Researching and Representing Mobilities

Transdisciplinary Encounters

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Contributors

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Mobilising Representations: Dialogues, Embodiment and Power

Lesley Murray and Sara Upstone

In April 2013, *Meteoros*, a new sculpture by Lucy and Jorge Orta, was unveiled hanging from the roof of St Pancras station in London (Figure 1.1). As Jonathan Jones, a *Guardian* journalist wrote,

> Lift up your eyes – it floats high above the concourses of the reborn Victorian railway station, a baroque vision of the heavens hung under the modern glass roof that has brought this gothic structure back to life.

Comprised of figurative travellers atop fluffy white clouds, the sculpture is a representation of the coming together of the old and the new, the renaissance of the beautiful building and perhaps of rail travel itself. But *Meteoros* is also implicated in the mobile practices of the station's inhabitants, a vision to be looked at, dwelled upon and remembered. As Orta says, 'I hope our sculpture, suspended in the midst of this incredible architecture, will be one more way for the millions of visitors to admire the beauty of the space and to take their minds off the mundane' (Sharkey, 2013). Orta's previous works including *Identity and Refuge* (1995), *Mobile Intervention Units* (2001–2005) and *Refuge wear* (1992–1999) (Bourriaud and Galeano, 2003) have mobility at their core. These social architectures are created to move, to allow people whose movement is considered risky – the migrant worker in Johannesburg, young homeless people in Sydney and immigrant communities in New York – to be mobile and in doing so is contesting and transforming space (Townsend, 2005). This art, and to an extent *Meteoros* also, makes visible and challenges discourses of power and establishes discourses of resistance.

Art such as *Meteoros* illuminates how mobility is a matter of representation: it is represented in the cultural text of the installation,

Figure 1.1   Lucy and Jorge Orta's *Meteoros*, St Pancras Station, London

performance or written word; it is transformed by the nature of those representations; and it demands a rethinking of the relationships between space and that representation. Such contributions to mobilities may be ultimately 'beyond representation' in that they exceed the boundaries of their respective forms, with intangible and affective implications. Yet, at the same time, they demand a broadening of that notion of representation to include both embodied and political practices. This collection of essays examines these intersecting concerns, drawing attention to the ways in which mobility is and is not representational, is and is not representable, with significance for how we see the role of mobility in contemporary social and political discourse. Here, we are interested in both meanings given to mobility through representation and in representations of mobility that reproduce, reconfigure or produce further representations. In doing so, we position mobility as central to how space is lived and understood in contemporary culture, a potent site of political engagement and a potential site of resistance and transformation. The purpose of the collection in this regard is threefold. Firstly, it considers the methodological potential of representations as a modifier to existing work in the context of the social studies of

mobilities. Secondly, it examines how these representations make inter-
ventions into existing discourse surrounding mobilities, providing a rich
source of 'data' to be interrogated. Thirdly, it explores how representa-
tions might not only reflect real-world mobilities, but actively produce
them in a range of contexts. In this respect, the essays here are con-
cerned not merely with discursive representations of mobility, but with
how such representations might contribute to concerns for the study of
'lived' mobilities.

Reconceptualising/mobilising representation

What, then, do we understand by mobility? Cresswell (2006, 2011)
articulates an understanding of mobility as opposed to movement,
where mobility is meaningful movement. He conceptualises 'mobility'
as socially produced and 'movement' as that which is abstract, outside
the context of power and devoid of meaning. Mobility is both pro-
duced through social interaction and productive of space and time.
In particular, the 'mobilities turn' (Cresswell, 2006, 2011; Sheller and
Urry, 2006; Urry, 2007) proposes a mobilisation of social science, argu-
ing that we need to move away from a static social science in order
to fully understand the social world. Sheller and Urry's (2006) 'new
mobilities paradigm' sets out the range of mobilities that have the
capacity to shape the social world: nearness and distance; interdepen-
dent mobilities including corporeal travel, the physical movement of
objects, imaginative travel, virtual travel and communicative travel;
embodied movement; materiality and affordances; and mobile iden-
tities. These aspects of mobilities can be used to make sense of the
urban form and urban social relations. In addition, the concepts of
hypermobility (Adams, 1999), a term used to encompass the far-reaching
and deleterious impacts of increased mobility on the social and phys-
ical environment; and *hypomobility*, a term that reflects the supposed
mobile disengagement of particular groups including children and
young people (Murray, 2008) can be used to highlight the more neg-
ative aspects of normative constructions of mobility, and in particular
the intersection of difference and cultural and systemic barriers to
mobility.

In situating mobility as a vital location of impactful, dynamic spatial
practice, the contention here is that we need to move beyond a static
notion of representation and engage with the idea that mobility can
be represented and is produced through representation. Despite its ter-
minology, non-representational theory has placed representation at the

centre of contemporary debates around society and space. As Dewsbury et al. (2002: 438) suggest,

> Non-representational theory takes representation seriously; representation not as a code to be broken or as an allusion to be dispelled rather representations are apprehended as performative in themselves; as doings.

Non-representational theory (see Anderson and Harrison, 2010 for a comprehensive guide) offers a moving on from 'new cultural geography' and from social constructivism more generally, in an 'attempt to invent new ways of addressing fundamental social scientific issues' (Anderson and Harrison, 2010: 2). It is claimed that this paradigmatic theory 'locate[s] the making of meaning and signification in the "manifold of actions and interactions" rather than in a supplementary dimension such as that of discourse, ideology or symbolic order' (2). In addition, it is concerned with a relationality that goes beyond the human to an 'assemblage that includes all manner of materialities' (13).

Our broad approach here draws from, although it does not wholly adhere to, non-representational theory. One of the key points of divergence is in this theory's conceptualisation of the subject. We are in agreement here with Cresswell, who argues that in non-representational theory the subject is 'unmarked' or undifferentiated. Rather, the subjugation of particular social groups emerges as a major theme in this collection. Perhaps this resonates with an observation by Cresswell (2012b: 96) of Anderson and Harrison's collection and of non-representational theory more generally in that 'it is very British and very male', appealing to a 'limited hinterland and audience'. In comparison this collection is very female and not very British.

Nevertheless, like non-representational theory, we engage critically with 'representation', particularly in its association with the 'fixed'. For Doreen Massey representation has entailed a fixity of meaning with 'science, writing and representation' producing a space that is static and closed; 'choked [...] to death' (19). The correlation of space and representation 'is an old association; over and over we tame the spatial into the textual and the conceptual; into representation' (20). Subsequently, Massey calls for a disruption to this notion that representation necessarily fixes, and therefore 'deadens and detracts from, the flow of life' (26) and recognises a shift in thinking towards 'representation [as] no longer a process of fixing, but an element in a continuous production; a part of it all, and itself constantly becoming' (28). At the same time she cautions

that representation should not be 'conceived of as producing a space' as this 'rob[s] space of those characteristics of freedom (Bergson), disloca-tion (Laclau) and surprise (De Certeau), which are essential to open it up to the political' (29). This critique has resulted in calls for methods that 'co-produce' the world without going beyond what is being described and ascribing meaning, critiquing 'dead geographies' of representation. Non-representation, for example, emerged as a result of the inability to represent mobilities, especially dance and performance, which were embodied through feelings and emotions that are beyond representa-tion. In acknowledging space as open, free, unpredictable and political, the challenge here is to is to decouple representation from space and to mobilise it.

   Mobility, then, becomes integral to a complication of representation, and a freeing of space from static representation and of representa-tion from rigid spatialities. Representation as we conceive of it here is not about 'capturing' practice in specific time and space but much more than that; this mobilisation of 'representation' presents it as some-thing that is active and reflective in time and space. In the service of this aim, we suggest here that representation and non-representation are not mutually exclusive and that indeed 'mobility appears to be both simultaneously representational and non-representational' Adey (2010: 149). In doing so, we situate mobility as indicative of broader understandings of space as a dynamic and much underesti-mated factor in social interactions (Harvey, 1973/2009; Massey, 2005; Soja, 1996). This dynamic, open space – a reconceptualised spatiality that responds to spatial politics and challenges spaces of hegemonic neoliberalism – questions essential distinctions between representation and non-representation.

   Here we draw from Lefebvre's (1991) dialectical relationship between spatial practice, representations of space and representational spaces. Spatial practice is the observed 'doings' of people in society, where the 'reproduction of social relations is dominant' (50). Representation of space is conceptualised space, the space of planners, urbanists, techno-cratic subdividers and social engineers and is 'the dominant space in any society' (39). Representational space is

   space as directly lived through its associated symbols, and sym-bols, and hence the space of 'inhabitants' and 'users'. This is the dominated – and hence passively experienced – space which the imagination seeks to change and appropriate. It overlays physical space, making symbolic use of its objects. (39)

Social space, Lefebvre argues, is at the confluence of triad, where each conceptual element of space can 'embrace a multitude of intersections' (33) that make hierarchies of power visible:

> As for representations of the relations of production, which subsume power relation, these too occur in space; space contains them in the form of buildings, monuments and works of art. Such frontal (and hence brutal) expressions of these relations do not completely crowd out their more clandestine or underground aspects; all power must have its accomplices – and its police. (33)

As such, representation is seen to be a heuristic device or an analytical tool:

> The area where ideology and knowledge are barely distinguishable is subsumed under the broader notion of representation, which thus supplants the concept of ideology and becomes a serviceable (operational) tool for the analysis of spaces, as of those societies which have given rise to them and recognized themselves in them. (45)

For Lefebvre, therefore, representations are not static but take on new meanings – it is this mobility of representation that is knowledge-producing – a novelist, an artist, a musician puts something out there and the practices of writing, painting or playing are in the first instance permeated with meaning but it is the understanding of the journey of reinvention, reinterpretation and reappropriation of these representations that tells us something about space and society and people's everyday lives within them.

Lefebvre's concept of space has been influential on recent spatial theory, and central to the contemporary repositioning of spatial practice as equally important as time in the practice of everyday social interactions. In particular, Edward Soja's Thirdspace geographies have examined how Lefebvre's thinking pertains to contemporary culture. For Soja, this 'Thirdspace' is a corrective to spatial practices that can be closely aligned to the divergent practices of the social sciences and the humanities as they are traditionally conceived. Firstspace epistemologies, or perceived spaces, are material spaces that are 'directly comprehended in empirically measurable *configurations*' (original emphasis) (1996: 74). A method attentive to such spaces searches for explanation in primarily exogenous social, psychological, and biophysical processes' (75). As such, it can be seen to reflect a traditional social science attention to 'objectivity

and materiality' (75). In contrast, Secondspace epistemologies, focused on conceived spaces, are directed towards 'the spatial workings of the mind' (79). Directed towards 'discursively devised representations of space' (79), they are attentive not to material reality itself, but rather to how that material reality is comprehended via imagined geographies. This, then, is a focus on representations of space, which pertains more closely to traditional humanities approaches, particularly those which focus on 'cultural texts'. The 'text' in this sense pertains to any cultural object – literary, musical, artistic – that can be 'read'. In Secondspace epistemologies, the imagined geographies come to substitute for the 'real' geography, so that the image is given signifying preference.

For Soja, such epistemologies produce precisely the disciplinary distinctions this collection attempts to bridge, 'pitting the artist versus the scientist or engineer, the idealist versus the materialist, the subjective versus the objective interpretation' (1996: 78). Central to the book is the assumption that mobilities play a vital role in exposing the false dichotomy between perceived and conceived space as – in Lefebvre's terms – we can only fully appreciate spatial interactions as a complex fusion of spatial practices, representations of space and representational spaces. In particular the essays here reflect upon the dialogue between material spaces and their representations, drawing attention to how the role of mobilities is thus situated within a broader spatial turn that emphasises the 'simultaneously real and imagined' (Soja, 1996) nature of space. This way of thinking is what Soja refers to as a Thirdspace epistemology – those ways of thinking 'arising from the sympathetic deconstruction and heuristic reconstitution of the Firstspace-Secondspace duality' (81). Significantly, such an approach is not simply a critique of the limits of Firstspace and Secondspace approaches, but also a rethinking of how spatial knowledge is produced and what it consists of. What emerges is a 'lived' space that encompasses these two spaces to produce a 'thirding-as-othering': a Thirdspace that is not merely a fusion of first and second spaces but a transformation of them through combination. This space 'with all its intractability intact [...] stretches across the images and symbols that accompany it' (67), 'combining the real and the imagined, things and thought on equal terms' (68). We take on this rethinking of the production of knowledge through a transdisciplinary account of representations and mobilities.

Before discussing the mechanics of this epistemological challenge, it is useful to firstly consider the relevance of spatial representation to mobilities scholarship. Like Lefebvre's and Soja's analyses of space,

Cresswell's (2006) conceptualisation of mobility is in the form of a triptych, within which representation is not only perceptible but constitutive. Cresswell's book *On the Move* is an account of the 'interface between mobile physical bodies on the one hand and the represented mobilities on the other' (4). The three relational mobilities that underpin his explication are: mobility as observed, as a 'brute fact', the stuff of transport planners and analysts; mobility conveyed and made sense of through a 'diverse range of representational strategies' such as film and literature; and mobility as experienced and embodied 'as a way of being in the world' (3). As with Lefebvre and Soja, it is the relational intersections that are of most interest here. It is the interactions between meanings and the ways in which mobilities are produced and reproduced through embodied practices. As Cresswell suggests,

> often how we experience mobility and the ways we move are intimately connected to meanings given to mobility through representation. Similarly representations of mobility are based on ways in which mobility is practiced and embodied.
>
> (Cresswell, 2006: 4)

These relational interchanges between mobilities and representation are not devoid of politics. For Cresswell, this is demonstrated at the micro level in the ways in which moving bodies are represented according to sociocultural norms and on a grander scale in the classed and racialised mobilities in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans. Taking on Creswell's perspective, this collection suggests that it is the relational and politicised interplay between the 'brute force' of mobility and its representation which offers a particularly revealing and productive site of enquiry. The consumption of such narratives by readers points to how the consumption of representation may produce mobility, a theme that has been taken on by a number of mobilities scholars (Cresswell and Dixon, 2002; Packer, 2008). Here, we are exploring the ways in which mobility is illuminated through representation, a representation that is mobilised through the dialectical relationship between meaning and practice. Following on from Lefebvre's theories of social space, Soja's epistemologies of space and Cresswell's conceptualisations of mobilities, the following sections introduce the contributions in three broad themes. Firstly, we give an account of transdisciplinary dialogues that reveal epistemologies of mobilities premised on representations. Secondly, we discuss the ways in which embodied experiences of mobilities are medicated through representation. Thirdly, and

necessarily following on from these sections, is a discussion of the emergence of resistant practices of mobility and of representation.

Transdisciplinary dialogues

Although, following Urry's (2000) seminal text, *Sociology Beyond Societies: Mobilities for the Twenty-First Century* and Sheller and Urry's (2006) *The New Mobilities Paradigm,* the mobilities approach is often located within the discipline of sociology, it is a field of study that has from the outset been interdisciplinary. Scholarship across disciplines (Adey, 2010; Cresswell, 2006; Edensor, 2010; Ingold, 2004; Jensen, 2006; Kellerman, 2006; Thrift, 1996, Vannini, 2009) has unravelled the distinction between a sociological focus on mobility and a geographical attention to fixity – deconstructing a binary that has opened up mobility studies to the possibility of alternative disciplinary interventions. By focusing on visual arts, literature and music, this book extends existing criticism, which has examined mobilities in this context (Pearce, 2012; Tironi, 2012; Townsend, 2005). For example, Annette Kern-Stähler and David Britain's *English on the Move: Mobilities in Language and Literature* (2012) has drawn attention to the ways in which the concept of mobility has been used to think about not only about how mobility is represented in texts, but also how the text in itself represents a kind of mobility, looking at a range of examples including colonial literature and Shakespeare. Also, Packer (2008), in *Mobility Without Mayhem: Safety, Cars and Ctizenship,* looks at how discourses of safety in relation to women drivers, motorcyclists, hitchhikers, African American drivers, truckers, road- ragers and most recently car bombers are represented in mass-mediated popular culture such as film, television, magazines and newspapers. In particular, he examines automobile racial profiling through *Cadillac Flambé* (Ralph Ellison, 1973 cited in Packer 2008), a fictionalised account of the car as a site of African American struggle.

   Equally, already much work has been done on mobilities in the context of film (Cohan and Hark, 1997; Dixon and Cresswell, 2002; Roberts, 2012) – perhaps reflecting the mobility of film and its emergence alongside the intensification of mobilities towards the end of the nineteenth century (Roberts 2012; Thrift, 1996). In Cresswell and Dixon's (2002: 3) collaboration on mobility and film, they argue that film is a mobile media that provides 'a visual representation for the mobile world' (Cresswell and Dixon, 2002: 3) and a 'temporary embodiment of social processes that continually construct and reconstruct the world as we know it'. Adey (2010: 193) suggests that the televisual (film

and cinema) is a 'mediator to mobility of cultural ideas'. Roberts (2012) considers the 'place of film' in the cultural economy of Liverpool, arguing that through film, as an 'analytical tool of urban discourse' (2012: 5), it is possible to reveal the dialectical relationship between space and time. Significantly, Roberts' argument for a cinematic geography that challenges the duality of 'real' versus 'fictional' draws a distinction between geographies of film representation and films as representational spaces, which resonates with our own interests here.

There is also a growing interest in musicscapes as place-makers (e.g. Lashua and Cohen, 2010; Tironi, 2012), and in photography: for example Sassen's work on Sebastiao Salgado, in which she claims that 'it produces knowledge about more than what the photograph's content itself captures visually, but it does so through the photograph itself' (Sassen, 2011: 429), so that photographs make visible and produce dialogue on new global injustices. Sassen reveals the unevenness of mobilities in Salgado's photographs, in which she recognises a localised immobility that sits both uncomfortably and comfortably with his narratives of universalism: 'Once territory and time seep out of the cages of the national, the immobile can be global actors—their bodies do not cross the borders of national states, but that does not preclude them from being part of global subjectivities and politics' (Sassen, 2011: 442).

Yet whilst these studies suggest that there is already much theorisation, debate and research on mobility and representation *across* the social sciences and humanities, and whilst Urry contends that the 'mobility turn is post-disciplinary' (2007: 6), existing studies such as these have, however, tended to work from within traditional disciplinary boundaries (see e.g. Adey, 2010; Cresswell, 2011, 2012a). In particular, there has been little critical attention to how humanities and social science approaches might usefully work in dialogue with each other. This is despite the fact that the 'mobilities paradigm' (Sheller and Urry, 2006: 214) calls for a 'postdisciplinary field that is converging around studies of space, place, boundaries, and movement'. In response to this, what are offered in this collection, in contrast, are very much transdisciplinary encounters. This term is preferred to the alternatives 'interdisciplinary' and 'post-disciplinary' because it recognises that disciplines may endure; but goes beyond the transfer of methods from one discipline to another (interdisciplinarity), to a further seeking of intersectionality between them (Nicolescu, 1997; Stenner, 2010; Stenner and Brown, 2009).

In drawing a distinction between transdisciplinary and interdisciplinary work, Stenner and Brown (2009) suggest an unpacking of

the processes of transdisciplinary working into transcendence, transposition, transversality, transduction, transaction and transvaluation. In doing so they argue that transcendence, or 'going beyond' leads to different ways of thinking and in this way is transformative; that there is a transposing of disciplinary knowledge; that through tranversality it is possible to cut across disciplinary interests; that transduction is necessary in cutting across boundaries; that transaction is used to identify the rich seams or intersections at the disciplinary boundaries, 'where the action is'; and lastly that the use of transvaluation introduces an ethical dimension where an anti-authoritarian re-evaluation of disciplines is required in the pursuit of transformation and knowledge. This analysis of transdisciplinarity produces a nuanced understanding of the fundamentals of this approach in transforming knowledge, in a way that entails a letting go of disciplinary dogmas and concentrating on the production of knowledge at the intersections around disciplinary boundaries.

These transdisciplinary explorations are well established in geography, where scholars have exploited the rich disciplinary seams at the nexus of literary theory and geography (see Elden, 2012, a virtual theme issue on literary geographies in *Society and Space – Environment and planning D*) and of art and geography (e.g. Hawkins, 2011). Following from this practice, this collection is transdisciplinary in seeking to draw from the intersections of knowledge in pursuit of transformations. It does so by offering understandings of how imaginations are shaped through representation. Such a statement is made in full recognition of the fact that to use fictional, visual and audial accounts of mobile lives as data has epistemological, theoretical and ethical implications, raising important conceptual questions as to what indeed can, and does, constitute research data. Examples of this kind of approach can be seen, for example, in Yasmin Hussain's *Writing Diaspora* (2005), which approaches the fiction of South Asian diasporic women writers in Britain as 'data'. Working as a sociology academic, Hussain evaluates contemporary novels by South Asian women as potential documents charting the lives of South Asian diasporic women, departing from the conventional scepticism about the representational nature of such texts. The risk in such an approach is that it makes reductive assumptions about the ways in which individual 'texts' (visual, written, or aural) might offer insight into particular real-world social practices. There is a danger of seeing a simplistic correlation to lived reality when, in fact, even the most 'realist' texts are strategic and inherently subjective. This is something, for example, that Hussain's text at times falls foul of, particularly in its