Afterword

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Abstract

This afterword reflects on how the concept of mobility offers a valuable framework for the analysis of individuals and groups moving into and within early modern urban environments, of the privileged sites of encounter and exchange for such movements, and of the physical trajectories of particular objects as they traverse and connect urban spaces of encounter. Particular attention is given to the material life of objects and how these both enabled and reveal the mobilities of the people and places they interacted with. Illustrated by a few examples drawn from Siena (Italy) in the early modern era, this contribution suggests that mobility can be said to be defined by the triangulation between objects, people, and places, where one or more element is subject to movement.

Keywords

Mobility – early modern – material culture – ritual – objects – Siena

Introduction

On September 2, 1260 – the eve of the Battle of Montaperti, in which the Sienese triumphed over their more populous neighbor, Florence – the city's elected commander, Bonaguida Lucari, led citizens in a penitential procession through the streets. At the cathedral, a formal pact was made between representatives of the Church and Commune, and the city was pledged as a gift to the Virgin Mary. The pact itself was an elaborate ritual, sworn in front of the early thirteenth-century image of the “Madonna degli Occhi Grossi” (the “Madonna of the Big Eyes”), in which the keys to the city gates were pledged to the Madonna; following the victorious return of the Sienese troops, that

same image was taken in triumphant procession around the city, as is recorded in a remarkable set of manuscript illuminations made in 1443 by Niccolò di Giovanni Ventura.¹ A new chapel was soon commissioned for the cathedral, dedicated to the “Madonna del Voto” (“Madonna of the Promise”), and so followed the wholesale remodeling of the cathedral as decorative complex almost wholly dedicated to honoring the city’s pre-eminent celestial patron.

Fifty years after Montaperti, on June 9, 1311, another procession centered around a painted representation of the Virgin Mary, as Duccio da Buoninsegna’s *Maestà* – an image of the Madonna enthroned and surrounded by saints and angels – was brought to the cathedral from the artist’s workshop by way of the southern gate (*Due Porte*).² Duccio’s massive altarpiece was designed for the High Altar and had taken almost three years to complete; the procession to the cathedral, in which a huge host of citizens participated, took a very long detour to enable a lap of the piazza del Campo. The importance of the event was marked by the fact that all shops were closed, and the bells rang in celebration. This gilded altarpiece was the centerpiece of the elaborately decorated cathedral until 1506, when it was dismantled to be replaced by a new sculptural composition in marble and bronze, and rehung on a side wall of the chapel of the Sacrament, dedicated to S. Ansano.³ There it stayed until July 1771, when it was taken down and sawn into pieces; some of the resulting panels were rehung, while others eventually entered the art market, dispersed eventually to London, New York, and Washington. Only in 1878 were all the panels extant in Siena reassembled in the Opera del Duomo museum, where they can still be seen today.⁴

With this brief example I would like to draw attention to aspects of mobility that are to some extent missing in this collection, and which speak to the role of objects in structuring or tracking mobility, with a specific focus on cultural artifacts.⁵ At one level we may note how processions – the ritual use of public

1 Niccolò di Giovanni, “La sconfitta di Monte Aperto,” Siena, Biblioteca Comunale degli Intronati, ms. A.IV.5, c. 5r; discussed recently by Alice Covinato, “Niccolò di Giovanni da Siena à fatto questo libro di sua propria mano e di sua spontanea volontà: note su due manoscritti illustrati senesi del Quattrocento e le loro sottoscrizioni,” *Opera Nomina Historiae*, 2009 (2/3), 219–262. See now also the fully illustrated critical edition, Niccolò di Giovanni, *La sconfitta di Monte Aperto*, ed. Alice Covinato (Siena, 2016).

2 Frederick A. Cooper, “A Reconstruction of Duccio’s *Maestà*,” *The Art Bulletin*, 47 (1965), 155–171, 165.

3 Cooper, “A Reconstruction,” 166.

4 From a vast bibliography see the exhibition catalogue *Duccio: alle origini della pittura senese*, ed. Alessandro Bagnoli (Milan, 2003).

5 This is a lively area in art historical studies, see Elisabeth A. Fraser ed., *The Mobility of People and Things in the Early Modern Mediterranean: The Art of Travel*, (Milton, 2019). From a

space, in many ways the best documented of urban forms of movement – are structured around people, places, and objects.⁶ First, in the lead up and triumphal aftermath of the battle of Montaperti, with the city-wide processions that articulate the city's civic devotion to the Virgin Mary. Then, in 1311, when both civic devotion and pride in the magnificent commission of Duccio's masterpiece results in an unprecedented procession of an artwork that represents and embodies the city's patron; by parading the image, the Sienese are in fact above all honoring the enthroned figure it depicts. In both processions, movement and the processional route connect together the primary sites of civic government and religion, so that the ritual process can be analyzed using the classic frameworks of Victor Turner and Arnold van Gennep.⁷ Here, movement articulates relationships on an urban scale, through assigning meanings to objects as they move through space.

However, the example also sheds light on other types of mobility – spatial, temporal, and even textual. It is all too easy to think that objects have fixed meanings, associated with their moment of creation. Instead, the object – in the specific instance of the *Maestà* – has diachronic meaning that changes over time within its cathedral setting. Siena's cathedral was dedicated to the Virgin Mary well before 1260, so that numerous decorative schemes celebrated that fact.⁸ Duccio's altarpiece was part of that process, but over time its function was eroded and superseded by new formulations of civic devotion. While art historical narratives tend to focus on style and fashion to explain the removal of the altarpiece, a different set of questions arise if we focus on the movement of the work itself. So then, if we consider the biography of this now mobile object, we might consider a range of its trajectories: from issues raised by how it was repurposed to its secondary setting, to the role of intermediaries in the brokering of its carving up, the networks that led fragments to be sold abroad, and indeed even the agency of museums in facilitating the reassembly of panels in permanent collections or temporary exhibitions. Furthermore, we might even approach the “myth of Montaperti” through the filter of the cultural

sizeable bibliography see Anne Gerritsen and Giorgio Riello, eds., *The Global Lives of Things: The Material Culture of Connections in the Early Modern World* (London, 2016); Daniela Bleichmar and Meredith Martin, eds., *Objects in Motion in the Early Modern World* (Oxford, 2016). For a study that uses the mobility paradigm in a different way, see Barbara Furlotti, *Antiquities in motion: From excavation sites to Renaissance collections*, (Los Angeles, 2019).

6 The literature on ritual is vast; for a still valuable introduction see Edward Muir, *Ritual in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, 1997).

7 Arnold van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage* (London, 1960) and Victor Turner, *The Anthropology of Performance* (New York, 1987).

8 For an account of the city's devotion to the Virgin Mary over a millennium, see Gerald Parsons *Siena, Civil Religion and the Sienese* (Aldershot, 2005).

mobility of texts to see how objects created and given meaning at one time (such as the “Madonna of the Big Eyes”) are remediated in the retelling of the story (as in the 1443 manuscript illuminations of Buonaguida’s procession), to reinforce a local foundational narrative; here, as befits any myth, texts, objects, and chronologies are fluid or mobile.⁹ The perceived fixedness of the myth is mitigated by the real movement of the constitutive elements of it.

The theoretical framework of mobility helps us analyze an object and image as uniquely local as Duccio’s *Maestà* within a contemporary framework of ritual encounters, and its more complex longue durée history as a cultural object in movement. In so doing it underlines aspects of how what Stephen Greenblatt has termed “cultural mobility” differs somewhat from the analytic frameworks adopted from the social sciences, even though they have much in common.¹⁰ There can be no question that the concept of mobility offers a valuable framework for the analysis of individuals and groups moving into and within early modern urban environments, of the privileged sites of encounter and exchange for such movements, and indeed of the physical trajectories of particular objects as they traverse and connect urban spaces of encounter, as the essays in this collection demonstrate.¹¹ However, within the context of humanities research it is important to remember that the attribution of meaning is an act of interpretation contingent on multiple factors.

If we adopt the concept of space theorized by Henri Lefebvre, in which meaning is “inscribed” on space through the actions of individuals and groups, when considering mobility and urban space in the Early Modern period we need to be alert to how movement operates to create a more dynamic process of space-creation, while also keeping in mind that culture operates in ways that are “strikingly enmeshed in particular times and places.”¹² That this is the case emerges clearly from the articles in this collection, all of them based around closely analyzed case examples, in most instances focused on specific cities, where the framework of mobility is deployed in diverse ways to provoke new questions and yield original observations from sites, events, people, and objects. In the most general terms, two essays deal with mobility

9 These observations follow Stephen Greenblatt, “A mobility studies manifesto,” in *Cultural Mobility: A Manifesto*, ed. S. Greenblatt et al. (Cambridge, 2009), 250–253

10 Greenblatt, “A mobility studies manifesto.”

11 A valuable bibliography of recent studies on mobility is in Luca Zenobi’s “Introduction” to this collection.

12 Greenblatt, “A mobility studies manifesto,” 252. For a recent discussion of how sociology develops concepts of relational space see the special issue *Spatial sociology: Relational space after the turn* eds. Martin G. Fuller and Martina Löw, *Current Sociology* 65, no. 4 (2017).

through the analysis of the movement of bodies in urban space (Atkinson and Gonzalez Martin), two others consider examples of nodal sites of urban mobility (Salzberg and Canepari), while Marcus Meer examines objects as tokens of movement. Niall Atkinson's close reading of ritual movement in the streets of Florence in late autumn 1494 reveals the changing balance of power, from the waning authority of Piero de' Medici to the incoming presence of King Charles VIII, as they rode about the city; strikingly, it is local residents such as the shopkeeper Luca Landucci that were most alert to the subtle changes in itineraries and how these coded for power and authority, or its loss.

While the encoded rituals of the ceremonial city form a structure within which power lines are drawn, it is significant that it was everyday people on the streets – as much as the potentates on horseback – that assigned political value to ritual actions. That ritual movement was a powerful structure that defined relations in the polity is reinforced in Pablo Gonzalez Martin's account of popular revolts in Tournai; here, as so often occurred in cases of urban uprisings, rebels challenged familiar sites of civic authority by creating alternative spatial nodes for contestation, as occurred around the peripheral Bequerel square. In both cases we could say that meaning is not so much generated from the established movement of ritual actions, but rather through the breaking of those norms through new spatial practices.

If these two essays place the accent on the movement of people in urban space, another pair of essays center instead on the normative function of nodes in the spatial network, through infrastructure that was essential for mobile populations in cities. As Rosa Salzberg shows, for a city built on trade, with a large transient population of travelers, migrants, and elite tourists, inns and taverns were a vital facility in early modern Venice. While it was the mobility of the customers of these centrally-located amenities that was their *raison d'être*, their purpose in the urban ecosystem was also normative: by clustering non-resident groups, inns and taverns were able to provide key services such as food and drink, while also creating easily policed nodes for surveillance by the highly regulatory state. Similar functions of registering visitors performed by inns on the outskirts of Marseille and Rome allow Eleonora Canepari to calculate the proportion of mobile populations in relation to the demography of those cities. In so doing, a high turnover of residents is revealed, one that blurs the boundary between local and transient groups, and even among occupants of the same city's inns. By contrast, the first essay in this collection considers how the display of heraldry can be interrogated through the prism of mobility as evidence for travel, as shown by the late-fifteenth-century practice of elite (pilgrim) travelers from German lands who collected and displayed heraldic devices gathered on their journeys, and left their own marks on the holy places

they visited. Here, the object (the coat of arms, chivalric emblem, etc.) is a token of the journey that has taken place, and these symbols are quite literally inscribed on urban spaces of the travelers' place of origin or destination; while the tokens also travel, in Marcus Meer's account they represent the ephemeral journey more than being objects in motion in their own right.

So then, the five articles in this collection broadly address the mobility of people or groups, and specific sites that mediated movement within the urban environment. Thus, as we have seen with the taverns and inns of Venice, Marseille, and Rome, these were sites that shaped behaviors, as mobile bodies usually settled at these specific locations, where particular institutional controls could be exercised upon them. Innkeepers might operate in the service of government institutions to monitor guests, while the inns themselves could be places where spies or police gravitated for information; conversely more informal economies also clustered around inns – from itinerant food-sellers, to gamblers, or local city-guides, all of them intermediaries that thrived on the needs of those gathered in these contact zones.

There are, of course, a number of other such elements of urban infrastructure that serve comparable functions in the regulation of movement. City gates are a prominent example, serving to define the edges of a polity and regulate the flow of goods and individuals.¹³ The seemingly porous boundaries of cities that face towards the sea or a navigable river give rise to ports, river ports, and quaysides – most of these would have had customs houses that again served to regulate trade and movement in a similar way to the function of officials stationed at city gates.¹⁴ The regulation of movement of people and goods was a necessary function for most cities, and within the walls a range of sites can be associated with the transactions that occurred once these had been allowed entry. Markets, occasional fairs, trading posts, and a range of other commercial activities of course existed to transfer goods – as is widely recognized in the networks and connections created through trade that reached huge distances to connect Europe to the wider world. By considering such sites of trade as nodes in global networks of mobility – as for example has recently been done for the *rua Nova dos Mercadores*, Lisbon's principal commercial street (destroyed in the 1755 earthquake) – it is possible to understand seemingly static urban spaces as dynamic sites in the flow of people and goods.¹⁵

13 For example, see the excellent Daniel Jütte, *The Strait Gate: Thresholds and Power in Western History* (New Haven, 2015).

14 For some examples see now Fabrizio Nevola, *Street Life in Renaissance Italy* (New Haven, 2020), 68–77.

15 Annemarie Jordan Gschwend and Kate Lowe, "Princess of the Seas, Queen of the Empire: configuring the city and port of Renaissance Lisbon," in *The Global City: on the Streets*

Similarly, it is worth considering how people on the move shaped urban form. Visitors through cities journeyed for a variety of reasons, to find work, to conduct business, on diplomatic missions, as well as for widespread devotional practice of pilgrimage. It may appear reductive to note that movement is a key part of life, so mobility is in many ways a central function of urban design. Streets, as Joseph Rykwert commented, “is human movement institutionalized.”¹⁶ The main streets that ran through most urbanized centers tended to be those most richly furnished with amenities and shops selling luxury commodities; while it is unquestionable that civic pride conspired to beautify these urban centers, it is equally true that such changes were directed as much at local residents as outside travelers who might also be consumers.¹⁷ So then, as much as inns and taverns, we might note that the increasing specialization of central city streets during the early modern period was also shaped by mobile populations. Moreover, as is widely understood, pilgrimage was not uniquely a practice that shaped end destinations (Rome, Compostela, Jerusalem, etc.), but operated as a point-to-point practice which created multiple nodes in Europe-wide itineraries of devotional travel. Cities across Europe participated in these pilgrimage itineraries, through active collecting of significant relics that mobilized travelers to visit particular sites, and the establishment of pilgrim hospitals that provided shelter for pilgrims. An example from Siena will suffice to illustrate the point. Here, the vast complex of Santa Maria della Scala assembled a huge collection of relics; significant numbers of pilgrims passed through the city, leaving goods and money with the hospital as they made the last leg of the journey to Rome, and leaving thus an extraordinary documentary trace in the account books maintained by the hospital of the pilgrims, through descriptions of individuals’ distinctive features, and the deposits they had left for collection on the return journey.¹⁸

As the example at the outset suggested, and the relics at Santa Maria della Scala also confirm, in addition to people and places, objects also participate

of *Renaissance Lisbon*, eds. Annemarie Jordan Gschwend and Kate Lowe (London, 2015), 12–35.

16 J. Rykwert, “The Street: The Use of its History,” in *On Streets*, ed. S. Anderson (Cambridge, MA, 1978), 15.

17 For a detailed account of urban change directed at a city’s primary artery during the fifteenth century, see Fabrizio Nevola, *Siena: Constructing the Renaissance City* (London, 2007), 91–146; for a comparative discussion see Donatella Calabi, *The market and the city: square, street and architecture in early modern Europe* trans. Marlene Klein (Aldershot, 2004).

18 Gabriella Piccinni, “La strada come affare: Sosta, identificazione e depositi di denaro di pellegrini (1382–1446),” in G. Piccinni and L. Travaini, *Il libro del Pellegrino (Siena, 1382–1446): Affari, uomini, monete nell’Ospedale di Santa Maria della Scala* (Naples, 2003), 1–82.

in complex mobile histories. Thus, returning to the example of taverns and inns, particular objects were instrumental to mobility at these sites – from the papers that travelers might carry (passports, letters of safe conduct, health documents), to money (sometimes in non-local currency), to the stabling of horses and other transport for those lucky enough not to be moving on foot.¹⁹ We can observe that a variety of sites in the city – gates, inns, ports, hospitals, and so on – structured forms of mobility, and that at these sites individuals had an active role to play in histories of movement, while objects often exist at an intersection between the two, in many cases mediating the very processes of mobility. By attending more closely also to the material life of objects, mobility might be said to be defined by the triangulation between objects, people, and places, where one or more element is subject to movement.

19 For an account of documents carried by people on the move, see Valentin Groebner, *Who Are You? Identification, Deception and Surveillance in Early Modern Europe* (New York, 2007).