THE WORLD BEYOND THE WINDSHIELD

Roads and Landscapes in the United States and Europe

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ONE

Driving Cultures and the Meaning of Roads

Some Comparative Examples

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I

In the conclusion to his *Roads: Driving America's Great Highways*, the Pulitzer Prize–winning novelist and screenwriter Larry McMurtry comments that "fiction seems mainly to be asking two questions: Where does the road go? And how is one to marry?"[1] McMurtry concedes perplexity on the latter question, but on the former he exhibits more certainty. "I wanted to drive the American roads at century's end, to look at the country again, from border to border and beach to beach."[2] His plan took him across the United States, not in one extended trip but in a series of short and medium treks from Dallas to Laredo on I-35; from Baltimore to Burlington, Colorado, on I-70; and from Detroit on I-75 to Michigan's Upper Peninsula, where McMurtry pays homage to the vivid portrayals of life in the northern woods by Ernest Hemingway and Janet Lewis. But McMurtry insists that his travel memoir takes the road itself as a destination as much as it values the people, stories, and landscapes encountered along the way. He likens America's interstates to the great rivers of the world, on which traveled intrepid explorers, such as the Americans Lewis and Clark, as well as bourgeois tourists like those nineteenth-century representatives of the British

Empire who plied the Ganges. Riverine travel came alive through the narratives these people told of their voyages and through the searching explorations of self and society to which those voyages gave rise. The meaning of such passageways, whether rivers or roads, finally came down to "the travelers themselves, characters so powerful, so twisted, so packed with sensibility that even the striking places they travel through frequently have trouble competing for our attention."[3] The travel writers told stories about the real world, about what was *out there*. But the shape and content of their stories always also led back inside, to the perception of existence and how that perception was projected outward onto the byways of human interaction.

McMurtry's point is relevant to the thesis I develop in this essay, which asserts that modern roads and highways derive their social resonance not from the actions of engineers or political authorities but rather from people who drive cars. Recent scholarship on the history of road-building in Europe and the United States elucidates a rich pattern of conflict and negotiation among economic interest groups, the state, engineers, construction companies, political and civic authorities, and the media. This research extends from accounts of the building of parkways, boulevards, and even legendary roadways in the United States, such as Mulholland Drive in Los Angeles, to analyses of the rapid construction of the German autobahn system, of such stunning mountain roads as Austria's Großglockner Alpine Highway, and of urban traffic systems in West and East Germany.[4] Scholars acknowledge that the "view through the windshield" has been a constitutive element in such projects, as engineers, builders, and politicians sought to mobilize or satisfy the car-driving publics that would use the new roadway systems.[5] Drivers' perspectives, or rather what authorities deemed those perspectives to be, were crucial in the process of proposing, designing, and building roads from which natural parks, cityscapes, and even industrial environments could be viewed. Even so, scholarly acknowledgment of the driver's role in modern roadway systems has rarely dealt adequately with the fact that the most socially resonant meanings of boulevards, parkways, and superhighways have evolved only after certain patterns of everyday usage were established. Regardless of how engineers or urban planners have envisioned the function and character of roads and arteries, it is quotidian use that has determined the shape of transportation systems. Who could have engineered the cultural meanings that became associated with Route 66 in the United States?[6] Usage patterns may sometimes have developed roughly

along the lines anticipated by property developers and engineers; but often they did not, as the quantity of traffic either fell below or far exceeded predictions, or as certain streets and boulevards attracted "undesirables" who drag-raced or cruised their way through urban and rural neighborhoods. As a recent study avers, "automotive history should always also be a history of streets."[7] But the obverse is true as well: the history of modern roads must also be a history of cars and of the people who use them.[8]

Inattention to drivers as shapers of roads is one aspect of a larger scholarly indifference toward the social history of driving, as anthropologist Daniel Miller has pointed out.[9] The extensive historical literature on the automobile is replete with accounts of the major manufacturers and engineers, studies of labor relations and business practices, and analyses of design and aesthetics.[10] Recently, environmental perspectives have entered the picture, often with dire consequences for scholarly attitudes toward the car, which were already one-sidedly negative. Yet the most direct and palpable aspects of automotive history, the experiences individuals have of driving their cars; of entering and exiting flows of traffic; of negotiating, successfully or not, the multiplicity of roads and intersections that driving entails; of parking, touring, and promenading—all or most of these still escape the historian's attention. Even recent discussions of American "road-trip literature" miss the mark here, largely because they are fixated on artistic representation rather than quotidian social practice.[11] Sociologist John Urry points out that modern civil societies not only presupposed but also required mobility in a multitude of forms to foster participation.[12] The car achieved domination in the United States quite early compared to Europe, where stronger initial resistance and more intense competition from other modes of transportation slowed public embrace of the automobile. The contingency of this development, its unexpected and discontinuous qualities, will be examined below. Nonetheless, "automobilized" civil societies did become a key benchmark of modernity, if not always a full social reality in much of the industrialized world,[13] just as new hybridized relations between humans and machines, between drivers and their cars, came to shape social and cultural perspectives even when many did not drive cars or drove them only irregularly. To ignore or underestimate the citizen-drivers of modern societies, that is to say, to overlook the fact that very often citizens *are* drivers, in imagination as well as in actual practice, is also to ignore how those societies have been constituted on the ground, or in our case, on the road.[14]

To illuminate the general process whereby roads acquire meaning through social usage, I will here sketch out three distinct, though related, driving practices—the "pioneering," the "democratic," and the "oppositional"—each of which has assumed a particular appropriation (or creation) of roads and streets over the past century. By *practice* I mean making "use of a semiotic code to do something in the world."[15] As William Sewell argues, putting something into practice entails the ability not only to deploy a cultural code in stereotyped situations but also to elaborate and modify it and to adapt it to unexpected conditions. When drivers drive, they use a code, the "rules of the road" as they are understood in particular cultures. But different drivers adapt that code to the kind of car they are driving; to their needs and dispositions; to the assumptions they make about their ethnic, national, class, or gender status; to the types of roads and landscapes through which they drive; and to the determinate political and economic relations that have produced the roads in the first place. Their practice is not only a formulaic or mechanical behavior designed to meet specific functional needs but also a semiotic act, an effort at negotiating meaning through use of a shared code.

My analysis will focus mainly on the United States and Germany. It is not meant to offer a comprehensive catalogue of driving modes but rather to tease out some distinctive relations between driving patterns and the cultural appropriations of roads since the early part of the twentieth century. In so doing, it will necessarily underemphasize topics such as landscape technologies, the history of roadway construction, and the development of signage and roadway semiotics (advertising, roadside architecture), to say nothing of the themes of automobile design, safety regulations and the history of accidents,[16] the evolution of drivers' education and licensing, and the history of car makes and models. Some of these themes will be touched on below, but for the most part they must await elaboration in future research projects. Above all, this essay is meant to be transnational and synthetic rather than explicitly comparative across national borders or distinct time periods.

II

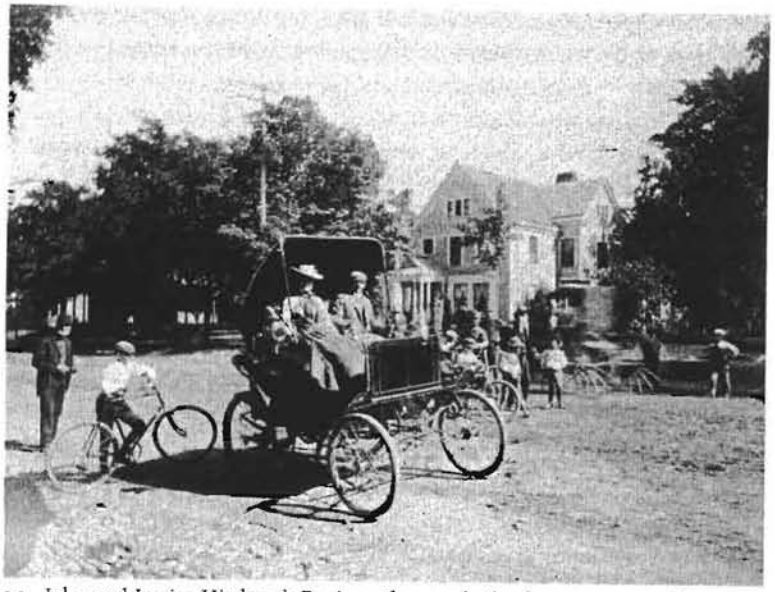
The road-making practices of driving find a most literal expression in my first example, which I refer to as the pioneering mode. It should be noted

that I use this term not to suggest a Whiggish or teleological narrative of the rise of the car. Rather, my terminology is intended to underscore the radical contingency of automotive transport at the end of the nineteenth century. Not only was the car an untried medium of individual mobility, but automotive technologies based on gas, electric, and steam alternatives competed with one another for dominance. Moreover, the quality of roads varied widely; they were often no more than paths in the United States, where organizations such as the League of American Wheelmen (a bicycling group) and the Good Roads Association would make great efforts to develop existing roads and create new transport networks, especially in rural areas, where road improvement promised to boost agricultural economies and prevent depopulation.[17] The sheer novelty of the car also reinforces the point that the automobilized civil societies of the twentieth century had uncertain beginnings, as mobile individuals at the end of the nineteenth century were more likely to be transported by rail or carriage or on horseback than by car. Competition between public and private transportation shapes a large part of the story of individual automotive experience.[18] Mobility, a sine qua non of modernity, meant something quite different at the dawn of the twentieth century from what it would mean just twenty years later in the United States, or a half century later in Europe. For all these reasons, the idea of pioneering driving practices here refers to the discontinuous and experimental qualities of early car use rather than to some celebratory narrative of the automobile. Even so, we should not fail to mention that the terminology does indeed reflect a kind of heroic story, since at no previous point in history had a form of individualized transport enabled people to move about with a rapidity and ease only imagined in the past. Scholarship on early childhood development repeatedly emphasizes the revolutionary change in perspective brought about by a child's ability to take its first steps entirely unaided. The concept of a pioneering driving practice is meant to convey the same kind of first step, a truly radical break with what had gone before.

In the pioneering mode, drivers often literally had to create their own roads, or rather paths, through landscapes that in some cases had never been traversed by an automobile. I am referring specifically to the first transcontinental trips in the United States between 1899, when the first attempt was made to cross the country by motorcar, and 1908, when the first family drove across the United States by car.[19] Automotive historians on

both sides of the Atlantic have focused generally on speed as the definitive characteristic that drew an initially elite audience to the automobile in the United States, France, England, Italy, and Germany. Races, reliability competitions, and even amateur "sports" driving of the kind associated in Germany with often-reckless *Herrenfahrer* from the aristocracy or wealthy bourgeoisie were indeed important constituents in the building of early automotive cultures in Europe and North America.[20] Yet although historians have put more emphasis on these spectacular driving practices, it was the early transcontinental trips that may have done more to create an auto-buying public, at least in the United States. Whereas racing and speed were central to the technological development of internal combustion engines, transmissions and drivetrains, suspension systems, brakes, and other important mechanical features of the car, the qualities of reliability and durability as evidenced in the early long-distance pioneering trips convinced a wider public that the automobile was there to stay.[21]

Let us concentrate here only on the first trip, which was planned as a spectacular excursion from New York City to San Francisco in 1899 by John D. Davis and his wife, Louise Hitchcock Davis. The couple ended their trip in Chicago after experiencing numerous mechanical breakdowns and other complications, prompting one newspaper to call it "the bust of the century."[22] Yet the trip began with broad publicity and significant popular interest, and it had an impact well beyond the three months it took Davis and his wife to traverse the nearly twelve hundred miles along the way. Sponsored by a Connecticut automaker and two newspapers, the couple drove a two-cylinder Duryea. For Davis, whom a doctor had ordered to seek healthy western air, as well as for his wife, the trip meant both adventure and pleasure. *Scientific American* highlighted the touristic appeal of the trip when, early in the Davises' excursion, it wrote: "[T]here is no more delightful way of seeing the country than to view it from the comfortably cushioned seats of an automobile vehicle."[23] But the element of leisure was only one of many motivations for the trip and certainly not the primary one, as it would be in driving practices that evolved later in the history of auto use. Trip sponsors were thinking internationally, as they hoped that the Duryea's exploits would prove the competence of American automobiles, still regarded as inferior to French competitors. Moreover, the Davises not only intended to make a detailed report on the quality of roads; they also planned to determine whether navigable roadways for autos existed at all,



1.1. John and Louise Hitchcock Davis as they made the first attempt to drive coast to coast in 1899. Palmyra Photographs collection, album 3:20, negative 03:834, reproduced courtesy of the Department of Rare Books and Special Collections at the Rush Rhees Library, University of Rochester, Rochester, New York.

especially west of Ogallala, Nebraska, about which press reports disagreed, and between Denver and San Francisco, auto routes for which little official information was available (fig. 1.1).[24]

As he prepared for the trip, Davis studied a map issued by the League of American Wheelmen, one of the main supporters, beside car clubs and rural groups, of the Good Roads Association. This reflected a general attribute of early automotive routes in that the car traveled on roads designed either for other means of transportation or to be shared with other vehicles and pedestrians. In decades to come, auto-only roads would be considered both desirable and feasible; and later in the twentieth century, planners would begin to establish separate routes for pedestrians, bicyclists, streetcars, buses, and autos. But Davis's map-reading revealed important elements of the pioneering driving mode that were shared with other driving practices as well.

First, the maps (and the routes finally employed) suggested not merely possible functional paths but a national-cultural itinerary. Since at least the

eighteenth century, Americans had believed that engagement with "wilderness" and the "frontier" was a constitutive experience of national identity. Some two decades later, environmentalists would decry the notion that a meaningful frontier experience could be derived from automobile touring; as Aldo Leopold wrote, "[I]f we think we are going to learn by cruising around the mountains in a Ford, we are largely deceiving ourselves."[25] But this is precisely what the Davises' encounter entailed and what their route-planning implied, namely, the finding of an East-West itinerary through which the country's roads and frontiers, and thereby the nation itself, as well as its characteristic natural vistas and stunning natural monuments, could be viewed and mapped. The creative and inventive aspects of the landscape experience in the pioneering mode come through most clearly in this instance, as did its contribution to later road-building projects. For if there was a national culture of auto road-building in the United States, then a chief part of it was the attempt to construct a grand "linking" thoroughfare from East to West, a kind of "main street across America," as the famous Lincoln Highway was called, that brought the Atlantic and Pacific oceans, the two great natural wonders bounding the country, together across the rugged body of the nation.[26] Indeed, the Lincoln Highway and analogous projects suggested that not even natural wonders sufficed to express national identity in the United States. The mode of transportation itself—whether a Conestoga wagon, a steam locomotive, or a car—was the decisive symbol of Americans' need for ceaseless travel across the continent.[27]

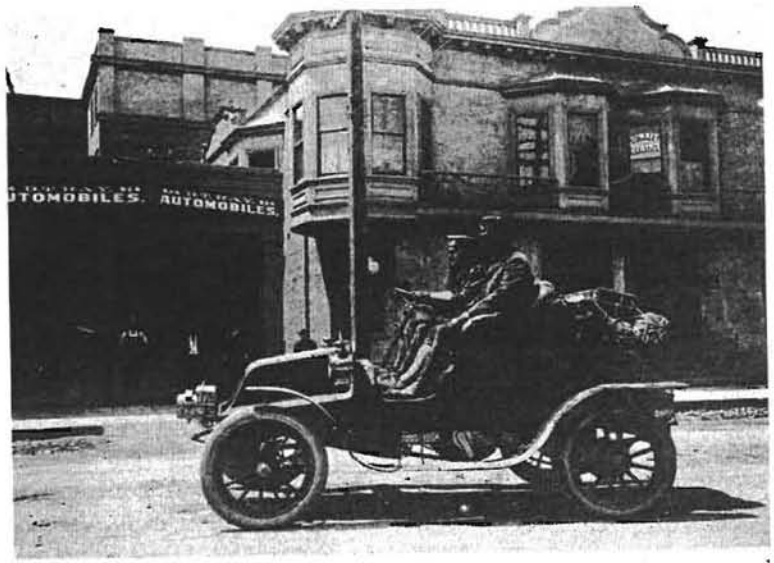
Second, road-mapping and attempting to traverse the nation were by no means mere exercises in "imagining" community, as present orthodoxy would have it.[28] Through planning and driving, the individual actively mediated a relation between the car and the road and, in so doing, entered the national community in a specific and palpable sense. We can speak here, using Heidegger, of a "referential totality"[29] in which human agents formulated the task of driving and encountered the mechanical equipment (the car and the road) needed to fulfill the task in a constantly reciprocal and self-perpetuating dynamic. The balance of energies between the car, the driver, and the road varied in different driving modes, as did the manner in which this balance connoted national belonging.[30] In the pioneering mode the rigorous physical demands of driving could hardly be ignored. The Duryea broke down almost daily, and the trip fell behind schedule from the moment the two-cylinder vehicle left New York City. Bad roads and the

fragility of the automobile combined to create a highly uncertain trip that finally had to be discontinued. Yet it would be wrong to assume that this was only a frustrating or negative experience for the Davises. Writing from Buffalo, Louise Hitchcock Davis observed: "[I]t would be monotonous to go speeding across the continent without accident or mishap of any kind. One might as well fall back in the cushioned chair of a Pullman car. But the joy of being thrown into a ditch, of having cylinders break while the motor is running at top speed, of having a wheel come off, letting you gently down to earth, and of all sorts and conditions of mishaps, is something too exhilarating for words."[31]

Early automobilists' apparent pride in their ability not just to weather such mishaps but also to quickly recover from them, either on their own or (as was often the case for the Davises) with assistance from capable blacksmiths along the way, appears to have been a transnational and cross-class phenomenon, as suggested by aristocratic gentleman-drivers' accounts of their early automotive adventures in Europe. No less a personage than the brother of Kaiser Wilhelm II, Prince Heinrich, was seen repairing his Benz automobile on German roads in 1911, thereby earning the deep admiration of the car-owning public.[32] In all such cases the physicality of the car experience was linked to efforts to participate in a direct way in the community, which, in the case of the transcontinental automobilists, was defined by the American frontier experience.

The first attempted transcontinental car trip in the United States heralded the coming decade of automotive pioneering.[33] The Davises' trip was followed in 1901 by another unsuccessful attempt, by Alexander Winton. Two years later, however, Dr. H. Nelson Jackson and Sewall K. Crocker crossed the United States from San Francisco to New York City in a 1903 Winton touring car nicknamed "Vermont" (fig. 1:2).[34] Several additional crossings followed, each accompanied by more fanfare, more advertising investment, and more impressive speeds and times. In 1908, the businessman and sports enthusiast Jacob Murdock, his wife, his three children, and two mechanics traveled from Pasadena, California, to New York City in thirty-two days. This accomplishment merits analysis, for it marked the first time an entire family had made the crossing. But I mention it here only to suggest its relevance for things to come.

Exaggerating the resolve with which he had planned the adventure, Murdock would later write that he meant the trip to demonstrate that an ordinary family, children included, could withstand the rigors of transcontinental motoring.[35] In making this claim, he envisioned a different sort of driving practice, one oriented less specifically to exploration and adventure, although these experiences would continue to be among the goals of even the most comfortable automotive touring of the late twentieth century. Murdock's trip opened a window on a mode of driving in which people learned to "motor democratically," in the words of the English automotive journalist Owen John.[36] In this instance, roads were not primarily exploratory itineraries of national being but pathways constituting a democratic public sphere, places where individuals and families performed a cultural code based on tolerance, reciprocity, and freedom as they drove or rode in cars (and later station wagons or minivans) designed to travel safely yet efficiently, in much the same way that commerce and manufacturing were intended to function in a smoothly flowing capitalist society. Cars and their drivers were analogous to freely circulating capital in this interpretation, and drivers on the road operated according to the principle of "one man, one vote."



1.2. Horatio Nelson Jackson and Sewall K. Crocker in their Winton touring car named "Vermont," in the early days of their transcontinental drive from San Francisco to New York City in 1903, the first successful cross-country trip by automobile. Photograph reproduced courtesy of the Department of Special Collections at the Bailey/Howe Library, University of Vermont.

The democratic mode presupposed that a certain "culture of control" had already been put in place through which the requisite technical, political, and cultural requirements of working transportation systems were met.[37] The bicycle played an important role here, as its proponents advocated new paving techniques, safety measures, and other improvements that would redound to the benefit of the automobile. In both America and Europe, roads had to be adapted to car use, which meant that sharply cambered streets had to be fixed, the incline of steep slopes reduced, and markers and signals created or improved. Among the main proponents of such changes were the automobile associations, which have come in for substantial scholarly criticism for their resistance to many government regulations and their aggressive intent in rewriting the rules of the road to suit selfish needs.[38] Accurate though such criticisms may be, the fact is that the roads did become less dusty and dangerous for drivers as well as pedestrians and animals over time. Additionally, it is important to note that such cultures of control were subject to immense national and regional variation, and that the meaning of democratic driving practices evolved in relation to historically specific conditions in different countries.

Just as roads acquired new meanings in the evolution of this tradition, so the referential totality of car, driver, and road changed. The transformation of motoring clothing signaled a deep structural shift. Owen John associated nondemocratic driving with the masks, goggles, and full-length dusters worn by early automobilists as they careened over the roads.[39] Not only did these costumes scare the devil out of farm and domestic animals, they also alarmed local people and enhanced the sense of anonymity and class distance surrounding the first motorists. But drivers were soon able to shed such accoutrements, making the people behind the wheel more visible and identifiable to pedestrians as well as to other drivers. A new transparency characterized roadway interactions. In addition, as cars became less labor-intensive and more reliable, drivers honed their motoring skills, and roads improved. This led to an emphasis on technique, safety, and comfort rather than physical stamina and a "warrior mentality."[40] Contemporaries often bemoaned such changes, as Herrenfahrer criticized the "feminization" of cars and the ease with which driving could be learned. "Today, the automobilist is for the most part an automaton," wrote one chagrined driver in 1913.[41] Women had been active participants in automotive history from the beginning, as the example of the first transcontinental attempt in the United States demonstrates. But they became even more prevalent in the democratic mode, most often as passengers but increasingly as drivers.[42]

In the democratic mode, perhaps because of a degree of direct and indirect feminization, the car's "domestic" features predominated, as the automobile developed analogously to the bourgeois home, becoming a site for "dwelling within the car" rather than "dwelling on the road."[43] Electric starters, closed bodies, glass windows, better sound insulation, cloth seats, more informative dashboard instrumentation, and later the introduction of radios in car interiors—all such technical, safety, and design increments added up to a cumulative change that was nothing short of revolutionary when considered in terms of its social consequences. What had been gained by the shedding of elaborate automotive clothing seemed to have been lost by closing off the car from its surroundings. Critics might suggest that the domestication of the car—its transformation into a more secure, semi-isolated unit relatively insulated from the sights and sounds of road traffic—paralleled the privatization of culture in the twentieth century. In this shift, it may be argued, roads lost their function as conduits for a participatory civil society and instead became sites of passive, consumerist pleasure. The evolution of roadside architecture, shaped not only by scenic rest stops but also by the auto camp, the motel, the garish horde of advertising signs, and later the strip mall—all signaled the powerful commercial dynamic that informed the driving experience.[44] The landscape experience shifted from "wilderness" in the pioneering mode to a commercially mediated chain of natural and urban vistas. Scholars have analyzed more sinister trends, as they argue that the automobile and suburbia aided whites' persistent efforts (already widespread before the age of cars) to isolate themselves from blacks, immigrants, and blue-collar workers.[45] In such instances highways and roads served not only to link driving with the intense commodification of daily life but also with social and racial segregation. But I find the argument of the car's isolating effects only partially convincing, or at least in need of strong qualification, as will be noted below.

Democratic motoring emerged most decisively in the United States before World War I, partly as a result of the rise of middle-class car ownership but also partly due to American farmers' embrace of the car in general and the Model T in particular by the late 1920s.[46] Auto ownership in Europe

grew more slowly, although by the 1920s and 1930s both England and France had seen the automobile become an important symbol of middle-class family life, and even a small minority of workers had gained access to the previously circumscribed circle of auto ownership.[47] But these patterns should not obscure countervailing tendencies such as the "motorphobia" documented by Uwe Fraunholz for Germany or by Ronald Kline for the United States.[48] From farmers who opposed the dust and noise raised by speeding automobiles in rural America to stone-throwing adolescents who bombarded wealthy automobilists' cars as they passed through German villages before World War I, individuals reacted critically and on occasion even violently to the spread of automobiles. Nonetheless, Fraunholz's data could be adduced for the opposite purpose, namely to document how scattered and quantitatively insignificant protests against the car were.[49] Moreover, given the extraordinary rapidity with which cars became ubiquitous in the United States, one can only conclude that popular acceptance of the car dramatically outweighed the envious, critical, or hesitant voices. In the United States the period during which automobile ownership was limited to the elite passed quickly, although it lasted much longer in Europe. But there, too, the demographics of car ownership were influenced much more by the larger structural and historical characteristics of income patterns and consumer markets than by any organized resistance to the automobile.

Germany was also part of the story of democratic driving practices even when auto ownership there fell far below what it was in France or England, the two European leaders in car use until the late 1950s. During a 1930s visit to the United States, the German engineer Ferdinand Porsche commented on the "courtly" behavior Americans demonstrated as they drove.[50] He had in mind the rather slow, orderly, and relatively polite motoring practiced by Americans in a variety of venues, from national parks to tree-lined urban boulevards. He no doubt overlooked the yahoos screaming down American rural roads in their Ford V-8s, and New Yorkers might have scoffed at such a comment as they bristled their way through daily traffic jams. But Porsche's observations were meant only partly as straightforward observation. He had journeyed to the United States in order to learn more about American automotive manufacturing, labor relations, and designs as he took on the task of building a "people's car" for Germany.[51] He also knew that many Germans, including some who were trying to articulate

a new driving culture adequate to the nascent autobahn system, opposed speeding and other kinds of reckless behavior on Hitler's superhighways. Thus, his positive assessment of Americans' driving practices could serve as a spur to developments back home.

That German drivers were still uncertain about how to negotiate their nation's roads cannot be doubted. Indeed, the country's driving culture existed in a liminal state, suspended between the devil-may-care traditions of the Herrenfahrer and practices more attuned to the age of mass automobility and to navigating roads dedicated exclusively to car traffic. The German autobahn system, a decidedly precocious phenomenon in a country where auto ownership was still limited, presented both an important challenge and a significant opportunity in this regard. My argument is that it was an important context for the learning of democratic driving practices, even in Hitler's Germany, where the state's ultimate goal was totalitarian mobilization in preparation for a war of racial conquest.

It was not Porsche only but many others who looked to America for inspiration. The automotive journalist Heinrich Hauser was one of the most articulate advocates of *Motorwandern*, or "motor wandering," which featured moderate driving in scenic landscapes, knowledge of which enhanced both individual pleasure and pride in the nation. It entailed a cooperative attitude and a slow pace, which drivers observed not only on the superhighways but also on country roads. Like Americans, Germans were to let the elements and their own personal spontaneity be their guide rather than adhering slavishly to preordained routes or itineraries. Hauser argued that the autobahn system was ideal for such driving experiences, and he counseled Germans to learn to use these new arteries as quickly and efficiently as possible.[52] Developed at a time when there was a scarcity of cars in Germany, Hauser's vision was just as precocious as the autobahn system that formed its backdrop. Even so, because it took its cue from an American image of the individual driver with access to leisure pursuits of his or her own choice, it was part of what Raymond Williams would have termed an "emergent" culture of democratic driving practices in Germany.[53] Yet Hauser's position was always deeply ambivalent, for he would criticize consumer society and the "Americanization" of Europe after World War II.[54]

At first glance, other advocates of autobahn driving appeared to emphasize individual experiences less than Hauser did. Hauser praised Hitler, as so many commentators did, for his grand road-building scheme, but he

always came back to the individual driver. By contrast, C. Volkhardt, an engineer and contributor to a popular car magazine of the time, *Motor-Kritik*, urged Germans to learn the new rules of the road because Hitler had intended for them to be used in a particular way, that is, as auto-only routes supporting speeds of up to a hundred kilometers per hour. "The incorrect or even dangerous use of the autobahn contradicts directly the Führer's intentions, and it is therefore to be punished even more severely than faulty driving on normal streets," he wrote.[55] Volkhardt followed this declaration with a catalogue of "Autobahn sins." He chastised the estimated 25 percent of all drivers who didn't keep to the right unless passing, and he noted that truckers were especially egregious offenders. People who weaved in and out of their lanes, lovebirds who dawdled along without paying attention to surrounding traffic, drivers who continued to sit in the passing lane even after they overtook slower-moving cars, and those who failed to consult their rearview mirrors—all deserved criticism, argued Volkhardt, if not harsher penalties, such as fines, imprisonment, and impounding of the offenders' cars—a system similar to the one allegedly used in the United States. Paradoxically, even Hitler lent a hand in this project, as he strongly condemned reckless or inappropriate driving on the autobahn.[56] Of course, Hitler had his sights set on war, so his admonition to the autobahn sinners was not meant primarily to promote new civic values on the roadways but rather to conserve manpower and raw materials.

All such discussions of wanderers and "sinners" on the autobahn oscillated between an emphasis on roads as "vistas of delight," to use a phrase from interwar Britain,[57] and an emphasis on the public responsibilities of road users. But both facets were always present, regardless of whether commentators pinpointed elements of consumer fantasy, pleasure, and individual choice or of civic obligation and official control. Between these two poles, democratic driving practices developed, shaped by specific national (and regional) driving cultures, but always with an eye toward harmonizing individual choice with civic and political purpose, private interest with public engagement.

Road-builders also tried to balance such interests and priorities. As Mumford argued, the international language of transportation planning conceived of the road not as a social locus but as a major structure whose function was to enable speedy circulation of auto traffic. A linear notion of progress shaped this functionality, just as similarly linear notions influenced

liberal political practice.[58] The autobahn system appropriated the evolving American parkway ideal, initially shaped by Frederick Law Olmsted and extended by midcentury planners such as Robert Moses. This ideal was based on linking urban civilization with nature and intercalating the private automobile as a symbol of public life in a modern consumer society. In the case of the autobahn, nature took on a particularly important role, as the new superhighways were built through forest, heath, and mountain, offering stunning natural landscapes that German as well as foreign observers found delightful and exhilarating.[59] German road-planners claimed that such landscapes wedded nature and technology in a revolutionary new synthesis. But it is more likely that the autobahn's natural vistas promoted what John Brinckerhoff Jackson has called an "abstract, preternatural landscape of wind and sun and motion."[60] In the "abstract world of the hot-rodder," which is really the world of the ordinary (male) tourist and his family, according to Jackson, people see not traditional, picturesque landscapes of forest and village. Instead, theirs is a world of motion in which natural and man-made settings constitute abstract patterns best appreciated through the windshield of a car or perhaps from the window of a plane. They do not get back to nature as much as they appropriate a glimpse of nature as they drive, ski, or paddleboat through it. "The new landscape," wrote Jackson, "is composed of rushing air, shifting lights, clouds, waves, a constantly moving, changing horizon, a constantly changing surface beneath the ski, the wheel, the rudder, the wing."[61]

German adaptations of the American model of extraurban parkways and the abstract world of the hot-rodder reflected the political culture in which they occurred. A major feature of the German case is that Hitler thought in distinctly "postliberal" terms as he excluded a whole category of people from participation in the new autobahn system. Nazi Germany was not a liberal community but a "racial meritocracy" in which, theoretically, everyone who was "racially correct" had access to societal resources;[62] racial comrades were in turn invited to use the roadways as paths to territorial expansion, especially in the East, where the superhighways would lead first soldiers, then settlers, administrators, and tourists, into a German imperium. But those deemed racially unfit were initially harassed, then excluded or murdered. In all such cases the autobahn's landscapes were to reflect German social values, not liberal Western ideas of commercial progress and linearity. This search for authenticity resulted in truly tortuous

efforts to create unmistakably "German" bridges, roadside plantings, and even gas stations consonant with each *Heimat* (homeland, or regional) style.[63] If drivers of the interwar democratic mode were experiencing a consumerist, abstract world, then in the autobahn system this world would be shaped by the political determinants of a system based on racial hierarchy and imperial conquest.

A most striking feature of the German-Jewish philologist Viktor Klemperer's best-selling memoirs of his life in Nazi Germany is his detailed account, scattered throughout the first volume, of how deeply his exclusion from German driving culture hurt him. It was not only a matter of losing his mobility, a right to which citizens throughout the Western world laid greater claim as the twentieth century wore on. Rather, the initially irritating, then more serious and debilitating prohibitions against Jews' owning or operating cars also removed a pleasurable and challenging element of Klemperer's life. Klemperer was no natural driver; his recollections are filled with painful moments in which he took driving lessons, learned how to maneuver his used Opel in and out of his garage, and got into fender-bender accidents, which would create moments of truly high anxiety for him and his wife. Yet he found the autobahn "magnificent," and his passion for driving was unlimited: "Car, car over all, it has taken a terrible hold of us," he wrote in 1936.[64] In his love of driving and his determination to be a safe driver, Klemperer practiced democratic driving—until 1939, when his use of the car was transformed into a subversive activity, indeed, into a crime against the racial state.

Klemperer became an unintentional subversive, but many other drivers quite willingly adopted this stance. My third example touches on oppositional driving practices such as those developed by hot-rodders and "joyriders" in Europe and America. In this mode, cars and highways became sites of dissidence, if not resistance. Antielite and antibourgeois, sometimes based on illegally "borrowing" cars (as in joyriding in interwar England and Germany) but often also including the populist cultural practice of customizing automobiles (as in the American hot-rod scene starting in the 1930s, or in the "tuning cultures" of Japan and the American West Coast over the past quarter century), such resistant driving exploited the temporal and spatial gaps of roadway systems, transforming what might be a sedate urban boulevard by day into a racetrack in the early morning hours.[65] Youth and working-class tinkerers have often been drawn to such driving

cultures. Unlike drivers in the pioneering and democratic traditions, these individuals practiced what Michel de Certeau calls the "subtle art of 'renters,'" which is to say they did not enact a comprehensive vision of roads and society but selectively adapted elements of the dominant system to their own needs and interests.[66] In this they also differed from the gentleman-drivers, whose perspective was not only more "strategic" but also aristocratic or elitist rather than populist.

Let us move to the post–World War II hot-rodding scene in the United States for a brief glimpse of this phenomenon. The history of American hot-rodding goes back to before World War I, when, for example, Los Angeles police arrested 115 juveniles for "joy-riding" in 1913.[67] In the 1920s, people began racing automobiles on desert lakebeds in Southern California or on Los Angeles streets, where the speeding of "wild-eyed kids in hopped-up jalopies" was decried as a public nuisance in 1941.[68] After 1945, the term *hot rod* had at least two overlapping but different meanings. It referred to "a highly visible, relatively affluent, teenage lifestyle which seemed to turn on drive-ins, noise, jalopies held together with chewing gum and dangerous driving on public highways," as analyzed by H. F. Moorhouse.[69] But it also referred to a specialized, more self-regulated, and technologically demanding form of sport racing undertaken by older men, many of them ex-GIs, on the broad, flat desert stretches of California landscape. This second variant became institutionalized through characteristic publications, such as *Hot Rod* magazine, and organizations, such as the National Hot Rod Association.

Of the two variants, it is the former that interests us here, in part because its oppositional features are more clearly outlined. Hot-rodding contrasted with the sedate driving practiced by the average American, but its focus was not without an important international dimension. Hot-rodders considered street and drag racing to be typically American activities, less refined and more spontaneous than the driving of sportscar enthusiasts, who favored European automobiles, and less regulated than European-inspired Grand Prix racing.[70] The drag strip or urban boulevard on which hot-rodding took place was contrasted with the "typical" European road. The former was unerringly straight, intentionally or unintentionally designed for the optimal display of power and speed; whereas the latter's curves and variations in no way required high horsepower but rather deftness of touch and a degree of nuance. If the symbol of American hot-rodding quickly became

the "rebel without a cause," it should nonetheless be noted that its "all-American" and nativist tendencies were very strong and explicitly articulated. The street-racing rebel was unwilling to leave home, and his "cause" was often patriotic and even nationalistic.

In the oppositional mode, moreover, the relationship between car and driver was more direct and intense, much as it had been in the pioneering mode or in the practices of the Herrenfahrer. Likewise, the oppositional mode was usually accompanied by more explicit reference to masculine identities: racing and street-rodding were often extensions of dating rituals, and women appeared as pinups in car magazines or as audiences for, rather than full participants in, street-racing cultures. Shaped by masculine preconceptions, street-rodding presupposed a mastery over automotive technology and the ability not just to excel in the driving of a car but actively to shape it, modify it, and maximize both its performance and its "machinic" visual cues.[71] The alleged passivity of the democratic driving mode was the explicit counterpoint to the technoactivism of oppositional driving practices. But to stop at the masculinist elements of such activism would be incomplete. Hot-rodders' engaged approach to automotive technology was not only an assertion of male values but also an important mark of civic participation. Even when they assumed the rebel's posture, they followed the precepts of an automobilized civil society, which demanded rapid circulation through the "scapes" and "flows" of modernity. In this process the acquisition of technical skills became an important measure not just of hot-rodders' collective and individual identity but also of societal competency as such. Contemporary scholarship on the meanings of citizenship has done relatively little to factor technical practices into the equation, much less to consider hot-rodders as "citizens" at all.[72]

If democratic driving practices lent themselves to living within the car, the oppositional mode returned the driver to living in the road. The road was valued not for the way in which it eased the individual's orderly traversal through urban or rural landscapes but for its ability to communicate to the driver. Its texture and relationship to surroundings were to be experienced directly, not subdued or rendered as elements in a commodified set piece accessible through the windshield of a domesticated interior. In the oppositional mode, the road spoke to the driver, who interpreted its language through feedback gained from the engine, steering wheel, suspension system, and sound of the tires. Had Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* not been

suffused with the dissoluteness of "beat" culture, it would have been the perfect anthem for proponents of oppositional driving, who valued the "romance" of roads and the traffic they enabled. Even slow "cruising," a kind of urban promenading undertaken mainly by youthful drivers everywhere, fits the argument of the road as a source of direct communication.[73] Cruising ostensibly nullified some of the effects of dissident driving because it was based on that courtly progression that fit the democratic motoring tradition. Yet cruising derived much of its allure from rolled-down windows, revving engines, and open sexualized display—rather a contrast to the domesticated and relatively inward-looking vehicle of democratic driving.

The landscape experience mirrored this new type of engagement with the road. In the oppositional mode, it was neither natural nor commodified vistas that demanded attention but the environment of the machine. This is not to say that oppositional driving practices departed from the tradition of visuality that had characterized the pioneering and democratic modes. Instead, oppositional driving foregrounded the gleaming surfaces of automotive bodies, the sheen of asphalt roads on hot afternoons, and the hard glare of plate-glass windows in the summer sun. It was as if oppositional drivers had turned road-planners' intentions inside out as they raced or promenaded through urban streets; not natural scenes or grand urban monuments, not "the environment" or history, but the immediate sights and sounds of the traffic itself excited the driver. Their perspective was not that of a sublime "windshield wilderness" but that of the fleeting image glimpsed in the rearview mirror, as Reyner Banham once wrote of driving in Los Angeles. Banham might just as easily have been writing about the oppositional mode when he argued that the driving experience was one of "heightened awareness that some locals find mystical."[74] For the landscape experience of the dissident drivers was oriented not so much to the physical surroundings, whether appropriated tangibly or abstractly, as to the expressionistic impulses satisfied by racing, weaving in and out of lanes, and testing the car's mechanical limits. Landscape surfaces were reduced to emotionally laden catchments apprehended in the act of fast, often dangerous driving. It is worth asking if the dissident mode, or at least significant parts of it, did not take on a normative rather than transgressive character in the late twentieth century as the Los Angeles landscape experience analyzed by Banham came to characterize more and more driving practices, at least in the United States.

III

My goal in this essay has been to direct attention to the cultural work that makes modern motor roads what they are: not only arteries for rapid transportation but also complex systems of societal communications in which the interactions of drivers and cars connote larger systems of civic belonging. This approach leaves little room for current theories of the road as a "non-place," which Marc Augé defines as a space without relational or historical features. The non-place has no anthropology, in this view, because it is not "concerned with identity."[75] Augé argues that "supermodernity" is defined by the production of non-places, including not only roads and railways but airplanes, transit points such as airports and waiting rooms, cable and wireless communications networks, and motor vehicles.

Conversely, in my approach, driving always entails a dynamic, meaningful relation among individuals, the car, and the road. Different driving traditions or practices have evolved (and continue to evolve) over time, each of them linked with particular modes of interaction between the car and its operator. In each practice, moreover, we find that driving lends itself to characteristic understandings of the self as a participant in society, which is to say that driving enacts citizenship, just as citizenship implies certain kinds of driving practices. Above all, driving practices may emphasize close interaction with the road, as in the pioneering and oppositional traditions, or interpolate the car as a semi-isolated and domesticated unit protected from the road, as in the democratic mode. But none of them can do without the road as a site of social engagement. After all, a person who travels on a high-speed freeway as he or she listens to music, talks on a cell phone, and eats a snack is "concerned with identity" even if the roadway has been designed exclusively for traffic circulation rather than the social, economic, or recreational functions roads once performed. Finally, my discussion presupposes that no single or definitive meaning may be attached to roads and highways, regardless of what builders and their sponsors in state and society intended. Only when the multiplicity of driving practices and everyday usage of roads are taken into account will we be able to write a complete social and cultural history of roads and landscapes.