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# **Mobility justice and the right to immobility – from automobility to autonomobility**

Noel Cass, Lancaster University, UK

Katharina Manderscheid, University of Lucerne, CH

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## ***Introduction***

Modern societies appear to be unthinkable without intense exchange across geographical distances, without extensive mobilities of people, goods, ideas and information (Canzler et al. 2008: 1). While, in pre-modernity, spatial mobility had been associated with insecurity and danger (...), in modernity, mobility (...) gradually turned into a common right claimed among equals.” (Rammler 2008: 61). Thus, the continuous increase of mobility associated with a continuous increase of progress, freedom and autonomy appears to be the still valid promise of modernity.

However, the present threat of climate change and the finite nature of fossil and other non-renewable energy fuels, as well as issues of global justice, question the possibility of prolonging a growth of mobility into the future. On the level of cities and communities also, motorised traffic produces increasingly negative impacts on the social and spatial level. Moreover, what is commonly understood as a freedom turns more and more into the *compulsion* to move.

This tension between two major human goals in relation to mobility, which we label provisionally 'freedom' and 'sustainability', form the point of departure of our short explorative paper. In order to untangle the herein contained strands of values and arguments, we will firstly sketch the connection between capitalist growth and increase of movement of goods, information and people. Secondly, we will look more closely at the association of mobility and freedom and argue that it is a very specific concept of freedom – the nuclear individual, freed of spatial and social bonds – which constitutes the basis of this mobility-as-freedom ideology. In regards to the social and ecological costs of this *mobility dispositiv*, we will thirdly make an attempt to think of future mobilities in a new, utopian way drawing on examples from history and literature, through which we hope to better reconcile freedom and sustainability.

## ***Modernity, capitalist growth and mobility***

Whereas the sedentary Middle Ages understood socio-spatial order as fixed and God given, the Copernican principle, the Enlightenment and most radically, capitalism replaced sedentary order with paradigms of development, progress and mobility.

Capitalist economic growth seems to entail growth of motorised transport and traffic. While the world's population during the last century grew by a factor of about four, motorised passenger kilometres and tonne-kilometres by all modes each grew on average by a factor of about 100 (OECD 2000; Holden 2007: 3). From an economic point of view, the overcoming of distances and the ubiquitous availability of capital and labour forms the vanishing point of development. Marx referred to this direction of development as the melting down of all solidness and the annihilation of space by time:

"While capital ...must strive to tear down every barrier...to exchange and conquer the whole earth for its markets, it strives on the other side to annihilate this space with time." (Marx, *Grundrisse*, 538f.)

This means that steep increase of personal movement is not simply explainable as an effect of

wealth or free time. Drawing on Elias' argument of lengthening chains of action through processes of functional differentiation (Elias 1999), increasing economic interdependence forces more mobilisation and flexibility, but also social integration, thus entailing growing communication and transportation needs (Rammler 2008: 69).

At present, the forces of mobilisation of people seem to have gained new drive. Together with processes of what is commonly termed globalisation, referring to the process of trans-national economic activities and networks, there seems to be an economic interest in reconfiguring the labour force as an army of ever more socially and spatially flexible and mobile individuals. Amongst others, the European Commission tries to establish this goal and correspondingly demands the removal of obstacles to mobility for workers across Europe within the framework of the Treaties in order to ensure and establish a European market and economic growth (<http://europa.eu.int/growthandjobs/>):

“In this context, it is not surprising that a key paradox persists within the European Union: skills shortages and bottlenecks coexist with areas of persistent high unemployment. Differing levels of economic growth and employment create simultaneous shortages and excesses of labour across Europe, which is due in part to heavily regulated labour markets and low labour market mobility. For this reason mobilising the potential of labour mobility is one of the key issues in the Lisbon process and the European Employment Strategy. The Integrated Guidelines for Growth and Employment (2005-2008) calls upon Member States to *‘improve matching of labour market needs through the modernisation and strengthening of labour market institutions, ... removing obstacles to mobility for workers across Europe within the framework of the EU treaties...’*” (European Commission 2008: 2).

Employers expect employees to move, backed up by the threat of replacement (Schroer 2006: 119) and welfare policies expect unemployed people to accept jobs involving significant commuting distances or even to move, backed up by the threat of reduced or removed benefits. Kesselring has recently explored a similar process of the incursion of mobility into work, using the concepts of normalisation and disenchantment whereby mobility becomes an expected part of employment, of rationalisation in relation to the self and to others and of compression of schedules and timescales.<sup>1</sup> A major ICT company baldly states (in a document dispelling negative “myths” about mobility in employment) that “Learning how to work effectively from a distance has become a fundamental imperative for surviving and succeeding in today's connected economy” (Sun 2008: 1). Thus at both ends of the labour market, in workfare at the bottom and in the “mobile work”<sup>2</sup> of elites, flexibility in the form of spatial mobility comes to structure both productive and private life. Once viewed as a bonus, a perk, or a sign of social status, or connected with social mobility, spatial mobility in connection with employment and within work has become a compulsion, a structuring expectation and the minimal precondition to keep one's social position.

However, not everyone is supposed to move and not for other reasons than economic purposes. In line with historical moral panics centred on “bad movers” (Urry 2007: 205) (such as the “masterless men” that posed a revolutionary threat in 17<sup>th</sup> century England, the movements of gypsies of all European countries throughout the last 500 years, or more recently New Age Travellers) flexible and mobile workforces are expected to bend and match themselves to the demands of capital. Only economically useful people and their dependants, in set amounts, residing in predictable areas and at the command of capital, are supposed to move on set routes (Huxley 2006; Peters 2006). The backside of this capitalist labour-mobility regime can also be seen in the arming and strengthening of border controls across and around the European economic area, with the intention of managing and filtering labour mobility, now requiring cheap construction labour, now requiring skills.

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<sup>1</sup> “Travelling where the opponents are, Business travel and the social impacts of the new mobilities regime”, talk at Lancaster University UK, 9<sup>th</sup> May 2009.

<sup>2</sup> The IDC (2008) define “mobile professionals” as those spending on average 20% or more of their time away from the office.

## ***Freedom or compulsion to move?***

To be mobile in this perspective cannot be simply understood as an individual choice. Rather, following the “mobilities turn” in social sciences, we talk of mobility regimes or, in a poststructuralist Foucauldian approach, of mobility *dispositifs*, in order to emphasise this complex interweaving of different forces. Thus, mobility of some as well as immobility of others appear to be a collective strategy or compulsion, embedded in economic and material structures (Graham 2001; Castells 2002) and shaped by political decisions and path dependencies constituted and stabilised by corresponding discourses and the production of correlating subjectivities (e.g. Paterson 2007; Peters 2007; Manderscheid 2010).

It seems that the *association between mobility and freedom* constitutes a critical hinge for this discursive foundation, cultural embedding and inscribing into subjectivities. “I move, therefore I am free. And I travel, therefore I am cosmopolitan.” This appears to be one of the axiomatic truths of modern life. Therefore, we now want to look more closely at what kind of freedom is connected to what kind of mobility and whose freedom and whose mobility is nevertheless being restricted.

Amongst others and drawing on a governmentality background, Nikolas Rose (1999) argues that the modern conception of freedom harks back to a very specific, individualised idea. In his analysis Rose abstains from searching for origins or intentions but looks for connections between different fields, processes and developments, thus highlighting the evolution of the specific modern idea of freedom. Against a background of Foucauldian theory, Rose understands this modern freedom as a disciplinary or governmental technology, which places the responsibility for social and economic wellbeing increasingly onto the individual.

This modern liberal concept of freedom is embedded into rules, institutional settings and topographical technologies of civilisation which have produced the free, economically exploitable individual. Freedom means here freedom from pre-modern or traditional social and spatial bonds, and consists of high mobility linked to economic dependence on wage labour:

“As Marx repeatedly pointed out, the worker was to be freed from the land through the removal of long-standing rights which enabled a limited self-subsistence, and freed for exploitation in the labour market through punitive sanctions against gambling, vagrancy and the like which precluded any and all legitimate means of survival other than waged labour. Simultaneously, the worker was to be individualized: freed from collective bonds through laws against combinations and collective action. Once the worker was individualized and wage labour generalized, the dull compulsion of the labour market would combine with the disciplinary organization of time, space and activity in the factory, mill and mine to produce the forms of life and modes of individuality in which docile and utilizable labour would present itself at the workplace 'of its own free will'.”(Rose 1999: 70)

A growing body of governmentality studies highlight the enforcement of the underlining of self-responsibility and management as significant governance strategies appearing in various policy fields. We see one common denominator of these governmentality strategies as being the *forcing of individuals to continuously increase their economic utility partly through increasing their flexibility and mobility, which represents a form of economisation and de-socialisation of subjects, their life chances and risks* (cf. Rose 1996; Bröckling 2000). This neoliberal de-socialised concept of the individual was paradigmatically expressed by Margaret Thatcher

“who is society? There is no such thing! There are individual men and women and there are families and no government can do anything except through people and people look to themselves first. It is our duty to look after ourselves”

<http://www.margarethatcher.org/speeches/displaydocument.asp?docid=106689>

In this sense, we can talk of an increasing compulsion for individuals to move in order to not fall out of society by economic failure.<sup>3</sup> Economically motivated mobility – commuting, residential mobility or consumption driven mobility – are not only legitimate but necessary, whereas the right to immobility, to live close to ones social ties and embedded into local networks is denied legitimacy, especially when linked to a lack of economic productivity. As Kaufmann and Montulet (2008) express it, the contemporary ideology of spatial mobility is one that is equated with social fluidity. This equation, in which it is asserted that the individual has unbounded freedom of movement, enables economic (neo)liberalism to develop freely by denying all existing social constraints, presenting mobility as a socially neutral process. By obscuring dependent immobilities and other mobility constraining forces, this ideology of mobility-as-freedom increases the moral pressure which reinforces real mobility of the players involved (Kaufmann/Montulet 2008: 53). Thus, against a discourse theory background and an understanding of governmentality as a disciplinary technology of subject formation, the sketched connection of freedom, mobility and the subject has to be seen as exclusive and contingent, politically (cf. Mouffe 2005) economically and socially produced through power relations.

### ***'Free' and de-socialised (auto)mobile subjects***

In order to explore these rather general concepts of freedom and mobility, in the following we will approach them through the example of the car.

Today it seems self-evident and natural that automobility evolved in history. The car is so inbuilt into our imaginations, perceptions and the continuous re-production of the social world that even sociologists struggle to see, mention or even analyse this system. What Urry (2004) termed 'automobility' represents perhaps the most paradigmatic form of the modern mobility-as-freedom ideology. This mobility system comprises of whole industries producing the modern petrol car and its corresponding infrastructures and services, policies that plan and (re)build the automobile landscapes of roads, settlements and cities; the cultural and discursive embeddings of automobile culture associated with freedom, autonomy and longing for new challenges (cf. Peters 2006; Paterson 2007) as well as co-evolving social formations stretched across geographical distances, distanciations of work, residence and other activities and so forth. Whole modern life forms, such as that based on the one-family-house in suburbia, which represent the typical modern ideal of the 'good life', depend fundamentally on automobility. Developments such as oversized shopping centres and theme parks outside city centres are also unthinkable without the privately owned car. This situation is even more pronounced in the United States or Australia (Dobson / Sipe 2005, 2008) than in most parts of Europe, but new housing developments in the UK, for example, have for decades mirrored the American ideal, even as it passes its zenith of acceptability.

The current automobile world entails cars as privately owned extensions of the body, allowing individuals to move through public spaces, whilst protected in a private cocoon (cf. Thrift 2004; Urry 2004) only directed by the availability of roads, streets and motorways. The individual and his/her car thus appear to form an inseparable unit. Policy making, spatial planning (cf. Manderscheid 2010) and economic enterprises tend to have this automobile subject in mind when making decisions on siting development in relation to infrastructure and the availability of labour. This corresponds to the unreflected actions of individuals when choosing and justifying the car as the preferred means of transportation (cf. Freudendal-Petersen 2007). Thus, there seems to be a strong associative interweaving of citizenship, personal mobility and cars, built into policies,

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<sup>3</sup> At the same time that the Thatcherite individualisation represented by the quote above was being proclaimed, traditional productive industries and the spatially embedded communities that provided their labour force were actively dismantled through monetarist economic policies, and the then Employment Secretary Norman Tebbit responded to the resulting record levels of unemployment by saying: "I grew up in the '30s with an unemployed father. He didn't riot. He got on his bike and looked for work, and he kept looking 'til he found it."

landscapes and subjective perceptions. Many countries have introduced the temporal withdrawal of a driver's license as a substitute for imprisonment in cases of minor crimes or offences, which expresses concretely the construction of *the free citizen as a car driver*. This association of freedom and car driving constitutes probably the strongest reference point for political activism against ecologically motivated policies to restrict people's motorised movements.

Following this strand, automobility represents this very specific, de-socialised form of freedom, the freedom of the individual from place, and from social and spatial ties. The ever growing distancing of workplace and place of residence which forms the normal geography of today's labour force, can be thus interpreted as another level of freeing the individual from spatial bonds. As amongst others Putnam (1995) fears, this trend may eventually destroy proximity-based socialities, thereby further atomising the individual. The freedom and power associated with the car can thus be described what Bauman (2000: 11) termed *exit*. According to him, this prime technique of power allows "escape, slippage, elision and avoidance, the effective rejection of any territorial confinement" and the possibility of escape into "sheer inaccessibility" (Bauman, quoted in Urry 2007: 201). Having a car outside the house allows one to move whenever one pleases to wherever one wants to, independent of time tables and other people's control of a vehicle etc. Moreover, it is the freedom of the atomised economic consumer subject to choose the road, the speed and the destination among preselected options. It is the same freedom of choice also represented in other consumption activities that create, express and cement social status: consumption of symbolic products and valued, cosmopolitan or exotic, locations and landscapes. And it is the compulsion of the socio-material world which forces the very same 'free' consumer subject to be auto-mobile and to choose the road. Thus, it appears to be a highly regulated and governed form of freedom of choice, one restricted and restricting in various ways:

- Firstly, although the advertisements of SUVs like to paint an image of borderless off road mobile freedom, being automobile requires economic resources and the competences to drive, is restricted to automobile landscapes and is limited by technological reliabilities.
- Secondly, automobility restricts the freedom of the non-automobile, e.g. those walking, cycling, or playing. As the major cause of fatal accidents, automobility reduces physical safety, by occupying and polluting space, it decreases the living quality especially of urban environments. The unlimited and mass exercise of automobile freedom produces congestion, restricting overall automobile freedom. In sum, the freedom of automobility enforces constraints on other freedoms, on the flourishing of human capabilities (Sen) and of alternative socio-spatial configurations.
- Thirdly, automobility produces and is dependent on immobility. Heteronomously immobile others include those providing caring work, maintaining roads and automotive infrastructures and servicing the car. With automobility being the accepted form of autonomous modern life, these immobilities appear more or less heteronomous and dependant – forced immobility as the backside of the freedom to move (cf. Urry 2004; Adey 2006; Dennis/Urry 2009:27-44). However, with policies and public attention focusing on the dis-embedded, de-socialised nuclear subject, these dependent immobilities are made invisible (cf. the critique of the dis-embedded subject by feminist theorists such as Fraser, etc.)
- Fourthly and prosaically, driving a car is an all-encompassing activity, physically and psychologically. Being strapped in the driver's seat, "the driver's body is disciplined to the machine, with eyes, ears, hands and feet all trained to respond instantaneously and consistently, while desires even to stretch, to change position, to doze or to look around are suppressed" (Dennis/Urry 2009: 38). This means that while driving, one can not do much else but drive. These constraints mark possibly the limits of self-propelled car-movement and contradict the imperative of efficient self-organisation – while travelling by train, the commuting time can be used more efficiently for doing work or pursuing other activities.

The individual 'on the road' is maybe the archetype of the free, equal, modern citizen. They are forging their own path, taking the route they wish to choose, not following tracks laid out by others, but flexible and spontaneous. This is the imaginary of automobility represented in the majority of advertising, of open roads and driving off-road. The automobile society perceives itself as a band of equals, with attention focussed on other drivers, and unconsciously or unreflexively consigns the inequality of access to this band to the back of the mind. In doing so, the system of automobility ignores the multiple ways in which the driving subjects themselves are nodes in relational networks.

In short, the (self-)construction of the free, autonomous, automobile subject on the road depends on and produces the concealment or denial of the constraints imposed on and by the material landscape and social relations. Thus, (auto)mobility is not neutral but highly infused with power relations and accompanied by several restrictions and derived unfreedoms and immobilities. The system of automobility values people in cars more highly than people outside or without cars.

The car seems to be a necessary piece of equipment for modern citizens, perhaps like the armour and weapons of Greek *hoplites* or medieval European knights. If the car may be understood as an extension of domestic and personal space, then the outrage expressed in the fuel protests of 2000 (and to a lesser extent in 2005 and 2007) becomes understandable as a reaction to the inevitable use of price levers as policy responses to the environmental impacts of carbon-based mobility. Freedom of choice and freedom of movement appear to be unassailable in the modern, mobile, mind.

However, it was not a 'natural' development or an evolutionary implementation of the stronger technology which led to the privatised mobility system, but the deliberate destruction of alternative and collective systems of mobility such as the streetcar lines in the US (Dennis/Urry 2009: 35; cf. Paterson 2007), cutting off a potential path of less atomised mobility<sup>4</sup>. The ongoing disadvantages of public transport in relation to private transport are well known: whereas rail companies have to include the construction of a rail line in their calculations, streets and highways for private cars are financed by the public, through taxes.<sup>5</sup> Unsurprisingly, in current neoliberal policy making, the process of privatisation of mobility-capacities has gained even more drive. The former public good of ubiquitous provision of social and spatial infrastructure, including availability and accessibility of public transportation, is giving way to what Graham and Marvin called 'splintering urbanism'.

Rather than understanding the connection of places and people as a public good, state policies aim at mobilising subjects in both senses of the term. As noted before, subjects are supposed to be self-responsible for their capacities and marketing their competences, and if their social or geographical position appears to be outside suitable economical environments, they are expected to move towards these centres. In sum, there is a shift of responsibility and blame from social structures to the individual subject. Against this background, we interpret the contemporary neoliberal mobilisation of individuals, as appearing to accelerate auto-mobilisation as the logical continuation of the modern government of individualised freedom.

Given such an understanding of individualised responsibility and the normalisation of automobility, the intentionally immobile or the non-auto-mobile appear to be deviant. As historical studies have shown, this very specific form of politically produced automobile freedom comes at the price of prohibiting, sanctioning or demonising other forms of mobility outside this capitalist individualised system (cf. Greenley and Rice 1973-4). Such denigrated forms can also be taken to encompass formerly widespread practices such as hitch-hiking (Chesters and Smith 2001). Such informal, collective and socialised forms of co-automobility, like hitchhiking, lift-sharing, have been made difficult and unattractive in the UK at least by specific laws, insurance restrictions on carrying passengers (in the case of the paradigmatic lift-givers, truck-drivers) and associations with danger and threats to personal safety. In a process that can be rightly labelled as "Blaming the Victim"

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<sup>4</sup> Brians (1995) points out that this "paranoid" theory is the theme behind the plot of *Who Killed Roger Rabbit?*

<sup>5</sup> This is despite the traditional role of taxes in imposing a levy on all citizens to avoid "free-riders" on public goods. Public transport is, or could be, a true public good, *non-excludable* (in that almost anyone can jump onto a train or bus) and *non-rival* (the use of public transport by one does not significantly prevent its use by another). The same cannot be said of the automobiles whose infrastructure is publicly funded



(Ryan 1976), a series of high-profile murders of hitch-hikers seems to have led paradoxically to an assumption that anyone still attempting to hitch-hike must be mentally ill, reckless or a potential threat themselves. Chesters and Smith (2001) discuss these aspects of the death of hitch-hiking whilst placing more emphasis on a combination of the spread of automobile ownership to the majority of the population (thus making hitching a 'deviant' practice), and generational changes whereby modern drivers rarely have a history of hitch-hiking experience, thus feeling no social obligation to repay a debt of kindness.

Understanding these ongoing processes of politically, socially and economically manufacturing the *dispositiv* of automobility highlights its contingency and therefore the possibility of change. Whereas most social scientific analysis tends to stop at this point, leaving the imagination of alternatives to public or political discourses, we want to trace some lines of alternative mobility systems which would reassemble the elements in a different but not freedom-constraining way.

### ***Dystopian and utopian scenarios of (in)just future mobility systems***

One no longer needs to stand outside the mainstream to critique the current system of motorised transportation in general and the system of automobility in particular. The most pressing force for change is the recognition of the threat of climate change, and the overwhelming contribution that emissions arising from transportation make. The finite nature of fossil-based energy resources and the zenith of economically effective extraction represented by "Peak Oil" constitute sound and sane reasons to develop technological alternatives to the steel-and-petrol car (Urry) if not, and preferably, more radically alternative mobility systems. The outlined social injustices and constraints of the current automobile-centred mobility *dispositiv* represent however a set of more unrecognised problems and do not even figure as a legitimate cause to question current mobility-systems. Corresponding to this hierarchical arrangement of problem constructions, the majority of emphasis has been placed on technological fixes to the ecological impacts of the present automobile system *within* the structural frame of both a capitalist growth economy and individualised automobility. For example the UK's transportation-based climate change policy reflects this quandary, with fleets of electric cars, vans and trains expected to reduce direct CO<sub>2</sub> emissions from the sector, but these emissions will simply be displaced to the electricity generation sector, which at present has lower efficiencies than the internal combustion engine. But so far, the goal of de-coupling economic growth from transport emissions has not been successful, and there are well founded reasons to doubt whether it is possible at all. As Paterson (2007) and others have argued, with the coupling of economic growth and motorised transportation, in the long run, technological solutions will necessarily be insufficient to neutralise the ongoing growth of motorised mobility and its environmental impacts.

Specifically concerning the system of automobility, political and (social) scientific actors are attempting to imagine probable, possible and preferable mobility futures. Regardless of their origin, these future scenarios appear to be pervaded by the tension described before, between social justice, equity and freedom on one side, and the forces of an uncontrolled capitalist growth economy on a global scale.

Projecting forward to 2030, Herbert J. Gans (2008) sketches an imagined history of the United States resulting in more democratic polity, a fairer economy and less polarised society. With regards to mobility, Gans describes a somewhat Europeanised settlement and transportation landscape of higher densities, smaller cars, car pools, better public transportation and high speed trains (Gans 2008: 134ff). He therefore adopts a common and neither threatening nor challenging discourse that claims that through planning and technological innovations, ecological impacts can be mitigated. Although the suggested changes would indeed bring about a step change in the US ecological footprint from an ecological point of view, the projected co-existence of higher social and transportation equity is difficult to imagine without severe reductions in the absolute amounts of motorised mobility.

With a focus mainly on automobility, Dennis and Urry (2009) have recently outlined three scenarios that they consider possible in 2050. Their likelihood depends highly on accompanying socio-economic processes and political powers governing tipping points within the complex system of automobility.

Based on the UK Foresight Programme, Urry and Dennis (2009: 151ff.) develop the scenario of *regional warlordism* against the background of significant effects of climate change and peak oil. In this barbaric dystopia, mobility, energy and communication infrastructures break down or collapse, leaving tribes and regions unconnected. Long distance mobility is only available for the super-rich, and whoever can afford to tries to protect themselves within gated residential areas and cities. Hints of this scenario may be seen in the rise of gated communities, the decline of infrastructures in peripheral regions and the disconnection of unproductive communities from social resources. In the discursive realm, many films, e.g. *Children of Men* or *Mad Max*, sketch scarily imaginable visions of such futures.

A more controlled but highly surveilled world is described in the scenario of *digital networks of control* (Dennis/Urry 2009: 155ff) in which transportation systems are merged into a centrally coordinated, organic traffic landscape, consisting of deprivatised light and electronically steered vehicles; a more intelligent but still cocooned system of individual mobility. Thus, this scenario involves high limits on the freedom to move ‘un-controlled’ by smart technologies. Furthermore, motorised mobility would be restricted for emission reasons and communities and social networks thus organised more locally. Probably, this scenario would be one limited to the western world, coexisting with already forced immobilities and warlordism in the south.

These scenarios come with threats to and reductions of mobility and liberties or justice, depending on economic structures and political governance. Whereas *regional warlordism* implies a restriction of movement and freedom for everyone – caused by scarce resources and violence - *digital networks of control* provide western societies with a more peaceful but panoptic mobility regime. Both scenarios assume the maintenance into the future of certain factors that are central to existing socio-economic, political and mobility systems: globalised enterprises within a growth economy, and competitive and individualised protection of personal (or tribal) spaces and properties. Only the third scenario sketched, that of *local sustainability*, assumes a – purposeful or forced – challenge to this capitalist foundation, involving the reduction of overall pecuniary wealth but allowing more autonomous ways of life and communities. *Local sustainability* or eco-communalism, involves localised production, local social networks and little long-distance travel. In general, transportation and movement in this scenario would be slower but with the benefit of being more autonomous. The scenario is built on the premises of restructured economic activities, and the displacement of the global organization of economy, finance and social life (Dennis/Urry 2009: 149f.). A similar concept is eco-localisation, subjected to a ‘sympathetic critique’ by North (2009), who specifically distinguishes between *immanent* localisation, imposed by the efficiency logics of capitalist responses to resource scarcities and over-extended chains of action, and *intentional* forms, based on anticipating and building resilience against such problems into society. Dennis and Urry see the shift to localism in this model being both crisis-driven and produced by a massive shift in values, and they conclude that it is possible but highly unlikely. The collapse of global trade is the envisaged crisis, and such a radical shortening of chains of action might be driven exogenously (e.g. by protectionism elsewhere). Such exogenous forcing might be a vital and productive lever, not only for those areas that have served as sources of extraction, but for newly isolated “centres” of global networks, who will have to rediscover the art of living in locality.

These scenarios appear either dismissive of freedoms and justice, not to mention questions of inequity, in their projection of current economic and social priorities and foundations from the crisis of the present to an imagined crisis of the future, or else they propose a scaled-down form of capitalism (America-as-Europe) in which inequalities persist. The ‘preferable’ model of genuine (and more equal) sustainability is portrayed either as wishful dream (Dennis and Urry cite Harvey’s *Spaces Of Hope*) or as staple environmentalist fare, in which a ‘contraction’ of society is seen as

unlikely, involving “huge reversals of almost all the systems of the twentieth century, as well as ... massive restructuring of economic activities and the displacement of the global organisation of economy, finance and social life” (Dennis/Urry 2009: 151).

None of this seems to clarify the relationship between freedom, justice and equity with regards to mobility. We have outlined the selectivity of the mobility-as-freedom ideology which obscures its immobilising, disciplining and de-socialising effects. At present, these tensions are mediated in Western societies by the still existing mechanisms of social equalisation stemming from the Post-WW II era. However, these tensions between social and economic ends are highly likely to escalate into open friction and conflict due to increasing scarcity of resources, peak oil and climate change against the background of roll-back neoliberalism, reducing state intervention to a minimum. As a premise for the following, and resulting from our critique of the mobility-as-freedom ideology, which we have tried to unveil as merely economically driven, we will now clarify our understandings. From a sociological point of view, the politically and economically constructed subject as an individualised and de-socialised form of existence cannot be the valid reference point. Thus, we draw not on concepts of distributional justice but more relational concepts (cf. Gordon 2009) like the capability approach of Sen (1999) and Nussbaum (2003) which aims at enabling individuals to lead an autonomous self-determined life. This involves greater social, economic and political preconditions than the liberal approach of negative and individualised freedom. In regards to mobility, we label our corresponding ideal of autonomous, self-determined mobility '*autonomobility*', and it *is* likely linked to a de-centring of the economic structuration of both extended and habitual or compelled mobility.

Given Elias' lengthened chains of action and functional differentiation, and acknowledging that certain spatial interrelations and trans-regional economic and social interdependences will persist and appear politically worth sustaining, some degree of mobility will remain an essential and socially desirable part of future societies. This will be the case even if we take economic de-growth or zero growth (at least in the present industrialised countries) as a material and structural foundation. Thus, in a way, the following takes ideas that are contained within the scenario of local sustainability as the point of departure but applies a stricter definition of sustainability than implied in this scenario or in the concept of sustainable development. The end of the economic growth of production regime could however open new options for more sustainable mobility regimes.

- First of all, the pressure to accept any employment at any place would cease to exist if life chances and social participation are decoupled from wage labour, as the concept of a basic, living, income would imply. This, in turn, would not increase individual pecuniary wealth but, as the proponents believe, could increase well-being in a broader sense (cf. Happy Planet Index [www.happyplanetindex.org](http://www.happyplanetindex.org); Degrowth movement etc.). Without the monetary benefits and pressures of the labour market, individual options and needs to move and travel would probably drastically change. The exogenous need to commute long distances or even move house for employment reasons would decrease, thus people would gain the *freedom not to move, the right to immobility* as a freedom in its own right.
- Secondly, given the likely policy measures that will be used to reduce mobility to a sustainable minimum<sup>6</sup>, individualised transport will become economically exclusive and beyond the individual means of the majority of society. Personal movement, transportation and travel would thus become scarce and time intensive. But mobility to maintain social networks would no longer have to fit in limited slots of 'free time', meaning holidays or time after work, but could constitute a more legitimate reason to spend time, thereby freeing social network induced mobility from time pressure and the need for acceleration.

How, then, can we look forward to a decoupling of mobility and the dominant economic paradigm whilst replacing the liberal myth of individual freedoms as expressed through automobility, and still

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<sup>6</sup> The debate as to what constitutes “essential” mobility is intrinsically political and likely to become increasingly contested.

promoting or extending autonomy and equity in relational networks? We admit that this is far from simple. This paper's intervention is primarily orientated towards other critical mobilities scholarship and so we feel that it is appropriate to draw on both examples of the seeds of more sustainable mobilities in the present and somewhat "utopian scenarios" in thinking through what the desired end-point might be in a journey towards a society in which mobility compulsions and opportunities are tempered both by ecological limits and social sustainability and justice values.

Our identification of existing, emergent (and disappearing) mobility practices that appear to fulfil some criteria of furthering mobility justice and/or autonomy has highlighted two main features. First, there is a collectivisation and sociality of some forms of mobility that goes beyond merely promoting public transport as the solution, Secondly, there are attempt to protect, resurrect and promote alternative forms of mobility that have been delegitimized and often carry the stigma attached to autonomous free-riding, of getting mobility 'for nothing'. We deal with each of these in turn.

In the area of collectivisation and *socialised mobility* the often-cited lift-sharing and car-sharing, car-pooling and so forth are all in existence. Work-places institute their own commute-sharing systems and websites whilst other largely online systems operate as businesses with safety protocols and formalised cost-sharing. Businesses and other social groups and networks utilise communal transportation on a small scale. Minibuses, vans and other "people-carriers" ferry particularly lower-paid workers to their place of work, on the understanding that their availability is of use to the employer and partly their responsibility if the desired flexible workforce is to be acquired. This is the normalised experience of "the commute" for large numbers of marginal workers across the globe including in the developed world. It is rife because it is an economic rationalisation of the securing of flexible labour outside of the constraints imposed by the state and by individualised automobility. Minibuses and coaches also ferry children to mosques or to Sunday schools, and likewise collect and deliver members of diverse social networks (that may be interest-based rather than geographically defined communities) to gatherings, conventions, festivals, music events, works outings, demonstrations and football matches. Depending on the method of calculation, the cost per individual is usually cheaper than public transport and often more time efficient. Demand-responsive public transport is a mode chiefly used by local authorities to plug the gaps in provision created by profit-driven public transport, and utilised mainly by the young and the elderly and those without access to cars. These systems explicitly acknowledge a link between mobility and social inclusion or equality of life-chances, and provide it as a right for non-automobile groups (see Cass et al 2005). Local authorities, larger businesses and obviously car hire and bus businesses operate fleets of vehicles for reasons of efficiency and economies of scale, with mechanics employed to maintain the fleet and ensure that variegated and flexible mobility needs can be satisfied at short notice. Beyond motorised transport, schools in the UK have been trialling "walking buses", where the pedestrian commute by children is collectivised and supervised by members of staff and parents. Bike-buddy schemes have also been used to encourage employees to cycle with others from the same home districts, in order to demystify cycle commuting where it is practicable, and offer immediate support and sociality. Here collectivisation acts to re-socialise alternative forms of mobility that have become threatened and perceived as risky through the atomisation of individuals undertaking them within the restraints of automobility outlined above.

The main material obstacles to the mainstreaming of the above-mentioned examples of existing, quotidian, socialised mobility are a combination of insurance and ownership restrictions in the case of cars and smaller vehicles, and the individualisation of responsibility for (not only, but importantly) work-related travel. Much of this could be addressed by softer forms of policy, encouraging and permitting communal ownership and maintenance of vehicles, and transferring the responsibility for encouraging and coordinating work or public sector-related travel to the employee. Beyond simply making public transport more attractive and accessible, it may also be possible to make trip purposes and the social role they play the subject of insurance, coordination and facilitation or remuneration, rather than individual vehicles.

In addition, there could also be pooling of resources or collectivisation within service, construction and maintenance industries which presently consist largely of one-person or very small scale businesses. Incentivisation, tax-breaks and so forth could be used to move away from a dominant model of one-person, one-van businesses to something more resembling a 'dial-a-service', where locality and proximity are prioritised from a register of available skills. Structural and economic changes may force these developments exogenously. They might either represent, or develop from, a transition towards local sustainability or intentional eco-localisation, in which such skills would be more valued and also more diffused through communities. They would require a transition from intensely individualistic competition for trade to collectivisation, contracted out coordination, and trust and increased sociality between former competitors

In the area of *delegitimized practices of free-riding*, the form of hitch-hiking is most well-known and widespread along with train-jumping, fare-dodging and the like. In addition there is the historical case of riding freight trains, the preserve of hobos and tramps (e.g. Cresswell 1999), and we will later address the rationality of combining autonomous personal mobility with the unavoidable mobility of goods.

In much of the developing world and in rural areas, hitching or sharing lifts are totally mainstreamed activities. Especially in Europe, specific locations are signposted in order to encourage lift-giving at safe locations. One of the few kinds of hitch-hiker still visible on the roads in the UK at least is the "red plates" hitcher, who carries the red "trade plates" or number-plates from the vehicles they have delivered when hitching, and lorry (truck) drivers similarly used to wave tachograph disks to identify their (mobility-based) trade and thus their suitability for lift-receiving. In many countries soldiers and trades-people such as carpenters on the road can still rely on lift-giving solidarity. Their contribution to society and their right to expect help with travel seem to be unquestioned. As with current thinking on cycling (see below), the question is how such autonomous mobility was transformed in perception into a deviant activity, a process we have linked to governmental technologies. These insights could form a basis for re-legitimizing lift-giving, involving also changes to structural factors concerning insurance, regulation and so forth, as touched on in our discussion of the possible causes of the death of hitch-hiking.

Cycle researchers have identified that in the UK as opposed to continental Europe, cycling is still being constructed as something of a deviant activity through the processes in which "serious" cyclists are shaped as a market: hi-viz and sports clothing and expensive specialised equipment is sold as a uniform even for commutes and short trips, constructing the "cyclist" as a differentiated Other, and further marginalising and rendering deviant those who would cycle in normal clothing or without a helmet. Cycling campaigners are resisting legislation to make the wearing of helmets and other safety-preoccupied restrictions obligatory for cyclists, these once again representing attempts to impose individual responsibility rather than the de-hierarchisation of traffic and spreading safe road use to all road users, and reinforcing dis-incentivising risk and safety concerns on what is considered a prioritised, preferred and above all normalised mobility practice on the mainland.

These, then, are examples of *quotidian* existing mobility practices that have been sidelined under automobility. In *exceptional* circumstances, other autonomous and collective mobility practices emerge as rational responses. We suggest that mobility in future will increasingly take place in a state of exception, and these rationalities may increasingly overcome the individualising, competitive drivers we have identified in automobility. In previous research, one of the authors explored with automobile commuters what they had achieved, or could conceive of achieving, to maintain travel to work when faced with the unavailability of their car (see Cass et al 2003). The responses largely drew on family and friends, on social networks to rely on automobile access rather than ownership, suggesting that collectivised and socialised ownership may be viewed as a viable alternative by many of the unreflexively automobile. In the fuel protests alluded to above, the potential of fuel shortages at petrol pumps was anticipated by the UK government and a system was implemented whereby "priority workers" would have access to the limited fuel available. This

shows that (in exceptional circumstances) a rational form of mobility prioritisation was applied, and employment which is certainly not valorised through wages or status was suddenly accredited with national importance. We are referring to public sector work, nursing, caring, education and so forth. Similar to the prioritisation of mobility employment (car delivery, freight transport) in hitch-hiking, could not a system of recognising and rewarding socially valued labour be instituted?

To cite a more exceptional set of circumstances, war and natural disasters similarly require a radical rationalisation of almost *all* social practices and norms, including mobility. Such might be the necessary rethinking of the central values of society in our imagined mobility futures. Although there is no doubt that in many cases the responses involve the imposition of hierarchism and the curtailment of individual liberty, this is not always the case. Our Utopian example would be Civil War Barcelona as one of the few, and better documented, examples of the reorganisation of transport under more radically communalised and egalitarian principles. Private transport was largely confiscated and turned to the war effort, whilst the existing public transport system was transformed extremely quickly, as the following quote demonstrates:

“Take for example the tramways ... Because of the street battles all transport had been brought to a halt. The transport syndicate (as unions of the CNT were known) appointed a commission of seven to occupy the administrative offices while others inspected the tracks and drew up a plan of repair work that needed to be done. Five days after the fighting stopped 700 tramcars, instead of the usual 600, all painted in the black and red colours of the CNT, were operating on the streets of Barcelona. With the profit motive gone, safety became more important and the number of accidents was reduced. Fares were lowered and services improved. In 1936, 183,543, 516 passengers were carried. In 1937 this had gone up by 50 million. The trams were running so efficiently that the workers were able to give money to other sections of urban transport. ” (Conlon 1986-2001, 6)

Such a transformation was possible partly through the pre-existence of collectivisation<sup>7</sup> and the understanding that socialised mobility was part of an all-encompassing social drive. Orwell famously recounts his experiences of this place and time in *Homage To Catalonia*, including details of how individual movements around the country, from frontlines to refuges and to the city for leave, were achieved by “piggy-backing” on essential transports of goods, munitions or fighters, and such was not considered “free-riding”, but the legitimate use of mobility as a public good. Numerous wartime posters from several countries remind us of the over-riding question applied to personalised mobility *qua* automobility, which might not apply to free-riding on the socially necessary mobility of materials, or on private or scheduled public transport: “Is Your Journey Really Necessary?”

What characterises these disaster-related and historical examples is the common sense yet revolutionary suggestion that one way in which mobility can be made more just and sustainable and less unequal is through “free-riding”. A more elaborated story of future socialities based on localised economic production involving autonomous mobilities is found in the novel of the *Dispossessed* by Ursula LeGuin. Her novel is a work of Utopian science fiction in which two forms of social structure are compared and contrasted. The society from which we wish to draw inspiration is the anarchist moon of Anares, founded by voluntary colonists with an ideology adapted to maintaining an egalitarian social system in a hostile environment of scarcity. The protagonist lives a peripatetic life, spending months in different settlements in communalised and free accommodation, working at a variety of jobs depending on the need for labour to maintain different sectors of the economy or on personal choice. His experiences reveal that some restrictions of personal liberty and virtual mobility (of communication of ideas) have been imposed. Travel

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<sup>7</sup> Conlon also notes that 6,500 of the 7,000 tram workers were members of the CNT union and quotes Bolloten’s (1961) observation that amongst 3,000 collectivised enterprises were “railways, train-cars and buses, taxicabs and shipping, ...engineering and automobile assembly plants,”

from one settlement to another takes the form of piggy-backing on the transportation of goods or labourers, and within settlements electric trams are the form of universal provision. The society's founder Odo's vision for mobility justice is laid out in the following quote:

*“Though she suggested that the natural limit to the size of a community lay in its dependence on its own immediate region for essential food and power, she intended that all communities be connected by communication and transport networks, so that goods and ideas could get where they were wanted, and the administration of things might work with speed and ease and no community should be cut off from change and interchange.”*

In the novel, this interchange, it is argued, should take place across and beyond social, political and spatial borders, literally across the universe, following the need to exchange knowledge. We can see in this quote aspects of eco-localisation, carbon footprinting, radical decentralisation and so forth, and we are not the first to highlight the inspiration the novel offers for sustainability theory and practice (Armstrong 2007). LeGuin also expresses the value system which is inextricably linked to this model of a radical form of eco-localisation or local sustainability, in which rationalisation and necessity replace the myth of individualised freedom: “free from the guilt of ownership and the burden of economic competition [one] will grow up with the will to do what needs doing and the capacity for joy in doing it. The delight of ... anyone doing needed work and doing it well, - this durable joy is perhaps the deepest source ... of sociality as a whole.” (Le Guin, 207)

The novel exemplifies our thesis in that the mobility system of Annares is inextricably tied up with all the other aspects of the society, particularly with its ethics and values and its understandings of both justice and freedom. These reconcile the economic and environmental constraints imposed by life on a planet of limited resources with the desire to equalise and maximise the flourishing of autonomy, happiness and life chances accordingly, facilitating such mobility as is necessary to achieve these societal ends. As such, it is a parable for the post-oil future..

## **Conclusions**

The automobility system has finally come under sustained analytical attention during the mobilities turn in social science. Broadening out from an understanding of such systems as intrinsically socio-technical, the entire nexus of social, material, legislative and ethical structures, along with discursive underpinnings and ideological valorisations can be seen to have transformed modern, particularly urban, society and economy in ways which serve capital and automobility in a mutually reinforcing dispositiv. We have shown this constellation to be highly contingent and political, to have shaped, and been shaped by, deeply held concepts and feelings of what it means to be a free modern citizen. The implications of these freedoms – their short-comings, paradoxes, impositions and intrinsic unfreedoms for the driver and for others – highlight that (auto)mobility has been sold through manufactured desires, and that its flipside is a reflection of the inequalities essential to competitive, economically centred and defined neoliberal society. The dispositiv and the material and social driving forces through which it is (re)produced are almost certain to be subjected to increasing stresses from ecological limits, political unacceptabilities, social sanction and more in the decades and century to come. We have argued that tinkering with the automobility system's constituent technologies will not escape the inevitable frictions and fractures if this merely represents an attempt to maintain a cocoon of individualised and idealised mobility freedom for the few, whilst also maintaining the structuring framework of capitalist economic growth prioritisation and the atomisation of self-responsible economic subjects. Instead the transition to a future of restrictions and redeployments can be softened by reinvigorating mobility practices that struggle to exist within these dominant paradigms, relegitimising the concept that mobility can be autonomous whilst also maintaining and promoting sociality at scales which will anyway be reordered exogenously.

There are several trajectories of enquiry that arise from this analysis. Firstly, we argue for a “90

degree” shift in the perspective taken on mobilities. Rather than taking the exponential growth of both economies and personal mobility as givens, and providing descriptive analysis and reflections on the latter within the untouchable framework of the former, we propose more explicit attention to freedom, reconsidered as autonomy and as flourishing lives within reconfigured economic and socio-spatial geographies, and to justice and equity rethought more broadly than distributional equity or spatial equalisation and smoothing. In other words, focussing on freedom and justice may help to enable the re-evaluation of mobility practices from the perspective of the social-political ends that they ideally aim at. Mobility *per se* is not an end in itself, and may not be the means to these deeper ends. Following from this we secondly suggest more focussed research on alternative mobility practices which incorporate or at least address such ends and which have existed, exist now, and could be foregrounded through re-structuration particularly of ownership and insurance norms and other such governmental technologies. The reinvigoration of delegitimized autonomous mobility may then be better integrated in the inevitable contractions and re-prioritisations of personalised mobility that will be forced by exogenous limitations and, potentially, crisis. Thirdly, concepts that have arisen from the spatial and mobilities turns may be utilised to examine the reshaping of socio-spatial ordering particularly through planning technologies. A shift of focus from transnational corridors and networks, and sub-nationally inter-regionalism (Manderscheid 2010), to intra-regional diversification and localisation of social services along with de-splintering (walkable neighbourhoods, livable streets, community gardening, mixed-use zoning etc) would realign spatial planning and the mobility practices that they engender with the contraction of socio-economic geographies that we envision. In summary, we propose not only to critique the present state of affairs, the critical analysis of present architectures and power geometries of automobilities, but also to turn the spotlight on the seeds of more just mobility systems, alternatives to the compulsion-to-move and the freedom of immobility.

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