



# Introduction: Bio-Mobilities Issue

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*Wi: Journal of Mobile Media* 2015 9:01

The online version of this article can be found at:

<https://doi.org/10.65968/WZLV2856>

Willet, Jennifer "Introduction: Bio-Mobilities Issue". *Wi: Journal of Mobile Media*. 9.01 (2015). Web.  
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# Introduction: Bio-Mobilities Issue

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Our daily interactions with the biological world are more mediated, modulated, and mobile than ever before. Some argue that these forms of mediation are further removing human experience from direct encounters with the biological domain, while others suggest that mobile media is enhancing human/nature encounters in an increasingly urban society. Regardless, mobile media is transforming interspecies interrelations in outdoor ecological environments, in cities, in hospitals, in laboratories, in kitchens, and within both human and animal bodies.

The Winter 2015 issue of *Wi: Journal of Mobile Media* will address issues of bio-mobility from a variety of perspectives. With contributions from artists, theorists, programmers and tinkerers, this issue serves to address bio-mobility in relation to biomedicine, bioart, biotechnology, biomedicine, ecology, phenomenology, embodiment, performance, and even re-animation of biomaterials.

As mobile technologies transform the biological domain, hospitals are populated with mobile health technologies, laboratories ship and receive cryogenically preserved bioproducts, and patient records are digitized and available to practitioners at the bedsides of patients and in online consultations. In wildlife spaces, webcams document

wildlife, sensors measure both precipitation and temperature in remote locations, and ornithologists play birdcalls on their cell phones to attract species in the wild. At the consumer level, a myriad of mobile bio/technologies are available for purchase. These products include Botanicalls, a DIY biokit that measures moisture in potted plant soil and then instigates communication via online Twitter status updates on the mobile phone and the 'Virtual Frog Dissection Educational App', where users of all ages can download and dissect a virtual frog from the iTunes store.

Conversely, ongoing ecological, biomedical and biotechnological research is transforming our notions of mobility. If we look to examples like performance enhancing drugs, molecular machines, bacteria data storage devices, life itself can be conceived of as a form of mobile media. Biological media is able to store, transport, and transform data and experience within the living world. Eugene Thacker popularized the term Biomedica to describe the informatic inscription of data into living media, vis-à-vis molecular biology. Moving beyond this definition, I would suggest that we re-consider notions of biomedica through the lens of evolutionary biology, where animal migration patterns, chemical pheromone communication, and inherited genetic traits can all be interpreted as possessing bio-mobile properties essential to the robust function of our planetary ecology. In other words, in the lab, in the wilderness, and in the dog park down the street, biological entities are not only the subject or object of mobile technologies, they are in and of themselves engaging in systems of mobile communication and inter-connectedness.

The vitality of biomedial poses a variety of quandaries for the user / programmer / technician / body. What ethical considerations are necessary when harnessing biomedial? How are we, our communities, and our ecology transformed by ever growing bio-mobile technologies? What new relations and aesthetics are produced when we re-imagine the biological world as reproducible, transportable, and programmable? And, alternatively, are we possibly over imagining our human position in biomedial exchange as one of autonomous authorship? Is it possible that our actions are in fact an extended outcropping of ecological functions exhibited by all species involved in the simultaneous construction and destruction of the larger ecology we inhabit?

The contributors to this issue of *Wi* have engaged creatively and theoretically with a broad range of concepts and questions connected to biomobilities.

Contributions include:

**Dr. Roberta Buiani** traces a short history of her struggles with the social / political / economic barriers to building a DIYbio Laboratory as a non-specialist in metropolitan Toronto. In response to these circumstances she teams up with with Lisa Carrie Goldberg to develop a project called Biolab-on-Wheels.

**David Dowhaniuk** presents “Personal Nature,” an artist / programmer progress report on a project intended to better connect visually unresponsive patients with their families and caregivers through the projection of sound samples from the outdoors. The projections are mediated by live patient biodata in medical environments.

**Antonia Hernández** offers an online portfolio of photographs of microorganisms with which she shares her domestic space – specifically a delightful array of colorful and textured molds found in foods left unattended in her fridge.

**Dr. Karl E. Jirgens** provides readers with an analysis of contemporary artists Janet Cardiff and George Bures Miller's walking tours as mobilizing participant bodies in the production of art. He argues that they present participants / viewers with a site specific schizo-phenomenological experience of perceiving a site, while simultaneously perceiving a virtual sound scape of voices, audio recordings, histories and analysis generated by that site, both mirroring and deviating from the parallel experience of embodied perceiving.

**Doo-Sung Yoo** is an American artist who has developed a series of technological augmentations to the human body that involve the mechanical re-animation of inanimate biomaterials, particularly butchered animal organs. His paper traces earlier artistic practices utilizing human / robotics interfaces, as well as other cultural and scientific influences on his artwork. He provides readers with ample visual documentation of his uncannily lush, beautiful, and horrific Butoh Theatre style performances.

And lastly, in my own article (**Dr. Jennifer Willet**) I present research results from a large collaborative bioart project called BioARTCAMP, where I invited 20 artists, scientists, and students to build a portable bioart laboratory and conduct a variety of art/science projects in the Canadian Rocky Mountains.

I would like to extend my thanks to **Dr. Kim Sawchuk** and **Dr. Owen Chapman** for the opportunity and support in editing this edition of *Wi*. A very special thanks to **Kendra Besanger** for her coordination, communication, copyediting, and careful nudges throughout this process. Thank you to **Antonia Hernández** for her design work, and to all the team members of *Wi*. And lastly, a big thank you to all the contributors to the Bio-Mobilities Issue for their artistic and intellectual contributions and their patience and persistence in completing this edition together.