Editorial

At Eindhoven University of Technology, which has a modest reputation for collecting contemporary art, an exhibition of large machines and poetic video clips by father and son Van Bakel invites passersby to reflect on mobility. Gerrit van Bakel, who died more than a quarter century ago, became known for his Tarim Machine, a vehicle that moves at such a low speed that it almost does not matter whether it moves or not. The propulsion principle—for those who love technology—rests on the dilatation energy of oil in tubes propelling (if propelling is the right word ...) the contraption a couple of centimeters over a hundred years or so, as long as there is change in temperature to trigger the dilatation. Emphasizing his father's insights, Michiel van Bakel, exhibits a video clip of a horse and rider galloping over a square in Rotterdam, where the position and camera work are operated so that the horse seems to turn around its axis while the environment rotates at a different tempo. Mobility, these Dutch artists convey, is often not what it seems to be.

We could not agree more: the automobile system is one giant Tarim Machine moving at an unperceivably low speed: most of our cars rest in parking lots and garages most of the time. Even when they move they often stand still in traffic jams, connected, like a metallic swarm, to the outside world through digital devices, celebrating immobile mobility.

Such confusing images of vehicles and environments standing still and moving at the same time are more than wordplay. They express the short-circuits between disciplines at the moment their semantics, methodologies, and lexicons collide. *Transfers*, as an interdisciplinary journal, is built upon, and designed for, those short-circuits and their scholarly repercussions. After all, we want to bring together several traditions of scholarship not often in conversation: arts, film studies, the history of technology, philosophy, the social sciences, cultural and American studies, and science and technology studies (STS). This interactivity has been attempted before, but our ambition is to provide a platform for high-quality scholarship using the reliable peer-review system as a basis (and a staged refereeing system to accommodate those scholars who are not versed in English, as we explained in our previous editorial).¹ To recapitulate the plea that we put forward in our first issue: we need you, reader, to help us accomplish this!

The differences between *Transfers* and monodisciplinary journals are large indeed, as we are continually discovering. After one year of experiments we have learned that we cannot simply build upon the exclusivist expertise of the specialist, although we need her knowledge and experience to identify errors and inconsistencies. In the peer-review process, we sometimes have

to deal with recommendations for rejection from one referee, while another praises the paper to the heavens. We have found that there normally is at least one dissident among the referees and often one of the opposing opinions remains unsatisfied with the final paper. We take this disputation as, all things considered, a sign that we are doing something useful—at least we prefer it to an illusory or lukewarm consensus. Our editorial collective engages in two and sometimes even three or four rounds of refereeing, so we have to go back to the dissenting referee and persuade him (by showing him the reports from his fellow-referees) that he is right and wrong at the same time. In the vast majority of cases, a referee will be convinced, however grudgingly, in order to let a compelling piece of scholarship see the light.

Disciplinary “turf” is regularly invaded in an interdisciplinary endeavor like *Transfers*: historians do not like anthropologists to “do” history, and vice versa—nor do cultural studies people like to be accused of a lack of empiricism by their STS colleagues. Yet interdisciplinary scholarship requires its authors and referees to be both rigorous and generous, to be uncompromising on argumentation, evidence and theoretical robustness, but willing to grant latitude on disciplinary differences of method and style. We are thankful and proud that we have a growing pool of such referees who are ready for that challenge.

We are also adamant that *Transfers* be a journal not only for senior and established scholars. We note with satisfaction that the summer schools we attended during the past season, as well as the submissions we have collected during our brief existence so far, show that among young scholars there is a lively interest in transdisciplinarity, which we defined in our first editorial as a process that would result in a new scholarly entity (instead of just an amalgam of influences).²

Now, at the start of our second volume, the translation of Marc Augé’s brief text we dubbed “Thinking Mobility” stands for this uncompromising interdisciplinarity. Augé, an anthropologist by training, has throughout his career asserted that mobility cannot be comprehended through a single disciplinary perspective. Here he emphasizes the stakes of mobility at both the global and national levels. His text, like the one by Peter Sloterdijk we started our journal with a year ago, reminds us that there exists scholarship that must be translated before it can be consumed. We thank Dr Augé for his permission to translate and print his text.

The product of a different kind of “translation,” Phillip Vannini and Jonathan Taggart’s article “Off-grid Mobilities: Incorporating a Way of Life,” represents a novel form of anthropology that uses more than the textual record to make its point. Starting with an HD video capturing fragments of everyday life on Lasqueti Island—off Canada’s West Coast—Vannini and Taggart push the boundaries of ethnographic representation throughout their paper, by showing (through evocative writing, artistic photography,

and hyperlinked audio clips) how energy and fuel generation and utilization are “incorporated” into routine movements. Energy, they argue, is pure circulation, and channeling it in desired ways presents the dwellers of this countercultural island space with the taskscapes of a unique mobility constellation. We hope this article will function as a model for other scholars who wish to experiment with transmedial representation, thus enriching *Transfers*’ online version beyond what the printed version can deliver.

The second contribution, Nathalie Roseau’s “Airports as Urban Narratives: Toward a Cultural History of Global Infrastructures” is a fine example of interdisciplinary inquiry, moving between architecture and the history of mobility, urbanism and art. Building upon and challenging Marc Augé’s work, Roseau argues against a globalizing analysis of airports as “non-places” by offering an historical analysis of how particular airports have been imagined, built, and renovated always in relation to the cities for which they serve as gateways and emblems.

In apparent contrast, the Special Section on Roads appears to fall back on a monodisciplinary stance, but this is misleading. The three papers—Michael Ryckewaert’s “Building a Hybrid Highway System: Road Infrastructure as an Instrument of Economic Urbanization in Belgium,” Massimo Moraglio’s “European Models, Domestic Hesitance: The Renewal of the Italian Road Network in the 1920s” and Peter Merriman’s “Britain and ‘the Motorway Club’: The Effect of European and North American Motorway Construction on Attitudes in Britain, 1930–1960,” —were contributions to a workshop organized by the Dutch Ministry for Traffic and Water Management in February 2009 dedicated to “Dutch Mobility in a European Context.” These papers have been the basis of conversations (if not confrontations) between historians of mobility and transport experts from the Ministry about the usefulness of history for current-day planning and policymaking. Meanwhile, debated under the heading of Applied History or Public History, such crossovers between disciplines have become more common recently, and are an important part of this journal’s portfolio. That is why we invited two well-known scholars to guide the papers to the readers. Thomas Zeller, the renowned historian of German *autobahnen* and their surrounding landscaping, places the papers in their historiographical context. Max Lay, the Australian authority on roads known for his *longue durée* genealogy of road construction and management, illuminates the same papers from a contemporary engineering point of view. This is the format for Special Sections (containing three to four articles maximum) we offer to those scholars who might consider publishing the very best selection of a conference session or workshop.

Apart from this interdisciplinary angle, the three contributions also represent new departures within the discipline. Moraglio shows how Italian fascist road-building discourses and practices resulted in a retardation,

rather than acceleration, of modernization. He also claims that England, not the U.S., functioned as a model for Italian road builders, therefore questioning an all-too-simple “Americanization” thesis. The U.K., for its part, also looked abroad for inspiration, most particularly (and crucially) to Germany. In his contribution, Merriman traces the complex reactions in Britain to the construction of the German National Socialist Party’s *Autobahnen* in the 1930s, arguing that while national contexts are important for understanding transport histories, officials in Britain developed national policies with one eye focused on other nations, and developments on an international scale. Ryckewaert suggests a new departure in road construction history by relating the planning history of Belgium, deviating considerably from the standard modes of the history of mobility. “Hybrid” is the term he uses to describe Belgium’s post-Second World War road network, as that network combined long-range and local design goals. Together with Greet de Block’s and Bruno de Meulder’s analysis of spatial planning and urbanism, published in an earlier issue,³ a new and exciting vista emerges on a third model of decentralized intermodal mobility planning, alongside an American and a Northern-European model. We hope that scholars of other small countries (Switzerland? Norway?), as well as of other political formations (revolutionary? colonial? settler colonial?) will respond to this challenge and develop their own comparative accounts.

With the start of this new volume, we would like to thank our co-editors and the members of our editorial board for their commitment during the last year. Our most heartfelt thankfulness, however, is directed at all those anonymous referees who were so instrumental in making *Transfers* into a journal that *exists*. During the coming volume we hope to make sure that our journal *matters*. We need your support, as readers, as submitters, and as subscribers, either individually or through your institution’s library. Help us matter!

Gijs Mom
Editor

Georgine Clarsen and Cotten Seiler
Associate editors

Notes

1. Gijs Mom, Georgine Clarsen, Cotten Seiler, “Editorial,” *Transfers* 1, no. 3 (Winter 2011): 1–4.
2. Gijs Mom (together with Georgine Clarsen, Nanny Kim, Cotten Seiler, Kurt Möser, Dorit Müller, Charissa Terranova and Rudi Volti), “Editorial,” *Transfers* 1, no. 1 (Spring 2011): 1–13.
3. Greet De Block and Bruno De Meulder, “Iterative Modernism: The Design Mode of Interwar Engineering in Belgium,” *Transfers* 1, no. 1 (Spring 2011): 97–126.