



Atlantic automobilism: emergence and persistence of the car, 1895–1940

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BOOK REVIEWS

Atlantic automobilism: emergence and persistence of the car, 1895–1940, by
Gijs Mom, New York/Oxford, Berghahn Books, 2015, xv + 751 pp., £95.00, ISBN 978 1
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Atlantic Automobilism is a fascinating and innovative new publication on arguably one of the most important events in twentieth-century history: the breakthrough and worldwide generalisation of the use of motorized vehicles. Of this history, the history of the 'automobile', Gijs Mom treats the early period: the emergence and persistence of the car in the industrialized Western world in the first half of the century. The main title of the book as such is carefully chosen. The term 'Atlantic' means that this history is going to present us with both the European and American cases of car history taken together, not separately, as two sides to a single story. The term 'automobilism' refers to the uses of the automobile, rather than to the vehicle itself as purely a construct of technology. The viewpoint taken, in other words, is that of a social and cultural history of the car and its users – although the author throughout the different chapters reminds that technical aspects too definitely play a significant role in this process.

This viewpoint is clearly linked to the professional background of the author, who combines a past as an engineer working in the Renault factory in France with an academic education in literature history. Dr. ing. Gijs Mom of the University of Eindhoven in the Netherlands is one of the most renowned international experts in mobility history, a relatively young field of research that has emerged strongly since the 1990s. A former editor of the leading journal in the field, *The Journal of Transport History*, and the founding president of the professional association of mobility historians T²M (<http://t2m.org>), Mom has been over the past 15 years a prolific writer on the history of the car, transport, tourism and the likes. This wide field expertise is reflected in the extensive bibliography in the back of the book: 76 pages with well over 1000 titles. It is also clear in the long introduction, where Mom reviews and critically asserts the mobility and transport historiography of the past 40 years and attempts to develop a 'toolbox' for the still developing field of research.

'This is the work of lifetime,' are the opening words of this book, and indeed *Atlantic Automobilism* may well be perceived as the author's *magnum opus*. Mom recapitulates on the insights of all of his previous researches and confronts and extends his findings with recent publications on almost every imaginable aspect of car culture. The voluminous text of over 700 pages is chronologically structured, covering two periods, the *belle époque* (1895–1918) and the inter-war years (1918–40), in seven chapters. The book has no illustrations, which is rather unfortunate for a cultural history, but does offer quite a number of figures and tables – although these are not always clear, partly due to poor print quality.

The first chapter deals with the earliest history of the motor car. In an overview of breath-taking width, the author argues that the development and early uses of the internal-combustion engine and other forms of motorized vehicles were dependent on a number of technical breakthroughs, but at the same time could only arise within a wider cultural context of the construction of what Mom labels as a (masculine) 'Adventure Machine'. In Chapter two the author turns to literary sources and (silent) movies in order to understand the making of this cultural image (over 150 works from seven countries). Again the author presents a new model for analysing such processes of cultural modelling. A third chapter concludes this period, specifically devoted to the First World War. The author convincingly shows how the preparation, events and aftermath of this war have played a key role in the early history of the automobile and its transformation into a 'useful' object and vice versa, as the war was being described as 'a victory of allied motors over German railroads' (p. 270).

The second period, the inter-war years, is dealt with in four chapters. After the war, the situation had clearly changed with rising densities of car ownership in the European countries, but most of all in the United States. American motorization is linked to consumerism and Middletown culture, and consecutively compared to a number of European cases. Mom then tries to get a grip on the changes in car culture by analysing a number of user profiles, such as the farmer, the commuter, the family car and so on, as 'new users joined the prewar elite motorists and in the process reshaped automotive adventure' (p. 528). Chapter five focuses on some of the practices involved in the use of car technology by middle-class families. There is a long and fascinating section on the introduction of the closed car, transforming the car from a 'clam' into a 'capsule' and profoundly changing the sensory experiences of car usage. Apart from what the author calls this 'encapsulation' process, attention is also given to the process of 'prosthetisation' with the introduction of ever more components such as electric ignition, hydraulic braking or automatic transmission. The author again turns to literary sources (and movies) to analyse the cultural context of such processes. This part of the book is particularly readable, with long and fascinating extracts of writers trying to describe their emotions as they experienced the car and its speed sensation, among other feelings. Mom definitely has a talent for spotting interesting viewpoints and for creating and handling striking new concepts, such as where he analyses the new forms of motor technology and car uses through a so-called 'cyborg' motive. Also, in this very masculine culture, the author does not neglect to regularly give attention to a gender perspective.

The last chapter deals with traffic and what the author calls 'the automobile system'. The text treats such divergent topics as car maintenance, road building, car-accident statistics and the rivalry between train and motor-car transport. Unfortunately this is a rather weak chapter. Mom relies heavily on his own research into the historical association of road builders PIARC, but this is clearly insufficient. The author claims to treat 'the construction of road safety' but restricts his effort to the analysis of a number of accident statistics. The responses to these accidents in virtually all Western countries and the subsequent transformation of public space in a modern 'traffic system' are simply ignored. There is nothing here on the creation and introduction of traffic police, traffic rules and traffic signs, although these measures were massive and omnipresent in the treated period and may well constitute the most important change Western societies underwent as a result of 'automobilism'. The modern traffic system was in the first place created by a number of international traffic committees and national technocratic-minded public administrations, not just by road builders and urban planners as the author seems to suggest.

But this hiatus may easily be forgiven, as *Atlantic Automobilism* has more than enough to offer. Gijs Mom is a visionary researcher and well known for his creative and innovative ideas. The text has an endless number of topics and theories to offer, almost always enriching, surprising and inspiring – truly 'food for thought' for any potential reader interested in enlarging her or his perspective as a social and cultural researcher, and obligatory reading for any expert in transport and mobility history. *Atlantic Automobilism* is one of the most important books on automobile history of the past 20 years, and well beyond this also a definite eye-opener on the social history of European and American societies in a key cultural period. One could almost regret that the author has limited himself spatially and chronologically, instead of dealing with a global history of automobile culture in the whole twentieth century. Perhaps a suggestion for Mom's next *magnum opus*?

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Business historians will not find here a book dedicated to the history of car manufacturing, trade and business. Rather *Atlantic Automobilism* is envisioned as a mix of cultural history and modes of life and consumption. It focuses on the evolution of the concept of the car, of its uses and thus of the varieties of mobility, as well as on the collective perception of its values – all focused on North America and six European countries, mainly Germany and France, with a transversal approach of studying changes of mind-sets, paradigms and values. Although most works until now have scrutinized the history of technologies, a few books have already utilized a socio-cultural approach (John Rae, *The Road Legacy and the Car in American Life* [1971]; James Flink, *The Car Culture*, 1975), gauging the effects of American culture on European habits, the building of the symbolic value of car ownership and the sociology of consumption.

In addressing car culture G. Mom has brought together a range of issues and insights from the history of travel, tourism and mobility along with revolutions in technology, design and the sociology of drivers. Each chapter is based on a significant bibliography of academic sources. But the breakthrough achieved in the book results from the mobilisation of another layer of inspiration, with analysis of arts, literature, songs and movies providing, for each period, a rich assessment of how the car moved from daily life deep into actual culture, as these media are used to reveal aesthetic experiences of materialistic *modus operandi*: social and technological histories are thus joined by an emotional history of car. The car ended the predominance of the horse, and shook the parallel and somewhat rival culture of the train, both of which had led the history of mobility in the nineteenth century. Although joined by a parallel mass culture of bicycle and then motorcycle, the car remained predominant in the twentieth century. Such a broad scope has resulted in a large book. But while it is often thick with information and sometimes demanding to follow, each line of thought is richly supported by sources and persuasively argued. Given the author's skill in balancing facts and interpretation, several chapters could stand alone as individual essays.

Mom has adopted a chronological approach, which explains that car culture touched only a minority of upper classes and elites – mostly male ones – committed to sports, tourism, outdoor travel in the countryside or natural parks, as well as exuberance, beyond mere constraints of functionality and 'tinkering'. Automobile clubs, associations, specialized journals and racing blossomed, even if the size of the US territory favoured the increasing use of light trucks among small-town farmers (paving the way for the perennial triumph of the Ford F pickup from 1948, for instance). Car culture began to flourish in the ads, in 'mobility poetics', media and moreover in novels (think of Octave Mirbeau) as well as short stories about car travels and the landscapes they help to discover, like 'sporting fairy tales'. But the First World War demanded another kind of car use, as it joined the economic war machine, answering the need for mechanical mobility near the fronts, and even contributing to the revolution of tanks.

The inter-war period confirmed but also revolutionized the legacy of the 1900–10s, as car use exploded and mass consumption emerged in the United States. Sociological and cultural analyses abound in the chapters about this period, rich in data and quotations. The uses of the car were diversified and reached deep into the modes of life, as thinking and leisure evolved. The effect was less pronounced in Europe, as proved by statistical comparisons. G. Mom could here amplify his scope by scrutinising the perception of the car by families and the middle classes – using the concept of 'comfort'. He could grapple more with the fate of the Ford T as the crisis of the Ford company at the end of the 1920s resulted from its failure to understand the new concept of 'family sized-car'. But, as the author states, business history is not the aim of the book, even if technological progress is evoked for its effects on the design of cars (balloon tires,

closed body and so on) and a new rationality as a background for the perception of ‘varieties’ of car uses – as studied with regards to German ranges of cars, from sedans to small cars by Opel, complying with the *Mittelstand* demands. As Mom states: ‘The car as a multifaceted adventure machine for the white-collared lower middle-classes crept into the literature’ (p. 492). The process of ‘domestication in mobility’ (Chapter six) is well pondered either in daily life or in literature, where ‘travelogues’ wrote about domestic round trips and ‘tamed adventure’ (like Klaus and Erika Mann, in *Rundherum*, 1930), leaving aviation as the mode of travel for fresh experiences, even if a passion for ‘ultra-modernity’ sometimes invoked the car (like in Expressionism). At the same time violence joined the fray, with robberies, in real life or in movies and mysteries, or with sublime rule-breaking (think of *The Great Gatsby*, by F. Scott Fitzgerald): human psychology was now at stake, positively – the car as a cocoon or a shelter, as a sentimental nest like in *Babbitt* – or negatively, with ‘car speeding as a mechanical form of rage’ (p. 495). Films welcomed more and more such automotive images, from Chaplin to automotive romances.

Mom transforms himself into a mass psychoanalyst when, writing about the 1920s–30s or the 1950s–70s, he mobilizes data, published studies and other media to reconstitute the building of a new type of human, involved in mass trafficking and urban or suburban swarming, networks of flows, *petit bourgeois* family culture, within a new car system, at the core of the reorganisation of territories around road hubs and axes and spatial planning, while rural or ‘rurbane’ middle classes exemplified the wealthy society in small US towns.

A vast and rich conclusion proves that the author has mastered both the huge array of sources and the analytical structure of his demonstrations and interpretations of the connections between cognitive issues and the diversification of mobility cultures. But the book could have included more on studies about the connections between car civilisation, law and police and the need for order in the world of automobiles; on the emergence of trucks in the United States, with a specific culture of road haulage; and the commercial and design strategies of the car manufacturers, using the many business history books available, for instance about General Motors (in the United States mainly) or Ford (both in the United States and Europe [see *Ford in Europe, 1903–2003*]). And ads should have been used more as levers to understand cognitive perceptions of the car as a commodity, and how it was differentiated by car firms’ marketing strategies and the uses it was put to by elites, individuals or families, from commuting vehicles to transcendental adventures, from mere functionality to experiences of movement.

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Gijs Mom’s *Atlantic Automobilism* is a text whose scope is nothing short of ambitious, charting a history of that vehicle so silent, and yet so prominent in literary expression. The car has been, for the majority of the twentieth century a mute character, driving plots in Fitzgerald, Kerouac, Waugh, Wolfe and even Fleming’s narratives to their sometimes questionable ends. Mom’s exploration of this technology is one which travels not only through literature but also through historical, national and gendered boundaries. This is not a simple examination of the

car as vehicle, but rather a theoretical one, driving the course of the book into and under the skin of those who view cars, those who made them, and those who drive them.

Mom's account is astonishingly vast in its scope, yet resoundingly clear producing an example of historical analysis which encompasses a wide range of disciplines from the social to the subjective. This is a history Mom makes clear has been conditioned by the car and its uses across interdisciplinary fields incorporating the vehicle into North Atlantic culture for the past century. Focusing on the manner in which culture has been borne out of the car, Mom's text considers the action of the car (racing and touring), the language of the car (grammar and travel writing), the consumer culture epitomized by ownership ('Americanisation' and the family) and the violence of the car as gendered (women and cyborgs). Prior to such a seminal work, cars were, as one reviewer wrote, 'considered a mere technological triumph', but *Atlantic Automobility* redresses this, expanding the scope of scholarly research into one of cultural, historical, literary and sociological importance.

Mom's study begins with an indication of the car's cultural centrality, claiming that in 2002 'auto was among the first fifty words ... children produced' (p. 1) and in order to construct a car canon of this nature, Mom recognizes the importance of the vehicle as more than object, but instead a 'constant transfer of ideas, people and objects' (p. 2). Much of the text is dedicated to a challenge of the manner in which the car has lost its playful qualities, and upon entering into a period of mass car ownership and consumption the once 'tool' and 'toy' becomes simply a commodity. The study therefore ranges from American to European tales of ownership, citing the 'North Atlantic' element as merely referential to those of Western societies. In doing so, the text engages with two World Wars and the emergence of the Cold War, only it does so through the lens of transport and technology. Through this stepping stone into New Mobility Studies the text aims to provide an explanation for car culture and its use in landmark events of the twentieth century in new and dynamic ways.

Perhaps the most problematic element of this new undertaking is precisely its scope: the range of analyses on offer which aim to investigate hundreds of pieces of literature through technological gadgetry. However, Mom makes clear that his study is one which recognizes the relevance of distinct camps of theory, acknowledging the difference between reality and perception by imposing such a socio-technical network onto an image found predominantly in the humanities. Mom's study is one which bridges previously disparate ideas, where imagery related to reality becomes relevant in our understanding of a global culture. By tracing 'the domestication of the car, its ascendancy to normalcy, and the particular shape its technology and its culture took' (p. 7) he seeks to answer how these phenomena have been, if ever, accurately and concretely defined in literature. It is no longer enough to cite the car's centrality in *The Great Gatsby*, but instead, we must now undertake further investigation which sees this as a technological, economic, systemic, political, social and cultural body, unveiling the car as *Gatsby's* most cohesive and versatile silent character. In this way, Mom makes a compelling case for not only the car as vehicle for literary progress, but also as social barometer, for 'the car reconstructs the high expectations among Americans about the imminent coming of the car for the masses' (p. 9). The focus is therefore on the car as catalyst of change, adoption of that change, and locus for fear of change in society, culture and in bodies themselves, offering a private solution to a social problem.

The text is underpinned by theories based in the History of Technology, citing Rae, Flink and Volti and their technological determinism in its creation of the car canon. In doing so, Mom's work integrates recent studies which identify the broader aspects of car culture such as trucking, road building, safety, racing and the environment itself. Perhaps what is key to this work is the understanding that these are all engaged in a relationship between transport and its communication: how the car communicates with those who view it, drive it, own it, desire it and make it, as well as how the car itself communicates with the landscape it drives through

and how it creates an identity of its own. Not unlike the society Mom points to as one of private and public division, the study here seems to envelop the idea of cars as other bodies who can not only be driven, but drive us – our identity, our bodies and our social meaning.

Not only does *Atlantic Automobilmism* communicate issues of selfhood, this study also recognizes the importance of literary movements from within the twentieth century, engaging with discussions of Modernism, American economic booms and trends which have all informed the persistence of the car as an image for utopian achievement. Mom hints at the central irony, however, by suggesting the underlying inaccuracy of the car as icon of liberty and individualism given the popularity of models such as the Ford Model T, remoulding bodies into similarity not individuality. This tension at the heart of the study, however, is one which spans the book, acknowledging factors in the car itself which adhere to duality not unlike the political climates Mom situates them within. Whilst creating a case for the ‘master narrative’ of the car, Mom is quick to suggest a ‘multitude of national subplots’ (p. 27) which all feature in the car’s multiple modernities and by challenging this, Mom manages to challenge the accepted fables of the car’s image as vehicle of ‘pleasure’ and instead sees it as ‘necessity’, debunking the myths which have pertained to its repeated and continual manufacture.

The bridging of media and cultural studies works to an extent to read literature which foregrounds its status from within the culture of mass consumption, not unlike a cultural materialist framework. In this way, the reading of the car as object and product of its time levels the rampant use of literary, filmic and musical ephemera as measures of a social, cultural and political climate that was, like the car, ever changing its values and appearance. Symmetrically examining two periods to uncover the ever-evolving nature of the ‘automotive adventure’ (p. 40) Mom ultimately recognizes the current, past and even future car systems and their relevance to us and our daily lives, where Automobilmism can better express the ‘dynamism of culture’ (p. 38) and a community without a voice.

This is a breathtaking sweep across history as Mom synthesizes scholarship across seven countries. For him, this is a study of mobility in all its various ways; it is about the mobility of bodies, language, identities, gender and action; and in many ways it is the closest we get to being able to visualize Deleuzian theories of becoming and the importance of the in-between most vividly and accurately. This is not as simple as a study of the emergence of the car: it is about the emergence of global cultural processes, all convening at the point where the car resides at their centre.

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The sin of omission; a response

Being the subject of a co-ordinated set of reviews is a humbling experience, especially when the text to be read is so large, and my reviewers must have spent many hours digesting its content. My first response to the reviewers, therefore, is a message of gratitude, especially for their words of praise. The other point the reviewers’ comments have in common is my book’s lack of systemic aspects. Even if, in the words of Donald Weber, I may be ‘forgiven’ for this sin of omission, I have to confess that I perhaps followed my main sources (novels, poems, movies, songs) a bit too much, in their emphasis on the individual ‘inner universe’ of their protagonists. Apart from some exceptions, such as Ehrenburg’s *Das Leben der Autos* and Steinbeck’s *The Grapes of Wrath*, most mainstream literary utterances (and, I must add, literary scholarship in their wake) have

indeed focused upon 'driver individualism' in an obsession for the Quest of the Self, neglecting not only the role of the passenger (the wife in the nuclear family as the real, collective subject of mobility, let alone children, the elderly, the physically impaired), but also the collective aspects of the mobility experience, be it in car traffic, or as bus passenger, or as a monad in a stream of pedestrians. When I talk, in the book, about systemic aspects of automobilism, I often mean these 'transcendental' elements: those elements that make a group of pedestrians, cyclists or motorists into a 'swarm', a collective without a designated leader. Both Donald Weber and Hubert Bonin lament that I did not include the infrastructural substrate that enables these phenomena: manufacturers (and their advertisements), the infrastructures of the 'car society' beyond the safety discourse and the struggle between road and rail, two systemic aspects I deal with in a separate chapter. It does not help, of course, to say that when I had to shorten the manuscript (yes, it was one third larger than what ended up in the book!), road building had to go, as well as some other systemic aspects that were too far from my main argument about the car as a socially shared, white masculine 'adventure machine'.

Those choices reflect my conviction that in the careful balancing between agency and structure that is history writing, agency has more trouble to become a powerful societal force, because 'experience' is a corporeal phenomenon: people not only have to develop a desire and an expectation, but they also have to act to bring about change. It is agency's struggle to transform 'structure', and the latter's reluctance to be changed, that forms the thrust of my narrative and analysis, the 'motives, motifs, and motivation' of which I found to be present prolifically in artistic and popular utterances. And it is the second phase, the 'persistence' period, in which these motives and motivations become hardened, cemented into a fledgling substrate of what by the end of this period can be called a 'car society'.

I could, of course, write a second monograph on this period, devoting more attention to the systemic aspects, but I won't. I am, instead (and responding to suggestions by the reviewers), working on a sequel for the remainder of the century, a period in which the automobile system had matured and was ready to be exported over the globe. In this phase, certainly from a global viewpoint, structure may be predominant over agency, even if it were millions and millions of advisers, engineers, construction companies, governments, one billion motorists and several billion 'non-users' who had to do the 'work' to bring this about.

Perhaps this is also what Antonia Mackay refers to when she problematizes the 'scope' of my narrative. If I understand her remark correctly, she suggests, perhaps, that I confuse reality and its 'imagery', a doubt sometimes expressed when I presented parts of my argument at conferences and workshops, but which somewhat amazes me coming from the pen of a literary scholar. The space given to me for this response does not allow me to elaborate on this very pressing issue. I only can refer the reviewer (and the reader!) to my first chapters, where I argue about the explanatory power of the (historical) narrative. My preference for literary over filmic utterances has to do with the writer's ability to verbalize feelings, emotions and motives, but I also argue that this is especially prolific for the first period of 'emergence', as then literary and motoring pioneers not only largely coincided ideologically (belonging to the same societal class), but even personally. The first twentieth-century modernists were often the first motorists and, conversely, the first non-literary motorists often tried to develop their writing skills through their motoring experiences as much as they had to learn to drive. In Europe, that is. In general, Mackay touches upon a sore point of mobility history: its poverty of theoretical scrutiny. The only defence I can add to this beyond what is in the chapters mentioned is the fact that my book could not have been written without literary sources, for the simple reason that the information gathered from these sources is rarely found in traditional sources, and, if so, then only after we have been alerted about it through its first formulation in literary sources. Does this mean that the 'adventure machine' is a mere imaginary thing? Perhaps so, but other historians then will have to explain the car's attraction for so many people, without recourse to the aggressive and

violent drives of early motorists, without the still ubiquitous daily onslaught on the road and, in general, without the 'dark side of automobilism' as cultural historian Kurt Möser has called it. They won't succeed, I venture to predict.

In general, the reviews reflect the complexity of the topic, which I consciously avoided smoothing into a neat linear narrative. Instead, the narrative unfolds in different directions, touching upon multiple subplots and in general (in)tends to transmit the messiness of history. To be honest, the book's structure was also a mild criticism of American(ized) historical scholarship that all too often forces historians into becoming pastry bakers of easily digestible chunks of arguments, consumable in just an hour or so. There is a lamentable paucity of variety in Anglophone historical scholarship on mobility in terms of narrative structure and style. My frequent use of quotation marks, however, another issue brought up against the book's reluctance to be an 'easy read', has more to do with the fact that I am not a native English speaker. My previous monograph was first written in Dutch and then translated. This time, I tried to avoid the loss of the richness of meanings engendered by translation by profusely quoting the native speakers in my (mostly Anglophone) sources themselves, especially when they showed an eloquence I myself do not have, hoping for (and getting!) an excellent copy editor at Berghahn Books who would help straighten out my limited mastery of English. I do not apologize for this. Native English speakers are thus constantly reminded, while reading my book, that they are in a very privileged position of linguistic imperialism, indeed.

The book's structural complexity also led to some misreadings by the reviewers that I need to correct, not to expose myself as a wise guy, but to warn readers not to expect the wrong things from the book. Apart from some inaccuracies (I was the editor of *The Journal of Transport History*, but that was long ago and for a brief period only; I am, however, the editor of *Transfers: Interdisciplinary Journal of Mobility Studies*) and without the learning-by-doing of managing cutting-edge scholarship on a regular basis, especially its theorising, and its mega-wide scope of topics and approaches, I would not have been able to give my book the shape it has now. The book does *not* cover the 1950s to 1970s (Mackay), nor the two World Wars and the Cold War (Bonin). The book also does *not* argue that the car's use developed from pleasure into something of a necessity. As a matter of fact, the book intends to argue just the opposite: it claims that the downplaying of automobilism's pleasurable sides are part of the 'politics of mobility': of convincing others and ourselves (as drivers) that we really need this lethal contraption. It is this deep-rooted bodily-based pleasure (the vibrations, the flight experience) that enables the transcendental, god-like feeling (mostly in men) as the basis of the 'power' (in all possible senses of the word) of motoring. With an eye to my coming monograph I need to add: white, middle-class Western men (and some women), because that is the real challenge of a history of twentieth-century automobilism: to explain how and why the majority of the adult world population became convinced that the car, this Western invention of pleasure and misery, was the best solution to their mobility problems.

So, permit me for the sake of clarity, to wrap up my argument in less than my remaining 500 words. I claim that the car's attraction is neither a pure agency thing, nor a structure thing. It is something in between, based within the corporeal bond between (mostly masculine) drivers and the vibrating technology of the car, a bond that apparently (considering the countless experiences expressed in artistic utterances) generates fantasies of power beyond the narcissistic self. The resulting transcendence makes the individual feel a part of a collective, a swarm, a flow, without ever losing the conviction that it is the 'freedom of mobility' invested in the individual that feeds these transcendental experiences. The transfer of experiences between the individual and the swarm (and back) is enabled by concrete, corporeal feelings of 'flight' while driving (the feeling of being a bit 'uplifted' from the earth), supported by another trope in motorists' writings: the phenomenon of 'inversion', the experience that the driver is the centre of the automotive universe, as the world 'flees' along. Women, blacks and other 'minorities' do not have

easy access to this universe, although there are exceptions, and the book gives many examples. Whether having easy access to this world or not-so-easy, however, both groups have one crucial trait in common: they belong to the middle class which in both income and cultural disposition appeared to be very receptive to the concept of the 'adventure machine', helping to change its content as the automotive 'movement' went along. This adventure machine initially allowed a tripartite adventure: in space (roaming), in time (speeding) and function (tinkering). Thereafter came a second, 'persistence' period, affording an adventure of 'conquest', both colonial (the car 'expedition' into the colonies) and gendered (the erotic conquest).

The question, then, is firstly: what happens when we extend our analysis beyond the inter-war period (when the working class gets access to the car)? And secondly, if we extend its scope to the world beyond the West, does the automotive adventure lose its power in a decolonising, globalising world in which a majority rides a rickshaw, drives a motorcycle, uses a 'mammy wagon' (a truck used as bus in Africa), pushes a one-wheeled barrow in China, operates a Jeepney in the Philippines or, indeed, simply walks. And thirdly, how does the automotive adventure get reformulated (if at all), if we shift mobility history's usual focus from the driver to the passenger, the person (or animal) that is not able, not willing or not allowed to drive? And fourthly, why not end with this cliffhanger?

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