

# Editorial

Gijs Mom

In the very first issue of *Transfers*, we invited our readers to “Hop On the Bus,” to engage in an adventure to rethink mobility, and to reformulate and construe what we called new mobility studies (NMS), an envisaged amalgam of historical, humanities, and social science approaches to modern and post-modern mobilities.<sup>1</sup> Now, seven volumes and seven years (and twenty-one issues with give or take two hundred main articles and three hundred reviews) later, at a moment when I consider my time to lead this fascinating project as coming to an end, we can look back, I venture to conclude, on a period in which this project stabilized into a transdisciplinary, transnational program of research with contributions from academic and nonacademic writers from across the globe. Although it took nearly twice as long as we had planned at the beginning, we now manage and edit a journal that meanwhile has clearly conquered its own position in a rapidly expanding field, of experimenting with reformulations and redefinitions of what it means to be mobile, either in a bus, in a car, or on a bicycle, or through a cell phone, a game, or the Internet, or, for that matter, in just a dangerous situation, as the current issue will testify. These reformulations and redefinitions are of an increasingly inter- and transdisciplinary nature, because we consider the future of NMS to be some form of symbiosis between media studies and transport studies, between histories of communication and mobilities, between social science and the humanities.

The content of the seventh volume testifies to this multifacetedness. We had two special sections/issues that determined to a large extent the topics and approaches dominating this year: travel writing and print culture (7, no. 1) and dangerous mobilities (7, no. 3). Together with the “open” issue in between (7, no. 2), the represented disciplines varied from media studies and travel writing, gender studies, musicology, migration and refugee studies, urban transport and disaster studies (from poverty management to earthquakes and nighttime cargo ship navigating), undertaken by philosophers, anthropologists, geographers, sociologists, literary students, and historians. The array of “vehicles” depicted and analyzed this year also show the inadequacy of traditional transport-related categorization, as they varied from maritime transport and printed texts to music pieces, bicycles, subways, and cars, including a philosophical piece on digital mobility and a fundamental study about the relationship between mobility and disaster studies. The analyses



were written and their topics located in Australia and New Zealand, China, Latin America, Europe, Afghanistan, Gaza, and the United States.

Now that I will no longer be responsible for the scholarship to be printed in our next volume, this should be the place to thank from the bottom of my heart those numerous, anonymous referees in our pool, who had the stamina to insist on positions taken without falling back into disciplinary partisanship (“this is not history,” “this is bad geography”), often for three consecutive cycles of revisions. The high scholarly quality of our content is predominantly because of them, as eager as they are to develop a subfield that is prepared to think “out of the box.” This is also true for the editorial team members Mimi Sheller, Georgine Clarsen, Peter Merriman, Stéphanie Ponsavady, and Dagmar Schäfer (and Fabian Kröger as media editorial assistant, responsible for illustration quality), with whom I had the privilege to cooperate during the last seven years, as well as those who served as editor for a shorter period of time: Carissa Terranova, Cotten Seiler, and Nanny Kim. They all proved to be nonpartisan, eager to transcend disciplinary borders, willing to assist nonnative submitters in their struggle with linguistic imperialism, and, indeed (we are a text shop), making sure that all those dozens of texts reach the publisher in time. I would like to mention especially Georgine Clarsen, my down-under friend who during the first years was instrumental in doing last-minute refereeing, anglicizing my English, and all those other emergency things that characterize the daily work of managing an academic journal.

What makes our journal special, too, according to the responses we have received from readers and the measurements of download “clicks” from our publisher, are the review sections on film, exhibits and exhibitions, art, and books, including novels. We deliberately cast our nets very wide, identifying novel approaches, themes, and topics rather than constructing a canon, suggesting new ways of “rethinking mobility” (this journal’s mission). I would like to thank Fernanda Duarte, Dorit Müller, Chia-ling Lai and Deborah Breen, Liz Montegary, and Steven Spalding (including their predecessors, whom we thanked at the appropriate places, whenever they chose to leave) for their efforts to survey the vast terrains of mobility thinking. I am indeed very proud that we built a team able and eager to deliver three high-quality issues per year at the crossroads of mobilities and their history. It is only appropriate that my successor will be (at the time of this writing, but at the time of your reading: has been) announced at the common conference of the International Association for the History of Transport, Traffic and Mobility (T<sup>2</sup>M) and the Cosmobilities Network in Lancaster, in the beginning of November 2017. I am very pleased that this new editor, as well as the core editorial executive team that is now being formed, will enable us to realize one of our main ambitions: to have at least half of our content stemming from and dealing with the Global South, or however one wants to call the global majority beyond the West.

It is a satisfying coincidence that the present special issue is dedicated to mobility and danger. Those of you who are familiar with my work know that I spent most of my career breaking my head on the question of why people drive cars, and danger and risk form the core elements of my explanation, at least for the West.<sup>2</sup> Now, new scholarship is in the making, as this special issue on “Mobilities in a Dangerous World” testifies, that not only expands this risk-related approach to many forms of mobilities but also shows how the thrill and adventurousness of mobility risks have meanwhile turned sour. The vibrations that are transmitted from the road through the car to the driving and passenger body (the corporeal basis of the thrill of automobilism) are now considered to invade the body during an earthquake. Instead of (or next to) the car, it is the building that moves in a world literally turned upside down. The tongue-in-cheek hooliganism of a playful middle class as early bicycle and car pioneers has meanwhile morphed into “manufactured uncertainty,”<sup>3</sup> the unique knowledge of flood-affected children, the “sterilized” mobility systems of the homeless and the “parkouring” youngsters who take pictures of each other in front of their destroyed homes in Gaza. The subfield and disciplines mentioned above are expanded, with this issue, by performance and childhood studies, sports and development studies. And yet, as a student of automobilism, I cannot refrain from emphasizing that Paul Virilio’s built-in “accident” in modern technological systems is especially fierce at work in car history, with its annual onslaught of many tens of thousands of victims.

Such scholarship is also important for another reason, signaled also by Mimi Sheller in her comments on this special issue: at last, after so many years of scholarly navel gazing, mobility scholars start experimenting with activism again, reformulated as “performative” research and scholarly “interventionism,” but clearly aimed at changing the living and mobility conditions of the both the objects and the subjects of their study. I hope, as a historian and an engineer, that new mobility studies as explored in these pages will develop the tools needed for such changes. There is no doubt in my mind: changing the world goes through the mobilization of the multitude.<sup>4</sup> But will the multitude ride, drive, or be driven?

## Notes

1. Gijs Mom (together with Georgine Clarsen, Nanny Kim, Cotten Seiler, Kurt Möser, Dorit Müller, Charissa Terranova, and Rudi Volti), “Editorial,” *Transfers* 1, no. 1 (2011): 1–13.
2. Gijs Mom, *Atlantic Automobilism: Emergence and Persistence of the Car, 1895–1940* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2015), but see my forthcoming *Pacific Automobilism: World Mobility History, 1900–2015*.

3. Ulrich Beck, "World Risk Society as Cosmopolitan Society? Ecological Questions in a Framework of Manufactured Uncertainties," *Theory, Culture and Society* 13, no. 4 (1996): 1-32.
4. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (New York: Penguin, 2004).