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## Urban Mobility and Narrative Form

How do people move in the city? What happens when the form of urban mobility is translated into the narrative level? I propose to rethink the concept of “literary urban” as a generic formulation of urban mobility in narrative terms. To that end, I examine, as a case study, how H. G. Wells’s novel *Tono-Bungay* (1909) represents wooshing—that is, unsettling acceleration displacing the moving subject into the flow of traffic—both in the content and form. I argue that the absence of locus in the disconnecting narrative movement relates to Wells’s rebuttal of the Victorian realist novel’s form pivoting on the individual. I will open up an environmental approach for literary urban studies with an emphasis on the materiality of narrative movement and ask for a reflection on urban mobility and its reshaping of literary genres in the past, present, and future.

Literary Urban Studies can be enriched by an environmental approach to the novel’s relationship with the city. The city is a space in the process of construction, and its meaning has been mostly discussed in terms of social, economic, and cultural relationships, as shown by Henry Lefebvre’s conceptualization of urban space as an ‘abstract space’ manifesting the development of capitalist labor, exchange value, and commodity culture or George Simmel’s observation of quantitative time and external stimuli of the modern metropolis. Walter Benjamin read Paris as a cultural reservoir of fragmented memories of the past contrasted with the enforced unity of Haussmannization. I suggest, however, that we focus on the built environment of the city, in which human bodies move and walk, collectively or individually, autonomously or involuntarily, across

space and species. Walking converges the walker's bodies with the physical environment of the city and paradoxically contests the self-directed agency of humans-

H.G. Wells's *Tono-Bungay* shows how urban mobility reshapes the generic convention of a novel by featuring wooshing, or the rushing flow of traffic dislocating the subject in commercial, industrial London at the turn of the twentieth century. The novel is written in first-person retrospective narration, recording the narrator-protagonist George Ponderevo's childhood in Kent, his move to London, and his involvement with his uncle's business in Tono-Bungay, the patent medicine his uncle makes with secretive ingredients. Woosh, a word I take from this novel, appeared around the 1910s, during which the acceleration in pneumatic tubes, electric tubes, trams, elevators, escalators, and motor-buses made people dash merging with the flow of traffic, losing their agency as the moving subject. Linguistically, the word was used as an interjection or a verb whose meaning was constructed by the context, not by the word itself, as if to confirm the void in the semantic flow. Likewise, there is no locus of agency in the process of urban walking described in the novel's commercial, industrial London full of acceleration featuring the whirlpool of traffic, passing pedestrians, flood of lights and commercials.

Wells translates this urban mobility of flashing by into the novel's form that disengages the reader by arranging reading, character, and narrative syntax. George's proclamation to write a "novel" modeled on cumulative, progressive reading is soon disrupted by the commercial expansion of Tono-Bungay, his experiments with aeronautics, and his adventure in Africa. These all accelerate the pace of narrative and exacerbate the loss of the subjective locus directing his movement as a character and narrator. The novel progresses without relying on the reader's engagement in its material book form as well, through syntactically-split serial formats (as shown here) and the abrupt insertion of atemporal, illegible visual illustrations representing preliminary

sketches for advertisements. By emptying out the individual locus in the disconnecting, accelerating narrative flow as does London with its mobility, Wells revises the genre into a form embodying the city's unsettling power.

Amitav Ghosh suggests that the recent climate change characterized by the unpredictability and abnormality of collective actions in the Anthropocene challenge the scope of realism. In a similar vein, I argue that urban gaits and the built environment have already been renovating the novel's form beyond the scale of individuality characterizing the modern novel. Another example besides wooshing is jostling in crowded streets, which explains the collective collisions of multiple plots in Dickens's novels, and there are many other types of walking which relate to particular modes of the urban environment. I ask, how do people, whose bodily forms are shaped by their race, gender, class, and the environment, move in the city? What kinds of urban gaits and agency emerge thereof? . In the pandemic present, how do the sanitary conditions, physical distancing, and face-covering intervene into city-walking and contest the city's meaning as a participant and site of capitalistic movement?. How are other narrative genres responding to this crisis in the materially-embodied urban gaits and the city's future? How can literary urban studies use material environments and mobility to imagine the genre and narrative form of cities?

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