Editorial

The title of this journal, *Transfers*, merits explication, as it attempts to engage a multitude of scholarly fields, applications, practices and conceptual frameworks. For us, *Transfers* invokes the movement of people, things, and information through time and space, but it also applies to the transit of concepts between fields of scholarship. The practices of technology transfer are an example of the former, while the latter can be seen at work when the concept of mobility is used to refer to both social (or “vertical”) mobility and physical (or “horizontal”) mobility. Social mobility, for instance, comes into play when the possession of a car leads to higher status, or when the train compartment becomes a medium of social exchange or the display of social hierarchies rather than simply a vehicle of physical transport. Interdisciplinarity, the key scholarly mode of this journal, always involves the movement of ideas across disciplinary borders, unsettling them in (we think) productive ways. *Transfers*, in other words, connects adjacent fields of scholarship as much as it connects geographical areas between which technologies move. It is crucial to understand that during this process, people, technologies, concepts, and goods in movement are transformed and transform their environments in turn. This is not an automatic or passive process: as people move, people translate.

We do too. A special form of translation takes place in scholarly journals like ours: when a French historian or a Chinese sociologist, for example, submits a paper to *Transfers*, a process of translation is set in motion which is not limited to the linguistic level. An entire academic culture has to be “translated”, and often there are some casualties along the road. Scholars who have travelled this road sometimes complain that, once “translated”, they no longer recognize the subtleties of their argumentation in the impoverished representation of what they originally wished to convey. Not only that, but they also may have the feeling that an entire academic culture has been recast into an Anglophone frame of mind. When Jacques Derrida discussed the possibilities of publishing a continental-European review of books (the short-lived periodical *Liber*) the prospective editor, Pierre Bourdieu, believed, in the words of someone who was present at the time, that “cultural divisions would be overcome and their very origins could be subjected to intellectual scrutiny.” The witness who tells this anecdote, Jeremy Treglown, in a letter to the editor in the *Times Literary Supplement*,¹ relates how Derrida “warned that in practice the editorial board would select only the most translatable submissions.” Treglown

acknowledges that Derrida “was partly right, and when he was wrong the pieces chosen, once translated, proved unreadable.”

In some cases such translation problems influence an entire scholarly reputation. While Claude Lévi-Strauss is seen by some as an unscientific dilettante, others (especially those in the dominant, Anglo-Saxon academic culture) experience his translated work as a victim of a “a difference in scientific style,” as a Dutch anthropologist concludes: a difference between “the Anglo-Saxon which is cool and precise versus the French which is reputed to be more literary and philosophical.”²

This problem of translation haunts every Anglophone journal with the ambition to be truly international. All too often submissions are rejected on linguistic grounds, although the wording in the referee reports might not say so explicitly. Moreover, promising pieces of scholarship are lost because they do not seem to “fit” the standard Anglophone mold.

Transfers recognizes these issues, and the referees and editors try their utmost to understand and preserve the cultural perspectives of our international contributors’ work. The journal is also considering offering, initially on a modest scale and only for German and French articles for the moment, a staged refereeing procedure. Referees will first read submitted articles in the original language of the author and only then in English, after a reasonable confidence has been built up about the potential of the submission for publication and after the author has made the investment in a high-quality translation. If you, as a reader, or potential author or referee, are interested in such a scheme, please contact the editor to discuss the possibilities.

Despite these obstacles, we are excited by the transfer of scholarship between countries, disciplines and conceptual approaches in evidence in this issue. Deborah Breen’s “Constellations of Mobility and the Politics of Environment: Preliminary Considerations of the Shipbreaking Industry in Bangladesh” uses “mobility” as framework for analyzing ships’ biographies, especially their environmentally harmful end of life, and their subsequent recycling, or transformation into new (and problematic) resources.

Sasha Disko, in her historical analysis of German long-range motorcycle journeys, entitled “‘The World is My Domain’—Technology, Gender, and Orientalism in German Interwar Motorized Adventure Literature,” considers the ways that adventurous travel was represented as a re-ordering of Germany’s place in the world. She analyses the memoirs, adventurous travel literature and popular press stories by and about prominent male and female transcontinental motorists in the years after the First World War as a very specific expression of German Orientalism. Tomás López-Pumajero, in his “Urban Consumers on Two Wheels: Metropolitan Bike-sharing Schemes and Outdoor Advertising in Paris, Montreal, New York and San Juan,” covers the transfer of a bike-sharing business model

between four cities. He notes the confluence of environmentalism, fitness, and consumer culture that enable such schemes, and asserts that urban bike-sharing programs are likely to feature prominently in a post-car, but robustly consumerist future.

Nduka Otono analyzes brain-drain migration from Africa as a transfer of people in his “Tracking Skilled Diasporas: Globalization, Brain Drain and the Postcolonial Condition in Nigeria.” He describes a critical economic problem facing Nigeria and other postcolonial sites: namely, the “bright flight” of educated professionals to Europe and North America. Otono notes that the contribution of the migrants to the Global North amounts to a sort of reverse foreign aid.

Finally, Stefan Krebs follows the ways French automotive engineers silenced the automobile by translating the desire for a less noisy urban culture into the nuts and bolts of technology, in his “The French Quest for the Silent Car Body: Technology, Comfort and Distinction in the Interwar Period.”

As usual, we have the review sections dedicated to art (our new Art Editor Fernanda Duarte presents her dissertation topic on a “Transborder Immigrant Tool”), museums (the railway museum in Utrecht, The Netherlands, by Rolf-Ulrich Kunze), film (Sønke Myrda’s report of the 11th Annual Bicycle Film Festival) and books. In our discussion forum, “Ideas in Motion”, we offer a book review essay by Louise Nelson Dyble on food-related mobilities, while Sven Kesselring reports of a new initiative by the French national railway company SNCF to start a research center in which the role of art is as prominent as social science research.

With this issue we conclude our first volume of *Transfers*, a hectic phase in our young history in which we had to (re)invent many aspects of running a journal. We have an active editorial team who did all this, backed by a prominent editorial board and supported by a knowledgeable and reliable pool of referees. This group, of more than fifty people led by the core of the editorial team, meanwhile managed to publish fourteen peer-reviewed papers (and one translation), ten of them historical. Four covered (the history of) planning and coordination (between road and rail, our first Special Section), two each were related to philosophy/cultural studies; media and mobility; art and literature; and the bicycle, while one contribution was dedicated to migration, one to environmental issues and one was written in the tradition of the history of technology. Most of the authors came from Europe or the US, which we hope you, as readers, will change by sending in submissions from other continents. We also hope that we convinced you in the previous three issues that the interdisciplinary fields of *Transfers* are worthy of further investigation. Perhaps we have even moved you into that most genial of readerly acts,

subscribing, or into having your university subscribe. We thank you for this much-needed support!

Gijs Mom
Editor

Georgine Clarsen and Cotten Seiler
Associate editors

Notes

1. Jeremy Treglown, "'Anglophone' literature," *Times Literary Supplement*, May 6, 2011, 6.
2. André Köbben, "Lévi-Strauss droeg kleren van de keizer met zwier," *De Volkskrant*, June 25, 2011, 32–33 (review of Patrick Wilcken's biography of Lévi-Strauss [New York, 2010]).