Editorial

Sunny Stalter-Pace and Gijs Mom

How do you represent a moment when crossing a bridge became a major historical flash point? The twenty-fifth of March of this year marked the fiftieth anniversary of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s fifty-four-mile march from Selma, Alabama, to the state capital of Montgomery, a march to protest the lack of voting rights for African Americans in the southern United States. The major point of contention, where infrastructure and politics met, was the Edmund Pettus Bridge leading out of Selma. The first attempt to march occurred on what was later known as Bloody Sunday. Black protestors attempted to cross the bridge, against the instruction of local and state troopers. They were beaten mercilessly and the footage was broadcast on national television. The second attempt took place after Dr. King put out a call to all Americans who identify with the civil rights movement. They gathered on the bridge and knelt to pray. King sensed trouble and called off the march. After a court decision in favor of the protestors, the march took place.

Selma serves as a starting point for this issue of *Transfers*, which thinks about the different modes of representing historically important acts of mobility. During the 1990s, acts of the U.S. Congress declared Highway 80, the road on which the march took place, a National Historic Trail and an All-American Road. This second designation means that this stretch of U.S. Highway 80 is "a road that has national significance, cannot be replicated, and is a destination unto itself."¹ The Selma to Montgomery Voting Rights Trail now includes two interpretive centers, one where the march began and another in Lowndes County, Alabama, where the marchers rested halfway through their journey and set up a tent city. Contemporary tourists' starting and stopping on the road echoes that of the "foot soldiers" of the civil rights movement, though tourists make the journey by car.

Selma (2014), the film directed by Ava Duvernay, uses the immediacy of the cinematic image to place the march into the context of an outsized historical figure's everyday life. The audience is shown many intimate moments—King's wife tying his tie, his friends and colleagues eating breakfast. At the same time, the film's composition, especially in the crowd scenes, insists on the parallels between that earlier political action and present-day protests against police brutality in the United States. Because the footage was widely disseminated on TV, the Selma to Montgomery march is an instance of local mobility that had national (and transnational) consequences.

This issue of *Transfers* includes several articles that consider the ways that representations of mobility can make an argument about how a specific

group of people relates to the nation. It covers a variety of transport modes (roads, rails, air, animals, pedestrians) and considers how they operate on every continent but Antarctica. In “Urban Railways in Buenos Aires: Spatial and Social Alienation in the Documentary Film *El tren blanco*,” Benjamin Fraser discusses the political arguments made in this documentary representation of a group of poor Argentine workers. Like the nineteenth-century ragpickers described by Walter Benjamin in “Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire,” the *cartoneros* of Buenos Aires live on the margins of the city, collecting its refuse to make a meager living. Unlike Benjamin’s figures of urban mobility, though, the *cartoneros* live outside of the city’s core and must pay a private company for the privilege of being brought into the city by train to collect recyclable material in their *carretas*, the characteristic carts of their trade. Fraser uses the spatial theories of Wolfgang Schivelbusch and Henri Lefebvre to illuminate the ways that the railroad car, like the city of Buenos Aires itself, is structured by the separation of classes and the parceling out of space according to its possibilities for profit.

Where *El tren blanco* shows the separation within city spaces, early twentieth-century British travel narratives attempt to bring together the discrete areas of city and country through the “home tour” by automobile. In “‘The Song They Sing Is the Song of the Road’: Motoring and the Semantics of Space in Early Twentieth-Century British Travel Writing,” Martin Walter argues that travel books show middle-class automobilists “discovering the nation” through their drives in the countryside. A number of questions arise with this new prominence of the automobile on country roads: What characteristics are necessary for someone to belong to the “brotherhood of the road”? How can the driver preserve the sense of nature and remoteness that his noisy, mechanized presence interrupts? How does the vehicle shape a new perception of space and of nation? Travel narratives do not answer these questions, according to Walter, but they do suggest the central role played by the automobile in navigating the move from tradition to modernity.

Travel functions as a means of making the nation coherent and eliding the local specificities of place. As Anthony Harkins writes in “Airlines, Interstates, and the Creation of ‘Flyover Country’ in the United States,” the first cross-country flights took place at lower altitudes, and their promotional materials emphasized the regional differences in the landscapes being crossed. With the advent of nonstop flights, however, Harkins sees the airlines playing down the particularity of the American landscape below and reframing the journey as one of leisure and not education. The increasingly smooth and detached movement of jet planes—and the increasingly abstract representation of this movement in promotional maps—plays a part in the contemporary understanding of states between the east and west coasts of the United States as “flyover country.” Interstate highways do similar work, emphasizing the speed and efficiency of a trip rather than the sights seen along the way.

The articles by Fraser, Walter, and Harkins examine mobility from a cultural studies perspective, analyzing the interplay between aesthetic representation and lived experience of mobility. The remaining three contributions, by Shell, Swart, and Pesek, apply a geographical and historical perspective to questions of infrastructure, considering the ways that movement takes place outside of the state-sponsored infrastructural network. Jacob Shell's title, "When Roads Cannot Be Used," could serve as an alternate title for them. His subtitle, "The Use of Trained Elephants for Emergency Logistics, Off-Road Conveyance, and Political Revolt in South and Southeast Asia," encompasses the important and diverse roles that trained elephants can play in Asian mobility. Elephants' more complex and refined sense of proprioception enables them to move through flooded landscapes and off-road trails, making them excellent "vehicles" for moving materials and people during natural disasters. Though elephants are featured prominently in South and Southeast Asian tourism, Shell discusses the role they play outside of state-sanctioned activities as a part of underground economies and guerilla political movements.

Animal mobilities are a subject of growing interest, and Sandra Swart suggests the many ways that an animal-centric point of view reframes many of the central debates in the field. Her "Reviving Roadkill? Animals in the New Mobilities Studies" suggests the many new vectors that open up when we move away from a narrow focus on vehicular mobility along human-constructed roads. *Animobility* impels us to think about shifts in scale, both in size and in time. It fosters a more networked understanding of mobility, one that considers the interdependence among the circulation of pathogens, insects and herds, for example. Swart delineates the many ways that state control of animals is interwoven with the control of humans, calling animobility "the ultimate subaltern mobility." Considered in these terms, a focus on animals can defamiliarize our assumptions about the ways that mobility is associated with power and challenge us to rethink the kinds of ethical obligations that should be taken into account in our field.

Michael Pesek discusses a more conventionally subaltern group, one that played an unconventional role in the history of wartime mobility. His "The War of Legs: Transport and Infrastructure in the East African Campaign of World War I" offers a history of Africans forced into service as porters by the colonial governments of England, Belgium, and Germany. African porters moved supplies in regions where infrastructure was insufficiently developed for vehicular transportation. Pesek compares the (often violent) German, British, and Belgian strategies for recruiting porters from among their colonial populations and outlines the porters' strategies for survival under these conditions, where disease and starvation posed a daily threat.

In 1965, the *Williams v. Wallace* court case that allowed the Selma to Montgomery voting rights march to take place weighed the claims of competing American mobilities: to what extent could the constitutionally guaranteed

right to peaceably assemble interfere with the free movement of individuals driving on U.S. Highway 80? It is no surprise, then, that the plaintiffs spent so much time discussing the logistics of their march. They had to prove that their physical movement itself would be orderly and respectable. Who belongs where, how they should move from one place to another, and what mode of transportation should be used are all political questions. Mobility is never neutral.

The “Ideas in Motion” essay in this issue takes this claim to heart. Part of this lightly refereed section intended to provoke debate and investigate the edges of our field, “Ideas in Motion” pieces present ideas about mobility that are political, poetic, and personal. Joshua Nash’s discussion of architectural pilgrimage raises questions about this kind of physical and imaginative inhabitation of space in a personal essay about a pilgrimage that helped him understand Finnish architect Alvar Aalto’s work. Nash discusses the ways that language and architecture coconstruct meaning. He sees a similar interplay between virtual pilgrimages (through images and electronic media) and physical movement in and around buildings.

As usual, we have our review sections on art, film, exhibitions, and books, the latter enriched with a review of a novel, which starting with this current volume will be a regular feature of this journal. We also have some personnel changes to report. After a brief duty as museum review editor, Anne-Katrin Ebert has stepped down and will be succeeded by a team consisting of a veteran exhibit expert, Deborah Breen (who previously served as our reviews editor in this section), and a newly engaged museologist, Chia-ling Lai. This change is part of our endeavor to dedicate more space to non-Western topics and reviewers. With now more than half of our annually printed space dedicated to such topics, we hope that you, as reader, follow us in this steady, but exciting and promising, paradigm shift.

Notes

1. “We Shall Overcome: Selma-to-Montgomery March,” National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, <http://www.nps.gov/nr/travel/civilrights/al4.htm> (accessed 7 April 2015).