Decolonizing the Mobility Turn: Toward Non-Western Traditions of Spatial Linguistics for the Anthropocene

Friday, April 30, 1:00 – 2:00 pm through Zoom
Registration is required. Please click here.

The present health, environmental, and economic crises have inspired a reexamination of dominant academic paradigms for their role in the human condition. What scholars have celebrated as the “mobility turn” or “mobilities paradigm” has also contributed to this crisis. Canagarajah will examine the tropes that have constituted the mobility turn since 14th century European modernity. They are: Mobility is a new normal; Mobility is progress; Mobility is individuality against tradition; Mobility is resistance against control; Mobility expands horizons (both geographically and intellectually); Mobility conquers space in favor of time; Geographical mobility is social mobility; and The end of mobility is the ownership of new and permanent homes. Canagarajah will demonstrate that these tropes have also influenced a linguistics based on genealogical and temporal foundations (i.e., privileging peoplehood and teleological progress). In their place, he will articulate a spatial orientation based on land-based Non-Western epistemologies, including his in South Asia. This spatial paradigm promotes a vision of relationality and dependency between human and nonhuman beings, and communication through embodied semiotic resources, complementing the nonlinear mobilities of space and time. To balance this broad strokes approach across vast historical spans and philosophical discourses, Canagarajah will narrate how he himself has traveled through the dark side of mobility as a refugee from Sri Lanka—and yet benefitted from the resilient habitus from his ancient heritage to engage in resistant scholarship, translingual communication, and diasporic “placemaking” during the global lockdown.

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Co-sponsored by the Department of Asian and Asian American Studies