

IDEAS IN MOTION

Vistas of Future New Mobility Studies

Transfers and Transformations

Georgine Clarsen (with Peter Merriman and Mimi Sheller)

Abstract

With our eighth volume of this journal, the *Transfers* editorial team celebrates our achievements under our outgoing editor, Gijs Mom. This article outlines our priorities under our new editor, Dagmar Schäfer, and reaffirms our commitment to the burgeoning field of new mobility studies. The presentations by Mimi Sheller and Peter Merriman, fellow members of the editorial team, at our journal's panel at the recent T²M conference, "Vistas of Future Mobility Studies: *Transfers* and Transformations" is summed up for the convenience of those who were not able to attend. This journal will continue to encourage and publish work that places mobilities at the center of our scholarship, with special emphasis on the humanities. Our commitment is to good, innovative, activist scholarship that can help us move toward alternative mobility futures.

Keywords: activist scholarship, alternative mobility futures, critical mobility studies, new mobility studies, transdisciplinary mobility studies

Transfers is entering its eighth year of publication, and this issue marks the end of our founding editor's "reign." Our colleague Gijs Mom, at the recent T²M conference in Lancaster, "Mobile Utopias: Pasts, Presents, Futures," announced that from volume 8, he will step back from the arduous job of editing this journal. Gijs is handing over the "reins" to our new editor, Dagmar Schäfer of the Max Plank Institute for the History of Science in Berlin. Gijs has been the energetic heart of this journal since its first stumbling steps. Through countless hours of work, he shepherded us through the first crucial tasks: bringing together an editorial team and advisory board; negotiating the generous support of our publisher, Berghahn Books; hammering out our intellectual policy; finding our international audience; establishing a production rhythm; and devising our publication style. Thanks to his dedication and leadership, we can now say with confidence that *Transfers* has created its own niche in this burgeoning scholarly landscape and, indeed, greatly contributed to its development.



Gijs first conceived of the need for a new journal during his term as the editor of one of our sister publications, the *Journal of Transport History*. At that time, the field of mobilities was still new and boasted only one dedicated, broad-ranging journal, *Mobilities*, which saw its first issue in 2006 and focused largely on scholarship from the social sciences, most notably sociology but also cultural geography. Gijs's crucial intellectual contribution was to apply the "mobility turn" to the long-standing field of transport history, thereby conceiving of transportation in a much wider sense, encompassing culture, communication, media, and all kinds of multimodal movements. The journal that Gijs envisioned has a remit that is interested in theory, is oriented toward history and the humanities, extends to all parts of the world and all historical periods, and uniquely includes art, film, museum exhibitions, and book reviews. Now the inter- and multidisciplinary field of mobility studies has come into its own with some seven dedicated journals and several book series under a variety of imprints. We have seen the creation of *Cosmobilities* and various other "mobilities networks," including a Mediterranean mobilities network, a Pan-American mobilities network, an Aotearoa/New Zealand mobilities network, and the newly launched Australian mobilities network, AusMob. We expect this efflorescence of research energy to continue for many years to come.

To be honest, as an editorial team we were not entirely sure where we would end up when we hopped onto the *Transfers* bus with Gijs,¹ but the ride has been exhilarating and intellectually fruitful. Now we can boast seven volumes over seven years, with twenty-one issues containing some two hundred refereed articles and three hundred reviews. We look back on a project that has stabilized into a research program that attracts an international readership and contributions from academic and nonacademic writers across the globe. We have experimented with redefinitions of what it means to be mobile—on a bus, a car, a ship, an airplane, a bicycle (or all of them); in a house; through a virus, a cell phone, or a game; on the Internet; or, for that matter, in a dangerous situation, as the recent special issue on "Mobilities in a Dangerous World" testifies.² These reformulations are increasingly interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary. We envisage the future of new mobility studies to continue as some form of symbiosis between media studies and transport studies, between histories of communication and material and imaginative mobilities, between the social sciences and the humanities, and to emerge with increasing urgency as a program of emancipatory action.

In earlier editorials and Ideas in Motion sections, we discussed our goals and what we believe to be our journal's important achievements.³ Here we again look forward to what we dedicate ourselves to under the leadership of our second editor, Dagmar Schäfer, who brings with her welcome expertise in the history of science and technology, with a particular emphasis on the history of China. So now is a good time to reexamine and reformulate our

ambitions, inspired by some overarching contemporary questions. Are there emerging topics, approaches, and methodologies that are not represented or are underrepresented in the field of mobilities that we should recruit and encourage for the coming period? How can we bridge diverse research clusters and put them in conversation with each other? What can our journal do to bring together research that matters, to foster scholarship that makes a difference?

Those crucial interdisciplinary conversations or exchanges across the breadth of our interests were raised by Mimi Sheller in her presentation at our journal's panel at the recent T²M conference, "Vistas of Future Mobility Studies: *Transfers* and Transformations":

I often get people assuming that what I study is "transport" alone ... and feel that I must explain that the study of mobilities is more than just transport (which is not to say that transport is not also an important aspect of it). Or I get people who assume that what I study is how the world is more mobile now, a place of liquidity and flows ... and feel that I must explain that the study of mobilities is also historical and critical, and includes a critique of such discourses. Or I get people who think that studying mobilities is "Eurocentric" and anti-feminist ... and feel the need to explain that it engages deeply with feminist and postcolonial theories, and seeks to study inequalities in mobilities, the politics of mobility, and power relations around (im)mobilities.

The cultural and historical geographer Peter Merriman, who has a similarly foundational engagement with the field of mobilities and with *Transfers*, articulated in that same panel his sense of a "some-thing" that has clearly happened and is happening across many disciplines. The result, as he sees it, is that mobility is increasingly entering the mainstream of many disciplines. He noted that in his own field, the increasing purchase and recognition of work on mobility has been recognized by the inclusion of annual reports on mobility research in one of the leading journals, *Progress in Human Geography*,⁴ in encyclopedia and dictionary entries,⁵ in monographs in leading book series, in a textbook on mobility authored by Peter Adey in Routledge's Key Ideas in Geography series (which is now in its second edition),⁶ and in a section on mobility in the leading UK human geography textbook, *Introducing Human Geographies*.⁷ Peter pointed out that research on mobility has gained considerable recognition in UK sociology (because of the influence of John Urry, Mimi Sheller, and others), though the new mobilities paradigm has barely made a dent in US sociology.⁸ The discipline of anthropology too is showing signs of a distinct mobility strand (through the work of Noel Salazar, and more tangentially through the work of Edward Simpson, Dimitri Dalakoglu, Penny Harvey, Tim Ingold, Danny Miller, and others). The concept of mobility also remains at the heart of fields such as migration studies, transport studies, and communication and media studies. It is gaining increasing purchase in pockets of disciplines such as literary studies, performance studies, and archaeol-

ogy. When it comes to the discipline of history, however (though with some notable exceptions, such as in colonial and settler colonial studies), mobilities has some way to go before it could be said to be mainstreamed.⁹

Peter urged that the work of placing mobility at the center of our various disciplines needs to continue (particularly given the strategic need for developing a presence in the peer-assessment panels that assess funding applications) while also recognizing that mobility may be both theorized and practiced differently in different parts of the world. Extending this, he flagged the importance of continuing to think through some deeply philosophical questions, particularly the need to adequately theorize the ontological foundations and the realist worldviews of much mobility research. He suggested that key questions remain about what mobility and movement actually are, what is moving, how we perceive and register movement, and how subjects and objects are constructed through dynamic practical relations.¹⁰ Peter notes in his own field that many cultural geographers have moved away from a focus on representation to consider the practices, performance, and nonrepresentational movements that comprise situations, spaces, and events.

So whether we move on foot, in a Dutch *bakfiets*, in an autonomous vehicle, or while virtual voyaging from the comfort of an armchair, how do we wish *Transfers* to unfold in this new period in our history, under Dagmar Schäfer's leadership?

First, we want *Transfers* to be a voice and a mirror of the field in all its complexity, and, above all, a site for investigating those complexities. This should be a place to turn to and say, "Look, this is all that we do, and there is still much more that remains to be done." *Transfers* must be an inspiration and an instigation for further research on many topics. It must continue to reach around the world and seek out new scholarship and new topics, and attract early career scholars who are turning new turf, so to speak.

Second, we all want the journal to assist us in advocating for a more public voice and activist-scholar positioning of the field as a whole. There is an urgency to create what Mimi Sheller has called "alterative mobility futures"—more just, more equitable, more sustainable mobilities. If our scholarship can contribute to debates about such futures and advancing such futures, then we need to enter the public fray and make our voices heard more. We want to make the journal a platform for doing this, to garner more attention from the public at large, from policy makers, planners, designers, citizens' groups, community organizations, governments, and, yes, even so-called new mobility entrepreneurs.

Third, we will continue to build on our sections on arts, museums, and film and book reviews, because this makes us part of a wider cultural conversation. In general, academics need to make their work circulate in the world at large in new ways, and *Transfers* can perhaps experiment with such "transfers"—literally moving our work into new kinds of spaces and circulating in

new ways. The arts, museums, and reviews sections should be crucial to our mission, and they can become an opportunity to promote and support new modes of research creation and public communication, and give it new levels of visibility and recognition. Could we be curating our own art shows, hosting public conversations, and having the journal sponsor panels, workshops, or public events that engage with artists, exhibitions, and visual/audio media?

In short, we ask all of you who are part of our journal—as readers, contributors, reviewers, and supporters—to help us imagine new ways to transfer our work into circuits of connection and conversation that might help us reach together toward alternative mobility futures. As an editorial team, we dedicate ourselves to live up to our role as a site of action and become a verb “to transfer” as well as to transform, to translate, and to transition. The challenge is big, and the need is urgent.

Georgine Clarsen is Associate Professor in History and Politics in the Faculty of Law, Humanities and the Arts at the University of Wollongong. A member of the Australian Historical Association, the Australian Feminist History Network, T²M (International Association for the History of Traffic, Transport and Mobility), and the University of Wollongong Feminist Research Network, she is currently researching the ways in which Australian national culture and automobile culture developed together during the first half of the twentieth century.

E-mail: georgine@uow.edu.au

Notes

1. Gijs Mom (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. *Transfers* 7, no. 3 (2017).
3. Georgine Clarsen, “Frontiers of Mobilities Studies,” *Transfers* 5, no. 1 (2015): 114–121.
4. Tim Cresswell, “Mobilities I: Catching Up,” *Progress in Human Geography* 35, no. 4 (2011): 550–558; Tim Cresswell, “Mobilities II: Still,” *Progress in Human Geography* 36, no. 5 (2012): 645–653; Tim Cresswell, “Mobilities III: Moving On,” *Progress in Human Geography* 38, no. 5 (2014): 712–721; Peter Merriman, “Mobilities I: Departures,” *Progress in Human Geography* 39, no. 1 (2015): 87–95; Peter Merriman, “Mobilities II: Cruising,” *Progress in Human Geography* 40, no. 4 (2016): 555–564; Peter Merriman, “Mobilities III: Arrivals,” *Progress in Human Geography* 41, no. 3 (2017): 375–381.
5. Peter Merriman, “Mobility,” in *International Encyclopedia of Human Geography*, vol. 7, ed. Rob Kitchin and Nigel Thrift (London: Elsevier, 2009), 134–143.

6. Peter Adey, *Mobility* (London: Routledge, 2010); Peter Adey, *Mobility*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2017).
7. Paul Cloke, Phil Crang, and Mark Goodwin, eds., *Introducing Human Geographies*, 3rd ed. (London: Routledge, 2014).
8. Mimi Sheller, "Sociology After the Mobilities Turn," in *The Routledge Handbook of Mobilities*, ed. Peter Adey, David Bissell, Kevin Hannam, Peter Merriman, and Mimi Sheller (London: Routledge, 2013), 45–54, here 46.
9. Georgine Clarsen, "Special Section on Settler-Colonial Mobilities," *Transfers* 5, no. 3 (2015): 41–48.
10. Peter Adey, "If Mobility Is Everything It Is Nothing: Towards a Relational Politics of (Im)mobilities," *Mobilities* 1, no. 1 (2006): 75–94; Peter Merriman, *Mobility, Space and Culture* (London: Routledge, 2012); Peter Merriman, "Human Geography Without Time-Space," *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 37, no. 1 (2012): 13–27; Merriman, "Mobilities II: Cruising"; Peter Merriman and Lynne Pearce, "Mobility and the Humanities," *Mobilities* 12, no. 4 (2017): 493–508.