

“Mobilizing the New Mobilities Paradigm”: The Mobilization of a Paradigm, a Theory, or a Field?

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OVERVIEW

1. The New Mobilities Paradigm Claim
2. Locating the mobilities paradigm claim in the terrain of *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*:
 1. A community of practitioners
 2. A “way of seeing”
3. Kuhnian Paradigms and the Social Sciences
4. The Primary Extant Paradigms of Automobility Studies:
 1. Foucault
 2. Systems theory
 3. Political economy
5. Mobility Studies as Disciplinary Field
6. The Paradigm Claim: Performative Considerations

The New Mobilities Paradigm Argument

- Two Observations:
 - Mobility is increasing and is ubiquitous
 - Social science has developed new ways to theorize mobility
- The “mobilities turn” *is* the new mobilities paradigm:
- New Mobilities Paradigm Claim Based On:
 - Theoretical reasons (reading of Thomas Kuhn’s *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*)
 - Empirical Grounds:
 - Extensive mobilities literature
 - Existence of research institutes
 - Degree programs and courses on mobilities



Video: Louise Sanji Mina

Music: Steve Reich, *City Life*

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 - Theoretical reasons (based on a reading of Thomas Kuhn’s *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* and the mobilities literature)
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The bodywork, the lines of union are touched, the upholstery palpated, the seats tried, the doors caressed, the cushions fondled; before the wheel, one pretends to drive with one's whole body.

—Roland Barthes, *La nouvelle Citroën*

How many years are needed in order to make it possible for every Soviet citizen to use an automobile in any direction he chooses, refilling his gas tank without difficulty *en route*?

—Leon Trotsky, *The Revolution Betrayed*

And which driver is not tempted, merely by the power of his engine, to wipe out the vermin of the street, pedestrians, children and cyclists?

—Theodor Adorno, *Minima ~~Moralia~~*

Course	SOCI 2000. Issues in Contemporary Society: Automobility	
Instructor	Name:	Richard Randell
	Email:	richardrandell75@webster.edu
Course Description	This course examines how our world has been changed by automobility since the beginning of the twentieth century. With the increase in the ownership of automobiles, the building of factories for the production of automobiles, the construction of roads, highways and other automobile related infrastructure, the urban, rural and social landscapes of the planet	

Locating the Mobilities Paradigm in the Terrain of *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*

“...after a revolution scientists work in a different world... The proponents of competing paradigms practice their trades in different worlds... after Copernicus astronomers lived in a different world... after discovering oxygen Lavoisier worked in a different world.... [Where Lavoisier saw oxygen] Priestley had seen dephlogisticated air.... [There was once] no pendulums... only swinging stones, for the scientist to see. Pendulums were brought into existence by something very like a paradigm-induced gestalt switch.”

—Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*

The Mobilities Paradigm Argument

- There exists:
 - A community of mobility practitioners
 - A “mobilities way of seeing”
- This community of practitioners lives in a different world:
 - A world of ubiquitous mobility
 - It is unlike the “static,” “a-mobile,” “sedentarist” world of the old social science paradigms.

Kuhnian Paradigms and the Social Sciences

“...it remains an open question what parts of social science have...
acquired... paradigms at all.”

—Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*

The primary extant paradigms of automobility studies

1. Foucauldian analyses
2. Systems theory
3. Political economy
4. Miscellaneous paradigms (Gender analyses, American Pragmatism)

Foucauldian Analyses

- Automobility as a technology of contemporary liberalism (Rajan 2006)
- Disciplinarity and the body (Bonham 2006)
- The Biopolitics of automobility (Campbell 2005)
- Automobility governance (Forstorp 2006)
 - state control of licensing
 - legislation regarding traffic movement and laws
 - The construction of automobile subjectivities (Paterson 2007)
- Automobility regimes (Böhm et al. 2006)

Systems Theory

- The System of Mobility:
 - The sub-system of automobility
 - The pedestrian subsystem
 - The horse sub-system
 - The rail sub-system
 - The sub-system of aeromobility

The System of Aeromobility



Photo courtesy of the Lufthansa Museum, Berlin. The airship was built in 1928 and was the first rigid airship to be built in Germany since 1914.

Systems Theory

- Major mid-twentieth century sociology paradigm
- Associated with and inseparable from structural-functionalism
- Talcott Parsons remains the canonical figure of this paradigm
- Employed to:
 - Describe automobility and other forms of mobility as “systems”
 - Categorize and interpret much of the mobilities literature in the 2006 and 2016 paradigm papers

Political Economy

- The political economy of automobility:
 - Infrastructure construction
 - State subsidies
 - Neglect of public transportation
- Achieved through:
 - Lobbying
 - Corporate influence in the state (Domhoff)
 - State actors assuming that it is in the national interest to promote automobility

There Is No Mobilities Paradigm

- Evidence of a mobilities paradigm can be found:
 - Neither in the automobility literature writ large
 - Nor in Mimi Sheller's and John Urry's own contributions to the automobility literature
- The Mobilities *Field* is dominated by the three social science *paradigms just discussed*.



Mobility Studies as Disciplinary Field

- The subfields of the mobilities field:
 - Automobility
 - Cybermobility
 - Velomobility
 - Aeromobility
 - Etc.

Performative Considerations: The Paradigm Claim as Speech Act

- Who Cares?
- Why does it matter what we call it?
- What is being done in making the claim?
 - Symbolic benefits
 - Material benefits
- The Revolution Betrayed?

“...still more men [sic], convinced of the new view’s fruitfulness, will adopt the new mode of practicing normal science, until at last only a few elderly hold-outs remain.”

—Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*

Thank You For Your Attention!

