

1650-1850: Ideas, Aesthetics, and Inquiries in the Early Modern Era

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WHEN MOTION MATTERED
ESSAYS ON THE MOVING EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

A Special Issue of

1650–1850

Ideas, Æsthetics, and Inquiries
in the Early Modern Era

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Kevin L. Cope
Editor

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INTRODUCTION

KEVIN L. COPE

Past periods are stationery in time; the time of past periods passes at stationery places. To the historian's eye, everything that has happened seems to have happened somewhere, in one location, whether a drawing room, a cabinet chamber, a spa, or a battlefield. The vast record of mass migrations, military campaigns, and overstepped boundaries that sums up the history may seem intensely kinetic, yet history as a genre remains attached to fixed positions: to unmoving venues, whether palaces, cabinets, laboratories, or Washingtonian cherry trees, where events occurred. That picaresque cousin of history writing, the boisterous novel, likewise attends more to fixed positions than its action-packed pages might suggest. How many times does Henry Fielding announce an intention to leave his hero at one place in order to view events at another, thereby implying motion but talking about unmoving locations? How often do Richardson's heroines wonder about events elsewhere while penned up in a room or on a bed? How often are real-life rangers such as the continent-trampling Duke of Marlborough or the Pacific-perusing Captain Cook portrayed atop a quiescent horse or amidships in calm seas, in one place, in one posture, in the unchanging medium of oil or the untransportable element of marble?

Attempts to do justice to early modern motion—to celebrate a period that prized travel, that developed mathematical characterizations of movement, and that experimented with forms of transport never previously imagined—are complicated by the astounding variety of motions that animated the Enlightenment. Wits as diverse as Descartes, Galileo, and Hobbes created a broad, indeed universal field of inquiry when they decreed the universe itself to be, per the title of this volume, matter in motion. Increasing mathematical finesse was making it possible to predict the gyrations of moons, planets, meteors, and comets: to contemplate celestial itineraries that few would ever observe and that none would ever directly experience (short of a calamitous cosmic collision). Those with upturned eyes monitored misty as well as rocky bodies, raising new questions about the movement of wind, cloud, and water. Down in the world of commercial affairs, the routinization of worldwide shipping exposed thousands of ordinary persons to a frequency and scope of travel that, only a few centuries earlier, had, owing to its danger and rarity, conferred immortal fame on the Columbuses, the Magellans, and the Drakes. Biologists transferred some of their taxonomizing energies from description and classification to the evaluation of animal or, in the case of Friedrich Christian Lesser, insect locomotion. Frivolity proved as fertile as science and business when it came to disclosing new species of motion. With the emergence of ballet as a major cultural and courtly interest, the entertainment industry created new canons of extravagant movement. Opera impresarios occasionally ran human armies or animal herds across theater stages. The hyperbolic gesturing of David Garrick and the soaring architecture of Christopher Wren epitomize the taste for innovative or extreme motion.

It is easy enough to imagine the artistic as well as bibliographical implications of a new awareness of previously unimaginable motions. How artists and historians should go about describing, characterizing, recording, or archiving a thousand species of motion was a major question throughout the long eighteenth century. As anyone who has ever studied an eighteenth-century ephemeris knows, even one small, highly specialized application of “motion studies”—jotting down, printing, cataloguing, and proofreading data entries concerning the motions of those few celestial bodies that were useful to navigation or astronomy—was a colossal task. Adding to such assignments an obligation to record Louis XIV’s pirouettes or to monitor the motions of ocean currents or to evaluate the vibrations of viola strings or to plot the peregrinations of an atom would push the most ardent annalist beyond the breaking point. Considering the rising demand, in the period, for empirical accuracy, undertaking a seemingly simple project such as daubing

a history painting that accurately represented the motion of the wind while also portraying the signing of America's Declaration of Independence would require far more than a master of the brush.

With motion appearing everywhere, whether in the lens-aided detection of squirming microbes in every drop of water or in philological analyses of the dispersal of languages, Enlightenment thinkers could well wonder whether words such as "still" or "quiet" or "stationary" referred to anything at all. Philosophical analyses of the senses such as those carried out by John Locke and David Hume treated the input side of human knowledge not as a matter of timeless apperception but of process, action, and, in sum, motion. Painters such as Jan Lievens and Gérard de Lairese regarded sensing as appropriate subjects for dramatic compositions or action-packed allegories. Experiencing and knowing had motion-intensive story lines that carried interest for all the arts. The persistence of the melodramatic baroque idiom into an age committed to symmetrically stable classicism registers a widespread recognition that the world moves as much as it balances. A poet such as James Thomson might try to arrange four equally voluminous descriptions of the seasons symmetrically around the still central solar reference point, yet, while he was composing and while his audience was reading, our planet continued whirling ahead, orbiting—moving—through the quarters of the year. Time moved ahead while the many persons, places, and things that come and go from Thomson's panoramas "gyred and gymbled," as Lewis Carroll might say, in a million different directions, speeds, and trajectories.

The "long eighteenth century" might be re-branded as "the motile eighteenth century" owing to its discovery of the universality of motion. More than an attribute of objects that maintain their unchanging essences no matter where they might be, motion emerged, after the scholastic era, as one feature common to all knowable things. True, Heraclitus had, in antiquity, posited "change" as the foundation of the universe, but it was the empirically-minded, rationally analytical eighteenth century that began identifying change primarily with motion. The interval extending from Nicolas Lémery and Robert Boyle to Antoine Lavoisier, Joseph Priestley, and John Dalton, for example, laid the groundwork for the description of change and indeed of nature itself as the motile interplay of atoms. Modern chemistry began demonstrating that motion served as a philosopher's stone, transmuting one material into another. Repositioning atoms produced new materials, thus reducing the fundamental philosophical problem of identity to the logistics of motion. The question was no longer, "what is the essence of water?" but rather "how may one move hydrogen and oxygen into sufficiently close proximity

so as to produce water?" The post-Newtonian probes of astronomers such as William Herschel and of mathematician-astrophysicists such as Jean-Baptiste D'Alembert and Leonhard Euler seldom revealed or even considered the possibility of motionless bodies; the study of the cosmos had resolved into the study of movement. So for that more practical manifestation of the harmony of the spheres, music, where technical analyses of the means of producing sound by the managed movement of air yielded better, louder, and more tuneful instruments. The intellectual history of the long eighteenth century could accurately be defined as the relinquishing of explanatory models based on the expository analysis of stationery objects in favor of dynamical models tracking motile phenomena. Whether in rudimentary studies of geological transformations such as those of virtuoso John Woodward or in daring queries into the origin of life by speculators such as Carl Linnaeus, Jean-Baptiste Lamarck, or the versifying Erasmus Darwin, motion provided the turn that allowed the keys of science to open long-closed doors.

Tautologies have the advantage of being true. It can be said without hesitation that motion moves. The fundamental process by which borders are crossed, motion facilitates the fusion, rearrangement, or revision of identities, definitions, and institutions. Many if not most of the cultural productions of the long eighteenth century exhibit a disregard for genre restrictions, an insouciance arising from the love of movement. Travel books, for example, waver between fact, fiction, reportage, and narrative, indeed have often been postulated as the foundation of that blockbuster eighteenth-century genre, the novel. Like ship's logs or like diaries by prominent passengers aboard explorers' vessels, travelers' reports enjoyed enormous popularity among an information-hungry public that cared little for fine distinctions—that regarded data mining as an art form. The anecdotal reports of amazing experiences in assorted venues that fill the pages of eighteenth-century digests and periodicals move across genre lines and assemble audiences with very different tastes. The chatty if invisible personae emerging from periodical features, whether Johnson's rambler, Addison's (multi-positioned) spectator, or the omnivorous information absorber of *The London Magazine*, embody an ambition for universal and perpetual motion as they scan the world to find thousands of vantage points and observing positions. The Steele-Addison spectator is that one person who can move effortlessly between any and all listening posts; the editor of *The London Magazine* seems to superintend, from a series of locations, an entire town. The letters of erudite travelers such as Sir William Hamilton or Horace Walpole or Lady Mary Wortley Montagu likewise give the impression that those authors, if not actually being everywhere,

have the ability to go anywhere at any time. Eighteenth-century narrators and editors allow characters to move between life and literature so as to create new, hybrid forms, as occurs in Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, where the lead character resembles real-life castaway Alexander Selkirk but where author Defoe welds details from authentic periodical reports into imaginary stories. Poets, too, plied the uncharted spaces between highly mobile real-life observers and fanciful literary conceptions. Oliver Goldsmith's *The Deserted Village*, for example, cobbles together travelers' (often exaggerated) reports about America with the conventions of pastoral poetry to produce a biting indictment of social ills that wanders between dystopian dream and fact-based editorial and that covers the distance between Britain and America in a few hundred lines. The peculiar interest of the period in philosophical dialogue—in the creation of highly artificial dramatic scenes in which allegorical characters discuss philosophical issues—might be seen as a manifestation of a similarly migratory mentality: as an indication that audiences expected animation in the articulation of ideas. Best-selling philosophers found ways to jog between the disciplined world of ideas and the boisterous world of the stage. Ideas were not adequate unless motion activated them and unless they moved across genre boundaries.

Occurring in time, motion is forward-looking. Motion pertains to where a person or thing *will* go or to what an item *will* become. Even a reversal of course or a return to an original state involves irreversible travel forward through time. Motion thus couples loss with gain and progress. It prohibits a return to things exactly as they were, but it facilitates and sometimes choreographically enables the progress toward things as they will be. Although abstract in conception, motion, in its universality, is highly particular, for it provides the means for arriving at concrete realizations of the future. Things, people, and, sometimes, in the seismically active eighteenth century, places move. John Locke allows that motion may be a (primary) quality of an object, but it is still a quality. Neither Locke nor anyone else permits the empirical intuition of pure, disembodied movement.

The essays in this collection address those manifestations of movement in which the long eighteenth century excelled or upon which it obsessed. These studies attend to the multifarious forms, styles, modes, and consequences of motion while also focusing on motion itself as a central cultural and philosophical concern. The volume is divided into six sections: "Motion, The Genre"; "Poetry in Motion"; "Styles of Motion"; "Educational Movements"; "Emotions"; and "Sociable Mobility." Each of these sections includes essays addressing a key facet of the rolling polyhedron of motion.

The opening section, "Motion: The Genre," delivers three essays that discuss the ways in which the Enlightenment zeal for motion energized the production of new genres. Neoclassical critical theory, whether that of Sir Philip Sydney or John Dennis or Boileau, addressed the question of what genres are and what features they evidence; writers, however, allowed motion to take its course, to direct them to new, often unexpected forms. Stepping aside from the usual discussion of the themes or literary backgrounds of the English epistolary novel, Allan Ingram and Hélène Dachez compare the fictional letters in Samuel Richardson's novels with the real-life correspondence of Hester Piozzi (Hester Thrale), commenting on the exchange of conventions between the two bodies of writing. Noting that mail is designed to move, Ingram and Dachez study the role of irregular or interrupted transmission in the production of both fictional and historical events. Ambling between paint and pencil, Julien Morel considers the role, in the highly visual writings of Ann Radcliffe, of the winding road. Engineered as much by contemporary theories of art as by turnpike construction crews, bending paths lead travelers through a series of ever-changing, ever-unveiling scenes, for the production of which motion is required. Sonja Fielitz considers metamorphosis as a form of motion, investigating the reception, use, and transformation of the Ovidian tradition among a bevy of English translators, adapters, publishers, periodical outlets, poets, hacks, rhetoricians, and penmen. Fielitz forges a link between the highly literary world of Ovid adapters and that of Enlightenment biology, probing the Ovidian input in proto-evolutionist texts such as Goethe's *Metamorphose der Pflanzen* and Erasmus Darwin's *Zoonomia*. Together, these three essays review how motion creates the organisms in a landscape; how motion over roads reveals those landscapes; and how attentive writers transmit what they see to audiences elsewhere.

Section two, "Poetry in Motion," studies the role of motion in a genre that rose to the top of the Augustan hierarchy of literary prestige: verse. Bill Overton opens the investigation by inquiring after not only the abilities but also the limits of poetry with respect to expressing motion. In addition to directing attention to overlooked women writers who specialized in the poetry of motion, Overton revives the long-suspended debate, initiated by no less than Dr. Johnson, on the capacities of "representative meter." Overton's subtle approach—his attempt to make a systematic assessment of what eighteenth-century poets were trying to achieve rather than to judge by (anachronistic) measures whether they succeeded in that quest—is echoed in the contribution from Michael Szczekalla. Szczekalla attacks the persistent notion that Pope presents himself as a philosopher-poet and that shallowness, naivete,

and heterodoxy spoil the pronouncements of this grotto grumbler. Szczekalla argues that Pope suffuses his verse with “kinetic” metaphors that advance his satiric project by calling attention to the instability and inadequacy of human thought. Invocations of motion thus serve as powerful tools for the assessing the entire philosophical project.

The essays in section two celebrate the bigness and variety of motion: the fact that no one mode can encompass or adequately express all the motion is, means, or does and the fact that motion takes countless forms. Section three, “Styles of Motion,” aims to enlarge the colloquial idea of motion as simply a matter of getting from point “A” to point “B.” This section highlights forms of motion that have enjoyed only minimal publicity. Concerned that our twenty-first century obsession with speed—with fast cars, zooming aircraft, and atmosphere-shattering missiles—may limit appreciation for the ponderousness of eighteenth-century movement, Kevin L. Cope surveys the lower, slower end of the motion spectrum: drifting. Barely, slowly, and often involuntarily moving with wind or wave, eighteenth-century drifters included would-be tellurians who enjoyed floating along underground waterways as well as daredevil balloon pilots who unhesitatingly committed their fates to the breezes. William Falconer, that unlikely celebrity shipwreck victim, emerges as the brightest star in Cope’s floating galaxy of directionless movers and intermittent shakers. Hélène Dachez and Allan Ingram review a paradoxical form of motion: stasis, the apparent lack of motion. Proceeding in their considerations from one of the most famous as well as most static episodes in the eighteenth-century canon, the moment when Robinson Crusoe freezes before an unexplained footprint on his seemingly deserted island, Dachez and Ingram show us that eighteenth-century stasis actually abounds in motion, whether the swirling of neurons during fearful thought or the refined pursuit of innocence in Pope’s construction of quiet Windsor Forest.

Pope’s instructional amble through a pedagogical forest demonstrates the educational value of motion. New to the Western world in the affluent eighteenth century was the idea that at least some people would learn lessons from changes of venue. Section four, “Educational Movements,” reviews eighteenth-century attempts to elicit instruction from travel or to incorporate movement into the curriculum. Kevin Hayes initiates the discussion with a study of Thomas Jefferson’s recommendations concerning intellectually profitable travel. Hayes opens Jefferson’s notebooks, revealing therein the American leader’s conviction that youngsters on the (sometimes grand) tour ought to focus on detail, ought to prepare themselves by reading travel books, and ought to avoid those pesky human guides who prefer spinning yarns and

collecting tips to analyzing local customs and practices. Elisabeth Martichou explores the debate concerning the merits of traveling to Rome to prepare for an artistic career. In addition to reviewing the various theoretical reasons and practical curricula for the candidate international artist, Martichou excavates a body of anti-travel literature, including a whimsical tract suggesting, as a compromise, a tour of Roman Britain that would expose the budding painter, sculptor, or architect to classical influences without the adverse influence of the naughty ideas afoot in the great Catholic capitol. Not every educational travel required a journey of a thousand miles. As most overly chaired professors know all too well, a trip to the gymnasium can be more instructive than a shelf of books. Esther Sommer takes us down “the gravel path to human perfection” in a delightful perusal of Jonathan Swift’s thoughts and habits regarding exercise. Possibly the first kinesiologist, Swift took the cue for his personal motions from the aristocratic milieu, where dancing, walking, tennis, equitation, skating, and archery were favorite activities. Swift extended these upper-class diversions into performances more worthy of a professional athlete than a pampered aristocrat, often embarking on marathon rides that kept him in the saddle for entire days or often undertaking strolls traversing vast territories. Swift’s interest in movement leads him to a very preliminary idea of what we now call “physical education,” education not only by means of but specifically comprised of movement.

Motion enjoys a unique philosophical status in that it can either cause or be caused. A moving object may set other objects in motion or an object may be moved by some other motile entity. Aware of the literal meaning of words such as “passion,” eighteenth-century thinkers and writers remembered the full meaning of the last two syllables in “emotion.” “Being moved” could carry physical or psychological meanings—or both. Section five, “Emotions,” explores the turbulent isthmus that sluices physical into mental motion and sometimes back again. Gerald J. Butler ponders the devastating consequences of Jane Austen’s unwanted move to Bath, where the sense of dislocation stymied her creative efforts. Butler offers a useful tonic to the eighteenth-century enthusiasm for motion, showing that some tender spirits would wilt when transferred to new soil, although Butler also notes that the long-term effects of temporary displacement could be salutary with respect to later creativity. Maryam Ghabris counterpoints Butler’s evaluation of Jane Austen’s abrupt displacement with a consideration of subtle neural movement: of the exchange of information between the mind, the passions, the body, and the place in which authors or characters find themselves. Taking Laurence Sterne’s *Sentimental Journey* as her study case, Ghabris treats the emotions that guide

Sterne's wandering works as a matter of the movement of information around the body as well as between the body and the brain. Sterne's works take us on two odysseys at once: on those travels that format his works and along the many lanes of that broad information superhighway that is a human being. Locke, Hobbes, and Newton, Ghabris reminds us, regarded movement as essential to experiment—and to the experimenter.

Writers, such as Laurence Sterne, who specialize in reverie tempt us to think of movement in individualistic terms. Following Locke in his belief that reflection is one of the two great founts of knowledge, we ask whether we ourselves are in motion; turning to the other fount of knowledge, observation, we note whether other persons or objects are moving. With its worries over the preservation of dynasties and estates and also with its cultivation of probability theory, which dealt with large, fluid, and diverse populations, the long eighteenth century considered movement with respect to group and social as well as individual phenomena. The sixth and concluding section of this volume, "Sociable Mobility," responds to the whole manifold of motion, to motion that may include or affect large populations. In the opening essay for this segment, Mascha Hansen takes the longest of views on the movements of Sophie Charlotte of Mecklenburg-Strelitz, who, at the tender of age seventeen, was swept up from Mecklenburg to become Queen to England's George III. From contemporary accounts of the rapid transposition of Sophie Charlotte, Hansen's scholarship extracts a fairy tale of the modern, mobile aristocracy, replete with cautionary episodes illustrating the limitations on royal mobility. Working at the opposite extreme of modern experience, across the vast populations of the English empire and in the voluminous warehouses of the first age of international capitalism, Kenneth J. Cozens elucidates the workings of Enlightenment entrepreneurial culture. Cozens focuses on the economic adventures of Peter Thellusson, who built upon everything from Huguenot merchant networks to German brewers to Caribbean sugar plantations to insurance schemes to create holding companies that could move money and goods around the world. For Cozens, merchants such as Thellusson played an integral role in creating the safe, reliable, and quick business procedures and the sturdy political institutions that enabled the rise of the modern mobility culture and that accelerated the convergence of government and business interests. Cozens's paper reminds us that people seldom move without baggage, whether coffers of money or magazines of commodities. Baerbel Czennia extends membership in the era of motion to citizens of the animal kingdom. Czennia shows how both European, domestic and foreign, exotic animals moved hither and yon through the membrane of imperial expansion.

Creatures captured in the far-flung corners of the world carried high gift and status-symbol value back on the home turf; familiar animals from the homeland represented the best of Britain to indigenous peoples. Voyagers such as Captain Cook created animal colonies to supply food to future travelers—to promote future motion—as well as to honor and pacify local leaders. Animals, consequently, described as many itineraries as did their wardens in the human tribe.

Whether by means of four hooves, two shoes, a keel and hull, a pair of skates, electrical charges between atoms, or oil paint and chiseled marble, motion found its way to the center of Enlightenment thought and culture. Understanding, representing, and engaging in motion of the most diverse kinds, from diving under the water to sweeping a telescope across the heavens, played the lead role in a culture that, in its urgent desire to gather data and experience from everywhere, continually invented new methods to reach anywhere. Few themes knit together the vast intellectual fabric of the Enlightenment as firmly as does that of motion, which wound its way into every pocket of experience from the orbits of planets to the travels of the splendid shilling in mock-heroic poet John Philips's pocket. To the exploration of the motion by which we explore we now turn.