

## **A report on our mobility**

Theron Schmidt, Visiting Correspondent, PSi Fluid States Melbourne

*Note: In preparing this report, I thought about the etymology of the word mobility and its usage in the late 17<sup>th</sup> and early 18<sup>th</sup> centuries to describe the emergence of a new social class, 'the great mobility' or 'mob', which emerged as a consequence of urbanization. I wanted to return to this use of term as a collective noun to describe a community that is defined by being in movement and by its habitation of public spaces that make possible its emergence. Its original usage carries pejorative connotations of 'fickle', 'common', and 'excitable', which we might revisit in valuing a concept of community that is provisional, transient, and without fixed form. In the context of our gathering on this continent, I would also acknowledge the meaning that the word 'mob' carries within the dialectical English spoken by members of Aboriginal communities to refer to an extended family or language group. I wish to honour and respect the deep kinship structures and connections to place that are conveyed by that usage.*

Our mobility is silent in the morning traffic, our heads turning slowly in the still air.<sup>1</sup>

Our mobility is adrift. Our mobility could be anywhere.<sup>2</sup>

Our mobility has many names and can only remember some of them, but it's trying.<sup>3</sup>

Our mobility is implacated. It weaves itself into the fabric of a place. It is willing to bend and fold, to shrink and extend, until it finds a way of inhabiting that exactly mimics the room it is in. Our mobility is entangled. Our mobility crosses the line, and then goes back again; wherever there is a line you will find our mobility crossing, in their uniforms, all around the city, crossing over and back again.<sup>4</sup>

---

1 Chris Braddock, *Repeating Silence* << PASSAGES >>

2 Serena Chalker, *Every/Nowhere*, performance

3 beta common, *Petition*, participatory artwork

4 Benjamin Cittadini, Ceri Hann, Fiona Hillary and Shanti Sumartojo, *Crossings* << PASSAGES >>

Our mobility travels by boat up the river. Our mobility rides the tram through the city. Our mobility are creek-walkers,<sup>5</sup> Frisbee-chasers,<sup>6</sup> salt-carriers.<sup>7</sup> Our mobility live on their bicycles and travel for free.<sup>8</sup> Our mobility is unashamed in its use of air travel.

Our mobility is always in movement, but the most important movements we make are across registers of experience.<sup>9</sup> Our mobility assembles itself in a variety of shapes and forms: a line-up of experts; a working party; a Q and A; an artist's talk; a roundtable; a dinner party; a crammed mass struggling to see; a one-to-one conversation conducted in transit; a conversation by emails sent during stolen time; a few precious words during a coffee break or 'smoko'.<sup>10</sup> In each configuration some people hold power and privilege and authority, and there is someone else who has knowledge or experience that would completely challenge everything that is being said, but who is silenced by the structure. But our mobility keeps changing the configuration so that who is in which of these roles changes from setting to setting.

Our mobility knows where its home is. Our mobility makes music from the rustle of leaves and the beating of sticks.<sup>11</sup>

Our mobility sleepwalks through the city, active in its dreaming state.<sup>12</sup> Our mobility wants to know: where is the blind flâneur? The psychogeographer in a wheelchair?<sup>13</sup> Our mobility makes theatre for passing trains and charts its course against the current.<sup>14</sup>

---

5 Brogan Bunt, Lucas Ihlein, and Kim Williams, *Walking Upstream: Waterways of the Illawarra* << TRACES >>

6 Paul Gazzola and Nadia Cusimano in association with PlanB, *Town Crossings* << TRACES >>

7 Mick Douglas, *Sal de Sal* << TRACES >>

8 Artist as Family, 'The Art of Free Travel', performance-lecture

9 Jondi Keane and Kaya Barry, *Pan & Zoom* << TRACES >>

10 Monique Redmond, *Smoko* (New Zealand slang for a work break), participatory art project

11 Aunty Joy Murphy, *Welcome to Country* << ASSEMBLY >>

12 Rachel Fensham, 'Dance, Sleeping and Surrender: Lost in Translation' << ASSEMBLY >>

13 Dee Heddon, 'Walking Interconnections: Performing Conversations of Sustainability' << ASSEMBLY >>

Our mobility lives in the country that invented bread.<sup>15</sup>

Our mobility doesn't worry if no one knows they are dancing.<sup>16</sup> Our mobility is unsteady in its belonging.<sup>17</sup> Our mobility practices being spectators, and practices being witnesses, in the hope that it will be able to tell the difference between the two.<sup>18</sup>

Our mobility is curious. Our mobility is easily distracted. Our mobility will stop in its tracks to watch a figure swinging her arms in visual rhythm with the room.<sup>19</sup> Our mobility will gather to watch food scraps be turned into fertiliser.<sup>20</sup> Our mobility are the tourists of all tourists on the tour of all tours.<sup>21</sup> Our mobility sends you text messages that helpfully get you lost, and it is the garbled voice you hear at the end of the phone when you call for customer support.<sup>22</sup>

Our mobility is the last avant-garde. Our mobility has been fighting for years, and wants our struggle to be represented, but not to stand in for everyone else's struggle; our mobility isn't sure who should be able to say 'our' and what name they should call themselves; our mobility doesn't want to be an inspiration; our mobility knows that all of us are constrained in our mobility.<sup>23</sup>

---

14 Fiona Wilkie, "What our mobility makes us": Resisting, Registering and Making' << ASSEMBLY >>

15 Bruce Pascoe, 'Hunters and Gatherers or communist share croppers? An analysis of the real Aboriginal economy in 1778' << ASSEMBLY >>

16 Julie-Anne Long, 'Val, The Invisible: Walking Whilst Working and Other Invisible Mobilities' << ASSEMBLY >>

17 Justine Shih Pearson, 'Unsteady Belongings: Failures to Mob' << ASSEMBLY >>

18 Caroline Wake, 'Seeking Asylum, Staging Withdrawal' << ASSEMBLY >>

19 Shelley Lasica, *The Design Plot*, site-responsive performance

20 Kim Donaldson, *Technopia Tours - Working Melbourne* << PASSAGES >>

21 Bill Aitchison, *The Tour of All Tours* << PASSAGES >>

22 Jason Maling and Robert Walton, *Dark Telephony*, telematic performance

23 Roundtable: Eddie Paterson, Bree Hadley, Janice Florence, Yumi Yumimare, and Lachlan MacDowall: 'The Last Avant-Garde? Disability arts and (rethinking) mobility' << ASSEMBLY >>

Our mobility wears suits, and our mobility hates suits. Our mobility is literally beyond the pale.<sup>24</sup> Our mobility does lots of things literally. We literally lay out a welcome, putting our bodies on the floor.<sup>25</sup> Our mobility puts wheels on everything. Nothing is immovable. Even our dinner whirls and spins through the room.

Our mobility will occasionally tolerate someone who claims to speak on behalf of the group, using words like 'we' and 'our mobility', but our mobility knows full well that these words are an invention of the speaker, that there is no *one* mobility, that no one can speak on behalf of it in anything other than a fiction, and that someone else will no doubt come along shortly with an entirely different story to tell.

Our mobility explores precarity as activism.<sup>26</sup> Our mobility conjures a sea of stories that rolls in salty tears.<sup>27</sup> Our mobility knows what it is to be surveilled and doesn't want to go through that again. Our mobility wants to know just what kind of island this is.<sup>28</sup>

Our mobility is practiced in the monologic, the dialogic, and also the travelogic. Our mobility delivers reports though not in the service of the magisterial centre, but as a provisional shout-out, a sideways turn of the head, creating not an official repository but instead a momentary pause, like what happens when one person stops on the street to look at nothing in particular, and then a few other people unconsciously slow down, and then a few more people stop to look at what the first people have been looking at, and now there really is an event to be looked-at but that event is the pause itself.

---

24 Glenn D'Cruz, 'Migrant Mobilities: Cruel Optimism and the Case of AJ D'Cruz', performance-lecture

25 Mark Harvey, *Welcome Mat*, performance series

26 Sarah Balkin, 'An Anecdotal Account of Transnational Performance Scholarship' << ASSEMBLY >>

27 Jazmin Llana, 'Journeys across the Philippine archipelago: Co-performative accounts of disaster and resilience' << ASSEMBLY >>

28 Paul Rae, 'Watching Hamlet in the Pacific' << ASSEMBLY >>

Our mobility prefers to call themselves 'boat people'.<sup>29</sup> Our mobility sold their home for a passport.<sup>30</sup> Our mobility can tell you about forced mobility.<sup>31</sup> Our mobility can't remember who are the good ones, the ones with beards or the ones with moustaches.<sup>32</sup> Our mobility insists that people who appear on our stage deserve warmth and welcome.<sup>33</sup>

Our mobility knows that wet wool is harder to knit, especially when that wool is wet with your own blood.<sup>34</sup> Our mobility sweeps up after the coal fires.<sup>35</sup> Our mobility is itself swept up in calculations and mobilisations that are at a scale beyond human comprehension.<sup>36</sup>

Our mobility will build a raft on dry land, and this raft will be a place for dancing, sand-blasted, wind-swept, precarious, held afloat only by song.<sup>37</sup> Our mobility makes spaces where meanings take place. They happen, they occur. But they also *take* place, they inhabit, they occupy.

Our mobility is as interested in disassembly as in assembly. Our mobility gathers together in order to go our separate ways. Our mobility is a dispersed mob. Our mobility invents gestures of divergence and distribution.

This report is one.

---

29 Mammad Aidani, Omid Movafagh, Mike Fard, Mohsen Panahi and Hoda Kazemi, *Finding my City in Your City*

30 Australian Performance Exchange, O-T-D#2 *Origin-Transit-Destination* << TRACES >>

31 Sally Sussman and Annemaree Dalziel, 'Forced Mobility within a Mobile Performance Structure: Australian Performance Exchange's *Origin-Transit-Destination*' << ASSEMBLY >>

32 Australian Performance Exchange, O-T-D#2 *Origin-Transit-Destination* << TRACES >>

33 Mammad Aidani, Omid Movafagh, Mike Fard, Mohsen Panahi and Hoda Kazemi, *Finding my City in Your City* << ASSEMBLY >>

34 Lara Stevens, 'Craftivism and the Menstrual Fluid States of Casey Jenkins' << ASSEMBLY >>

35 Hartmut Veit, 'Mobility of Carbon' << ASSEMBLY >>

36 Maaïke Bleeker, 'Epistemologies of Cargo, Part 2' << ASSEMBLY >>

37 Anthony Pelchen and friends, *Malaysia Australia Raft Project (MARP)*, performance