

Filthy passage: Deborah Singerman

Glorious sun in a breezy setting brings joy and welcome thought and relaxation. But hot, crowded King Street embodied every Newtown infrastructure nightmare. Pavers jugged and danced to every level of crack and repaving. The slopes on either side leading down to the road, though created to be kind to prams and cycles, have hazardous gradients, steeply angled making it hard to balance.

Uninhibitedly, I ask a youngster for an arm to lean on to steady me across the road. That worked. Thank you. Sometimes though, especially across two roads following in quick succession, I am concentrating so hard on crossing that if someone interrupts my thought by pushing their arm in my way, I am thrown completely. If offered at the wrong angle, I become jittery and just push on. The line between help and hindrance is narrow.

Heat is another problem.

I ask in every cafe on that stretch of street, "Do you have a fan?" No, and certainly no air conditioning. One place I espy across the road has open windows and doors.

Balancing on a woman's elbow, I reach it. Sigh, less sweat and I enjoy a glass of cold water.

It is too hot to relax into the street vibe. Anything goes is not so much fun in endless humidity, though my limited mobility may have something to do with it.

There is no sign of a bus. I hate waiting for buses. I assume they will never turn up, and much prefer trains where the wait at least is on platforms. Even here though, beware the huge gap between train edge and resting

place at many stations, especially when I have not correctly gauged my position at one station to know I will alight to a safe spot.

Every millimetre counts.

Tree roots devastate pavements, as do repairs of broken concrete. It is bumpy and hazardous. Crowds rushing is nerve-wracking as I weave between people of all ages and speeds.

Individual trauma encapsulates all. A woman once wheeled her suitcase under my foot. I was walking slowly. She was belting along. "Be careful", I shouted, scared of being knocked over. She turned round, glared, and screamed something I could not hear properly except for "you old hag".

Flustered, I reflect that this reaction is rare. Most people are more understanding, but I was made to realise how quickly support can turn sour.

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