Mobility

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Abstract
This entry focuses on the relationship between mobility and possibility and postulates that movement – physical and psychological – underpins the possible and its exploration in individuals and in society. This basic argument is supported by a brief examination of objects and inventions on the move throughout prehistory, the circulation of ideas in past and present societies, the mobility of people, within and between national boundaries, and the movements of the mind, expressed as episodes of daydreaming and imagination. In each case, potential and actualised forms of mobility support the expression of possibility-expanding phenomena such as creativity and innovation. But this relation is neither linear nor easy to unpack. Less mobile lives can be lived very creatively, just as constant travelling can be disempowering and reduce one's agency. Final reflections are offered on the interplay between (im)possibility and (im)mobility and the way it shapes human existence.

Keywords: movement, new mobilities, creativity, imagination, innovation, migration, diffusion.

Cross-references: creativity, imagination, innovation, automobility studies, impossible, collaborative creativity, ignorance.

Introduction

Everything in the universe is mobile. We have known this from at least the time of Heraclitus of Ephesus, 500 years before the common era, who famously claimed that 'everything flows' (*Panta rhei*). Movement defines the existence of galaxies, as well as that of the smallest subatomic particles. Life itself is intrinsically mobile. By moving around, infants learn about the world and adults can play multiple roles in ever-changing, dynamic societies. Of course, the meaning of movement here varies. Galaxies, infants and societies move with different rhythms, at different scales, and for different 'reasons'. But, essentially, they all change position, in space and time, in ways that describe trajectories and make up evolving networks. By acknowledging and studying mobility, we can thus understand something essential about ourselves and the world we live in. And yet, our view of the world (and the way we talk about it) is often trapped by stable, static or unchanging units and entities; in mobilities research, on the contrary, we get to see all these entities as they emerge, transform, and dissolve in and through movement.

This entry focuses on human forms of mobility, both individual and societal. Two of the characteristics of this kind of mobility are purposefulness and meaningfulness. In other words, human beings develop intentions to move (or stay) and construct all sorts of conceptions, images and visions of what this movement will be like and how it will end. They ascribe meaning to their mobility, acts that can be then related to as good or bad, exciting or scary, useful or pointless. And, with this, immobility also gains signification. It can be frustrating to have your movements reduced and this is why many societies, across time, used imprisonment as punishment. And there are few things more unsettling and traumatic

for human beings than going through forced displacement or migration. But it can also be comforting to stand still for a while, to be grounded somewhere, and to feel at home.

If we see the world, social and psychological, through the lens of movement and mobility, we get to understand better the development of the self, the way our cognition functions, the role of imagination and emotion, and the directions taken by history and social change. But we also get to recognise something more essential about our human existence, ultimately defined by its openness to the future and to other ways of being. And that is the basic fact that *mobility begets possibility*. It is by moving – physically and/or imaginatively – that we experience more of our world, we develop a sense for what is possible and explore the wide range of possibilities and impossibilities that distinguishes us from other species.

And yet, this relation between mobility and possibility is not linear or deterministic. It doesn't mean that more mobility will lead to more possibility, manifested for example in increased levels of creativity and innovation. Sometimes, constant movement can be distracting or overwhelming. Immanuel Kant is famed, for instance, for never having left his hometown of Königsberg, and still, he opened up possibilities for thinking that survive the ages. Stephen Hawking spent most of his life paralysed, and yet this didn't prevent him for making exceptional contributions to our knowledge of the cosmos. Conversely, many people feel the need for some quiet time alone in order to create. J. K. Rowling sat writing many of her novels in the same café, overlooking the Edinburgh castle. Does this make, though, Kant, Hawking and Rowling immobile? Certainly not. But it does call to our attention the fact that there is more to movement than physical journeys and migration. Just like there is more to possibility than writing novels, creating theories or philosophising about humanity. Conceptual clarity is called for in both mobilities and possibility studies.

In this entry, I will support and nuance the claim that possibility is born out of and depends on mobility by considering, in turn, the movement of objects, ideas, people, and minds (for a more detailed discussion see Glăveanu, in press a). These forms of mobility are intrinsically connected to one another. Objects don't emerge out of nowhere, ideas depend on minds, and the bodies of people should not be separated from either in a Cartesian way. By analytically making these distinctions, I am hoping here to relate the discussion of mobility and possibility with that of temporality. Each one of these movements captures a different timescale, from phylogenetic and sociogenetic to ontogenetic and microgenetic. In the end, it is important to reflect on the notions of immobility and impossibility. Is the impossible defined by an absolute lack of movement? And is the latter even possible?

New mobilities

New mobilities is a paradigm that emerged in the early 2000s in sociology and related disciplines such as geography, archaeology and anthropology, as a response to static and entity-based theories of society and culture. John Urry, one of its main proponents, aimed to recreate sociology as a discipline that "examines the diverse mobilities of peoples, objects, images, information and wastes; and of the complex interdependencies between, and social consequences of, these diverse mobilities" (Urry, 2000, p. 1). He challenged views of society as self-contained, bounded, and unitary and, instead, proposed that it should be conceived in terms of flows, networks, and 'scapes'. This dynamic vocabulary goes a long

way in transforming not only our conception of society, but also of culture, globalisation, the environment, and the self. After all, living in the hyper-connected and mobile world of the 21st century invites us to reconsider our models as well as everyday practices.

The meaning of mobility in new mobilities – called 'new' in recognition of the fact that mobilities have been studied for decades by various disciplines – is expanded to incorporate dimensions that cut across the psychological, physical, social, economic and political:

1. "the corporeal travel of people for work, leisure, family life, pleasure, migration and escape, organised in terms of contrasting time-space patterns ranging from daily commuting to once-in-a-lifetime exile;
2. the physical movement of objects include food and water to producers, consumers and retailers; as well as the sending and receiving of presents and souvenirs;
3. the imaginative travel effected through the images of places and peoples appearing on and moving across multiple print and visual media and which then construct and reconstruct visions of place, travel and consumption;
4. virtual travel often in real time transcending geographical and social distance and forming and reforming multiple communities at-a-distance;
5. communicative travel through person-to-person messages via personal messages, postcards, texts, letters, telegraph, telephone, fax and mobile" (Urry, 2007, p. 47).

This wide scope is welcomed as it both highlights the relevance of mobilities studies nowadays and the necessarily inter-disciplinary nature of this endeavour. And yet, beyond cataloguing types of movement and studying them in detail, it is also important to develop a deeper reflection on what mobility *does* to our existence and the many ways, positive and negative, in which we are transformed by it. New mobilities scholars are right when it comes to not romanticising movement and exploring, for example, the 'darker' sides of mobility as well, including in terms of oppression, environmental destruction or increased inequalities (see Ohnmacht, Maksim & Bergman, 2009; Macková & Kysučan, 2016). But how exactly does mobility operate? What are the differences and similarities between the movements of bodies and information, for instance? What about the difference between human and non-human mobilities, more broadly?

There are many conceptual questions still to be raised within new mobilities. Fortunately, the methodological developments inspired by this emerging paradigm have been substantial and allow us to capture previously invisible or under-studied phenomena. The specific methods used by researcher include, but are not reduced to:

- "the 'observation' of people's movement, of bodies strolling, driving, leaning, running, climbing, lying on the ground, or (…) visiting a petrol station. This involves observing directly or in digitally enhanced forms mobile bodies undergoing various performances of travel, work, and play. (…)
- Second, there are several emerging forms of 'mobile ethnography', which involve participation in patterns of movement while conducting ethnographic research. (…)
- Third, there is the keeping of 'time – space diaries', in which respondents record what they were doing and where, and how they moved during those periods. (…)

- Fourth, there are varied methods of 'cyber-research' that explore the imaginative and virtual mobilities of people via their websites, multiuser discussion groups or listserves, as well as through the use of computer simulations. (…)
- Fifth, there is imaginative travel normally involving experiencing or anticipating in one's imagination the 'atmosphere of place'. (…)
- "Sixth, much travel and communication involve the active development and performances of 'memory'. This necessitates research methods that simulate the active employment of photographs, letters, images, souvenirs, and objects. (…)
- "Seventh, much mobilities research will need to examine multiple 'transfer points' (…), 'places of in-between-ness' involved in being mobile but immobilised in lounges, waiting rooms, cafe¨ s, amusement arcades, parks, hotels, airports, stations, motels, harbours" (Sheller & Urry, 2006, pp. 217-219).

The new fieldworks mentioned above should all be of interest to scholars working on possibility studies from across different disciplines. They each reveal something interesting, above all, about the interplay between the possible and the impossible within mobile societies and mobile lives. What remains to be theorised and studied further is precisely this articulation between (im)possibility and (im)mobility in the case of objects, ideas, people and minds.

Objects on the move

One of the most directly observable mobilities are those of objects. As people and ideas move around, they usually leave material traces in the forms of things and institutions. These embody the views, knowledge and norms of different communities and, as such, their presence in faraway places is taken as a marker of cultural contact. And one of cultural transformation, given that the objects that 'travel' most and furthest are innovations.

In fact, the prehistory of humanity is defined by vast migrations and the circulation of early technological inventions. These prehistoric tools expanded the sphere of the possible for entire groups that, through travel and exchanges, got to spread these innovations, improve and transmit them forward. The likelihood of these processes taking place depended to demographic factors. If useful inventions were rare, then small and isolated societies had small chances of developing them and, even if they are created, the risk of losing them, because of random events or incomplete transmission, was great (Richerson, Boyd & Bettinger, 2009). As people migrated and communities became larger, technological invention and its transmission increased, what Richerson and colleagues called a 'population-technology-population positive feedback'.

> "We can assume that the first hominins, like our closest relatives, the chimpanzees and bonobos, lived in social groups knit by intense interactions among group members. At some point, their social lives began to expand far beyond the local group. Hominins first began to systematically exploit large animals as food sources, whether by hunting or scavenging, around 2.5 mya (reviewed by Plummer, 2004; but see McPherron et al., 2010 for possible evidence of even earlier forays into carnivory). (…) Anatomical evidence from later *Homo ergaster/ erectus* (after 1.8 my) suggests an adaptation to a high level of mobility, particularly long-distance running (Bramble and

> Lieberman, 2004). Both of these behavioural trends are linked with well-recognised technological developments. The first widespread evidence of carnivory around 2.5 my is of course associated with the earliest stone tools (Plummer, 2004; de la Torre, 2011). (...) There may be basic functional explanations for both the first development of stone tools and the subsequent shift to bifacial shaping of artefacts. However, the dispersal of these new behaviours across large parts of the African continent, and eventually into Eurasia, required at least some exchange of information among local populations" (Kuhn, 2012, pp. 76-77).

The same deep connections between mobility and innovation, as illustrated by the movement and transformation of objects, have been documented for later prehistory (e.g., Knappett & Kiriatzi, 2016) up to the early modern period (e.g., Schilling, 1983). In the latter, for instance, the forced migration of Calvinist communities from the southern Netherlands in the 16th century had a great impact on the economic modernization of host societies in Western Europe and, in the long term, the emergence of modern capitalism. The objects travelling in these cases are much more complex and include an important symbolic dimension that brings them close to the circulation of ideas. But it is always the case that, throughout history, objects and ideas are connected by processes of creativity and reflect the cultural conditions and life experiences of their makers. Without a physical or material expression, however, the 'durability' of ideas, knowledge and values would be considerably reduced and, without acts of mobility and position exchange, the creation and transformation of objects, in the first place, would become all but impossible.

Ideas on the move

As people and things travel, so do their conceptions and views of the world. All innovations, especially successful ones, operate at two different levels: on the one hand, there is the level of practical action where innovations become tools to operate with; on the other hand, they explicitly or implicitly bring new ideas that either consolidate or change the direction a society is moving in. And this is precisely why ideas on the move are so powerful – they are the root of changing mentalities, social practices and social movements. But, how exactly do ideas 'move'? The migration of people is again essential, but also are general processes of communication. Today, the latter are greatly facilitated by the use of technology and social media platforms. In theory, more becomes possible for people who are exposed to the views of others. In practice though, the phenomenon of information bubbles and the circulation of misinformation radically reduce possibilities for change.

The circulation of ideas is explained in science primarily with the help of diffusionist theories and models. These assume that cultures are dynamic and that innovations that travel don't just add themselves to a local culture but shape it. Diffusion patterns include, among others, "a partial penetration of two cultures, the overlapping of a 'weaker' culture by a 'stronger' one, the parallel mixing of almost all cultural aspects, or only sporadic adoptions" (Heitz & Stapfer, 2017, p. 15). The focus on the diffusion of ideas started in disciplines like geography and anthropology starting from late 18th century. And it led to a transformation of how we understand culture, society and contemporary phenomena:

> "'Migration of ideas' opens up a vast field of study—how Indian and Arabic knowledge reached Medieval Europe; how Christianity, hand-in-hand with colonization, spread across the globe; how Marxism spread and adapted to different conditions; how technical innovations and scientific discoveries spread and get taken up in different contexts; how conquerers force their views and practices on the conquered; more recently how global capitalism and 'McDonaldism' has resulted in a depressing homogeneity around the world and so on" (Porter & Poerwandari, 2008, p. 64).

It would seem, from the above, that diffusionist models ultimately explain the spread of impossibility, for instance the impossibility of imagining a different way of living in society. Dominant ideas and practices circulate, taking over local cultures and spreading uniformity rather than diversity. And, given that possibility resides in difference (Glăveanu, in press b), ideas on the move can easily close down rather than open up news spaces for human thinking and action. And yet, it is important to note here that ideas never 'travel' unchanged. The process of transmission and diffusion is equally one of *transformation*.

This is acknowledged to various degrees by different theorists of diffusion. Gabriel Tarde (1962) built a new sociology on the premise that society is made up of invention and imitation and, while he recognised that imitation often means adapting ideas, he nevertheless outlined different laws for these two phenomena. Everett Rogers (2003) famously offered a generalised model of diffusion including the S shaped curved of adoption of innovation over time; however, his focus was again never on re-invention through transmission, but on how innovations are adopted as such and passed on. Psychological accounts drawing on parallels with biology, such as Dawkins's (1976) meme theory and especially Sperber's (1996) epidemiology of representations, left more room for the role of interaction and communication between people. But it is early sociocultural accounts of transmission, like the one formulated by Frederic Bartlett (1923), that fully recognised the constructive nature of ideas on the move. This became the premise of more theories, such as social representation theory (see Moscovici, 2001) and a new literature on mobility and inter-group contact as sources of creativity, innovation and possibility in society.

People on the move

Historically, the mobility of objects and ideas was based on the movement of people. Nowadays, however, makers and buyers of a product will rarely meet, even if the relation is still enabled by human intermediaries. The circulation of ideas online makes it possible for individuals to connect with each other from the comfort of their own homes. Exchanging with someone at the other end of the world can be done in an instant and take little physical movement except for typing messages on a keyboard. And, with these exchanges, there is an assumption that users could become more open, flexible, and creative. This hope that people's mobility leads to more creativity, innovation and, ultimately, prosperity, underlines the European Union's four freedoms of movement – of goods, capital, services, and labour. The last one, the movement of people, however, consistently comes under criticism from right-wing, populist governments ready to blame national problems on 'outsiders' and demonstrably fuelled the UK's exit from the Union.

And yet, the movement of people shouldn't be reduced to the act of crossing national boundaries. Not only is migration taking place primarily within countries, but our daily life is marked by the longer and smaller journeys we take and even by micro-mobilities within the house. At the moment of writing, almost half of the world's population has been under different forms of lockdown and exit strategies are gradually set in place; still, constraints on personal mobility abound. But this doesn't mean that everyone is immobile or standing still or has been so for months. The notion of personal mobility should thus be extended to incorporate immigration, online activities, and everything in between:

> "Personal mobilities constitute self-propelled movements, which include, first, the natural corporeal (physical) non-technological self-moving, more simply known as walking, and obviously those physical mobilities extended by technologies (driving automobiles and bicycling and motorcycling). Personal mobilities further include virtual mobilities through fixed and mobile telephones and the Internet. Self-propelled mobilities exclude, by their very nature, the use of public transportation and communications, in which movements are mediated, though comparisons between automobiles, on the one hand, and buses and trains, on the other, as well as between telephones versus telegraph and postal services, have been made, and some will be made later on" (Kellerman, 2006, p. 2).

The important question for this entry is *how* personal mobilities contribute to personal possibilities. It is undeniable that living mobile lives contributes to our imagination and creativity by: a) helping individuals acquire multiple experiences of and perspectives on the world; b) increasing the chances of meeting others and exchanging ideas and objects; and c) expanding our agency and sense of what is possible in our lives. In making these observations, however, we need to recognise the fact that there is no linear relationship between mobility and possibility. More travel and more experiences don't necessarily translate into more creativity, especially if they come out of forced displacement or subject the person to traumatic events. Interestingly, it is the capacity to imagine that is directly affected by trauma, and yet, healing resides precisely in exercising this capacity and being able to envision a new and different future (Womersley, 2020). In these cases, the experience of migration can become one of impossibility. On the other hand, sedentary people can be highly creative, whenever they diversity their experience and interactions with others from the more stable positions they occupy in the world.

There is a growing literature today on the relationship between migration and the imagination (Salazar, 2011), as well as empowerment (Trifanescu, 2015). The risk is developing a romanticised perspective on movement. There are many variables, personal, social, economic, political and historical, that mediate the connection between migration and possibility and determine its concrete outcomes. But there is little doubt that lives lived in forced immobility and the absence of social contact are closed to the possible in the sense of lacking opportunities to envision alternatives (by considering the views of others) and choose between them (by guiding one's own course of motion and action). To understand why, we need to turn our attention towards a final key dimension: the psychological one.

Minds on the move

All human mobilities, individual and collective, have a psychological component to them. They are triggered by needs and visions of the journey and its end point, accompanied by emotions and the motivation to continue (or to stop), and depend on the psychological adaptation to (and transformation of) one's new life at the destination. Mind and bodies travel together as an inseparable unit given that all our mental processes are embodied (including imagination and affect) and our entire psychology depends on movement. It is not without reason that cognitive development, for example, starts from the sensorimotor stage (Piaget, 1950), or the emergence of a human self depends on our capacity to 'move' to the position of the other, at first physically and then mentally (Mead, 1934).

There are, thus, complex relations between psychological explorations of the possible and mobility that don't depend on migration or even bodily movement. The mind itself 'travels', through daydreaming and the imagination, to other temporalities (e.g., the imagined past, the projected future), geographies (e.g., faraway places, including ones impossible to visit), and spheres of experiences (e.g., moving between home, school and work). Zittoun and Gillespie (2015) formulated a theory of imagination premised on psychological forms of mobility that they describe as the 'loop model'. According to them, imagination loops in and out of immediate or proximal experiences of the here and now and into distal experiences. This conception builds on a sociocultural psychology grounded in movement, for which the possibility of being in different positions and diversifying experiences is essential (see Gillespie & Zittoun, 2013). While recognising the importance of repositioning, trajectories and transitions for human existence, the authors posit too sharp a differentiation between minds and bodies, proximal and distal experiences, and thus create the risk of harmful dichotomies (for example, in our case, that between physical or embodied movement on the one hand and psychological or imaginative loops on the other).

The reality of psychological mobilities is that they are mental and physical *at once* and that possibility-expanding phenomena such as imagination and creativity don't 'take us out' of the here and now but, rather, bring the 'then and there' into it, transforming the experience of the person (see Glăveanu, Karwowski, Jankowska & de Saint-Laurent, 2017). In the end, our engagement with the possible depends *both* on mind and body and, beyond them, on a physical and cultural environment populated by objects and by other people. My own work has been dedicated primarily to understanding the role of others – and differences with them – for creative action and possibility (for more details, see Glăveanu, in press b). From this standpoint, psychological mobilities are rooted in physical ones, and explorations of what is possible and impossible depend on the two. There is no human movement that doesn't trigger and result in emotions, needs, thoughts, and anticipations of the future. And the processes that help us engage with this future equally invite and depend on mobility.

Concluding thoughts

In this entry, I made the claim that possibility originates in mobility (see Glăveanu, in press a) and that, in order to grasp this, we need a complex understanding of both phenomena. Mobility, for example, isn't reduced to the migration of people but captures, more broadly, the movement of things, ideas, and human experiences through offline and virtual environments. At the same time, possibility shouldn't be reduced to revolutionary creations

and historical inventions. All mundane acts of anticipation, imagination, creativity, wonder, awe and serendipity (and many others, as illustrated in this encyclopaedia), contribute to making us aware of what is possible, help us explore potentialities and actualize at least some of them, allowing new cycles of mobility and possibility to take place.

Towards the end, I want to reflect for a moment on what looks like the reverse of these notions: the *impossible* and the *immobile*. To start with immobility, it is physically impossible for an entity in our universe to be perfectly still, just like it is for a living system to not express any kind of movement. For human beings, for as restrictive as their material conditions might be, for example in prison or in situations of being physically immobilised, there is always the possibility of psychologically reaching out to new spheres of experience. Of course, these are extreme examples and, most often, we live lives somewhere on the continuum between (im)mobility and (im)possibility. But if the basic premise outlined here is correct, then ontologically we need mobility in order to exist as beings within the realm of the possible (Glăveanu, 2018), open to difference, to otherness, and to unknown futures. Absolute impossibility comes from no movement or even the prospect of it – when people feel stuck, trapped, unable to 'move on'. A perceived lack of agency leads, in these cases, to either hopelessness or anger. In societies that appear paralysed by inequality, plagued by misinformation and fired up by populism, it is these kinds of experiences that scholars of new mobilities and possibility studies would do well to focus on and understand better.

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