

Editorial

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“Mobility crisis”: These are the words used by Anumita Roychoudhury, the executive director of Delhi’s Centre for Science and Environment, to describe the growing pollution in India, especially in large cities like Delhi, as a result of the dramatic increase in the use of motorized vehicles in the past two decades. Although the population of Delhi and its surrounding cities more than doubled (to twenty-two million) between 1991 and 2011, she points out that registered cars and motorbikes increased fivefold, to eight million.¹ This growth, along with increased but poorly regulated construction, underinvestment in public transport, and local and national policies that privilege automobiles at the expense of other forms of transport, has resulted in pollution rates that are now, according to a World Health Organization report, the worst in the world.²

Roychoudhury’s dramatic choice of words about pollution focuses our attention on the perplexing shades of mobility: its intricate connections to technology and status; the way it has shaped our notions of modernity, especially in our sense of the quality and quantity of voluntary movement; how, through the confluence of environment and health, we perceive its impact; and, above all, the inescapable paradox of mobility’s inequalities—the disparity between freedom for some and its concomitant constraints on others. Mobility, as Roychoudhury reminds us, has consequences.

Exploring the consequences of mobility is part of the mission of *Transfers*; in this issue, our authors incorporate that mission into discussions that integrate consequence into their analyses, not simply as linear cause and effect, but as interpretations of complex situations viewed from different disciplines. Sunny Stalter-Pace begins this conversation about mobility and consequence in her overview of twentieth-century plays that use the subway as setting or imagery. While giving readers a framework that places the “unavoidable diversity of the subway” within the scholarship of mobility and performance, Stalter-Pace engagingly challenges the notion of the subway as a “frictionless space of movement.” Through a detailed reading of Elmer Rice’s 1929 play *The Subway*, she shows how literary analysis complements social science by bringing to light the actions, interactions, and reactions of the theatrical protagonists. Stalter-Pace’s interpretation provokes us to consider the way mobility needs to be read alongside space and time: the subway, “a possible space of upward mobility during the morning commute,” becomes a “space of sexual menace in the middle of the night.” The “crisis” in this representation is not catalyzed by externally generated indicators such as pollution; rather,



it emerges from an internal crisis brought about through identity and social position. City dwellers, Stalter-Pace argues, are “mere nodes in the movement of people, vehicles, commodities, and utilities,” and literary representations, such as plays, help clarify these connections.

A different kind of consequence is explored by Rutul Joshi and Yogi Joseph in their examination of cycling policies in Indian cities. As Joshi and Joseph point out, bicycles are “fast disappearing from the urban landscape, popular culture, and everyday life in India.” They draw our attention to the statistical complements of growth and decline: as automobile ownership or usage grew, cycling in India’s major cities declined, from 30 percent in 1994 to 11 percent in 2008. Over a slightly longer period (1971 to 2004), the authors note, road-traffic deaths increased more than sixfold, with pedestrians and cyclists accounting for 50–67 percent of the fatalities. Joshi and Joseph make a compelling case that cycling has been displaced as a consequence of a paradigm of modernity that is defined by automotive technology and its infrastructures. Cyclists, they point out, have been stigmatized by their poverty and have been rendered invisible by government policy, which locally and nationally has largely focused on “motorized mobility as the future.”

From a misplaced emphasis on automobility as a template for the future to a reimagining of the mobilities of the past (though avowedly with the future in mind), the special section on “Settler-Colonial Mobilities” considers mobility and its consequences within aspects of Australasian colonial histories. The four articles, separately introduced by Georgine Clarsen, fit this journal’s mission in that they help us rethink the accepted wisdom of Western master narratives of mobility history. Clarsen highlights how applying a transnational mobilities framework to settler-colonial histories, in place of the traditional nationalist focus, renders “our historical imaginings less parochial.” Clapperton Chakanetsa Mavhunga, who comments on the special section, extends this observation to note the achievements of these four authors: first, to “decenter technology and center the human factor,” and then, to unfold the multiplicity of subjects and contexts, whether Indigenous peoples, or European and Asian migrants in varying circumstances on both sides of the Tasman Sea. These articles, he declares, open out counter- and antirepresentations of Western colonialism.

In our “Ideas in Motion” section, Zhenhua Chen’s contribution focuses on another dimension of consequence and mobility: that of culture. Using the lens of American exceptionalism, Chen analyzes resistance within the United States to the development of high-speed rail (HSR). He provides a perspective on the failure of President Obama’s administration to craft a successful federal-state HSR initiative by briefly examining four aspects of U.S. exceptionalism: individualism, antistatism, populism, and egalitarianism. The consequences of culture, Chen suggests, become clear in this scrutiny of opposition to high-speed rail. In our review section, we have our usual portfolios of art, films,

and museums. Each of these contributions aggregates our sense of mobility and its multiplicity of consequences. Whether exploring work that is “multi-referential and diasporic” (see the review of Senegalese artist El Hadji Sy and his collaborators in *Labaratoire AGIT’ART*); exposing the faulty binary of “ordered freedom” opposed to “chaotic self-destruction” in the representation of Indigenous American lives (see the review of *The Exiles*, originally released in 1961 and rereleased in 2008); or considering “the constraints of race and class and the contingency of mobility” (see the review of African-American painter Jacob Lawrence’s “Migration” series), our reviewers draw on the mission of *Transfers* to expand disciplinary boundaries and to connect work that is sensory and emotional with the research-based orientation of our articles.

Over a decade ago, John Law and John Urry stressed the significance of studying the “pleasures and pains, which follow the movement and displacement of people, objects, information and ideas.”³ This issue of *Transfers* allows us to consider those pleasures and pains from many perspectives. We hope you, too, will find the work of our authors significant and compelling, as they continue the conversation about mobility and its many consequences.

Notes

1. Quoted in Jason Burke, “Child Health Fears at the Most Polluted Spot in the World’s Most Polluted City,” *Guardian*, 24 June 2015, U.S. edition, <http://www.theguardian.com/environment/2015/jun/24/indian-children-fall-victim-to-delhis-appalling-pollution> (accessed 25 June 2015). (Note: Roychoudhury is rendered as Choudhury in the article.)
2. World Health Organization, WHO’s Ambient Air Pollution Database—Update 2014, http://www.who.int/phe/health_topics/outdoorair/databases/AAP_database_results_2014.pdf?ua=1 (accessed 6 July 2015).
3. John Law and John Urry, “Enacting the Social,” *Economy and Society* 33, no. 3 (August 2004): 390–410, 404.