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On being aeromobile: airline passengers and the affective experiences of flight

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Abstract

The advent of heavier-than-air powered flight and the subsequent inauguration of regular passenger air services at the beginning of the twentieth century transformed not only the practical geographies but also the affective human experiences of travelling. Aircraft enabled passengers to accomplish journeys, which would once have taken many days or weeks to complete, in a matter of hours, and transformed the sensory experiences of being mobile. However, while much has been written about the development of global commercial aviation and the metaphorical compression of time and space air travel has effected, research into the individual embodied human experiences of being aeromobile remains relatively scarce. Drawing on powerful theoretical arguments inspired by the mobilities turn within the social sciences and recent concern with the 'affective'™ dimensions of everyday life, this paper uses firsthand written historical records of passengers'™ experiences of travelling by air

during the 1920s and 1930s to uncover the diverse kin/aesthetic and affective experiences of flight. While recognising that such experiences are shaped, at least in part, by gender, age, nationality, race, and past experiences of air travel, passengers' descriptions of the unique bodily (dis)comforts, fears, and anxieties associated with flying are used to illustrate how aeromobile bodies experience their airborne environment in ways which have yet to be adequately addressed. The paper concludes by calling for a more nuanced understanding of air travel that recognises that the advent of powered flight has fundamentally changed our perceptions of time, space, distance, and speed, and transformed what it means to be mobile.

Research highlights

° Analyses written records of passengers' experiences of flight in 1920s and 1930s. ° Discusses the affective dimensions of early aeromobilities. ° Advances a more nuanced understanding of airline passenger geographies.



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Keywords

Air travel; Aeromobility; Airline passengers; Affect

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