CHAPTER 4

Motorised Flânerism

Simone de Beauvoir is a model reference point for anyone seeking an intellectual guide through life’s trials and tribulations. Choosing another autobiographic passage, in which she admits that travelling had always been one of her ‘most burning desires’ would equally be apt when pondering over the notion of the flâneur in the age of post-mechanical reproduction. Of course, there is little new in underscoring the significance of mobility for human societies. Yet even since the 1960s there are drastic differences in the scale and pace of our geographic ranges, resulting in ecological transformations and grave social justice implications. More and faster-moving people, across greater distances creates certain bottlenecks—a two-way set of opportunities to travel beyond what was once only possible on foot—as well as a heavy congestion in the increasing number of global centres.

Indeed, in the early 1960s, the song by Marvin Gaye simply titled HitchHike\(^1\) captured these elements of freedom and possibility, as well as the social stigmas surrounding class and ethnic mobility. The live performances of this track by the Prince of Motown even generated its own unique dance craze. There is perhaps some irony in that the song was

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\(^1\) Thanks to George Schöpflin for putting me on to this song during the 9th Annual Lotman Conference in Tallinn.

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P. Laviolette, *Hitchhiking*,

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recorded in Detroit, a city not at all known for its associations with hitchhiking, yet clearly identified as the hearth of the American automotive industry.

\[\ldots\] I'm goin' to St. Louis,  
but my next stop just might be L.A.  
(Hitch hike) Now what'd I say? (L.A.)  
Got no money  
in my pocket so I'm gonna have to hitch hike all the way \[\ldots\]  
‘Hitch Hike’

U-TURNS, ROUNDABOUTS AND THE MOBILITIES SPIN

In academic circles and debates, we can identify the onset of the ‘mobilities turn’ to a time around the mid-1990s. During this epoch, one could witness a great deal of optimism about the processes of global change. One important publication, written by Kenichi Ohmae (1990), explored the idea of a borderless world. This involves the free-flowing movement of knowledge, information, people, labour, resources, investments, industries and so forth. The significance of the mobilities turn literature within the humanities and social sciences is vast. This area of scholarship is still developing rapidly, in many interesting ways and it certainly has important connections to the development of ‘landscape-isms’. The intention in this chapter is to provide an overview of this body of literature as it relates to the comparative context of Western versus Eastern Europe in terms of hitchhiking’s survivability. It explores the idea of im/mobility in more detail, especially as a conditioned possibility of existence.

The theme of mobility has seen yet another explosion of interest in contemporary ethnological and anthropological theory. Indeed, many scholars have regularly spoken of a mobilities return. Yet perhaps it is more appropriate to speak of a spin—or maybe even more apt still, to consider this trend as a u-turn—emphasising the utopian dimensions of this body of literature. Grounded in ethnography conducted within Western Europe, this study will nonetheless span wider cross-cultural and spatio-temporal spheres when considering mobility: from the

\footnote{Released on the Tamla label from the album \textit{That Stubborn Kinda Fellow} (1962) produced by William ‘Mickey’ Stevenson/Clarence O. Paul/Marvin P. Gaye. Sony/ATV Music Publishing LLC.}
fleeting movement of hitchhikers in the Baltics which may last only for moments (or a lifetime), through to the fairly regular movement patterns of uber-taxi drivers; from the pseudo-pilgrimage ascensions of abandoned post-industrial or Soviet-era buildings by urban explorers, through to the existential \emph{longue-durée} trope of ‘free travel’, as it occurs in the textual depictions of certain Eastern European poets as well as in the region’s audiovisual representations made by other important cinematographic auteurs.

I have thus begun to uncover some of the hermeneutic significance of hitchhiking as a physical practice and compare this to how it occurs in different genres and fields. Some of the recent lessons about mobility from phenomenologically influenced conceptualisations and approaches are that the complexities and dialectics of transient environments grow in terms of dealing with concerns for the embedded or embodied (Fischer 2014). Delineating mobility in a phenomenological framework is thus a deliberate attempt to map out the life-paths of human beings as a progressive move from ‘home’ to ‘world’, or from hearth to cosmos as the geographer Yi-Fu Tuan (1996) would say. With time, people grow into larger worlds. Not to do so is often seen as to live a stunted life. According to anthropologist Michael D. Jackson, the human’s stages of maturation are celebrated in all cultures, because at each stage one enters into larger spheres of activity, responsibility and mastery (Jackson 1996). A significant judgement against patriarchal societies is that women are made to stay in the domestic realm. Similarly, a judgement against hierarchical societies is that members of the lower classes are confined to limited spheres of interaction and subjected to forced migrations, whilst the elite have the possibility of enjoying the world without the fear of forced displacement. They are privileged in being both cosmopolitan and grounded (de Beauvoir 1960). The ideals of the auto-stop community generally seek to extend this privilege to more and more members who once suffered constraint, but eventually no longer need to feel that the edge of their home is the edge of their world.

This link, which I’m arguing exists between an ethos at the heart of hitchhiking and a phenomenological approach, is one that emphasises empathy. It highlights a concern for being sensitive towards, and thus drawing attention to, people’s negative experiences. In thinking in terms of embodiment and agency, the notions of alternative mobilities such as narrowboat or barge living, caravanning as well as traveller settlements
are all relevant (Aiken 1976; Okely 1987). It is very much in this context of striving to understand the social significances of alternative travel schemes that the present work situates itself.

A recent example of highlighting potential inequalities and injustices in the sphere of travel comes out of considerations for the surveillance or panoptical effects of so-called technologies of well-being. Under these auspices, mobility becomes a site where the ego is not only produced but is also contested. Moral subjects are forged, represented, enacted, pathologised, witnessed and judged. Also under these auspices, the focus of interest shifts towards what is taken for granted, the mundane. Not only is the everyday a site of social importance but so too are the objects that are discarded, not noticed or ridiculed as trivial and meaningless. Here cars and road infrastructures are heralded for their primal cultural significance. They have as much potential to act upon us as do artefacts said to be powerful, spiritual or special in some way or other (Fig. 4.1).

Several social scientists consider that mobility is one of the more stratifying factors of everyday life. In such a context, it works as a model, mirroring class, position, cultural capital and similar indicators of social strata (Bourdieu 1984). Spatial mobility thus functions as a tool, exposing

Fig. 4.1 Innsbruck (home of Douglas Adams’ HHG2tG), summer 2017 (Photo by PL)
the social and individual dimensions of privilege, whilst uncovering short-term transnational displacement. One of my objectives in playing with flâneurism, at least in terms of the stop and go motion of hitchhiking, is to provide a descriptive and analytical portrait for how some erratic travel can slow down time (Zinganel 2013). By occasionally grounding the hectic mayhem of everyday twenty-first-century living, the non-linear narratives embedded in hitching adventures are full of potential; to free up our stifled imaginations and to unclog the silted up gutters of privilege. Consequently, accounts of what we may label ‘adventure capital’—a subcategory of socio-cultural capital, should be genuinely destabilising—guiding us in the direction of hopeful futures, but equally harbouring a darker side. Yet the latter, the more sinister horizon for travel capital, is hardly new itself. It has existed for over a hundred years now—a murderous hand-axe to engineering’s exploits of progress. Dialectically, however, we should nonetheless be open to concealed flashes of inspiration in order to point out alternative directions, or ways for rediscovering unnarrated messages from the past. Or to re-invent those horror stories that the media and analogous spheres of audiovisual/literary entertainment have glorified with the sensationalistic shock-horror techniques so vividly illustrated in A Clockwork Orange.³

At the turn of the century, in parallel with a significant shift in the humanities and social sciences for an about-face in considerations towards the realm of mobilities (itself seen as turning, perhaps spinning around incessantly these days), such authors as Kaufmann et al. (2004) introduced the holistic idea of ‘motility’. With the assistance of such qualifying notions as access, competence, appropriation, surveillance, subversion and so on, motility describes both the individual and social capacities or potential for achieving mobility. This term provides the opportunity for a set or nexus of notions to illustrate with nuance the setting of a situation’s relational levels of mobility. It thus depicts forms of capital that may be linked with, exchanged for or repressed by other forms of capital. Compared with Pierre Bourdieu’s (1986) definitions of capital from twenty years

³See Anthony Burgess (1962) or Stanley Kubrick’s film of course. I refer to spin, spinning and time loops here to denote the influence of hyper-modernity in producing a body of literature that is increasingly fast paced, somewhat circular and often grotesquely ‘out of control’. These may equally be useful in terms of showing the dangers of empty rhetorical manipulations and word-play games that have made their way into mobility debates, especially in the realm of politics.
before, motility is a broader, vaguer and flatter (less hierarchical) term that some authors would even suggest acts as an umbrella concept. Due to its holistic character, however, motility claims to be more existential, allowing for the potential to adjust individual perspective to the changing dynamics of hyper-mobile modern societies. It offers pertinent methodological and analytical approaches that permit researchers to expand the range of capitals without abandoning other insights from studies on spatial and social mobility.

Focusing on the spaces between the discourses on spatial mobility, the composers of this new term argue that social structures and dynamics are ‘interdependent with the actual or potential capacity to displace entities such as goods, information or people’ (Kaufmann et al. 2004: 745). Their perspective entangles understandings of mobility as strictly structuring dimensions of social life. Rather, movement acts as a spatial way of linking individuals to social relations and everyday practices regarding production, consumption and leisure activities.

Within such a framework, the agencies and free choices that privileged mobility take place within unfix ways of organising our lives, through the possibilities available via systems and technologies that provide virtual, physical and communicative mobility. Motility, as a hyper-hybrid notion, thus allows us to combine the spatial mobilities of social and individual experience. This is then reminiscent of Bourdieu’s ‘field of possibilities’ as being ever regulated by structural dispositions, hence the range of one’s capital and ultimately their *habitus* (Bourdieu 1984: 10). Such intellectual circumnavigations allow Sven Kesselring (2005) to claim that mobilities cannot exist in the realm of pure freedom. Instead, they form ways in which individuals adapt their personal needs, wished and demanded from the collective conditions for the mobile. That is, from the options for creating one’s life through movement whilst being influenced, not to say shaped, by rules and structures.

In terms of many of my own participants and interlocutors, their ages range as such does their interest in long-distance travel. They embody a sense of flexibility and fluidity. Several of them are still studying, do not have a permanent job, are not in long-term relationships and are ready to remain mobile in order to meet and eventually settle with a partner. They generally see long-distance relationships as something temporal and agree that such distance relations take a lot of investment in time, finances, trust and emotion. As Kaufmann et al. (2004) point out, the relation between flexibility and the ability to carry out life projects or long-term plans are embedded within the very notion of motility.
Here’s an example to conclude. In her *mémoires* Simone de Beauvoir recounts a near-death experience of falling down a ravine when hiking alone in the Maritime Alps of Southern France. What’s interesting in terms of her recollection of the events is that she nevertheless adds the details of her trek home, thus adding yet another narrative layer to an already harrowing story:

It astonished that I had felt so little emotional reaction when I believed myself on the very brink of death. I picked up my rucksack, ran back all the way to Lauzet, and thumbed a lift from a car, which took me across the mountains as far as my chalet-hotel on the Col d’Allos. As I fell asleep I remember saying to myself somberly “I’ve lost a day!”. (de Beauvoir 1960: 141)

**Flâneurism on Four Wheels**

The urban cityscapes of the Parisian arcades were perfect examples of an imaginative ‘panoramic architecture’ devised to orient the individual’s movements through the market-place. In light of all the social changes brought on by the French Revolution, the most significant of these were the result of budding capitalism which involved the need to create new social spaces for vending and purchasing purposes. These were passageways through neighbourhoods that were covered with glass roofs and lined by marble panels so as to shape a sort of ambiguous interior–exterior environment. Through the literary inspiration of Charles Baudelaire [1821–1867], this generic space was populated by the character of the *flâneur*, a marginal occupant and eccentric user of such a space. These ideas were initially theorised by Walter Benjamin in the 1930s and published posthumously (1980). Both authors wrote about the growth of a new upwardly mobile class as one of the key groups to embody the public experience of modernity:

The street becomes a dwelling for the flâneur; he is as much at home among the facades of houses as a citizen is in his four walls. To him the shiny, enamelled signs of businesses are at least as good a wall ornament as an oil painting is to the bourgeois in his salon. The walls are the desk against which he presses his notebooks; news-stands are his libraries and

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4 PL’s translation from the original French text of *La force de l’âge.*
the terraces of cafés are the balconies from which he looks down on his household after his work is done. (1980: 37)

Inevitably men, *flâneurs* would stroll through the city to kill the time afforded to them by wealth and education. Their tendency for nonchalance meant that they would objectify the masses, treating the other passers-by and the surrounding architecture as riddles for interpretative pleasure. The act of the *flâneur* symbolised privilege and the liberty to move about the city observing from a distance, not interacting; consuming the sights through a controlling but rarely acknowledged gaze, directed as much at other people as the goods for sale. An anonymous face in the multitude, the *flâneur* was free to probe for clues that were unnoticed by other people, simpletons, caricaturised as domestic beings. In making apparent the spatial inversion between public and private, Benjamin brought the outside in and placed the inside out. This inversion was intended as a social subversion whereby leisure became one of the main tools behind creating an enduring persona for the *flâneur* as someone not confined to an increasingly State-manipulated domestic sphere but who had the capacity, freedom and cultural capital to live within the world.

Mobility is of course central here, as is the kinaesthetic dimensions of movement and ultimately the physical experience of the urban. Benjamin defined modernity as a break from the past, focused on the gaze and liberty of movement. We should also note that mobility and movement are inherently connected to the phenomenological project. It is through such an emphasis that certain anthropologists have come to think through and conceptualise the idea of being *At Home in the World* (Jackson 1996) or how migration can be a form of identity creation (Rapport and Dawson 1998). In this sense, the emphasis is not on the formulation of identity as necessary being focused on where someone is from, but more importantly on where they are going.

A notable feature in this regard is that the *flâneur*, this supreme being of leisure, was the personification of in-betweenness, especially in terms of a perambulating demeanour which was halfway between sleepwalking and an intoxicated consciousness of reform. This characteristic of course lent itself well to the surrealists who captured the *flâneur* as a kind of mascot for moving poetry. For Benjamin, dreams were indices of freedom, whereby our socially constructed dreamscapes could be tapped to provide visions for utopian change.
Flâneurs were therefore a form of transcendental presence who encompassed what Thorstein Veblen (1899) had later labelled as ‘conspicuous leisure’. Veblen’s musings were heavily influenced by the populist movement in America which was prominent from 1887 to 1908. With some socialist influence, they divided the world between those who were producers and those who were not. Populists were antagonistic to the values of the dominant leaders of the business community and shared a sense of urgency and an edge of desperation about the demand for reform. And it is this connection between a desire for change, increased leisure and the ability for movement through different spaces that connects the flâneur to adventure. But despite being mobile in a number of senses, this urban type of trickster is nonetheless the embodiment of idleness, at least with regard to the production of socio-economic value. So we need to introduce another component before we can apply the relevance of this category to the topic of adventure. This additional element, also a product of modernity and the industrial revolution, is acceleration, rapidity, speed.

The contemporary manifestation of the flâneur can perhaps best be understood in our times through the idea of immediacy and therefore as an ‘accelerated flâneur’, facilitated by globalisation anxieties, mega-infrastructures, postmodern architecture and the ruinous decay of buildings, as well as the modern ambition for heightened leisure and freedom from restraint. For attention to the actual social experience of modernity’s fascination with acceleration, one must move away from traditional theorists to the sociological impressionism of someone like Simmel. In the background of most of his writings, although never specified explicitly, Simmel was drawn to thinking about the effects and affects that result from the increasing pace of modern life, with the overall result in the global shift from rural to metropolitan existence.

Inspired by his impressionistic musings, French scholars such as Michel de Certeau’s (1984) and Henri Lefebvre’s (1991) provided some thoughts on walking in the city which are extensions to the former work on the flâneur—although theirs is about ordinary citizens rather than the exceptionally educated bourgeois who receive pleasure from wandering around cities gazing at, but never communicating directly with others. One of the lessons from their studies is that urban movement is hegemonically restricted and controlled. Walkers exist within the built environment that they explore. Whilst some possibilities are denied to them, other possibilities open up. De Certeau calls this ‘walking rhetorics’ which suggests the idea of creativity for getting around obstacles. Now in the
realm of ‘buildering’ (the climbing of buildings), urban exploration and parkour/free running, such ideas of overcoming the restrictions of urban planning through acrobatics and accelerated movement are part of the core rationale for these practices (Laviolette 2011, 2016).

In terms of examining the links between thrills and rapidity, Michael Balint (1959) has offered a psychoanalytically driven approach. His work reveals the often pessimistically dark association between the dangers, risks and implicit violence associated with acceleration and the typically modern sensual aesthetic experiences it can engender.

This is a discourse which embraces a range of transgressive and rebellious impulses chafing the smooth surface order of institutional modernity. And out of this is formed a narrative of speed which is ‘unruly’ both in its orientation and in its expression. Subversive and impetuous, conjoining hedonism with a particular sort of existential hedonism, this discourse constantly teeters on the brink of collapse into violence and chaos. (Tomlinson 2007: 9)

From such a position, the euphoric landscape in which plays the accelerated body is no longer an enveloping sphere of tracts, expanses and panoramas. Rather, it is a beckoning foreground of special sites, niches and locations, each significant for how it technically engages the body in risky play. Indeed, the modern player as sensation seeker encounters the thrillscape as a patchwork of technical possibilities, each to be explored, tested and evaluated with the rules of the game and the singularly trained body in mind. To this attuned and sometimes exceptionally well-trained practitioner, vaguely defined assemblages of natural features transform into distinctly technical spaces and precisely describable arenas that invite exploration, penetration, naming, commentary, repetition and reputation. Whereas the idyllic landscape of the spirit offered the alienated subject the sublimely panoramic envelopment of backgrounds, the ecstatic landscape of the body decisively reverses this symmetry. For the new adventurer, panorama only really provides a setting for foregrounds that, in the game, grounds their body and rivets one’s attention.

Nonetheless, late-modern culture is not just characterised by the intensification of technological mediation and of mobilities and exchanges. It equally relies on excesses, on the perspective that faster is better. Accelerated machine movement, such as automobility specifically, has dominated our globalisation era, becoming a seamless and unquestioned model for
transport in most people’s experience. If the *flâneur* is a figure that epitomises serious leisure during early modern times, what kind of character is the hitchhicker? Is he or she any different and what will his/her heroic or transgressive features be in the 2020s?

**Trans-Sport**

As with traditional *flâneur* metaphors, motion continues to inspire our society. It is a powerful force of our mind/bodyscapes, made even more significant this century by the rapidity of mechanical engineering and the virtual possibilities for exploring wider ranges. A fundamental component of social acceleration, as well as a significant part of the contradictions embedded in hitchhiking culture, is that we have to accept the presence of significant environmental undertones. Hitchhiking exists in this in-between and *inter alia* space, betwixt motor vehicles and porous infrastructural roadscapes. It is an activity heavily dependent on cars, vans and lorries, but which somehow opposes, or at least challenges, global obsessions with engine cultures of the petrochemical variety.

The search for the self in travel is a common theme in both hitchhiking and other mainstream road narratives. In this sense, the destination is not always as important as the process of getting there—a process that bathes in the freedom from commitment and responsibility. Mobility thus opens to the esoteric. Movement is the means, the development of a kaleidoscopic self-image is the pursuit and a more satisfying self is the destination. As Salter has eloquently stated just over 40 years ago: ‘new paths lead to new images either on the road or in the haven at the end of the junket’ (1979: 13).

Ideas of mobility transgress borders concerning the characteristics of modern individuals and modern states. They advocate the notion that private car ownership and domestic car industries are hallmarks for what constitutes modernity (Wolfe 2010). Quinney, for one, noted the importance of the immersion of the self into the immediate moment of movement and travel: ‘As with all travel – no matter how near or far from home – every moment is a journey of the soul. We spend our lives travelling’ (1986: 21). In this sense, the conscious self loses itself in a larger imaginative world, a world where we are intimately grounded to an unhindered space. We travel the world to discover its secrets and in so knowing we become one with the landscape.
This phenomenological position implies that the restriction of movement is a form of alienation from the world’s mysteries. Such a stance hints at the danger of disembodying ourselves from the landscape, for in so doing we deny ourselves and desacralise nature. Kierkegaard wrote of what it meant for the self to fail to become part of the otherness of the world. He called this condition *The Sickness unto Death* and claimed that it denied the nature of the ultimate human reality. As he asserts: ‘[…] and possibility is for the self what oxygen is for breathing (1848: 42).’

Many environmentalists ascribe sickness unto death as an excellent idiom for the current state of the Earth’s ecosystems. Amongst other things, they point the finger of blame to our automobile addiction and infatuation with mobility. The car has indeed had profound impacts upon the quality and character of city and country life around the globe. It is a major force in the shaping of the Anthropocene. And if even the oxygen we breathe is contaminated at a level that impacts all people in all places, then how are we as a species to realise our full possibilities as selves?

Without doubt, automobiles have evolved far beyond their utility as transportation devises to become, in many parts of the world, the very symbol of the good life and conspicuous consumption. They are status symbols, objects of fantasy, sources of employment and major forces in the income of many countries (Miller 2001). Commentaries about the important shift in car use, from family property to personal property, have existed since the birth of this modern technology. The increasing dependency on the car for the fulfilment of daily activities was accurately predicted as a trend that would continue, imposing greater demands on precarious energy supplies as well as solidifying the human landscape with a ‘network of institutions that take limitless personal mobility for granted’ (Bogart 1977: 15). It is no wonder then that the automobile holds a primary place amongst those artefacts that have significantly transformed society in the twentieth century. This is so much so, that it is becoming obvious that certain important psychosocial processes lie at the heart of explaining why one’s personal vehicle is one of the most significant objects in the age in which we live.

By its ubiquitous presence in Western society, the car has shaped the ways in which people can move. It also quickly became a metallic statement to who and what we are. Automobiles and their related concrete networks of roads are readily apparent in our landscapes—standing as monuments to the past, present and future. Even the atmosphere is not safe from their pollution and scrapped vehicles have created a whole new
refuse problem. In terms of its relation to surfing, car travel has been intimately connected not only because of the bulky piece of equipment involved and the need to follow conditions dictated by weather patterns, but also because of the associations with free roaming and free love. This relationship with hedonism is clearly at the heart of the complex rapport that the surfing lifestyle has had with the need to have access to a vehicle.

The performance artist Laurie Anderson has reacted to the automotive industry’s despotism in her rendition of a journey of life. The dark glebe is entered and the straightway is lost. The errancy in Anderson is accelerated as her body becomes a motorway: ‘I… I am in my body… I am in my body the way… I am in my body the way most people drive…I am in my body the way most people drive their cars’. These lyrics are from the song Americans on the Move, in which she goes on to translate a parable of lost direction into a frightful nightscape of rain and ceaseless traffic where you are ‘[…] driving through the night to a place you’ve never been with everything unfamiliar’ (quoted in Ezell and O’Keeffe 1994: 232).

The sociologist Eugene Halton (1994) refers to such car fetish symbolism as ‘auto eroticism’, which places the sports car as America’s top symbol of its youth’s budding sexuality. Indeed, automobiles embody sex, excitement, and in certain cases liberation, both by the personal privacy that they permit and by the social and financial emancipation that they proclaim. It follows that by incarcerating sexuality, the automobile has the potential of alienating its youthful drivers from the sexuality that comprises them. And so, the elevation of motor vehicles to cultic status conveys malignant control of the machine over individuality. Some authors have even argued that the erotic appeal of the car derives from the combination of such feelings as control, omnipotence and self-enclosed regression. Its inner space is a simulated environment that provides its passenger with a self-propelling womblike capsule. Here ‘driving can be an onanistic experience in which the driver extends his power manifoldly’ (Freund and Martin 1993: 91).

There is another phenomenon that links car travel and surfing—the way in which each can manage to alter our spatial perception. The landscape as seen from a motor vehicle is experienced as a set of visual sequences. Objects appear to move, they alter in colour, shape, size and texture. Compositions form, dissolve and fade whilst perceptions of constancy and motion, sometimes exciting, frightening or simply boring, become increasingly rapid. The connection to the idea of the accelerated flâneur, explored above, is immediately pertinent here. In reducing
our field of vision and limiting the use of our other senses, cars often homogenise the experience of landscape.

Speed and constricted space are not the only factors involved in generating a sense of sameness and flatness to the environment. Commercialisation is a culprit as well. Cars have been the target of the visual pollution of words which increasingly effect urban centres and their hinterlands. In many cases, the information on roads becomes so varied and superfluous that it is unreadable. The upshot is a film-like illusion, where mirage and reality are blurred: ‘This mode of apprehending the world constitutes the essence of the postmodern experience’ (Freund and Martin 1993: 105).

There is therefore a liminal component to this surreal form of perception. Of course, the postmodern roadscape is not only shaped by driving experiences. The transient images of television equally mediate experiential encounters with the world. Together they provide much of our spatial information: ‘[…] The mutual dependency of the road and television has changed our architecture. The strip has become the Television Road’ (MacDonald 1985: 13). This construction of architecture, space and entertainment for the needs of the automobile industry was one of the instigators in the shift from modernity to postmodernity. Sequentially, the architecture of road commerce grew into its own form of communication. In such a virtual landscape, the urban environment, buildings and architecture move from being forms in place to becoming symbols in space.

The geographer Stephen Daniels (1993) has also attempted to sight iconographical roadscape images by creating a category for imaginative geographies in which texts and illustrations generate cultural histories that foster the narrative genre we have come to know as ‘travel writing’. His excessively ocular outlook is limited, however, because ultimately he provides a static way of seeing.

The written recollection becomes the medium of choice for communicating what has been visually observed. The use of multiple meanings surrounded by a variety of discourses is what Daniels advances as the eloquence of images. Surely, however, the landscape is equally a lived-in environment. Images provide one type of reality yet every landscape harnesses a wealth of human potential (Bender 1998). Roads, streets, avenues and boulevards are not simply links between points or corridors for travellers. Concrete and cobblestones literally consume space. In an average city more space is dedicated to the movement of vehicles than to
most other activities. By relying principally on pictorial material, Daniels is able to quickly shift narratives but he does not put into question the observational points upon which he stands. For him, we have historical contexts which explain specific views and vistas. But we do not examine how to move between or change certain platforms of power. By examining the landscape from a static position, the visual analyst only changes his or her vantage point, without connecting or moving between the shifting perspectives. Constructions of historical contexts can be problematic when one is relying on images generated by the elite. In short, such a methodology helps recreate unequal balances of power.

This is exactly where J. B. Jackson (1984) would be up in arms, by pointing out the absence of any vernacular landscape understanding. In essence his mission was to reveal the traveller’s path, a path that is latent with power since it may not be accessible or noticeable to all. Jackson therefore reminds us that the tact of social scientists is suited to revealing the power latent within the layers of the landscape itself. This only becomes possible by relying on actual observations of human mobility. In so doing, we can uncover the patterns to city transport which are not obvious from the layout of the transportation network.

It is this notion of what is noticeable in environmental perception that raises many controversies in the landscape literature. Some authors argue for instance that it is not what we perceive but how we feel about what we perceive that is central in our understanding of human behaviour and what it means to be human. Such a humanistic perspective examines human–environment relationships in terms of embodied ideas. It admits that what we see is greatly influenced by our attention, intention and interest. Further it is grounded in history, where events are always present, ever recurring and fused to terrain; where events are, for all intents and purposes, trans-temporal: renewed and confirmed each time that the words of stories, myths and legends are written or spoken (Ryden 1993).

Other scholars, however, continue to strive for objective interpretations of the landscape. They proclaim that noticeability is not a contentious issue since observable phenomenon should be recordable, measurable and mappable. This latter positivistic attitude is at the heart of many problematic transport policies. Yet different views about transportation networks exist. Over a hundred and thirty-five years ago now, John Ruskin wrote that some people can be compared to careful travellers who neither stumble on stones nor slip into sloughs but who have from the onset
of their journey gone in the wrong direction; others are travellers who, however stumbling and slipping, have their eyes fixed on the true way (Ruskin 1885).

There are many other dimensions in which issues about a change in environmental consciousness could be considered. For instance, in a shrinking world of accessible travel options, international surf tourism is certainly comparable to the production of conventional surfboards in terms of the levels of carbon emissions and overall ecological footprint impact. In the popular surfing magazines there have been a number of articles about carpooling and other alternative modes of transport for surfing, including bikes, the train and the less practical, hitchhiking. Let me thus provide a short ethnographic vignette to illustrate this theme whereby adventure and alternative transport come together.

**The Ledge Over the Edge**

The scene is the Gunnersbury roundabout in Chiswick, London, on the lay-by to the beginning of the M4 motorway heading West. At about half-nine in the morning, I set out to hitch a lift to Cornwall, my original ethnographic field site. The year was 2003 and it hadn’t been long since my student days had ended. To be honest, as a teaching assistant looking for research funding, I was probably less well-off than your average undergraduate ‘fresher’ who had yet to spend all their student grant or loan on beer. As a result, I was hoping to save a few bob by thumbing a ride.

In not much time at all, less than about 15 minutes (or 170 cars), a vehicle pulled up. ‘Where ya headed mate?’ said a shaved headed man in his early 40s who’s shoulders looked quite broad indeed and who must have been well over six feet tall. But he did not seem threatening in the least. In fact, he seemed to be a rather pleasant fellow, casually dressed in jeans and a t-shirt, with a fairly tidy car—not that an excess of precaution, much less comfort, are the most crucial issues when hitchhiking. And this is doubly so of course, when one is about to embark on a little pilot study for a project on adventure, risk-sport and extreme places. ‘As far Southwest as you’re going really’, I replied. ‘Perfect hop in boy, off to the West Country I be going’ he followed, putting on a thick mock accent. I couldn’t believe my luck and this was only the beginning. Within minutes of our conversation it transpired that my new travelling companion was working in West London as a firefighter, four days on and four off. He had recently moved into that line of work because of the extended weekend
time which it allowed, so he could indulge in his favourite hobby and obsession, surfing. Commenting further, he explained that his sudden and radical shift in career path was a necessary lifestyle change. In the past years his health had been deteriorating and he needed to find a way of supporting what he called an increasing ‘surf addiction’:

As you can see, I’m a pretty heavy bloke […] it took me three years of part-time dabbling on the odd weekend of good surf just to stand up on a board […] that was really frustrating. But once I nailed it, there was no turning back […] so I spent some time thinking about work options that could give me a four-day weekend.

This was one of those days where I really should have bought a lottery ticket. And things got even better. After a bit over an hour of driving this chap, let’s call him Martin, got a phone call from one of his friends who was already expecting him. ‘[…] what’s that mate? Three foot and clean on the North coast […] I’m putting my foot on it, be there by three-ish, I’ve gotta stop at my sisters in Somerset but I’ll keep it to one cup of tea, fifteen minutes tops’.

He hung up and explained that it was a little out of the way but he’d promised to bring his sister some DVDs and he wouldn’t be able to stop at hers on the way back, did I mind? Oh, and did I mind if that was the only pit stop? ‘No time for lunch I’m afraid’ he continued “but you can always borrow a board once we’re there if you fancy’. So yes, it was the kind of day that a field researcher embarking on a fairly new project dreams of.

To top it all off was the contextualising of the surf-addiction lifestyle that resulted from the end of our three hour drinking session, which followed two hours of surfing. When we said our farewells, he gifted some precious ethnographic snippets: ‘[…] guess it’s been a pretty crazy day huh? Driving all morning at an average speed of over 100 miles an hour, to then hit the cold sea for a while, and the warm beer for a while longer’. Such sensorial overdrive and distortion is of course a significant justification for risk behaviour put forward by many practitioners of adventurous activities. Moreover, it is frequently this distorted modality of experience that is excessively sought by those participants who engage in extreme or radical practices during moments where they have further altered their states of mind through drug or alcohol usage.
In an elegant and rather rehearsed way, Martin summarised this ‘work hard, play harder’ ethos by saying: ‘but hey, contrary to popular belief, I don’t live on the edge, I live on the ledge over the edge’. Pleased with himself, he chose to elaborate even further, more to his mates than me at this point. If it wasn’t obvious by then his final boasting provided a conclusive statement about a lifestyle motto that transpired not to be about a type of romantic ‘hippy’ dream of escaping the pressures of modern living. Instead, it was about something quite different—leisurely excess: ‘ya man, we’re talking the full combination of sex, drugs’n surf the roll, baby! The ledge way over the edge’.

**Phenomenological Stochasticity**

Carl Sauer’s (1925) work on the morphology of landscapes was one of the founding approaches to an experiential understanding of space. It was conceptual in its ability to capture structural units as well as methodological in its formulation of a temporal framework which embraced the human impact on landscape change and evolution: ‘As method, morphology was “synthesis”: the identification of changing processes responsible for the creation of different “forms”’ (Kenzer 1985: 258). Sauer’s focus on cultural landscapes is as influential on anthropology as it is grounded within it, even though he is generally regarded as one of the gurus of historical and cultural geography. As Tilley (1994) and Ingold (2000) have demonstrated, however, spatial phenomenology is inherently trans as well as inter-disciplinary.

Overall, such a perspective echoes how space embodies humanity. In this sense, landscapes are analogous to the interior of our mind and bodyscapes in that they reveal the ends which have directed human energy. The means to the ends are either rational or irrational but the ends themselves are neither. Instead, they rest on a different plane: ‘the realm of the will and of the search for meaning’ (Tuan 1971: 183). For the French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty, our human ‘being in the world’ equates to a bodily being. Subjectivity is a bodily experience. Our behaviour does not mirror the willingness of the mind in which the body mechanically executes the mind’s commands. Instead, consciousness is ‘a being-towards-the-thing through the intermediary of the body’ (1962: 137).

Mobility is therefore not the transporting of the body to a point in space where we have created an a priori representation. Rather, the
meaning of mobility is in the action of movement itself not given to the action by an external agent. In sum, bodily subjectivity implies that meaning does not invariably originate from explicit verbal formulations or from the conscious mind. Meaning should not be reduced to these mediums since it may exist in the doing of said action or in the manifested accomplishment of that action (Jackson 1996).

Phenomenology’s anthropocentric basis leads to the potential of understanding humans and landscape as a single system. Human relationships with space are understood not only as cognitive relationships but as something that permeates our whole being. Similarly, humanity permeates space. The human–environment system is therefore flexible and in flux. It is composed of a multitude of worldviews which are unified into a synergism or Gestalt via common experiences, intentions and reactions. This system is also understood through exceptionally selective cultural filters of values (Relph 1970).

In considering the rupturing process of journeying through various transient spaces, additional experiential accounts of ‘road-scape’ travel emerge from the work of certain phenomenologically influenced authors. Christopher Salter (1979) and Richard Quinney (1986) have provided such descriptions. The former has suggested that four catalysts, each having its own environmental, psychological and spatial consequences, set in motion our infatuation with the road. He labels these: (i) the road as education; (ii) the road as flight; (iii) the road as a source of environmental options; (iv) the road as a source of new self-images. In more detail, Salter’s typology denotes:

i. A theme about movement which stands as heuristic and pedagogic sources. Numerous things change as the traveller moves from place to place. And since different landscapes are peopled with different cultural groups, he or she is exposed to a vast extent of new experiences and demands which intensifies social as well as environmental learning. Dealing with this flood of environmental and cultural uncertainty is a lesson provided by few other mediums of education.

ii. In perception studies, the discourse on sense of place frequently overlooks the dynamic aspects of such senses. The sensations giving substance to locales and landscapes are in perpetual flux however. New favourite places can be discovered or old ones abandoned as long as movement remains possible. We often consider the options of movement and relocation to free ourselves from the past. Indeed,
feelings and place are intimately linked and in many cases the act of fleeing somewhere is driven by intense emotion or the desire to start life afresh. Consequently, when we ‘hit the road’ we are perhaps perceptually impaired given the significant push forces from the hearth. Because of our vulnerability, negative or dangerous images and situations might be ignored but the distortion need not be negative. Periods of mobility can also engender a heightened sense of environmental or cultural awareness.

iii. Environmental preferences have an intriguing role in stimulating movement. People often discuss decisions to change residence in terms of the socio-cultural environment. This is equally true for travel plans. The traveller’s anticipation of what to expect derives from numerous sources such as popular travel advertisements, hearsay, novels, films and so forth. Such discussions and information thus heighten our awareness of our own preferences. They blend together with our actual experiences to modify the preconceptions of our environmental information. Based on this information, we create patterns of familiar types of preferred places and panoramas which help guide our movement.

iv. Soul searching whilst travelling is a common motif in road narratives. In this sense, the destination is never quite as important as the process of getting there—a process that bathes in the freedom from commitment and responsibility. Mobility thus opens to the esoteric. Movement is the means; the development of a kaleidoscopic self-image is the pursuit and a more satisfying self is the destination.

As a modern mediator of accelerated movement, the automobile holds a primary place amongst the artefacts that have significantly transformed society in the twentieth/twenty-first centuries (Zuckermann 1991; Miller 2001; Laviolette and Sirotina 2015). So much so that it has become a truism to scrutinise the psychosocial processes which lie at the heart of explaining why the car is ‘one of the most significant objects of the age in which we live’ (Marsh and Collett 1986: 4). Arguably perhaps, some authors have even suggested that car-oriented transport has predominantly altered our perception of place and replaced it with a rootless or placeless space—Marc Augé’s (1995) archetypal non-place. The car is now the instrument through which ‘Westerners’ express most of the social
bonds linking them to their institutions and to each other (Bogart 1977; Sachs 1984; Widmer 1990). Clear boundaries and centres of exurban-suburban landscapes have consequently disappeared. The claim would thus be about auto-mobility contributing to the dehumanisation of the landscape and to the de-authentication of sensorial experience. More recently, however, Tim Dant has chronicled a shift in attitudes. He indicates that for the first time in over half a century, at least in the UK, cars are not at the heart of ‘broken-Britain’. Having consistently worked on vehicles and maintenance, he reveals evidence for a drop since 2007 in the numbers of both people passing their driver’s test and car registration (Dant 2014). Despite not addressing hitchhikers explicitly as a significant category of passengers (which makes sense in the noughties), his account of the typical dichotomy between driver and driven is especially pertinent here.

**Wild Vertigo and Other 4 × 4 Metaphors**

Hitchers for their part are not typical automobile travellers. Despite using this medium to get around, their journeys are frequently interrupted and shrouded in various moments of exhilaration and vertigo. And, by their very presence outdoors along road networks, they are re-humanising the landscape. The effort involved in finding suitable stopping places, speedy routes and adequate shelter means they are able to physically and emotionally engage with places which many people only glimpse at. Indeed, if nothing else, a hitching endeavour means that one is removed from what most people experience during straightforward car trips. Instead, one is in a position to fully absorb certain elements of the roadscape environment. In so doing, one also learns how to adapt to new and unpredictable circumstances. Hitchhikers thus cause ruptures within the linearity of most vehicle journeys—symbolic of those fragmentations necessary in subverting certain aspects of modern petrol-fuelled transport.

In terms of environmental perception, it might be interesting to propose that the gaze of hitchhikers seeks the horizon in the anticipation of going somewhere. This generates a form of travel sequencing, whereby hitchhikers experience the world in destination stages: progressive blocks of superseding momentary events that combine to create a unique unit of voyage remembrance. Hitchers often glance at the horizon of the oncoming road to evaluate the number of cars approaching and
hence the likelihood of getting a lift. I have found in so doing that the hitcher risks being overlooked by motorists if their attention falters too far away from the motorists themselves.

Once picked up, the experience of shifting from the roadside to the car’s inside reveals a unique angle on how the hitcher sees and feels the world. Suddenly, they are less focused on the horizon, the world out there. Instead, sight and sound, smell and tact, are thrust into the confined space of someone else’s vehicle, in close quarters with another’s presence. The solitude is broken and the continued benefit of a free ride depends on quickly grasping and respecting the driver’s rules. The hitcher’s image of solitude weakens as the image of the street or motorway, with its oases of rest and lifts, strengthen. So to paraphrase the geographer Yi-Fu Tuan, the symbol of happiness moves away from the sound of a kettle boiling at home to become the precious hum of an engine on the open road (Tuan 1971).

Hitchers also differ from the average motorist because they might ride in several types of vehicles during their journey and their conditions as passengers will equally vary. This guarantees them an exposure to different outlooks during the voyage as well as to various socio-cultural settings. At certain times, they will be sitting eight feet off the ground in the front of a lorry. At others, they will be sat in the cargo section of a pick-up truck, the leather seat of a Mercedes convertible, or the floor of a Volkswagen campervan. Additionally, each situation is an exposure to different class, gender and ethnic issues (Plumb 2014). As the cliché goes ‘beggars can’t be choosers’ and so the successful hitcher learns to be accepting of others. This reliance on charity reveals that the hitching process opens its participants to new levels of tolerance and humility.

Undeniably, the roadscape is embedded with the hitcher’s performance. In this sense, hitchhikers are not separate from their surroundings. The landscape makes the participant into a part of itself and the landscape’s components appear to hitchers as biographical self-reflections (Meskell 2005). As part of the environment, the hitchhiker leaves desirable or undesirable traces that will correspondingly be encouraged or discouraged by passing motorists. It is therefore important for those who study landscape to get an impression of the labour embodied within the roadscape since the notion of ‘congealed labour’, traditionally applied to artefacts, equally uncovers the rich human investment of creative mobility in the land. This is a reminder that hitchhiking is a political act,
sometimes on a micro scale, sometimes with subtle, but farther-reaching consequences.

Here’s a brief example connected to The Stone Roses, a Britpop band out of the ‘Madchester’ music scene from the 1980s and 1990s. The painting on the cover of their eponymous debut album from 1989 is titled ‘Bye Bye Badman’, which is also the name of a song on this recording. The lyrics are clearly an expression of the anger felt by political protesters when faced with oppression. Videos, news reports and meeting people who had been involved with the May 1968 riots in France had served as the catalyst not only for this song, but for shaping the particular style of their music, as well as producing a set of visual ‘branding’ associations that included lemons in their posters, t-shirts and set designs for live concerts. This is fine as a tangent for music buffs, but so what? Well, an online blog posting has explained the reasoning behind this visual symbolism. The guitarist of The Stone Roses, John Squire, the artist who has designed many of the band’s visual promotions material, was the one who painted the cover of their first full studio record in a style à la Jackson Pollock. We can see the French tri-colours on the top left corner, with three slices of lemon superimposed on the paint. In an interview many years later, he explained the political significance behind the work as such:

Ian [Brown, the band’s lead signer] had met this French man when he was hitching around Europe. This bloke had been in the riots, and he told Ian how lemons had been used as an antidote to tear gas. (Squire 2001)  

* * *

On the road, there is no middle ground, or that’s how it seems. You either walk or you take. Yet one could say that actually the entire journey is middle ground, balanced on a fine line. The freedom of this medium essentially means that hitchers take charge of their own destiny. Hence, it is not a randomly determined task. Implicit as well as explicit rules exist and the onus of responsibility for one’s destination and safety lie largely with oneself. Because of this, we often witness that hitchers keep

5 See Radio X ‘This is why The Stone Roses used a lemon as a logo’ (5 May 2019). https://www.radiox.co.uk.
detailed travel logs in the form of journals, books, poems or songs. Either through contributing to online resources or by scribbling messages on lay-by barriers for others, they record the best places to get rides from; the routes they take; the number of lifts and time it takes to get around; and of course, they leave messages of hope and despair—funny, sad or cryptic. Indeed, hitching is an excellent example of a type of activity where the pen remains firmly in the hands of the participant. And it is to this theme of ‘creative participation’ and intervention that Chapter 5 returns to in a sinuous way.

Auto-stop is an experiment in vulnerability, establishing new connections and disruptions across the public sphere. Moreover, it is not exempt from precarious moments of solitude since it involves a public exploration of both inwardness and awkwardness. Camus’ rebel, Baudelaire’s flâneur, de Beauvoir’s mnemonic life stories—all three figures are seekers, slowing down in some places, going faster in others—without ever being quite satisfied with what they find. This is an incessant hunt, revealing an anxiety and despair that some restless people admit to being prone to with such words as: ‘not feeling good with the world one lives in – in search of something else that does not exist at the moment’ (Martínez 2015: 431). Understanding the movement of people who resist normative and regulated forms of travel is especially pertinent in an age when Europe is experiencing a renewed growth in both xenophobia and populist politics, as well as concerns over mass extinction, melting icecaps, the overuse of plastics, the cost of nappies.6

Conceptually and comparatively, we can extend this beyond Europe for a moment if we ever aim to truly highlight some of the key landscape depictions that are implicated in such a vernacular and creative setting for transport. Historically associated with labour emigration and exile, there are many literary examples that demonstrate how the erratic character of hitchhiking journeys acts as a form of resistance to modernity and poverty.7 Increasingly the case within the framework of global markets, hitchhiking often factors as an exchange of a commodity that is non-transactional.

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6 Name it what you will, austerity, economic crash, cultures of fears—the Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Chthulucene—they’re here to stay. Like a bee in a bonnet or a prickly pear, it seems impossible but to talk of an uncertain future (Haraway 2016). This has indeed been demonstrated recently through the global Covid-19 pandemic.

7 See for instance John Steinbeck’s The Grapes of Wrath (1939).
I shall explore in Chapters 6 and 7, through my own ‘intrusion’ into the discipline of social anthropology, how I have traced back a narrative that gives me an identity as an interdisciplinary anthropologist. The European Association of Social Anthropologists (EASA) 12th biennial conference in Paris in 2012 was when Tallinn University’s Anthropology Department won the bid to host the following biennial conference in 2014. For me, it was a personal anniversary: ten years since first attending this organisation’s event (in 2002 at the University of Copenhagen). Nanterre marked a decade of unfaltering ‘pilgrimages’ to this anthropology conference, even when I was experiencing the tyranny of distance in New Zealand from 2007 to 2010. My point is that the flâneur type hitchhiker features a mixture of traits from other motilities characters, especially the tourist, nomad and the pilgrim. As such, they certainly illustrate archetypal ways of being a hybrid persona in the typology of mobility (Salazar and Coates 2017). They are captivating metaphors of the embodied imagination, in part because of their links to both the literary and the experiential activity of sensing the world first-hand as it were (Fig. 4.2).

In terms of transport history then, perhaps 2017 will eventually transpire to be the year hitchhiking made its grand scale début on the European art and design stage. During that year there were two artistic exhibitions, each comprising 15 artists—one held in Warsaw in May, the second at ZK/U in Berlin 10 days later. The year also witnessed a day-long practical design workshop in Sydhavnen as part of Copenhagen’s City Link Festival in September to build three experimental hitching ‘shelters’ (see Figs. 4.3, 4.4, and 4.5). The following chapter explores the first two of these events in more detail.
Fig. 4.2  HH Streetfood restaurant, Olso, January 2019, PL
Fig. 4.3  Copenhagen, *Blafferstoppped* project sign for City Link Festival, 2018, PL
Fig. 4.4  *Blaffernationen* waiting spots, thumb shelter, City Link Festival, 2018, PL
Fig. 4.5  *Blaffernationen* waiting spots, statue, City Link Festival, 2018, PL
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