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Mathieu Flonneau, Léonard Laborie & Arnaud Passalacqua (eds), *Les transports de la démocratie. Approche historique des enjeux politiques de la mobilité* [Transport and Democracy. A Historical Approach to Mobility and Politics], Presses Universitaires de Rennes, Rennes (2014), 224 pp., €19.

As the title accurately suggests, this eclectic collection of essays adds to the growing body of work within the social sciences on the relationships between transport and politics,¹ with an emphasis on the historical approach and on French perspectives. The volume originates from a series of seminars on the history of mobility organised since 2004 in Paris, and from a national research project on technological networks and democracy (2010-2014).

In accordance with the editors' plea for a multidisciplinary approach to mobility (p.18), the collection brings together contributions from historians, political scientists, economists and planners, although virtually all studies adopt an historical perspective. The geographical focus is mostly, but not exclusively, on France, and the period of reference of most contributions is the twentieth century. The editors are probably well-known to the readers of the Journal and indeed the collection expands on previous work by the first editor.²

The volume comprises eleven essays, divided into three sections, each with a short introduction. It is topped off with a preface by Hans-Liudger Dienel, a postface by Cotten Seiler, and longer introductory essay. In the Introduction, the editors set out the subject matter of the book, i.e. the multiple and recursive relationships between mobility (broadly conceived) and democracy. They argue convincingly that existing transport systems and infrastructures need to be historicised if we are to advance contemporary debates about their social and environmental sustainability. The second thesis underlying the book is that, while there was once an 'elective affinity' between increasing mobility and democratization (p. 9), we are now in an era where mobility creates challenges for democratic societies.

As perhaps to be expected given the broad scope of the collection, subsequent chapters are more grounded in specific but disparate thematic considerations. The first section focuses on the governance of mobility flows. In a particularly interesting essay, Denis retraces the intellectual history of the concept of 'mobilité', showing how a generic term for the movement of people across the national territory slowly emerged from administrative and policing practices in the decades around the French revolution. In what some may consider as a bold juxtaposition, the next article by Gardon shifts the focus to the evolution of public-private municipal commissions on traffic in Lyon between 1912-1970. The same city is the subject of the article by Huré and Passalacqua, which examines the rise of locally based outdoor advertising giant JCDecaux in the period between the installation of the first bus shelters (1965) and the pioneering bike sharing system Velo'v (2005). In the final chapter, Desjardins reviews critically how French institutional reforms have tried since the 1970s to enhance integration between levels of local government and policy sectors in order to improve public transport.

The second section focuses on the relationships between the rise of new modes of transport and democratization. López Galviz demonstrates how different political configurations in London and Paris at the turn of the twentieth century resulted in different subway networks, with consequences still apparent today. The symbolic and material investment of the young Czechoslovak Republic on aviation in the troubled inter-war years is the subject of Oliva's essay, while Faugier concludes the section with a study of the advent of mass motorization in the Rhône area between 1890 and 1960.

The third section is the most cohesive, gathering contributions that critically engage with the anti-car critique of the 1960s and 1970s. The subjects range from the Buchanan Report and 'The Italian Job' movie (Moraglio) to the works of French ecological thinkers of the time (Duverger), from Ivan Illich's famous notion of 'effective speed' (Héran) to the all-too-influential economic concept of 'generalized transport cost' (Crozet).

Overall, the book is an intriguing read, but one cannot help notice the contrast between the many well-written and thought-provoking contributions and the vagueness of the narrative framework holding them together. While some readers might be drawn to this admittedly eclectic collection, others might be repelled by the poor integration between the articles, attested by the complete lack of cross-referencing. The Introduction(s), the preface and postface struggle to make the connections between the (otherwise high profile) studies - mostly focused on transport in a narrow sense - and the rather generalized arguments on the changing relationships between mobilities, democratization and the Nation State. The puzzling choice to include two contributions in English, while translating an American author's contribution into French, only adds to the lack of cohesion. Also, the Franco-centrism of a minority of essays, which include virtually no references to non-French literature, clearly limits the engagement with international debates.

That said, the volume is inspiring and its diversity makes it worthy of consideration by transport scholars interested in questions of politics, equality and justice both within and beyond the History discipline. Let us hope that this will help demonstrate the need for more historical analysis in current debates about transport sustainability.

Giulio Mattioli
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Notes

¹ e.g. Walks, A. (ed.), *The Urban Political Economy and Ecology of Automobility. Driving Cities, Driving Inequality, Driving Politics* (Abingdon, Routledge, 2014)

² Flonneau, M., Guigueno, V. (eds), *De l'histoire de transports à l'histoire de la mobilité?* (Rennes, Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2009)