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Transport Reviews: A Transnational Transdisciplinary Journal

Publication details, including instructions for authors and
subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/ttrv20>

The Cultures of Alternative Mobilities: Routes Less Travelled

Tim Jones ^a

^a Transport Studies Unit, School of Geography and the
Environment, University of Oxford, Oxford, UK

Version of record first published: 17 Nov 2010.

To cite this article: Tim Jones (2011): The Cultures of Alternative Mobilities: Routes Less Travelled,
Transport Reviews: A Transnational Transdisciplinary Journal, 31:3, 419-420

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/01441647.2010.520828>

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BOOK REVIEWS

The Cultures of Alternative Mobilities: Routes Less Travelled

Phillip Vannini (Ed.)

Farnham, Ashgate, 2009, pp. 300, ISBN 978-0-7546-7666-9, £60.00 (hbk)

This edited collection provides a significant contribution to the field of mobility studies which has flourished since the *mobility turn* in the social sciences (Sheller and Urry, 2006). *The Cultures of Alternative Mobilities: Routes Less Travelled* attempts to forge what Jensen, in the opening Foreword, describes as ‘Critical Mobilities Thinking’, a counterpoint to the taken-for-granted understandings of mobility and general focus on the instrumental act of physical displacement, towards mobility as culture, as a signifying practice, with associated norms, power and identity. Whilst cross-disciplinary and methodologically diverse ways of engaging with mobilities research have emerged (Büscher and Urry, 2009; Büscher *et al.*, 2010), the editor argues that a homogenous picture has been painted because of a hegemonic focus on automobility and aeromobility. Vannini’s accomplishment is bringing together a collection that moves beyond these established themes, and that instead seeks out the ‘creative marginalities of mobility’ by focusing on the everyday plurality of modes, sites and practices. The volume consists of 15 chapters (in addition to the editor’s opening chapter) organised across three parts. Part 1 focuses on the theme of movement and the construction and experience of space and time, Part 2 on mobility as a structured experience and Part 3 on the materialities and technologies of mobilities.

Waskul and Waskul open Part 1 with a deep account of the *travail* (i.e. the elements, subsistence, constraints and creativity) of movement by canoe through the Canadian wilderness. Collis follows with a persuasive account of the gendered spatiality founded on mobility and the way power is constituted in the Australian Antarctic (viz. ‘as a man’s world’). Travelling aboard the East Coast Mainline (between Edinburgh and London), Bissel reveals the sociality and complex relational aspects of rail travel in the UK whilst Budd’s social and cultural account of aeromobility reveals how the sensual embodied experiences of flight has changed over the century from one of visual spectacle towards boredom and discomfort. The closing chapter of Part 1 by Jain provides a rare detailed ethnographical account of the liminal experience of deregulated bus travel in Britain. Part 2 opens with Letherby and Shaw sharing personal narratives of their own travel experiences and a convincing argument of the potential power of mobile (auto)biography for mobilities research. Jiron’s ethnographic study of life in the Chilean capital of Santiago examines how mobile inequalities are experienced (gendered and classed) and the strategies employed by working families to try to overcome them. Mobile lifestyles in later life in Sweden are examined by Levin and the significance given of the growth and heterogeneity of

the over-65 population. Kleinert provides an intriguing insider's view of the German-speaking cruising community (aka 'yachties'). Back on dry land for the final chapter in this part, Kidder reveals the contradictions that arise between bike messengers' strategic and tactical mobility whilst navigating post-industrial US cities. The final part (three) of this volume starts with Boshier's lively account of the pains and pleasures of running boats between home, on an eight acre island, and mainland West Coast Canada. Van den Scott carefully considers the role of 'less than perfect' regional air travel in the lives of a remote Arctic Canadian community and how it serves to create sense of place and identity. Using a performative approach, editor Vannini and spouse provide an entertaining account of the drama, sociality and rituals of making it to the Canadian mainland by ferry with family. And so to motorcycling, where Mitchell and Kubein provide a biographical account of the essence of building a motorcycle culture in the 1970s and the displacement of that sociality through commercialisation. Finally, in the closing chapter, Jones and Neumann take a historical trip along the infamous Route 66 and arrive at downtown Winslow, Arizona, where they reveal how mobility technologies led to both the development and decline of this (once) magnificent town.

The Cultures of Alternative Mobilities: Routes Less Travelled presents a series of highly accessible and engaging ethnographic studies which all succeed to greater or lesser degree in rendering visible accounts of the trials and tribulations of 'alternative' travel. It is frustrating that, after such a giddy excursion through time and space by a plurality of modes, our journey has to end so abruptly in Arizona. At this juncture, readers would have benefited from a chapter summarising the whole volume. However, this is only a minor gripe. This publication is a significant contribution to the field and could be an important catalyst in generating a whole new area of critical mobilities thinking and studies of 'movement in the margins'.

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Tim Jones
*Transport Studies Unit, School of Geography and the Environment, University of
 Oxford, Oxford, UK*
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Airport Competition: The European Experience

Peter Forsyth, David Gillen, Jurgen Muller and Hans-Martin Niemeier (Eds)
Farnham, Ashgate, 2010, pp. 438, ISBN 978-0-7546-7746-8, £75.00 (hbk)

This book explores airport competition, studying whether and where it exists, how strong it is and what policy implications it has. It is the result of a challenge identified in an earlier publication by the German Aviation Research Society. In *The Economic Regulation of Airports* one of the challenges identified was '...