

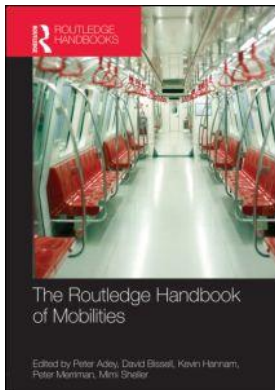
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Feminism and Gender

Georgine Clarsen

Feminist aspirations have been frequently articulated through the meanings, pleasures and potentialities of mobility. The very term 'feminist movement' suggests a valorisation of motion. The Enlightenment values of dynamism, progress, freedom and the escape from the confinement of irrational traditions have provided powerful motivating stories for many progressive collectivities across generations. For feminists, however, images of the transgressive movement of women beyond the limited spaces ascribed to femininity, often expressed in terms such as 'expanding women's horizons', have been especially pervasive and powerful.

The term 'feminist' is far from simple, and its meanings and associations have varied in time and place. It came into regular usage in Western Europe and Britain in the last decades of the nineteenth century, where it was largely associated with organised campaigns for women's political rights, critiques of masculinity, and aspirations for women to be included as active citizens in the new world that was heralded by the French revolution (Caine 1997). Feminism was a movement that sought to reduce the consequences of sexual difference by extending the newly conceived 'rights of man' to women. In the United States, 'woman movement' activists did not embrace the term until the second decade of the twentieth century as suffrage campaigns reached their peak. By the 1920s in the United States, 'feminism' referred to women's desires for personal emancipation and individual self-fulfilment in all spheres of life – in sexuality, at work, as well as in formal national processes (Cott 1987). What has been identified as a general feminist 'consciousness' or 'imagination', however, has been traced to at least the Middle Ages, well before the term was devised, and it continues into the present (Taylor 2003). 'Feminism' can be broadly characterised as the long history of overt actions and intellectual analyses that seek to further individual women's own and other women's status. Feminism always implies both an analysis of injustices between men and women and a claim to change them.

This discussion will examine the relationship between both of those aspects of feminism, within mobility research in general and the 'new mobilities paradigm' in particular. The two faces of feminism, the critical debates and academic disciplines that interrogate women's secondary status on the one hand and the activist campaigns devoted to precipitating change through emancipatory practices on the other have often been considered to be in tension. But feminists have increasingly refused their opposition, viewing campaigns to extend disparate

mobilities to women and the intellectual projects that examine women and men's differential relationships to mobilities as inextricably intertwined. In this chapter I argue that the radical potential of the concept of gender has not been exhausted in mobilities scholarship and, conversely, a broad mobilities paradigm has not had a significant impact on feminist theorising, in spite of their commonalities in theoretical commitments and political aspirations.

Though the radical potential of feminist analysis has not been placed at the centre of mobilities scholarship, there have been strong connections between the two projects. Feminism's long engagement with women's mobilities is arguably one of the intellectual and political antecedents that shaped early formulations of the new mobilities paradigm and led to its emergence at a particular historical moment. Key foundational texts in mobility studies demonstrate that engagement with feminist politics, research projects and theoretical concerns. For example, *Sociology Beyond Societies*, John Urry's 'brave manifesto' (2000, 19) for his proposed 'new agenda' (1) for twentieth-century sociology puts forward an argument for a 'post-disciplinary reconfiguration' (3) that sounds rather familiar to feminist scholars who have always operated in counter-disciplinary and trans-disciplinary settings. Urry's discussion engages with a range of feminist writers and texts, as well as other foundational scholarship that has influenced feminist theory. He acknowledges that his key metaphors of movement and flow have been widely deployed by feminist theorists of the body, as well as in feminist debates surrounding nomadic subjectivities (26–27). Beyond that, and in common with feminism, Urry's vision of a revitalised sociology highlights the connections between embodiment and larger social processes, ascribing a central place to the corporeal and sensorial dimensions of individual and collective life (77 ff.). Throughout Urry's discussion, gender is named as a key axis of inequality, though he does not devote any detailed attention to it. Other early publications within the new paradigm (Sheller and Urry 2000) more explicitly consider gender as one of the key sites of differential mobilities. However, this has not translated to articles in the journal *Mobilities*. Since it was first published in 2006, only two articles have included 'gender' in the title, ten have included the term in the abstract, and only one article lists it as a keyword.

Urry couched the project in interdisciplinary terms and as increasing numbers of younger scholars began to adopt a mobilities perspective in the second half of the decade, it has proven to be less influential in sociology than in other disciplines (see Sheller in this collection). Notably, the resolutely modernist and masculinist field of transport studies has been influenced by the new mobilities paradigm. Transportation research has taken a distinct 'cultural turn', and gender is increasingly found as an important term of analysis. New scholars with a background in the humanities are entering the field, a greatly expanded range of research questions is emerging, and new professional bodies have been established (for example, the International Association for the History of Transport Traffic and Mobility, <http://t2m.org>). New publishing opportunities foster an interest in theoretical issues alongside the empiricism of traditional transport scholarship (for example, the annual *T2M Handbooks*, first published in 2009, and the new journal *Transfers: Interdisciplinary Journal of Mobility Studies*). Established journals in the field, notably the *Journal of Transport History*, have also responded with a distinct broadening of their offerings (the special Gender edition in 2002; Mom 2003; Millward 2008a).

Of all the academic disciplines, however, geographers have led the way in systematically developing the radical potential of mobilities formulations. Geography had long been concerned with movement of people and things across space, and during the 1980s and 1990s cultural geographers, including an influential generation of women, were engaged in a radical reconceptualisation of their discipline. Among other things, cultural geographers

elaborated more dynamic conceptions of places as social productions, fluid and always in the processes of formation. Extending this project, geographers began to subject the concept of movement, until then a largely unexamined term, to critical analysis, teasing out the ways that movement (and its necessary other, stasis) were also socially produced (Cresswell 2001). Over the last decade, geographers of mobility have increasingly advocated a processual approach to mobilities, by emphasising the operations of power and mapping a differentiated politics of mobility. They have been at the forefront of new scholarship into gendered mobilities, which advances feminist debates and locates gendered differences as crucial to contextualising systemic inequalities. A group of British cultural geographers have stimulated research beyond their own discipline by suggesting productive schemas for analysing how movement is made meaningful within specific social contexts, for example in teasing out a gendered politics of mobility practices, experiences and representations (Cresswell 2006; Adey 2010; Cresswell 2010; Cresswell and Merriman 2011; Merriman 2012).

Feminist interest in what we now routinely call 'gendered mobilities' predates the new mobilities paradigm and it is important to briefly sketch a trajectory of some of those earlier debates and emancipatory ambitions. The ubiquitous relationship between sexual difference and mobility, across all modalities of human activities and experiences, and at scales from the personal to the global, has been well documented. Feminists have long asserted that mobility, as a social value and material practice, has been more available to men than to women. Men have been overwhelmingly associated with mobile activities such as warfare, the exploration of new worlds, pilgrimage, sports, adventure quests and *flâneurie*. They have been more closely engaged with the material technologies and infrastructures of mobilities such as bicycles, railways, steamships, automobiles and information systems. And pervading discourses assign positive values, such as dynamism, progress and entrepreneurship to masculine mobilities. Conversely, women have been routinely associated with stasis, confinement to a 'private sphere', the containment of bodily capacities, the surveillance of autonomous movement, and a less-than-authoritative relationship to modern technologies of mobility. Furthermore those qualities, particularly within Western traditions, have been ascribed a secondary status (Sheller 2008).

In response to that pervasive gendering of mobilities, countless women have produced narratives of their pleasure in transgressing such gendered norms, naming them as acts of defiance and personal growth. Many represented taking charge of their mobility in feminist terms – as 'seizing their own destiny'. Examples of such narratives of autonomous movement include Frances Willard's famous late-age embrace of the bicycle as a vehicle of pleasure and feminist politics (Willard 1895), the writings of women volunteers on the French front (Beauchamp 1919) or women who took to the skies in the interwar period (Batten 1938). It also includes women's aspirations to mobilise personal and political freedoms for themselves and others, such as Indonesian nationalist heroine and educator Raden Ajeng Kartini's desire to travel to Holland for a European education (Taylor 1992), or Shidzue Ishimoto's campaigns for birth control in Japan (Ishimoto 1935), or Indian dancer and actress Zohra Segal's travels across Europe and America (Erdman and Segal 1997).

Beyond these personal representations of women's diverse mobilities as transgressive actions, a great many feminist studies in a wide range of academic disciplines and across a variety of social contexts have documented men and women's differential mobilities and the discursive fields that surround them. Such research is increasingly being framed within, or broadly influenced by, a mobilities paradigm and it does not assume mobility to be intrinsically transgressive. The republishing of Victorian women travellers' texts by feminist presses in the 1980s led to flourishing scholarship on gendered travel narratives and their

intersections with the discourses and practices of colonialism (Mills 1991; Pratt 1992; Blunt 1994; McEwan 2000; Woollacott 2001; Lahiri 2010). Feminist studies of Western urbanisation and modernity have traced how the growth of cities created spaces of liberation for women, offering new mobile practices and new spaces of work, pleasure, deviation and disruption (Wolff 1985; Wilson 1991; Nava 1996). Labour researchers and development scholars have revealed profoundly gendered patterns of men and women's workplace mobilities (Hanson and Pratt 1995) and the crucial role of mobilities in shaping women's livelihood opportunities (Mandel 2004). Migration researchers have highlighted structural inequalities using mobilities frameworks (Walton-Roberts and Pratt 2005; De Regt 2010). Feminist philosophers have investigated the phenomenological dimensions of gendered embodiment (Young 1980 and 1998; Bordo 1993), and this scholarship has been extended into many areas of gendered mobilities, such as women's engagements with sports (Scraton and Flintoff 2002), technologies (Millward 2008b; Clarsen 2008; DeLyser 2011) and in feminist politics (Cresswell 2005).

The wealth of research and debate is also indicated by the increasing number of collected volumes devoted to gendered mobilities of all kinds published by academic and activist presses. They attest to the continuing energy of the field (Constable 2005; Passerini *et al.* 2007; Cresswell and Uteng 2008; Ballantyne and Burton 2008; Metz-Göckel 2008; Resurreccion and Elmhirst 2009; Letherby and Reynolds 2009; Kusakabe 2012; Lund *et al.* 2013). While the full range of scholarship on gendered mobilities is too large and diverse to do more than gesture toward, the research cited here indicates how the concept of gender has proven productive for thinking through men and women's differential practices, experiences and representations of mobilities. The literature reveals a complex picture of the pervasive intertwining of mobilities and gender. Research suggests not only that women have been less able and less likely to move with the same degree of ease as men, but that even when their physical motion appears to be exactly the same as men's, the meanings ascribed to it are never quite the same – indeed, they are often very different. And it is not as if movement occurs through neutral physical space, but gendered bodies move through gendered social spaces, via material objects and technologies of travel and communication that themselves are often profoundly gendered. And finally, the research serves as a constant reminder that all of these gendered meanings, practices, potentialities, experiences, emotions, places, representations and objects have changed greatly over time and differ across diverse locations.

The publication of dedicated review essays surveying the gender and mobility literature confirms that a broad field is beginning to cohere and provide a platform for cross-disciplinary conversations (Law 1999; Silvey 2004; Yeoh 2005; Blunt 2007; Cattán 2008; Walsh 2009 and 2011; Clarsen 2009; Hanson 2010). Transport geographer Robin Law, in her widely cited early discussion, applauded the move away from traditional 'gender blind' transport research, but declared the time had come for scholarship that was based on a more systematic treatment of gender as a theoretical category (Law 1999, 568). Law argued that her field was constrained by the empiricist assumptions of conventional transportation research, such as its focus on the journey-to-work paradigm, and argued for a move away from the 'women and' approach into a more nuanced theorisation of gender and mobility that drew on wider intellectual traditions. She called on feminists in her field to continue to develop gender as a category of analysis that did not simply research the impact of gender on mobilities, but more crucially analysed how mobilities and gender are co-constituted in banal, everyday practices (Law 2002).

Law's call has been reiterated by similar literature surveys in the decade and a half since it was published, suggesting the need for constant reassessment of this apparently simple and

intuitive concept in order to sustain its radical potential. Striking in many discussions of gender and mobility is that the meanings and usefulness of the term 'gender' are very often assumed rather than examined, as if we all already know what gender is. A close reading of the literature, however, suggests that its meanings are rather elastic and, as in everyday speech, 'gender' is often used as a descriptive category that is interchangeable with 'sexual difference', 'men and women', 'feminine and masculine' or sometimes just 'women'. My outline of the literature above exemplifies those shifting meanings, and this fuzziness of the analytical category deserves exploration.

Most discussions of gendered mobilities treat mobility as a concept that requires analysis or explication, but (with notable exceptions) they rarely provide a similar account of gender. Precisely because the concept has been so productive for feminist research, however, it is important to reassess the term forty years after it was so enthusiastically welcomed into the feminist toolbox. Teresa de Lauretis's injunction, offered at the moment when the term was becoming ubiquitous in feminist literature, that we need a notion of gender that is not so bound up with sexual difference as to be virtually coterminous with it, remains salient (de Lauretis 1987, 2). Gender itself is a mobile concept and how feminists have deployed the term has a history. In order to harness the critical power of the concept within mobilities studies it is important to consider how its various meanings have been useful for feminists at different strategic moments, and in particular social and geographical locations.

'Gender' was eagerly adopted in the 1960s by 'second wave', Western feminists as a key strategy to counter the widespread beliefs underpinning women's disadvantage: that differences between men and women were immutable because they were rooted in biology. The term, which had previously been used in English to indicate masculine and feminine forms in language, was then entering into the lexicon of psychologists, who used it to refer to transsexuals' expressions of masculinity and femininity. Feminists first embraced 'gender' not to critique the notion of the biological intractability of sex, but as a way of sidestepping that vexed issue. 'Gender' made room for change by asserting that it was social processes ('socialisation') that built variation onto those fixed biological differences between men and women. That perspective allowed both of the key but paradoxical assertions of feminism to be held at the same time: that there were crucial commonalities between women ('sisterhood') and also that those characteristics ('sex roles') could be transformed through political action (Nicholson 1994, 80–81). So, as prominent theorists later put it, it was the 'perceived dangers of biological reductionism' that compelled the repudiation of sex and the embrace of gender in feminist analytical discourse (Gatens 1996, 4). This linguistic tactic meant that gender could be 'quarantined from the infections of biological sex' (Haraway 1991, 134).

In this sense, the term 'gender' may be understood as a strategic response by western feminists, particularly in Anglophone contexts, to the prevailing conservative discourses and practices of biological determinism, at a particular historical moment and in specific social locations (Braidotti 2002; Moi 1999). The creation of the term marked a moment of historical change, energising feminist research agendas and activist projects. Gender opened out new landscapes of opposition to the discourses, institutions and practices that constrained ('oppressed' was the term most often used) women. There was an outpouring of feminist research in the humanities and social sciences, and to a lesser extent in the sciences, that produced a wealth of new knowledge about women's lives now and in the past. In retrospect, it is clear that the value of the term was not simply as a new descriptor for things that existed in the world (sexual difference open to change) but more crucially it was also a bid to break open a political and intellectual deadlock. And the term did indeed become a powerful agent of change, perhaps beyond the dreams of those who first formulated it. 'Gender' worked to

reshape the contours of feminist debates and activism, in fact reshaping debates well beyond feminism.

Gender offered a productive solution to an historical impasse, but the term soon presented problems for feminist theory and practice. Both elements of the dualistic conception – fixed ‘sex’ and variable ‘gender’ – became the subject of increasing contestation by those who were marginalised or excluded by their terms. Over the following decades, ‘first world’ women of colour, ‘third world’ women, working-class women, lesbians, transsexuals and feminist men critiquing masculinity were among the groups who forged critical sites of enunciation out of those terms, refusing that simplistic characterisation of the sex/gender distinction and ‘speaking back’ to the limitations and normative assumptions built into them (Mikkola 2012). Such cumulative and intersecting critiques have been closely bound up with dramatic changes in feminist theory and activism: the undoing of the fantasy of a unitary feminist project, the insistence on the irreducibility of difference, the challenging of hierarchies of power within feminism, the construction of new identities, the installing of the centrality of the body to feminist politics, the highlighting of the relationality of gendered categories, and the development of an analytics of power from the intimate to the global. These processes of contestation over the meanings and usefulness of gender have generated the variety of ways that we see the term now used, which exceeds the unitary denotation intended at its inception.

What began as an important innovation in a positivist project to undo presumptions about women’s historical lack of agency and their lives ‘hidden from history’, and to document instead the variety of ways that women held up ‘half of the sky’, had by the 1990s turned into a critique of positivism (Scott 1999, 3). The question became: could existing disciplinary paradigms be expanded to include women and other marginalised subjects, or did gendered research necessitate rethinking the foundational paradigms of those knowledges? For historian Joan Scott, one of the leading theorists of the category of gender (though rarely cited in the gender and mobilities literature), that accumulation of feminist scholarship did more than merely point out silences and fill in gaps in existing research. Even more fundamentally, it constituted and inspired a profound critical challenge to the knowledge claims of established disciplines. Critical feminist scholarship revealed how existing frameworks of knowledge, for all their assumptions of mastery, universality and objectivity, relied on the exclusion of women, producing and reproducing it, rather than accidentally omitting women from their terms. Disciplines were ‘participants in the production of knowledge that legitimised the exclusion or subordination of women’ (Scott 1999, 26). Her work was a powerful and provocative influence on the ‘linguistic turn’ in historiography and a marker of the discipline’s (often reluctant) engagement with poststructuralism (Scott 1999, 9–10; Butler 2011, 19).

Though historians of gender rarely frame their research within a mobilities paradigm, Scott’s historical perspective can do much to maintain a critical focus, and thereby enhance mobilities research. Her formulation places gender as much more than a descriptive category for the fixed subject positions of ‘men’ and ‘women’ whose meanings we already know in advance, or a qualifier to a field of research, such as ‘gendered migration’ or ‘gendered auto-mobility’. Scott’s work opens out ways to think historically about how gender is integral to producing the analytic fields we investigate, and how we as researchers are inextricably complicit in that process (Butler 2011). While the growing work on gender and mobility serves to increase our knowledge about differential movements, it can do much more than simply indicate that men and women stand in different relation to mobilities. In fact, uncritical research that does not place gendered mobilities in their historical and discursive contexts can

work to reinstall and naturalise those very power relations that feminists seek to understand and change (Subramanian 2008).

An historical perspective to gendered research continues to serve feminist ends when it seeks to make visible how the very concept of mobility, its practices and representations, has been built within complex and changing matrices of meanings that may sometimes appear to be unconnected to sexual difference. The ways and mechanisms through which mobility has historically come to organise our understandings of gender and what effects that has had in specific locations and at particular moments still needs much teasing out. Understanding precisely how and by what means shifting ideas of gender have come to structure the meanings of mobility in particular historical contexts is also an unfinished project. How have conceptions of gender naturalised the value of particular mobilities over others, and mobility over stasis? How do these processes operate within constellations of other categories of subjectivity? How have notions of gender served to structure fields of meaning for the movement of material things as much as for people? How are notions of gender bound into ideas such as justice, progress or sustainability? And finally, to recognise the agentic power of our research, how and by what means can the narratives of gendered mobilities that we produce serve as resources for articulating alternative visions and suggest ways to bring about change? Feminist historiography tells us that mobility research can further progressive ends when it nurtures gender's instability and critical potential as a contested process of meaning-making, and continues to resist routinised and essentialised approaches to gender that take it to be a static 'thing'.

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