Book review

THE ETHICS OF MOBILITIES: RETHINKING PLACE, EXCLUSION, FREEDOM AND ENVIRONMENT

Sigurd Bergmann and Tore Sager (eds.). Transport and Society Series, Ashgate, 2008. ISBN 978 0 7546 7283 8, £60, 292 pp.

The provision of transport has usually been regarded by society as something functional and linked with the transport of goods and people for the benefit of individuals, society and industry. Of course, a concept of benefit brings with it value judgements and this 292-page book provides valuable insights for anyone concerned with thinking through transport issues from a philosophical point of view. The book does not specify a readership, but is likely to be most valued by those who enjoy reading academic texts, and by those with an interest in the deepest roots from which transport problems emerge.

The chapters in the book comprise an unusual mix of considered essay writing and reporting of basic primary research, with the essays providing the reader with the most helpful thoughts.

Sigurd Bergmann provides an interesting opening chapter on speed and challenges the concept that higher speed simply compresses time and space: he argues that it makes time and space more complex and wide, and hence changes our experiences in a qualitative way. Mimi Sheller follows this with an analysis of freedom and coherently argues that those who are able to exercise freedom of movement may use it to shape space and reduce the ability of others to be mobile.

In chapter 3, Jeremy Packer rehearses arguments concerning the changing face of security as a consequence of modes of transport being used as weapons, as exemplified by the '9/11' attacks in the USA. This is followed by a discussion by Margaret Grieco and Julian Hine of natural rather than man-made catastrophes, focusing on the aftermath of hurricane Katrina as a case study. 'Remoteness' they define not in a physically distant sense, but in the sense of poor access to infrastructure. Katrina becomes a laboured subject, being once again treated in chapter 7 by Tim Cresswell, who concludes no more than that infrastructure and mobility serve some more than others.

Chapter 5 also provides a case study, this time of non-Western immigrant women in Norway by Tanu Priya Uteng. She sets gender-differentiated roles in different multicultural contexts, a useful widening of the book's purview beyond a developed world bias, but the case study itself provides little new material to advance the discussion of gender issues.

Tore Sager picks up the essay writing once more in chapter 6, which examines the interesting question of whether trips are motivated by escape rather than attraction and discusses the proposition that tensions and stresses in a local community are lessened by people adjusting their psychological distance. The adjustment of physical distance may help achieve this psychological distance, and hence planning processes need to account for origin-motivated travel behaviours.

Juhani Pallasma provides a review of placelessness in chapter 8 which explores the contrasts between a human desire to move and the need for roots. Perhaps in a very deliberate act of existential placelessness he does not arrive at home, but merely arrives at nostalgia for an absent home.

At the connecting point between mobility and sacredness, Peter Nynäs in chapter 9 describes the relationship between 'place' and 'self' and, by virtue of the relationships between different places, provides an account of the way that they are evocative, demand an affective response and hence invite relationships. Bringing the reader metaphorically back down to earth, chapter 10 provides a case study by Kerstin Söderblom of chaplaincy work at Frankfurt international airport. She links the 'separation', then 'passage' then 'reconnection' of travel through an airline system with religious passage through life and argues that theology can offer a language, images and symbols to interpret such a passage.

Elizabeth Pritchard explores the relationships between religion, mobility and conflict in chapter 11 and suggests that in religion all is flux and hence there is a bias towards a culture of migration. Michael Northcott provides a stimulating chapter 12 which discusses the relationship between the human desire for speed and the rhythm of the earth. He argues that movement through pilgrimage is about learning independence while on a journey. He suggests that the influences along the way, including external referents and the effect of surroundings on the consciousness, contrast markedly with modern transport's emphasis on time and speed. His thesis is that the recapturing of a 'love of the slow' in transport would have value for individual travellers.

In what would undoubtedly for some be an overdue recognition, Ullrich Zeitler in chapter 13 recognises that it is a big step from philosophy to transport planning, but he manages to seamlessly construct an argument which suggests that the essence of mobility is based on a relationship between different actors who are never free to act independently, that speed is possible only

when social and natural environments are ignored and that infrastructure is required which develops, but does not impair, our moral capacity. His journey end is a suggestion that we need to stop 'maximising', and to start discussing quality of life.

Jutta Steigerwald takes some of the thoughts which have emerged in the book and in chapter 14 contextualises them in current policy debate and David Kronlid provides a final chapter arguing for an ecological approach to technology, one in which the effects of technology on people are given appropriate consideration.

The book considers a wide range of issues connected with mobility, including individual and mass movement at local and international levels. The context of the discussion of the issues varies by background and interest of the authors, and so the

reader is left wondering about the extent to which the thoughts and ideas taken as a whole provide a comprehensive treatment of the subject.

The book is divided into two parts, with the first part dealing with freedom, control and social implications, and the second part dealing with spatial, environmental, gender and ethical and religious issues. This division did not work for this reviewer and it is arguable that the book would be better with the chapters re-ordered around more clearly defined sub-themes, or grouped according to the nature of the content: either essay or case study. The reader does, however, come away satisfied that the journey through the book has provided significant insights on a wide range of challenging topics linked with mobility.

JOHN PARKIN