

ONE

INTRODUCTION

Begin at the Beginning

WHY TRANSPORTATION?

It is astonishing how many of the world's great struggles may be framed in terms of mobility issues, from forty years in the desert, to the middle passage, the Trail of Tears, diasporas, dislocation, expatriation, repatriation, immigration, emigration, access to work, school, play, home, and so much more. Transportation options serve as both a barrier and a bridge, literally and figuratively, and may truncate or elongate both time and space for all denizens of the planet. The wherewithal to move about is increasingly packaged as an item that may be bought and sold whose exchange value buys more than simple arrival at destinations. The cultural cachet of being able to traverse a great deal of space and consume time at a rapid rate affords one a favored position in society, smoothing the road for a successful life. This commodification of movement and the consequent privileging and punishing, mobilizing and miring, conferring and crippling, produced and reproduced by the systematized transportation complex, evident globally, fine-tuned in the United States, and well illustrated in the Atlanta case, is what I refer to as the mode of mobility.

Both preference for and access to transportation options are created through overt and subtle processes that include: creating spaces that only lend themselves to certain forms of mobility (namely, the automobile) and preclude in many instances any alternatives; fetishizing high-speed, privatized forms of mobility; and privileging those forms that have been accommodated and fetishized, and also those persons who advocate them. The built environment both proscribes and describes where and how we are going, and the discourse that both reflects and creates that environment too often goes

unexamined. This reflexivity is manifest in all aspects of our movement as well as in our immobility. We learn what we “need” in part from reading the landscape that we are given (which was created by people’s choices or lack thereof at some point), which in turn gives those very needs life. Ever more roads call for ever more cars and we become increasingly less able to distinguish what we created from what is a “natural” and “obvious” trajectory of progress.

The human hand becomes invisible as creator and director of transportation options, in such a way as to allow us to believe, often, that we are merely following the road as it stretches before us, rather than shaping its twists and turns as we go. In this vein, then, the mode of mobility not only determines where we go and how we get there, (as if that were not enough) but further confers value added to (or subtracted from) the means that we choose or are forced to employ, and simultaneously obscures from us our power in the production of those means. Deciphering the hieroglyph of the mode of mobility and its ability to conflate physical movement and social position is the aim of this book.

Mine is fundamentally a neo-Marxian perspective: “Marxian” in that I take relations of power as central to all social processes, and “neo” in that I conceive these relations as situated not only in the economic sphere. Production is not purely an economic notion, but also applies to the production of knowledge, culture, and space. I see the concepts of ideology (the legitimization of the status quo via a predominant system of signs, symbols, and discourse); hegemony (the cultural domination of ideology by the elite); multiple oppressions, operating sometimes simultaneously and sometimes at odds with each other; and spatiality (how space is created, negotiated, manipulated, and dominated) as salient issues in reading the mobility landscape.

My central concept of the mode of mobility is fashioned after and extended out from Karl Marx’s conception of the mode of production in which the mode indicates the method of producing the necessities of life. This method is a complex and recursive exchange between external conditions and internal conceptions determining what we as a society need, want, and do. Marx ([1859] 1978) asserts, “It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness” (4). I extend on and transform this assertion by removing the “not” and transforming the “but” to an “and.” In so doing, this supposition discloses its deeply reflexive character, revealing the dialectical nature of the process, becoming: “It is the consciousness of men [humans] that determines their being, and their social being that determines their consciousness.” Thus, I seek to investigate the interplay between discourse and the built environment, mindful that each recursively affects the other, culminating in transportation policies and practices that both mirror and manufacture the mode of mobility.

More specifically, I ask how the mode of mobility is produced and reproduced in Atlanta, Georgia. This overarching question leads to a set of sub-questions:

- What motivates groups of individuals to fight for, or against, a particular transportation policy?
- How does this motivation and the action(s) in response to it, vary temporally, geographically, by race, class, gender, age, and so forth?
- How are transportation decisions arrived at?
- Who are the key players in setting the agendas and making the decisions?

Car-centered Growth advocates; Green (environmental) proponents; and Equity (social justice) actors emerge as the triumvirate in the region determining transportation and land-use practices. Attention to these forces leads to questions such as:

- Under what circumstances do each of these goals intersect with the others?
- When are they mutually exclusive?
- What makes them at times mutually supportive?
- When they are at odds, what forces result in the privileging of one over the others?

WHY ATLANTA?

When one person's mobility is mired in gridlock, lack of access, pollution, impossibly circuitous routes, or danger, it is a private trouble. When one million people are consistently so mired . . . it is Atlanta! The transportation crisis in Atlanta has reached such epic proportions that it is the topic of not only much scholarship but also of street-corner and tabloid discussions. Illustrative is a Web site simply entitled Atlanta Jokes. If one visits this virtual location, sixteen of the twenty jokes listed have to do with Atlanta's transportation issues. Two examples give not only the flavor of the site but also well reflect sentiments often heard expressed around town:

Atlanta is comprised entirely of one way streets. The only way to get out of downtown Atlanta is to turn around and start over when you reach Greenville, South Carolina.

The 8 a.m. rush hour is from 6:30 to 9:30 a.m. The 5:00 p.m. rush hour is from 3:30 to 6:30 p.m. Friday's rush hour starts Thursday morning and lasts through 2:00 a.m. Saturday (AHAJokes.com).

Joking aside, the inconveniences, annoyances, and hardships created in Atlanta by too many automobiles and overcrowded roads, and not enough alternatives for movement, have reached untenable levels:

In metro Atlanta, the number of miles driven each day on the area's roads was expected to rise by about forty-two million miles by 2005—about half the distance from the earth to the sun. The vice chairman for transportation of the Metro Atlanta Chamber of Commerce predicts that by 2010, Atlantans will spend more time in traffic than at home. Traffic congestion in Atlanta has become so bad that the Chamber of Commerce called it the greatest threat to the city's prosperity ("Traffic Congestion," FAIR 2003:1–2).

Efforts to rectify the myriad problems associated with this impasse have for too long focused on individual pieces of the puzzle and behavior modification with little attention to the ideological framework that undergirds the entire system. For example, growth-oriented policies (and the political actors associated with them) look to ever more roads to alleviate the traffic congestion. Those with a "greener" orientation seek greater walkability, bikability, and more public transit options to address the needs of both those who must move about and the space in which they move. Citizens concerned primarily with issues of equity organize their efforts around policies that will increase the mobility of marginalized members of society, reminding us that, "solutions guided by a tendency which ignores that fact of inequality will inevitably place the greatest burdens of adjustment on those least able to carry them" (Irrante 1980:516). While all of these actors are in pursuit of relief for pains arising from the same source, their proposed solutions can at best be palliative and never curative because they attend to symptoms rather than the disease.

To further complicate matters, groups of people with the above-mentioned primary interests often find themselves at loggerheads with one another, either in overt conflict (as with the growth and equity groups); in an uneasy and volatile game of concessions and compromises (as with the green and growth groups); or in a strange and often confoundingly strained relationship in which ostensibly compatible goals clash despite the best intentions of the parties involved (as with the equity and green groups). The tensions arising from the open enmity in some instances, the veiled friction between interests in others, and the unsettled alliances created in still others could perhaps be eased if all parties had a more profound understanding of the foundations on which their assumptions about mobility are predicated.

Getting at what lies beneath the asphalt, as it were, will shed light on its seemingly unstoppable space, energy, and money consumption and perhaps allow for future decision making that includes a more nuanced reading of the landscape. This exploration will therefore include, but not

be limited to, a cataloguing of the components of policy formulation as commonly understood—i.e., the agenda-setting process, the actors invited to the table, and the outcomes. It will further be an examination of what precedes all of this; the taken for granted assumptions about the meanings and possibilities of mobility. For example, all researchers are aware that the questions we bring to a study in part determine the answers. This is no less true with how transportation policy is created. In terms of equity issues, for instance:

How transportation is defined and measured can often determine how equity is evaluated. The use of vehicle mileage, as a measure of travel and traffic congestion, tends to favor more spending on infrastructure improvements and less on other transportation alternatives. Also, transportation planners use other variables in their transportation modeling such as vehicle miles traveled, which favors people who drive their automobile more miles than average, or passenger miles traveled, which favors people who travel more than average (Bullard et al. 2000:68).

If mobility is defined and hierarchically structured in such a way as to marginalize some modes, and even preclude others, we would do well to identify how that construction came into being. As with any social problem, seeking a way out must begin with understanding how we arrived there in the first place.

This investigation engages a wide literature on race, space, and place; attendance at transportation and land-use meetings and symposia; archival data; and in-depth interviews with twenty area transportation experts and interested parties, including planners and designers, authority staff and board members, conservationists and environmentalists, transit and pedestrian advocates, environmental justice actors, lobbyists, and Chamber of Commerce staff and members. As race and regionalism are so central to understanding power and procedure in metro Atlanta, particular attention will be given to racial and spatial practices. (See appendix A for a full detailing of methodology.)

The macro analysis, meaning how these local transportation and land-use policies and practices reflect and inform the mode of mobility on a global scale, will be largely addressed in chapter 2 and in the concluding chapter. What I discover through scrutinizing the particular cases in chapters 3 on MARTA, 4 on GRTA, and 5 on the Beltline will also be—though not generalizable—situated in the larger context to understand how Atlanta's mobility practices are both products and producers of global ones.

As this is an examination of transportation-related policies and practices and the suppositions upon which they are based at the local and regional levels, the microanalysis of how individuals personally negotiate space shall

be mostly left to other works or other scholars. My investigation will focus largely on meso-level processes through the examination of the creation, trajectories, and current positioning of three major Atlanta transportation projects: the Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority (MARTA), the Georgia Regional Transportation Authority (GRTA), and the Beltline, an enormously popular current proposal to build a twenty-two-mile loop of greenspace, transit, and other amenities around an inner loop of the city built on existing rail beds.

These three projects exemplify the region's struggles with transportation and land-use policy development over the last thirty years and hold the key to understanding how transportation is "done" in metropolitan Atlanta. The examination of MARTA's life course especially reveals the intersection of race and place in transportation planning. GRTA's history gives us a clear window into spatial disputes—particularly the urban/suburban split and how regionalism becomes so central to policy decisions. The examination of the evolving Beltline project is an excellent site from which to view issue framing around a currently popular enterprise in which developers, politicians, environmentalists, and public transit actors all have a clear and articulated stake. All three cases provide insight into the interplay between Growth, Green, and Equity issues in the region.

Transportation policies and procedures are not developed in a vacuum. It is increasingly recognized that land-use patterns are both informed by and informative of transportation practices. Consequently, much of this investigation focuses on the intersections between the development and implementation of land-use policies and transportation decisions. How land is configured shapes how we move about on it, and how we move about determines how we delineate space. Growth and development, environmental concerns, and issues of equity—both geographic and social—all play major roles in these determinations. Thus, land use and transportation negotiations are highly politicized and hinge largely on ideological positions for their existence. Consequently, they rely heavily on paradigm shifts if they are to transform. In this work, I trace the conceptual and tangible trails, especially in the metropolitan Atlanta region, of the mode of mobility over the last several years. Through the interrogation of MARTA, GRTA, and the Beltline, and the ideologies that have driven them, I disentangle the "spaghetti junction" that comprises Atlanta's mode of mobility.

CHAPTER OVERVIEWS

In chapter 2, I invoke the pertinent literature. This inquiry engages a number of discourses and perspectives. For convenience and clarity I have loosely subdivided the literature relevant to the mode of transportation into three groups: Race; Place; and Space. These categories are merely an artifice with much overlap and other shortcomings. Nonetheless, it is my

hope that this necessarily oversimplified classification system will allow me as the author and you as the reader to make sense of the salient works as they pertain to this one. Toward that end, I will define the terms as I am using them here.

The Race literature refers to those works that primarily focus on race or ethnicity as either most or highly salient in the trajectory of urban development, especially as it relates to transportation issues. I interrogate global, national, regional, and local discourses on race and its application to mobility, with an emphasis on Atlanta's issues. As Atlanta's theme song could be dubbed, "We Built This City on Race and Roads," there is no better site for such an inquiry.

The Place research touches on urban inquiries that situate location, both physical and social, at the heart of their arguments. In addition to invoking race, class, gender, age, disability, and other markers of difference from the dominant in the examination of urban mobility, the place research invites an interrogation of the role of transportation in the negotiations between the ideological bastions of pro-growth and slow-growth groups (facile yet useful distinctions). In this review, I examine place conceptions such as sprawl, Urban Regimes and issue framing, Smart Growth, New Urbanism, Market-based growth, and automobility.

The Space narratives involve those discourses that problematize the very notion of place, inviting us to dig beneath the surface and discover how space is created, manipulated, defined, and undergoes metamorphosis through the processes of human perception, commentary, and action. If we conceive of place research as examining location—both physical and social and the interconnections between the two—we may think of the space narratives as deconstructing, or de-locating if you will, location itself. This can be understood through discourses that uncover both the globalization of the local and the localization of the global. By the former, I mean the stripping away of the cultural identity of places—marked by the indistinguishability of various aspects of cities, such that in strip malls and chain restaurants around the world you might be anywhere at all—deprived of local flavor and steeped in Starbucks coffee. The relentless paving of space, reconfiguring vast quantities of it into freeways leading to intersecting and bisecting further freeways, is also emblematic of this phenomenon. Ruteiser (1996) speaks of this phenomenon in the Atlanta context, noting that both the local and the global have been subsumed under the mantle of progress and image-making, resulting in a place that is "the inverse of both globality and locality, the ultimate nonplace that belongs to everywhere, yet is located nowhere in particular and which has little to offer but Planet Hollywood, the Hard Rock Café, and other sites of serialized uniqueness" (73).

By localization of the global, I refer to those aspects of city life aimed at the reappropriation of regional identity. In Atlanta, the current excitement and advocacy around the Beltline project speaks vividly to this concept. It is

an effort to combine greenspace, land use, and transit options as a means to localize the global need for community and identity, by creating a connected series of parks and amenities that, allegedly, no other city in the United States, or perhaps the world, has. Similarly, the push for sustainable communities (discussed at length farther on in this book) is another means by which people attempt to incorporate global concerns, such as environmental consciousness, into local, daily practices.

These two often competing but occasionally complementary aspects of spatiality—one gobbling up place through homogenization and the other struggling to rescue it from obliteration via local identity claims—comprise the essence of the space narratives as I utilize them here. This lopsided equation with (as we shall see in the ensuing discussion) the attempts at retrieval often resulting in the unintended consequence of reproducing that which they aim to escape—reveals an important component of the mode of mobility. That is to say, the space narratives help us to understand how the mode of mobility is deeply implicated in the orchestration of space. Mobility's infrastructure is informed by pushes and pulls toward the vacuous and the meaningful, the artificial and the authentic.

Space narratives use the place research as their jumping-off point, further problematizing notions of location by placing them in a broader context. For example, in examining the new “planned communities,” both the place research and the space narratives can help us to identify whose interests are served by “new” spatial configurations. The space narratives can also take us farther into the recognition that places are symbols for something else (affluence, poverty, individuality, private property) and that at the same time that “something else” gets finally devoured by the symbols themselves. LeFebvre ([1974] 1991) explains: “The ‘world of signs’ is not merely the space occupied by space and images . . . It is also that space where the Ego no longer relates to its own nature, to the material world, or even to the ‘thingness’ of things (commodities), but only to things bound to their signs and indeed ousted and supplanted by them” (311).

Through this lens, then, we begin to apprehend the ways in which, for instance, the supremacy of the automobile has resulted in “city life [that] is subtly but profoundly changed, sacrificed to that abstract space where cars circulate like so many atomic particles” (312). The examination of these three intimately related literatures will set the stage for the analysis of the three transportation cases I explore: MARTA, GRTA, and the Beltline.

Chapter 3 takes an in-depth look at MARTA. I begin by situating MARTA's current station in historical context. I look at its evolution from the perspectives of Atlanta's black and white communities and other interested parties, including the transit dependent, the business community, political actors, and environmental and equity groups. I examine the interactions, negotiations, and outcomes among these several actors. This exploration places MARTA squarely in the center of Atlanta's racial and

spatial disputes, and highlights the ways in which politics continue to be deeply implicated in its trajectory.

MARTA, often read as both symbol and carrier of Atlanta's poor and left behind, has, at times, been alternately framed as Atlanta's beautiful centerpiece. Its current hideous reputation, to elucidate this point, caused one of my respondents to proclaim, "It's hard to believe now, but it's only been nine years since MARTA was the darling of this town! I mean, the Olympics would never have come to Atlanta without MARTA!" In tracing MARTA's path to its current brink of transformation, it becomes clear that the contest over what it becomes is more dependent on what it means than what it is.

The investigation of the Georgia Regional Transportation Authority (GRTA) in chapter 4 reveals the deeply conflicted relationships between land-use planning and transportation modality. From its inception to its present state of being, GRTA has conjured up both the best intentions and the worst fears of area actors regarding a vision for Atlanta's mobility future. Implemented at the behest of Governor Roy Barnes in response to issues of nonattainment of air quality standards, GRTA's powers (though, as we shall see, sparingly used) have become emblematic of the tightrope between liberty and license, or, seen from another perspective, between urban planning and social engineering.

Shot through with language allowing for unprecedented regulation on area transportation plans, the GRTA statute moves our inquiry to a deep place, poignantly pitting notions of free-market ideology against those of limited, sustainable growth. Those who favor unfettered mobility are passionate in their defense, not only of its benefits, but also of its position in our lives as an inalienable right. Those who see setting some limits as necessary in leaving our children a livable planet are equally ardent in their beliefs and efforts. The contestation over GRTA's role is an excellent site in which to view this intense divide, which profoundly influences local, regional, national, and global discourses and performances.

Chapter 5 explores the current proposal to build on a belt line of existing railroad tracks in Atlanta. The proposal was based on a Georgia Institute of Technology graduate student's master's thesis, and then strongly advocated by developers, city government, various transportation agencies, and pedestrian and bicycle-oriented groups. The proposition is essentially a twenty-two-mile loop of greenspace, transit, and transit-oriented development within the city of Atlanta. This is a particularly significant case, because its proponents frame it as advantageous to all parties—promoting it as tantalizing to growth, green, and equity groups alike.

Despite seemingly ubiquitous support, the Beltline is no more uni-dimensional than the other cases studied. Notwithstanding the rhetoric, it is as unlikely to be a panacea for all the city's ills as it is to bridge the ideological chasm already referenced between area actors. Thus, its physical

manifestation and symbolic meanings will be negotiated on the same playing field as the other instances examined. The Beltline project is gathering steam every day and appears to be remarkably popular with a broad cast of players. (Critics have also begun to appear on the scene, as we shall see in Chapter 5.) Yet there are really multiple versions of what it may become floating around the city. Its neonatal status makes it distinct from MARTA, which we are perhaps capturing in its swan song phase, and from GRTA, which we are analyzing six years into its existence. The Beltline affords us an opportunity to speculate, based on evidence from the other cases and from application of the sociological imagination, on which version will ultimately emerge.

The concluding chapter will examine the ways in which taken together these three cases provide an optimum window through which to view the Atlanta Metropolitan Area's transportation policies and practices over the last several years. Ideally, it will also give us the theoretical tools to assist in the formulation of a vision that will move us forward, as the transportation lingo goes, in a "seamless, linked, and coordinated" fashion. This chapter will also go beyond the lessons of the preceding ones, and be a safe haven in which to richly imagine a different mode of mobility. In it, while not entirely suspending reality, I invite us to envision with fewer cynical constraints a world of movement within spaces created by and for the people. After acknowledging some of the mighty forces that we find ourselves up against, I will draw on examples from inspirational, experimental, and visionary persons and communities that seek to create, in the words of Lefebvre ([1974] 1991), "an architecture of pleasure and joy, of community in the use of the gifts of the earth" (379). I will examine some alternatives to the auto-craic landscape that has been so painstakingly crafted. Examining contemporary mobility patterns—central and marginal, actualized and fantasized, with and against the current—I will take a glimpse into the potential futures of transportation. Shifting our gaze from the horrific probable to the promising possible, we round off our tour through the labyrinth of the mode of mobility, ultimately returning to what is likely to actually be the transportation future of the region.