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# Mobilities II: Still

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## Abstract

This second report on mobilities considers some key themes in mobilities research by (mostly) geographers over the last two years or so. Following on from some of the themes outlined in the first report, this report explores accounts of historical geographies of mobility in order to put claims to ‘newness’ in perspective. Second, it surveys how mobility research has influenced methodology focusing, in particular, on ‘mobile ethnography’. Third, the report looks at the blossoming arena or research on the forms of waiting, stillness and stuckness that have become an important component of our understanding of mobility. The conclusion reflects on the continuing importance of the politics of mobility and urges greater consideration of the mobility of ideas alongside people and things.

## Keywords

historical geography, mobile methods, mobility, politics of mobility, stillness

## I Introduction

In my first report on the theme of mobilities I focused on catching up with the emergence of what some have called a ‘new mobilities paradigm’ (Cresswell, 2011a). Of necessity, that review was wide-ranging both in terms of publication date and in disciplinary breadth. It also focused on the potential bridges to be built with a longer tradition of transport geography, a conversation which has been ongoing (Bissell et al., 2011; Shaw and Sidaway, 2011). The contact point between transport geography and mobilities research still appears to be at its most creative in accounts of the uses of travel time – most recently in the world of the ‘passenger’ (Bissell et al., 2011; Budd, 2011; Jain, 2011). In contrast, this report is focused almost entirely on geography and on the last couple of years. Most of the writing I report on here has a self-conscious awareness of its contribution to the now established mobilities turn – a turn which continues to provide a rich seam of material

(Adey and Bissell, 2010). In this report I focus on three themes that emerged in the previous report: the need to take histories of mobility seriously; the innovations of mobile methods; and, finally, the necessity of thinking about forms of stillness as part of the theorization of movement.

## II Historical geographies of mobility

There is always a danger with any body of work that uses the word ‘new’ as often as mobilities research does that the longer histories of both bodies of writing and events in the world will be lost. In the first of these reports I underlined the importance of recognizing long-standing

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work on forms of mobility – particularly in transport geography. It is also important to acknowledge the longer histories of mobility in the world. Mobility was not invented by the mobile phone. It is encouraging, therefore, to see a number of engagements with different dimensions of the historical geographies of mobility.

One of the most interesting areas of inquiry in historical mobilities has been at the micro scale of the body. Just as ethnographers of the present have looked into the ways in which differently marked bodies move in relation to notions such as gender and race, so historical geographers have added temporal depth to these studies by illuminating the processes through which bodily mobilities have been produced. There is now, for instance, a small but significant literature on geographies of dance and choreography that has continued to grow (Dewsbury, 2011; Merriman, 2010, 2011). Sport is another arena in which forms of mobility have long been studied, engineered and regulated. Gilbert uses Bourdieu's theorizations of bodily practice to explore the contrasting bodily compartments of the 1919 Wimbledon tennis final between Suzanne Lenglen and Dorothea Lambert Chambers, a competition that seemingly revealed contrasts between an older and new streamlined forms of femininity (Gilbert, 2011). Gilbert carefully accounts for approaches to movement and dress that reflects other work on women's bodies on the move in the early 20th century. DeLyser, for instance, explores the world of female aviators such as Amelia Earhart and Louise Thaden that emerged at almost the same time as new ways of playing tennis for women (DeLyser, 2011). She shows how new experiences of moving were linked to new subjectivities and new politics through the embodiment of flying in the first few decades of the 20th century in the United States. This bodily production of 'airmindedness' was occurring on a mass scale in the United Kingdom as earth-bound air-scouts (possible future pilots) were

encouraged to inhabit the air through coordinated bodily mimicry and kinaesthetics (Adey, 2011a). Reading these accounts together it seems that there was a wider culture of new bodily mobilities emerging in the early 20th century that linked dance, sport, youth movements and work, among other sites of bodily movement.

Other historical work on mobility traces the role of past mobilities in the present constitution of modern notions of security, identity and citizenship. Reactions to vagrants in early modern Europe, for instance, can be traced through legal constructions of the right to mobility in the contemporary United States as well as the invention of the passport as a form of 'identity' (Cresswell, 2011b). Interpretation of legal documents lies at the centre of Hague's analysis of the historical curtailment of black mobilities in the United States undermining their citizenship insofar as citizens are, in part, defined by their ability to move. Through an examination of four key Supreme Court cases 1857–1946 Hague reveals how the unwritten 'right to mobility' has often been a right to *white* mobility which is logically linked to the immobilities of African Americans in the United States (Hague, 2010).

Another way in which citizenship gets linked to mobility is through practices of travel and exploration in educational institutions. Just as air-scouts in 1920s Britain were learning 'airmindedness' through the micromotions of the body, so students involved in Commonwealth expeditions from Dover to Delhi by bus in the 1960s were being taught the virtues of contact, discipline and hospitality in the hope of making them better citizens of the British Commonwealth (Craggs, 2011).

Historical geographies of mobility such as these provide instances of the ways in which the act of moving, whether at a micro scale or across continents, are tied into sets of meanings that go on to play a role in the production of future mobilities. Moving, meaning and bodily practice are entwined in ways that travel through history.

### III Mobile methodologies

In the previous report I mentioned the rise of interest in new kinds of methods that are suited to both actual mobility in the world and new theoretical approaches to mobility. Several edited collections had been published exploring the potential of mobile methods (Büscher et al., 2010; Fincham et al., 2009). The last two years have seen this potential come to fruition. Ethnography, in particular, has gone mobile. Crudely put, ethnography has moved from a deep engagement with a single site, to analysis of several sites at once (multisite ethnography), to ethnography that moves along with, or besides, the object of research (mobile ethnography). This is not to suggest, however, that the latter has replaced the former, but, rather, supplemented it. The object of research is often people but may also be animals, objects or ideas.

Much of the innovation has occurred at the micro scale of bodily or daily mobilities rather than systematic analysis of mobility systems (D'Andrea et al., 2011). Researchers interested in mobility have been at the forefront of the use of video technology in order to capture the movements of bodies in a variety of spaces (Garrett, 2011). One set of bodies are those of cyclists weaving through other forms of traffic. Spinney uses a variety of video techniques, including head-mounted cameras, in order to drive home the importance of being mobile with the subjects of research and then being able to analyse mobility in controlled settings when reviewing the footage where instant decisions and the active negotiation of space can be analysed (Spinney, 2011). Elephants provide an entirely different set of problems. Jamie Lorimer examined the world of elephants as moving animals that evade attempts to stabilize them – either with fences or with forms of representation that remain static. A mobile subject demands a mobile method and Lorimer, like Spinney, turns to moving image methodology as a way of both witnessing human/non-human interactions

and encouraging a ‘micropolitics of curiosity’ (Lorimer, 2010: 252).

Not all mobile methods are necessarily high-tech. The challenge of moving subjects has inspired a range of creative practices. Walking continues to attract the interest of mobilities scholars (Lorimer, 2011; Pinder, 2011; Smith, 2010). As well as being an object of scholarship it has also been used methodologically. Myers, for instance, evokes narratives of place for refugees and asylum seekers in the UK through the construction of performative narrative walking practices that engage refugees as they walk (Myers, 2011). Phil Smith, a practising artist and theorist, reflects on the continuing salience of the situationist *dérive* for contemporary artistic interventions that focus on walking to resist and play with the established metanarratives of contemporary spaces. Here (as in the work of Myers) the walk is both an object of research and kind of interventionist methodology which opens up questions about space and place (Smith, 2010).

Ethnography also continues to inform new kinds of work on transport infrastructures in order to show how such spaces are inhabited and made lively through use. In a fascinating paper on the new Metro system in Delhi, Butcher considers how the new system is packaged as a symbol of cosmopolitan globalism. While the older railways above ground are characterized by inherited habitual cacophony, the new sleek Metro is regulated space where spitting, eating strong-smelling food and begging are all banned. Using a range of ethnographic methods, including travelling the whole system regularly, Butcher explores how young, relatively well-off people in the city use this system as a technology of sociality which allows them to ‘hang out’ in ways not afforded by older infrastructures (Butcher, 2011).

Things also move. ‘Follow the thing’ methodologies continue to trace a variety of objects in their travels. Pfaff, for instance, follows a

single Siemens CF 62 mobile phone as it is passed from owner to owner in Zanzibar. She shows an understanding of things in motion as well as the networks of people, other objects (such as SIM cards) and telecommunications networks that the object facilitates and is facilitated by. The mobile phone is a fluid technology linked to a deeper history of trading practices and networks of Swahili trading history. This phone passes from a Canadian woman to a woman in her host family to her brother, who is a mobile phone trader. The phone is then bought by a young man who is leaving home to live and work in Dar es Salaam, and ends up in a shop in a part of city where mobile phones are traded. In the end it is almost redundant, its journey over, still (Pfaff, 2010).

#### IV Still/stuck/stopped

Usually, it does not take long for the academically inclined to start to explore the seeming opposite of what is currently fashionable. This has been true of mobilities research with a considerable amount of work emerging on themes of waiting and stillness. In some ways, of course, the mobilities turn is a result of a dissatisfaction with the valorization of forms of stillness – rootedness and the sedentary. The new turn to stillness is, in this sense, surprising. Stillness in work informed by the mobilities turn, however, is not suggesting a return to a discipline based on boundedness and rootedness but rather to an alertness to how stillness is thoroughly incorporated into the practices of moving.

Anyone who travels a lot knows that this entails waiting in line, sitting with a book, bored or in anticipation. Then when we travel we often travel sitting down and strapped in. This has not escaped the attention of mobilities scholars. David Bissell and Gillian Fuller's edited collection *Stillness in a Mobile World* is a notable collection of serious, engaged papers that add a consideration of stillness to the mobilities turn. In their introduction, Bissell and Fuller tell

the story of the house of Yung Wu. This house, in the city of Chongqing in China was in the way of the rapid hyperdevelopment that is sweeping China. The authorities planned to build a six-storey shopping mall over what had once been a street selling snacks. Yung Wu's house had become a 'nail-house' – a term used in China to describe such obstacles to development. Stillness – staying put – had become an obstacle to the swirling flow of the new China (Bissell and Fuller, 2011). This illustration of obdurate stillness is just one of the ways in which stillness is mobilized in this introduction. Stillness is everywhere: 'a queuer in line at the bank; a moment of focus; a passenger in the departure lounge; a suspension before a sneeze; a stability of material forms that assemble; a passport photo' (Bissell and Fuller, 2011: 3). Stillness, they suggest, is often seen as a wasted moment or a kind of emptiness and inactivity – all coded negatively. The introduction and the chapters in the book seek to question and do away with these codings providing a nuanced account of stillness. This is not a return to a metaphysics of sedentarism but an insistence that those of us interested in mobility include an awareness of stillness as part of our inquiry. The chapters in the book cover a range of forms of stillness including those imposed by air raids (Adey, 2011b), the stilling of action in photography (Lisle, 2011) and the still, quiet moments of religious retreats (Conradson, 2011). Martin considers the often enforced stillness of undocumented migrants who are locked into containers and refrigerated trucks in order to strip stillness (as experienced by elites) of connotations of cosmopolitan authenticity. While the elite have their capsules in gated communities and business lounges where they are protected from the troubling turmoil of a mobile world, people being trafficked are locked into capsules of a very different sort (Martin, 2011b). Further reflection on these less comfortable forms of stillness is necessary in a world marked by detention camps, refugee camps and any number

of spaces of exception through which some forms of global and regional mobility are regulated.

Forms of stillness and stuckness pervade Philip Vannini's work on the kinds of community built around the need to constantly negotiate the extensive ferry system of British Columbia, Canada. In his extensive ethnography he has creatively engaged with the processes of waiting that forms a central part of lives spent on ferries (Vannini, 2011a). He shows how the desire of some people to live an island life with its associated conceptions of boundedness and 'remove' from the mainland have to negotiate complex mobilities in order to be so removed and insulated from the perceived hypermobile life of nearby Vancouver. Vannini's work is based on mobile ethnography – many journeys and hours spent in 'line ups' (queues) (Vannini, 2011b, 2011c, 2011d). It reveals lives of considerable stillness formed from the need to move through the network provided by the ferries – a network in which forms of community are built through travelling (and waiting) together.

Other moments of stuckness occur in dramatic ways when infrastructural mobilities break down (Graham, 2010). During the 2010 conference of the Association of American Geographers in Washington, DC, hundreds of geographers were stuck as European airspace was shut down due to the ash being spewed into the air by the Icelandic volcano Eyjafjallajökull. Like many other people, I spent time thinking about the paper or editorial I would write as a result of the experience. You could almost hear the brains humming with ideas about how to make this enforced stasis productive. Sure enough, the following year saw an eruption of accounts of the geographies resulting from this event. I wonder how much of this is because it was flights between Europe and North America that were most affected and that it happened to erupt at the same time as the major geography conference. While I am sure there will be plenty written in the Anglo-American world about

recent events in Japan it is likely that it will be less instant and less personal.

A special issues of *Mobilities* was dedicated to ways of thinking about logistical calamity and the eruption of turbulence in the world system (Birtchnell and Büscher, 2011). The papers in the collection take a wide array of approaches to this spectacular instance of stuckness. Some papers reflect on the systematic links between ash, planes, logistics and geopolitics which are productive of this particular failure in a system which is never closed or knowable – a system that produces its own turbulence and threat (Adey and Anderson, 2011; Adey et al., 2011). Others describe the events as a warning about the fragility of air travel and the vulnerability of seemingly secure systems that surround modern mobilities, secure systems that are connected to the reduced ability to travel by other means, as many of us in Washington, DC, discovered (Guiver and Jain, 2011).

At another scale there was the issue of waiting in the USA as it was experienced at a personal level. How did people manage with the enforced comparative stillness? Ole Jensen's reflections on being stuck in the USA at conferences and the ways the news of the breakdown in mobility infrastructures moved around the Omni Hotel in Washington, DC, provide a subtle insight into the poetics and politics of being stuck. Some (reasonably well-paid academics with full-time jobs and partners who were able to arrange childcare back home) were able to think of this as an extended holiday or adventure while others (students at their first overseas conference) were reduced to tears due to their lack of both financial resources and the kinds of confidence that come from frequent international travel (Jensen, 2011). Once again, stillness was experienced in dramatically different ways.

One place where kinds of stillness happen, for some more than others, is at borders. Borders are a key consideration for research into mobilities. Commonsense notions of borders still point towards lines around nation states delineated on



maps or marked with walls, fences and gates. Clearly some borders are very much still like this. It is also clear, however, that borders are multiplying and becoming more dispersed in a mobile and globalized world. Mobilities scholars, when thinking about the ways mobilities are resisted and regulated, need to be involved in the rethinking of borders. A theme issue of *Environment and Planning D* began to address this issue. In the introduction, Chris Rumford addressed this issue of borders popping up in a multitude of local sites throughout our lives (Rumford, 2010). The papers in the issue cover a diverse array of border issues ranging from the regulation of global mobility (Andrijasevic and Walters, 2010) to the daily experience of life in a border zone (Bialasiewicz and Minca, 2010). Borders are one way of filtering acceptable mobilities and threatening ones – of deciding which travellers are trusted. Van Houtum's paper traces how the process of bordering has progressively been 'outsourced' so that the process of bordering increasingly takes place before what we might normally have thought of as a border is reached (van Houtum, 2010). This is particularly true of the UK Border agency that Vaughan-Williams argues is increasingly distributed and mobile and is just as likely to be encountered in an invisible, electronic form as it is at immigration (Vaughan-Williams, 2010).

The theme of borders in a mobile world is developed elsewhere in different ways. It is not only mobile people that are regulated at borders but also vectors of disease. Budd et al. confirm the need to reconceptualize borders in relation to global threats such as SARS and N1H1 influenza. These pathogens, they argue, are symptomatic of air transport liberalization and forms of infectious disease governance. They show how, in order to combat the mobilities of pathogens, borders are both outsourced (so that sick people never get on a plane in the first place) and replicated internally at local and regional airports that become a form of distributed border – not a line but a series of points or nodes (Budd et

al., 2011). Borders have also become sites for artistic interventions that question the forms of mobility that happen or are prevented from happening at border sites. Louise Amoore and Alexander Hall explore the installation art at the US/Mexico border that encourages an active enchanting encounter with the habitual and mundane encounter with security – by introducing the undecideable and not-known into the border landscape (Amoore and Hall, 2010).

Finally, there is a more abiding and long-term sense of waiting and boredom in the work of Craig Jeffrey in his long-term ethnography of lower-middle-class, educated but unemployed men in the north Indian city of Meerut. He examines 'situations in which people have been compelled to wait for years, generations or whole lifetimes, not as a result of their voluntary movement through modern spaces but because they are durably unable to realize their goals' (Jeffrey, 2010: 3). In this process of long-term limbo he describes the construction of forms of masculinity centred on 'hanging out' but also the constitution of a micropolitics emerging from and enabled by waiting for endlessly deferred social and political empowerment.

## V Conclusions

Work on mobilities over the past several years has continued to fulfil some of the expectations of early programmatic statements. Work has ranged across scales from the microgeographies of the body to travel across the globe, often in interlinked ways. It has filled the supposed dead time of movement (whether daily commuting or transnational migration) with creative liveliness. It has explored both historical and contemporary mobilities in terms of both practice and meaning. Perhaps most importantly, scholars have continued to insist on the role of power in the production of mobilities and role of mobilities in the constitution of power. Even in a collection of papers on passengers which emphasize the creative ways in which passengers employ travel



time, there is a paper to remind us that some passengers – undocumented migrants – are locked in containers and inside trucks and that whatever creativity this involves (and it surely does) it is not necessarily to be celebrated (Martin, 2011a).

The various ends of a kinetic hierarchy continue to be explored. At the top end the lives of the kinetic elite have been examined through a thoughtful analysis of frequent flyer programmes and the ways in which they structure the experience of aeromobility. Gössling and Nilsson connect the practices and infrastructures of elite mobility showing how moving is connected to social status and how the practices of the frequent fliers feed back into infrastructural provision (Gössling and Nilsson, 2010). The negotiation of practice and structural provision is also at the heart of the lives of the homeless. Jocoy and Del Casino (2010) trace how homeless people in Long Beach, California, negotiate their daily lives moving between moments of extreme exclusion and other moments of inclusion as they interface with transport infrastructure and welfare services. Their paper is an excellent example of the benefits of thinking about usually disparate arenas (daily travel patterns, infrastructures, welfare provision, etc.) together – a characteristic of much of the best work in mobilities research. Reading these two papers alongside each other, we see not only how mobility is part of the lives of people at two ends of a social hierarchy, but how microscale movements are connected to institutional and infrastructural forms of support regardless of whether you are collecting air-miles or are trying to negotiate another day of homelessness.

Most mobilities research to date has focused on the movements of people and things and the relations between them. The methodologies of mobile ethnography and ‘follow the thing’ have developed into sophisticated tools over a comparatively short period of time. There is also a clear sense of the role of mobility in the production of social hierarchies. Other areas are less

developed. The ‘new mobilities paradigm’ has been promoted as an integrated approach to the mobility of people, things and ideas across all scales. The least developed of these has been the mobility of ideas. One of the most exciting papers over the last few years brought a mobilities approach to the older research arena of policy transfer. Eugene McCann borrows the notion that the movement of people is not ‘empty’ but filled with liveliness – a notion that has been richly developed in the study of travel practices. He argues that policies also need to be studied as they move in order to reveal the practices of knowledge transfer from place to place and to reveal how things change in transit (McCann, 2010). McCann adeptly sets out a research agenda on the interface of mobilities research and work on urban policy as it travels around the globe.

If there is to be more work like McCann’s (and I hope that there is) then it will benefit from taking all of the themes developed in this report seriously. First, work on the mobility of ideas (as with anything else) needs to be attentive to the histories of such movement, exploring how ideas have moved in the past as well as in the present. Second, a variety of methodologies need to be employed, including travelling with ideas. This will involve moving with both people (urban planners, policy advocates, etc. in the case of policy transfer) and things (books, software, planning documents, etc.). Indeed, mobile methods will have to find ways to consistently pay attention to the interactions between ideas, people and things as they move and take hold (or fail to take hold). Finally, such work will have to pay attention to moments when the movement of ideas gets stuck, is made still, or is forced to wait for receptive audiences. There will always be points of friction and obduracy in the networked worlds of mobilities where, for a while at least, stillness dominates.

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