

ABSTRACT: Along its 45,000 miles, the network of American interstate automobility comprises a number of interpenetrating, schematic/schematizing techno-cultural subsystems that include automated tollbooths, electronic financial transactions and position-aware technologies. These systems ease passage, but also enhance surveillance. Non-systemic gaps persist—bumper stickers amongst others—opening possibilities for the driving subject to be 'seen' that do not entail surveillance systems. Such spaces, which require the attention and imagination of other drivers, are at once material and discursive; real and virtual; subjectifying and liberating; interstitial and yet produced through and informed by the dominant cultural systems and logics between which they are situated.

1. Recently, Peter Merriman has suggested mobilities studies would benefit from increased attention paid to “the fleeting social attachments generated through the visualities of car windscreens” (2012, 60).
 - a. this project, and my presentation today are a tentative response to this challenge
 - b. project: <http://interstateinterstitial.wordpress.com>

2. The interstate: first photo, gods-eye view, schematic, strategic map—de Certeau (1984)—removed from the obscurity and complications of everyday driving practices [**SLIDE 2**]
 - a. controlled-access, divided highway network that extends transcontinentally for some 45,000 miles linking all the major population centres in the US.
 - b. Systems / surveillance:
 - i. automated tollbooths
 - ii. electronic financial transactions
 - iii. position aware tech / GPS
 - iv. licensing & registration
 - v. credit & finance... ownership
 - vi. actuarial calculations & insurance
 - vii. operational / safety controls
 - viii. police
 - ix. rules of the road
 - x. congressional appropriations
 - c. Representations, interstate highway as:
 - i. open road [**SLIDE 3**]
 - ii. city destroying concrete spaghetti [**SLIDE 4**]
 - iii. dromoscopic free-fall [**SLIDE 5**]
 - iv. surveillance [**SLIDE 6**]

- v. anonymous and anonymizing spaces of mass-consumption
[SLIDE 7]
 - vi. faceless co-presence [SLIDE 8]
3. I want to trouble that... by looking at bumper stickers, through the windscreen
[SLIDE 9]
- a. anecdotes
 - i. Effie Gladding – 1914, Lincoln Highway route
 - 1. pennants hometowns / places visited
 - 2. “whole clusters of pennants are fastened about the car”
 - 3. *Excuse my dust* and *Thank you*
 - ii. When this baby... [SLIDE 10]
 - b. perhaps, considered from a perspective of assemblages, other possibilities emerge... but what conditions do these possibilities depend, or, put another way, what are the social possibilities of the *driver-car*?
 - i. driver-car (Dant, 2004): “not a thing or a person; it is an assembled social being that takes on properties of both and cannot exist without both... not a species resulting from chance mating but a product of human design, manufacture and choice” [SLIDE 11]
 - ii. writer-driver-cars and reader-driver-cars; extension of the visual field / interlacing with various ‘personal’ and ‘discursive’ and ‘technical’ backgrounds (Thrift, 2004)
4. Engagement [SLIDE 12-17]
- a. What happens in these ephemeral engagements?
 - b. the presence of a bumper sticker on the surface of the writer-car stands as a continuous transmission of invitation to be seen... a sort of Goffmanian ‘opening move,’ (1963) but one that is ongoing, always taking place, rather than a discrete gesture
 - c. in the usually brief moment in which driver-cars pass one another:
 - i. the reader-car may or may not become aware of the invitation;
 - ii. may notice but ignore it; may notice but unsuccessfully try to read it (passage is too fast, the sticker is faded or otherwise obscured);
 - iii. may notice and successfully read it. Success or failure here is determined by the corresponding subjective sense of the reader-car vis-à-vis the decoding of an intelligible message from the text(s).
 - d. If the reader-car makes a successful reading of the writer-car, the imaginative interstice is opened, and the reader may engage in the sort of hermeneutic play that characterizes the reading of other signs / texts in

other circumstances, with the constraint that sticker texts are extremely economical in their expression.

- e. the engagement may be extended over time-space through
 - i. reflection or conversation
 - ii. encounter with another text
 - iii. Google (Goggles); searching the internet – online forums
 - iv. social media
 - v. ergodic: “The adjective I propose for this function is ergodic, which implies a situation in which a chain of events (a path, a sequence of actions, etc.) has been produced by the nontrivial efforts of one or more individuals or mechanisms.” (Aarseth, 1997)

5. Other work

- o D’Alisera (2001) – Sierra Leone immigrants in DC, multi-dimensional placing, examines how Sierra Leonian immigrants in the Washington D.C. area use religious objects (commodities: cassette tape, bumper stickers, pamphlets) to situate themselves in multiple cultural, material and political spaces: "in so doing, they create a community space in the site between actual location (Washington, DC), homeland (Sierra Leone), and global imaginings (Islam)" (99)
- a. Linda-Rene Bloch (2000) – stickers in Israel after Yitzak Rabin assassination: intertextual, asynchronous, mobile discourse via bumper stickers

6. Conclusion / Questions:

- a. Stakes: moving toward a post-car / post-individual ownership era (Urry 2007), how to account for / go beyond the symbolic investiture / performance of identity work through American automobility & private cars?
- b. Is this desire to ‘represent’ simply a product of the long-standing symbolic relationships between Americans and their cars? Or has it begun to constitute it as well?
- c. To what degree does the desire to be ‘seen’ / ‘recognized’ reflect a sense of invisibility on a day to day basis, or is it an effect of cultural tendency toward self-presentations, combined with an increased significance in lifestyle representations and facilitated by hyper-agile production / consumption patterns enabled via the internet?
- d. The metaphor of the 'information super-highway' has circulated through the American cultural consciousness since the mid-1990s. What I propose, by contrast, is a consideration of the ways in which bumper stickers,

operating as a particular genre of ergodic literature re-constitute automobility as a *super-information highway*. In particular, I am interested in the ways in which contemporary Americans, in conjunction with their cars and bumper stickers, write themselves and read other selves upon their lived world.

References

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