



## **Public Lecture Series Spring 2015** **Paradigmatic Perspectives on Migration and Mobility**

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**Thursday, 16 April 2015**  
**Theorizing Friction in a Mobile World**  
**Prof. Tim Cresswell**  
**History Department, Northeastern University Boston**

**Discussant: Prof. Ola Söderström, Institute of Geography,  
University of Neuchatel**

18:15 – 19:45 h, University of Neuchatel, Rue Abraham Louis Breguet 1, Lecture Hall 301

### **Abstract**

In his talk, Tim Cresswell, one of the leading mobility scholars, considers the potential of the idea of friction as one theoretical device for the exploration of the politics of mobility at all scales. In physics friction describes what happens when two moving bodies (or a moving body and a stationary body) come into contact. Heat is produced as a byproduct. What happens when friction and heat are translated into a social and cultural realm? The significance of (social) friction is the way it draws our attention to the manner in which people, things and ideas are slowed down or stopped. But it is not just this. Mobility needs friction. Even the most footloose of transnational flows need to get purchase on an actually existing place for mobility to occur. One reading of the mobility turn in the humanities and the social sciences is to see it as an analysis of a world of flow where friction has been reduced or (nearly) eliminated. This would be a mistake. Foregrounding mobility in theory and methodology does not mean turning our attention away from friction but, instead, highlights it. Friction would not

happen without at least the potential of movement (motility). Similarly, mobility would not happen without the existence of friction. The talk draws on classic writings on friction and logistics in wartime as well as contemporary theoretical endeavors to understand what happens when moving people, things and ideas get caught up in the sticky topographies of actually existing places.

### Curriculum Vitae

Tim Cresswell is Professor of History and International Affairs at Northeastern University, Boston. Before that he was Professor of Human Geography at Royal Holloway, University of London. The author of four books on the role of place and mobility in cultural life (including *On the Move: Mobility in the Modern Western World* (2006) and *Place: A Short Introduction* (2004)), his research considers modes of thinking that utilize notions of place, space and mobility to give the world value. Tim Cresswell is also a widely published poet and his first collection, *Soil* is published by Penned in the Margins Press (London, 2013). He is currently working on a collection of essays on *The Politics of Mobility* as well as a monograph about the idea of place based on the Maxwell Street Market, Chicago.

### List of Publications

#### Books

- Cresswell T (2014) *Place: An Introduction* (Blackwell) Second Edition.
- Cresswell T (2013) *Geographic Thought: A Critical Introduction* (Blackwell).
- Cresswell T and Merriman P (eds) (2011) *Geographies of Mobilities: Practices, Spaces, Subjects* (Ashgate).
- Cresswell T and Uteng P (eds) (2008) *Gendered Mobilities* (Ashgate).
- Cresswell T (2006) *On the Move: Mobility in the Modern Western World* (Routledge).
- Cresswell T and Verstraete G (eds) (2003) *Mobilizing Place, Placing Mobility: The Politics of Representation in a Globalized World* (Rodopi Editions).

#### Papers

- Cresswell T (2013) Citizenship in Worlds of Mobility, in Soderstrom O, Ruedin D, D'Amato G and Panese F (eds), *Critical Mobilities*, London, Routledge, pp. 105–124.
- Cresswell T and Martin C (2012). On turbulence: entanglements of disorder and order on a Devon beach. *Tijdschrift voor Economische en Sociale Geografie* 103/5: 516–529.
- Cresswell T (2010) Towards a politics of mobility. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 28/1: 17–31.
- Cresswell T (2009) The prosthetic citizen: new geographies of citizenship. *Political Power and Social Theory* 20: 259–273.