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Mobilities at work: care, repair, movement and a fourfold typology

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ABSTRACT

In this article, we make a conceptual and typological contribution to studies of work and mobility and mobile work. We do so by describing the physical, pedestrian mobilities of a team of care workers as they look out for homeless clients in the UK city of Cardiff. Conceptually, and in conclusion, we engage with Goffman's essay, published in *Asylums*, on the 'vicissitudes of the tinkering trades' and consider the ways in which mobility further and differently complicates already difficult care work. By way of this one empirical case – drawn from a sustained ethnographic engagement with the team – we develop a fourfold typology. We intend this typology as something to be tried out, put to use and shared across different work settings. We offer it as a means of illustrating the ways in which mobility and work and the work of movement might relate to one another. And also how work, and care work in particular, and movement are differently figured in relation to the environment. We also intend the typology as a means of developing a conceptual distinction between (work) practices that take place on the move and mobile (work) practices proper.

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1. Introduction

In this article, we make a conceptual and typological contribution to studies of work and mobility and of mobile work. We do so by describing the physical, embodied, pedestrian mobilities of a team of care workers as they try to look out for homeless clients in the UK city of Cardiff. By way of this one empirical case – developed from a sustained ethnographic engagement with the team¹ – we develop a fourfold typology, which we see as offering some conceptual purchase on the ways in which mobility and work and the work of movement might relate to one another. Our particular context is that of the work of care, repair and attention, but we offer the typology as something to be tried out, put to use and shared across different work settings.

The article is structured in the following way. We begin with a conceptual discussion of the organisation of work, and repair work in particular, drawing on Goffman's ([1961] 1991) essay, published in *Asylums*, on the "vicissitudes of the tinkering trades". Following that discussion and a consideration of movement and the medical model, we introduce our case

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site and study: the city of Cardiff, and outreach work with the street homeless. The remainder of the article is used to set out and consider our fourfold typology of work and movement. We review our contribution, and return to Goffman, in a short conclusion.

2. Mobilities, work and the tinkering trades

How does care and repair work happen and how is it organised? How do damaged objects (and people) and would-be-repairers come to be in the same place, and come into a relationship, so that repairs can be made? The answers to these somewhat mundane questions are not so simple and illuminate a good deal about the organisation of work and mobilities more generally.

All work situations and practices involve movement, and the ordering of movement; of the body in completing some physical tasks, of the materials that are required to be present in any given situation, and of knowledge, and competencies required for a specific job to get done. The centrality of movement to work is demonstrated in various ways across various settings by the articles in this issue. Our contribution is concerned with the movement and circulation of bodies in public space, with corporeal mobilities. Indeed, ours is a case of the corporeal mobilities at play in producing the “occasional co-presence” (Urry 2002, 256) through which care can be enacted. In addition to the development of a typology intended to be of use for future studies of work, we also suggest that the care and repair work of outreach workers is a case of a significant novel relation of mobility to work which, in turn, provides insight into both care and mobile work more generally. Mobility is, of course, central to all forms of work and work sites and this is where we begin.

Work sites, howsoever construed – repair shops, classrooms, hairdressing salons, air traffic control towers, hospital wards, operating theatres – find mobilities being differently managed and ordered as that work’s work. Mobilities differently intersect and settle, enable and interfere with the work being carried out. The work site, then, might be conceived as an intensity of mobilities. For example, those whose work is the fixing of physical objects must, in order to complete their work, have to hand the necessary tools, equipment, spare parts and a whole range of other materials (solvents, solders, lubricants, degreasers, paints and lacquers) in order to make good the repair. And none of this stuff began life there in that workshop; even 3D printed components created *in situ* require the digital and physical movement of templates and base materials to *that* site (see Birtchnell and Urry 2016). We can also note that a good deal of physical repair work is itself to do with movement; replacing things that have come loose, stopping things moving that should not, or getting things moving again that have become stuck. And we can note, in case it has been missed, that the object of repair has to arrive at the workshop in the first place. This preliminary stage, bringing the object in for repair, can be complicated and difficult, sometimes. In other cases the complication lies in the other direction. The object will remain *in situ* and the repair worker will have to travel, taking with them, perhaps in the back of a van, equipment usually found in the workshop. The inventory carried is, of course, a compromise of necessity and portability. In such instances of “off site” repair, the worksite is “remote”, at a distance from some properly and purposefully organised base. The mobilities of such mobile repair workers criss-cross the city and are quintessential urban phenomena (Thrift 2005). Remote repair work also, and crucially, requires of the worker the employ of various practices geared to turning the place in which the object is located in to a place of work for its repair. Orange plastic barriers,

for example, serve such a purpose for repair workers in city centres; redirecting pedestrian flow not only for the safety of the public but also to eliminate from the worksite the interference of those movements. And here, already, we have a sense of the ways in which the nature of the damage to the object, the nature and mobility of the object itself and the environment in which it is located can differently shape the relationship and the necessity of mobility and movement to work.

A good deal of what is at stake for the understanding of mobility and repair work developed herein turns on two conceptual distinctions made by Goffman ([1961] 1991) in his discussion of the “tinkering trades”. The first concerns whether the work is “public facing” or has only to do with the organisation in which the person works. In the first case, the worker meets a changing cast of either individuals or audiences who are by and large unknown to them in any personal way, and, in the latter, a relatively stable cast of others with whom they will be acquainted in some way if only institutionally so. Further contingencies for the worker are introduced when that work is conducted in full view of those who have a direct concern with the process as opposed to when the work can get done in some “back region”. Matters of delicacy and the handling of the object are important in the first situation in different ways than in the second; the first having to do with producing the *appearance* of care through decorum and respect for the client and object and the latter only with the practicalities of not further damaging the object through some kind of rough or overtly careless treatment. The second conceptual distinction is bound up in whether or not the object can be, physically or morally, taken from wherever it is that it has broken to a specialised place of work. In the latter case, material and structural arrangements emerge in relation to the particular kind of repair work that was to be done; the workshop complex, as Goffman had it ([1961] 1991, 290). And these arrangements are not only related to the work of the repair itself but to the production and management of the “proper” relationship between the parties as “server” and “client”.

Whilst this “service ideal” and repair cycle is apt for the efficient handling and repair of physical objects, in the case of the treatment of human damage and suffering, as Goffman is at pains to demonstrate throughout *Asylums*, it introduces further contingencies for both the injured party and those aiming to effect the repair, and, moreover, the potential for further damages to be wrought. Goffman’s own critique of the application of the server–client repair cycle in the mending of persons and bodies rather than cogs or electrodes is a damning one. We consider this critique below, but given our interest, here, in mobility and work, we move toward our typology by sketching out some of the stages of the repair cycle and server–client relations in terms of the to-ing and fro-ing of care work.

2.1. Movement and the medical model

If one is suffering from minor physical damage, is sick or otherwise ailing, one presents oneself to a doctor as an object to be diagnosed and repaired. The diagnosis itself will often include movement, or “manipulation”, of the body in order to ascertain the cause and extent of the problem. General and more exploratory check-ups can set out in the same way – the hammer to the knee to test reaction, or asking the patient to walk a line, or close their eyes and touch their nose are nice examples. There are mental movements too, drawing on episodic memory, perhaps; “think back to when you started feeling unwell”. Following the

diagnosis an appropriate repair cycle will be initiated there and then, and some form of treatment or another will be forthcoming, a prescription issued and the client sent on their way to visit the pharmacist, rest up at home, or otherwise patch themselves up. A key factor in all this is, of course, that “the body is one possession that cannot be left under the care of the server while the client goes about his other business” (Goffman [1961] 1991, 298).

If a person is seriously sick or injured they may struggle to get their body to the workshop under their own steam. In cases involving sudden and traumatic injury, intermediaries are frequently required whose task it is to manage transportation to the workshop setting, most likely the hospital (also to administer immediate and remedial assistance, if required and feasible). Perhaps the relationship between movement and care seems straightforward enough in such cases. It is, however, worth remembering Goffman’s observation that in some instances an object in need of repair cannot be easily removed from its immediate location without risk of inflicting further damages ([1961] 1991, 293). We will return to this particular issue below, but, before doing so we can consider here two further circumstances that might complicate the application of the server–client repair cycle to the repair of persons. Of these two complications, the first is central to Goffman’s original argument and discussion of mental health and hospitalisation. The issue here is the way in which damage is understood or, better, constructed, through relationships between the injured client and the would-be-repairer. To remain with physical troubles for now, one may have an obviously broken leg, have it confirmed as such and then repaired in an appropriate manner by a medical professional; alternatively, one may suspect a break only to find, on expert examination, that there is no break, only bruising; then again, one may have no suspicion of a broken leg whatsoever, but, given cause for examination from some general discomfort, find that an X-ray reveals a fracture. Given any one of these instances, despite perhaps being unaware of any trouble in the first instance, the injured party is unlikely to find cause to dispute the eventual diagnosis and refuse to see things the same way as the repairer.² Things are not so simple, however, when the party in need of assistance does not see their need or circumstance in the same way as those attempting to initiate a repair (Hall and Smith 2015, 13).

In some such cases, a client’s seeming inability to recognise a need for repair, and their refusal to give credence to others’ diagnoses, may itself be taken as a (further) symptom that all is not well. In the case of serious mental illness and hospitalisation the individual may end up “seeking assistance” and entering the repair cycle not of their own volition but, rather, as Goffman has it, “as a product of consensus, if not pressure, on the part of the patient’s close kin group” ([1961] 1991, 300) in deciding that something is wrong or broken. In the absence of such agents – no kin to hand, no consensus, no pressure – things, at least in terms of the original troubles, may go from bad to worse. The second complication is less relevant to Goffman’s discussion but central to our own and, indeed, emerges from and can exacerbate the first: there are circumstances in which those who would like to initiate a repair cycle on behalf of some ill or injured but seemingly unwilling party simply do not know where they are to be found. Before they can work away at the sorts of eventual consensus, or pressure, that might bring a possible client around to the idea that they could do with some help, they have first to find them. This brings us to our case: outreach work with the homeless on the streets of central Cardiff.

3. Street care in Cardiff

Cardiff is a city of close to 400,000 people with a larger urban area; it is the capital of, and largest city in, Wales. No different from any other UK city, it has its rich and poor, its extensive housing estates (some, not all, significantly disadvantaged) and prosperous suburbs, its high-rise apartments and inner city bedsits. At the sharp end of housing and economic advantage in the city, there is new money and finance and business professionals in luxury flats with extensive views across the cityscape. At the equally sharp but opposite end (of housing and economic *disadvantage*) there is no money, or very little of it, and a small collection of individuals whose difficulties – for familiar enough reasons we cannot unpack here – have brought them into the city centre, where they are homeless and on the streets.

In this context, the local authority employs a specialist and multidisciplinary team, made up of social and care workers of varying specialism, nursing staff, assorted project officers and outreach workers, tasked to work with those who have come unstuck somehow in the centre of the city and whose needs manifest in public space – street homelessness is the major area of work (but also, and in combination, drug use and addiction; also sex work). Clients of the team are not only those who stand in some sort of visible need of health, housing and support services but also and especially those who appear to be struggling to access those services independently. Team members are tasked to engage with and support such individuals, supplying immediate assistance where possible, assessing needs and negotiating entry to appropriate mainstream and specialist provision. This team is managed through the local authority social services and housing departments; it has offices in the city centre, close to the central train station, and is known locally (to those with need to know of its existence) as the City Centre Team.

Our argument proceeds from the basic assertion that this is a team that *moves*. We will examine just how and why in due course; but it will help at this point to consider this assertion in terms of the working remit sketched out above. What gets the team on the move? A most general and elementary answer to that question is that its clients do. The sorts of individuals in the sorts of circumstance that supply the team's essential rationale are not to be relied on to make and keep appointments – they are not to be found waiting dutifully outside the team's office, ten minutes early for a scheduled assessment meeting; they are, instead, somewhere else and quite possibly in no fit state (perhaps drunk in a doorway, or huddled on a park bench, or sat begging on the pavement by the cash point on the train station forecourt). A good few lead daily lives that are close to shambolic – skewed by drug and alcohol use, repeatedly overtaken by short-term expediency; some are deeply suspicious of bureaucratic intervention in their lives; some are uncommunicative or confused in their speech and thinking; some are aggressive, alarming and intimidating (and quite possibly banned from the very premises at which they might, under other circumstances, have been expected to seek assistance).³ We can also note here that Cardiff's street homeless very seldom have close kin to hand concernedly working away at an eventual consensus that something is amiss and that something needs to be done about that. This job of work falls to the City Centre Team instead. The team exists because its client group is unsupported and "hard-to-reach", and it is this that gets the team moving. Clients do not come to the team, or can't be counted on to do so; nor are they brought in reluctantly by concerned family members. Indeed, sometimes a client's immediate circle can exert a pressure that is counter to an engagement with services. Given all of which, the team is forced to go to wherever it

is that its clients are. It is in this most general and elementary sense that the team's work can be described as mobile.

Outreach workers are the foot soldiers of the team's operation, tasked to make and maintain street-level contact with clients on a daily basis – some of whom are barely clients at all, or whose status as such is realised only through repeated attempts at contact, conversation and minimal assistance delivered *in situ* from one day to the next. When, and only when, outreach work is already working, other members of the team, agents of the repair cycle (social worker, nurse), can be brought into play, alongside other associated professionals (housing officer, youth worker, drugs counsellor). In this way, outreach workers act as scouts, agents, brokers; their role is to move around the city identifying possible clients, making approaches, introductions and connections; in the process they also administer numerous minor acts of immediate assistance and repair, *in situ*. They do this repeatedly, throughout the working day and into the evening.

4. Work on the move: a typology

In this section, we develop a typology of work and movement, taking the job of city centre outreach as a recurrent point of reference and illustration. What we construct here, and offer up for use and further commentary, is a typology of combinations. We are interested in the different ways in which work and movement might be brought together in combination, and from our case study material, we see (at least) four of these, as follows: Functional, Pragmatic, Peripatetic and Mobile. First, though, some preliminary remarks on journeys and work.

4.1. Preliminary: journeys to work

Jeff is an outreach worker but, like others, has a life outside work, heads home at the end of a shift to his house on Marion Street in Splott, perhaps by way of the pub; once home, he will spend an evening reading historical fiction and listening to music before turning in for the night. The next morning he wakes early, fixes a bite to eat and catches a bus back in to the city centre; some mornings, if the weather is fine and he feels in the mood, he walks. Either way, whether sat on the bus or stepping along Tyndal Street, he is doing no more than what countless others are also up to at around the same time of day: making their way to work. Commuting takes on different forms – walking, riding, driving, cycling – but “[t]he daily travel to work is an unremarkable ... essential, mobility” (Holdsworth 2013, 75), and its object is timely arrival. In this sense it is, as Wunderlich has it, purposive: “[connecting] A to B to C and further on”, typically undertaken at a rapid pace and “performed in a rather anxious mode, in which we long for arrival at a destination” (2008, 131). Perhaps longing is a little strong, but Jeff looks forward to work most days; regardless of which, the point here is (no more than) that his commute is required of him, is necessary. On arrival, only *then* does work begin – which is to say that the commute, the movement task already undertaken, is unsalaried and in that, narrow, sense not really work at all.

4.2. Functional: workplace journeys

Now in the office, Jeff is at work and we can ask again the question posed once already: What gets the team on the move? Answer? This sort of thing: mid-morning and the phone

rings, picked up by the team's receptionist, who relays the incoming news across the office in short bursts: it is the police ... already on their way to a reported incident ... an elderly man, drunk and collapsed, possibly injured ... outside the public toilets by the North Road underpass; the police officer thinks "it might be one of our lot". Two outreach workers – Lee and Jeff – sat at desks and until a moment ago engaged in data entry and email correspondence stand up and confer, quickly coming to agreement that the elderly man could very well be Brian F., and if not him then possibly Ronnie W. Jeff and Lee reason that, of the two, Brian is the more likely; certainly a heavy drinker, and known to be sleeping rough these last few days in the corner of a car park behind an office building not more than two minutes' walk from the underpass (where he was seen by outreach workers late last night). Ronnie, on the other hand, has been off the drink for a couple of weeks now, and is in hostel accommodation; it will be a setback if it turns out to be him (and his social worker is off today on a training course). Perhaps it will be someone else altogether? Only one way to find out. Pulling on coats, the two colleagues step away from their desks and into the corridor and down the stairs to exit the building by the main doors and make their way across town together, on foot – likely to be quicker than going to the trouble of fetching the works van, given the relatively short distance. They will see who it is and what needs doing when they get there.

Such instances are common – wholly imagined in this case, but the account is more than plausible (any member of the team, and others⁴, would confirm as much); a phone call, a third-party report of some or other incident, a problem somewhere out there in the city, possibly a description if only of sorts – one of our lot? – and members of the team duly dispatched. Off they go. What next? Perhaps on arrival the outreach workers will find an ambulance already in attendance. Perhaps it will prove to be Brian after all, and perhaps he has hit his head and is bleeding profusely and will need to be taken back to hospital (and perhaps the outreach workers will tell themselves this might turn out to be no bad thing as they have been working to get Brian seen by a doctor for some time now, and he will be better off in a hospital bed overnight than sleeping out in the car park; maybe they can arrange for a social work visit, if he is kept in for anything more than a day or two).

Clearly, upon arrival, there is work to do – identification, reassurance, assistance, further arrangements; Jeff may be conferring with the police officer, and Lee may be crouched down beside Brian telling him to stop swearing so much and let the ambulance crew have a proper look him; reassuring him that his bags and walking stick will be safe with them. But we should recognise that work has also already been done, inasmuch as the outreach workers have had to get here. Fifteen minutes ago they were sat in the office, and now they are stood at the top of the underpass stairs. This, then, provides us with our first movement type: movement undertaken in order for work to (then) be done; movement undertaken in the service of work.

There are two things to note. The first is that movement in this case figures as something antecedent to the actual business of tending to Brian – the "real" work, as it were. Walking briskly across town together has been a preliminary task for Lee and Jeff, ancillary to the actual deployment of their expertise; so too the same journey traced out in reverse, walking back across town to regain the office and on arrival there get down to further duties (recording the incident, drafting a note for Brian's social worker to read, stashing Brian's bags and walking stick under a table at the far end of the office, phoning through to the hospital for an update). The second point to note is that movement of this sort is really not so very far away from commuting as a movement type, perhaps no different at all typologically. The

movement has been undertaken in working hours, but is otherwise very much the same: destination-oriented, necessary, unremarkable. And reduced to as great an extent as is possible, if the business at the destination is very pressing. Making their way along St Mary Street, Lee and Jeff are on their way to work, engaged in what is essentially a commuting practice, albeit interior to the working day. Such workplace journeys are “first and foremost a type of transportation” (Gehl 2011, 133).

4.3. Pragmatic: work on the move

Even if we recognise that transport can be a job of work (often skilled) in itself, it remains that those transported might themselves engage in work, not on arrival (see type one) but on the way – as passengers. This is our second type, *work on the move*. Examples of work conducted on the move are plentiful, and mundane practices are as likely to be instructive as anything else (see Laurier 2004). Consider a conversation Jeff and Lee might have shared as they made their way back to the office. Walking and talking at the same time: what could be more mundane, as an accomplishment? Doubtless Brian’s “case” will be discussed in detail at the weekly team meeting, but there is no harm (and some advantage) in working through some of the detail right away, not least whilst the incident is fresh in Jeff and Lee’s minds. When was the last time Brian took a fall? Not so very long ago: last month? What was the name of Brian’s key worker at the Salvation Army hostel (where he was resident until evicted late last week)? What was it Brian said about not wanting to get in the ambulance, something about collecting a prescription? Could that be the prescription there, poking out of the top of Brian’s bag? “Here Lee, hold the bag while I take a look,” says Jeff, crossing the road. (Meanwhile, halfway across town, en route to the hospital, the ambulance crew may be similarly at work, in transit, not yet arrived at the hospital but tending to Brian as best they can while the ambulance driver weaves through standing traffic.) Doubtless work-related travel can provide a welcome interlude and respite – time out from the demands of work (see Jain and Lyons 2008). Yet it is also, and perhaps increasingly, populated by the possibilities of work. Mobile communication technologies enhance such possibilities, for better or worse (see Hislop 2013; also Brown and O’Hara 2003). But what is distinctive here, for our purposes, is that work on the move is work carried out in the time it necessarily takes to get somewhere. Or, put another way, no one working on the move would choose to do so were it possible to accomplish the same task some other way (without introducing further detriment). Putting on make-up is a skill, harder still to execute in a crowded, swaying subway carriage; the movement complicates the practice – but it can be done. So too tending to a casualty in the back of a moving ambulance. So too trying to hold a conversation or read a crumpled medical prescription while crossing the road.

So why do it? Because of the affordance and necessity of the time it takes to get anywhere. Such advantage as there is to be gained lies in the fact that the movement has to happen, takes time, and cannot be got around (and ought not to be delayed: dealing with a casualty in the back of a moving ambulance is tricky, but there is little advantage in pulling over and parking up; the point is to get to the hospital). This is our second type then, work on the move, with movement and work combined as concurrent activities rather than sequentially organised.

4.4. *Peripatetic: work enabled by movement*

Our third combination of movement and work takes things forward. As indicated earlier, Cardiff's City Centre Team exists because its client group is "hard-to-reach"; it is the circumstance of their would-be and present clients that gets the team moving, to wherever it is that they already are. The team *must* move. One way in which this happens has been sketched already: a call received and outreach workers duly dispatched, to an incident somewhere in the city centre – to something already taking place. This sort of thing occurs repeatedly, but it would be a mistake to imagine that outreach workers operate only in this responsive mode, sat at their desks awaiting a call-out to some or other location to deliver care (in whatever form that might take). Outreach workers are employed to instigate and maintain contact with (among others) rough sleepers in the middle of the city, and do not wait to do so until one of the latter has a fall; instead they repeatedly patrol the city streets (and parks, and rear lanes, and empty plots and building sites) on the look-out for clients, hoping to come across and meet up with those who might be "out" today and receptive, perhaps, to the team's advances. We can conjecture another scenario, just as plausible as the one we have worked with up to this point, in which movement figures not in getting somewhere to get work done, nor in getting work done on the way, but in moving in order to get something done. Jeff and Lee are walking through the underpass, again, doing outreach. Brian is there (discharged from hospital two days ago). He is standing, unsteadily, outside the public toilets. Beside him, sitting on the pavement, are two more drinkers, and arranged between them is an untidy collection of bottles and cans, blankets, cigarette ends and a tightly rolled sleeping bag. One of the two seated drinkers is Tony, who was in a bed at the Huggard Centre last night (a local hostel providing 20 en-suite rooms and an additional eight "accommodation pods" for emergency overnight use; Lee knows Tony was in there last night because he was the one who placed the call to reserve a "pod"). The other man is not known to either Jeff or Lee, not yet. Lee settles down on his haunches and asks Tony how things went at the Huggard last night. Jeff beckons Brian across, hoping to draw him away from the other two. "Got five minutes, Brian?" asks Jeff. "Let's take a little walk. Lee'll mind your drink". And off they go, Jeff and Brian, side by side, through the underpass and out to the other side. Jeff wants to talk about the medication Brian is on (or ought to be on, according to the prescription Jeff sneaked a look at last week; a private matter this, and best handled delicately). There are other things he wouldn't mind finding out either: "Who's that with Tony, Brian?" asks Jeff. The question is put as a casual enquiry, the two of them strolling along together. He would rather not put Brian on the spot.

Here care is not in transit and on hold, waiting to be enacted on arrival; nor is work being somehow got on with on the move – carried forward in the time it necessarily takes to get somewhere but in all probability more easily done standing still. Instead, movement has been *enrolled* so as to advantage a job of work that needs to get done. The conversation with Brian could be held face-to-face, standing still, but somehow it *helps* to be moving; taking five minutes to amble along together, away from the others, is a profitable way in which to make enquiries; it would have been harder standing still (with Tony and the other man listening in, and Brian caught up in his drinking). In this third type, then, we have a different configuration: movement is enrolled in the service of work; it is deployed or exploited, to advantage; work gets done not *despite* but *because of* the fact that people are moving. Keeping to the care context, we can find similar examples. Consider Ferguson's

(2010) exploration of the vital but neglected role of the car in child welfare practice. Ferguson discusses an account of social work practice involving the transport of three children to a residential unit following the death of their foster mother.⁵ In the hands of the skilled professional, the journey, a non-contrived and necessary trip, becomes an opportunity for reflection and adjustment in the course of which the children are “[taken] through the emotional turbulence of the move and ... [enabled] to work on it” (Ferguson 2010, 131). Rather than being (only) an occasion for transit, the journey, deliberately prolonged by the social worker and at points suspended, provides an opportunity for intimate conversation and adjustment, for some measure of care and preparation.

This same overlap is a distinctive feature of the mobile methods literature, or one corner of it. The idea that movement might somehow assist understanding is fundamental, after all, to what it might mean to find things out – for empiricists certainly. Jeff takes a walk with Brian to make space for and ease along the questions he wants to ask. So too ethnographers: Kusenbach (2003) and Moles (2008), for example; increasing numbers of qualitative researchers it seems accompany respondents on something like their daily rounds, and in the process aim to capture “the stream of perceptions, emotions and interpretations that informants usually keep to themselves” (Kusenbach 2003, 464). In such undertakings, it is not only the time it takes to move somewhere that is put to some other purpose, the environment traversed may also be enrolled. As Myers has it, the “spatial practice of walking ... activates encounters within and with particular contexts through ambulant, kinesthetic and communicative movement and interaction” (2011, 187), and this activation can take conversation (and commentary) to places it might not otherwise have ventured (see also in this issue; Roy 2016).⁶

4.5. *Mobile: work as movement*

With our fourth and final category, we bring work and movement together again, only this time in amalgam. We have already moved past sequential combinations in which (care) operatives move so as to set to work on arrival (type one); and we are no longer concerned with simultaneity, with work getting done together with movement (types two and three). Instead we want now to consider what it might mean, not least in the context of our particular case of outreach work, to talk about movement itself as work. We have signalled this already in our comments above about outreach patrol. Members of the City Centre Team repeatedly patrol the city streets, setting about their work away from the office at least twice daily for what may be several hours at a time, moving through a well-known but shifting geography of streets and sites where they are confident they are likely to come across clients. “Come across” is a useful expression here. They hardly ever meet anyone by prior arrangement, and although there are certainly occasions where they might set out from the office to move directly to some location at which a client is reportedly in need (Brian collapsed in the North Road underpass), most of their moving is done without any definite destination in prospect. Outreach workers on patrol are not best described as being on their way anywhere (patrols tend to end up back where they began).

In developing this point, we are best to return to our earlier discussion of Goffman and the tinkering trades, in the course of which we noted two circumstances that might complicate the server–client repair cycle. The first of these, certainly appreciated by Goffman, had to do with those in need of assistance but unwilling or unable to acknowledge as much

and turn themselves in for repair. We have recognised this complication as applying to work with at least some of the hard-to-reach homeless; outreach workers are employed for the very reason that clients do not come to the City Centre Team offices of their own accord. But the second circumstance, we suggested, is rather more particular to work with the street homeless (and is not taken up by Goffman). The point here is that potential clients of the City Centre Team, in need of assistance and repair, are of no fixed abode and have to be *found* before they can be helped. And they have to be found repeatedly: over there this morning, somewhere else by the afternoon, somewhere else again tomorrow. They not only lack a place of their own but are liable to be dislodged from any setting to which they might lay temporary claim as somewhere to sit, stay, drink, or briefly sleep. This liability produces not only instability but a tendency towards niche settings and under-observed corners, somewhere you might hope to lie low and be left alone for a few hours at least. Taken together, instability of location and a tendency to niche and concealed settings, can make the homeless hard to find sometimes; and it is an outreach worker's job to do just that – to find them. Outreach workers have to *search* for their clients, which is a mobile practice and job of work quite distinct from the business of walking briskly to a known location. It is a case of casting about, for sightings and signs that one might be in more or less the right place, or moving along the right lines; it requires a very close attention to one's surrounds; and it requires distinctive ways of moving – careful, exploratory, tentative, open. Note that these are ways of moving that are purposed to fully engage the environment. Out on patrol, outreach workers need to see what is going on and pay close attention to any indication their immediate surrounds might offer as to where their clients might be. On patrol, work *is* movement, which gives us our fourth and final category: movement as work, work as movement, the two combined – *mobile work* – and in combination wholly engaged with the environment rather than seeking to traverse it. To watch anyone search for something – not frantically or half-heartedly, but deliberately and expertly – is to watch someone move slowly; and the slowness here has to do with careful attention paid to such information as is available to the senses, and to moving in such a way as to maximise the availability of such information (tracking back, crouching down, peering over; see Hall and Smith ([forthcoming](#)); also Hall (2016)). This is how outreach workers move when out on patrol, as opposed to how they move in response to a specific call-out; and it is different again from the sort of slowness that might come about through the deliberate prolonging of a journey for some other purpose, separate from the journey itself, as might happen when a social worker slows things down in the car so as to make time for conversation. There is no distinction, when searching for something, between the movement of the person searching and the work that is getting done.⁷

5. Conclusion

How do damaged objects or people and would-be repairers come together such that repairs can be made? The answer is that one or the other, or both, *must* move if things are to work out as they ought. In this article, we have considered different ways in which movement and work are combined in this context, and in the context of street care and homelessness in particular. We have suggested a fourfold typology, which we can summarise here by way of conclusion. *Type 1. Functional: workplace journeys*; movement and work are sequential; operatives move to where their work awaits. The environment can be burden or complication to

this functional movement. *Type 2. Pragmatic: work on the move*; movement and work are simultaneous; operatives get work done in the time it necessarily takes to get anywhere. Movement itself, and the environment traversed, is to be dampened down so as not to distract. *Type 3. Peripatetic: work enabled by movement*; movement and work are again simultaneous; operatives get work done better than they otherwise might because of the affordances that movement offers, only the environment might play some part in this and need not distract. *Type 4. Mobile: work as movement*; movement and work are neither sequential nor simultaneous – they are the same thing; they are wholly engaged with the environment to which the work, in and through and *as* movement, attends. We offer this typology as something to be tried out, put to use and shared across a range of different work settings. We intend, specifically, that the typology be put to use and tried out in the sense of providing a conceptual distinction – in situations of work and more generally – between corporeal and embodied practices that just happen to occur whilst moving and those which are inherently and inextricably mobile. This, we think, might provide a clearer sense of what it is to talk of mobility practices in the first instance and a much needed means of clearing some of the conceptual fog that clouds distinctions between movement and mobility (at least as far as social scientists are concerned).

We are left with one more comment to make, in relation to our case study and the wider work of care. In doing so, we turn again to Goffman, whose remarks on objects not easily removed from their immediate location we mentioned briefly in discussing movement and the medical model. The point Goffman ([1961] 1991, 293) makes, is that some jobs of repair need to be undertaken *in situ*, not because the conditions are ideal but because hasty removal to the workshop would only introduce further and unwelcome damage; some things need fixing exactly where you find them. This observation is obviously germane to outreach work of the sort we have briefly described. Homeless individuals are not to be simply removed from wherever it is that outreach workers might find them; workers do not have the power to do that, nor would they wish to exercise it if they did. It would serve no purpose to stuff a homeless client – Brian – into a hostel bed and confiscate their drink at short notice. That sort of fix would simply not stick, would end badly and in no time at all would further alienate a client with reason enough already to mistrust service providers and to doubt his own abilities.

Instead, outreach workers move much more carefully towards eventual agreement with (at least some of) their clients, building trust and understanding over a period of time, working together on possible solutions and a client's willingness to consider these. Working in this way with Brian means keeping up with his many moves around the city, his repeated relocations, over weeks and months; means losing him, finding him again, looking out for him every day; means maintaining his health and wellbeing as best as can be managed in the meantime whilst also working towards the sorts of movement – in his circumstance, expectations and outlook – that might one day see him agree to come indoors of his own volition and with a good enough chance of holding on to his accommodation. The sorts of manoeuvring and compromise this might involve are considerable; outreach work requires a tricky combination of care, concern, reassurance, encouragement but also stratagem and subtle pressure – of the sort to which Goffman alludes; a repeated labour of searching and finding, and then of moving together with clients, reaching shared understanding and agreement. This is a practice and organisation of care that exists as distinct from the more familiar and static arrangements that frame relations between “server” and “client”. Outreach is, then, extra-institutional, compromised, negotiated and essentially mobile work.

Notes

1. The discussion and typology developed herein are grounded in an ethnographic engagement with the team. We have both, on separate and overlapping occasions worked with and alongside the team as volunteers and members over the past decade. We have gained the skills of outreach work and can claim what Garfinkel (2002) calls the “unique adequacy” of the trade. We adopt, here, something of a Goffmanian (1989) approach to both the fieldwork and the analysis presented herein. That is to say, we do not foreground our own experiences but rather the organizational and performative practices of the team and the features of the settings and frames in which they operate. Analytically, the discussion and typology are grounded in traditional practices of participant observation (enhanced with GPS recording and data; see Hall and Smith 2014) but also make use of a conceptual comparative method through which other cases and instances of work on the move are informative for our own. Needless to say, we know the team very well; the names used here (of the workers) are real and we thank them for their trust and support over the years.
2. Realists often hold up a broken leg, metaphorically, as a phenomenon for which an adequate “social constructionist” account cannot be provided. The beginnings of such an account is here, and we could provide the rest if the matter were more relevant to the discussion in hand.
3. We do not want to exaggerate and risk reinforcing some of the negative stereotypes by which the team’s clients are forced to live; nor are we doing so. Not all of the team’s clients are so very chaotic or difficult, and a good few are a positive pleasure to encounter and spend time with (if caught at more or less the right moment). But the point here is that none could be counted among the most reliable and compliant of the tens of thousands of Cardiff residents who avail themselves of health, welfare and housing provision in the city – or ought to.
4. For example, the outreach workers of the Manhattan Outreach Consortium whom we have observed on a number of occasions.
5. Ferguson is drawing here on an account of practice to be found in Juliet Berry’s book *Social Work with Children* (Berry 1972).
6. Note here the potential overlap between types two and three. It can very often make sense to get some work done on the move if movement is what in any case has to happen (type two). But it may also turn out, under some circumstances, that the moving that has to happen also affords something *extra*, an opportunity or enhancement, such that the work that then gets done gets done that little bit better than it otherwise might (type three). In each case work and movement are going on at the same time, but in type three the movement doesn’t have to lead anywhere – it is enough to be moving.
7. One might argue that work is movement for the bus driver too, or for any other transport professional, and indeed it is; but this would be to misread our typology. Transport workers are employed to move things and people to a destination, to accomplish an arrival specified at the outset. The aim is to deliver, as efficiently as possible under the circumstances. In such cases the environment is essentially an obstacle, delays are unwelcome and short cuts much appreciated (as when a taxi driver knows a quick way round some obstruction or congestion). There are no short cuts when searching for something, or patrolling a territory; the idea makes no sense in such contexts (see Hall and Smith [forthcoming](#)).

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