

Media and Mobility

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**Anthropologies of Media and Mobility/Reflection:
Gleaning Motilities
Rebecca Carlson**

As a graduate student studying filmmaking, and earlier as a poetry student, I was obsessed with ideas of movement, with thinking about and capturing flow which I visualized as an indelible current: pushing, maybe transforming but always going somewhere else. It is only now that I make this connection to my interests, as an anthropologist, in circulation. I've always been captivated by what Anna Tsing described in "The Global Situation" as the channeling work of cross-border movements—the grooves etched by the people and things going somewhere as they are helped along by the people and things who move them—a process which she later described as both emitting and existing through friction.

In his keynote address at the Anthropologies of Media and Mobility workshop, Dr. David Morley reminded participants to think about motility, the capacity to move, and the power to give meaning to that movement. Though as media and migration scholars attuned to flow we may fetishize speed and the apparent slipperiness of travel, migration, and digital data—often potentialized as transgressive and transformative—Dr. Morley called us to attend to experiences of being "stuck:" to the social classes and the economies and to the very material geographies which keep some of us fixed, sometimes in the act of unfinished movement.

Perhaps unintentionally, this theme emerged again and again in presenters' work as they wrestled with seeing and asking across various contexts: who or what is allowed to move and along which channels. In fact, more than one presenter stated (in reference to John Urry and other scholars), that there is of course, no mobility without fixity.

As a panel respondent, Dr. Dorothea Schulz asked us to consider what each of our particular incarnations of movement precludes. At the time, we were discussing a, perhaps inconsequential, graph included in Julia Hildebrand's presentation on hobbyist drone usage in Philadelphia. The graph was focused on recreational, or at least non-lethal, categories of use in the US, but we began to ask whether the "leisure" drone, as imagined and represented by the graph, could be so easily separated from its militarized—and also very lethal—practice and history. Itself a part of the power geometry which engenders both moving and seeing movement, the graph participates in the media spectacle of diverting attention away from the drone as weaponized object and onto, in very neoliberal fashion, the civic responsibility of the individual who wields it recreationally.

How then can we attend to motility when the data we collect and the community practices we observe participate in camouflaging networks of power, diverting our attention away from the infrastructures, formulas, re-routings, barriers and requisite decision-making that channel flows. If these electronic and migratory circuits project themselves as deterritorialized through aggressive effacement of their ongoing reterritorialization (of course, for Deleuze and Guattari these are the same)—at work in algorithms, increased surveillance and other older, more familiar, forms of boundary maintenance—how can we see, let alone interrogate (diminished) capacities for movement and meaning making?

Dr. Heather Horst's focus on the moral economies of mobile phone usage in Fiji, which she presented in her concluding keynote, offers one methodological solution, as it prioritizes the relationships between agents (in her case, the state, the company and the consumer) who together participate in, and also shape, possibilities for variously imagined and configured forms of

movement. Indeed, this remains a value of the anthropological endeavor: to see structure, as Dr. Morley reminded us, as “structuring”—not a fixed set of principles, but an ongoing process materialized in everyday actions and activities across a variety of actors and scales. Throughout the workshop, each presenter attempted to insert a question about, or a route for, seeing motility; it was the juxtaposition of our various perspectives, topics and approaches, in finding a way forward, that was for me a key benefit of this workshop.

The mediation 'turn' in mobility, or something more drastic?

Jamie Coates

The relationship between migration, tourism, and media, as topics of study, is not new to most fieldwork based researchers, and has served as inspiration for at least the past thirty years in various disciplines. The shift towards research on transnational migration (Glick Schiller, Basch, and Blanc 1995), and diaspora (Safran 1991; Castles and Miller 2003) in the 1990s, showed how media afford relationships between multiple locations and over long distances (Madianou 2012). And the central role of media in re-producing imaginaries of 'homeland' and modernity (Lewis, Martin, and Sun 2016; Sun 2002) has been well documented. Mobility and media have also tood as key terms within the grand narratives of modernity and globalization (Anderson 1991; Appadurai 1996; Beck 2000; Cresswell 2006; Hall 1991; McLuhan 1964). All of these assemblages of meaning, deterritorialized and reterritorialized across the globe, suggest that, just as movements came to bear meanings in the form of mobility, so too has meaning gained the ability to move in news ways through media. Among the early to mid-career researchers that largely make up ANTHROMOB, we have increasingly found that the study of (im)mobility necessitates the study of media. Yet, while fieldwork based intuitions have drawn us to study both mobility and media, and the ethnography of this field is growing rapidly, there is still room for the development of a stronger conceptual relationship between these two fields. Even though we might intuitively see mobility and media as very different kinds of 'things', I am increasingly unsure whether we should, or how we might, distinguish between mobility, movement, media, and mediation as processes.

Media and mediation, although related, are not the same. Mediation refers to a relationship between things, the nature of which I will discuss below, whereas media are a specific form of thing, which translates, transforms, or embodies a relationship. The etymology of media connects to membranes in biological terms and mediumship in its spiritual relations. Consequently, media are typically objects or entities, whereas mediation is a process. However, in a world where it is easiest to observe mediation as it is embodied in material processes, the line between social process, media, and mediation becomes difficult to determine. Dominic Boyer has asked similar questions in relation to the difference between social processes, mediation, and media:

...why could the anthropological study of roads and migration, currency and finance, commodity chains and values, and the formation and dissemination of expert knowledge, not be productively connected to anthropological research on communicational media under the rubric of a broader anthropology of mediation? (Boyer 2012: 384)

Following Boyer's question, I ask whether mobility would also be better understood in terms of mediation, or inversely, mediation as mobility?

From its inception, the popularization of the term 'mobility' was intended to represent a conceptual shift, undoing the 'sedentary metaphysics' of the human sciences (Malkki 1992). To some it was even seen as paradigmatic (Sheller and Urry 2006), a turn towards a more generative and processual approach to social life. Practically speaking, it has brought mostly migration, tourism, transport, and urban systems researchers together, with a healthy dose of people interested in embodiment and experience (Adey et al. 2014). These fields are largely concerned with the mobility of people, whether as persons categorized by their movements (migrant/tourist) or the technologies and systems that facilitate the movement of persons (transport etc.). The intersection of mobile persons and media (Moores 2012), and/or material culture (Burrell 2008), have challenged the anthropocentric tendencies of mobility studies in more recent years. These studies have also

elucidated how the political project of many mobility researchers intersects with the field of media studies. The perceived threat of certain mobile bodies for example, is evidenced in the negative media portrayals of migrants and refugees (Salazar and Schiller 2016) King and Wood 2002; Köhn 2016; Morley 2002), attesting to bounded way of thinking about the world. To unravel taken-for-granted bounded and sedentary conceptualisations of the world, particularly those which affect human livelihoods, such as methodological nationalism (Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2002), is thus a project that many media and mobility researchers have come to share.

But why not take the relationship further? Some of the ontological claims of the ‘mobility paradigm’, that the world and its various meanings are produced through movement, share a similar emphasis on processual thinking with many media researchers. In particular, the proposal that current mobility regimes represent some form of epochal shift towards more processual life is a common feature of both media and mobility debates. For example, Sarah Kember and Joanna Zylinska argue that mediation might serve as a fruitful means of developing a ‘theory of life after new media’ where:

mediation becomes a key trope for understanding and articulating our being in, and becoming with, the technological world, our emergence and ways of intra acting with it, as well as the acts and processes of temporarily stabilizing the world into media, agents, relations, and networks’ (Kember and Zylinska 2012: xv)

In similar ways, several scholars have suggested that mobility might serve as a key trope for how the world comes into being (cf. Ingold 2007; Merriman 2012; Thrift 2008; Urry 2007).

With all this emphasis on either mobility or mediation as epitomising processual ontology and worlds that come into being, I have become a little confused. What distinguishes these processes from each other? Should I distinguish between them? If I do not, how might I best describe that these processes are the same?

As an experiment I tried to briefly sketch out a few distinctions and propositions that I have found helpful. We might call it my ‘media/mobility manifesto’.

- 1) Change is a fundamental property of our world, and although movement (the perception that something has changed in space/time) is a common index of change, it is not the only one.
- 2) Movement is the abstract and analytical conceptualization of changes in space/time. Although intelligible in an abstract sense, it is only sensible or tangible as mobility.
- 3) Mobility is not movement, it is a qualisign (Chu 2010; Peirce 1991), a quality that signifies multiple and contingent meanings as they are embodied in things, words, people and practices. From dance, as a genre of bodily movement, to migration, a genre of place-to-place movement, movement needs to be signified in everyday practice. Migration, tourism, trade etc. are different forms of mobility that share similar signifying qualities because of their association with human movement, but differ because of their entanglement with other signifiers.
- 4) Mediation, like movement, is a form of change. It is the means through which processes become things, via encounter and/or translation. It is the ‘difference that makes the difference’ (Bateson 1972). Its premise is that the smallest form a thing can take is in dyadic relation to another (Latour 1993; Simmel 2011). Mediation is easiest to observe when something becomes a ‘thing’ or changes in its status as a ‘thing’
- 5) Media are a category of discourse, people, things, and practices where mediators/intermediaries, as actants in mediation (Latour 2005), are explicitly labelled in relation to their mediating properties (ie. thing-making). Some media mediate through

movement (where the same body/thing travels, a book or similarly singular and crafted object), through extension/dissemination (the broadcast model) or through reproduction (where information is re-produced between one setting and another, such as in digital tech).

From a focus on the embodied meanings generated through walking (Ingold and Vergunst 2008) and dance (Wulff 2007), to migration, tourism and transport, much of the fieldwork-based research on mobility has experimented with how we might trace the meanings generated by movement. Multi-sited ethnography and reconsidering ‘the field’ (Marcus 1995), practices of following and nonrepresentational approaches to meaning, and reconceptualising scale more broadly, have resulted from methodological experimentation in both media and mobility research (Elliot, Norum, and Salazar 2017). Indeed, I would argue that the dialogue generated in these two areas of research has stood as two of the most significant methodological challenges in fieldwork-based disciplines. I would argue that a focus on mediation in fieldwork-based research would build new conceptual links within the related fields of media and mobility studies. A focus on mediation encourages us to remain attentive to processes of signification in an inclusive, processual, and pluralistic sense. It also encourages us to avoid the pitfalls of viewing mobility as somehow escaping the process of signification, or conversely seeing signification as sedentary.

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Alternative Mobilities Jordan Kraemer

The following is from my forthcoming book (University of Pennsylvania Press) on emerging social and mobile media practices among young, transnational Europeans in late 2000s Berlin.

Early in my fieldwork on emerging media practices in Berlin, my roommates invited me to join their weekly kitchen gathering, a regular but informal affair. Although gatherings were common on weekends, typically before going out together, this midweek meet-up was specific to their friends' circle (Freundeskreis), which was organized around shared regional origins in Saxony-Anhalt. Recently, the circle had expanded to include newly-met Ausländer (foreigners) in Berlin, including a number of Anglophones and non-German Europeans studying or working in the city. The gathering took place nearby at a friend's apartment, with guests arriving around 8pm. As people trickled in, they settled around the kitchen table, adding chairs as necessary to accommodate the growing crowd of eight to ten people. On the table were arrayed beer bottles, plastic lighters, mugs of herbal tea, and, I observed, a number of mobile phones. More guests arrived, shedding coats and shoes, taking beer from the fridge, and then, almost automatically, removing phones from bags or pockets and laying them on the table.

Throughout the evening, people would attend to their phones if they received a call or a text, occasionally alerting others whose phones went off while they'd stepped out. But they rarely looked at their devices otherwise. At the time, most owned candybar or flip-style handsets, with limited Internet capabilities, mainly used for voice calls and texts (SMS, or short messages). Only a few possessed smartphones, owing to the cost of the devices and data plans. A few years later, however, this situation would change rapidly, as touchscreen smartphones became the only option available from most providers. As was typical among young Germans and others I knew in Berlin, almost all had acquired their first mobile phone before a personal computer or broadband Internet (most had used a computer at school or shared one with family at home). For a few, a highspeed mobile data plan was now their primary Internet connection at home. This relatively early adoption of mobile phones, compared to broadband Internet and personal computers (especially laptops), was typical among younger Europeans, as most European states implemented mobile telephony, and the interoperable GSM standard, by the early 1990s.

But what, exactly, is mobile about mobile phones, and what kinds of movement do they index? In German, the colloquial term for such a device is neither a mobile (as in the UK and many parts of Europe) nor a cellular phone, as in the U.S., but a Handy—pertaining to one's hand. This colloquialism likely owes to marketing campaigns in the early 1990s which termed the new device a "Handfunktelefon" or "Handheld-Telefon oder Handy." Although German Hand and English "hand" are cognates, "Handheld," and the suffix "-y" derive from English. One popular explanation was that Germans thought Americans used the term "Handy" and adopted it in mistaken imitation. While the term "mobile" invokes potential movement, and the U.S. "cell" phone indexes the network technology (cellular versus wired landline), German Handy stands in contrast to a Festnetz, literally a fixed network. This language characterizes mobile phones in terms of neither their mobility nor wirelessness, but in relation to the body—something you hold in your hand.

Mobile phones, as much research corroborates (e.g., Licoppe 2004), correlate to shorter conversations and text messaging between intimates—family, close friends—especially among those likely to see each other "in person" or "face-to-face" (terms which must be interrogated to consider what personhood assumes and how video-conferencing involves faces). For mobile, often

transnational young Germans and Europeans I studied, mobile devices facilitated acceptable, legitimate ways of being mobile—e.g., middle-class movements through the city and public space or state-sanctioned travel within and across borders. The design of phone handsets and other devices, for example, implicitly presumed an individual owner, as did typical service contracts (unlike landlines with multiple handsets). In this sense, I consider how mobile devices encode western understandings of personhood and subjectivity as discrete and indivisible. Those who did own smartphones made frequent use of apps that tracked or directed them through the city, such as restaurant recommendations and fitness route mapping. These services supported and enabled middle-class movements and consumption, as well as cosmopolitan aspirations.

Yet in other instances, such as the weekly kitchen gatherings, mobile phones took part in a more collective form of sociability. One evening, my roommate Danielle left her phone on the kitchen table and stepped out onto the balcony. When her phone later began ringing, a friend reached for it and called out, “Danielle, dein Handy!” In an interview, Danielle explained that she kept her phone (a “kleines Klapphandy,” a little folding phone) “to make calls, and to be called” (angerufen zu werden). Among her circle of friends, Handys could circulate, making friends available to one another when not co-present and extending presence across multiple spaces. Mobile technologies in these ways embodied many tensions and contradictions of emerging media among young and transnational Europeans. Their design entailed neoliberal notions of selfhood, individual and customizable, while facilitating acceptable, middle-class movement through urban space. The term Handy itself indexed cosmopolitan aspirations to transnational cultural circuits, even as it grounded German-speaking users in relation to mobile devices as bodily components extended shared sociality. I explore in this chapter the politics and ontologies of media mobilities, as articulated through mobile device design and practice, and the alternative mobilities that took shape in and through them.

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Anthropologies, Mobilities, Medias: Missing the Forest because of the Trees? **Noel B. Salazar**

The 2017 international workshop co-organized by EASA's anthropology and mobility network and its media anthropology network was entitled 'Anthropologies of Media and Mobility: Theorizing Movement and Circulations across Entangled Fields'. The original aim of the workshop was to theorize the (often intricate) relationship between media and mobility. The chosen theme seems to suggest that there are multiple anthropologies. The organizers are not the first to propose such a thing. Probably the most influential example is that of the Red de Antropologías del Mundo – World Anthropologies Network, launched in 2001 by a group of engaged anthropologists, the majority from Latin America, aiming to de-essentialize anthropology and to pluralize anthropological inquiry (Ribeiro and Escobar 2006).

What does it mean, in the context of mobility studies and media studies, to 'pluralize' the discipline of anthropology? While listening to the various presentations during the packed programme in Cologne, I did not detect any major epistemological or methodological differences. Ethnographic findings were described and analysed in remarkably similar ways. As far as research design is concerned, the anthropologists presenting relied mostly on traditional methods, enriched by the latest mobile and/or media technology tools. In that sense, both subfields seem to be pioneers within the discipline in testing out new methods (Elliot, Norum and Salazar 2017).

It became interesting when presenters tried to cross from one field of studies into the other. While my own research focuses on human (im)mobility, I have included media-related discussions in the past (Nilsson and Salazar 2017; Salazar 2009; 2011). For the workshop in Cologne, I presented some research-in-progress on how GPS sports watches keep active lifestylers (im)mobile. Strikingly, few presenters bothered to define the key concepts of 'mobility' and 'media', assuming that the audience understood what they were talking about. The organizers had proposed in the call for papers to conceive of mobility as 'movement ascribed with meaning' and media as 'meaning ascribed with movement'. However, these descriptions do not bring us very far when trying to communicate across fields of expertise. I tried to be a little more specific in my presentation by defining mobility as 'an assemblage of movement, experience and social imaginaries', and media as 'data storage materials as well as communication channels'.

I felt that I lacked a proper conceptual framework to talk about the media aspects of my findings. Similarly, I noted during the workshop that others with expertise in media studies struggled with the conceptualizations of the 'mobile' aspects of their findings or that they chose to ignore this altogether. That is why this type of boundary-crossing workshops is so important: they make you aware of your own black (conceptual) holes and allow these gaps to be filled by insights received from other presenters. However, such cross-fertilization only works if the people gathered are from fields of study that are not too distant from each other (as is clearly the case with mobility studies and media studies). Otherwise, one gets lost in translation or, more precisely, the lack of translation (Salazar and Jayaram 2016).

In sum, what I take away from the workshop in Cologne is that the anthropologists gathered there, coming from across Europe but also from way beyond the continent, pretty much relied on the same disciplinary base. However, people clearly had different understandings of what 'media' and 'mobility', both as objects of study and analytical lenses, refer to (although these differences remained mostly unarticulated). This is partially related to the specializations in either mobility studies or media studies and their related expert literatures and scholarly networks. By bringing

scholars together across subfields, one becomes more aware of one's own specialist biases. This awareness is only a first step though. Finding a common framework requires more intense collaborations, a process that the joint workshop may have initiated and that is continued in this e-seminar.

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