

Mobility, Space and Culture, by *Peter Merriman*, Abingdon, Routledge, 2012, 214pp notes and index, £85.00 hardcover. ISBN 978 0 415 59356 4

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Peter Merriman's significant empirical and theoretical work has established him as a prominent thinker on mobility in the social sciences/humanities and his latest contribution firmly cements this position as one of the most astute, incisive and influential researchers on topics concerning mobility. *Mobility, Space and Culture* is a book of two halves in which Merriman introduces a series of conceptual arguments that are then traced through an exploration of early motoring experiences and practices that all seek to demonstrate how such an emphasis on mobility necessitates a critical evaluation of its relationship with other key geographical concepts; namely time, space and place.

The empirical work into Victorian and Edwardian motoring practices was thoroughly refreshing; an exemplar of how to study historical mobilities and of real value to understandings of automobility and geographies of the car. Brought to life by richly detailed prose and curious illustrations, Merriman delves into the archives of motoring magazines from the period to explore the embodiment of driving (Ch.4), the ways in which it was a gendered practice (Ch.5) and the means by which it was governed and contested (Ch.6) in rigorous and sometimes humorous ways. I found particularly fascinating the contested nature of early motoring and the struggles that ensued in getting motoring accepted by the wider public. In the current age when the car reigns supreme and we are constantly seeking ways to go beyond it (Böhm *et al* 2006) – these prove novel insights. Motoring's early conceptualisation as a sporting pastime of polite society arguably hindered its acceptance

and it would have been pleasing to see Merriman tease out some of these tensions and transitions between motoring as a sport and as a transport mode. Such complexities of mobile practices that are both leisure/sporting endeavours and forms of transport are being investigated at an ever-greater rate and *Mobility, Space and Culture* misses an opportunity to make a worthy input here.

Not all of the narratives are as novel however and some of the real delights of the book were discovering that particular debates about driving have been around since its foundation. The Victorian/Edwardian view on which gender are better drivers and the suitability, capabilities and role of women in a changing society makes for very interesting reading. If there are criticisms to be made, they would revolve around the lack of attention to class-based politics of early motoring (barring the acknowledgement of driving being an upper-class pursuit). Equally, the chapter on the embodiment and sensations of motoring were predominantly concerned with male bodies. Despite demonstrating the complex gendering of motoring in the following chapter, the embodiment and sensations of women drivers were not equally attended to in the book.

These empirical chapters on motoring constitute the majority of the volume; something surprising when scanning the front cover. The key-word friendly yet somewhat ambiguous title suggests a conceptual book and the opening chapters do deliver on this assumption. Chapters 1 – 4 provide a superb overview of how post-structural, open and processual approaches have had implications for contemporary thinking on mobility and in turn, what the primacy of movement and process might mean for understandings of space, time and place. This section of the book is likely to have the widest appeal and utility as Merriman challenges the a priori positioning of space, time and place in human geography, problematizes the stillness/mobility binary, unpicks the conjoined conceptions of time-space and space-time, and critiques notions of non-places or placelessness. Yet for those familiar

with Merriman's work, not all of this will be new as many of the conceptual arguments having been published in some guise previously (something of a common occurrence for books in the *International Library of Sociology* series). This however, does not negate the importance of the arguments Merriman makes and the book is an excellent primer on cutting edge thinking around mobility, space and place - making it well suited for an undergraduate and postgraduate audience or anyone who is unfamiliar to processual understandings of these concepts. Understandably, these chapters feature a dizzying array of theories and theorists that sometimes results in a dense text and a desire for further explanation in some areas, especially if targeting the undergraduate audience. I do not find the use of endnotes useful in this endeavour.

Merriman does more than just synthesis contemporary thinking on mobility, space, time and place however, he also provides some means of progression and arguments he wishes to take forward and explore. I found particularly useful his use of 'molecular mobilities' as an approach and a term to consider the mobilities that are 'more fundamental and less easily perceptible, constituting life, the becoming of objects, and the unfolding of events' (156), in contrast to discrete 'molar mobilities' that tend to uphold stasis/mobility binaries and assume such movements occur in spaces (rather than constituting them). Relatedly, the repositioning of space and time away from the primordial measures in geography is a very promising provocation. Merriman suggests that the unfolding of events is characterised by an apprehension of other registers such as rhythm, sensation, experience, atmosphere, affect, force and movement. I'm sure this is something that will be taken up by others with merriment in the future.

So there appears to be two quite contrasting sections within the books – one on contemporary theorisations of space, place and mobility and the other concerning historical experiences of motoring. I was initially sceptical about how well they could be coupled but

Merriman demonstrates a highly skilful threading through of the conceptual arguments over the entirety of the book to real effect. Yet it is certainly still a cleavable book and without a specific interest in motoring, there is a good chance Part II will be merely skimmed over. This would be a real shame as it truly is an excellent book and a fine example of the benefits that 'traditional', in this case archival, research gifts to the study of mobilities. To a field that has witnessed a proliferation and espousal of new methods in recent years, this is an extremely pertinent and exemplary piece of work. Merriman does introduce this argument in Part 1 but is something I hoped could have been more greatly developed and reflected upon in what is a brief conclusion (something he has now done, see Merriman 2014).

Barring the occasional gripe, this is an important book that should find itself onto the shelves and reading lists of anyone interested in current thinking on and a foundational understanding of mobility, space, time and place in geography and the social sciences. It will have particular relevance to those interested in historical- or auto-mobility given its novel insights into early motoring experiments and experiences but is a fantastic book and a pleasurable read. This book reaffirms Merriman as an important figure for interdisciplinary thinking on mobilities and anybody wanting to understand contemporary approaches in this field could do much worse than pick up a copy of *Mobility, Space and Culture*.

References

Böhm S Jones C Land C and Paterson M eds 2006 *Against Automobility* Blackwell, Oxford

Merriman P 2014 Rethinking Mobile Methods *Mobilities* 9 167-187