

## The City as Performative Object Workshop



### Workshop announcement for Students

During this 4-8 day workshop, a group of students/participants explores the city as a space that is produced by its mobilities.

Mobilities, in Esther and Ivar's view, are culturally structured through categorizations like the pedestrian, the cyclist or car driver, to name the most obvious ones.

One possible way to make this process tangible is to engage in hybrid (drag) forms of mobilities: is it possible to be a pedestrian but behave like automobilist or the other way around? If so, what kind of city space does that produce?

During the workshop, we will draw on the theory of the performativity of gender by Judith Butler. We will apply these to the performativity of mobilities in city-space.

Departing from the mobilities-lexicon that Esther and Ivar proposed in their research [<http://www.polakvanbekkum.com/?p=2835>], students/participants will explore (public) city space and play with this theoretical framework. They engage in fieldwork and develop a series of practical experiments in the city.

### Research questions:

- By what means this production takes place?
- What kind of city does it produce?
- When/how becomes this process of production tangible?

### **Learning Objectives**

- To apply a theoretical framework as a starting point for artistic research. (this can be tackled playfully or severely)
- Understanding of the meaning of the concept of "performativity" in various contexts.
- Grasping the difference between the concepts "performative" and "performance" on a theoretical level.
- To grasp and to experience the difference between the concepts "performative" and "performance" on an artistic-practice-based level (through experiments in public space).
- Developing experiments in public space that can be interpreted as "performative" or "performance" (or as a hybrid between both).

### **Possible Structure of a four day workshop (example)**

#### **Day one**

##### theory morning

- Introduction of everybody present. Students share their backgrounds and expectation of the workshop.
- Introduction to Esther and Ivars work
- Introduction to Judith Butler's ideas on the performativity of gender
- Introduction to Ivar and Esther's thoughts on the performativity of the city
- Introduction to the the lexicon lemma:  
Move-Entity;  
Move-Act;  
Move-Category;  
New-Tread and After-Tread

##### practice afternoon

- Observation fieldwork based on The Handbook of Ethological Methods and guided by the lexicon lemma.

#### **Day two**

##### theory morning

- Students will have one hour to work on their fieldwork notes of day one (yesterday's fieldwork), and have feedback from Esther and/or Ivar
- Students will share their fieldwork results, if they feel like it, based on their notes.
- Video moment: 3 cinematographic examples of fluid city experiences:
  - Clip from Inception by Christoffer Nolan
  - Clip from News From home by Chantal Akerman
  - Clip from GoGoGo by Maria Menken
- Introduction of the lemma Move-Drag

##### practice afternoon

- Participatory fieldwork or observation fieldwork guided by the lexicon lemma Move-Drag.

### **Day tree**

#### theory morning

- Students devote one hour to work on their fieldwork notes of day one (yesterday's fieldwork), and have feedback from Esther and/or Ivar
- Students share their fieldwork results, if they feel like it, based on their notes. Possible additions to the lexicon by students are welcomed and written down on the flip over.
- The first 16 minutes of a documentary on Judith Butler.
- The first 16 minutes of a video on How to do Things with Words by Austin.
- Elaboration from Esther Ivar how their work is benefiting from this theoretical framework.
- The remaining time will be devoted to discussing how to organize the tour on day four. Students will need to indicate the spot that they have in mind for day four by the end of this day.
- Two students will take on the job of making an online map for the tour.
- Two students will take on the responsibility of overseeing the morning tour.
- Two students will take on the responsibility of overseeing the afternoon tour.

#### practice afternoon

- Participatory fieldwork or observation fieldwork guided by the students intending to lead to their contribution to the tour on day four.

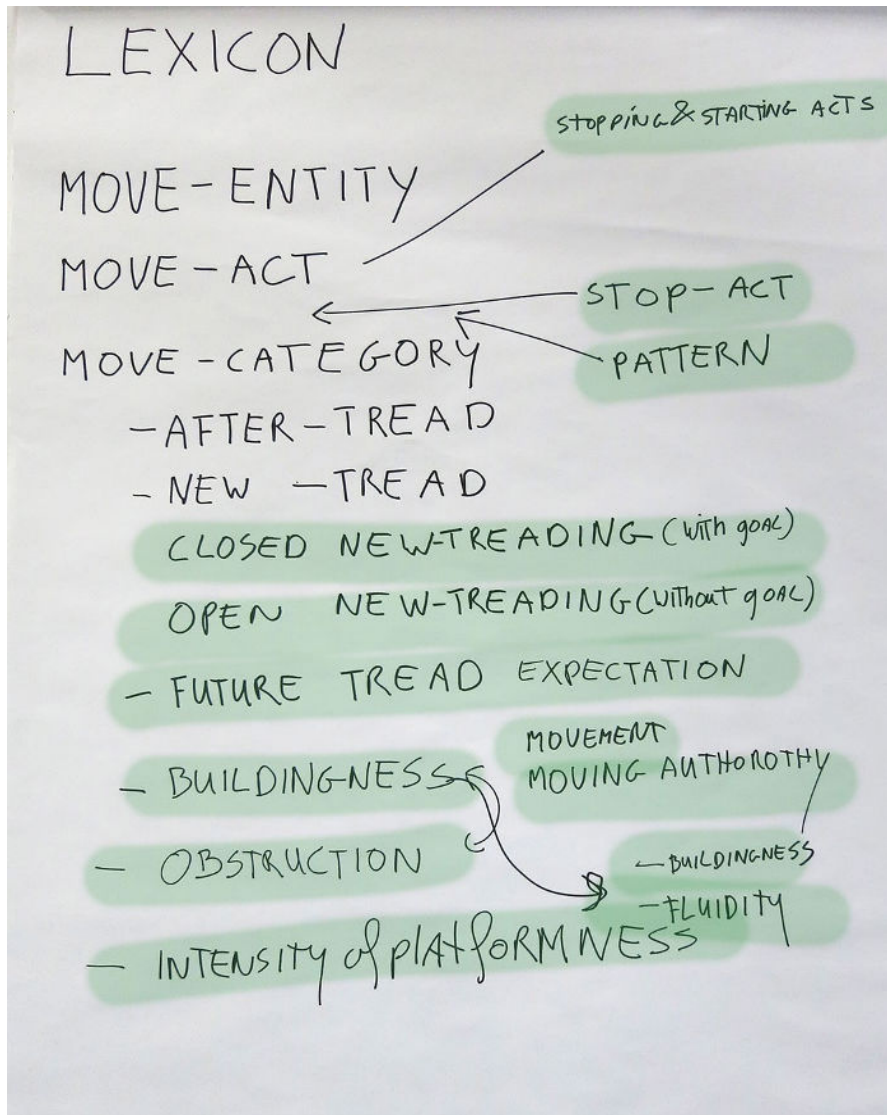
### **Day four**

The last day is going to be devoted to the tour. The students share their experiences in a location of their choice, and presentations may take any form. It is encouraged to do this on the actual spot in public space; students are also allowed to do this elsewhere or even indoors.

**Dear Daan, Daniil, Ho Chi, WJ, Esther, Max, Farah, Anne-Florence, Marlene, Tony, Tammam, Jelle, Luca, Robin and Giammarco,**

Thank you so much for your contributions to The City as Performative Object workshop.

During the workshop the following contributions to the lexicon were made (marked in green) :



Of some of them, I remember who contributed them, for example (intensity of) platformness was provided by WJ, and Ann Flo added the distinction between closed and open New-Treading.

In general, a lot of new insights in New-Treading arose for me. For example, the fact that all kinds of New-Treading for humans (and dogs), at least, seemed scary. People hesitated, needed to stop before diving into New Treading, or deciding to After-Tread after all. Or people needed excuses for New-Tread, like holding useless paper maps in their hands. The dog tended to return to its owner after a short exploration of New-Treading, residing in After-Tread, before daring a second dip into the new.

I liked it when one of you asked whether we needed antonym for buildingness. After suggesting fluidity, you all decided that fluidity as a term was needed, but that you wanted to avoid the binary between the two. They could exist together. This, I think, was very much in line with Butler's objective. Also, Tony's question of whether Ivar and I only used Butler's methodology or if her feminist agenda was also part of our appropriation was valid. I answered, "only the methodology," but the more I think of it now, the more I start to doubt my answer.

Doing the tour on Friday, an idea that came about during a talk between Max and me, your

experiences of the fieldwork became very tangible for me. Your fieldwork contributed to our research objectives in two ways: -during your reports in the PB301 class, and -during the tour on Friday. Besides, the notes some of you send me are of value, and if you want to contribute still some, please do so.

Find below the personalized notes a made about all of you. Feel invited to correct them, before I hand then to the coordinators Marisa (AS) and Erika Bordan (CO and SO)

**Daan** contributed by following the theory in the mornings and did fieldwork. He was focussing on how pedestrians and people on bicycles alternated in the strength of their move-authority. Bike path and footpath are blending here in Spuistraat. Pedestrians block the people on bikes. Only if there is a group of bicycles, they become stronger, and pedestrians don't even look, even if a car approaches. On the Friday location tour, he collaborated with Max. He was very motivated to experiment with Move-Authority and invited us all to cross the road behind CS while the lights were red. This resulted in a scary situation, and after one car horn, I said that I could feel his point in my belly and that for me, it was clear.



**Daniil** contributed with his remarkable patience to hang out on the high rise platform, realizing that only two Move-Categories were possible: waiting for a tram, (Stop-Act?) leaving or arriving at the platform. During the last day, we could all experience this briefly, in about 7 minutes of hanging out at the platform. For me, it stood out as a very lonely experience. Daniil later told me that it had taken him about 1.5 hours to get bored during fieldwork. This remarkable and skill-full and exercise in patience impressed me. Daniil explained that he had developed this skill by listening to minimal music.



**Ho-Chi** expressed his interest in the effects of executing life music in public space. During his fieldwork, he focussed on the public piano at the central station and studied how the flow of people changed as soon as somebody started playing. He also observed how both the group of listeners and the music itself, produced buildingness, by their presence. This effect was made clear to all of us during the visit to the site on Friday.



**YJ** contributed by studying the (turned off) fountain behind CS during fieldwork. She introduced the word platformness as a means to describe people's Move-Acts entering this space where all Move-Acts did turn out to be New-Tread, not leaving any traces. The alternation of the fountain being turned off and on contributed to this effect. Later she studied how these kinds of fountains are intended: as a means for placemaking, surprisingly contrary to her findings. During the Friday tour, she focussed on the spot in front of the ATM Machine. She did read a text of which some words she mounted on banknotes that she again fed back into the system.



**Esther** participated in the fieldwork and could not be present on Friday for the location visit due to illness. She wanted to do fieldwork in line with her master's research but soon found that the approach of this workshop was somewhat contrary. Therefore she decided to open up to the given angle of approach. She linked the approach to a lesson of a former architecture teacher, who also claimed that specific characteristics of space come about, though.

**Max's** contribution was also impressive to me, as he had a lot of difficulty with the concept of architecture becoming fluid. He, in his thinking, uses the word "concrete" a lot to describe anything stable and fixed, both literal and metaphorical. Thinking bricks stones pavement and concrete now as fluid, made his thinking bend and lose one of its regularities. During fieldwork, he made a very lucid observation of Snackcar "De Vrijheid" behind CS, which was a building disguising as a "car" a Move-Entity. "And it did not even have wheels, not even fake ones, and he noted that this was in this case not needed as the concept of "food truck" is so internalized in the city as a Move-Entity. During the Friday tour, he leads us to this car, to contemplate on that situation.



**Ann-Flo** contributed to the theory with detailed fieldwork-observations and thoughts on the topic of New-Tread. Introducing "closed" and "open" New Tread. This also introduced the concept of intentionality. Questions arose about how its intentionality alters the way Move-Entity produces space. With Ann-Flo's contribution, political aspects of performativity again entered the room. During her fieldwork location visit on Friday, she used the presence of the

group to experiment with a playful, flash-mob like, event, whereby movements needed to be synchronized through a simple set of rules. Besides enjoying the play, I felt the increase of Move-Authority production by **synchronized iterations**, (if that is a possible concept meaning the same Move-Event taking place simultaneously, this could we better name this **Move-Multiplication?**)



**Marlene** fieldwork focussed on "play." During her fieldwork, she searched the city for spontaneous play, so playgrounds, as designated for play, were excluded. After her first fieldwork afternoon, she returned somewhat disappointed, as no playing could be found. In ethology and ornithology, the following adagio stands: no observation is also a valid observation. All Marlene had found was a sign that said: "verboden te spelen" ( no playing allowed). During the location visit tour on Friday, she conjured up a ball from her bag, inviting us to play and test the concreteness of the walls of the buildings surrounding the small square she had picked to be her location.



**Tony** During the initial fieldwork, Tony and Robin together climbed a tree as an observation point. Sitting in the tree, Tony focussed on the concept of Move-Entity. He realized that everything is a Move-Entity. Move-Entities have internal and external relationships shifting in scale. During his stay in the tree, Tony experiences how every Move-Entity is part of something that is again a larger unit and Move-Entity in itself: a tree includes the Move-Entity leaf, branch, trunk. But together with all the other trees, it is a forest, along with



houses and streets, a city. One can scale up to the universe even. During the following days, Tona made a drawing, depicting this nesting of Move-Entities schematically into each other. During the location visit on Friday, he brought us to “his” tree (a sizeable free-standing tree in the grass-field in front of KABK) and asked us to stand around it. We all had to focus on a small spot on the tree bark and feel our heartbeats. Then we were asked to slowly walk backward until we could see the tree in one glance. To stop the experience, Tony blew a whistle ( the one used in football games). For me, this created a beautiful blend between the meditative approach of a slow walk and the sound that made us believe in running after a football in shorts.



**Tamman** During his initial fieldwork, Tamman observed while drifting. He was too restless to be in one location. This way, the space around him moved as well. He walked into a protest. These people repeated the same words and sentences over and over again. Also, they were protesting for (another country Armenia???) , so they were connected to another place geographically speaking. So space became layered. A folding of geographies. Then Tamman noticed some strangeness while walking along with shops, as they spit out different kinds of music, that can also be connected to further away locations like Arabic music, of which he can understand the lyrics of. On the next fieldwork, Tamman has been looking for traces of mobilities of non-humans that he called histories.

On Friday, Tamman takes us to a historic photo outside CS, showing people eat herring from holding the tail in the 1930s. He offers a poetic description of how herring is linked to mobility on many levels. Afterward, I recognize Sarah Ahmed's ideas resonating in this approach, a valid appropriation of another feminist thinker. The herring is both something that enters our body, as a symbol: a fish and a sign. The golden age is built on herringbones, so this herring mobility has buildingness.



**Jelle's** first fieldwork focusses on Move-Act and takes place at Binnenhof. For him, it turns out to be challenging to observe Move-Act without categorizing all-ready. People seem to follow lines, he notes. Benches disturb those lines. Groups of people split up and merge again after crossing a bench. The Move-Entities of the pedestrians become buildingness for people on bikes. They acknowledge their authority.

The birds on binnehof ( pigeons?) seem to have an invisible circle around them. They don't have authority. As soon as somebody enters their circle, they move away.

Jelle's next fieldwork focussed on a situation were cyclists were faced with a bizarre dilemma, of New -Treading without choices as their bike lane suddenly stopped and was blocked. They had to decide whether to throw themselves in the stream of passing cars, or rather to stop and wait for space to continue their route. From the stop position, there was no other choice than to go into New -Treading again; to get in the stream, there was never an actual space for them. New-Treading between cars was the only way to continue cycling. Jelle stayed in that place for as long as he needed to be able to describe it properly, using the lexicon therms.



### **Luca.**

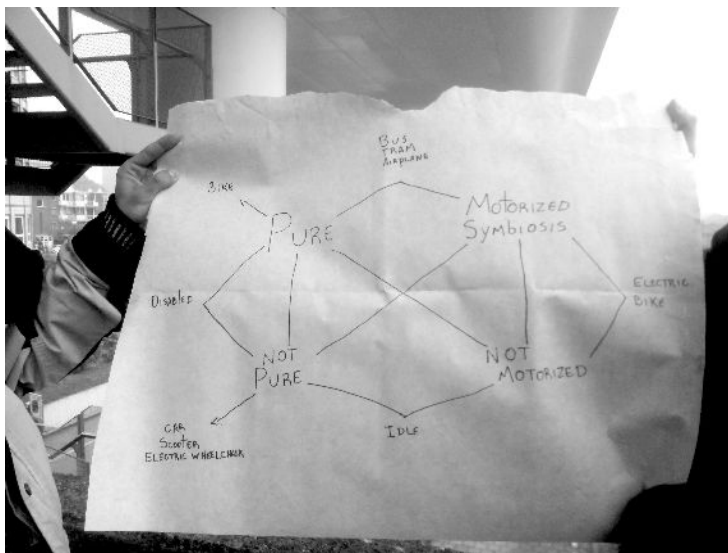
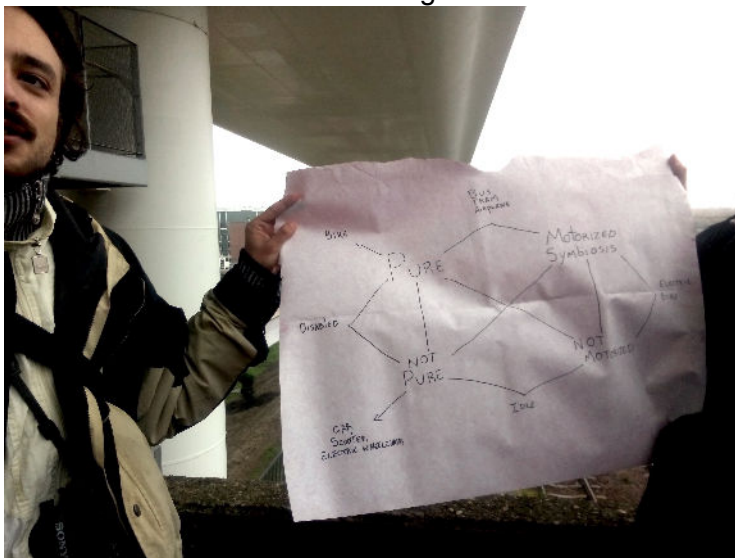
During his initial fieldwork, Luca focussed on Move-Categories. He decided to go to a location with a certain height and an overview: the viaduct crossing the platforms behind CS

to identify Move-Categories.

There he could find all possible basic types: trams, buses, bikes, pedestrians and even the people in office buildings moving between desks.

The place contained a specific selection: no strolling, most Move-Entities did seem to have a purpose, for example, waiting for the bus, catching a train. Here Luca could easily divide pedestrians into several sub-categories, but he could not subdivide trains this way.

During the Friday location visit, Luca takes us upstairs to the same viaduct, where all Categories again are present: tram, train, car, pedestrian, bicycle. He describes his findings. Regardless of the observable plurality of Move-Categories in this location, and regardless of my proposition on the plurality of Move-Categories, Luca decides to search for a binary nevertheless. This way, he tries to falsify against my original theory ( my conclusion). He proposes a binary division between a pure (human-powered ) mobility and non-pure mobility (all that requires an external, artificial motor and energy source like an engine). With this binary as a starting point, he applies the concept of Klein four-group to this division between the two fundamental Move-Categories he decided on. This resulted in the following scheme:



**Robin** During the first fieldwork, Robin decides to study reiteration. He teams with Tony climbing the tree, for Robin, trees are familiar places as a starting point of studying processes and dynamics of public space.

His observations are centered around the Egyptian Goose, which he found to be remarkable stationery on the grass field between his tree and KABK. Also, he observes a lady that scrutinizes a public map, seemingly being very lost. Do we need an “act” for being lost? Do we need a p form of empathy for Move-Entities? Robin made notes through a short video with the ducks and the woman staring at the ducks.

During theory in the morning, Robin shares that he has been reading Bataille, who mentioned “cursed space” and surplus value (as in Marxism) that leads him to the concept of surplus energy. Sacrifice might mean getting rid of surplus production. I find it difficult to relate this to the performativity of the city, and in hindsight, I might have asked further. During the Friday tour, Robin invited us to line up at the canal in front of KABK, looking east and letting the city express itself in relevant and irrelevant Move-Acts ( surplus energy?) were performatively present.



**Giammarco** Participated in the workshop with interest in cities and how movement forms them. As an example, he showed me the book on vehicles by Valentino Braitenberg, and he expressed his excitement about approaching the topic from this angle. Giammarco was not present on Friday. He elaborated on his experiences in an email to me later: He missed an elaboration on how the given theory relates to the artistic practice of Esther and Ivar. Also, he found it challenging to work within the framework; he was skeptical about the methodology applied. The approach felt strategic to him. He thought that the workshop made use of the group of students, but did not allow the students to get a sufficient understanding of the “content.” He feels that this leads to a stereotyping of the viewer act. He feels this to be problematic, as it only scratches the surface of topics like gender, race, culture, capitalism. All this is why he felt uncomfortable participating in the presentations on Friday.