

Performing Immobility / Protesting Immobility
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Though there is much interest in mobilities as a characteristic of modern, urban, social life today, this is not always matched by attention to immobilities. In this paper, I investigate public space performances designed to draw attention to precisely this counterpoint to current discourses of mobilities – performances about the socially produced immobilities many people with disabilities find as a more fundamental feature of day-to-day life, the fight for mobility, and the freedom found when accommodations for alternative mobilities are made available.

Although public policy is increasingly aligned with a social model of disability, which sees disability as socially constructed through systems, institutions and infrastructure deliberately designed to exclude specific bodies – stairs, curbs, queues and so forth – and although governments in the USA, UK and, to a lesser degree, Australia, New Zealand and other Commonwealth nations, aim to address these inequalities, the experience of immobility is still every-present for many people. This often comes not just from pain, or from impairment, or even from lack of accommodations for alternative mobilities, but from fellow social performers' antipathy to, appropriation of, or destruction of accommodations designed to facilitate access for a range of different bodies in public space, and thus the public sphere.

The archetypal instance of this tension is the antipathy many able bodied people feel towards the provision of disabled parking spaces. I examine a number of protest performances in public space, in which activists present actions to give bystanders, passersby and spectators, as well as antagonistic fellow social performers, a sense of what socially produced immobility feels like. I examine responses to such protest performances, and what they say about the potential social, political and ethical impacts of such protests, in terms of their potential to produce new attitudes to mobility, alternative mobility, and access to alternative modes of mobility.

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Respondent >

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