of thought' through which dynamics over time in the 'focal points of experience' become understandable. He defined three such mutually implicated focal points, the first of which comprises the *formation of different forms of knowledge* that follow from and constitute something like madness or sexuality. Rather than studying the evolution of particular bodies of knowledge over time, he sought to elucidate the rules and practices through which certain claims could become meaningful and – especially – truthful. *The Order of Things* (Foucault 1970) arguably epitomises Foucault's achievements regarding the first focal point, while *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (Foucault 1972) explains in detail how the multiplicity of discursive formations is to be analysed. But later work keeps demonstrating a keen interest in knowledge formation, as is clear from writings on criminology (Foucault 1977), statistics (Foucault 2007), *homo œconomicus* (Foucault 2008) and techniques of the self and *parrhēsia* (or risky, critical truth-telling) (Foucault 2005, 2010).

Some studies in the mobilities literature have drawn on Foucault's thinking and writings regarding knowledge formation (e.g. Bonham 2006; Merriman 2007; Frello 2008; Jensen 2011). Applying this perspective to pressing issues, such as climate change mitigation or the perceived need to increase the share of forms of mobility construed as sustainable – walking, cycling, public transport and high-speed rail –, could bring to the fore why these continue to be framed and understood predominantly through the language and reasoning from economics, engineering and psychology (Schwanen, Banister, and Anable 2011). Such a perspective can also help scholars understand why it is so difficult for other forms of knowledge – not least mobilities scholarship (Manderscheid 2014) – to travel beyond academia and really have significant 'impact' on the governmental actions of national and local authorities or transport service providers. Nonetheless, in applying Foucault's thinking on knowledge formation, mobility scholars should bear in mind Law's (1994) aforementioned criticism and carefully consider how knowledges as discursive formations '*reshape themselves in new embodiments or instantiations*' (22, emphasis in original).

Foucault's second focal point concerned the normative frameworks for behaviour, to be studied through analyses of the 'micro-physics' (*D&P*) and *wider ranging technologies of power* – the multiplicity of forces that is both constraining and productive

and that exists only in action. One of his characteristic insights is that different modalities of power – that is, different ensembles of knowledge, mechanism and technique – produced different sorts and intensities of norms. Where the modality of sovereignty worked with ‘the binary opposition of the permitted and the forbidden’ (Foucault 1977, 183) and not infrequently brute force, discipline created ‘normative norms’ (Waldschmidt 2005, 193) that both compare the individual with and differentiate him/her from the group or whole, in order to create conformity with externally imposed social rules and sanction abnormality. This again contrasts with the modality of security and its ‘normalistic norms’ (Waldschmidt 2005). These refer to regular rather than rule-conforming behaviour and are often constructed with the help of the techniques and procedures of statistics. Here, norms are not (predominantly) set *a priori* and embedded in the design of spaces – be they panoptic prisons, schools, hospitals or squares in city centres under neoliberal urbanism, or rather roads, airports and border crossings – but created by many people acting in similar ways.

It might be tempting to think of sovereignty, discipline and security as historically sequential and as corresponding to the archaic (Middle Ages and onwards), modern (from the eighteenth century) and contemporary (twentieth century). Foucault (2008, 6) nonetheless maintained that older modalities already contain ‘those that appear as newer’, and this offers another parallel with the mobilities tradition, which – at least at the onset – has sought to disrupt linear understandings of temporality (Callon and Law 2004; Sheller and Urry 2006). Either way, the analysis of the normative frameworks sensitises mobility scholars to differentiations between mobility and immobility, as well as legitimate and illegitimate ‘movers’, free and forced mobility, good and bad movements, and so forth. Such differentiations have in turn led mobility researchers to examine the processes through which such figures as the illegal migrant, high status expats, gypsies, leisure travellers and creative nomads come into being (Endres, Manderscheid, and Mincke, forthcoming). The constitution and effects of normative and normalistic norms in relation to mobilities may be also traced in relation to the recent emergence of ‘big data’ collected – often by private companies – via web browsers, mobile phones and integrated public transport cards. This development not only raises difficult questions over privacy and surveillance; it also enables new normalistic norms of unprecedented levels of detail to proliferate, and hence new techniques of social sorting and forms of constructing and governing ‘risky’ mobilities (e.g. Lyon 2013).

Foucault’s final focal point concerned the *potential modes of being for subjects*, and has already been touched upon above. His analyses of subjectification, or practices through which people are governed by others, in such institutions as the prison (Foucault 1977) or under neoliberalism (Foucault 2008) have proven influential, also within the mobility literature (Paterson 2007; Seiler 2008; Manderscheid this issue; Mincke and Lemonne this issue; Philo this issue). A recent rise in interest across the social sciences notwithstanding (e.g. Paterson and Strippel 2010; Macmillan 2011; Skinner 2012; Little 2013), less attention has been paid to Foucault’s later work on subjectivation – the practices of self-fashioning through which individuals govern themselves. In the 1980s, Foucault’s histories of the present moved beyond a focus on institutions and populations to critical reflection on the relation one has with the self (ethics). This shift reflected Foucault’s argument that techniques through which selves are (re)constituted in the present – think of self-tracking one’s behaviour and CO₂ emissions, dieting, going to the gym, using Viagra, taking a gap year, or engaging in positive thinking, yoga, eco-tourism and ‘active’ travel (or cycling and

walking), to name but a few – produce a mode of subjectivity that is both objectifying and conducive to domination. For Foucault, such techniques were ultimately rooted in obedience and self-renunciation, preventing individuals from becoming truly free and autonomous. In his final years, he, therefore, examined alternative techniques of the self from Greek antiquity, such as *parrhēsia*, that did produce genuinely autonomous subjects (Foucault 2005, 2010).

The extent to which such ‘techniques’ as gap year travel, eco-tourism and cycling to work for health reasons are objectifying subjectivity and producing domination is up for debate. If those practices are analysed using theoretical and methodological lenses that are particularly sensitive to such processes as sensation and perception, embodied experience and affect/emotion, it becomes readily apparent that different forms of mobility also generate a holistic sense of well-being, self-worth and authentically positive emotions (e.g. Bissell 2010; Middleton 2010; Schwanen, Banister, and Bowling 2012). Moreover, mobility practices also offer myriad opportunities to resist or reappropriate the social codes written into contemporary techniques of the self (e.g. Cresswell 2006). Nonetheless, considering mobility as an intricate mixture of domination and self-fashioning, of governing by others and the self, and trying to ascertain the relative importance of each for different forms of movement by different individuals in different times and places makes for a fertile area of mobilities research. Despite the lack of attention for sensation and perception, emotion/affect and materiality in Foucault’s original texts on subjectivation, a theoretical approach on mobility practice and experience that is inspired by Foucauldian ethics can offer researchers committed to the study of individuals and their everyday lives a useful alternative to the voluntaristic conceptions of behaviour in psychology, the neurochemical reductionism of most neuroscience, and social theorising that ‘decentres’ agency and the individual too far.

Why Now?

Multiple reasons as to why a more systematic engagement of mobilities research with Foucauldian concepts is happening now can be derived from the above reflections on Foucault’s legacy. Primary among these is the simple temporal coincidence of the emergence and now embedding of Anglophone mobilities research with the continuing translation of Foucault’s lecture series at the *Collège de France* into English. Many of the issues discussed therein regarding subjectivity, government and circulation have also come to feature centrally in the mobilities paradigm. The hubbub of interest in Foucault’s lectures has thus affected mobilities research no less than countless other areas of social science. What is more, ‘Foucault’ allows the *dispositifs* of mobility – the ensembles of knowledges, scientific truth regimes, technologies of power, classifications, hierarchies, normative and normative norms and subjectifications – to be analysed, and his later work on ethics and subjectivation can be used to place issues of power and governance more systematically at the heart of ongoing research into mobile lives and individual embodied experiences of im/mobility (cf. Adey and Bissell 2010; D’Andrea, Ciolfi, and Gray 2011). Where previously mobilities researchers have tended to gravitate towards Foucault’s work on discourse, power, discipline, governmentality and subjectification, the mobilities tradition could be enriched by engaging with other elements of his thought as well.

There are at least three additional aspects to the timeliness of further engagement. First, there is a sense amongst many mobilities researchers that the present is a