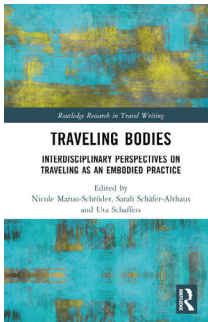




TRAVELING BODIES: INTERDISCIPLINARY PERSPECTIVES ON TRAVELING AS AN EMBODIED PRACTICE

edited by Nicole Maruo-Schröder,
Sarah Schäfer-Althaus, and Uta Schaffers
(A Book Review)



Interest in travel writing is certainly strong, and the field experiences a continual steady evolution, even if perhaps in the last couple of years this has been a bit slower. The recently published contribution to *Routledge Research in Travel Writing* series: *Traveling Bodies: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Traveling as an Embodied Practice* promises to effect a major change in how travel discourses are perceived and addressed—whereas indeed there has already been a lot said and written

about travel writing *per se*, academic positions offering a broader look at travel writing, especially from the perspective of interdisciplinary embodiment studies, have been few and far between. *Traveling Bodies: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Traveling as an Embodied Practice* has the potential to address this niche. This is also a timely intervention in our covid-marred post-pandemic times, when a truly unprecedented thing has happened—as the authors note, “the world has come to a standstill ... [and] forms of traveling and the experience it comes with have fundamentally changed” (Introduction, 11). The editors of the collection—Nicole Maruo-Schröder, Sarah Schäfer-Althaus, and Uta Schaffers—rise to the challenge of this new reality and explore the complexity of travel from the position of the one who, while “still mobile and traveling” (Introduction, 12), experiences their body’s being “immobilized, forced to remain in one spot” (Introduction, 12), a predicament both liberating—we have, after all, learnt to become “location-independent,” and unsettling—it is a whole new dimension to come to terms with. In this light, an academic volume concerned first and foremost with the mutual entanglements of body (politics)

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and travel as well as travel writing is indeed a well-timed intellectual project that is bound to be in growing demand.

The concept and methodology of *Traveling Bodies* merit praise. The authors and editors have made it their goal to address a relatively scant researched tenet of travel writing: its intersections with body/embodiment studies. The works collected in the volume investigate the centrality of the body in traveling practices, approaching the issue from a variety of perspectives, thus fostering a true inter-/ and trans-/disciplinary endeavour, provoking impulses and incentives for fresh directions in future research. The volume is logically divided into four parts: *The Body as Concept and Metaphor*; *Other Bodies*; *Crossing Borders: The Body and Its Liminal Zones*; and *Mobility, Perception, Experience*.

In the first section, contributors look at the physicality of the travel experience and how landscapes encountered by the travelers influence their ways of conceptualizing exploration, both inwards and outwards. This is further enriched in Part Two by accounting for the voices of 'others'—e.g. animals, and allowing them to be heard, recorded and thus represented. In Section Three attention is guided to transgressing borders and immersing oneself—or one's body, for that matter, in liminal zones and actions related to them, such as eating practices, modes of clothing, and issues of medical interventions performed on and/or for the traveling/traveler's body. The final section expands the discussion of cultural implications of travel, at the same time bringing it down to the original *genius loci* of traveling, which the authors aptly prove to be the body in its performance of the traveling act, both externally and internally, through, for instance, the tradition of inscribing the body with meaning acquired in the course of the journey. Each section promises to offer a refreshing and original take on the diversity of traveling practices and addresses these in a complex and nuanced way. The whole volume is written from an original perspective and constitutes a brave new approach to the field, definitely on the leading edge of the area. The structure and organisation of the volume is logical and transparent, and promises to take the reader on an intellectual adventure into the meanders of travel and travel writing.

One of the work's greatest strengths is that it offers a refreshing and uncommon look at a topic and a field of study and research engagement which for some time might have seemed all too well explored. The editors and contributors manage to come up with a volume that opens new research paths and poses previously unstated questions, offering complex, though not definitive, solutions. As such, the volume will principally appeal to researchers and academics engaged in the broad area of travel literature, as well as literary scholars

and intellectuals with a background in the humanities pursuing their investigations of cultural theory, and race and postcolonial studies. Additionally, given the volume's involvement with body/embodiment studies, it will surely also be of interest to scholars of various interdisciplinary proveniences who in their work address the entanglements and interconnections of body discourses, material culture and history of body representations in the humanities.

As stated in the Editors' Introduction to the volume, the attitude that the authors and contributors embrace with regards to travel and travel writing rests on the premise whereby "the (re-)presentation of the bodies of the so-called others has been discussed in travel writing ... the traveler's own body and her sense perceptions have played a much lesser role" (Introduction, 2). It is this gap that *Traveling Bodies* sets out to address, seeing how it is long overdue that attention has been paid to the "lived" body and how it deals with the assault on its senses, which traveling frequently proves to be. In fact, already Introduction is a delight to read. The volume has all it takes to captivate both more "seasoned" travel theory scholars and neophytes—the former will be given fresh and innovative vantage points from which to explore and analyse travel discourses, while the latter will be introduced to the field in a state-of-the-art manner, which accounts for more historical approaches and investigates the core issues of the field, as well as presents the newest, just emerging trends in travel studies. Also, personally I was thrilled to discover that *Traveling Bodies* includes Sofie Decock's text on Annemarie Schwarzenbach and Ella Maillart, and that the very Introduction relies heavily on references to Schwarzenbach's and Maillart's journey to Afghanistan—I could not be happier that these two outstanding personalities, indomitable travelers and pioneering women drivers are finally getting more due attention in English-language academic sources.

Surely another asset to the volume is its editorial team, made up of dedicated scholars representing different stages of an academic career. Their choice of contributors is diverse, both geographically and research-wise; the editors have taken great care to collaborate with scholars who all share a defining interest in travel and travel writing, but who represent these from multiple positions and a plethora of academic proveniences. This intellectual variety directly translates into a wide-reaching research profundity and scholarly originality, which single out *Traveling Bodies* as an innovative intervention occupying a place all of its own in the field of travel embodiment studies. It does not feel as an exaggeration to assert that as of early 2024, the volume does not have a "direct contender."

Abstract: The present review looks at the recent contribution to the Routledge Research in Travel Writing series—*Traveling Bodies: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Traveling as an Embodied Practice*, edited by Nicole Maruo-Schröder, Sarah Schäfer-Althaus, and Uta Schaffers. The review discusses the contents of the volume, the concept and methodology employed in the work, as well as the major aspects pertaining to its position within the broad field of travel writing. It offers an evaluation of the originality of the collection and assesses the quality of the contributions included in the volume, highlighting how the gathered articles enrich the ongoing academic debate on travel, travel writing and the embodied experience of mobility and movement. The present review looks at the recent contribution to the Routledge Research in Travel Writing series—*Traveling Bodies: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Traveling as an Embodied Practice*, edited by Nicole Maruo-Schröder, Sarah Schäfer-Althaus, and Uta Schaffers. The review discusses the contents of the volume, the concept and methodology employed in the work, as well as the major aspects pertaining to its position within the broad field of travel writing. It offers an evaluation of the originality of the collection and assesses the quality of the contributions included in the volume, highlighting how the gathered articles enrich the ongoing academic debate on travel, travel writing and the embodied experience of mobility and movement.

Keywords: travel, travel writing, body politics, travelogues, new media, animals, automobile culture, sensory journeys, photography, film, migration

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