

## **Mobilities II: Cruising**

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### **Abstract:**

In this second report I discuss research published in 2014 and early 2015. The article examines recent debates about elemental geographies, including research on the mobilities associated with air and water, and on how aluminium, steel and carbon facilitate movement. The paper then highlights the vibrant materialities and mobilities underpinning events, examining different approaches to processual and molecular mobilities, including work which is critical of the suggestion that everything is moving. In the final section I examine the centrality of mobility to academic practices and biographies, and here I discuss the life and work of the influential cultural studies scholar Stuart Hall.

**Keywords:** mobility; elements; water; process; movement

### **I Introduction**

Having departed or moved off in my first report (Merriman, 2015), I am now cruising along, picking up and setting down passengers along the way, while reflecting on my travels in 2014. Our passage could be by any mode, and you may be enjoying the journey, or not! Either way, we are in movement, moving with and through the world. The subtitle of this report – ‘cruising’ – denotes a certain quality, style or means of travel, as well as a ‘betweenness’ fitting of a second and penultimate progress report. The English word ‘cruise’ can be traced back to a range of seventeenth century terms that were in use in European, colonial sea-faring nations (OED, 2014).<sup>1</sup> Cruising, like terms such as coasting, free-wheeling, gliding, and drifting (on drifting, see Peters, 2015), implies an effortlessness and

consistency, as we ‘cruise to victory’, or reach a ‘cruising height’ (OED, 2014).<sup>2</sup> Cruising becomes associated with certain practices, qualities, spaces, materials, subjects and events, and it is important to break down movements into such components (Cresswell, 2010; Peters, 2015), especially when seeking to understand their social, cultural, political, environmental or economic weight and significance. In this report I pay particular attention to these qualities, examining a few of the elemental geographies and dynamic processes associated with mobility practices and infrastructures. In section II, I focus on work which has examined how water, air, steel and aluminium shape our mobilities. In section III, I examine recent work on the processual nature of movement, and finally, in section IV, I reflect on the life and work of an ‘unexpected’ mobilities scholar: Stuart Hall. Before moving on, I want to make a few observations about key publications over the past year.

As has previously been reported (Cresswell, 2011, 2012, 2014; Merriman, 2015), the field of mobility studies is characterised by a striking multi- and inter-disciplinarity, and the past year has seen engagements with – and developments of – mobilities research by scholars working in and across a diverse array of fields, including archaeology (Leary, 2014), anthropology (Lipset & Handler, 2014), design (Jensen, 2014), socialist and post-socialist studies (Burrell & Hörschelmann, 2014), theatre and performance (Wilkie, 2015), sound studies (Bijsterveld et al., 2014), social interaction studies (Haddington et al., 2013; McIlvenny et al., 2014), media and communications (Goggin & Hjorth, 2014; Madden, 2014; de Souza e Silva & Sheller, 2015), literary studies (Murray & Upstone, 2014), and Foucault studies (Manderscheid et al., 2014; Paterson, 2014; Philo, 2014). A major new 600-page interdisciplinary collection, *The Routledge Handbook of Mobilities* (Adey et al., 2014), seeks to transcend such disciplinary divisions, with 55 chapters from scholars working in history, management, media, English studies, tourism, politics, ethnology, communication studies, transport studies, and anthropology, as well as the predictable disciplines of geography and sociology. The *Handbook* traces the genealogy and emergence of what is increasingly being characterised as a new ‘field’ – mobility studies – discussing different disciplinary approaches (section 1) and methods (section 7), as well as tracing the diverse materialities (section 4), subjects (section 5), events (section 6), qualities (section 2), and spaces and technologies (section 3) associated with movement and mobility (including travel and transport). As one of the editors of the *Handbook* I am hopeful that it will help to open-up new debates and make links with other established fields, and the increasing purchase and maturity of geographic studies of mobility is perhaps best reflected in the incorporation of a section on mobilities within one of the leading human geography text-books published in the

UK, *Introducing Human Geographies*, edited by Cloke, Crang and Goodwin (see Adey, 2014a; Minca & Wagner, 2014; Verne, 2014).

## **II The Elemental Mobilities of Earth, Wind and Fire (and Water)**

To counter the suggestion that mobilities *simply* imply and evoke qualities of movement, flux, dynamism, and speed, mobility scholars have long emphasised how movement relies upon a wide range of relatively-fixed ‘moorings’ (Urry, 2003, 2007), from seemingly grounded infrastructures (Graham & Marvin, 2001) to a diverse array of objects (Adey et al., 2014), all of which *may* become associated with experiences of stillness, waiting, boredom and stasis, as well as feelings of speed, thrill and excitement (Bissell, 2007; Bissell & Fuller, 2011). Infrastructures, routes, passages, and vehicles are revealed to have diverse and complex materialities associated with different experiences and affects, and the simple term ‘materialities’ somehow fails to capture the elemental, affective and dynamic qualities of mobilities past and present. As a result, an increasing number of geographers and mobility scholars have sought to unpick the elemental or elementary geographies of our mobile worlds, including the ‘elementary geographies’ of ‘being in passage’ (Adey et al., 2012: 180, 177). As I discuss in section III, considerable attention has focussed on the vibrant materialities and mobilities of life (Bennett, 2010; Bissell, 2010; Merriman, 2012a), as well as the ‘elemental prejudices’ of a discipline which has not surprisingly been preoccupied with earthly topographies and materials (Jackson & Fannin, 2011: 435; Forsyth et al., 2013). In contrast, however, the past few years have seen increasing attention paid within human geography to the elemental geographies of air and water, as well as the significance of materials such as steel, aluminium and carbon. Moving far beyond his earlier work on airports, air-mindedness and aerial life, Peter Adey’s *Air: Nature and Culture* arrived in 2014 in the Earth Series published by Reaktion Books. In a plush, small-format book with 99 illustrations (57 in colour), Adey provides an impressive account of ‘air and how we have come to know it, feel it, sense it’, as it has become central to ‘our ways of life, our science, our culture, our politics, our technologies’ (Adey, 2014b: 9). One aspect of this story is an account of how imaginations and knowledges of human flight and aerial ascendance have emerged and evolved, from classical and early modern imaginations of airborne figures to early experiments with balloons and aeroplanes. Airs blow through different imaginations, scientific experiments, and technological assemblages, lifting thoughts, hopes, wings, and bodies (Adey, 2014b).

In *Aluminum Dreams* Mimi Sheller reveals how this metal has been central to modern life, including modern mobilities: ‘aluminum is a substance constitutive of modern mobility due to the crucial part it plays in the transportation, construction, and the aviation industries. It also moves our electricity, without which many other things would not be able to move’ (Sheller, 2014a: 10; also Sheller, 2014c). Aluminium is utilised in a broad range of domestic, industrial and military technologies, with its strength and lightness proving ideal for airborne vehicles. In a very different study Dydia DeLyser and Paul Greenstein (2014) discuss the materialities, mobilities and enthusiasms involved in restoring a rare Czech Tatra T87 car purchased on eBay. In describing how they restored this rusty wreck to a ‘gold standard’ winner of the 2010 *New York Times* Collectable Car Contest, DeLyser and Greenstein trace the artisanal production practices, ‘transnational networks of enthusiasm’, and global mobilities involved in restoring a rare, Eastern European motor car (DeLyser & Greenstein, 2014: 10). Drawing upon ‘follow the thing’ literatures, they reveal the flows of materials, bodies and knowledges involved in repairing, replacing and sourcing three parts – the clock, the wheels, and the steering wheel – as they are rebuilt, moulded or replaced – with the aid of fellow enthusiasts, collectors and restorers (DeLyser & Greenstein, 2014).

The bulk of the Tatra’s restoration was undertaken in the Czech Republic, and this rare and distinctive steel car was shipped across the Atlantic in a standardised steel box container, entering a system of cargo logistics whose mobilities and political economy have been carefully traced and unpicked in a number of recent studies, most notably Deborah Cowen’s important new book *The Deadly Life of Logistics* (Cowen, 2014; see also Martin, 2013, 2014; Parker, 2013; Hepworth, 2014; Birtchnell et al., 2015). Mobile ‘elements’ enable mobilities, but they may also emerge from or be generated by mobilities. Of these, carbon is perhaps the most significant. Through fossil-fuel extraction and combustion, carbon is ‘released’ and ‘mobilised’ in ways most scientists understand to be detrimental to the global climate (on oil, see Urry, 2013, 2014), and as Mathew Paterson explains in an article on carbon mobilities, contemporary ‘climate change politics has been precisely organised around the generation of newly mobile objects – specifically the rights to generate carbon emissions, as mobilised via carbon markets’ (Paterson, 2014: 570).

The final element I want to discuss is water, focussing on the elementary geographies and mobilities of our oceans, seas and rivers. While physical geographers have held a long-standing interest in its physical processes and mobilities, human geographers have only recently begun to examine the elemental qualities and materialities of water, moving beyond early work on the political and cultural geographies of ocean territories, exploration, ferries

and shipping ‘to fully appreciate the ocean as a uniquely fluid and dynamic space’ which requires ‘an epistemology that views the ocean as continually being reconstituted by a variety of elements: the non-human and the human, the biological and the geophysical, the historic and the contemporary’ (Steinberg, 2013: 157). Seas, oceans and rivers may be explored, governed, imagined and represented in diverse ways, but their elemental qualities and physical properties are vital to how they are encountered and traversed. As Steinberg succinctly argues, oceans are ‘wet, mobile, dynamic, deep, dark spaces that are characterized by complex movements and interdependencies of water molecules, minerals, and non-human biota as well as humans and their ships’ (Steinberg, 2013: 159; also Steinberg & Peters, 2015). Following Steinberg’s influential work, a number of geographers have begun exploring different aspects of the geographies of seas, oceans, and indeed ships. Jon Anderson and Kimberley Peters’ edited collection *Water Worlds: Human Geographies of the Ocean* includes sections on ocean knowledges, experiences and natures, with a number of chapters on oceanic mobilities, including surfing, ice roads, kayaking, pirate radio ships, the Royal Mail Steam Packet Company, and an ethnography of wreck diving (Anderson & Peters, 2014). Oceans are examined as surfaces traversed and experienced, depths explored, and above all as meaningful, material, elemental, practised spaces, and such enquiries are increasingly multi-disciplinary, with a recent special issue of the *Harvard Design Magazine* on ‘wet matter’ including contributions from architects, designers, historians, anthropologists, sociologists and geographers (Bélanger, 2014; Peters & Steinberg, 2014).

Ships and boats come in many different forms, and a special issue of *Mobilities* on ‘the mobilities of ships and shipped mobilities’ outlines the shear diversity of ship technologies and ship mobilities which have, over centuries, transported people and things, whether these mobilities were voluntary or forced, feared or enjoyed, rough or smooth, carefully planned or accidental, fortuitous or disastrous (Anim-Addo et al., 2014). Ships are diverse mobile technologies, and the special issue includes papers on pirate ships (Hasty, 2014), steamships (Anim-Addo, 2014), super yachts (Spence, 2014a; see also Spence, 2014b), maritime surveillance (Peters, 2014), naval mutinies (Davies, 2014), containerisation (Martin, 2014), and creative voyaging (Straughan & Dixon, 2014). Other maritime studies have, of course, focussed on the slave ship (Rediker, 2008), ferry (Vannini, 2012), cruise liner (Wealleans, 2006; Ashmore, 2013), migrant passenger (Ong et al., 2014), and most recently the prison ship (Peters & Turner, 2015). With the increasing interest of scholars in the volumetric properties of ocean space, attention has also turned to sub-surface movements, currents and vehicles, including underwater drones and submarines (Steinberg & Peters,

2015), although the elite military, scientific and exploratory uses of these expensive underwater vehicles creates patterns and experiences of mobility which may be more difficult to observe and access.

### **III Processual Movements, and the Politics of Becoming Mobile**

Elemental mobilities direct our attention to the many incessant, forceful, vital and vibrant movements and materialities which seemingly underpin and shape our worlds, simultaneously generating and fragmenting ‘simple’, ‘common-sense’ understandings of subjects, objects, actions, movements, and stillness. Inspired by the processual philosophies of Lucretius, Bergson, Whitehead, Deleuze and Serres, a notable number of thinkers are rethinking notions of movement, materiality, subjectivity, and affect (Bissell, 2010; Merriman, 2012a). Jane Bennett (2010: x) has famously examined how ‘the vital materialities that flow through and around us... are crucial to political life’, while more recently Erin Manning has focussed her attention on the primacy of (relational) movements which subjectify, materialise, body, and en-world:

A body never pre-exists its movement. Total movement courses through all incipient form-takings (the edging into itself of ‘object’, the shading into itself of ‘figure’). What actualizes as this or that displacement, this or that form, is but a brief instantiation of what that movement has become. Choreographers such as William Forsythe know this well: Forsythe speaks not of hitting a form (‘do this figure’) but of dancing the very force of movement-moving (‘find the movement in the figure, and move with it’). He asks his dancers to *body*, not to ‘represent’ a body. From noun to verb, what movement does is make apparent that nothing is quite what it seems. (Manning, 2014: 164-165)

Manning’s processual re-imagination and apprehension of embodied practices associated with dance (Manning, 2009, 2013, 2014; Manning & Massumi, 2014) clearly resonates with recent work in geography and cultural theory on the spatialities, affects and atmospheres generated by moving bodies (Merriman, 2012b; McCormack, 2013; Henriques et al., 2014; Pine & Kuhlke, 2014), but it also reignites debates surrounding the adoption of nomadic theories and nomadic metaphysics which surfaced in the 1990s (Braidotti, 1994; Kaplan, 1996; Cresswell, 1997, 2001). If movement is primary, foundational, ubiquitous and

universal – if everything is in process and flux – then how do we distinguish between different kinds of movement, different regimes for controlling, governing and enabling movement, and different experiences of movement (Adey, 2006; Merriman, 2012a)? Put bluntly, what happens to the social, cultural, political and economic geographies of different senses of movement and stillness if we assert that everything is in motion? It is this concern – presented in terms of the disruption of universally ‘common-sense’, realist understandings of differentiated movements (on realism and mobilities studies, see Sheller, 2014b) – which appears to motivate Cresswell’s (2014) suggestion that:

While it is the case that the world is always in motion at a molecular level, it still presents plenty of immobilities at both experiential and political levels. Molecular vibrations are not much comfort, I expect, to Palestinians who cannot walk through the wall that has been built between their homes and their farmland. Immobilities (and indeed time-spaces) such as these cannot be wished away with a theoretical wand. (Cresswell, 2014: 719)

Cresswell is, here, replying to my own discussion of how ‘molecular mobilities’ might be seen to underpin the unfolding of events, subjectivities and spaces; a proposition that was in part driven by a desire to ‘challenge the *a priori* positioning of space and time as *the* primordial, ontological vectors, grounds or measures of extension through and in relation to which movement, life and events unfold’ (Merriman, 2012a: 2; see also Merriman, 2012b). Critics frequently suggest that celebrations of the vibrations and incessant movements comprising the world may divert our attention away from the diverse political practices underpinning the production and regulation of mobilities (Cresswell, 2001, 2010). However, to say that the world is in constant flux and movement does not mean that we are arguing that vibrant and molecular mobilities are uniform, linear and uncontrolled, that molecular mobilities do not generate effects and affects of stillness, or that they are more significant than movements registered as perceptible, molar mobilities (Merriman, 2012b). Movements generate diverse and vibrant affects, rhythms, forces, ontologies and effects of stillness and solidity (Bissell, 2010; Bissell & Fuller, 2011). Movements have different speeds, magnitudes, qualities, and affective force and resonance.

The Israeli wall which Cresswell enrolls as a concrete example of a fixed and solid barrier clearly does restrict Palestinian embodied mobilities – forming part of a complex network of Israeli infrastructures that includes bypass roads, settlements, and check-points

designed to ‘secure’ Israeli occupied territories and prevent the movement of suicide bombers – but it also generates, enables and embodies distinctive movements, rhythms and affects which have political resonance and significance (Till et al., 2013: 56). In one sense, the wall is mobile, for although possessing molar stability – *appearing* to be fixed – it has a molecular mobility, as it very slowly degrades over time and moves through cultural and political discourses and imaginations. What’s more, the wall has the potential to move, and may well be removed:

The wall appears permanent, but is actually made up of prefabricated modules that have been dropped into place by crane without deep foundations; in the same manner that they have been laid, they can also be extracted. While not to diminish the present distress caused to Palestinians, or the unpleasant tendency of such “temporary” structures to endure, it is important to realize that, as a structure, the wall can come down. (Till et al., 2014: 56)

Complex movements resulted in the construction of the barrier, but rather than simply restrict or prevent mobilities, the wall has generated and reshaped both Palestinian and Israeli mobilities, leading to a diverse array of both expected and unexpected, planned and unplanned movements, flows and resistances. Of course, these movements are regulated according to what is moving and who is moving, and the wall has clearly prevented movements that matter to Palestinians separated from their land, workplaces, friends and families. Nevertheless, resistive movements do occur. Palestinian anti-wall protestors hold regular protests along the route, resulting in clashes with Israeli forces, and in November 2014 activists succeeded in not-only scaling part of the wall with ladders (Lewis, 2014), but also in knocking a hole in one section to mark the twenty-fifth anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall (Sabin, 2014). Images of the wall travel far-and-wide, and the barrier has become ‘the setting for art installations, films, tourism, and activist events’ (Till et al., 2014: 55), with the British political campaigner and comedian Mark Thomas attempting to walk the route of the wall (Thomas, 2011), and prominent international artists (including British graffiti artist Banksy) painting the wall (Till et al., 2014). The mobilities of international artists, wall ‘tourists’, Israeli security forces, protestors, and Palestinian farmers are all in some senses shaped – although in radically different ways – by this seemingly static wall, illustrating how the wall physically, imaginatively, affectively, and politically ‘moves’ and affords movements. Walls are ‘mobility infrastructures’ as much as ‘infrastructures of immobility’,

and they are as important as bypass roads to Israeli state security and political strategies (see Selwyn, 2001). Of course, roads and walls also register affectively in a diverse array of other ways. Following the anthropologist Kathleen Stewart, cultural geographers could usefully approach roads, for example, as ‘emergent assemblage[s]’ with ‘a mixed ontological status’, being ‘a multi-scalar, multi-modal, aesthetic and kinaesthetic, momentary or long-enduring composite of elements charged with potentiality’ (Stewart, 2014: 549-550).

#### **IV Mobility: a Life**

As Tim Cresswell so eruditely outlined in his landmark book *On the Move*, movement and mobility are central to both everyday life and academic enquiry, whether we are talking about molecular movements, embodied gestures and practices, transport systems, or global and trans-national forces and flows (Cresswell, 2006). In my first progress report, I discussed the growing body of work on elite mobilities, including those of skilled migrants, international students, academics, and the super-rich (Merriman, 2015; Jöns, 2014; Jöns et al., 2015). As academics, we are all-too familiar with the different mobile practices associated with our employment sector, whether these are the movements entailed in conference attendance, short-term research trips and sabbatical visits, international exchanges, or migration to seek employment. Until recently, geographers have only really paid indirect attention to how those mobilities and movements shape ‘us’ as academics. At the forefront of this work have been postcolonial and feminist scholars who actively theorise and reflect upon their own positionality, mobility and biographies, and their work has highlighted the important role that mobilities play in the personal identities and trajectories of scholars. The passing of the prominent black sociologist and cultural theorist Stuart Hall in February 2014 prompted me to think not only about the important influence of his work (and that of the CCCS and Marxist cultural studies) to the development of cultural geography (see Jackson, 1989; Mitchell 2000), but also the centrality of issues of movement and mobility to Hall’s life and work, ranging from his migration from Jamaica to Oxford on a Rhodes scholarship in the 1950s, to his critical thinking around questions of hybridity, relationality, multiculturalism, the Left, and identity in the 1990s (Akomfrah, 2013). While surprised by the absence of editorial comment or obituaries for Stuart Hall in cultural geography journals – especially given his influence on cultural geography, and in sharp contrast with the extensive coverage of his life and work in cultural studies and other disciplines (e.g. Blackburn, 2014; Morley & Schwarz, 2014; Grossberg, 2015) – I turned to an essay entitled ‘Travelling thoughts’ written

by Doreen Massey for the volume marking Hall's retirement from the Open University (Massey, 2000). Massey positions movement, journeys and relations at the heart of her approach to space and place, demonstrating the differential political and economic geographies that result from processes of globalisation, imperialism and travel; all of which she illustrates through a critical reflection on her regular commute by car with Stuart Hall from North London to the Open University in Milton Keynes. While the chapter can be seen to form part of Massey's ongoing theorisation of places as dynamic, contested, products of political, economic, social and physical forces (cf. Massey, 2005), it also provides a convenient lens through which to approach key elements of Hall's work. In his attentiveness to the complex relational cultural-politics of imperialism, race, globalisation, hybridity, diaspora and identity, Hall (like Paul Gilroy) was in many senses a theorist of mobility and mobilisation, while also highlighting the 'emplacing' of cultural and political practices and relations. If, as John Urry and others have stated, the emergence of mobility studies reflects the ascendance of particular strands of non-essentialist, post-colonial, post-structuralist and feminist thinking, including 'a focus on issues of identity, embodiment, performance, subjectivity, [and] transnational migration' (Merriman, 2007: 5), then Hall could rightly be considered an important – though, perhaps, unwitting – mobility theorist, alongside mobility scholars such as Cresswell, Sheller and Urry, and critical thinkers such as Bauman, Castells, Clifford, Deleuze, Gilroy, Merleau-Ponty, and Simmel. Mobility theories come in many forms and from many disciplines, and this diversity, multi-disciplinarity and plurality is an important hallmark of this rapidly expanding field.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> The Oxford English Dictionary traces the etymology of 'cruise' to the seventeenth century Dutch term *kruisen* (to cruise), Spanish *cruzar*, Portuguese *cruzar*, and French *croiser* (OED, 2014).

<sup>2</sup> The Oxford English Dictionary also explains how in slang it may refer to movement for specific functions, as in the practice of cruising on foot or by car for casual sex, especially homosexual sex (OED, 2014).

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