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Mobilizing Social Life

For Move You Must! 'Tis now the rage, the law and fashion of our age

> (Samuel Taylor Coleridge, quoted Buzard 1993: 84)

On the Move

It sometimes seems as if all the world is on the move (see Sheller, Urry 2006b; Hannam, Sheller, Urry 2006, for further elaboration). The early retired, international students, terrorists, members of diasporas, holidaymakers, business people, slaves, sports stars, asylum seekers, refugees, backpackers, commuters, young mobile professionals, prostitutes – these and many others – seem to find the contemporary world is their oyster or at least their destiny. Criss-crossing the globe are the routeways of these many groups intermittently encountering one another in transportation and communication hubs, searching out in real and electronic databases the next coach, message, plane, back of lorry, text, bus, lift, ferry, train, car, web site, wifi hot spot and so on.

The scale of this travelling is immense. It is predicted that by 2010 there will be at least one billion legal international arrivals each year (compared with 25 million in 1950); there are four million air passengers each day; at any one time 360,000 passengers are at any time in flight *above* the United States, equivalent to a substantial city; 31 million refugees roam the globe (Papastergiadis 2000: 10, 41, 54); and there were 552 m cars in 1998 with a projected 730 m in 2020, equivalent to one for every 8.6 people (Geffen, Dooley, Kim 2003). In 1800,

people in the United States travelled on average 50 metres a day – they now travel 50 kilometres a day (Buchanan 2002: 121; Axhausen 2002; Root 2000). Today world citizens move 23 billion kilometres; by 2050 it is predicted that that figure will have increased fourfold to 106 billion (Schafer, Victor 2000: 171).

However, people do not spend more time traveling, since this appears to have remained more or less constant at around one hour or so per day, albeit with substantial variation within any society (Lyons, Urry 2005; but see Van Wee, Rietveld, Meurs 2006). People also do not necessarily seem to make more journeys; in the UK in recent years the number of domestic journeys per year remains at around 1,000 (DTLR 2001: Table 2.1; 3.1). But what is crucial is that people are travelling further and faster, if not more often or spending more time actually 'on the road' (see Pooley, Turnbull, Adams 2005, for the only detailed historical research on this). And given the spread of various communications such as the post, fax, the internet, fixed line phones, mobiles, mobile computing and so on, whose uses have all *increased* in recent decades, this book asks why do people physically travel, what are its uses, pleasures and pains and what social and physical ramifications does such movement possess.

Globally, travel and tourism constitute the largest industry in the world, worth $6.5 trillion and directly and indirectly accounting for 8.7 per cent of world employment and 10.3 per cent of world GDP (World Travel and Tourism Council 2006). And this mobility affects almost everywhere, with the World Tourism Organization publishing travel statistics for over 200 countries, with most sending and also receiving significant numbers of visitors (www.world-tourism.org/facts/metho.html: accessed 9.9.05).

Schivelbusch overall concludes that for: 'the twentieth-century tourist, the world has become one large department store of countrysides and cities', although of course most people in the world can only dream of voluntarily sampling that department store on a regular basis (1986: 197). This pattern of mainly but not entirely voluntary travelling is the largest ever-peaceful movement of people across borders. Such movement shows little sign of *substantially* abating in the longer term even with September 11th, SARS, Bali, Madrid and London bombings and other global catastrophes. Being physically mobile has become for both rich and even for some poor a 'way of life' across the globe. Pico Iyer identifies: 'an entirely new breed of people, a transcontinental tribe of wanderers . . . the transit loungers, forever heading to the departure gate' (undated: 6; and see 2000).

And materials too are on the move, often carried by these moving bodies whether openly, clandestinely, or inadvertently. Also the

multinational sourcing of different components of manufactured products involves just-in-time delivery from around the world. The 'cosmopolitanization' of taste means that consumers in the 'north' expect fresh materials from around the world 'air-freighted' to their table, while consumers in the 'south' often find roundabout ways to access consumer goods from the north – carried by small-scale informal importers, packed into containers for relatives 'back home', or smuggled. And more generally there are massive flows of illegal if valuable materials, drugs, guns, cigarettes, alcohol, and counterfeit and pirated products. Mass media too has a materiality as videos, DVDs, radios, televisions, camcorders, and mobile phones get passed from hand to hand often across borders (Spitulnik 2002).

This movement of people and objects is hugely significant for the global environment with transport accounting for one-third of total carbon dioxide emissions (Geffen, Dooley, Kim 2003). Transport is the fastest growing source of greenhouse emissions, and with the predicted growth of car and lorry travel within China and elsewhere throughout the world, the rapid growth of air travel and transport, and the political movement especially in the United States critiquing the thesis of global climate change, there has been little likelihood of this growth abating (but see ch. 13 below). Many other 'environmental' consequences follow from the growth of mass mobilities: reduced air quality; increased noise, smell and visual intrusion; ozone depletion; social fragmentation; and many medical consequences of 'accidental' deaths and injuries, asthma and obesity (Whitelegg 1997; Whitelegg, Haq 2003).

The internet has simultaneously grown incredibly rapidly, faster than any previous technology and with huge impacts throughout much of the world. There are already one billion internet users (Castells 2001). Also, since 2001 there are world-wide more mobile phones than landlines (Katz, Aakhus 2002a). The overall volume of international telephone calls increased at least tenfold between 1982 and 2001 (Vertovec 2004: 223). Such virtual communications and mobile telephony is calling into being new ways of interacting and communicating within and across societies, especially with some less well-developed societies jumping directly to mobile rather than landline telephony and computing.

These converging mobile technologies appear to be transforming many aspects of economic and social life that are in some sense on the 'move' or away from 'home'. In a mobile world there are extensive and intricate connections between physical travel and modes of communication and these form new fluidities and are often difficult to stabilize. Physical changes appear to be 'de-materializing'

connections, as people, machines, images, information, power, money, ideas and dangers are 'on the move', making and remaking connections at often rapid speed around the world.

Issues of movement, of too little movement for some or too much for others or of the wrong sort or at the wrong time, are it seems central to many people's lives and to the operations of many small and large public, private and non-governmental organizations. From SARS to plane crashes, from airport expansion controversies to SMS texting, from slave trading to global terrorism, from obesity caused by the 'school run' to oil wars in the Middle East, from global warming to slave trading, issues of what I term 'mobility' are centre-stage on many policy and academic agendas. There is we might say a 'mobility' structure of feeling in the air (Thrift 1996: 259), with Simmel and Benjamin, Deleuze and Lefebvre, de Certeau and Erving Goffman, proving important early guides to this mobile age. Virilio's 'dromology' (1997), Serres' 'angels' (1995), Bauman's 'liquid modernity' (2000), Thrift's 'movement-space' (2004b) and Hardt and Negri's 'smooth world of 'empire' (2000) are some recent manifestations of this structure of feeling (see my own Urry 2000; Sheller, Urry 2006b).

These theorists as well as more empirical analysts are mobilizing a 'mobility turn', a different way of thinking through the character of economic, social and political relationships. Such a turn is spreading in and through the social sciences, mobilizing analyses that have been historically static, fixed and concerned with predominantly a-spatial 'social structures'. Contributions from cultural studies, feminism, geography, migration studies, politics, science studies, sociology, transport and tourism studies and so on are hesitatingly transforming social science and especially invigorating the connections, overlaps and borrowings with both physical science and with literary and historical studies. The mobility turn is post-disciplinary.

This book brings together and systematizes the different contributions being made around the world to this mobility turn, a turn that emphasizes how all social entities, from a single household to large scale corporations, presuppose many different forms of actual and potential movement. The mobility turn connects the analysis of different forms of travel, transport and communications with the multiple ways in which economic and social life is performed and organized through time and across various spaces. Analyses of the complex ways that social relations are 'stretched' across the globe are generating theories, research findings and methods that 'mobilize' or assemble analyses of social ordering that are achieved in part on the move and contingently as processes of flow.

Part 1 of this book is concerned with theories, research findings and methods that 'mobilize' analyses within social science. I develop and establish a systematic elaboration of what I call the new mobilities paradigm that should come to re-order the contours of appropriate social science analysis. Subsequent parts of the book are concerned with applying this paradigm to re-thinking the nature of, and changes within, different modes of moving and communicating (in Part 2); and to re-thinking social science concerned with social inequality and exclusion, weak ties and meetings, networked relationships, the changing nature of places and complex systems, and global climate change (in Part 3). I try to show that most important social phenomena are only satisfactorily analysed if they are so 'mobilized'.

Part 1 then is mainly theoretical. The first chapter sets the scene by elaborating features of this mobile structure of feeling. I review various empirical and conceptual processes that seem to indicate shifts in how to understand and analyse diverse social processes. Some indications are provided of the wide array of substantive issues to be elaborated later. In chapter 2 I establish the heterodox theoretical and methodological resources that have to be assembled in order that this paradigm is established and stabilized out of many disparate elements. Chapter 3 sets out the paradigm's main features and discusses a handful of recent studies that exemplify the likely appeal and analytical strength of this emerging paradigm.

Different 'Mobilities'

In this section I detail some of the multiple aspects of mobility that are involved here. I begin by noting how there are four main senses of the term 'mobile' or 'mobility' (see Jain 2002; Kaufmann 2002). First, there is the use of mobile to mean something that moves or is *capable* of movement, as with the iconic mobile (portable) phone but also with the mobile person, home, hospital, kitchen, and so on. Mobile is a property of things and of people (as with the class designated the 'new mobility'; Makimoto, Manners 1997). Many technologies in the contemporary era appear to have set in motion new ways of people being temporarily mobile, including various physical prostheses that enable the 'disabled immobile' to acquire some means of movement. Mostly the term mobile here is a positive category, except in the various critiques of what has been termed 'hypermobility' (Adams 1999).

Second, there is the sense of mobile as a *mob*, a rabble or an unruly crowd. The mob is seen as disorderly precisely because it is mobile, not fully fixed within boundaries and therefore needs to be tracked and socially regulated. The contemporary world appears to be generating many new dangerous mobs or multitudes, including so-called smart mobs, which are less easily regulated and require for their governance, new and extensive physical and/or electronic systems of counting, regulation and fixing within known places or specified borders (Thrift 2004b).

Third, there is the sense of mobility deployed in mainstream sociology/ social science. This is upward or downward *social* mobility. Mobility is here vertical. It is presumed that there is relatively clear cut vertical hierarchy of positions and that individuals can be located by comparison with their parent's position or with their own starting position within such hierarchies. There is debate as to whether or not contemporary societies have increased the circulation of people up and down such hierarchies, making the modern world more or less mobile. Some argue that extra circulation only results from changes in the number of top positions and not in increased movement between them (Goldthorpe 1980). There are complex relations between elements of physical movement and social mobility as I examine especially in chapter 9.

Fourth, there is mobility in the longer term sense of migration or other kinds of semi-permanent geographical movement. This is a horizontal sense of being 'on the move', and refers especially to moving country or continent often in search of a 'better life' or to escape from drought, persecution, war, starvation and so on. Although it is thought that contemporary societies entail much mobility in this sense, previous cultures often presupposed considerable movement such as from Europe to the dominated countries of their various Empires or later to North America.

This book investigates all these 'mobilities'. Such a generic 'mobilities' includes various kinds and temporalities of physical movement, ranging from standing, lounging, walking, climbing, dancing, to those enhanced by technologies, of bikes, buses, cars, trains, ships, planes, wheelchairs, crutches (see Thomsen, Nielsen, Gudmundsson 2005; Cresswell 2006; and Kellerman 2006, for related recent book-length treatments). Movements examined range from the daily, weekly, yearly and over people's lifetimes. Also included are the movement of images and information on multiple media, as well as virtual movement as communications are effected one-to-one, one-to-many and many-to-many through networked and embedded computers. A mobilities turn also involves examining how the transporting of

people and the communicating of messages, information and images may overlap, coincide and converge through digitized flows. And the ways in which physical movement pertains to upward and downward social mobility is also central to a mobilities analysis. Moving between places physically or virtually can be a source of status and power, an expression of the rights to movement either temporarily or permanently. And where movement is coerced it may generate social deprivation and exclusion.

In some ways this current book is an extension of *Sociology Beyond Societies* where I asserted and developed some new mobile rules for sociological method (2000). These were set out as follows:

- to develop through appropriate metaphors a sociology which focuses upon movement, mobility and contingent ordering, rather than upon stasis, structure and social order
- to examine the extent, range and diverse effects of the corporeal, imagined and virtual mobilities of people, for work, for pleasure, to escape torture, to sustain diasporas and so on
- to consider things as social facts – and to see agency as stemming from the mutual intersections of objects and peoples
- to embody one's analysis through investigating the sensuous constitution of humans and objects
- to investigate the respective and uneven reach of diverse networks and flows as they move within and across societal borders and of how they spatially and temporally interconnect
- to examine how class, gender, ethnicity and nationhood are constituted through powerful and intersecting temporal regimes and modes of dwelling and travelling
- to describe the different bases of people's sense of dwelling, including their dependence upon various mobilities of people, presents, photographs, images, information, risks and so on
- to comprehend the changing character of citizenship as rights and duties are increasingly owed to, and derive from, entities whose topologies criss-cross those of society
- to illuminate the increased mediatization of social life as images circulate increasingly fast and with added reach so as to form and reform various imagined communities
- to appreciate the increasing interdependencies of 'domestic' and 'foreign' issues and the reduced significance of the means of physical coercion to the determination of the powers of states
- to explain changes within states towards an emphasis upon 'regulating' mobilities and their often unpredictable and chaotic consequences

- to interpret how chaotic, unintended and non-linear social consequences can be generated which are distant in time and/or space from where they originate and which are of a quite different and unpredictable scale
- to consider whether an emergent level of the 'global' is developing which can be viewed as recursively self-producing, that is, its outputs constitute inputs into an autopoietic circular system of 'global' objects, identities, institutions and social practices

I tried to deal with all those topics in that earlier book. However, in that book I never really developed a detailed analysis of just how and why mobilities make such a difference to social relations. And it did not sufficiently distinguish between different kinds of mobility systems and movement, tending to treat them all as rather similar to each other. I will thus seek to complete the project of that book by developing much more developed analysis of different mobilities and what I now call mobility-systems. These will be shown to be utterly significant in their own right and needing to be understood in terms of the social relations that surround and implicate them. And I will try to use these analyses to engage with and promote new analyses of a range of social science topics through various novel concepts, especially network capital, meetingness, interspace, the post car and various scenarios of the future. I also will seek to interrogate how rather different mobilities intersect. And I will not assume the movement of bodies is necessarily more rapid and extensive than other global processes. Hirst and Thompson remind us that: 'people are less mobile than money, goods or ideas, and in a sense they remain "nationalized", dependent upon passports, visas, residence and labour qualifications' (1999: 257).

In order to develop my argument I suggest that there are twelve main mobility forms in the contemporary world. Some of these are highly dependent upon passports, visas, residence and labour qualifications although others are much less so (see Williams 2006, on many of these). There are also various ways in which these forms overlap and impinge upon each other. These forms are:

- asylum, refugee and homeless travel and migration (Marfleet 2006; Cloke, Milbourne, Widdowfield 2003)
- business and professional travel (Davidson, Cope 2003)
- discovery travel of students, au pairs and other young people on their 'overseas experience', where this can constitute a 'rite of passage' and which typically involves going overseas to civilizational centres (Tully 2002; Williams 2006)
- medical travel to spas, hospitals, dentists, opticians and so on (Blackbourn 2002)

- military mobility of armies, tanks, helicopters, aircraft, rockets, spyplanes, satellites and so on which have many spinoffs into civilian uses (Kaplan 2006)
- post-employment travel and the forming of transnational lifestyles within retirement (Gustafson 2001; O'Reilly 2003)
- 'trailing travel' of children, partners, other relatives and domestic servants (Kofman 2004)
- travel and migration across the key nodes within a given diaspora such as that of overseas Chinese (Cohen 1997; Ong 1999)
- travel of service workers around the world and especially to global cities (Sassen 2000) including the contemporary flows of slaves (estimated by Bales at 27 m: 1999: 8)
- tourist travel to visit places and events and in relationship to various senses including especially through the 'tourist gaze' (Urry 2002c)
- visiting friends and relatives but where those friendship networks may also be on the move (Conradson, Latham 2005; Larsen, Urry, Axhausen 2006)
- work-related travel including commuting (Grabher 2004; Kesselring 2006a)

Analysing these various mobilities involves examining many consequences for different peoples and places that can said to be in the fast and slow lanes of social life. There is the proliferation of places, technologies and 'gates' that enhance the mobilities of some while reinforcing the immobilities of others (Graham, Marvin 2001). And mobilities are often also about duties, about the obligation to see the other, to return the call, to visit the ageing relative. These networks of often reciprocal obligations between people are the stuff of life, of how organizations, friendship networks, families, work groups, political organizations perform themselves as such across space and over time.

Moreover, the time spent traveling is not necessarily unproductive and wasted dead time that people always wish to minimize. Movement often involves an embodied experience of the material and sociable modes of dwelling-in-motion, places of and for activities in their own right, to climb a mountain, to do a good walk, to take a nice train journey. There are activities conducted at the destination; activities conducted while traveling including the 'anti-activity' of relaxing, thinking, shifting gears; and the pleasures of travelling itself, including the sensation of speed, of movement through and exposure to the environment, the beauty of a route and so on.

Furthermore, various technologies (beginning with the humble book in the mid nineteenth century) develop which are also 'mobile' and provide new affordances enabling 'activities' to those on the

move. And we will see how new social routines are engendering spaces that are 'in-between' home, work and social life, forming 'interspaces'. These are places of intermittent movement where groups come together, involving the use of phones, mobiles, laptops, SMS messaging, wireless communications and so on, often to make arrangements 'on the move'.

Mobilities at the same time though entail risks, accidents, diseases, trafficking, terrorism, surveillance and especially global environmental damage. The contemporary mobile world seems to be characterized by awesome new dangers and restrictions for people, places and environments, as well as by new opportunities for mobile risky lives.

This book then is about this thesis of a mobile world: what makes a person or sign or communication mobile, what are the characteristics of mobility within different kinds of society, how should such mobilities be investigated in terms of theory and research? How much does a mobilities turn make social phenomena across the world comprehensible when they were previously opaque? Is it good to be mobile?

Overall mobilities have been a black box for the social sciences, generally regarded as a neutral set of processes permitting forms of economic, social and political life that are explicable by other more causally powerful processes. To the extent to which transport and communication are studied they are placed in separate categories with little interchange with the rest of social science. Holidaymaking, walking, car driving, phoning, flying and so on are mainly ignored by the social sciences although they are manifestly significant within people's everyday lives. Further there is a minimization of the significance of such movement *for* the nature of work relations, family life, leisure, politics and protest. These all involve movement or potential movement and affect the form taken by such social relations. Moreover, the social sciences overly concentrate upon subjects interacting together and ignore the enduring systems that provide what we might call the infrastructures of social life. Such systems *enable* the movement of people, ideas and information from place to place, person-to-person, event to event, and yet their economic, political and social implications are mostly unexamined in social science.

Systems

In this book I particularly examine such systems. Each intersecting 'mobility' presupposes a 'system' (in fact many such systems). These

systems make possible movement: they provide 'spaces of anticipation' that the journey can be made, that the message will get through, that the parcel will arrive. Systems permit predictable and relatively risk-free repetition of the movement in question. Systems enable repetition. In the contemporary world these systems include ticketing, oil supply, addresses, safety, protocols, station interchanges, web sites, docks, money transfer, inclusive tours, luggage storage, air traffic control, barcodes, bridges, timetables, surveillance and so on. The history of these repetitive systems is in effect the history of those processes by which the natural world has been 'mastered' and made secure, regulated and relatively risk free. For people to be able to 'move', and for them in turn to move objects, texts, money, water, images, is to establish how it is that nature has been subdued. As Marx wrote: 'n[Nature] builds no machines, no locomotives, railways, electric telegraphs, self-acting mules, etc. These are products of human history . . . of human participation in nature' (1973: 706). In that human participation *in* nature, the production of ever more extensive systems of circulation is centrally significant as both a set of processes and as novel kinds of discourse.

This significance of ideas of movement and circulation especially followed Harvey's discovery of how blood circulates within the human body and Galileo's notion that a natural state is to be in motion and not at rest. Circulation is a powerful notion here that had many impacts upon the social world, especially in the development of Hobbesian political philosophy (Cresswell 2006: chap 1). More precisely with regard to the city: 'Enlightened planners wanted the city in its very design to function like a healthy body, freely flowing. . . . the Enlightenment planner made motion an end in itself' (Sennett 1994: 263–4). Systems increasingly develop in which there is an obligation to be circulating, and this is true of water, sewage, people, money, ideas (Virilio 1986). There is in the modern world an accumulation of movement that is analogous to the accumulation of capital – repetitive movement or circulation made possible by diverse, interdependent mobility-systems.

Some pre-industrial mobility-systems included walking, horse-riding, sedan chairs, coach travel, inland waterways, sea shipping and so on. But many of the mobility-systems which are now significant date from England and France in the 1840s and 1850s. Their interdependent development defines the contours of the modern mobilized world that brings about an awesome 'mastery' of the physical world (generally known as the 'industrial revolution'). Nature gets dramatically and systematically 'mobilized' in mid nineteenth-century Europe. Systems dating from that exceptional moment include a

national post system in 1840 (Rowland Hill's Penny Post in Britain based upon the simple invention of the prepaid stamp), the first commercial electrical telegram in 1839 (constructed by Sir Charles Wheatstone and Sir William Fothergill Cooke for use on the Great Western Railway), the invention of photography and its use within guide books and advertising more generally (Daguerre in France in 1839, Fox Talbot in England in 1840), the first Baedeker guide (about the Rhine), the first railway age and the first ever national railway timetable in 1839 (Bradshaws), the first city built for the tourist gaze (Paris), the first inclusive or 'package' tour in 1841 (organized by Thomas Cook between Leicester and Loughborough in Britain), the first scheduled ocean steamship service (Cunard), the first railway hotel (York), the early department stores (first in Paris in 1843: Benjamin 1999: 42), the first system for the separate circulation of water and sewage (Chadwick in Britain) and so on. In 1854 Thomas Cook declared as the slogan for such a period: 'To remain stationary in these times of change, when all the world is on the move, would be a crime. Hurrah for the Trip – the cheap, cheap Trip' (quoted Brendon 1991: 65).

The twentieth century then saw a huge array of other 'mobility-systems' develop, including the car-system, national telephone system, air power, high speed trains, modern urban systems, budget air travel, mobile phones, networked computers (these are examined in Part 2 below).

As we move into the twenty first century these 'mobility systems' are developing further novel characteristics. First, systems are getting even more complicated, made up of many elements and based upon an array of specialized and arcane forms of expertise. Mobilities have always involved expert systems but these are now highly specific, many are based upon entire university degree programmes and there is the development of highly specialized companies. Second, such systems are much more interdependent with each other so that individual journeys or pieces of communication depend upon multiple systems, all needing to function and interface effectively with each other. Third, since the 1970s onwards, systems are much more dependent upon computers and software (Thrift, French 2002). There has been a large-scale generation of specific software systems that need to speak to each other in order that particular mobilities take place. Fourth, these systems have become especially vulnerable to 'normal accidents', accidents that are almost certain to occur from time to time, given the tightly locked-in and mobile nature of many such interdependent systems.

So what is the point of such increasingly complex, computerized and risky systems? As daily and weekly time–space patterns in the richer parts of the world are desynchronized from historical communities and place, so systems provide the means by which work and social life can get scheduled and rescheduled. Organizing 'co-presence' with key others (workmates, family, significant others, friends) within each day, week, year and so on becomes more demanding with this loss of collective co-ordination. As we will see the greater the personalization of networks, the more important are systems to facilitate that personalization.

Human beings are being reconfigured as bits of scattered information distributed across various 'systems' of which most are unaware. Individuals thus exist beyond their private bodies, leaving traces of their selves in space. In particular as vast numbers of people are on the move so these traces enable them to be subject to systems of intrusive regulation. In what has been called the 'frisk society', places are increasingly like airports using novel systems of monitoring, surveillance and regulation to control those mobile bodies.

In subsequent chapters I consider in what sense we might say that this mobile life is a good life. Is it good to move, how often should this happen, would a good society be a more or less mobile society? If mobilities entail systems of massive regulation and monitoring would a less mobile society be preferable? And is this mobility now inevitable, an irreversible trend that short of a nuclear winter or global warming that tips the global order into mass flooding (New Orleans as a forerunner), 'feeds' upon itself and inexorably expands?

And in examining these issues, which hold the whole earth's future in their hands, there are new configurations of what Latour terms 'circulating entities' (1999). Circulating entities for this coming century are complex, arcane and risky systems that facilitate the speeded up circulation of people, goods and information. These systems produce *and* presuppose personalized networking and 'do-it-yourself' scheduling through machines that are individualized, smart and corporeal. Circulating entities we might say are increasingly productive of circulation itself.

So while it is true that all societies have involved multiple mobilities, I explore how the twenty-first century places interdependent digitized *systems* of mobility at its very core. This is why their study cannot but be central to deciphering the principal contours of life in a world that combines exceptional freedom (at least for some on some occasions) and exceptional system dependence. We might say

that we can go wherever we want to go but only because Big Brother got there first and knows (if the systems have not crashed) where we are choosing to go, with whom we are going, where we have been and where we are likely to go next.

These changes involve novel, extensive and 'flickering' combinations of the presence *and* absence of peoples, enemies, friends and risks that new mobilities are bringing about as the new century unfolds. Methods and theories thus need to be ever on the move to keep up with new forms of mobility, new systems of scheduling and monitoring, novel modes of mobilized inclusion and exclusion and extraordinary system dangers and risks.