

Why we still own cars:
an ethnographic case study of car ownership and use in Ottawa

by

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A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate and
Postdoctoral Affairs in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the
degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Anthropology

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Ottawa, Ontario

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Abstract

This dissertation comprises the results of a two year-long ethnographic study of car ownership and use in Ottawa, Canada. Based on interviews and observational data from thirty-two participants, this study aims present a profile of Ottawa residents' relationships to cars by providing an interpretation of cultural meanings and practices surrounding car ownership in a primarily urban setting. Building on literature from a variety of sources within anthropology and sociology, the major findings of this dissertation are broken into five interrelated chapters covering the diverse meanings and practices which construct car ownership as a necessary part of everyday life in Ottawa: 1) having a car is a response to the affordances of the built environment of Ottawa, 2) it means experiencing a desirable body; 3) it means having the human capital to realize complete flexibility and independence in one's economic and social pursuits; 4) it means being able to configure social relationships with transcendent cultural values and through the deployment of space and distance; 5) it means articulating autonomous politics and making sense of the interconnections between competing and complementary ideologies (such as freedom, independence, capitalism, family, work, able-bodiedness, modernity, and sustainability) which develop and change through everyday engagements with cars. In the final chapter of this dissertation, several questions are raised to prompt designers, social scientists, city planners, and citizens to think about how they might contribute to a popular shift towards a new kind of relationship to cars: one which is characterized by intentionality and choice, rather than by feelings of necessity.

Acknowledgments

This dissertation would not have been possible without the kind help and support of a number of people. I would like to extend my gratitude to them.

First, I would like to thank my supervisor, Dr. Danielle DiNovelli-Lang, for integral support and guidance. This project would not have been finished, let alone successfully so, without her wisdom and friendship. I would also like to thank the other members of my committee, Dr. Paul Thibaudeau and Dr. Michael Mopas, for their time, feedback and meaningful suggestions which have helped shaped this work. I would also like to thank my external examiners, Dr. Chiara Del Gaudio and Dr. Keith Murphy for their thoughtful comments, reflections and questions during my defense.

I must also thank my participants, who were very gracious with their time and detailed in providing me with a glimpse into their lives. Any significant impact of this research is owed entirely to them.

I would also like to extend my gratitude and appreciation to the staff of Carleton University, and in particular the staff and faculty of the Department of Sociology and Anthropology for their constant welcoming support with all aspects of being a member of the Carleton University community.

I would like to thank my wonderful family and friends, and in particular my loving and supportive wife Emma. Their support has been integral sustaining my enthusiasm and attention to this project over these past years.

Table of Contents

Abstract	ii
Acknowledgments	iii
Table of Contents	iv
List of Tables	viii
List of Illustrations	ix
List of Appendices	x
1. Chapter 1: Introduction	1
1.1 Purpose.....	7
1.2 Summary of Arguments.....	9
1.3 Points of Departure: Existing Perspectives	13
1.3.1 Approach 1: Socio-Cultural Perspectives	14
1.3.2 Approach 2: Political Economic Perspectives	16
1.3.3 How Previous Literature Has Informed My Work	18
1.4 Methodology.....	19
1.4.1 Location and Timing	19
1.4.2 Participants & Recruitment	23
1.4.3 Data Collection & Analysis.....	24
1.5 Limitations of the Research.....	26
2. Chapter 2: Ottawa is a “Car-Centric” Place	30
2.1 In Summary:.....	30
2.2 Introduction to Chapter 2.....	30
2.3 Perceived Affordances for Car Ownership and Use.....	34
2.4 The Modernist History of Ottawa.....	40
2.5 2700 Square Kilometers, 900 Buses	43

2.6	Modern Spaces and Places	49
2.7	From Gréber to Now: Designing New Affordances	60
2.8	Conclusion	68
3.	Chapter 3: Making Mobile Bodies	74
3.1	In Summary:.....	74
3.2	Introduction to Chapter 3.....	74
3.3	The Convenience of Cars.....	78
3.4	Social Construction of the Body	85
3.5	Assembled Embodiment: The Driver-car.....	89
3.6	Convenient Bodies and Able Bodies	94
3.7	Super-human Bodies.....	101
3.8	Conclusion	106
4.	Chapter 4: Freedom from Economic Uncertainty	110
4.1	In Summary:.....	110
4.2	Introduction to Chapter 4.....	110
4.3	Commuting and Commuters	115
4.4	Precarity and ‘Destandardization’ of Work	118
4.5	Maintaining Access to Economic Opportunities	123
4.6	Abilities-Machines: Cars as Human Capital	130
4.7	Auto-reliability (or Self-reliance Through Cars)	135
4.8	Conclusion	140
5.	Chapter 5: Creating & Maintaining Relationships of Care	144
5.1	In Summary:.....	144
5.2	Introduction to Chapter 5.....	144
5.3	Relationships of Care	148

5.4	Miller’s “Theory of Shopping”	151
5.5	A Vision of Excess.....	158
5.6	Smoke Ascends to the Deity	160
5.7	The Treat.....	166
5.8	The Sacrificial Meal	172
5.8.1	Relationships Within the Household	174
5.8.2	Relationships Between the Household and its Descent Groups.....	177
5.8.3	Relationships Between the Household and its Extended Kinships .	178
5.9	Conclusion	183
6.	Chapter 6: A Vehicle for Ideologies	185
6.1	In Summary:.....	185
6.2	Introduction to Chapter 6.....	185
6.3	Ideology as Autonomous Politics	188
6.4	The Sublime Object of Capitalism	195
6.5	Cars are an Environmental Problem (and Solution).....	199
6.6	Electric Cars Are Better for the Environment.....	204
6.7	Only Rich People Will Save the Planet.....	207
6.8	Conclusion	212
7.	Chapter 7: Discussion.....	215
7.1	The Exception that Makes the Rule	215
7.2	Review of Findings.....	217
7.3	Towards a Politics of Intentional Automobility	222
7.4	Insights for the Design-inclined	223
7.4.1	People Need to See the Possibility of Alternatives	224
7.4.2	Convenience is a Product of Experience	224

7.4.3	Cars Are the Modern Safety Blanket	226
7.4.4	Cars Let Us Live Apart, and Together, at the Same Time	226
7.4.5	We Can Decide What Cars Are, for Better or Worse	226
7.5	What Next?	227
Appendix A: List of Participants		230
Works Cited.....		232

List of Tables

- Page 49: Table 1. Proportion of commuters by main mode of transportation for the Ottawa-Gatineau Census Metropolitan Area
- Page 230: Table 2. Participants by age and sex (self-identified)
- Page 230: Table 3. Participants by neighbourhood of residence (self-identified)
- Page 231: Table 4. Participants by visible minority status (self-identified)
- Page 231: Table 5. Participants by body style of their personal vehicle
- Page 231: Table 6. Participants by vehicle mode of combustion

List of Illustrations

- Page 2: map of Ottawa highlighting Bronson Street, Bank Street, Downtown Ottawa, and South Keys.
- Page 20: Ottawa Greenbelt in green, separating “urban” Ottawa from other townships and suburbs.
- Page 35: map of Ottawa neighbourhoods highlighting Centertown.
- Page 37: map of Ottawa highlighting historical neighbourhoods of Downtown and Lowertown.
- Page 46: map of Ottawa highlighting the neighbourhood of Sandy Hill and the Ikea in Ottawa.
- Page 52: map of Ottawa taken from Gréber’s proposal in 1950 illustrating the circulatory system of the city of Ottawa as it was surveyed.
- Page 53: side by side comparison of Ottawa’s rail system in 1945 and the proposed rail system in Gréber’s plan, showing the relocation of the downtown station to six kilometers south-east of the city.
- Page 54: map of Ottawa included in the survey portion of the Gréber report indicating interurban (red) and main (yellow) traffic arteries in 1945.
- Page 54: map of Ottawa included in the proposal section of Gréber’s plan showcasing planned expansions to interurban and main arteries.
- Page 54: overlapping maps of Ottawa today and Gréber’s proposed expansions.
- Page 54: Ottawa’s roadways today with major highways and avenues in yellow.
- Page 56: map of Gréber’s proposed self-contained and self-sufficient neighbourhood zones marked with community centers, all of which are no larger than roughly a mile across allowing residents to live, work and play in their own neighbourhoods, minimizing the need for them to travel and congest the city’s roads.
- Page 56: map of Ottawa’s existing and proposed open spaces in 1950.
- Page 69: an artist’s depiction of the qualities of a 15-minute neighbourhood taken from the City of Ottawa *New Official Plan* (2021).

List of Appendices

- Appendix A: List of participants and their demographic characteristics

1. Chapter 1: Introduction

It's a Sunday in mid-January 2020, around 8:30 AM when I leave my apartment. I am going to visit Apurav and Chandra, two public servants of the Government of Canada, at their home in the neighbourhood of Alta Vista. Their suburb in South Ottawa is about 15 minutes driving from my own apartment in the neighbourhood of Centertown. My street is typically quiet on Sunday mornings, but as I walk to my car I notice that today is different. Having seen near record snowfall in the past few days, the street is noisy with the sound of people using snow blowers and shovels to clear the driveways in front of their homes. The fresh snowfall has contributed a lot to the already large piles of snow along the urban streets of my neighbourhood, creating narrow, trench-like sidewalks between the mounds which are spilling into yards on one side and into the streets on the other. From what I can see, only the main north-south streets, Bank Street and Bronson Avenue, and a handful of the larger cross-streets have been effectively cleared of snow. With flakes still falling, even those streets are still blanketed, showing only a few sets of dirty tire tracks cutting into the otherwise white street. Almost none of the pedestrian sidewalks have been cleared yet.

I pull up to Apurav and Chandra's home, it is only a few blocks from Bank Street, but the area quickly shifts from a busy urban avenue to a quiet suburban neighbourhood. Most of the homes here are single-family bungalows with large lawns unlike the commercial and residential apartment buildings found on Bank Street itself. Apurav is outside, clearing their U-shaped driveway with a snowblower.



Left Image - Centertown (cyan) located north of highway 417 roughly between Bank Street (red) and Bronson Avenue/Airport Parkway (blue) with the neighbourhood of Billings Bridge–Alta Vista (pink). Areas are approximations. Highlights are superimposed on an image from Google Maps (2020).

I can see that Apurav is sweating from the effort

despite the motorized assistance as he drives the blower into the garage. He shouts something about my impeccably timed arrival. “I’ll have to be back out here again when we finish talking,” he says. “It doesn’t look like the snow is going to stop any time soon.” He mentions to me that he got up early to clear the driveway and that he misses his hometown, in British Columbia, on days like this because it rarely snows there. It’s a little past 9:00AM now, given the slow drive through slush and snow, and I ask him why he has started clearing it so early in the morning. He tells me it’s in case he must go out this afternoon. He and Chandra might run errands at Costco later.

Apurav, Chandra and I chat for a few minutes and catch up, it has been a few months since I had last seen them. Photos from trips to India as well as a few from their wedding in British Columbia adorn the hallway walls and surfaces in their living room. They bought the house just a few years ago, and subsequently renovated it by putting a full suite in the basement (which is now rented to a tenant). Though one of the main reasons they moved to this neighbourhood was because of the close proximity to bus

lines that they could use to go directly to work, they also bought a new Toyota Prius hybrid – a large hatchback – to store all of their cargo from Costco (and as I would later find out, materials for renovations, luggage for road trips to eastern Canada, bicycles, and other things that make memories as well as make suburban living more convenient). They would also later tell me that since they have moved here the busses no longer take them directly to work downtown: Apurav now drives to work every day, Chandra takes a bicycle on nice days and takes a long meandering bus ride on not-so-nice ones. It is an unfortunate by-product, according to them, of recent municipal transit reprogramming brought about by the newly introduced Light Rail Transit system (I will return to a discussion of this famous Ottawa disaster in Chapter 2). As we finish catching up, I start our interview with the same question I would eventually pose to thirty other individuals from around the Ottawa area: “I want you to imagine that you have to describe a car to me as if I’d never seen or heard of one before. How would you explain it to me?”

Apurav: [Chandra], you go first.

Chandra: You just want to take my answer and make it better.

Apurav: No [laughing] I’m going to be creative.

Chandra: [laughing] that’s so rude. Well, a car is a machine, that has wheels, that you can sit in, that can transport people or things. You need someone who drives – I don’t know if you know what driving means... [more laughing]

Apurav: To operate it.

Chandra: You need someone who operates the machine. It is made of, I don’t know what – some kind of metal exterior I’m assuming. I don’t really know.

Apurav: Wow I’m learning so much about you.

Chandra: Why because I don't know anything about cars?

Apurav: No, because you're like, really descriptive – I would have gone first with purpose, so that's interesting.

Chandra: I said it transports people and things [trying not to laugh]

Apurav: Yeah, but you're like, getting into what it's composed of and stuff, it's interesting.

Chandra: Alright you answer then.

Apurav: No, that was good, I like it, it's different. I would have just said it's a structure that allows you to get from one location to another location. I would have also said that it has four wheels. You sit in it. I wouldn't even have thought that you would have to know how to use it, because apparently you don't often see proof of that on the roads.

Chandra: It protects you from the elements as you're in it, it can get you there faster.

Apurav: Hey, wow.

Tyler: [Apurav] you're going to have to start pulling your weight in this conversation.

Apurav: I know, Jesus Christ.

Chandra: And they look different, and some have different functions – some can be faster than others. Then for the most part it's just looks, so, they can be different colours.

Apurav: Some people view them as a status symbol or as a luxury item. You can have fun in them but most of the fun is regulated – but it is technically possible. They can also be really pretty.

...

Tyler: And what are some things you think of when you think of cars?

Chandra: I think of gas, utility. That's about it for me.

Apurav: Freedom and convenience, and uhh global warming, well kind of global warming but not totally – because it's not the primary factor in global warming but it still is highly associated. There's also some nostalgia – high school, university and stuff – just independence and freedom. And also like, it's nice driving people around, like that was like my job in high school

picking up all the friends and stuff. So also, it's a tool to help you have value to the people around you, especially if you're the only one that has one.

...

Tyler: And can you tell me the difference between a good car and a bad car, just from your experience?

Chandra: For me, [a good car] would be one that functions when you want it to. Not a lot of issues with it that you constantly have to get fixed or that can leave you stranded or not able to use it. And also, for me good vs bad would be how much gas it uses.

Apurav: Yeah, reliability and utility for sure.

Chandra: Oh, and size, depending on what I need it for.

Apurav: Everything else is just icing, yeah like if it looks nice. And I guess [what's good] changes over time, it has to have enough space and be able to haul a certain load, not just that it can't die but, it's so annoying when you're trying to fit something in your car and your trunk is just like 3 inches too small.

Chandra: Utility changes with time, like a while ago I would have preferred a smaller car that could just fit parking spaces, but now I need one that can fit my stuff.

Apurav: Yeah, it changes over time for sure.

Chandra: I don't care a lot about that other stuff [beyond reliability and utility]. I care about things like [air conditioning] and heat, and the radio works, but I don't really care about what it looks like as long as it's clean. Not really what kind [of car] it is.

Apurav: Yeah. And I've never had such an adult car before. I walk up to it and think "wow, I'm such an adult now because it's just such a practical, you know, regular car, rather than a "wheee" car, or even a hokey first car 'beater' — they all have a little bit of whimsy. But now I have, like, a boring adult car and it's strictly about function.

This exchange we had because of what I intended to serve as "warm-up" questions to our larger conversation was one of many similar exchanges I had encountered with other people in Ottawa. It was in these preliminary exchanges where descriptions of what a car is and what it does would begin to hint at what it means, or

more to the point of this research, what it means to own and use a car. I have selected Apurav and Chandra's description here because it is one of the more thorough responses I encountered and it exposes many of the common elements which would be elaborated upon time and time again across my interviews and observations: cars get us and our stuff to places; we require and prioritize their ability to reliably fulfil that function; we care (some a little, others a lot) about their environmental impact, but more so about their cost to us - in time, money, and effort; cars are boxes, structures, and sometimes "hard-shelled tent"-like contraptions with, usually, four wheels; they protect us from the elements of unpleasant weather; they require drivers; they get us places faster and easier than we could ever go without them; cars can be pretty, or ugly, and there are different cars for different kinds of people or different times in our lives.

An investigation into the varied meanings of cars in our everyday lives deserves attention, not only because of the lack of literature on the subject in anthropology (as I will later address), but because of the continued attention that cars have received as causes of social and environmental ills. Based on the numerous external costs of the transportation sector (e.g., traffic congestion, pollution, climate change, and energy dependency), the City of Ottawa is actively looking for ways to reduce its residents' overall dependency on cars in favour of other modes of transportation (Ottawa 2021). In cases where that reduction is not possible, then a switch to electric cars is positioned as the only alternative (Ottawa 2020).

In light of these goals of reducing car ownership, and encouraging a popular shift to electric cars, a general strategy for developing and promoting alternative modes of transportation has been to try to enhance the competitive advantage of those alternative

modes (e.g., improving the likelihood that one will choose public transit over a car based on factors like convenience, comfort, total travel time, etc.). These tactics seem to assume that the car is a mere functional conveyance, replaceable by any other mode. It risks minimizing the significant cultural and social reasons for car ownership, and unwisely reduces the complexity of the interrelations between different factors which drive ownership and use despite the presence of alternative transportation options. These factors, and the complexity of their interrelations as far as they contribute to the meanings of car ownership and use, are the subject of this dissertation.

1.1 Purpose

My research contributes to a deeper understanding of the meaning of cars within current conversations about contemporary urban mobility. The content of this dissertation is a profile of peoples' relationships to cars, at least, the people of Ottawa. It explores how cars are made meaningful in a complex network of physical spaces, experiences of the body, work and productivity, caring relationships with others, and evolving environmental politics. It addresses the limitations of current anthropological literature on the subject of owning and using personal automobiles, particularly in the context of North America, and in light of the growing social and political attention that cars are receiving as major contributors to climate change and other social and environmental issues. As I will show in this dissertation, there are many aspects of Ottawa which make it unlike any other city, so I make very few claims to the universality of these findings. My hope is, as I have used the literature that has come before, that others looking to interrogate new contexts of car meanings can use these findings to

direct their attention to things that might be pertinent to investigate and interrogate in their respective situations.

My approach in this dissertation is to present this profile of car ownership in a way that will inform a relatively robust understanding of the meaning of cars in Ottawa and explain why cars may not disappear from existence on the basis of, for example, simply offering more “competitive” transportation solutions (Ottawa 2021, 42). I intend that my findings can be used to generate creative and productive discussions on how we might take control over our relationships to cars: my conclusions are statements about the meanings of cars presented in each chapter; these conclusions are accompanied by easily digestible and relevant questions in the final discussion section which are meant to prompt us to think about how we might move towards having intentional relationships with cars. Having an intentional relationship means getting to a place where a conscious choice about the role that cars play in society can be made. However, as I will address more completely in the discussion section of this dissertation, we can only achieve this if there is room to feel that the choice exists at all.

My approach is inspired by the growing trend in the application of anthropology to design. This is exemplified by work like Natasha Dow Schüll’s analysis of machine gambling in Las Vegas (Schüll 2012), Brent Luvaas’ work with Indonesian Do-it-yourself fashion designers (Luvaas 2013), Keith Murphy’s ethnography of Swedish design (2015), and Sarah Pink’s work with Volvo on consumers’ interactions and expectations for a future filled with self-driving cars (2020). Similarly, this trend also includes the growing support and contribution of anthropologists to the annual Ethnographic Praxis in Industry Conference (EPIC 2020), and the explosive trend towards companies,

governments, and individuals adopting user-centered “design thinking” and the application of ethnographic research methods (Gunn & Donovan 2012; IDEO 2020; Murphy 2016). Across these above instances, it is the contributions of social scientists (or social science research methods and perspectives) that are fundamentally improving the knowledge that organizations (public and private) have about the people for whom they create products and services.

What is unique and intentional about this dissertation is that it is not strictly design anthropology, nor is it strictly a social critique about cars in society. It occupies what I think is a fertile middle ground in terms of its methodological approach and outcome: I raise questions to prompt our thinking and attendance to designing the built environment, but not at the expense of missing important ethnographic findings which are not so easily addressed with design; I use a wide variety and combination of social theories to analyze my ethnographic data, considering them as one would tools in a tool box; I spent relatively smaller but focused periods of time with participants instead of “deep hanging out” (Clifford 1996). My intention is primarily to remain honest to the ethnographic data and my participants’ voices, and I believe this middle ground has been a successful and unique approach to understanding why people in Ottawa still own cars when there are so many transportation alternatives available to them.

1.2 Summary of Arguments

There is no overarching argument for this dissertation, only a series of interconnected meanings which emerge by looking at car ownership from different angles which nonetheless co-exist simultaneously and reinforce each other: that having a car means living in accordance with the affordances of the environment; it means

having the human capital by which to realize a complete flexibility and independence in one's economic and social pursuits; it means an ability to construct and maintain one's kinship and extended kinship relationships as untethered from the limitations of physical geography, and; it means having a body with which these goals are conveniently pursued. Additionally, these meanings are inextricable from a multitude of ideological constructions and abstractions (freedom, independence, capitalism, family, work, able-bodiedness, modernity, etc.) which now come up against new ones, namely sustainability. By being the means by which one can experience important cultural values, it coincidentally serves as the means for reproducing them (and changing them). By being imbricated within these cultural values and ideologies, the car maintains a kind of cultural immunity from political attempts to dislodge it from a position of dominance.

While there are so many things to address about cars, the meanings raised in these chapters have all been prompted by the central research question: why do people in Ottawa own and use cars when there are so many alternatives available to them? The chapters have been written in such a way that they progressively move further and further away from the things which are more easily addressed with design (the built environment, the car as a convenience, and cars as a means of engaging in economic activities) and towards the deeply cultural (anxieties about productivity and independence, the symbolic aspects of social relationships, and a philosophical investigation of cars as a means of articulating ideologies). The chapters could be read independently, but in reality they build on, depend on, enforce, and modify each other. Each of the chapters, covering five ethnographic dimensions of car ownership and use, functions like a series of rings in an interconnected chain, comprising the major

motivations and meanings that are created in my participants' use and ownership of cars in the face of the available alternatives. I provide a description of each of the chapters and their arguments below, and a similar description is provided at the beginning of each chapter to support general readability.

In Chapter Two, I argue that people in Ottawa own cars because the City of Ottawa is a place that makes them feel needed. I argue that people in Ottawa use cars because it is a place that has been designed explicitly to accommodate and facilitate car use over any other form of transportation. I use the theory of 'perceived affordances' from design literature and dissect the Gréber plan, the legacy of a modernist approach to city planning. I accompany this effort with the contemporary voices of my participants as they describe their everyday interactions with the city's transportation infrastructure. In conclusion, I argue (as previous scholars have) that real life transgresses attempts to plan, order and optimize, yet a legacy of city plans for car-centricity are still widely felt today. This legacy makes alternative modes of transportation feel at best impractical or at worst impossible. Emerging city plans see the built environment as a given-signal of function, but this approach neglects to consider the interpretive activity of the city-dweller in successfully acknowledging the features of the environment as they are intended.

In Chapter Three, I explore how my participants use cars to create different experiences of their bodies within a networked series of relationships. Drawing upon a mix of anthropological works discussing the social construction of the body and inspired by thinking near-Actor Network Theory, in this chapter I complexify the idea of cars as conveniences by revealing that driver-car embodiment constructs various bodies in the

context of mobility, and the convenient body is just one of them. In conclusion, I argue that we ought to subsume and/or subordinate discussions and debates about convenience in mobility to a more productive and potent framework like disability studies. I propose that the experience of the convenient body is not something that is easily replicable in other alternative modes of transportation, and that we ought to start to contemplate how we might begin to live with inconvenient bodies rather than how we might create more convenient transportation.

In Chapter Four, I argue that people in Ottawa own cars because they want the human capital that it entails, particularly in the face of extraordinary demands for flexibility placed upon them by their economic practices. My participants buy cars because they believe they are the most reliable way of securing and routinizing their economic activities. Furthermore, this human capital carries a symbolic potency. Owned cars give people a sense of self-reliance and self-determination (often talked about in terms of freedom and independence) that other modes of transportation, even shared cars, are not seen to provide. In conclusion, I point to the role of my participants' cars as an economic necessity and as a symbolic object of comfort and self-reliance.

In Chapter Five, I argue that people in Ottawa own cars because through a ritual act of buying cars they create and manifest ideal relationships of care with specific others and symbolize the household, among other social relationships. I interpret car ownership and specifically car buying through the lens of Daniel Miller's theory of shopping, which presents shopping as a kind of ritual sacrifice primarily aimed at constituting relationships of care. In doing so, I focus on the relationships at stake in continued car ownership and use. In conclusion, I argue that buying cars is a ritual for

constituting the household (and other social relationships), and that the continued ownership of cars is integral to the maintenance and construction of mobile networks of social relationships.

In Chapter Six, I argue that people in Ottawa buy cars to articulate autonomous politics: an instinctual means of making ethical sense of the world. Using the concept of ideology as read through the surprising combination of Geertz and Zizek, I analyze car ownership and use as a means by which individuals make sense of sustainability, the environmental cost of cars, and of the continuity of capitalism generally. I propose an approach to using ideology as a cultural structure to describe how objects (like cars) can be bound up in the ways people make sense of the world, as a means of reconciling apparent contradictions in their world views, and I offer a unique perspective on 'sustainable capitalism' as an ideology.

In summary, I argue that many people in Ottawa do not use or expect to use their cars for everything. Instead, other kinds of transportation solutions (walking, cycling, public transit, car sharing, ride sharing, scooters, etc.) have relegated the car to the general role of mobility safety net pursued generally out of a sense of necessity. Considerations and questions surrounding how we might begin to change this meaning are raised in the final chapter of this dissertation in line with my own overarching politics: to bring ourselves closer to an intentional kind of relationship with cars, rather than one of necessity.

1.3 Points of Departure: Existing Perspectives

Existing literature on automobiles in social science has been dominated by two perspectives: a) conversations about automobile culture(s), and b) conversations about

the political economy of automobility. The first approach is more typical to anthropology, and its focus is largely the task of interpreting how the materials and practices associated with automobiles act as conduits/machinations/representations of culture i.e., as cultural symbols within larger networks of meaning. Current literature on this topic in anthropology is, however, limited in two ways which are important to this project: firstly, much of the literature tends to have a historical and/or non-western orientation, which means that use practices prevalent in North American (particularly Canadian) cities are absent from discussion. Secondly, what discussions do exist of the automobile in a western context are largely discussions of smaller sub-cultures which have their identity tied to the automobile in a way which sets them apart from the general population in which they live: examples of this include studies of Mexican low-rider communities (Chappell 2012), Caribbean “cruiser” sub-cultures and Scandinavian youth car clubs (Miller 2001). This literature serves as the point of departure for this thesis, which builds on these perspectives and theoretical orientations to explore Ottawa as a novel setting.

1.3.1 Approach 1: Socio-Cultural Perspectives

Even more general than looking at cars, movement and mobility have been the subject of growing interdisciplinary attention (Adey et al. 2014). Though the subject matter interest is shared by anthropologists, sociologists, and geographers alike, it has been addressed with considerably different aims within each discipline. As addressed by Salazar in *Routledge’s Handbook of Mobility Studies*, anthropology has been much more interested in symbolic aspects of (im)mobility, the trans locality of cultures and cultural practices, and discourses of globalization (Salazar 2014).

One key perspective in this area is of the role of mobility and place in the construction of identity. For example, Easthope (2009), building on the work of Giddens (1991), has explored how contemporary ideas about identity have moved away from place-based prescribed identities towards achieved and mobile forms of identity which stress the interrelations between places. Authors like Partridge (2009) have explored travel and its relationship to citizenship through the restrictions placed on individuals' mobility. Finally, other perspectives in this conversation have focused on the symbolic aspects associated with mobility and immobility as dimensions of a broader conversation about ability, disability, and accessibility (Cresswell 2010; Langan 2001).

This symbolic approach to automobiles is largely an extension of the anthropology of vehicles in general. This perspective addresses the capacities of materials found in and around vehicles to be conduits of culture, acting as mediums of cultural values within larger networks of symbols. The edited volume by Lipset and Handler (2014), for example, explores the ways that vehicles operate as metaphors for moral imaginations: drawing upon a number of cases, ranging from canoes in the South Pacific to cars in Serbia and China, their work draws together a number of perspectives on the ways that vehicles (of land, sea, and air) can serve as important tropes for conceptualizations of personhood, social and cultural mobility, and as markers of identity in their respective settings.

Toward cars specifically, this semiotic approach has been predominant in material culture studies influenced by authors such as Daniel Miller. Examples include Miller's edited volume, *Car Cultures* (2001) which presents several ethnographies analysing and deconstructing the entanglement of social concepts like race, gender,

mobility, consumerism, regulation, and urban planning from the social life of automobiles in the US and elsewhere, and Ben Chappell's *Lowrider Space* (2012), which explores the space-making capacity of cars-as-cultural-icons found in Mexican barrios. Non-ethnographic approaches in a similar vein have largely been the domain of media studies, such as Clarke's book on women's status in cultures of automobility as represented in fictional literature, film, and advertisement (2007), or Seiler's history of ideas about driving as a practice (2009).

Aside from a handful of examples in Daniel Miller's *Car Cultures*, published nearly two decades ago, existing literature in this stream has been oriented towards non-western and/or sub-cultural communities who have their identity defined by some integral aspect of cars and the way they use them which sets them apart from the conventions of the culture or society in which they live. Perspectives on mainstream North American cultural attitudes and behaviours around automobiles are largely absent from current discussions in anthropology, as are anthropological perspectives on car ownership in the context of technologies which have emerged within only the last ten years (e.g., car sharing, ride sharing, autonomous capabilities, and electrification of vehicles). It is on these last points that my research continues the discussion, considering the findings of this previous work and applying it where fruitful to my own findings on the ownership and use practices of people in Ottawa, incorporating where applicable, people's interactions and attitudes towards these new technologies and uses which are now very prevalent in everyday life.

1.3.2 Approach 2: Political Economic Perspectives

The political economic approach to studying automobility has had an integral role in analyses of the growth of global as well as local capitalism, the flow of labour, commodities, capital, class dynamics, the relationship between state and civil society, and the organization of labour. Notable examples of this perspective include Paterson (2007), who has written about the modern political economy as a 'dromocracy' (society ruled by movement and acceleration). This perspective has been the most common approach to more sociological studies of automobiles, focusing on the relationship between automobile industries, economic growth, and political power, and is echoed in similar political economic approaches to understanding the role of the automobile in contemporary North American (and global) society (Behrends, Reyna, and Schlee 2013; Dennis and Urry 2013; Elliott and Urry 2010; Lutz and Fernandez 2010; Walks 2014; Wells and Cronon 2013).

Other authors, such as Borg (2010), have remarked on the role of the automobile industry in creating new hierarchical classes of professions, while Yates (2001) has explored the legacy of Fordism in the organization of labour within North American manufacturing and production facilities. Studies of car design and its relation to political economy have also made contributions to this perspective, notably through work by Gartman (2013) and Batchelor (1994).

Many of the prominent voices in this vein, including Paterson, Walks, Urry and Cresswell, have argued that the automobile is the dominant cultural and economic force in shaping North American cultural subjectivity, and tend to focus on identifying the connection between cars, ideologies of movement, and the modern/mobile subject. Paterson (2007) touches on this relationship and makes the claim that the inevitable

corollary of the domination of 'movement' within a capitalist political economy is the subordination of certain subjectivities to that movement. Work by Walks (2014), also, for example, argues that while the automobile has expanded social mobility (for those who can afford it), it has also meant a significant restructuring of both the spaces in which that movement happens, and the possibilities of movement for those without cars.

John Urry, the progenitor of mobility studies in sociology, notes the inextricable nature of automobile's economic and cultural domination, calling it the "iron cage of modernity" (Urry 2004). In his work, Urry claims that such domination, and its ideal representation in automobiles, makes the principle of flexible mobility not an exception to modern working bodies, but a necessity. In the process, it often makes the automobile an object of compulsory consumption (Elliott and Urry 2010; Urry 2004).

1.3.3 How Previous Literature Has Informed My Work

These two approaches, the socio-cultural and the political economic, have predominantly oriented my work by directing my attention to things which might be meaningful in an interrogation of car ownership and use in Ottawa. Concerning the social and cultural literature, these works helped me to incorporate questions about the car and its general role in enabling mobility into my conversations with participants. This is most clearly present in Chapter Three and my discussion of various types of mobile bodies, as well as my investigation of the built environment as affording/constraining various kinds of mobility (in Chapter 2). These works also helped me to investigate the social relationship elements of car ownership and the personal symbolic dimensions. For example, my use of Daniel Miller in Chapter Five and my attention to the various

relationships of care that are created and maintained in car ownership (specifically in car purchasing) is heavily influenced by this perspective.

The political economic literature, though sparingly evoked as a means of making a critique in this dissertation, was very pertinent in my exploration of the relationship of cars to work and indirectly, to my discussion of ideology. Regarding my investigation of cars and their connection to work, political economic theory formed an important context for interpreting my participant's anxieties around needing a car to provide independence and self-reliance. Regarding ideologies, though my chapter (Chapter Six) takes a different perspective on defining ideology, the writing of Urry and Paterson lead me to pay close attention to how I might find ideologies manifest or present themselves in my interviews with participants, and it also led me to explore more diverse theorizations about modern ideologies (such as Bauman's *Liquid Modernity*, 2006). This in turn helped me to connect my participants attitudes to sustainability and cars to other powerful cultural signifiers.

1.4 Methodology

1.4.1 Location and Timing

Ethnographic data was collected between 2018-2020 in Ottawa, Ontario, although I personally have lived in the Ottawa-area (within 25 kilometers of the city) for over a decade. I interviewed mainly those who own a car, mainly urban dwelling, within the city limits of Ottawa (i.e., within the Greenbelt) although participants were chosen purposively based on my desire to get a mixed sample of different neighbourhoods and regions (see Appendix A). I discuss the site of fieldwork in more detail in the Chapter 2.



Image left: Ottawa Greenbelt in green, separating “urban” Ottawa from other townships and suburbs. (NCC-CCN 2020)

The Ottawa region presents a unique opportunity to study driving ethnographically.

In addition to never having been the site of an ethnography of driving and car use, the region is home to a burgeoning high-tech industry focused on autonomous vehicle development (nearly 70 companies), significantly varied infrastructural composition (urban, suburban, and rural), a diversity of road conditions created by seasonal weather conditions, and a great number and variety of commuter types (including personal cars, shared transportation, cyclists, and pedestrian traffic). Interestingly, it is for these reasons that Ottawa is being transformed into a centre for autonomous vehicle development and implementation. In October 2017, Legget Drive in Kanata served as the site of the first ever test drive of a fully autonomous vehicle in Canada.

Founded in 1826 as Bytown, and incorporated as Ottawa in 1855, the city has evolved into a political and technological hotspot. As of 2016, Ottawa had a city population of 934,243 and a metropolitan population of 1,323,783 making it the fourth-largest city in Canada (Ottawa 2017). From the 1960s until the 1980s, the region experienced a building boom, which was followed by large growth in the high-tech industry during the 1990s and 2000s. Ottawa is the capital of Canada, and it hosts a

large number of federal government offices including the Parliament of Canada. As of 2022 employment with the federal government accounted for 18% of the gross domestic product of the city, with employment in the technology sector accounting for an additional 19% (Ottawa 2022).

1.4.1.1 Geography

Ottawa is situated on the south bank of the Ottawa River and contains the mouths of the Rideau River and Rideau Canal. The older part of the city is known as Lower Town and occupies an area between the canal and the rivers. Across the canal to the west lies Centertown and Downtown Ottawa, which is the city's financial and commercial center, home to the Parliament of Canada and numerous federal government department headquarters.

The city has a main urban area (Centertown and Downtown), but many other urban, suburban, and rural areas exist within the modern city's limits. The main suburban area extends a considerable distance to the east, west and south of the centre, and it includes the former cities of Gloucester, Nepean and Vanier, the former village of Rockcliffe Park, and the communities of Blackburn Hamlet and Orléans. The Kanata suburban area includes the area of Stittsville to the southwest. Nepean is another major suburb which also includes Barrhaven. The communities of Manotick and Riverside South are located on the other side of the Rideau River, and Greely, southeast of Riverside South. A few rural communities (villages and hamlets) lie beyond the greenbelt (a section of field and grassland which serves as a buffer between the city of Ottawa and its satellite suburbs) but are administratively part of the Ottawa municipality.

Directly across the Ottawa river from the City of Ottawa is the city of Gatineau. Gatineau is within the province of Quebec, although interprovincial travel is commonplace for many residents of both cities. Much of Gatineau falls within the National Capital Region (which incorporates both Ottawa and Gatineau). As motor vehicle travel is governed at the provincial level, there are some differences between what is or is not allowed in either region. For example, Uber ride sharing is not permitted in Quebec. The geographical separation and language differences seem to exacerbate the perceived differences and accessibility of the region in the minds of Ottawa and Gatineau residents. I explore this more in Chapter Two.

1.4.1.2 Transportation Infrastructure

The varied transportation and infrastructural assets of the region make Ottawa a productive site for research into car ownership. The city is served by two freeway corridors. The primary corridor is east-west and consists of provincial Highway 417 (designated as The Queensway) and Ottawa-Carleton Regional Road 174 (formerly Provincial Highway 17); a north-south corridor, Highway 416 (designated as Veterans' Memorial Highway), connects Ottawa to the rest of the 400-Series Highway network in Ontario at the 401. Highway 417 is also the Ottawa portion of the Trans-Canada Highway. The city also has several scenic parkways (promenades), such as Colonel By Drive, Queen Elizabeth Driveway, the Sir John A. Macdonald Parkway, Rockcliffe Parkway, and the Aviation Parkway and has a freeway connection to Autoroute 5 and Autoroute 50, in Gatineau.

Numerous paved multi-use trails wind their way through much of the city, including along the Ottawa River, Rideau River, and Rideau Canal. These pathways are

used for transportation, tourism, and recreation. Many streets either have wide curb lanes or designated bicycle lanes, so cycling is a popular mode of transportation throughout the year but not without its share of issues (I discuss these more in Chapter Two and Chapter Three). OC Transpo (Ottawa-Carleton), a department of the city, operates the public transit system while the Société de transport de l'Outaouais operates public transit in the adjacent Gatineau-Hull region. Both operators run inter-provincial routes.

In 2013, the City of Ottawa announced its *Transportation Master Plan* which identified trends, projections, and ideal designs for the City's transportation requirements. In this report, the City of Ottawa identified that, going forward (to 2031), the City would work towards advancing key principles in transportation infrastructure and service provision, including: maximizing walkability, developing cycling infrastructure, developing and integrating its transit and rapid-transit networks, reducing the impact of roads and traffic on the environment, encouraging sustainable choices for mobility, and investing in cost-saving measures for durable and flexible infrastructure (Ottawa 2013). These ideas were further articulated in the subsequently released the City of Ottawa's *New Official Plan* (2021). The relevance of my findings to some of the ideas proposed in these plans are elaborated upon where applicable in each chapter, and vice versa.

1.4.2 Participants & Recruitment

Thirty-two people were purposively recruited to participate in the research, with a focus on car-owning and urban-dwelling inhabitants. Participants were recruited through online sources and through personal networks: eight participants were recruited through

personal networks and are people with whom I have a prior relationship either as friends or acquaintances, sixteen were recruited through a paid study recruitment platform for social science and design research called “User Interviews”, five through paid Facebook advertising; and four through specific outreach made on local Facebook groups for electric vehicle owners. Characteristics which were purposefully sampled were to achieve a balance of male and female participants, a mix of ages, a mix of geographical locations within Ottawa, and a mix of car ownership types (i.e., mode of combustion). Demographic characteristics (such as age, sex and visible minority self-identification) were self-reported by participants.

1.4.3 Data Collection & Analysis

Data was primarily collected through on-site or remote in-depth interviews (60-90 minutes in length). Supplementary data was collected through observation during in-person visits to participants’ homes or in/around their cars. Living and working in Ottawa provided some contextual information to participant-provided data. During my fieldwork, though not always tied to the formal process of collecting data, I purchased a new car, used public transportation, drove on streets, walked as a pedestrian, etc. This data, though relevant as a means of relating to my participants, is not featured specifically in this dissertation in order to prioritize my participants’ voices.

As some of the participants are acquaintances or even friends (eight of the thirty-two participants), I was able to engage with them on multiple occasions. For the remaining twenty-five participants, engagements were generally limited to the interview time I had allotted to them. This kept the methodology scoped and consistent with what is typically practiced in design research and user experience research as a means of

“problem/opportunity discovery” (Balasubramoniam 2013; Vermeeren 2013, et al.).

However, I did conduct some follow up engagements on outstanding themes from initial engagements with interested participants.

Interviews and participant encounters were semi-structured and relatively time-restricted to address particular topics of interest with a greater degree of efficiency, sacrificing the typical exploratory and unstructured anthropological “deep-hanging out” (Clifford 1996) for time- and labour-efficient data collection over a shorter period with a narrower scope of purpose. The theorization and methods of data analysis are, however, very much anthropological: the coding of interview content into emic categories, and the application of social theory lenses to aid in the interpretation of recorded data.

For data analysis, I used a blend of inductive and deductive thematic coding (Bernard 2011, p. 429-430). I coded segments of interview transcriptions and observational notes into initial themes (such as information pertaining to cars, emotions, contradictions, social obligations, etc.) based on my pre-existing understanding of the culture and the behaviour. I conducted the coding using a version of Atlas.ti software. I used the software to manage the code book, which included initial codes such as: types of cars, good and bad attributes of cars, uses of cars, self-described motivations for car ownership, discursive aspects of cars, driving, and public transportation, among others. I then refined the themes and coded sub-themes, such as for example, ‘uses for cars’ was refined into ‘uses for owned cars’ vs ‘uses for shared cars’, and included sub-themes such as: for work, leisure, relaxation, visiting friends, visiting family, carpooling, groceries, specific errands, etc. In doing so I paid specific attention to emotion,

contradictions and conflict, classifications and categorizations (such as social roles and codes of behaving, types of cars, or purposes of using different transportation modes), expressions of social control (e.g. “I bought an electric car to do my part for the environment”, or “I can’t be late for work”), and particularly symbolically charged expressions and deployments of metaphorical language (such as, “I don’t want to waste my money”, “gasoline is polluting”, or “Teslas are more modern”, etc.).

1.5 Limitations of the Research

One of the limitations of my research methodology was the limited engagement time with some of my participants and the method of recruitment. Some participants provided more time with me than others and were more willing to share their experiences and stories with me more openly. Further, some engagements with participants were limited to single in-depth interviews. In this context, I relied on my pre-existing knowledge of both the culture, the language, and the added information of my other participants to fill the gaps and frame some of the interview content I gathered. I reflect on this issue more in the last chapter of this dissertation, but the “design research” approach to rapidly gathering information on a highly scoped topic necessarily forces the researcher to rely on secondary information from other research and may over-index findings regarding specific participants over others. The number of participants I interacted with was helpful in combating this limitation, and I feel that I had gathered a sufficiently large group of participants to address reach thematic saturation (my last interviews, for example, raised no new themes to be coded).

I believe that being able to spend more time with participants would have been beneficial. It would have allowed me to more thoroughly explore the sub-themes that

emerged around owning and using cars, for example: instead of relying on information from other sociological and anthropological studies of work and labour, I may have been able to more thoroughly explore how my participants defined their relationships to their jobs, and perhaps more confidently argued for the connection between the social construction of productivity and car ownership than I do, for example, in Chapter Three. My hope in this case then is that the results of this study can prompt further research into more thoroughly exploring the connections between the meaning of car ownership and other symbolic aspects of everyday life in Ottawa (or other comparable regions).

Another limitation of this study is the types of cars that my participants owned. As I was deliberately looking to study people who were not “car enthusiasts” or some subculture of the population for whom cars were a central or important aspect of their identities, I have biased the data collected into an image of generic car ownership which may not be representative of the population more generally: the general trend in new vehicle sales reflects a dominance of the ‘trucks’ category (which includes minivans, sport-utility vehicles, light and heavy trucks, vans and buses). From 2009 to 2019, passenger cars went from representing 44.8% to 20.7% of all new car sales in Canada (the remaining percentage coming from trucks, Sport Utility Vehicles and Vans) (Statistics Canada 2021). While these numbers do reflect a consumer preference for Sport Utility Vehicles (SUVs) and light trucks, they may also be skewed to an unknown degree by trucks purchased for explicitly commercial reasons and/or as commercial fleet vehicles. Despite this trend in new vehicle sales, my participants predominantly owned small commuter cars with efficient engines and relatively modest equipment, however there were some SUVs, hybrids, and even electric cars included among them.

A study more inclusive of truck owners, sports cars, luxury cars, or other culturally relevant categories of cars may come to different conclusions or may find that trucks purchased for personal use simply reflect a kind of “doubling-down” on the same reasons for ownership I outline in this dissertation: for example, to satisfy the need for reliability and independence, to construct and define normal bodies, or to maintain relationships of care.

Another limiting aspect of the study is its narrow focus. The focus of the study was on owned automobiles for personal use (loosely described as reasons not specifically attached to the operations of a business entity, or for mixed business and personal use). As such, it only includes experiences of shared cars, taxis, public transit, and other modes of transportation as they figured into the lives and comments of my participants. There are still many avenues to study the role of other forms of transportation, including shared, autonomous, and public modes of transportation, as well as the meanings of commercially oriented vehicles (such as vans and trucks used explicitly on the job in areas of goods delivery, construction, field-site technical maintenance, etc.). In those cases, the meaning of cars may be radically different. Given that the research question was, “why do people in Ottawa own and use cars”, I do not see this limitation as a failure of the project, but rather a caveat to future scholars that this is a study of the meaning of personal owned cars from the perspective of those kinds of car owners.

One final and perhaps most significant limitation of this study is its timing. As the bulk of my research was conducted between 2018 and 2020, it was conducted right before the widespread fallout of the COVID-19 global pandemic which saw people all

over the world (including in Ottawa) confined to their residences, working from home, and reducing the prevalence of the car as a necessary means of transportation. With no amenities to engage with (such as restaurants, movie theatres, social events of most kind, etc.) and many types of work choosing to adopt a remote working arrangement (i.e., telecommuting), the findings of this research may have been completely upended in a new paradigm of the post-COVID-19 world. Only time will tell if the legacy of the global pandemic has had lasting implications for the meaning of owned automobiles in Ottawa and more broadly.

2. Chapter 2: Ottawa is a “Car-Centric” Place

2.1 In Summary:

In this chapter I argue that one of the reasons that people in Ottawa buy cars is because Ottawa has been designed to afford car ownership over other forms of mobility. I use the theory of perceived affordances from design literature to explore Ottawa as an environment that by design makes alternative, non-car, forms of mobility feel disadvantageous or unreasonable. I rely heavily on a dissection of the Gréber plan’s modernist approach to city planning and contextualize it with the contemporary voices of my participants as they describe their everyday interactions with the city’s infrastructure. In conclusion I argue (as previous scholars have) that real life often thwarts attempts to plan, order and optimize the flows and practices of people; that a legacy of city plans for car-centricity are still widely felt today; and contemporary efforts to promote other means of mobility (including pedestrian, public transit and cycling) may be repeating the city’s own history.

2.2 Introduction to Chapter 2

My focus in this chapter is to show that Ottawa has been both designed to be and is currently experienced as a car-centric place.¹ The car-centric features of this place make expectations of my participants for how they move within it, essentially

¹ I take up the term “car centrality” rather than “car friendliness” because in my interpretation it more succinctly captures the general relationship that my participants seemed to recognize between themselves, their cars, and the City of Ottawa: a relationship of expectation rather than option.

normalizing car ownership and use and making other forms of mobility seem disadvantageous. Low density neighbourhood zoning, a plethora of attractive green spaces outside of the urban area, and painful experiences of public transit are key aspects of the city's infrastructure which contribute to this situation. In this chapter, I put history in conversation with the present by examining the 1950 city planning report drafted by Jaques Gréber (the modernist/functionalist architect and city planner who has had arguably the most significant impact on the city's shape and growth) in the context of my participants' experiences of moving around in the city. I argue that the physical capacities of this modernist city play a tremendous role in its car centrality but that this cannot explain it entirely. The non-physical (i.e., non-infrastructure) dimensions of the city are the subject of subsequent chapters.

In this chapter, I discuss the many places and spaces of car-ness in the city. I deploy "place" and "space" as a dyadic concept based on the well-accepted convergence of writings by authors like Tim Ingold, Yi-Fu Tuan, and Christopher Tilley. Places are constructed through people's experience, feelings, and thoughts. Feelings and experiences of belonging, meaning, and function, are endowed and shared through relations of kinship, community and practice which shape the meaning and interpretation of geographic locations (or more specifically any arrangements of space) (Tuan 1977). Spaces, in contrast, are spheres of resources created artificially for a particular purpose. The relationship between them is, as Yi-Fu Tuan writes, "if we think of space as that which allows movement then place is pause; each pause in movement makes it possible for location to be transformed into place...When space becomes familiar to us, it becomes place" (Tuan 1977, 6). How my participants experience the

city is, roughly speaking, as a contiguous set of places and spaces, each of them salient and conceptually bounded by a qualitative sense of difference created through experience and discourse. Roads serve as spaces and vehicles as places in their own right, or they may act as extensions of destinations. Yet despite this, the city is also recognized as a discrete place. Not purely administratively, but again qualitatively by my participants as a place of its own unique character composed of so many other real places and spaces. This is what Tuan would call a kind of “mythical space” - an extrapolation or projection about the character, quality, or nature of a place by virtue of experiencing some part or parts of it (Tuan 1977, 91).

Throughout the remainder of this dissertation, I introduce additional complexifying factors which contribute to framing the way people feel about their own capacity to be mobile. I use Foucault’s conceptualization of normalization in *Discipline and Punish* (1975): forms of coercion concerned with what people have not done (non-observance), a person’s failure to reach required standards, and the distributed schemata of constraints used to discipline them such as timetables, compulsory movements, good habits, and infrastructures (Foucault 1975, 128-130). For my participants, mobility has been normalized as something which is timely, reliable, consistent, regular, flexible, and personal. It is not Ottawa as a place (or series of places) alone which does this, but it is created by the intersecting factors that I explore in this chapter (and subsequent ones): in the interaction between place, people, economic entanglements, social responsibilities, cultural values, and ideological motivations. These factors constitute what Cresswell has called *a constellation of movement*, “a fragile entanglement of physical movement, representations, and

practices” (Cresswell 2006, 17-18). I start with the city itself in this chapter, the “place”, to ground larger and more abstract dimensions of the meaning of cars. Similarly, these categories I raise above are not neat and tidy categories, they often overlap in the excerpts from my interview transcripts that I have selected to include. The excerpts I have included from my interactions with participants reflect what I interpret to be the reality of the entangled nature of these factors in the experience of these constellations of movement.

Throughout this chapter (and this dissertation) it is important to acknowledge that how my participants frame the necessity of the car is relative. For my car-owning participants, I had some difficulty discerning how hyperbolic the statement of need or necessity was. It was clear to me in some interviews that framing the car as a need was a purely linguistic exercise meant to stress the relative importance of the car to their lives. For others, however, I believe that the statement of need was not hyperbole, but an honest commentary about the feeling of being unable to proceed in their lives as they did without continued access to and use of a car. I raise this point here because of the way some of my participants in this chapter sometimes talk about a desperate need to be able to “escape” the city, or the way they feel the city itself makes it impossible to be without a car.

Lastly, as far as the structure of this chapter is concerned, I first discuss the concept of perceived affordance and its relevance to my participant’s commentary on the city as a built environment that implies, or even necessitates certain forms of movement. I then explore the history of Ottawa’s modernist city planning, a legacy and philosophy which prescribes a “right way” to manage the flows and wellbeing of a

population which is tied inextricably to automobiles. Following this, I shift to a more contemporary look at how this legacy is experienced today by my participants and elaborate on the connection between what was designed to be experienced, and how it is experienced in practice. Lastly, I briefly touch on the contemporary city planning approach from 2020 into the future and question the rationale of the 15-minute neighbourhood (the city's new planning theme), as something which may be inevitably repeating city planning history.

2.3 Perceived Affordances for Car Ownership and Use

In August 2019, I walked a few blocks to meet Samantha, a mid-20s computer engineer, at a nearby cafe not far from Bronson Avenue and Gladstone Avenue. We were situated just north of highway 417 and south of the downtown core of the city by only a few blocks, nestled between “Little Italy” to the west and “Chinatown” to the east (within an official neighbourhood called West Centertown). Despite this proximity to the downtown core and its relatively large commercial high-rises, the environment of these streets is, to me, a bizarre mix of residential single homes, low-rise apartment buildings, a handful of high-rise apartment buildings and about ten different automotive body shops interspersed with a variety of other commercial establishments (mostly takeout restaurants, a gas station, and convenience stores). Every time I walk in this area, I make a passing comment to myself on the impossibility of this many auto body repair shops being sustained in such a tiny area. City buses pass frequently down both Bronson and Gladstone, shuttling pedestrians from north to south and east to west, respectively. Both streets are generally four lanes wide, ostensibly providing ample room for traffic and at only specific times, city-controlled parking.

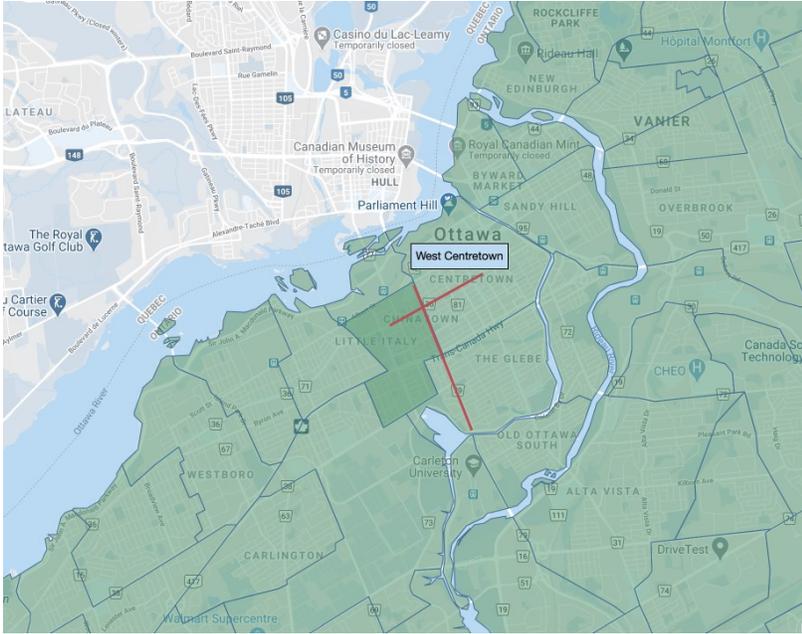


Image Left: the intersection of Bronson Street (vertical) and Gladstone (horizontal), in West Centertown. www.neighbourhoodstudy.ca

About halfway through my conversation with Samantha we started to talk about the city of Ottawa as a setting, and about how the features of the city (particularly

compared to other cities) made it feel so much more advantageous to own a car. She mentioned, or actually interrupted me, with this after I started to tell her that the scope of my project was mainly around understanding why urban residents continued to own cars. I had started to say, "Well, one of the things that made me so curious about owning a car in the city is that if you live in the city, there's kind of largely no reason to have a car if you think about it economically. Parking is expensive-". Samantha interrupted, "in most cities I would agree with you. I think Ottawa's too car friendly". I clarified, "You think Ottawa's too car friendly?":

Samantha: Yeah. 100%.

Tyler: Compared to?

Samantha: Compared to Montreal, compared to Vancouver. I think we've probably talked about this with [my partner] as well, where we're just like, "Ottawa is not a dense enough city." Everybody who's here in the middle of downtown has a driveway, and I say that being totally cognizant of the fact that we also have a driveway. But we're coming from Montreal, where you see townhomes that are stacked, stacked, stacked, stacked, stacked. You're like, "Look at this. Look at how many people are out [walking] in the

street around you every single day." And here you're like, "It's a ghost town." That's because everyone drives to where they're going, then they park and they do their thing, then they drive home, where they park in their driveway that they have. I just think Ottawa, especially because of the way that it's kind of just sprawled without needing to go up - sprawling horizontally rather than vertically...I think Ottawa is too car friendly.

The notion that Ottawa was a city that favoured personal car use was something that emerged in other conversations I had with participants. For example, in my conversation with Claire, a young public servant. She told me that Ottawa's car centricity (not friendliness) is one of the reasons she refuses to cycle on roads (where bicycles are mandated to travel by municipal Bylaw in the absence of bike-dedicated lanes):

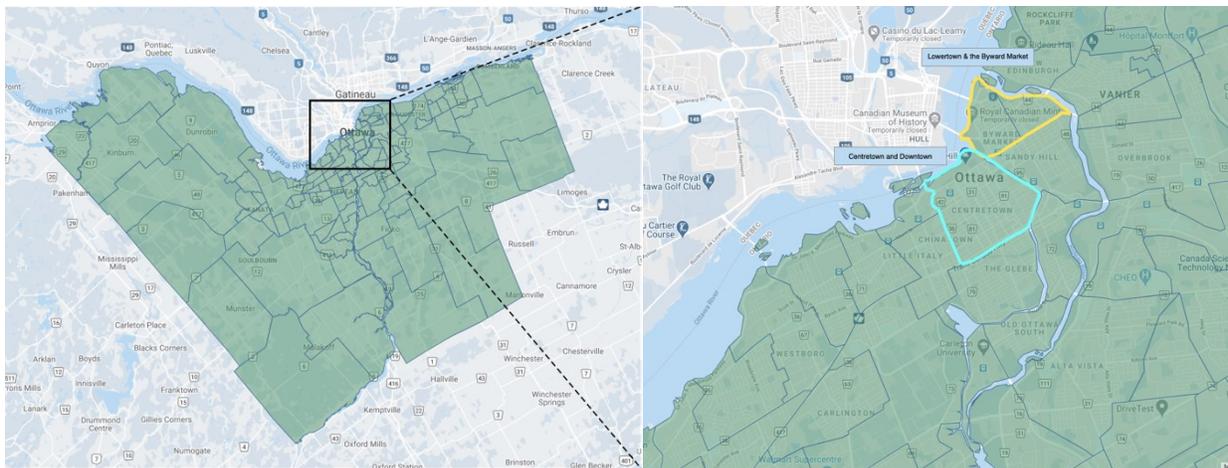
Claire: I'm not an experienced biker, and I feel like even if you are it's just inherently dangerous. You can get doored or... Yeah, and Ottawa is just so car-centric. Even as a pedestrian I constantly have to watch. Like today, someone almost turned right into me even though I had the right of way as a pedestrian. So, I feel like on a bike it would be even more dangerous 'cause you're moving faster. So yeah, I don't feel like that's very safe, if I had to bike in traffic a lot.

Tyler: Why do you feel that Ottawa is very car-centric?

Claire: Just so much... So many cars. I feel like rush hour starts at 2:00 PM here. It's noticeably busy from 2:00 PM or 3:00 PM, onward. It's just the nature of the city is very sprawling. There are so many communities within Ottawa that still make up Ottawa. I feel like the main employer, which is the government, that contributes to it as well because most people are going to the same area. It's either usually downtown Ottawa or Hull. So, it's a very small area that people are commuting to, versus spread out across the larger city. Yeah. I just feel people love their cars here. And it's also a very family-oriented community. So usually, if you're a young family, you have kids, you have a car along with that. If you live in Kanata or Barrhaven, I don't think you could survive without a car. So, it just comes with the territory.

My participants' feelings about Ottawa's car-centricity were frequently brought up with commentary about horizontal sprawl of Ottawa's many suburbs, and the general lack of the same kind of urban density of housing that can be found in other large

Canadian cities (namely Montreal, Vancouver, and Toronto) which might disincline residents in downtown areas towards personal car ownership. The attributable conditions varied between my participants, but examples include: Ottawa is more family oriented; Ottawa transit over-indexes on the commuting behaviours of government workers going from suburbs to downtown and neglects everyone else; Ottawa is made of a convergence of multiple smaller townships and so naturally it sprawls; residents of Ottawa just enjoy cars more than residents living in other places.



Images above: City of Ottawa municipal boundary in green (left), compared to roughly the downtown area specifically, with Centertown and Lowertown highlighted (right). Sourced from neighbourhoodstudy.ca

Geographically, Ottawa is objectively “sprawling”. Today the city comprises approximately 114 neighbourhoods. The oldest areas of the city are today known as Lowertown and the Byward Market, located near the intersections of the canal and the Rideau and Ottawa rivers. Historically, the second most significant part of the city lies west of the canal, today comprising the neighbourhoods of Centertown and Downtown, where Canada’s Parliamentary buildings are located, along with numerous federal government headquarters.

Today, the city extends considerably further in every direction, as over the last 70 years (since approximately 1950) the city has amalgamated and annexed the former cities of Gloucester, Nepean, and Westboro, following further annexation of the former village of Rockcliffe Park and Vanier, and the communities of Blackburn Hamlet, Orléans, Cumberland and Kanata. On January 1, 2001, a total of 11 municipalities combined to form what is today the City of Ottawa (administratively doubling the population of the city overnight). The current City of Ottawa spans 2,760 square kilometers, larger than the square kilometrage of Vancouver, Calgary, Edmonton, Toronto, and Montreal, while equaling just 13% of the combined total population of those other cities (City of Ottawa 2020). This is partly because of the inclusion of several rural communities in the 2001 amalgamation, including Manotick and Riverside South which are located on the other side of the Rideau River; Greely located southeast of Riverside South; and a number of rural communities lying beyond the “greenbelt” (a section of grassland and wetlands which sits between the city of Ottawa and its satellite suburbs) (City of Ottawa 2020). In combination, these factors (sprawl and low density) are interpreted by my participants as the common-sense justification for continued car ownership and use within the city: many of the city’s features afford a car centric lifestyle to its residents. Because of this, I choose to interpret the effect of the experience of the city on attitudes and practices of car ownership through the theoretical lens of *perceived affordances* (Norman 1998).

The concept of perceived affordances can be traced through designer and design theorist Don Norman. For Norman, an affordance refers to “the perceived and actual properties of a thing, primarily those fundamental properties that determine just

how a given thing could possibly be used” (Norman 1998, 9). Perceived affordances communicate the possible and probable operations of things to those who interact with them. As Norman puts it, regarding the design of everyday things like doors: “[door] plates are for pushing, [door] knobs are for turning. Slots are for inserting things into. Balls are for throwing or bouncing. When affordances are taken advantage of, the user knows what to do just by looking: no picture, label, or instruction is needed” (Norman 2013, 9). Essentially, in theory of design, the interactions that are desired between people and things are afforded into those things through their physical design and construction: design signals intended use.

This theory in design was predicated on the ecological theory of affordances coined by Gibson, whose usage of the term suits an environmental (rather than object-focused) analysis more effectively: “the affordances of the environment are what it offers the animal, what it provides or furnishes, either for good or ill” (Gibson 1979, 119). For Gibson, “affordances of the environments are facts of the environment, not appearances” (1977, 60), and this is where Don Norman’s approach differs from Gibson. For Norman, things can have perceived affordances which are subjective, contextual, and based on prior experience of the world (Norman 2013). In Norman’s use of the term, what is afforded to an animal (or in this case a person) depends on at least two things: the ability of the person to perceive the affordance physically (using their senses) and the social and cultural conditioning of the person to interpret what it senses as a means of doing something meaningful.

Reframing this within an anthropological perspective, affordances are physical *signs*, in line with the theorization of C.S. Peirce (Buchler 2000). Affordances are the

product of human interpretations of the features of an object or an environment which can still follow categorizations such as index, icon, or symbol. For example, a door handle or plate is an index - a sign that shows evidence of the interaction by means of an experience referenced through brute, causal or existential means (Buchler 2000, 60).

I choose to use this theory of perceived affordances for two reasons. One is because Ottawa has in fact been *designed* to project a kind of car-centricity in its topography since the mid-1930s when French architect and urban planner Jacques Gréber was personally selected by then Prime Minister Mackenzie King to lead the planning and design of several notable landmarks in Ottawa. In this way, the affordance is a *designerly* top-down lens through which to view how intention translates into how people symbolically construct and interact with the city today. The second reason the lens of the affordance is valuable here is because it simultaneously subverts any attempts to reduce car centricity to sheer physicality and materiality or to a top-down only analysis. It does this by always forcing a consideration of the real social, cultural, and psychological factors at play in a subject's interpretation of, and interaction with, their environment and anything in it. In this way, perceived affordances become the connection between the intended and the actual, the conceptual and the concrete, as well as the historical and the present.

2.4 The Modernist History of Ottawa

The long-term importance and impact of Gréber's planning and design of Ottawa in 1950 cannot be overstated, as Miguelez (a practicing director of urban planning with the City of Ottawa and academic) writes in *Transforming Ottawa: Canada's Capital in*

*the Eyes of Jacques Gréber*² (Miguelez 2017, 59): Gréber was “armed with the mandate to prepare a plan for the entire National Capital Region”, he worked to document the region’s history and evaluate the proposals and considerations of previous city planning reports. Gréber’s first work in the capital started in 1936 with Ottawa’s Parliamentary District, including the War Memorial, Confederation Square, and the Supreme Court, and his work continued into 1950 and beyond when a complete and comprehensive plan for Ottawa as the capital of Canada was authored and put in motion (Miguelez 2017, 53-57). He outlined the planning challenges as he saw them; a lack of city zoning, the replacement of a railway system with a system of zoned roads to support better traffic circulation and automobile-dominated traffic, and the creation of even more open spaces (space reserved for natural beauty and leisure). He was mainly concerned with advancing proposals and recommendations which embodied principles of High Modernism and Functionalism that were, at the time, the main reference for urban planning and architecture (Scott 1998). These principles reflected a confidence in science and technology to order the social and natural world, and that the built environment could channel and convey this order as a function of design. As a result, the city changes that came with the Gréber plan have been those that most changed Ottawa since it was founded in 1826 as “Bytown”. The plan made it the first Canadian city to have such a deliberate Modernist design and “essentially set in motion sooner than elsewhere the dynamics of urban sprawl, separation of land uses, priority to automobiles in roadway design, and use of the idea of green space to legitimize the

² I rely heavily on Miguelez in this chapter because he is one of the few academics writing about the city in this context, and his area of specialization brings an important perspective.

profound transformations brought upon the city (in a way, its de-urbanization)” (Miguelez 2017, 59).

Jacques Gréber’s approach to designing the city was also heavily influenced by the urban planning principles set out in the Charter of Athens, a set of architecture and urban planning principles adopted in 1933 by the Congrès International d’Architecture Moderne (CIAM), which focused on “embracing the modern challenges and opportunities of new technologies, especially the car” (Miguelez 2017, 42). Though the charter was concerned with improving urban sanitation, increasing sunlight and fresh air in urban areas, and generally reducing the density of cities, its main principles were to separate the city’s functions from one another (residence, commerce, industry, and leisure), to separate automobiles from pedestrians, facilitating the free flow of automobile traffic and creating a sort of hierarchy of streets which would give priority to automobile traffic. As Miguelez writes in *Transforming Ottawa*, “the Charter is a clear reaction against the industrial age city and challenges associated with it...By design or by unintended consequence, the [charter] introduced the type of segregated-use urban sprawl that all cities now have at their edges and enshrined the supremacy of the automobile in the transportation philosophy of urban planning” (Miguelez 2017, 43).

Gréber’s approach can be explored in a similar vein to Scott’s investigation of the architectural and urban planning work of Le Corbusier (Scott 1998). Like Le Corbusier, Gréber was highly influenced by the design trends of his native home of France and the mid-century turn to modernism - the idea that the science would give us mastery over ourselves, that people and society constituted an object, which could be a target of power and organizational efforts that would lead to their perfection or optimization. The

high modernists like Le Corbusier were primarily preoccupied with achieving functional efficiency through formal geometric simplicity, marrying the inventions and practices of the machine age with logical order (Scott 1998, 106). As Le Corbusier put it: “We claim, in the name of the steamship, the airplane, and the automobile, the right to health, logic, daring, harmony, perfection” (Le Corbusier 1967³, 322). As Scott writes about modernism’s influence in city planning, “the straight line, the right angle, and the imposition of international building standards were all determined steps in the direction of simplification. Perhaps the most decisive step, however, was...strict functional separation.” (Scott 1998, 109). According to Scott, the standardization and segregation of functions across the city (housing, roads, etc.) appeared in writings by the CIAM as early as 1928 (Scott 1998, 109).

The Gréber proposal, titled *Plan for the National Capital – 1950*, contains two major sections of proposed changes (which were largely followed through with) which I focus on here given their importance to a discussion of the city’s car centrality: changes regarding the city’s public transportation infrastructure, and changes regarding city zoning and road infrastructure.

2.5 2700 Square Kilometers, 900 Buses

The shift from rail transport to road transport was a key component of Gréber’s plans for the city, literally what Gréber referred to as the “key of the whole plan” (Gréber 1950, 165). This was true both in the emphasis on road widenings and the creation of

³ *The Radiant City: Elements of a Doctrine of Urbanism to be Used as the Basis of Our Machine-age Civilization* was originally published in 1933.

new arterial roadways like the Queensway highway (Highway 417), but also within the core of the city, replacing streetcars with busses as the predominant form of public transit and relocating the central train station of the city from downtown to several kilometers away. “In order to combat and alleviate the increasing traffic congestion in central areas of the city”, Gréber’s report reads on page 222, “certain existing streetcar routes obviously must be rerouted and in instances, eliminated, their replacement by bus lines being particularly recommended where routes traverse narrow thoroughfares accommodating heavy general traffic”. Gréber’s thinking in this respect was consistent with the fixations of the Athens Charter on aesthetics, function, and circulation. Gréber’s recommendations here were also taken up in relatively short order; Gréber laid his plans in 1950, and the complete streetcar service of Ottawa was discontinued in 1959.

These proposed changes came about despite Gréber’s survey of the area and previous city plans/reports showing generally positive towards the public transit within the city, remarking on its ample coverage of high traffic areas. At the time of the report twelve transit operators operated within the National Capital Region and Gréber’s main concerns were around the congestion of transit lines around Confederation Square, an area which is now dominated by the war memorial at the northern end of Elgin Street. Today, there is one city run transit operator for the massive city, OC Transpo, although several private bus lines serve commuting routes between downtown and several satellite townships not part of the city. Additionally, the Société de transport de l’Outaouais serves as the public transit provider within and to Gatineau.

Migueluez offers us a perspective that connects the impacts of the Gréber plan with the present day. On page 260 he writes “reading the report’s eighth chapter is a

fascinating exercise in bafflement at the candor with which automobile movement was given such priority and importance.” Miguelez also writes, however, “...that Gréber is consistent with the prevailing thought of the day, which regarded streetcars as obsolete because of their inability to leave their tracks, while busses could be driven anywhere” (Miguelez 2017, 289). In hindsight, he notes, comparable cities which did not do away with their streetcars (such as Toronto) have shown that contemporary streets are simply congested, whether they are served by busses or streetcars and Ottawa is no exception to this (Miguelez 2017, 290). The flexibility of busses and their lack of permanence has also, according to Miguelez, been shown in Ottawa’s history as a target for budgetary cuts, resulting in severe ridership declines.

While for Gréber the expansion of busses and replacement of rail with road was supposed to allow for greater circulation of traffic and greater efficiency, for my participants the experience and perception of today’s OC Transpo reifies the boundaries of the city’s places and increases the sense of distance between them. This stood out to me in my interview with Claire. As someone who had lived in most of the large Canadian cities that my other participants often used as reference points for comparably efficient and reliable public transportation (Vancouver, Montreal, Toronto), Claire mentioned to me how surprised she was to experience reliability issues with public transit in a city like Ottawa, as she put it: “I’d say Ottawa’s unique in that it has this weird thing with buses where they’re just not reliable, and they just don’t show up. So, I haven’t encountered that anywhere else. It seems strange to me that it’s one of the biggest cities in Canada, it’s the capital of Canada, and we just have this weird issue with bus reliability. So, it definitely stands out to me.” Claire (like others) explained she

felt that this unreliability was because of the focus of public transportation on suburb-to-downtown commuter transit routes, primarily for government office workers at the expense of other routes or travel habits.

As an experience, for Claire and many of my other participants, the bus seemed to make distances feel elongated because of the way that routes are programmed the rest of the day: “I feel like the bus, it’s okay for going downtown because it’s pretty express. But, like once you get into the more suburban, longer routes, it’s just stopping constantly. I feel like it stops every two minutes, so it just adds so much time. I went out to Ikea on the bus once. I thought that would be a good idea, and it took the whole day to get there, go to Ikea, and go back”.

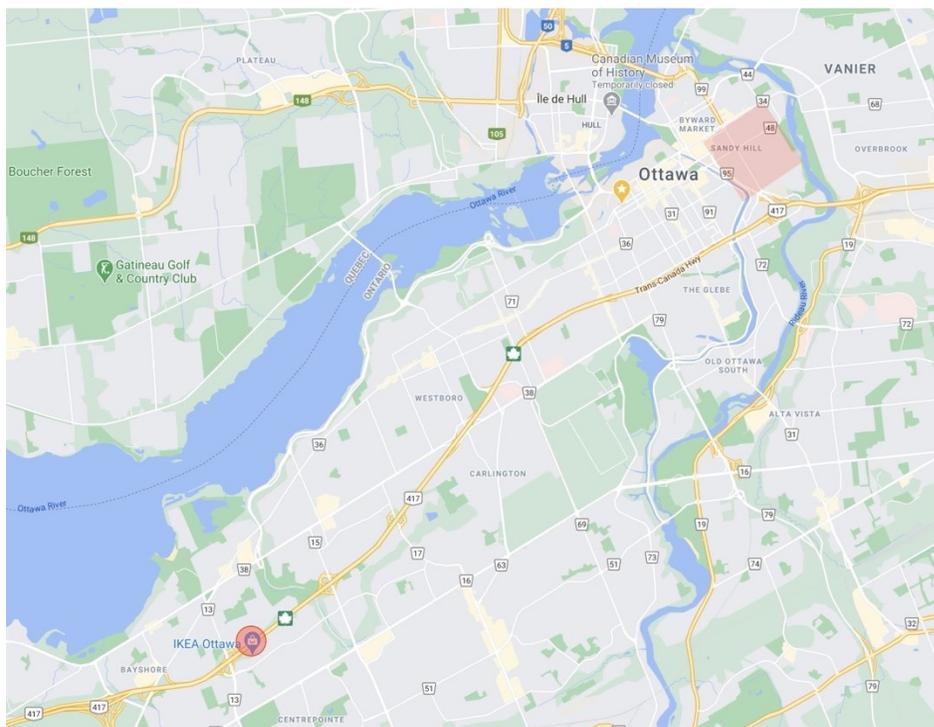


Image left: Map of Ottawa (Google Maps 2020), highlighting the neighbourhood of Sandy Hill where Claire lives (top right) and the Ikea in Ottawa (bottom left). According to Google Maps trip planner, this journey takes approximately 20 minutes by car, and over 1 hour by bus (on a Tuesday at 11am in the month of May, 2020).

Of course, the experience of “express” downtown routes was not a familiar experience for all my participants. For example, another of my participants, Melanie, decided it was better for her to bicycle even in the dead of winter than wait in anguish

for the bus to show up. It was winter in fact when I spoke with her over video call, and she regaled me with stories of public transit frustration in trying to get downtown even from the nearby East-Ottawa neighbourhood of Vanier:

Tyler: How do you find [the quality of] the buses in Ottawa?

Melanie: So, that's the reason I'm biking this winter, is because they were so bad last winter. There were times last winter where I chose to walk home [from work], which is 55 minutes to over an hour, because I was sitting on the bus for 20 minutes and we hadn't even moved a block. It wasn't even snowing. [chuckle] And more so when I was up in the Beechwood area, they would be full when they arrived. You would wait 45 minutes for a bus, it would come by, and it was full, so they wouldn't let anyone on. But even on better days in the winter, when I would be able to get on the bus, it was like jam-packed sardines, and then three stops later other people wouldn't be able to get on. On a good day, in the summer, if nothing's wrong, it's probably half an hour for me by bus, but it's 15 minutes for me to bike. So [biking] isn't that bad. I stay upright, just dress fine, and you're not sardined with 50, 60 people sneezing and snotting and coughing everywhere. [chuckle]

Public transit, or the perceived lack of transit efficiency, is also one of the reasons that the Gatineau-Hull region remains both physically and mentally “partitioned” from the rest of the city for many of my participants. For example, two of my participants, Amber and William, both commented on Gatineau-Hull as a difficult place to live in because of the configuration of transportation both public and shared (i.e., Uber):

Amber: Transportation is nearly impossible. Public transit is good if you go further north and follow one of the main commuter routes. I understand there's the Rapibus system which is quite direct where buses actually have their own route. But we don't live on that route. As I mentioned, we're kind of in this little no-man's land where we're just close enough to downtown Ottawa that we can walk but it's 45 minutes, or you drive. Uber [ridesharing] also won't come here because the Ontario ones aren't allowed and they're very scarce. So, if you don't have a car you have to take a cab which is prohibitively expensive, and even some of them won't go to the Ontario side. When we came here, we also knew there weren't a lot of grocery

stores or options nearby. So, when we moved to the Quebec side that's when we got a car.

William: To go places that aren't available on transit, so anything outside of Ottawa proper or just downtown. Even to go to Gatineau Park, there's no public transit that takes you to the overlook, or to get to my dad's in the Laurentians, there's no public transit there either. Even to get to, say, Buckingham at the easternmost part of the Gatineau, it would take an hour and a half and two buses, there'd have to be a transfer to get there, and then I'd still have 100 kilometers to do with no public transit available.

Public transit is something which I would hear about again and again from my participants, in the context of frustration with lateness, unreliability, general unpleasantness and even anxiety and concerns for safety. For example, one of my participants told me that in one particular year, the deaths caused by OC Transpo were so high he decided to buy a car: "It wasn't worth the risk anymore", he said "I had to do it." I never validated his claim⁴, but it was a sentiment that seemed to indicate a general awareness and apprehensiveness of the reputation of OC Transpo which now negates any possibility of it being perceived as anything but terrible. This is a perception, regardless of the direct experience my participants shared, that further reinforces the mental positioning of the car (or in cases of shorter distances, anything but public transit) as the better choice for most transportation needs.

The feelings expressed by my participants seem representative of the general experience in Ottawa. Looking at transit usage statistics, the average amount of time

⁴ I did investigate newspaper reporting on OC Transpo related deaths reported by the Canadian Broadcast Corporation, and although my participant was vague about the specific year that this had occurred, OC Transpo busses were reported to have caused injuries and even deaths to a number of people on half a dozen occasions between 1988 and 2004 (roughly in line with my participant's story).

people spend commuting with public transit in Ottawa, to and from work on a weekday, is 84 minutes and nearly one-third (30.5%) of public transit riders ride for more than 2 hours every day. By comparison, the average commute time on public transit in Toronto is 52 minutes and 28% ride for more than 2 hours per day. The average amount of time people wait at a stop or station for public transit in Ottawa is 13 minutes (12 minutes in Toronto), while 20.1% of riders wait for over 20 minutes on average every day (15% in Toronto). The average distance people usually ride in a single trip with public transit is 7.8 km (8.8 km in Toronto), while 18% travel for over 12 km in a single direction in Ottawa (21% in Toronto) (Moovit Insights 2017; Ottawa 2017).

Table 1. Proportion of commuters, by select main mode of transportation for Ottawa-Gatineau Census Metropolitan Area (Statistics Canada 2016).

<i>Mode of transportation</i>	Percent
Automobile	60%
Public Transit	18.3%
Carpooling	13%
Walking	6.3%
Cycling	2.4%
Total	100%

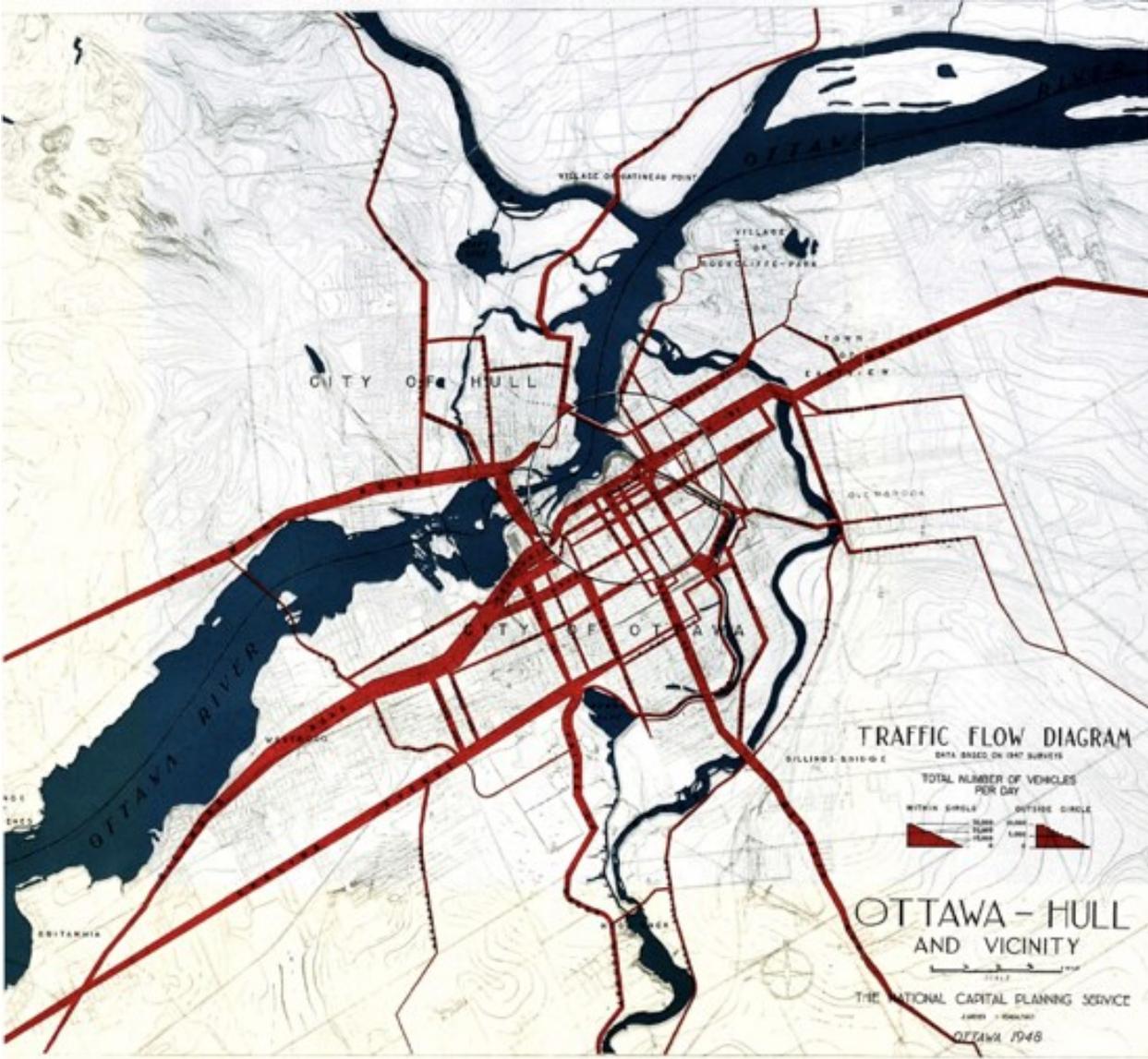
2.6 Modern Spaces and Places

Another of the Gréber plan's lasting (and perhaps most significant) impacts on the city was the combined effect of introducing strict city zoning regulations and the emphasis on automobile traffic infrastructure which connected them, namely road creation and road widening. As Gréber introduces in his report plan, solving the "railway problem" provided "opportunity for the *reorganization of traffic circulation generally*" (Gréber 1950, 160, original emphasis). Removing railways would open spaces for the provision of a new system of arteries and parkways of varying widths (based on the amount and speed of the automobile traffic they were intended to support). This would result, in Gréber's view, in "inestimable advantages in the amelioration and systemization of all traffic movements within the interior of and around the urban zone" (Gréber 1950, 160). Today, a number of significant roadways (Confederation Boulevard, and the Queensway Highway, among others) form the skeleton of the city and the main pieces of mobility infrastructure oriented towards automobile use, establishing the primary and secondary routes for cross-town traffic.

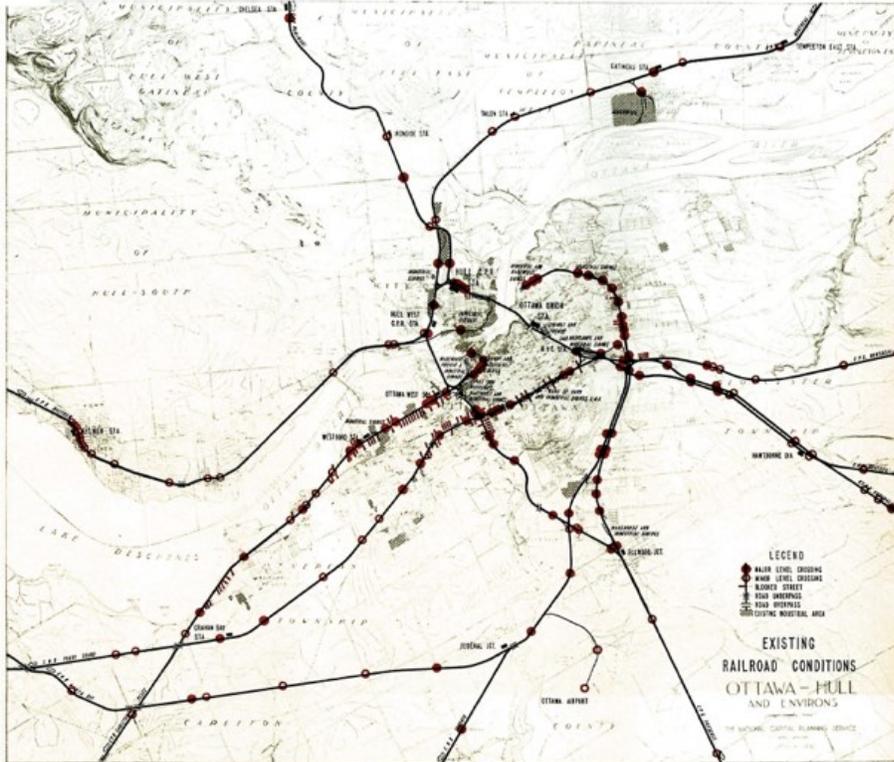
As a matter of fact, the skeleton metaphor is not far off from the truth of how Gréber might have imagined what he was doing to the city. As Logan (2015) has explored at length in his study of urban planning and automobility, circulation was a key metaphor through which modernist urbanism was understood because it referenced both the movement of traffic (in French, *circulation*) and the flow of blood in the body. This idea of circulation was central to the modernization of the city - the city was a body suffering ill and the urban planner was seen as the surgeon seeing to its amelioration. Logan writes, "the history of urban planning can be traced back to the idea that the city is a body, sometimes healthy, at other times sick and in need of a cure" (Logan 2015,

93). Sun, fresh air and light, greater sanitation and lower density housing dictated the architecture of modern urbanism and was a key component of the functionalist movement, but to the modern urbanists of CIAM it was above all about maintaining the constant flow of people and vehicles. Scott takes this point further, claiming that for architects and urban planners like Le Corbusier, planning the city was a utopian mission motivated by a “patriarchal authority” and motivated by the “scientific” determination and satisfaction of human needs (Scott 1998, 114-115). This approach and influence is also evident in the language used by Gréber in his chapter of the planning report titled “circulation”. High traffic routes are “arteries”, the system of traffic is called the “circulatory system”, and it is drawn like an anatomical diagram. This gives us some insight into how Gréber thought about the role of the automobile in the modern city: analogous to a red blood cell.

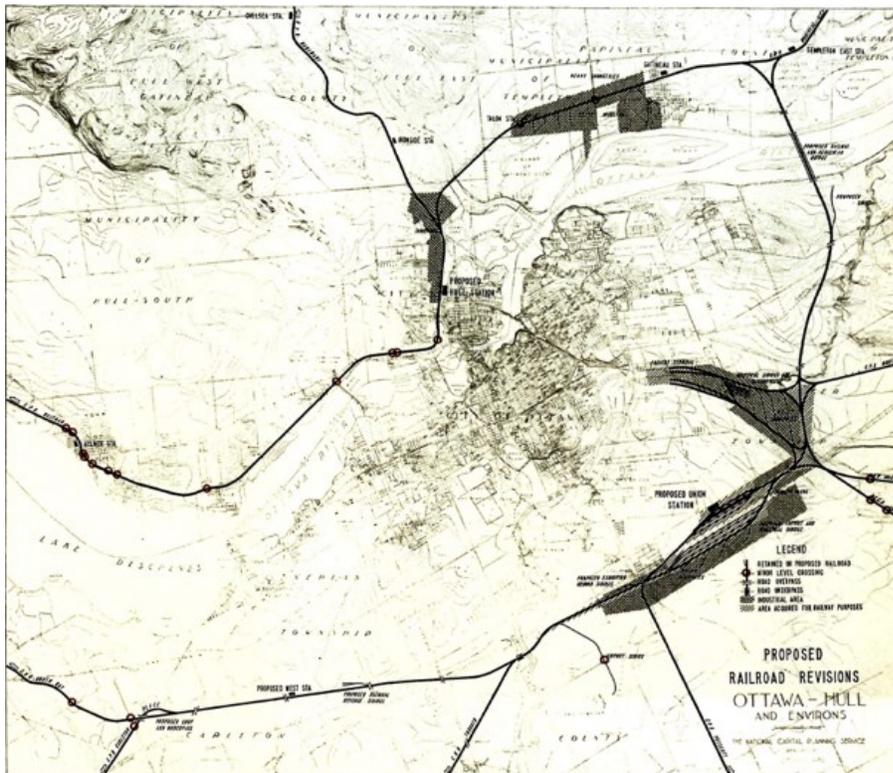
Image below: taken from Gréber's proposal in 1950 illustrating the circulatory system of the city of Ottawa as it was surveyed. Higher traffic areas are thicker and redder than lower-traffic routes.

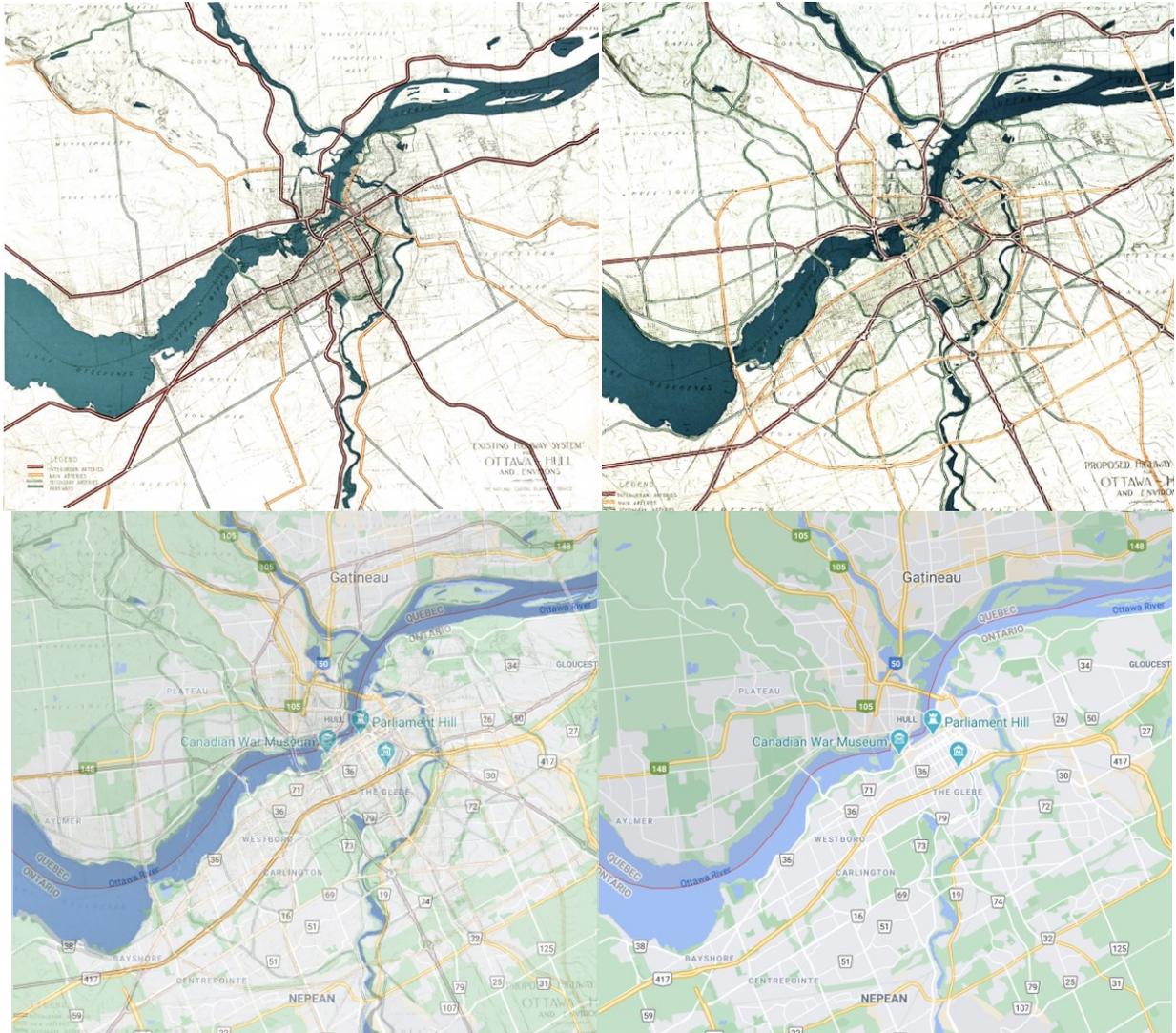


THIS ILLUSTRATION CAN BE REALIZED THE DEGREE OF CONCENTRATION IN THE TRAFFIC ATION, THE CONGESTED CONDITION OF CERTAIN ARTERIES, AND THE EVIDENT DEFICIENCIES CIRCULATORY SYSTEM, NOTABLY IN THAT WHICH CONCERNS THE EAST-WEST ARTERIES.



Images left: side by side comparison of Ottawa's rail system in 1945 where black lines indicate rails and red squares indicate rail crossings (top) and the proposed rail system in Gréber's plan (bottom), showing the relocation of the downtown station to six kilometers south-east of the city (dark grey area).



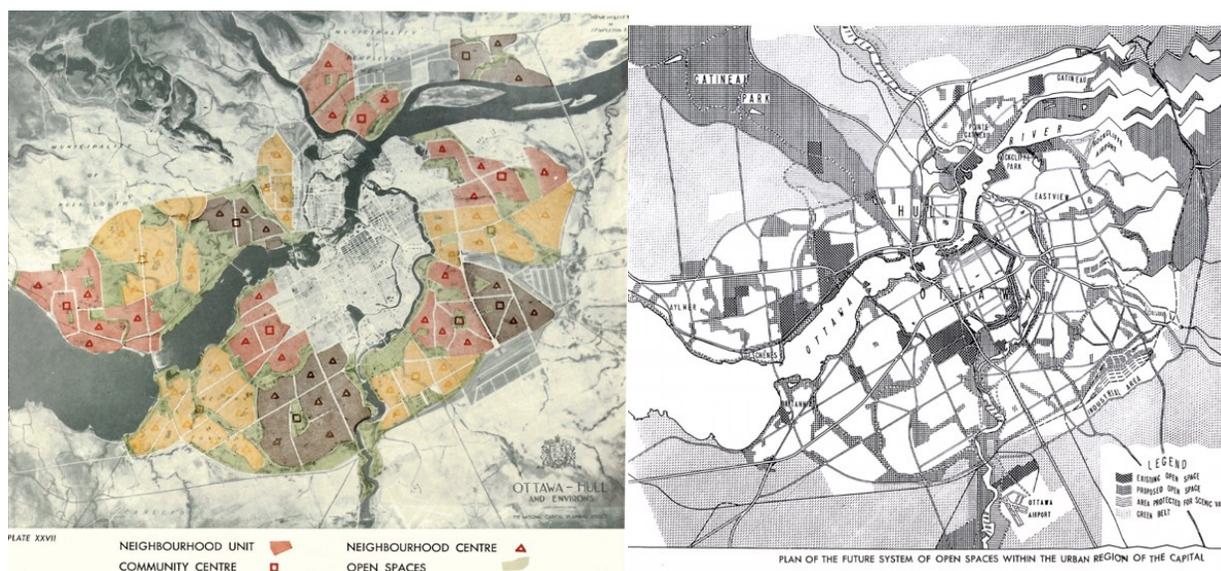


Top left: map of Ottawa included in the survey portion of the Gréber report indicating interurban (red) and main (yellow) traffic arteries in 1945; top right: map of Ottawa included in the *proposal* section of Gréber's plan showcasing planned expansions to interurban and main arteries; bottom left: overlapping maps of Ottawa today (Google Maps 2020) and Gréber's proposed expansions; bottom right: Ottawa's roadways today (Google Maps 2020) with major highways and avenues in yellow. Note in the comparison between Gréber's proposal and the contemporary map available on Google Maps: roadways which were completed and which now form the transportation skeleton of Ottawa: the main 417 Queensway running west/east, route 79 of the airport parkway (partially completed) running north/south, route 32 running to the south of the urban area through the greenbelt, route 16 running east/west along the border of the urban area south of the city, and additional scenic parkways in the north east (Vanier/Rockcliffe), north west (Brittania Bay) and south west (Nepean), and a pair of one-way streets downtown (Albert and Slater). Things notably not completed from Gréber's proposal: additional interprovincial river crossings near Britannia Bay (west), and Gloucester (east).

Throughout Chapter Seven in his report, Gréber identifies zoning as one of the major problems to be solved in his new plans for the city. As part of the Gréber plan, new traffic arteries and roadways would supply traffic to a series of these utilitarian zones (in keeping with the principles of the Athens Charter around designating specific areas of a city for specific functions - residential, commercial, industrial, etc.). As Gréber puts it, the intention was to create “complete, self-contained” community areas and separate them from the spaces designated for traffic and movement, while at the same time placing greater and greater restrictions on population density the further one moves away from the city core. Gréber saw this mode of urban organization as an antidote from what he saw as “districts lacking the elements of community life and suffering the major detriment of necessitating interminable and superfluous daily traffic movements” (Gréber 1950, 65). These changes to zoning are rationalized by Gréber as part of an effort to address what were seen as “insufficient accommodations,” “doubled up families” and “sub-normal standards and conditions” of sanitation and well-being regarding the city’s housing. All of which are reported conditions that he attributes to the city’s “lack of foresight and regulation” and “lack of zoning” (Gréber 1950, 65).

For Gréber, Ottawa would be a city of self-contained residential neighbourhoods, providing the residents with access to amenities of commerce and relaxation, limiting daily displacement and movement of citizens, in turn effectively ameliorating traffic concerns (density, speed, proximity to residences). In general, Gréber hoped that his work would improve the whole of social life, restoring (at least as he saw it) the economic and social advantages with which the outlying new neighbourhood units were endowed (Gréber 1950, 196). This is evident in the manner that Gréber devised the city

zones, establishing within each neighbourhood an “improved” grouping of places of work, business, public assembly, religious worship, relaxation, and what he called “intellectual and physical education”. He also notes that by introducing city zoning, the “daily displacements of people will be advantageously reduced”, resulting in a “general amelioration of traffic circulation and the suppression of congested and hazardous traffic conditions”. Gréber also takes this as basically self-evident, stating that “a more adequate distribution of the occupational use of land infallibly brings about a more efficient system of travel movements” (Gréber 1950, 196-197).



Images above: a map of Gréber’s proposed self-contained and self-sufficient neighbourhood zones marked with community centers (left), all of which are no larger than roughly a mile across allowing residents to live, work and play in their own neighbourhoods, minimizing the need for them to travel and congest the city’s roads; a map of Ottawa’s existing and proposed open spaces in 1950 (right).

Gréber comments on “the haphazard manner” in which communities have been allowed to grow and develop, which had been repeatedly brought to attention by the ever-increasing number of “representations” being made to civic officials by citizens for

restrictions against encroachments (Gréber 1950, 202). These encroachments, Gréber writes, took the form of stores, factories, and garages invading residential districts; apartment houses popping up amidst select homes and residential neighbourhoods and being built up to the street and side lot lines where adjoining residences have observed setback lines and preserved front and side yard areas. Gréber saw this as a “disregard of the welfare of community interests... manifestly wrong and socially unjust, wasteful, and disorderly”, a condition which he believed zoning would prevent and gradually correct. He also thought that “industry will be more efficient and living more wholesome, if kept generally separate.” (Gréber 1950, 202).

Part of Gréber’s socially-minded plan for complete and self-contained community zones was “a systematic organization of open spaces, in order that they may best fulfill their regenerative function... predicated upon their functional relationship to the classes of population and their activities.” (163). This also entailed that urban open spaces, wooded reserves and scenic drives would be integrated into this general plan of “*rational exploitation of all the elements of nature*” resulting in a more sanitary, regenerative, pleasant, and aesthetic urban landscape (original emphasis). The result of this concern was the creation of Ottawa’s Greenbelt, along with several interstitial (relatively speaking) greenbelts separating and framing the various neighbourhood units, as well as additional urban parks. Gréber saw this as “essential” to protecting the city and its neighbourhoods from encroachment, incongruous developments and protecting neighbourhoods’ sense of community (Gréber 1950, 204).

Miguellez again helps to contextualize Gréber’s survey assessment and plans for zoning, land use and added road infrastructure. About open spaces (additional parks,

the greenbelts, etc.), Miguelez writes that the ideological imperatives of Gréber's plans trump factual reality. This is evidenced by the fact that Gréber's assessment of Ottawa in 1945 is of a city of parks, gardens, open spaces, driveways within green corridors, home to an arboretum and an experimental farm, yet for some reason needing additional open spaces (2017, 265-266). This ideological concern also seems to be what is most at play in Gréber's imagination of the car's role in the city - a *modern* device suited to ameliorating *circulation*, and therefore city ills. Gréber writes in his report that the plan was somewhat contingent on the fact that Ottawa would remain a small city, serving as a capital and seat of government, not an economic or commercial powerhouse. The open spaces, the greenbelt included, sought to preclude Ottawa's growth into a larger city.

The legacy of these plans is still experienced today: as the movement between "zones" required the car, the car has become part of the means by which those places are made meaningful. While my participants saw the car as a necessity for getting to some places (Gatineau, "beyond the greenbelt", Ikea, places of work, etc.) which were not in their planned zones, their physical use of the car was an act of reinforcing this place-making. The car served as a transitory medium not just for their physical bodies, but also for their mental state. This was raised both in the context of places associated with work and with leisure, and it came up in several separate conversations with my participants.

Tyler: Why do you say that you like a separation between work and home? How does driving give you that?

Fannie: Oh, just because I like to listen to the news or the music and it's relaxing, so you get like a 35-minute break between home and work and a bit of a down time before really starting your day. And you can have some

time to think about what you're going to do and how you're going to get ready for the day and stuff. It's good. I listen to music or podcasts and stuff, so it just gives me that kind of get ready. Coming home, it's just more you can think about work, what you've done, what you need to wrap up, and maybe what you need to do tomorrow, and then just separate it. And then you're at home, and focused, and ready for your home time and then put your day away. I'm only commuting 35 minutes, so it's a nice commute of just no traffic. It's just straight driving, so it's enough to just ... By the time you get in the car, it almost feels like you're home, so it's a good little drive.

Samantha: So, for me, taking the 30 minutes to drive to work and home from work is very much a defusing time for me to be by myself. I don't know about you, but I talk constantly at work, and it is socially exhausting. So, it's nice to have 30 minutes where no one is allowed to talk to me. Well, for me it's because [my partner] doesn't talk to people all day, so when I get home, he's like, "I haven't talked to anybody all day. Let's talk a lot right now." And I'm like, "Oh my god. I've used all of my social currency for the entire month, and it's only the 3rd [of the month]. How are we going to do this?" It's fine because I've come home and I've had at least some time to kind of defuse and relax and just listen to music and feel like I'm in control of where I'm going, even if it's in a straight line and I'm not actually going anywhere because I'm on the 417 and it's at a dead stop because there was an accident or whatever. There's a definitive sense of like, "I can handle things a little bit better if I've had some time." Even if it was stressful traffic time, it was time that I got to be by myself.

Amelia: I find that driving can kinda be like a therapeutic time almost. It's kind of like a... Oh, I can sit in my car. And just think about driving and not really worry about much else like I put on my music, do whatever. And when I worked as a health care aide, there's a lot of stuff that kinda goes on in those environments and situations that kind of leave a funny taste in your mouth. You're like, "Oh I did not like seeing that happen." It can really be unhappy sometimes. So, for me, driving in between clients was my time to think and reflect and kinda just have some personal time to just kind of think about everything that happened, digest it, and then move on with my day, so nothing could keep bothering me, because I know it's necessary, even if it's not ideal. So, it's kinda like that time is just kinda like having some self-reflection and just thinking and being able to turn my brain off and focus on driving and just thinking about whatever I just need to think through. And it's kind of relaxing, in a way, I find.

Another way that the mode of mobility has been integrated into the experience and making of the destination has been through the city's parkway roads – this is undoubtedly a lasting effect of Gréber's plans to create a scenic and aesthetically enjoyable city viewed predominantly from a car. This came up in conversations about sharing a car with another person or group of people to create a more efficient use of time in running errands and to provide access to social activities located outside the city like hiking in the Gatineau hills. As one of my participants put it, about hiking: "If I am driving further out of Ottawa, that is nice. It can be very picturesque, and I enjoy it, but I still feel like I have an end goal in mind, like I'm going to hike somewhere, or check out a little town that's nearby. So, it's not just for the drive, but the drive can be an enjoyable part of it."

2.7 From Gréber to Now: Designing New Affordances

What I have aimed to show in these preceding sections is how, on the one hand, Gréber's designs intended to afford car centrality: by designating and altering streets to ameliorate traffic flows; by eliminating or otherwise relocating existing rail infrastructure; by reconfiguring and emphasizing the aesthetic elements of the city; by zoning areas with strict land use guidelines, etc. On the other hand, the consequences of that legacy have also afforded car centrality, although perhaps not exactly as intended: the unreliability and problematic nature of public transit, the experience of both sprawling city limits and the dislocation of destinations (places of work, leisure, and commerce) from residences, etc. Before returning to a discussion of this combination of intentional and unintentional affordances, there are a few developments since the Gréber plan in the history of Ottawa's city planning which are worth addressing to further contextualize

and refine the profile of Ottawa city mobility for a generative discussion about what we might try to afford in the city moving forward, and to set the context for subsequent chapters of this dissertation.

“With a few decades’ worth of planning cities around that logic [of car centrality], we see how flawed it is” (Miguelez 2017, 272). One flaw he notes is that the pedestrian has been completely absent from the entire discussion, both in Gréber’s plans and in the developments following Gréber’s plans (up until about the most recent iteration of the City of Ottawa’s *New Official Plan*). Everyone is assumed to travel by car or bus, and everyone is also assumed to want to flow through quickly. Roads notably should not perform more than one function: either they are highways, or they are commercial streets, or they are residential streets, because if a road tries to do more than one thing it creates delays - the thing that modern city planning is most preoccupied with avoiding. Cross-town roads, or inter-urban roads, cannot possibly be commercial streets under this scenario. This “bizarrely assumes that people who are going to a certain street won’t then want to be on it when they get there because of all the traffic. Because, even following the car logic, if everyone is driving, sooner or later everyone must drive on the street one set out to visit – and thus add to its traffic” (Miguelez 2017, 272).

From my participants’ comments, we know that even today many people in the city do not shop where they live - in some sense perhaps Gréber did not fully understand how or why people worked and consumed in the places they did. Jane Jacob’s book, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (1961), which explores the disjunction between urban planners’ visual sense of city logical order and the microsociology of its everyday function reflects a foundational critique of Gréber-style

approaches to city planning. Jacobs called attention to the fact that cities are problems of organized complexity and must be looked at holistically, as something comprised of many individual components which have their own slippery and unique intersecting factors which must be taken on their own terms. During Gréber's time, the prevailing wisdom was to address them as problems of disorganized complexity through sets of rules based in statistical rationalizations and inferences (432-433).

Many of my other participants commented on the ways that their local neighbourhoods can also feel confining rather than "ameliorating". In other words, my participants don't work, play, and consume in their local neighbourhood zone exclusively, and much of the city can feel out of reach or confining without a car. Recalling another conversation with Claire, she (and others like Lisa, and Donovan below) had made comments about the role of the car in "escaping" the city:

Claire: It actually surprises me how cheap it is to own a car in Ottawa. Obviously, in Toronto, it would be so much more expensive, just the parking alone...I mainly use [my car] to go grocery shopping, if I'm going to a store that's not within walking distance of me, or I'm going to buy more at a time and I obviously can't carry back all that from the store. So, grocery shopping, yeah, also weekend trips. Like I mentioned hiking, I definitely need a car, I think, to get there, or it would take five hours on the bus each way.

Lisa: I think if I had a car, I would probably do some things a lot more often, like going for hikes or going camping. Definitely I would hike a lot more if I didn't have to find a way to get there. Right now, usually I'll just go for a walk in the city instead until I can find someone with vehicle access who would also like to go for a hike.

Throughout my fieldwork, one of my participants, Donovan, at first had a car, then sold his car, then bought another one after lamenting that despite some slim cost savings from not owning a car, he felt there was no escape from the city and no

“greenspace” for him and his partner to enjoy. He also mentioned that he found not owning a car stifling to his independence (something I will touch upon again in Chapter Four of this dissertation). Sitting at my kitchen table one evening, Donovan revealed to me that he and his partner were using a car sharing company, VRTUCAR, so frequently, it was starting to negate the cost savings of not having a car:

Yeah. I think the independence piece I feel like is a part of it. I think that [my partner] very much likes to be busy in the sense that she wants to do more things. Not even explore more stuff, but be doing stuff that we don't normally do. A lot of that takes place out of the city. Even just finding a good green space that ... We sat in the hammock before just in the ... What's the park across from the beer store on Somerset?

Tyler: Dundonald?

Donovan: Yeah, Dundonald Park. That's not the best place to sit in the hammock. We are out of the city and weekends away once or twice a month typically, using VRTUCAR. [my partner] uses VRTUCAR quite often because she does not enjoy the bus. As a result, we'll probably get a car sooner than I thought that I would, just because I think that that will cut down on using the VRTUCAR that frequently. It goes down to the convenience bit, too, because there are some days that I would like to just go out to Perth for the day and just hangout or something. I know that it's not really doable without a car.

One of my other participants, Fannie, a practicing nurse, and married mother of two, was one of the few people I spoke to who lived outside the urban limits, in Greely. She spoke of the exact same problem but from the opposite perspective: as much as Donovan, Claire, Samantha, Lisa, William, and others felt they could not escape the urban core, or be in nature without a car, Fannie could not escape what she saw as the nothingness of her rural neighbourhood outside the city, except by car:

Fannie: So, where we live there's no busing, and so my husband and I both have a vehicle.

T: Is there anything you don't use your car for in terms of getting places?

F: No, not really, because where we live, you have to take your car to get everywhere. Even to go to the store, you need to take a car. We could go for a walk just for the sake of walking, but not to get to a store. Yeah, there's nowhere to walk to really, except walking for exercise. Yeah, we have to take our car to go for everything.

Miguellez notes that, in many of the pictures of Ottawa's neighbourhoods and streets in the early postwar period, kids can be seen playing - not in the parks, but in the streets themselves (2016, 265). There are several reasons, he says, that we can speculate as to why: perhaps it was easy for parents or older siblings to supervise other children when they were situated closer, it was more convenient for children to step out of the house and play in the street, streets did not have a dedicated purpose for automobile traffic, etc.

Argument that social ills came from a lack of parks has turned out to be naive...After decades of following mathematical formulas for exact amounts of green space per thousand people (and the rationale behind any of those figures has never been made clear in any convincing manner), we have vast expanses of green space sitting empty, and a shadow of what street play used to be thanks to the turning over of streets to car traffic. (Miguellez 2016, 266)

The larger point bearing on the comments of my participants is this: despite the creation of a multitude of designated zones for work, play, commerce, worship and so on, my participants do not conform to the places around them that have been imagined for them by city planners as implicitly *their* "local zones" for activity. They travel to the places that have been made meaningful by them in their mundane everyday practices (shopping locations, the various parks in the greenbelt, Gatineau Park, their place of work, their home, etc.), which may or may not be co-located or planned for.

Looking back at some of the important moments in Ottawa city planning since the Gréber plan, we can see efforts in more recent city planning strategies which have

sometimes perpetuated some of the car centrality afforded by the city's infrastructure, and which provide further context to the lived experience expressed by my participants. Since Gréber, the city planning of the region has been managed jointly by the City of Ottawa, the City of Gatineau, and the National Capital Commission (NCC) (Gordon 2006, 161). Key moments in the history of Ottawa city planning are reflected in a number of documents created by these organization following the Gréber plan. Specifically, I refer to 1) the NCC's *Plan for Canada's Capital* (1999 and 2017); 2) the City of Ottawa's *Ottawa Official Plan* (2003 and 2021), and; 3) the City of Ottawa's two most recent *Transportation Master Plans* (2013 and 2022).

The first complete master plan following Gréber was released in 1988 by the NCC. It, and subsequent plans authored by this organization, have primarily been concerned with maintaining and developing the city as a capital. This means its strategies have been focused on “the political, judicial and cultural functions of the Capital, advocat[ing] for the presence of the provinces and territories in the Capital, as well as of the international community, and preserv[ing] the Capital's green spaces” (NCC 1999, 25). As such, its concerns with physical infrastructure for transportation have primarily been with respect to the continuity of federal government functions, the presence and experience of visitors to the capital, and the preservation of the historical and aesthetic qualities of the “green space” which comprises the national capital region. The effects of this preoccupation and attention have been, for example: the development and maintenance of scenic multi-purpose roadways constituting the Capital Parkway Network, the location of national cultural institutions, and enhancing the protection of the region's ecosystems and capital “green spaces” through the

designation of natural heritage areas and the curation of a network of parks. All of these are, as reflected in my participants comments, key destinations to visit by car, and an important motivation for car ownership.

Conversely, key transportation and zoning related changes have been primarily the domain of the City of Ottawa (and City of Gatineau) municipalities. In the city's first *Official Plan* (City of Ottawa 2003), one of the clearly stated goals was provide a setting in which "walking, cycling, and transit are residents' first choices for transportation" (2003, Section 1-5). Key initiatives advancing this goal have been the creation of the Light Rail Transit system (which in the report was slated to have the Confederation Line running from east to west, completed in 2018), and a subsequent intensification of residential density in locations within the immediate vicinity of transit stations or along Transit Priority Network designations (2003, amended in 2018, Section 2-13). Other key initiatives have been the provisioning of cyclist infrastructure along "spine" routes within the city, which follow major roadways (typically arterials) (2003, amended in 2017, Section 2-23). Furthermore, and specific to cars, the city introduced high-occupancy and designated right-of-way roads and vehicle lanes (for buses and for car-pooling vehicles) (2003, amended in 2018, Section 2-25), as well as specific provisions for short-term and long-term parking with the intention of "balancing transit ridership objectives with the needs of automobile users" (2003, Section 2-26).

The city's strategy since the 2003 document has remained relatively the same although with some slightly different emphases: the city's narrative on promoting active transportation now emphasizes sustainability rather than physical health, but the city continues to look for ways to intensify urban density rather than increase sprawl.

Concern for reducing the greenhouse emissions of the city's activities has become more prevalent, and support for further economic development and diversity of employment is still a relevant goal (City of Ottawa 2013, 2). Despite the continued importance of the goals, the implementation of some of the city's initiatives have been better on paper than in reality: for example, the Light Rail Transit system has been plagued with issues including late completion, numerous closures due to system failures, complaints of inaccessibility among disabled riders, massive additional costs, lawsuits and numerous train derailments (Trick 2022). My participants' comments regarding their experiences of Ottawa public transit, their attitude towards the prevalence of street infrastructure and parking which to them suggests the obvious solution of car ownership, and their experience of the insufficiencies of dedicated infrastructure for both walking and cycling all serve to reinforce my interpretation that these changes have had a relatively insubstantial degree of impact on reducing car use (in the name of either physical health or sustainability).⁵

Looking forward to initiatives and plans mentioned in the latest *Transportation Master Plan* (2021), which is still undergoing reviews and public consultations, there are references to piloting E-scooters, developing a new thoroughfare near the Mer Bleu Bog area of the greenbelt, and introducing electric buses. More substantial, however, is perhaps the introduction of a concept called the 15-minute neighbourhood:

⁵ According to the 2016 Ottawa Cycling Report, cycling adoption has increased by 44% from 2010 to 2015, however, the number of people who reported feeling safe cycling during the day in Ottawa was just 53% (19% reported feeling safe cycling after dark) (Citizens for Safe Cycling 2016, 5-12). These conflicting statistics also make it difficult to say whether increased cycling adoption is a direct result of the infrastructural changes that Ottawa has made, or from the general attention that the residents of the city now give to alternative modes of mobility despite the provided infrastructure.

Healthy, walkable, 15-minute neighbourhoods are compact, well-connected places with a clustering of a diverse mix of land uses; this includes a range of housing types and affordability, shops, services, access to food, schools and local childcare, employment, greenspaces, parks and pathways. They are complete communities that support active transportation and transit, reduce car dependency, and enable people to live car-light or car-free. (Ottawa 2021, 28)

According to the plan, 15-minute communities will enable people to walk to meet their daily and weekly needs and is seen as a key to enabling healthy and sustainable living in the city's greenbelt boundaries. This concept resembles Gréber's self-contained communities, although perhaps even smaller in the hope of making them pedestrian centric rather than car-centric.

2.8 Conclusion

What I have shown in this chapter is that the way the car is experienced in Ottawa with respect to city infrastructure, and by extension the meaning it has for my participants which is in part due to the modernist planning of the city. These are the intended affordances. It would be a mistake to dismiss the role that the built environment and its specific legacy have had in conditioning residents to cling to their personal cars. The city's zoning regulations in conjunction with the planning mandate of the NCC have had an enormous impact in curbing continuous growth and maintaining a city filled with open places, scenic parkways, and a small-town feel.

However there have been unintended affordances for car ownership. The residents of those neighbourhood zones both inside and outside the greenbelt live in those places and travel widely to others, largely by car, rather than live in "self-containment", and busses have not been as effective as they were anticipated to be. This is at least in part because Gréber's attempts to target density and create self-

contained neighbourhood zones has not gone totally to plan. While Gréber intended to use this tactic to minimize the need for residents to travel between the zones (which arguably has not happened), some neighbourhoods have also developed isolated community centers of commerce, creating even more car traffic concentrated in specific areas (Miguelez 2017, 279-280) which are also not completely consistent with people's living patterns. My participants' concerns and comments echo this reality. Only time will tell if the City of Ottawa's 15-minute communities succumb to the same issues.

Figure 5

15-Minute Neighbourhood



Image above: an artist's depiction of the qualities of a 15-minute neighbourhood. (Ottawa 2021, 32).

Though I have intended this dissertation, in general, to be oriented around generating information for future efforts rather than only as a basis for the critique of

existing plans and policies, we can see some immediate things which should be supported, and others which might be causes for concern, with the City of Ottawa's current *Transportation Master Plan* (2021). The plans generally seek to compliment the *New Official Plan's* mission to tackle sprawl by building up and in around nodes of transit with intensification and redevelopment of existing property, rather than outwards (2021, 13-15). The emphasis is now on walking, cycling, and sustainable public transit for short trips within the neighbourhood, "a compact and connected city" (2021, 24). The question remains, will this be enough to curb car use, as it is intended to? Several actions are listed in the strategic document which, depending on the success of their execution, might begin to constrain car use in an effective way or at least begin to afford the viability of alternative means of mobility. Others seem less promising.

Firstly, the city has stated a policy to take an active role in the shared mobility environment in order to "advance transportation system objectives and mitigate potential negative consequences" (2021, 38). As shared mobility includes both car-based transport and e-scooter, bicycle, and e-bicycle modes of transport, this policy in conjunction with new configurations of the built environment to support it, will potentially curb personal car ownership (reducing the overall number of cars) as well as make the alternatives to inner-city transportation visible. Unfortunately, there are no specific actions listed at this time for how this will happen, or what specific objectives related to the plan are being directly addressed by this initiative. Similarly, while it is a goal I feel we should support based on my participant's comments and stated desires, these shared modes of transportation will face resistance given my findings later in this dissertation (Chapter 3 and 4).

Secondly, while the city's 15-minute neighbourhood approach is supported by a number of transit and transportation related policies, the general aim appears to be how to make non-car modes of travel more "competitive": the plan seeks ways to encourage certain modes by giving them or creating some kind of competitive advantage either in reducing travel time, travel cost, improving comfort, or addressing reliability (2021, 42). While these are worthy aims, my research suggests that it is perhaps equally important to understand the different ways that people are mobile within their current neighbourhoods and what draws them out of them, certainly beyond a behavioural economic approach to cost-benefit. We know that Gréber tried a similar plan with self-contained communities, and we know that people in Ottawa travel outside their neighbourhoods to the places that they make meaningful (and to some degree, to those which have been made meaningful for them by the virtue of the city as a Capital – its cultural institutions, its picturesque greenery, its network of parks, and likely more). This city plan approach seems to continue to assume that all mobility is based on satisfying rationally-determined needs (e.g., habitual provisioning, going to work, meeting a doctor's appointment, or other logical necessities) rather than acknowledging that peoples' motivations for choosing a mode of travel are not confined to a cost-benefit analysis, but rather (at least in part) a heuristic approach to quickly interpreting the visible environment, acting out of a desire for escape, or for a change.

Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, the plan looks to take positive steps by paying attention to the pedestrian experience of the city. There are key messages and moments in the plan which clearly discard the old ways of thinking about the pedestrian experience as one of simply "moving through" the environment as quickly as efficiently

as possible, and attending to the pedestrian experience as one of meandering, lingering, loitering and socializing, and which is afforded through various physical elements of the street configuration: such as the absence of visible surface parking lots, lower traffic volumes and speeds, adequate winter clearance of ice and snow, infrastructure which buffers pedestrians from traffic, etc. (2021, 47). Unfortunately, these moments appear contradictory to other elements in the plan, which for example at some points returns to a discussion of the competitive characteristics of certain modes and seeks to maximize “route directness” to improve the pedestrian experience. My research suggests that perhaps more investigation is needed to understand how various infrastructural configurations for the pedestrian accommodate different mobility mindsets and attitudes, or which may be perceived differently based on different motivations for movement.

Despite the continuing modernist and car-centric city legacy, residents play an active role in interpreting the affordances of the city. Currently, they interpret the sprawl, lack of meaningful greenspace local to them, scattered destinations, space for driveways and parking, among other things, as affordances for car ownership and use. The current city plan sees the built environment as a given-signal of function, but this approach neglects to consider the agency of the city-dweller in successfully constructing the built environment as it is intended and not as something else, or how unintended consequences will serve as unintended affordances.

Interestingly, in its discussion of the competitive characteristics of different modes of transportation, the plan (in a footnote) claims “Individuals' mode choices are also linked to social, economic, cultural, and environmental factors” (2021, 42).

Awkwardly, there is no information in the plan which supports this claim or describes what these social or cultural factors are. At least it is known that the physical features of the place cannot completely explain why cars are owned and used, even if there is no clearly demonstrated understanding of what the additional social and cultural factors are or how they influence car use. In the following chapters, my research explicitly explores these things, which I argue, are also very important to understanding how the physical environment is perceived as affording car ownership and use instead of some alternative modes of transportation. Without approaching the social and cultural conditions which presuppose the function of physical environmental features, city planning by itself may not be effective at reducing car dependency, or even making the choice of car ownership visible.

3. Chapter 3: Making Mobile Bodies

3.1 In Summary:

In this chapter, I explore how my participants use cars to create different experiences of their bodies through their engagements with cars within a network of relationships. Drawing upon a mix of anthropological works discussing the social construction of the body and inspired by thinking near-Actor Network Theory, I hope to complexify the idea of cars as conveniences by highlighting the ways that driver-car embodiment constructs various bodies in the context of mobility: some convenient, some plainly able, and others super-human. In conclusion, I argue that we ought to subsume and/or subordinate discussions and debates about convenience in mobility to those of universal accessibility and be attentive to the power of cars to meaningfully impact the way human bodies are experienced. In general, I challenge the attitude of private and public transportation efforts seeking to develop and promote alternative modes of mobility in ways which prioritize more and more convenience as a key incentive to encouraging adoption.

3.2 Introduction to Chapter 3

Tyler: Why do you enjoy cycling so much?

Julien: Well, I started when I was attending a CEGEP (a Quebec Post-secondary institution). One of the options as a physical education class was a cycle tourism class and that sounded so awesome to me that I decided to try it.

Tyler: Yeah.

Julien: I ended up really enjoying it; learning how to repair my own bike. We were learning about the mechanism of how your body should work when

you are cycling, how high your seat should be, and adjusting the morphology of your body to the bike.

Tyler: Right.

Julien: Basically, making it so biking becomes present and less work, and making sure the bike works better with you. I ended up really enjoying that experience, and then I became a bike patrol officer for the city of Montreal for one of the neighborhoods. I would bike eight to 12 hours per day and during the summer I would help people with mechanical distress, enforce bylaws.

Tyler: Oh, wow.

Julien: Basically, just that experience of doing that one summer and doing cycle tourism; going from Montreal to Iroquois Falls on a bicycle was really fun. I enjoyed that a lot.

Tyler: That sounds like a long bike ride.

Julien: Oh, yeah. It is. I find cycling as reliable as my own body. I trust my bike. I know how to take care of it. So, if I am in a hurry and I need to go somewhere, if there is some sort of natural catastrophe or some kind of nuclear attack and electronics are knocked out; the first thing I am going for is my bicycle. I trust my bike and I know from my experience of driving as a cyclist in Montreal, I am comfortable in heavy traffic. I can cycle in the middle of downtown, trucks and cars around me, and I know how to be safe and predictable, do the signs with my hands, when to weave in a car is probably not aware of me, how to position myself in the road, how to take command of the road to avoid being put in a dangerous position. So, I am very confident on a bicycle and I have also adjusted my bike. I have reflectors everywhere, so bicycling for me is...I would say on the same level as walking or driving.

Tyler: One of the questions I have for you to wrap things up: in terms of the way cycling becomes more available, to your earlier point of making the infrastructure available, do you think that people prefer ways of moving with their bodies such as cycling and walking compared to things like driving that get them there faster?

Julien: Oh, no. So, there is a convenience factor with cars that will never be matched by cycling or alternative means of transportation. For instance, for people with disabilities or those who are in poor health. Also, if you are going to work, one of the big issues with me when I cycle to work is I need to change clothing because I get sweaty. So, biking to work means I have to dress for biking, bring a change of clothing for my work day, and that is a huge amount of logistics and hassle that not everyone is willing to commit to. Also, because of the way the bike lanes are designed, the stress level

cranks up. Because I have to mix with cars, I will sweat a lot more and I will be far more stressed so I will need to change.

If the bike lanes were more isolated or I could take my time and I would not have to worry about anything, maybe I would be less stressed and maybe I would not need to get changed every time I go biking. I would likely do it just because I sweat a lot, but I know that for a lot of people, the stress of biking makes biking a non-starter.

For Julien, learning to cycle involved a process of reconfiguring his sense of body, and through that process, reconfiguring his own relationship to the environment. His language expresses this: “the bike becomes present and less work,” “adjusting the morphology of your body to the bike,” “how to position myself in the road.” By embodying the bike, it becomes convenient, reliable, and so on, whereas before his CEGEP experience, it was foreign, externally confronting him. On the road, as Julien remarks, being one with a bicycle opens a new sense of corporal action: he positions himself on the road, uses his hands as extensions of the cycle-body to signal things which are only meaningful by his cycle-body, he is empowered to take command of the road, etc. But he also acknowledges that it is *his* body that makes this possible, his body is not like other bodies which may be “disabled”, “in poor health”, untrained and unfamiliar with the bicycle, who see the bicycle not as part of the body, but something alien to it, who may be more susceptible to the “stress” of being a cycle-body among cars, or as I argue in this chapter, car-bodies.

In this chapter, I propose that cars are devices by which individuals experience certain types of mobile bodies: some convenient, some able, some super-human. In the following section of this chapter and continuing along the train of thought that my participant Julien was articulating. I explore what convenience means in the context of mobility. In doing so, I hope to establish a basis for considering the convenience of the

automobile as something which is oriented to overcoming and surpassing the limitations of *the individual body*. This is particularly evident in my ethnographic data regarding the car as the defacto solution to mobility when my participants were sick, in pain, limitedly mobile due to age, or felt constrained by the relative lack of their own bodies to be mobile against the impositions of city infrastructure and/or weather.

In the subsequent sections of this chapter, I explore the theoretical basis for understanding socially constructed mobile bodies based on other work exploring the social construction of illness, normalcy, and of abled vs. disabled bodies. I then shift to a discussion of the networked and embodied driver-car (what I referred to as a 'car-body' earlier). By considering the social construction of the body as existing in the context of a network of ideas, technologies, environments, etc., we can discern differential effects on the car-driver relationship upon different groups of people.

In the final sections I explore these differential effects, the construction of different mobile bodies, and present an ethnographic account of my participants' embodied experiences of cars. I compare three patterned constructions of the body and the qualities of the embodied relationships which construct them: the convenient body, the able body, and the super-human body. In doing so, I hope to highlight the powerful effect of cars on experiences of the body.

As Oka writes in the introduction to a special edition issue of *Economic Anthropology* (2021) on convenience: "convenience technologies have long been seen to help users gain benefits by enhancing efficiency and ease of activity by reducing time and effort spent... It is easy to infer that developing or refining these technologies further would be driven by many factors, including the need for more convenience"

(2021, 189). My attention to convenience is motivated by current transportation planning and policy discussions, which are efforts aimed at developing transportation solutions which are *essentially* just more convenient. In this chapter, I hope to show that the way my participants label convenience in the context of mobility is as a means of managing the expectations for being mobile that society puts on their bodies. I suggest that we must rather address how we might live with various kinds of inconvenient, abnormal and/or immobilized bodies, and that we should pay attention to the ways that the body is defined/redefined through our engagements with cars if we hope to take greater control over the role and meaning that cars have in society.

3.3 The Convenience of Cars

The most recent anthropological definition of convenience, composed in the review of historical and contemporary uses of the term, is that convenience is:

...a culturally shaped heuristic behavior within a larger doxa informing the judgment or calculation, unconsciously or consciously, used to assess utility and/or satisfaction gained, and time, effort/energy, and other culturally defined constraints expended, in order to make a decision on an intended activity. Convenience calculations fall within a spectrum bounded by two approaches: (a) modifying one's own behavior to suit the environment (e.g., adapting an activity to suit a built or natural landscape, such as taking a shortcut or calculating a least-cost route) or (b) modifying the environment to suit one's behavior (technological modification to stones to create cutting edges for convenient use, producing services and goods). (Oka 2021, 190-191)

Convenience defined this way allows for a deployment of the term beyond goods, services, and behaviours. For example, convenience is reflected in the status and position of some white-collar criminals which reduces the effort, complexity and time required to execute their illegal activities (Braeton and Vaughn 2019 in Oka 2021, 198).

Convenience can also be reflected in timing and organization, such as the convenient timing and organization of medical procedures like C-sections according to medical practitioner and patient schedules or compared to more “complicated” birthing scenarios (Morris 2016 in Oka 2021, 199). Convenience is also confronted by culturally relative moral and ethical systems, meaning it can sometimes be valued negatively within a society or as it appears in particular practices (such as in eating ‘fast food’) (2021, 200). Convenience, as it appears ethnographically, can be bound up in a complex network of “social needs, ideological interests, relevant identities, and micropolitics” (Koenig 2021, 220).

Convenience has been a popular focus in recent academic and public policy attempts to understand car dependency, particularly in relation to things like consumer aversion to public transit (Wardman 2014; Ramos et al 2019), decision modelling around available transportation options (Bouscasse 2017), and the development of new technologies such as self-driving cars (Nordström & Engholm 2021). Noted drivers of convenience associated with car-oriented behaviours in this literature include: total time in vehicle; total out of vehicle time (i.e. the inconvenience felt in time spent walking to nearby transportation access points or in time spent waiting at transportation access points); inconveniences felt regarding travel schedules (including available service variations and trip frequency for public transit); complexities of trip execution, such as multiple interchanges or modes of transportation used; inconveniences felt in using late and/or unreliable services; inconveniences felt in the absence of good user information related to wayfinding, timetables and payment options; inconveniences felt in large crowds and/or elongated journey times caused by crowding (Wardman 2014, 16).

These factors were also prominent in my interviews with participants to different degrees, and with respect to some variation in the specific operationalization of convenience: while all my participants associated the convenience of the car with “saving time”, they often combined saving time with some other aspect of convenience such as reducing effort, improving comfort, and alleviating bodily restrictions. Regarding the first factor of alleviating physical and mental effort, I heard things such as in the case of Samantha: [regarding what “convenient” means], she answered: “convenient in the sense that if you forget something that maybe would have been out of your way home from work, it's not a deal breaker where you say, ‘Oh, now I can't do the thing I was going to do.’ You can just say, ‘Okay, well, that's fine. I can just run out and buy it from the store or from the library or from wherever.’ And that doesn't require you planning heavily for making a bus schedule or hoping that it's within walking distance. You can pick anywhere that you want to go as long as you've got a good car.”

Another of my participants, Mark, also expressed this same feeling when I asked him why he bought an SUV: “Convenience. Say I wanted to buy something at IKEA. IKEA has \$70 delivery fee. Same thing as if you're buying something from Structube or wherever. If you're buying something off someone second-hand for example, you now have to figure out somebody that can deliver, because not everybody selling from second-hand will deliver. You're going to have to arrange a pickup time. You have to get a vehicle. Even if you went to rent a van or something, it's just an extra cost. It's an extra step. It's convenient just having a vehicle like this.”

Another factor associated with convenience was alleviating discomfort. Even among my participants who frequently took a bicycle or public transit to work, whenever

they felt sick the car became the most convenient option. For example, my participant Melanie told me that the last thing you want when you're ill is the feeling of being "sardined with 50, 60 people sneezing and snorting and coughing everywhere" on public transportation. Thomas also felt this way, saying "yeah. If I'm sick. I'll drive. I don't want to be contaminating people on public transit, and also not being exposed to the cold whenever my sinuses are acting up, like they are now. And it's just uncomfortable. Because if I'm sick, I'm just going to be uncomfortable for an extended period of time on public transit. Whereas driving a car, it's much more comfortable. Less cramped. Shorter travel time."

Yet another factor associated with convenience was being able to move without restriction caused by bodily mobility issues. The exchange I had with Julien (featured at the beginning of this chapter) reflects some of these ideas. In his case, convenience related to being able to arrive at work in a certain bodily state (calm) and condition (unsweaty). He also reflected on convenience as something related to the capacity of others' bodies, for example how bicycles would not be as convenient as cars for people with mobility-related physical issues. His concern was reflected in the voices of some of my other participants who did suffer from some condition affecting their physical mobility or who organized their lives to accommodate others who did. For example, my participant Peter discussed the convenience of the car with respect to his son's autism:

Tyler: What kinds of things do you do you do with the car now? What do you use it for it?

Peter: I would say 70 percent of my time is probably driving my son to and back from school and then also doing errands with him and taking him to the pool and stuff like that. I think the rest of the time is also just kind of general family stuff on the weekends, running more errands and stuff like that.

Tyler: You mentioned earlier that you bought the car because you needed something quickly. Was that because of the car accident?

Peter: Yeah, exactly and we didn't wanna go too long without the car... My son needs a drive from me. There is transportation available at a school, but he's used to me driving him in and it's just a better thing. So that we didn't wanna spend too much Ubering back and forth or busing back and forth every day and we were able to, at the time, buy the new car, so we just thought it was the best thing at the time to get it and we both wanted that car and it just, it made the most sense at the time, for sure.

Tyler: And in terms of just that experience of being in that situation without a car, how long were you without a car?

Peter: It wasn't that long, I'm not gonna say it was nerve wracking, but it was. When you're used to having the car for so long, and you have to adapt and start taking public transport, which is pretty good in the city or taking Ubers, which are also pretty quick and pretty good, it still kind of upsets the balance and especially with the special needs, he's used to certain things he needs is routine and he's used to the car, he's used to driving. And so, it was more of that kind of getting out of routine. And our lives are very routine. That kind of upset the balance of it.

I've been driving since I was 16. I don't love driving and I never have, but they are a necessity especially in my life just... It's the actual driving itself, that I find, not enjoyable as far as cars go though, I love my car, and I'm really glad I have the car that I have. To do the things that I do with my son, say, on the train or on the bus, it would take so much more time, possibly more money and be a lot more inconvenient as much as I say that I dislike driving, it is the most efficient and economical resource that I have for my son.

While my participants did also speak of the inconveniences of public transit (not frequent enough trips, not reliable information about when a bus was coming, etc.) I interpret these as issues that return once again to a consideration of the body. This is because the idea of bodily effort is intimately tied to how cars are defined conceptually and imbricated into other concepts such as 'saving time' and 'control'. The following responses to my request of each participant to describe a car to me as if I had never seen or heard of one before was demonstrative of this:

Claire: So, you don't know what a car is?

Tyler: Yeah, pretend.

Claire: And I explain it to you? Okay.

Claire: It is a machine that has a lot of parts that work together in order to transport you to different places via roads, and what's good about a car is when you're inside the car, even though you're being transported and it's taking you places at a good speed... [chuckle] Sorry, this is so awkward.

Tyler: I know, it's a strange question.

Claire: ...It's not physically... It doesn't take a physical toll on you. So it's a great way to get places, with minimal physical effort. Yeah. You can customize your journey. So if you know what a bus is, a bus usually goes on set routes, it's only at certain times or sometimes it doesn't show up at all because it's Ottawa. So a car is a really great machine because it's in your control pretty much. So you can go wherever you wanna go within reason.

Similarly, a key component to the definition of a car is in the external source of its energy. In the “mental model” (Jones et al 2011) that my participants have of the car and how it works, human energy is largely supplanted by externally-sourced power.

Amber: Describe a car to you. Okay. Well let's start conceptually. I would say a car is a, at least as we know it, it's an internal combustion engine and by which humans move themselves from one place to another with less effort than it would take for them to move with their own appendages. We are leveraging energy, natural resources in the form of fossil fuel, to run a mechanical engine that facilitates our movement in a way that allows us to expend less energy. So, it's a time saving device.

Further to this point, the emergence of electric cars and the conditions of their external energy is taken to become inconvenient if the energy is not as readily available for consumption by the car, in effect creating a situation where the human body is again required to put in additional effort in terms of planning and trip complexity.

Thomas: Motor vehicle that runs on gas that you have to refill, and so ... Because gas is its source of energy, and that you have to refill to be able to use the car. And it can be refilled at these things called gas stations, that are very numerous. You won't go too far without finding one. So, running out of gas is not really a big concern. And they just allow you to go from point A to point B. And most of the time, in ways that are faster and more

convenient that public or biking or walking. And there are different types of cars. People have different taste in cars. Cars come in all shapes and sizes, and different types. You have small cars, you have compact cars, you have larger cars for families. You have safer cars. You have sports cars, faster cars. Slower cars. Cars that are more fuel efficient. Sorry, that's probably more than you needed, right?

And lately, they've been starting to come out with these electric cars that run on electricity. Well, batteries. So that they don't need fuel. Most say that they are more environmentally friendly and reduce the carbon footprint. Although these types of cars might be less convenient because, let's say, you were to go on a long trip, you'd have to plan out in advance where you'd be able to refill those cars, because there are fewer charging stations than there are gas stations. Although it is possible to charge it at your own place.

What I have hoped to show in the above examples are how conveniences are constructed as overcoming the limitations of one's body, a connection which to me strongly suggests that it might be appropriate to subsume the concept of convenience (when thinking about people's relationships with cars) within the broader and more robust framework provided by disability studies.

This framework aligns with a social and cultural approach to understanding disability, which posits that people with impairments are seen and treated on the basis of how "impairment" and forms of "otherness" are constructed vis a vis various cultural and social structures and their interrelationships. These cultural and social structures include, for example, the mode of production, social and cultural capital, dominant ideologies (e.g., of individualism, medicalization, mobility, etc.) and various means of social control and normalization which organize bodies and practices (Riddell and Watson 2014).

Rather than staying with literature in disability studies (because though convenience and disability might be looked at with the same lens, they are not the same things), I explore the anthropological literature around how bodies are constructed by

their contexts (i.e., a network of objects, ideas, and environmental factors). It is on this basis that I argue that cars construct different kinds of mobile bodies, and I will expand on the ways that for some of my participants cars allow people to overcome their bodies not only as a convenience, but to provide a sense of normalcy and able-bodiedness, or even feelings of super-humanness. I discuss the possibility of pursuing further investigation of cars and their relevance to a conversation about accessibility in the conclusion of this chapter.

3.4 Social Construction of the Body

Bodies are socially constructed in that they are sites upon which relationships to people, objects, ideas, and values are inscribed, performed, contested, or otherwise brought into being through various behaviours, practices, modifications, and engagements with non-human objects (Demello 2013). This anthropological approach to the body concerns the ways that bodies become the canvases for inscribing politics, values, cosmologies, and relationships. What follows in this section is a brief exposition of some of the examples of this approach which are relevant to a discussion of the role of car ownership and use, particularly concerning the social construction of the sick or disabled body, which is relevant in both substance and approach.

The social construction of health and illness includes previous work, for example, which has identified the specific roles and behaviours a person is expected to exhibit when they are ill, such as the “sick role” (Nielsen 2014); as well as the culturally relativistic nature of the construction of illness and disease, or the process by which specific qualities, dispositions and symptoms of the body may be formalized by doctrines, authorities and legitimized by structures of power into illnesses (e.g. Clarke &

Shim 2011). Foucault's social genealogy of illness in *The Birth of the Clinic* (1975) is perhaps the quintessential example of this type of work. This perspective, as it applies to Western thought, constructs the treatment of diseases as independent entities which may be located within an afflicted person's body and treated separately from the body (2013, 23).

Integral to the development of this social constructivist perspective on the body has been Scheper-Hughes and Lock's conceptualization of the "three bodies". Each exists at separate but overlapping conceptual levels: 1) the individual body, which is the phenomenological or lived experience of the body-self. It includes our understandings of our own bodies, and our bodies as distinct from others' bodies; 2) the social body, which includes the representational uses of the body in conceptualizing nature, society and culture which is effectively also the symbolic and structuralist understanding of the body; 3) the body politic, or the mechanisms and processes by which society controls bodies' reproduction, work, leisure, illness and other forms of deviance on the individual and group level in order to maintain social stability (Scheper-Hughes & Lock 1987).

In 1987, Scheper-Hughes provided an example of this phenomenon among the Yanomamo:

In addition to controlling bodies in a time of crisis, societies regularly reproduce and socialize the kind of bodies that they need. Aggressive (or threatened) societies, for example, often require fierce and fool hearty warriors. The Yanomamo, who, like all Amerindian peoples living in the Amazon, are constantly under siege from encroaching ranching and mining interests, place a great premium on aggressivity. The body of Yanomamo males is both medium and message: most adults' heads are criss-crossed by battle scars into which red dyes are rubbed. The men's mutilated crowns are kept clean and shaved for display; their scars are endowed with a religious as well as a political significance-they represent the rivers of blood on the moon where Pore, the Creator-Spirit of the Yanomamo, lives (Brain 1979:167-168). In creating a fine consonance among the physical, material,

political, and spiritual planes of existence, many Yanomamo men are encouraged to put their bodies--especially their heads--in the service of the body politic. (25)

A more recent example can be shown in McGuire and Fritch's (2019) description of the constitution of "normal bodies" North America, which in addition to pointing to "physical, material, political and spiritual" dimensions of the bodily inscription or normal/abnormal, attends to the historical contingencies of such constructions. McGuire and Fritch write that, for example, normalcy in Western thought finds some of its roots in 19th century statistical measurement: the concept of "normal distributions". Within this mathematical paradigm normal became synonymous with the middle area of the normal curve encompassing the greatest frequency of distribution. Coincidentally, medicine identified the normal state of human bodies: the habitual or ideal state of the body, and its corollary, the negation of the habitual, became abnormality or pathologies (2019, 83-84).

The concept of normal in North America and Europe also finds in its past a legacy of attempts to "norm the abnormal", such as through social policing and eugenics. As McGuire and Fritch write:

Widely adopted in 19th- and 20th-century North America and Europe, eugenics implemented social engineering by incentivizing the reproduction of "fit" families and decreasing or prohibiting reproduction of those deemed abnormal or "unfit."...Eugenic normalcy was raced white and its oppositional category—i.e., abnormal degeneracy—grouped together a wide swath of bodies that did not conform to the heavily policed white Western European colonial ideals of bourgeois respectability (e.g., the poor and/or non-white body, the queer, trans, or otherwise "sexually deviant" body, the "cripple," "insane," or "feebleminded," the "alcoholic," the Semitic, and so on). This distinctively eugenic desire to know, count, classify, order, and control the reproduction of human characteristics in terms of normal or abnormal traits had everything to do with the ideologies and practicalities of both colonial and capitalist rule. (2019, 85)

The need for normal bodies in turn became instrumental in both war and in labour. The normal soldier body, which easily interfaced with mass produced technologies of war, became increasingly important to the overall efficiency of military operations (2019, 85). Similarly in the industrial mode of production, there was a need for standardized bodies to interface with standardized machines. This benefitted production such that any normal body was interchangeable in the complex of production. The factory was also a means of disciplining the body, as it was the rhythm of machines and processes which trained the workers (2019, 89). This normal worker of industrial production informed: "...not only how much rates of production could be increased, but also influenced the architecture of buildings, urban planning, modes of transportation, the length of the working day, the way in which home and family life were organized, and what was required for labour-power to reproduce itself" (2019, 89). It was against this image of the productive normal body that concepts of the disabled and unproductive body were at least in part produced (McGuire and Fritch 2019; Williamson 2019).

McGuire and Fritch argue that "contemporary neoliberal social and economic conditions anticipate the emergence of a new kind of "incapable" body/mind, one that, moreover, seems to blur long-held categorical distinctions between "normal" and "abnormal" bodies" (92) and that there "are variegated aggregates of capacity and debility" (Puar 2012 in McGuire & Fritch 2019, 92). In essence, that the contemporary body exists on a spectrum of flexible optimization of its own human capital⁶ while

⁶ I discuss the idea of flexible human capital in relation to cars in much more depth in the next chapter.

capitalism seeks to include as many individuals into regimes of production and consumption as possible. For example, individuals can engage with specific kinds of clothing aimed at the differently-abled which serve to reconstitute their bodies as normal (e.g., independent and self-expressive), but also classed and racialized into new social stratifications (2019, 94).

What I hope to convey with these examples is how bodies are socially constructed through complex networks of interrelations of ideologies, politics, materiality, spirituality, environment, economy, relationships, etc. They are historically contingent and capable of changing and being changed by other constituents of these networks of interrelationships: 'body', 'health' and 'ability', and 'identity', for example, must be understood "as interdependent entities that cannot be separated from each other and which constitute each other in a mutually dependent interchange of practice, meaning, social relations and relations with objects" (Demello 2013, 24).

3.5 Assembled Embodiment: The Driver-car

Considering that bodies can be imbued with meaning on three levels through various interchange of socio-cultural and material factors, I turn now to a theoretical basis for understanding the relationship between cars and drivers as embodied, and how that relationship necessitates a change in the behaviours, dispositions, and perceptions of the individual body (and others' bodies). This embodied disposition is not just present during driving but serves as a lasting kind of subjectivity that carries into everyday life. Scholars such as Dant (2004), Thrift (2004), Sheller (2007), and others have approached this issue from a variation of Actor Network Theory (ANT) (Callon 1986a; 1986b; Latour 1996; 1999) and called this phenomenon "the driver-car" (2004),

a networked or assembled entity. This approach generally argues, as Dant phrases it, that “the automobility that is realized in the driver-car serves as both an extension of the human body and an extension of technology and society into the human” (2004, 75). While ANT has proliferated in its use and its methodological permutations over the last 20 years (see for example Blok, Farías & Roberts 2020; Mol 2010), the driver-car approach retrospectively reflects a way of thinking about cars which is “near ANT”: that is “not simply deploying the existing ANT canon of concepts, research strategies and writing experiments, but keeping them near as a source of questions, problems and inspiration” (2020, xxii). The following summarizes the ways that I use the driver-car network and thinking near-ANT to locate the social construction of my participants’ bodies.

Regarding the individual body, Dant (and others’) approach is to explicitly move beyond affordances and towards a phenomenological understanding of the relationship between drivers and cars as a kind of embodied relationship to technology. Though Dant interrogates the concept of affordances developed by Gibson (1979), not Norman (2013), the general approach still applies. This is partly because, as Dant notes, their primary orientation is to a psychological contribution to the phenomena of perception.

For example, Gibson...

...recognize[s] that the car itself is: . . . also a sort of field which yields a variety of perceptual cues and which invites and supports specific actions. The impressions constituting it are kinesthetic, tactual, and auditory, as well as visual, and they interact with the impressions from the terrain to produce the totality of cues on which the driving-process is based. The ‘feel’ of the car or the ‘behavior’ of the car are terms which indicate what is meant by this particular field of experience. (Gibson, 1982a: 134) This begins to suggest an embodied relationship between the driver and the car, but Gibson’s interest in the driver was focused; he wanted to be able to

contribute as a scientist to the debate about what skills drivers needed and to help reduce the number of deaths on the road. (2004, 64)

'Affordance' is a relational concept which does not encompass an embodied relationship. The car affords locomotion and mobility, and it affords motility (the capacity to move spontaneously and independently). This combination of mobility and motility "is akin to that offered by legs, except that it requires little effort, is much faster and can cover much greater distances" (2004, 65). But affordance does not encapsulate the way that the individual body is "geared towards the world" in its interaction with the car; "the orientation of the whole body to the world through which it moves...wherein the visual field is complemented by the kinaesthesia of the body and its trajectory as a whole, by the sounds of the engine, the road and the wind on the car, by the resistance of steering wheel, accelerator and brakes – even the feel of the road through the wheels of the car" (2004, 71-72).

This is not to say that by using a car, a driver is not oriented to perceiving new affordances of the environment, but rather that in order to achieve that perception the driver and car enter into a new kind of mutually-constitutive relationship of technology-in-hand: "To get used to a hat, a car, a stick is to be transplanted into them, or conversely, to incorporate them into the bulk of our own body. Habit expresses our power of dilating our being-in-the-world or changing our existence by appropriating fresh instruments" (Merleau-Ponty 1962 in Dant 2004, 73). As Dant argues, this experience "becomes entwined in everyday practice such that it becomes ordinary and the re-orientation of the body to the rest of the material world ceases to be remarkable" (2004, 73). In this case the dispositions, behaviours, and abilities of driving a car "becomes an aspect of bodily experience that [drivers] carry into all their other perceptions and

engagements with the material world in a way that they take for granted and treat as unremarkable” (2004, 74).

We can see examples of this reflected in the previous chapter. Specifically, in the comments of my participants’ sense of Ottawa’s car centrality as a basis for being apprehensive of using a bicycle, or even being a pedestrian on city streets:

Claire: I’m not an experienced biker, and I feel like even if you are it’s just inherently dangerous. You can get doored or... Yeah, and Ottawa is just so car-centric. Even as a pedestrian I constantly have to watch. Like today, someone almost turned right into me even though I had the right of way as a pedestrian.

When a city is interpreted as car centric, it predisposes a car-centric view of others, their bodies, and one’s own body, as something which is “lesser than” one enabled by car mobility. I would argue as far as to say that it is reasonable to expect that this embodied sense of car-enabledness would condition the people of Ottawa to anticipate situations which are predominantly dealing with cars (rather than people who must cope with the mobility of various others, let alone as driver-cars which must cope with other kinds of mobile subjects on bicycles, scooters, pedestrians, and so on). In essence, the city and its inhabitants, look very different to a routine car driver, than they do to a non-car driver.

The ‘network’ element is an important aspect to understanding the relationship between the car and the driver. Firstly, it overcomes what I believe is a limitation of the concept of affordances, which is that affordance does not contribute to the meaning of the interaction, only the perception of the capacity for interaction. Cars may afford mobility, but the subjective experience of that afforded action (that it is convenient, easy to use, pleasant or satisfying or frustrating, even) is not. Secondly, it overcomes the

scoping effect of affordances as a lens. Affordances imply but do not explicitly look to recognize the contribution or interaction between multiple elements in the context of the person in configuring their interaction with the object: such as the infrastructure of the roads by which people travel and the places to which they travel; to the conventional understandings and experiences of physical human mobility without the car (what is a healthy, able body, and what is not); to the economic and social relationships which comprise the goals around which cars are oriented; nor to the cultural values or ideological persuasions of the individuals interacting with them, etc.

Dant describes the actor network as “a set of links between heterogeneous elements that are durable, either because of human interests or physical properties, but that can be modified or break down” (2004, 69). The durable aspect of the network comes from the fact that its ‘nodes’ exist and have meaning for people: my participants, for example, inhabit networks comprised of discourses around able and disabled bodies, they negotiate built environments intended for automobile transport, they traverse the city infrastructure on warm sunny days and cold snowy ones, they interact with not just any cars but *their* specific cars, they move about in fields of practice (Bourdieu 1977), and maintain specific relationships to other people, places, and cultural values.

Dant’s configuration of ANT also deviates from a core and generally held principal of the ANT theoretical orientation, namely for generalized symmetry. Generalized symmetry in ANT is taken up as a principle which attributes no more or less agency to non-human actors than human actors (2004, 71). I agree with Dant that

the agency of the person is not equivalent to the agency of the car (or of the other non-human nodes of the network). As Dant puts it:

...the car itself may 'act' (by going slowly or pulling to the left) but we do not attribute this to the intention or choice of the car (or the engine, or the steering) ... objects that are lifeless, especially artificial objects like cars, do not have any intentionality of their own. However, they are made by people who do have intentions. These intentions are designed and made into the object. In this sense, all non-humans become imbued with human intentionality...Latour, in keeping with the tradition of the sociology of science, is keen to claim symmetry between human and non-human. But just because the actions of people often occur within the shaping and limiting context of institutions does not mean that humans are equivalent with non-humans. (2004, 70-71)

It is in this context that Dant's theory is clearly more about thinking "near-ANT" than deploying ANT as a rigorous methodology. In Dant's formulation, as it pertains to constructions of meaning in the body, the car is an object with intention (indeed, some cars have been designed to be interpreted as objects of convenience among other attributes and qualities), but it does not produce convenient bodies by itself. The sense of convenience (and the sense of inconvenience in the experience without cars) is a matter of subjective interpretation of the relationships among the agentic elements of the network.

3.6 Convenient Bodies and Able Bodies

At this point, I want to quickly summarize the ideas presented up to now. I first presented how convenience is valued in mobility and how, in current thinking, mobility is somewhat fixated on discussions of how to achieve greater convenience (particularly as a means of making public transit more appealing to people, or in the creation of new solutions for everyday mobility). We can also see this reflected in material from the

previous chapter regarding the competitiveness of different transportation modes. I then raised a few examples to show how my participants constructed convenience as something which overcomes the innately limited abilities of their bodies. I then discussed the theoretical basis for reframing convenience/inconvenience as something constructed in the body: that bodies are socially constructed in networks of material and immaterial 'nodes' (for example, the construction of able vs disabled bodies), and that human-car interaction necessitates an embodied and networked relationship between driver and car by which people inform meanings of their individual bodies, and of others' bodies. I have intended for all of these points to indicate that there is a needed shift to overcome the limiting language of convenience and move towards the language of ability/disability (in terms of forces of normalization, of dominant ideologies, and of other cultural structures).

There are three kinds of driver-car bodies that appeared most prominently in my ethnographic research: convenient bodies, able bodies, and super-human bodies, but there may be others. The categorization depends on the subjective experience of the driver-car relationship. In other words, it depends on the specific constitution of the network or assemblages of the persons' life. This can include changes to the network which happen over time, such as if one becomes ill but gets better, or as one ages and loses their physical mobility permanently, or as one experiences interactions with different types of cars, or experiences a shift in subscribed values, beliefs, etc. These three kinds of car-body networked relationships that I single out, represent the patterned kinds of experiences across my participants.

Firstly, inconvenient bodies arise in the context of the physical impact of ailments or age, particularly in the face of weather or certain infrastructural conditions, and are made convenient by deploying the car. This kind of body emerges in situations which my participants considered temporarily abnormal by virtue of the construction of their body in relation to aspects of their environment and motivations for transportation. I have mentioned some of these aspects at the outset of this chapter, but the point of emphasis here is that ‘convenient bodies’ emerge in conditions where (without a car) one would otherwise be feel limited in their mobility either by discomfort (feeling sweaty or stressed as in the case of Julien), the social construction of illness (such as feeling uncomfortable on public transit when one is ill, as in the case of Thomas), or based on some other recognition of a temporary deviation of the body from its expected state based on historical experience (such as in the case of Peter and his son).

Convenient bodies are also constructed in car-enabled privacy. Cars constitute private space that, when compared to public transit, provide a feeling of privacy and of “being in your own body”:

Tyler: I see. And so, you mentioned, therapeutic. What else can you tell me about your driving?

Amelia: I just think it can be totally fun, just to be on the road, and if you're on a road without people on it, you kinda just get lost and just driving. It's a good way to get out of your head and into your body. Well, I guess I'm still thinking about driving, but it can be just a good way to go and clear your mind of everything else because you need to focus so much on the road and focus on the other drivers around you. It's a good way to stop thinking about everything else and just think about driving and... Well, I loved blasting music in my car and singing along, very therapeutic, it's a good stress reliever, stuff like that. But I'm also the type of person where I keep my car very clean, because I know that if I start to let it get messy, it's gonna go everywhere. So, I'm going from maybe a bit more of like a hectic environment of whatever my house or school is, and just going with a clean environment in my car, kinda like a nice break.

Donovan, similarly, conveyed the “therapeutic” nature of the experience of driving as an activity that absorbs him into a near-autonomic state:

Tyler: What do you miss about having a car?

Donovan: I miss the mobility of it, just being able to hop in the car and go for a Sunday drive or something. I miss driving. Period. I still get to do it pretty often with having a rental car, taking a car share. I really don't take car shares that often. But I have also found driving quite relaxing.

Tyler: Why?

Donovan: I don't know. It's just you get the highway and you're going, and you've been driving around for an hour but you can't really remember any of it. It's just like, I don't know. It's just an enjoyable way to get around. It's also I think in a weird way that it's something that humankind has only been doing for a little over 100 years.

Compared to convenient bodies, able bodies are constructed when the car seems to “remove barriers” (Ontario Human Rights Commission 2020) in line with discursive understandings of relatively permanent states of disability, rather than overcoming something seen as temporary. In these cases, cars are constructed as the only ‘reasonable’ option, rather than the best of many options, given the individual’s experience of their own physical limitations on mobility. This was made clear to me in my conversations with Victoria, who suffers from a chronic pain condition:

Victoria: when I got into my late 20s, I developed a chronic pain and so walking everywhere, taking Ubers or buses wasn't always an option for me because there would be certain times where pain was just very, very intense and I couldn't rely on buses and it if was too cold outside, my pain would get a lot worse, so standing out in the cold waiting for a bus wasn't a good option for me.

I tried Ubering but that wasn't always good because you never knew the quality of the driving. So too much braking and everything, so for me, I would just end up getting back to the driving and myself driving myself as opposed to relying on someone else to drive me because then I also had control of the conditions of the driving, if you will. So yeah, I think a sense of freedom in a way, for sure.

I am someone who walks a lot, a ton actually. My friends like to rib me for it all the time because there'll be a blizzard outside sometimes and if I'm not in pain, I'll walk anywhere and do that but when it comes to distance, there's only so far that I can do so when it comes to that, it's being able to call up my mom and drive the three and a half, four hours it takes to get to her house to see her when I need to in a moment's notice, or being able to take my dog to the vet and not have to worry about calling a friend, or relying on someone else, or trying to find a different way to get to that resource, if you will.

So, for me, I really have to schedule those things and I think that other people who are in much worse conditions than I am, I'm always really mindful and sympathetic of that. When I'm going to the bus stop and I'm thinking of that, I'm thinking, "I'm not 85 years old." I'm not dealing with other health complications or just even limitations when it comes to physical abilities.

These kinds of episodic or fluctuating variations also emphasize the need to consider the body within networks of nodes, where pain or even a sense of disability may not always be present in the network, but the construction of the disabled body is. This construction of the body in relation to the car appears in conjunction with the discourse around ability/disability and having the sense of a body which is limited relative to the ideal state of the body (what is expected of a normal body, in abstraction), not just one's own historical experience of the normal state of their body. For this particular body, the car is not a relief from the temporary deviation of a historical bodily state, but an effort to feel as one imagines everyone else does.

Another of my participants, Amelia, explained to me the complicated relationship she had with her car because of seizures. On the one hand, driving with the possibility of having a seizure is a tremendous risk, but the benefits to health that she felt she gained from driving she argued made her healthier and reduced the likeliness of having one:

Amelia: I think that I got my license, my G-1 in January of 2017 if I'm not mistaken. And then I had, I got my G2... Actually no, that's a lie. I got my G-1 in 2016, and then I got my G2 in the winter of 2017. And then I had my G2 for a while... And then I had my license suspended in spring of 2018 because I have seizures and they had been un-diagnosed at that point so whenever you have seizures your license is suspended up until you have a point of six months where you're seizure free or the seizures only happen at night or when you know they're going to happen. So, I ended up getting my license back, in I'd say November, December of 2018. And then I got my G license in I think February or March of 2019 and then I've had my G since then.

Tyler: This is going to sound like a strange question but has seizures ever been a consideration for not getting a car ever, has that...

Amelia: Yeah, totally. So, for me actually for a long time, I thought that I was having seizures, but I had never talked to anyone about it, because I was afraid of having my license suspended. Which is not a thing that a lot of people know, that if you have seizures, your license is gone pretty much no matter what.

Amelia: And a lot of people don't know that, and it is a big deterrent for people with seizures to come forward and say that they have them. So, when I was looking into getting my car, I was really afraid that I'm going to get my car, and then I'll start having seizures again, and then it's just going to be sitting there collecting dust, because I won't have a license, and I won't be able to drive. But it kind of was risk versus reward, kind of lay it up that way.

Amelia: For me, getting a car makes a lot more sense practically, then thinking, "Okay, well, if this and this and this happened, then I might not be able to drive it." So, it was definitely a consideration but, in my mind, the benefits outweighed the risks of getting it, and then maybe having something happen.

Tyler: Okay, that makes sense. What would you say those major benefits are?

Amelia: Just being able to get around when I need to, being able to get to appointments, being able to get to school, hospitals, being able to get to work, especially in the summer when I was working in home health care, being able to get from client to client. And then even just thinking about the seizure part of things, I'd be able to get more sleep, because I wouldn't be having to get up earlier to get on a bus to go somewhere. And a lot of seizures do happen because of lack of sleep.

Amelia: And I'm just, "Okay, if I get a car and I'm actually able to sleep, then my body will be better taking care of, so my health will be better in general." So, kind of stuff along those lines where the main benefits...

Other participants had similar attachments to the car as a means of achieving an expected or normal level of mobility and independence when they felt that their physical capacity was waning permanently. For example, my oldest participant John, firmly associated his ability to drive with his own personal independence and felt that bodily mobility was synonymous with personal independence (in the same way that McGuire and Fritch have argued above): "I see myself owning a car until they take it away. A sudden loss will feel like I've lost my role in life. I mean, the last thing I want to do is hurt someone." When I asked him about the possibility of self-driving cars and if he might use them in the future he said, "bring it on, sooner the better. Anything that can keep me independent. My ego is not in my driving, but my independence and my freedom are."

In the above examples, the goal of my participants is to, as McGuire and Fritch phrased it, "norm the abnormal" as it clearly invokes the social construction of illness, interruption, and disability as the abnormal state. The construction of the car as the antidote to these concerns is dependent on the network within which the driver-car is embodied, which includes my participants' uncomfortable and even painful lived experiences of their own bodies, and their loving concerns for the well-being of meaningful others (I discuss this more in Chapter Five).

We can also see some of the effects of the network on producing the normal, mobile, body when the network breaks down. For example, as my participant Peter described feelings of being without a car after a car accident, that it was near "nerve wracking" and being without a car "upsets the balance":

Peter: It wasn't that long, I'm not gonna say it was nerve wracking, but it was. When you're used to having the car for so long, and you have to adapt and start taking public transport, which is pretty good in the city or taking Ubers, which are also pretty quick and pretty good, it still kind of upsets the balance and especially with the special needs, he's used to certain things he needs is routine and he's used to the car, he's used to driving. And so, it was more of that kind of getting out of routine. And our lives are very routine. That kind of upset the balance of it.

It is in these moments that we can see how a breakdown of the network returns the carless body into the inconvenient body or a disabled body. As I will explore more thoroughly, the concern that people have for reliable cars (for stable and permanent functional operation, that do not break down often) is a dimension of the car which additionally constructs the normal body as an independent body (I discuss the concept of independence at length in Chapter Four).

3.7 Super-human Bodies

Lastly, cars provide a sense of super-human body. In this context, the sense of physical robustness and super-human abilities appears to extend beyond normalcy and towards feelings of greater physical power, greater safety, and which allows for forms of self-expression which are not possible in carless-bodies. It is in this case where the relevance of thinking near Actor-Network Theory holds additional relevance to exploring the capacity of the non-human agents to in play a role in influencing the resulting social constructions of reasonable and expected human capability.

“Physical power”, for example, has in the past been associated with discursive constructions of cars through advertisements and the experiences of men and women as an explicitly gendered phenomenon. As Redshaw (2008) argued, car size and the experience of car power was explicitly associated with gender, as women preferred

more practical and smaller cars, and men preferred larger more powerful feeling cars. This gendered distinction was not generally the case among my participants (only three of my thirty-two participants owned SUVs, one additional participant had experience driving a friend's Jeep; almost all my other participants owned and expressed a preference for small economical commuter cars). Among the SUV owners (and the one other), generally the association was between physical size, power and a feeling of safety and confidence. Thomas was the exception to this, equating the power of the Jeep with a feeling of "being king of the road" (in line with the more abstracted sense of masculinity as exercised in a feeling of physical power, as Redshaw described).

Mark: I used to drive it to work every day. I'd be driving 40 minute a day in total. To have something comfy is very important to me, obviously especially if you're sitting in traffic.

Tyler: Why do you say that, especially if you're sitting in traffic?

Mark: Well, if you're sitting in traffic on the highway, an SUV compared to a sedan, in an SUV you can sit up higher. You can actually see all the traffic on the highway. Sitting in it, you can see how long. If you're looking at a long stretch of highway, you can see up to maybe a kilometer or two kilometers to see how long the traffic is going to be. In a sedan, you're basically sitting on the ground. If you have a truck in front of you, you can't see in front. You don't know how long this traffic is going to be sitting for. It's more than that. It's more that you feel safer if you're in a bigger car. You feel not more dominant, but you feel like you can ... I don't know. If you're parking and you're close to a curb, you just go over the curb. It sounds weird but it's true.

If you're parking close, you're not afraid that you'll ruin your bumper.

Tyler: That makes sense. It's almost like a little bit more leeway to kind of go over the curb or ... What's the word I'm thinking of? You're not confined to the road as much if you can drive around it.

Fannie: The Santa Fe we originally got in 2010 and just because it was a bigger vehicle. It could hold three teenagers in the back, plus lot of storage

in the trunk, lots of space for the kids' activities and all their bags and stuff like that.

And then after that we got the Tucson, I just wanted one that was a little bit smaller and maybe not so expensive. But it's a little bit smaller because if we're going to have two SUVs, then we didn't need two for commuting and that. But I didn't want to go back to a car, so I wanted another SUV, but one that was just a little bit smaller.

Tyler: Why didn't you want to go back to a car?

Fannie: I just didn't want to go lower to the ground when I was driving, I just liked being up still, so I like that security of having and driving in a SUV.

Tyler: Why does it feel secure?

Fannie: I think just because it's like you're driving up higher and you can see more of the road. See more of your surroundings, I think.

Victoria: I like that it has all wheel drive because again, that's a reliability, comfort thing. Where we live, it's like all of the old houses all back into each other and there's a big, shared lane way and it's never cleared and so have what we basically a small lake in the back between our houses, so our car can drive right through and it's no problem, no sweat on her, so I really appreciate that fact, that I do feel very safe in that car.

Thomas: I wouldn't buy a truck, although I love trucks. My favorite driving experiences were the Jeep Wrangler and Ford F150. Great driving experience. Consumes too much gas, but you feel like king of the road when you're driving these things.

Tyler: What do you mean?

Thomas: It's just like you can feel the power of the car while you're driving it. The Jeep Wrangler in particular. You know, a buddy of mine paid like \$91,000 for it. He got literally every feature, it's a Rubicon. Every feature. Every possible add on, he has it. And it's just like how high off the road it is. How strong the engine is. Yeah. Just ... Yeah.

Tyler: This is going to sound like a stupid question, but why do those things make the car better?

Thomas: Well, I mean, I guess, some people prefer speed, some people prefer power. I don't know. Going faster vs. being like really high up and

having almost a vantage point from where you're driving. I don't know. I just like the feeling. I can't really explain it rationally. It's just a nice feeling.

I would like to draw attention to a few key comments from the excerpts above.

Firstly, the fact that Fannie “didn’t want to go back” to the smallness that she felt being in her car compared to her SUV. Similarly as Victoria described, the ability of the SUV to drive through the “small lake” of water that seasonally collected in the alley/driveway towards her condo parking. I find these moments to be very evocative, because of the way they reflect how experiences of the car begin to shift expectations for normalcy and what to expect as a reasonable level of bodily ability. Another moment is Thomas’ awe-inspired retelling of the experience of being in the Jeep, which reflects the alluring capacity of the vehicle to shift his expectations about what kind of capacities and experiences he desired from his body (and the desire to experience his body as a particular kind of car-body).

In addition to the feeling of physical robustness and safety, the relatively new electronic features of cars, through various sensors for example, also supplement the capacity of any physical body’s awareness of itself, and of other entities it comes across. For example, as my participant Amita described:

Tyler: You mentioned there was a change in a good way to get used to all the sensors and things. Do you find they help your driving? They're distracting? Do you like them?

Amita: I find them helpful. When I'm parking, for example, even though, in our garage in our house, I know, my husband's got this tennis ball that comes down. That's as far as I can go without, you know, and it'll hit the windshield, and that's fine. But if I'm out in a parking lot somewhere, if I'm getting close to something a sensor comes on. First, they're green, and then, they go yellow, and then, they go red. So, that's very helpful when you're in an area that you're not familiar.

And, also, when you're backing out, same thing if, let's say I'm turning my car this way, and if I'm really close to a pole or something, the sensors will come on. So, they help to guide you. I mean, you've got the mirrors, too, but you also get some visuals on screen and some beeping noises will happen.

I wouldn't say I rely on them, because I've been driving for so many years, but I guess it's just an added feature for a driver to have that.

Amita: And then, when I'm driving, as well, if I get really close to someone, I get a little feature coming on that shows me I'm really close to the person. You know when, if, say people start braking really quickly, and then, you end up being too close. You get that little thing coming up to you. It's just a very tiny little icon that shows me I'm kind of too close to the person ahead of me.

These technologies, which exist in some ways separate from the car but in other ways as contributions to new definitions of carness, prompt an awareness of our body and construct it as limited in new ways – either limited in attention, in communicating with others, or in its proprioception. They do this by showing us what is possible, and by confounding our understanding with sometimes overwhelming new images and sounds which try to communicate our bodies own inability. In both cases, the car expresses its intentionality (or our interpretation of what it may be intending) upon the networked construction of the body as being something which could be more. To frame these moments with the language of convenience is insufficient to express the profound nature of the experience and the expectations that it sets for the constructions of the body, which is well beyond the gratification one finds in using a tool to save some time and effort.

The embodied experience of convenient bodies extends beyond the immediate experience of driving. The experience of being in a vehicle, of controlling something so immediately responsive it feels like a part of your body, “produces the possibility of action that, once it becomes routine, habitual and ubiquitous, becomes an ordinary form

of embodied social action. People who have become familiar with the driver-car through participating in the assemblage become oriented to their social world, partly at least, through the forms of action of which it is capable" (2004, 74-75). Amber, for example, reported to me that she associated her long history of driving various vehicles with a desire and enjoyment of being in control of something to the extent that she expressed an enjoyment of 'pure' driving: [I asked her if she enjoyed driving] "So I do enjoy driving. I have been driving since I was 10. I used to ride dirt bikes, drive ATVs, and tractors. I remember being out on the ranch at home and I was driving one of those huge ugly brown Suburbans, like a 13-seater Suburban with a horse trailer. So, I like driving, I like being in control of something. It is a fun recreational activity. But again, I hate driving in traffic, and I hate driving in Montreal or I won't drive in Toronto. So, I love driving when driving can be pure."

3.8 Conclusion

My intention in this chapter has been to focus on the relationship between drivers and cars as one which is not just about people finding convenient ways to get around, but as an embodied relationship within a complex and changing network that constructs bodies in different ways. One of the main reasons that people buy cars is to transform their bodies into the bodies they want or feel they need them to be based on their experience of that body interacting with a network of factors: including the technologies of the car, the infrastructure of the city, ideas about normal and abnormal bodies, their prior experiences of their own bodily abilities, and more. I have also hoped to articulate that the language and goals of creating more convenient transportation is fundamentally a task of delivering on an experience of the body.

While looking for effective theoretical frameworks with which to interpret my findings, the cultural and social approach of disability studies helped to direct me to understanding convenience as something which exists in the context of the subjective experience of one's body within the environment, and it oriented me to be attentive to the various ways that convenience was connected to how my participants experienced their bodies. There is a need to explore the meaning of cars through the lens of disability studies much more thoroughly if we are to support the two aims of universal design (Steinfeld and Maisel 2012) and moving towards an intentional relationship with cars.

As contemporary discussions on transportation focus on innovative ways to make non-car transportation more convenient, this chapter should be seen as prompting a few important points to reframe the discussion around bodies. Firstly, that discussions about convenience in transportation should be subsumed within larger discussions around accessibility. This is not only because accessibility is a more important social issue than convenience, but because both are about how people experience their body in the world, and both are concepts which can be expressed in similar terms (e.g., measures of normalization, ideologies, relationships to capital, networks of actors, etc.). Secondly, because it may help articulate that those feelings of normalcy which come from car ownership are not necessarily replicable in the provisions of access to other forms of mobility. Just because alternatives save time or are more comfortable, for example, it does not necessarily mean they will feel convenient. Conversely, just because public transit may provide accessibility, it does not

necessarily mean it provides a sense of normalcy or that it will be seen as an attractive or enticing replacement for cars.

In conjunction with the points above, I also hope to raise a few questions: 1) If the desire for convenience is about overcoming our bodies and feeling normal, will innovations towards convenience ever reach a satisfying conclusion? Based on my interpretation, I believe the answer is no. I think that this is particularly evident in the way that my participants' interactions with the super-humanizing technologies of cars begins to redefine and reorient their own understanding of how their bodies are limited. We should consider that this is the same with technologies of convenience, which de-normalize the inconveniences of the body in a way that is constantly shifting and reorienting them to what is an acceptable, reasonable, or normal regarding the amount of time or effort expended to go somewhere, among other qualities.

Two other questions which I cannot yet answer but pose for others: 2) in the current discourse, the super-human body is luxury, convenience is decency, and able-bodiedness is necessity: does the social desire to shift away from cars deconstruct existing forms of social stratification, and/or does it create new ones? 3) What are the repercussions of these stratifications when we contemplate some of the conclusions of the subsequent chapters of this dissertation: namely, concerning infrastructure, concerning economic opportunity, concerning relationships of care, and concerning whose ideology and vision of the future is brought into being?

In conclusion, a discussion of cars must tackle prevailing discourses around the multitudinous constructions of our bodies first, rather than addressing just our needs for convenience as an objective and external quality of a technology. Of similar importance,

it is key to address the networks in which convenience emerges – though my research limitedly address the situations in which cars contribute to the construction of inconvenient car-bodies, details that my participants raised suggest that this may be the case in some situations. Exploring what experiences with cars make inconvenient bodies may have an impact on efforts to steer some people away from continued car ownership.

Cars are not just convenience devices, for some they exist within the same ontological category as wheelchairs or crutches, they are about removing barriers. When we consider a carless future, what considerations shall we make for those for whom the incentive to drive is not a matter of convenience, but a matter of physical independence? Further, to re-emphasize the point that Dant wrote previously: “The use of cars is not simply functional, a matter of convenience, nor is it reducible to individual, conscious decision. Like the wearing of clothes or following conventions of politeness, the actions of the driver-car have become a feature of the flow of daily social life that cannot simply be removed or phased out (like dangerous drivers or leaded petrol)” (2004, 74).

4. Chapter 4: Freedom from Economic Uncertainty

4.1 In Summary:

In this chapter, I argue that people own and use cars because they believe that cars are the most reliable way of securing and routinizing their economic activities. Personally-owned cars give people a sense of self-reliance and self-determination (often talked about in terms of freedom and independence) that other modes of transportation, even shared cars, are not seen to provide. I point to the role of my participants' cars as both a political economic necessity in the form of human capital and as a symbolic object of comfort in the context of the entrepreneurial, flexible, and precarious contemporary construction of work and employment. In this chapter I conclude that as we look towards the future of car ownership, we must also consider the future of work: as flexibility and precarity become more frequent conditions of employment, the human capital value of the car appreciates and its symbolic role as a self-guarantee for participating in labour will be increasingly reified as a cultural phenomenon. Without an alternative means of mobility that can offer the same sense of independence and self-determination to participate in the labour market, car ownership seems likely to continue as the status quo.

4.2 Introduction to Chapter 4

Ted is a 64-year-old Westboro resident. He is semi-retired from a career in software sales. When we spoke, he raved about his base-model Honda Civic: black, manual transmission, low maintenance costs, low fuel costs. A car that never gave him any "trouble", as he described it. It rarely needed maintenance nor was there ever a full

breakdown of its operability. A car that never failed to start, even on the coldest of cold Ottawa days at -40 degrees Celsius. I asked him about the cost of his car compared to public transportation, which at the time of our interview was \$122 per month for the unlimited usage of bus and train systems in Ottawa. He told me he had no problem spending additional money on parking and owning a car because of what access to a car meant for the reliability of his mobility and indirectly, his job. Even now, semi-retired, I asked him if he could see himself continuing to own a car for the foreseeable future.

Ted said:

Oh yes, yeah. As long as I can drive it. It's about reliability. I'm not gonna count on public transportation. Are you kidding? I like the [feeling of] independence. If I wanna go somewhere, I go. I wanna arrive at a certain time, that's when I get there. I'm not dependent on a schedule. I worked downtown for years and I paid well over \$150 a month just to park rather than take public transport because of the reliability. You can't keep telling your manager, 'Oh, I'm late 'cause the bus didn't come on time.' They're not interested, they just want you there when you're supposed to be there. I'm not against it, I just won't use it if it's not reliable.

This concern with reliability was not new to me, having conducted interviews with more than twenty people by this time from around the city. The subject of reliability entered most of my conversations with participants in my initial questions about the difference between “good cars” and “bad cars”.

Amelia: A good car would be a reliable car. For me you know what, appearance doesn't really matter, cost of the car doesn't matter, if it's gonna be reliable, that makes it a good car. If I'm gonna try to start it in the middle of a snowstorm and it doesn't start. Sure, some cars just do that, but if it's consistently not doing that, then it wouldn't be considered a good car to me. Like if it's reliable, it's good. It doesn't need to be fancy; it doesn't need to be expensive. If it gets the job done and it's safe, then I'd probably say that's a good car.

Apurav: For me, it would be one that functions when you want it to function. Not a lot of issues with it that you constantly have to get fixed, or that can leave you stranded or not able to use it. Also, for me, good versus bad would be how much gas it uses. Reliability and utility, for sure.

Guillaume: Yeah, to me, a good car is reliable, and efficient. Yeah, I do not look at performance, when I think of that. So, it's really about, "Is it gonna break down and isn't gonna cost you a fortune to drive, is it drinking way too much gas or not for its utility?" So, I'm really looking at... Is it worth your money and is it reliable?

Similar feelings were communicated to me when the questions focussed on participants' specific cars. For example, Alisha commented on her Toyota Corolla:

Tyler: What do you like about [your car] after all this time? What do you dislike about it?

Alisha: I dislike that it's not just perfect at all times. I still have to remember to go for an oil change and I have to get the brakes changed after a certain time. I hate changing tires on it. But I love that it's really easy to drive. I never worry about it. It's so reliable and dependable. I've never been stranded on the side of the road with it. I have driven probably close to 200,000 kilometers and I've never once worried about it. I've never been like, "The car is not going to start today." It's always ... It's minus 40, it'll start without being plugged in. It doesn't like it, but it will start. I've never had a problem with it ever, and I love that. I love that it's fuel efficient. I love that it fits all my stuff when I need to move or get from point A to point B.

Tyler: What would you say if you had to pick one thing? What would you say your favorite thing about it is?

Alisha: My favorite thing about it is it's very dependable.

In this chapter, I want to show that people buy and own cars because cars feel like the most reliable way of securing the mobility needed to participate in the economy.⁷ The context of this motivation is twofold: on one hand car ownership offers

⁷ I deliberately use "feel" here because reliability is constructed from a feeling of trustworthiness and quality, not of any objective performance.

pragmatic economic benefits which maximize an individual's ability to engage in economic activities. For example, cars increase the number of options an individual has for work and shopping (to participate in the production and consumption of goods and services) by expanding the distance that people can travel. Similarly, and with surprising frequency, cars fulfil a requisite criterion of some kinds of employment. Cars also serve as a store of measurable wealth and as an instrument of debt, both of which connect people to the larger economic institutions of the community. This economic face-value is important, although it does not completely explain the rationales for car ownership provided by my participants.

It is, on the other hand, the manner in which car ownership satisfies those pragmatic economic benefits that stands out as the cultural dimension which sets personal cars apart from other modes of transportation: primarily it provides *freedom*, and this freedom is defined as independence from other people whom the car owner would otherwise be reliant on for their transportation needs. This self-reliance, by extension, offers the feeling of *flexibility* and *control* over transportation outcomes, and it brings a sense of *predictability* and *routine* to economic and social activities. While a concern for reliability and cost dominated the discussions I had with participants about why they owned cars for transportation, these other benefits were strongly communicated to me, and I have interpreted them as the cultural values which serve as the counterpoint of the face-value economic concerns.

These ideas emerged ethnographically in the context of discussions of “commuting”, the habitual practice of traveling between places of home and work. Commuting is an activity which has coincided with the increasing spatial separation of

home and work that is characteristic of industrial capitalism since the 19th century (Aldred 2014, 420). In this chapter I focus on commuting because of the repetition of the subject I encountered with my participants and because it is an essential structural condition of their lives. The need for a car for use in commuting constituted a major motivation for car ownership among my participants.

The structure of this chapter begins with a brief summary of current academic perspectives on the commute. Subsequently, I discuss some of the scholarly studies of work and employment—the thing to which my participants were commuting. In that section (4.4), I explore two key trends in employment practices, namely the increasing precarity and destabilization of work relationships. I use these topics to frame the subsequent section of the chapter and a review of some key moments with my participants highlighting the economic considerations of cars; namely, how my participants' responses and behaviours reflect a concern for flexibility and mobility as important means for securing economic opportunities, and to increase their commuting opportunities (concerning production and consumption).

Next, I interpret my participants' behaviour and attitudes through Foucault's concept of *human capital* which argues that under capitalism each subject is oriented to investing in the means to secure and augment their economic potential and that the car is one such investment. Looking at the car as a store of human capital, however, only partly explains the predominance of car use in my participants' understanding. In the subsequent section (4.7), I highlight the cultural factors underlying the general concern for reliability as it emerged in my engagements with participants. Per their descriptions, I interpret the car as a kind of economic "comfort object" which is not owned solely for its

mobility, but rather for its security: as means of accounting for the “in case” or “what if” scenarios of uncertainty. It serves as a means of establishing self-reliance and independence, control, and a predictable routine for economic engagements. In this way, the car symbolically acts as a kind of *guarantee* which my participants made for themselves for reliable and continued participation in the economy, and which is in turn a practice that reaffirms a modernist orientation to everyday life.

An aim of this chapter is also to point towards the pronounced trends of modern practices of work as important considerations for understanding continued ownership and use of cars, particularly increasing precarity and the destandardization of work and of work relationships. These trends may be substantial explanatory social factors for my participants’ emphasis on the car as the most reliable way to participate in the economy, and the ideological orientation to the car as a kind of comfort object. In essence, I argue that trends in work today fuel a pronounced sense of need for a flexible, personal, and independent mode of transportation found in the car when taken in conjunction with the other meanings I have identified in other chapters of this dissertation.

4.3 Commuting and Commuters

Beginning in the 19th century with the prevalence of rail, the growth of transportation infrastructure has facilitated the expansion of capitalist modes of economy and with it, the ever-increasing mobility of capital and labour (Harvey 1990). “As rail became more widely used for passenger transport, employers’ locational flexibility increased: people could travel further to work, and workplaces became less closely tied to the location of labour as well as materials” (Aldred 2014, 450). Though initially commuting was primarily by rail, cars in North America are now the dominant

mode of commuter mobility. In 2016, 15.8 million Canadians reported commuting to work daily, with 12.6 million by car (Savage 2019; Yaropud et al 2019). In Ottawa-Gatineau, over 450,000 people commute by car, comprising 73% of the region's commuting population, including carpools. This is 7 percentage points lower than the national proportion of car-based commuters (Savage 2019; Yaropud et al 2019). From 2011 to 2016, the number of Canadians with a car commute longer than 60 minutes increased by 5%, with the majority of those car commuters reporting long commutes despite living and working in the same Census Metropolitan Area (Savage 2019; Yaropud et al 2019).

For the most part, government-sponsored transportation projects have aimed at reducing commute times due to the problems they cause (Aldred 2014, 455-456). For example, the Government of Canada states that long commutes by car can affect a person's health, safety, personal finances, result in more traffic, higher levels of individual stress and less time for individuals to take on other activities. Long commutes by car also represent a cost to society, through environmental impacts, raising infrastructure costs and lowering overall community productivity (Statistics Canada Census 2016). Despite these negative aspects of the commute, current research suggests that commute time is often used productively or for leisure with many commuters practicing a multitude of "multi-tasking" activities including reading, working, making personal and work phone calls, listening to music or media broadcasts, learning foreign languages, sleeping, daydreaming, etc. (Laurier 2004; Laurier et al., 2008; Lyons and Chatterjee 2008). While many of these are only possible in modes other than the car, it highlights that the commute is more than just time spent moving from home to

work and back again. It shows that the commute is more complex and host to a number of routine and potentially productive practices.

Commuting is an increasingly common, highly routine, and embedded social practice in Ottawa. It is a regular, generally twice-daily transportation activity from usually the same fixed address of home and the same fixed address of work (although this is, again, increasingly not always the case). Some scholars, as well as the data collected during the course of my fieldwork, suggest that commute time is a way of transitioning between work and home mindsets, or creating an extension of those places (Laurier 2004). This is something I also noted in Chapter Two. Recall the way that several of my participants used the commute as an opportunity to transition between home and work mindsets, or the ways they incorporated the scenic drive into escapes into Gatineau Park or many of the other parks and spaces with form Ottawa's Greenbelt.

As the commute and its socio-cultural effects have expanded and proliferated, commuting by any means (walk, bike, rail, car, scooter, etc.) has become a necessary practice for people to engage economically in society. Given the prevalence of commuting around the world, debates have emerged as to whether this necessary commuting time and effort is the responsibility of the employee or the employer; as Aldred writes: "worker mobility has become not just enabled but expected (expressed in contractual terms such as 'you may be expected to work at other sites' and through job advertisements stating 'essential driver' or 'essential car owner'). Getting employees to work however has mainly become a problem for the worker rather than the employer, and it has come with a cost" (2014 454). As Aldred has documented, in the US,

households spent 16 percent (\$148) of their total income on commuting per household per week in 2011. In Europe, the percentage is slightly lower: in 2008 the EU-27 average was 13.4 percent and the EU-15 average was 13.5 per cent. In the UK in 2010, households spent 13.7 percent of their income on transport—£77.10 per week (2014, 454). In Canada, the cost of transportation (across all modes) was roughly \$216 CAD per week in 2016.⁸

4.4 Precarity and 'Destandardization' of Work

A number of scholars have written about the important connection between work and individual identity, but there is a growing appreciation that the role of work must be addressed in an individual's context and with respect to changes in the configuration of individuals' relationships to work. Sennett (1998) and Putnam (2000) both proposed that major transformations in the world of work have created an individualised outlook on work and life. Giddens (1991) argued that workers had greater opportunities for self-realisation and for creating their sense of self in an 'identity project', whilst Beck (2000) and Bauman (1998) are critical of work as an identity project, contending that "the idea that social identity and status depend only upon a person's occupation and career must be taken apart and abandoned, so that social esteem and security are really uncoupled from paid employment" (2000, 57). Hodgkiss (2015) has written at length on how work has been typically theorized as either inherently meaningful and dignified (typified by type of work and observable degree of skill involved), or not at all connected to meaning

⁸ Calculated based on reported Stats Can Data (2016) of \$179 billion aggregate household spending on transportation costs (including insurance), divided by the total number of reported commuters (15.9 million), divided by 52 weeks.

and a sense of dignity. Given varied theoretical and empirical investigations into the relationship between labour and individual dignity, Hodgkiss notes that the connection remains “suggestive”, ambiguous, and relatively mired in methodological issues around the specific variable of “dignity”.

The connection between work and identity remains debated, but we can also look at how studies of unemployment have cast the lack of work as highly connected to identity and sense of self and thus shed light on the importance of work generally in Western societies. Roberts (2015) explored how a lack of work erodes individuals’ sense of self and is socially stigmatizing. The uncertainty of unemployment is “stressful and anxiety provoking” even when new job prospects are good. Individuals resist describing themselves as unemployed, they are known to conceal their unemployment from friends, family and acquaintances, and when they do become employed again, they are more likely to endure substantial losses of workforce status and income in order to regain employment (Roberts 2015, 473).

The threat of this stigmatization looms in the contemporary labour market, as we can identify from other more macro-oriented studies of employment, that the threat of unemployment, whether transitional/temporary or long-term, is ever-present in the minds of North Americans. Though this data is dated and limited, national surveys in the United States (US) have reported that many people in the US perceive their employment to be insecure (Smith 2015). In Canada, available data suggests that roughly 32% of Canadians feel negatively or very negatively about their job security (Forum Research 2019).

Real employment has also trended towards predominantly insecure and precarious forms of employment. There is a general consensus among sociologists and economists that expectations of “life-time employers” which typified employment of the mid-to-late 1900s, have “melted into air” along with the institutions that made them possible (Sennet 2006, 24–25). In the US in particular, American workers now take on an average of 10.8 different jobs before reaching the age of 42 (Bittman 2015, 535). Additionally, more people work on a contingent, temporary, freelance, and contract basis, comprising a considerable nonstandard, irregularly employed workforce (Smith, 2015, 368). As Smith (2015) has investigated using in-depth interviews, American workers engage in a complex process of interpreting, calculating, and strategizing around risk and uncertainty in employment. Individuals appear to appropriate elements of the neoliberal entrepreneurial ideology (what I call abilities-machines later in this chapter), rethink their careers as projects of self-mobility, and “strive to act as empowered agents in the midst of uncertainty” (370). People have largely internalized a notion of short-term job tenure as the norm, albeit to wildly varying circumstances and effect, and this is evident in several other sociological and anthropological studies across the spectrum of job types.⁹

⁹ I rely heavily on Vicky Smith’s (2014) comprehensive summary of literature on unemployment and precarity. Work she sites includes literature dealing with high technology and internet-based jobs (Barley and Kunda 2004; Bergvall-Kåreborn and Howcroft 2013; Cooper 2014; Lane 2011; Neff 2012; Osnowitz 2010); banking and Wall Street workers (Ho 2009); editors (Osnowitz 2010); (auto workers [Chen 2015; Dudley 1994; Milkman 1997], Gulf Coast shrimp fishers [Harrison 2012], logging industry workers [Sherman 2009], and other working-class adults [Silva 2013]); project-based, ‘sunrise’ occupations (creative industry jobs such as social media, entertainment, modeling, programming [Bergvall-Kåreborn and Howcroft 2013]).

Neoliberalism is defined as the economic philosophy of deregulation, privatization, and general reduction of state influence in market activities (Turner 2006). As Smith (2015) has previously reviewed, a common and surprising finding from the many studies mentioned above is that across the occupational board, American workers rationalize precarity as normal within the context of this “free-market ideology”:

Study after study confirms that Americans are very likely to endorse neoliberalism and market logic...They identify with corporate management's interests and endorse the idea that when employers lay off people, downsize, and close plants they are simply making rational and justifiable economic decisions to ensure their profitability... They let employers off the hook with respect to actions that lead to job loss and heightened employment insecurity. (372)

This attitude towards neoliberalism stands somewhat as evidence of Foucault's analysis of neoliberalism as a mode of governance and an ethical program (van Wijk 2021). I will speak more to this point in section 4.6 of this chapter.

Furthermore, Smith found that people decline to blame employers in these situations, and instead perceive their transitional unemployment as an *individual failure* to reposition themselves in new occupations or labor markets:

Workers accept often-times degraded conditions (of job security, of compensation, of benefits), many of which are determined by employers, without challenging these conditions. Moreover, people are highly likely to blame themselves, viewing themselves as incapable of adjusting or unfit for the turbulent economy. They endeavor to adapt individually and in groups to economic transformation. People rationalize to themselves that they weren't really happy in previous jobs and try to turn unemployment into an opportunity for personal growth. Others come to believe that their lack of a job or failure to move up the mobility ladder is a result of their personal failing: a problem with their appearance, body language, or attitude, or their inept networking practices (Sharone 2014; Smith 2001); a product of poor choices made in one's past (Dudley 1994); a reflection of deeper psychological troubles or family dysfunctions (Silva 2013); or their complacency and inability to take risks in their jobs (Sennett 1998). Some blame peers for their dysfunctional and maladaptive character (Silva 2013) and for being 'incompetent and lazy' (Purser 2009). (373)

In addition to the overall cultural importance of employment, the looming presence of precarity and shortening job tenure, is the increasing tendency of jobs to take on unstandardized temporal and spatial requirements. This destandardization is defined and understood as

...including all forms of employment that diverge along at least one dimension from year-round, full-time wage employment with a single employer, at the employer's worksite and with the expectation of durable attachment (some say 'permanent'). Nonstandard arrangements most often do not entail an implicit expectation of durable employment; in fact, many have an explicitly stated limited duration. Thus, intermittent, or on-call employment is episodic and therefore nonstandard. Fixed term or limited duration contracts/hiring is considered nonstandard. Triangular employment relationships – as in temporary agency work – are nonstandard both because employment is not expected to be long-term and because the worker is on the agency's payroll yet is supervised by the user employer (which in turn has a contractual relationship with the temporary agency). Employment may be nonstandard in several ways: contractual, for example with short term, temp, or on-call work; temporal (qualitative, as with shift work, fluctuating hours, nonstandard/night hours, or quantitative as with part-time); and spatial as with off-site, at home, in another company's locale (Beck 1992; Castells 1996). (Carre 2014, 386-387)

According to some scholars, such as Bittman (2015) and others, the transition in the 1970s to post-Fordism¹⁰ which in essence embodied a new regime “epitomized by flexibility” (527). The discourse of this mode of economic organization “idealizes flexible employment, invites the worker to construe employment uncertainty as emancipatory, and conjures the labor market as an arena in which individual freedom and self-fulfillment can be won” (Vallas and Prenner 2012, 339). The growth of the cultural phenomena of networking is closely linked to this trend in work:

¹⁰ According to some scholars, (Bittman 2015 and Tauss 2012), post-Fordist flexible accumulation and production grew in conjunction with the replacement of Keynesian economic theory with Neoliberalism, which essentially sought to reduce government intervention and control in the flow of capital and labour.

Participating in 'networking' activities also serves as a substitute for having a job: when networking, job seekers can feel like they are working, that hours spent at events is part of their job and can be counted as hours clocked in... Through networking, people learn to espouse the discourse of the entrepreneur, do identity work, and talk the talk of the risk taker... Networking therefore serves as part of the bundle of activities that channel individuals' job-seeking energy and effort. It can help sustain their hope that there will be a payoff to coping with employment ambiguity. (Smith 2015, 377)

4.5 Maintaining Access to Economic Opportunities

I met with Thomas via webchat, one evening in late October 2020. Thomas is a public servant, nearing 30 years old at the time of our interview and living with his parents. This was not for lack of income or affordability, according to him, because not only did he work full-time at a "cushy government job", but he also attended to tenants and his investment properties in and around the city. Furthermore, he worked part-time during summers to coach and umpire baseball teams for additional income. Thomas, apparently quite financially secure, also spoke to me about how he currently saved (that is, kept in a savings or investment account) about 90% of his income.

Thomas' car was a means of sustaining financial security and economic independence. According to him, his car afforded him the ability to access the multitude of economic activities he was engaged in, economic activities which in turn paid for the car and more, yet he did not see his car as his only or even preferred mode of transportation. He told me that he was driving just a little under 10,000 kilometers per year and mainly for work related reasons. While Thomas represented a sort of extreme case in terms of his frugality and the number of ways he was generating income through his car, this utilitarian consideration about cars was not unique among my participants:

Tyler: You mentioned you're living with your parents right now?

Thomas: Yep

T: And do they have cars of their own or do you share cars?

Thomas: Yeah, they have cars. They just bought a [Hyundai] Tucson, like a couple of months ago. I mean, I can tell you what my mom's preferences are, because they're pretty clear. In her case, pretty much take everything I told you out of the window, forget I ever said it. She likes bigger cars. She likes her four-wheel drive, leather seats, heated seats. She buys her car for purely comfort and safety. So, all the electronic gadgets are inside, they got the higher trim, the ultimate trim. No, sorry, the luxury trim. I'm not sure if you're familiar with the trims? Like leather seats, panoramic sunroof, heated steering wheel, heated seats, Bluetooth, adaptive cruise control, lane assist, blind spot monitoring. Yeah. And it has the bigger engine, the 2.4 liter one, with all wheel drive. It guzzles gas like you can't imagine. But anyways ...

T: And why does your taste differ so radically from that?

Thomas: I don't know. I'm not a materialistic type of person. I live very, very frugally. Like with my house and rental properties, not into cars, I guess. It's just not high on my priority list. And again, I consider myself very frugal. Like I save like 90% of my paycheck type thing. And what else? And I don't use my car a lot. If I used my car more, then I'd probably have a different position on certain things, but I don't. Throughout the winter I use it very little, just to go to friend's places. And in the summer, that's when I use it a ton, because I umpire sports in the summer. So, I do a lot of driving then. But never too far. In the four years that I've owned the car, I've done under 40,000 kilometers. So less than 10,000 a year. So, I don't drive a lot. And again, I'd say that over half of that is done in a three-month period in the summer.

My car is pretty much like the most basic model above the standard. So, it has electric windows, that's it. No Bluetooth, no cruise control. No heated seats, no starter, no key fob. Nothing. Just the cheapest thing I could find in that car class. There isn't much to say other than it's pretty bare bones.

It has decent fuel consumption. Good visibility. Great bang for your buck, really. I have a five-year warranty that came with it, instead of the three that you get with other cars. Fuel consumption's good, it does like under nine liters per 100 kilometers in the city. Which I'm content with. And very good turning radius. I don't know. That's about it.

...

My typical criteria is that any car over \$25,000 is a no go. So, anything over \$25,000 I wouldn't want to own...I wouldn't buy large cars, because I find them, I don't know, for city driving, not practical. They tend to guzzle gas. So right off, pretty much ... And if you want to go for a hybrid, then they

would be way over my budget. Because as far as monthly payment goes, it adds up close to about \$300 a month, maybe a bit more. I wouldn't want to pay that. And then when you factor insurance, and everything else, I wouldn't want to pay more than about 450 bucks a month on a car. Considering how much I use it.

...

T: And so, why don't you drive very often?

Thomas: Well, my commute to work, I work in Gatineau, it's about eight kilometers away. So, in the summer, from April/May, from as soon as the snow goes away, all the way 'till about now, so in November, I use my bike. Right? And then, in the winter, I mostly use public transportation because parking at work is too expensive. Alternatively, I'll drive if I'm not feeling well. Like last week I was sick, and I drove. It's 30 minutes by car, or 30 minutes by bike, but over an hour by bus.

So, throughout the whole year, I may drive to work and back like 20 times at most. In special circumstances, like if I have an appointment and I can park in the two, three-hour parking zones, because I have an appointment or a half day, or something like that, then I'll take my car. Otherwise, public transit or cycling. Yeah. And in the summer, I drive a lot because I have to for my part time job. I'm not going to ... It wouldn't be time efficient for me to use public transit or bike.

T: You mean with the sports officiating?

Thomas: Yep. And I use it because of my rental property in outside the city. So, another decent part of the mileage is that trip, which is about 85, 90 kilometers away. So, I head there, I'd say maybe 12 to 15 times a year. That's almost 1200 kilometers just to make that trip, right?

To emphasize the point of the excerpts above, Thomas exemplifies how cars facilitate access to economic opportunities, with a greater or lesser expense paid to have a car that suits one's own style, comforts, sense of social role, status, and ideological dispositions (these aspects of cars are things I explore more thoroughly in Chapter 5). Thomas, in this case, generally used a bicycle to get to work except for days when he was ill or when weather was particularly challenging, but he still owned a car (and a new one at that) because it was seen as a necessary "waste of money" in

order to secure those opportunities: [I asked him about the circumstances around buying the car], he said:

I was in school, right? So, I didn't really have a large down payment to put... I wanted to save it until I had to pay back my student loans, which I did. So, I took the fact that there was zero percent financing over 84 months ...which factored in quite a bit. And in the end, I got the car with everything included, all the fees and stuff, I got it for \$20,200 or so. So, it was the cheapest possible thing I could get financed very generously, over seven years. And didn't have to waste my cash flow on a car. Because I consider a car mostly a waste of money, for me, for my needs.

In effect Thomas looked to waste as little money as possible to facilitate his access to economic activities without wasting time, or being late due to unreliable public transportation, to avoid conflicting use of his parents' car and ensure he had transportation, to ensure he could effectively landlord over properties located outside the city, etc. Thomas provides an exposition of many of the reasons that my participants shared with me for their ownership of cars: to ensure *reliable* participation in economic (and social) activities.¹¹

Variations on this attitude were prevalent among my other participants, although more so in cases when they reported they needed their automobiles for primary work responsibilities or secondary forms of income. For example, Guillaume and Juan both owned contractor businesses out of Gatineau and Ottawa respectively for which their cars were seen as indispensable tools for dealing with the demands of those with whom they maintained economic relationships (tenants and customers). For others, like Julien and his wife, the car was primarily based on the unpredictability of working schedules as

¹¹ This is not to say that my participants were all just concerned with utility with their car purchases. I discuss this more in the next chapter.

lawyers and the need to quickly and effectively meet work-related social obligations (such as “business development” and “networking”):

Guillaume: Well, even though I have a full-time job I still have part of my real estate business, so I own a few properties around town, so I have to tend to those properties and hustling to go do the repairs and stuff like that. I suppose I could always take the bus if I had no other option, but it seemed like a worthwhile investment to be able to tend to my business and it makes doing groceries much easier. Now it's so much easier. I have a lot of tools to carry. So, my tool pack is about 70 pounds, plus if I need the materials. And I can get calls any time. So, I've had calls in the middle of the night and sometimes there's no bus for another 45 minutes, so if there's an emergency [with my tenants], I'd rather be there quickly, right?

Juan: Okay. So as far as car usage goes, I do renovations and home repairs and plumbing and so on. I've run a small business for the last 15 years here in Ottawa. Sorry, 10 years, here in Ottawa. Another five years before that in Toronto. So whatever vehicle I have is in fairly constant use. And I've found that I really don't need a truck. A car is just fine because 90% of the time all I need is my basic tools. Maybe a bit of lumber or a bit of pipe, that sort of thing. And you can generally fit that into whatever car you have. So, I've had a small Ford station wagon, a Honda Civic, and then a Toyota Prius for five years, and then now we have the Nissan Leaf. The Leaf has actually been really excellent for that.

Julien: All of the factors were taken into account when considering whether we should buy a car or not. Ultimately what sealed the deal was, my partner, as a lawyer, her schedule is very unstable. She will sometimes stay...like yesterday for instance, she was at work until 10:30 pm.

I drove her to work yesterday morning and the same day she finished at 11:30 pm, and then I have to drive her to work for a 7:00 am start because she had something urgent to do. So, the instability of her schedule, plus the fact that she plays sports, and part of her job as a lawyer is to do business development. So, she has to attend social events and often they are in the evening such as fundraisers that go very late or they are very far, and alcohol is served. So, I prefer to go pick her up, or if I attend I do not drink so that I can be her designated driver. So basically, that is what motivated us.

Car ownership and driving ability were also reported as key employment factors in certain fields of full-time employment. This was the case for a few of my participants, such as Amelia and Robert, who reported needing their vehicles because of their work in the fields of healthcare and social services, needing to get from client to client on a daily basis:

Amelia: Yeah, I just got it. I think it was probably June when I got it, May or June. And then my main reason for getting it was for my job as a home healthcare worker so I could get from client to client without having to take public transportation and make my 10-minute drive like an hour and a half commute on the bus.

Robert: Okay, so my current car, the Fusion, is not as bad as the Charger we had before but it's still a big car. So, I think I like something just kind of smaller now that I'm looking for a car. I have had brand new cars in the past, but I think I'm at the point of my life where I can't really afford that, so I'll go for older used cars now, mostly looking for good value. And good value for the money for gas. And then a couple of things that I really enjoy in a car are a lot of electronics like [power] windows, air conditioning. I like a nice sound system, and a sunroof. A lot of electronics and stuff like that, just because it makes it easier. The windows are just up and down and the sunroof you can just have it open and have air coming in and stuff like that. I'm really into music so I really like that. I have a CD thing in the car, like a five changer one or and or have Sirius as well as a radio station just because then I can pick my music, what I like right now we have it and I'm an '80s guy, so I just do a lot of '80s music.

The other things about this is that I tend to almost work out of my car, because as a case manager, I'm responsible for my case load, I have 12 people that I go and meet with every week, so I'm going to their places I'm going to hospitals, I'm going to wherever they are at the time. So, technically, I'm in my car all day.

And that's why the electrical stuff because then it provides a bit of extra comfort especially the Sirius Radio. We normally... I would never buy a subscription to a radio, but the one has no commercials and that I can hit up and music in certain artists and everything, so when I'm driving around all day that's really fun.

Other than that, I just use the car for regular stuff like groceries and visiting family. And sometimes we drive often to the states to go shopping and eat there, just go for drives even sometimes.

For Amelia, owning a car reduces the time it takes to visit clients, it increases the number of clients she can see in a day, and it increases the “free time” she has away from work in a given day. For Robert, owning a car is a necessity based on his job description. He is mandated to own a car and his employer reimbursed him up to a certain amount in terms of gas, insurance, and outright cost of ownership of the vehicle.

Interestingly, these very practical and utilitarian uses of the car also emerged in conversations about consumption (shopping for groceries, buying furniture, etc.). Apurav and Chandra, for example, recounted an interesting story about the value of their car in allowing them to go to the “cheap” grocery store as opposed to the one that was right next to their apartment. They told me that they used to take the bus, but now that they live in Alta Vista, they can drive for the same reasons - to go and buy goods where it is cheaper, or there are better deals, etc.

Apurav: We would take the bus to go get groceries, and because we're cheap, we would take it to...

Tyler: Wasn't your apartment right next to a grocery store?

Apurav: Yeah, we went to the cheaper grocery store

Chandra: Every once in a while, we would stock up on stuff and then we would carry, I'm not exaggerating, each of us would carry maybe 35-40 pounds of groceries, scattered amongst six bags so we would come onto the bus with 12 bags of groceries.

Apurav: But the thing is, I'm not sure that would improve quality of life because that was our choice to be cheap, because we could have gone to the one down the street from us, but it wouldn't have made sense to buy a car which would have been a cost, just to ... go to the cheaper grocery store.

Apurav: I guess now, in terms of the utility thing too, it changes over time, so now it would also be it has space, it has to be able to haul certain loads, it's not just that it can't die, but it also needs to... So annoying when you're trying to move something and your car is just three inches too small, or something can't fit in your trunk and stuff.

Apurav: So, just something for average utility because at some point in my life I would prefer a smaller car that could fit parking spaces, but now I prefer bigger cars where I can take my stuff.

Mark recounted a similar response for his primary uses of the car, more so on the lines of being able to buy large bulky items like furniture from cost-efficient retailers like IKEA:

Mark: Yeah. I could use it a lot more now that I am moving. It definitely doesn't worry me now if I get something and I want to buy something big or pick up something from Kijiji. You don't have to figure out oh, how am I going to get that home? Or how am I going to transport that? You just now have the option of oh, I'll just go in the back. It'll fit. Most kind of stuff I buy will probably fit in the car.

Or if you're ... When I had bought a snowblower, and I was able to put that in the back of my vehicle. I wouldn't have been able to put that in my Civic. It's just stuff like that when you're at a store. I'm personally a huge impulse buyer, so if I'm at a store and there's a deal on something, I don't have to worry about oh, I'll come back later for it or hold it. You just buy it on the spot. You don't have to worry about not being able to bring it home. Or if you got to Costco, everything's going to fit in your car.

4.6 *Abilities-Machines: Cars as Human Capital*

The concept of human capital largely informs my understanding of the cultural significance of these pragmatic economic motivations for car ownership. In combination with contemporary trends in attitudes towards work and changes in work relationships, it explains why my participants' need to expand and maintain economic opportunities of production and consumption favours personal cars over other types of transportation. With respect to human capital and its extension to cars, however, there is a nuance that must be acknowledged. For my participants in particular, cars were not an investment to

secure greater economic returns, rather they were instruments for *ensuring continued participation and access* to economic opportunities or rather to give them confidence in the persistence and security of that participation through the expansion of available possibilities. Put another way, cars ensured my participants had opportunities for work available to them, regardless of whether or not they choose to exercise that access.

I mainly deploy the concept of human capital as described by Michel Foucault in *the Birth of Biopolitics* (1979) and which has subsequently been elaborated upon further by authors Cederström and Spicer (2015; 2017), among others. There are a few key elements of this idea which have relevance to this chapter: firstly, that the desire to develop human capital is a by-product of neoliberal subjectivation; secondly, that the activities by which an individual can develop human capital are wide-ranging; thirdly, that mobility itself is a form of human capital. On the first point, I turn to an excerpt from *The Birth of Biopolitics* (1979):

In neo-liberalism—and it does not hide this; it proclaims it—there is also a theory of homo oeconomicus, but he is not at all a partner of exchange. Homo oeconomicus is an entrepreneur, an entrepreneur of himself. This is true to the extent that, in practice, the stake in all neoliberal analyses is the replacement every time of homo oeconomicus as partner of exchange with a homo oeconomicus as entrepreneur of himself, being for himself his own capital, being for himself his own producer, being for himself the source of [his] earnings. (225-226)

What Foucault is saying here is that within the economic context of neoliberalism,¹² the subject of that economic system comes to embody a “capitalist”

¹² Foucault singled out American neoliberalism here (as something distinct from the neoliberalism that grew out of the European context) for the following reasons: liberalism was a founding principle of the nation, liberalism was supposedly “at the heart” of every major debate in the nations’ history, and that Keynesian macroeconomic policy was contested by both left and right political parties in the US for different reasons. I am working on the presumption that “liberalism as a way of being and

ethos: an ethos of entrepreneurship. In other words, the subject's understanding of themselves is as capital *and* labour, rather than purely labour. As such the subject's labour is effectively an investment in themselves and not only as a productive power leveraged by some other external capitalist who remunerates it with income. In the context of neoliberalism then, the subject seeks to develop their own human capital and therefore maximize (in some loose sense) their productivity and profitability. For that reason, they conduct themselves in ways that will develop their human capital and therefore provide them some return on that investment. This brings us to the second and third points from above: that the criteria for developing human capital is indeterminate and that activities or abilities, such as mobility itself, are a form of human capital.

As Foucault describes it, human capital can be innate or acquired. Innate human capital refers to the essentially biological capacities of the body which are leveraged as beneficial for economic productivity. This includes things like life-span, survivability and capacity to ward disease or illness, or our physical capacities to work with the given (i.e., modern) machines and technologies of productivity of the time. Acquired human capital can be gained through formal and institutionalized processes such as through schooling, training, etc. or by informal means, such as in child rearing, developing certain friendships, etc. Acquired abilities might include social intelligence, networks of peers we can leverage for economic advancement, skills, and knowledge within and of certain domains, and other things that in other schools of thought are called symbolic, social or cultural forms of capital (Foucault 1979, 226-227). Arguably, although not

thinking" (218) can be extended to places outside the USA, today. I leave it to the reader to agree or not with that.

explicitly mentioned by Foucault, human capital can be acquired in the possession and use of things: cars, smart phones, particularly those that enhance our productive capacities. It is in this line of thinking that we come to the third point on mobility. As per Foucault:

In the elements making up human capital we should also include mobility, that is to say, an individual's ability to move around, and migration in particular. Because migration obviously represents a material cost, since the individual will not be earning while he is moving, but there will also be a psychological cost for the individual establishing himself in his new milieu. There will also be at least a loss of earnings due to the fact that the period of adaptation will certainly prevent the individual from receiving his previous remunerations, or those he will have when he is settled. All these negative elements show that migration has a cost. What is the function of this cost? It is to obtain an improvement of status, of remuneration, and so on, that is to say, it is an investment. Migration is an investment; the migrant is an investor. He is an entrepreneur of himself who incurs expenses by investing to obtain some kind of improvement. The mobility of a population and its ability to make choices of mobility as investment choices for improving income enable the phenomena of migration to be brought back into economic analysis, not as pure and simple effects of economic mechanisms which extend beyond individuals and which, as it were, bind them to an immense machine which they do not control, but as behavior in terms individual enterprise, of enterprise of oneself with investments and incomes. (230)

In the example above, Foucault exposes the elements of the entrepreneurial formula of investment and return involved in securing one's own mobility. Though the example above is specific to migration, the line of argumentation extends to mobility in general. By considering subjects as capital rather than pure labour, subjects become "abilities-machines" (219) in which the security of one's mobility (as well as other abilities) becomes an investment which will bring greater economic returns in the future. In other words, it is the innovation that the subject takes upon themselves in the application of capitalism "as a way of being and thinking" (218) whereby the subject sees all of his or her activities as contributing to that entrepreneurial "calculation", improving

productivity and increasing profitability even as for example the technical means of production remain relatively consistent.¹³ As Foucault and other scholars have identified, this drive to increase productivity has become a mental model for understanding life as a whole under neoliberalism. As such, that entrepreneurial economic model is applied to every domain of life including spirituality, creativity, sex, and morality as means of productivity, as well as to the specific domains of work and money (Cederström and Spicer 2017). In the case of my participants, however, there is a kind of twist to this mental model.

We can see this entrepreneurial spirit in the comments and behaviours of my participants: Apurav discards the impulsive desire for a fun car in favour of the practical capabilities of what he currently owns, rationalizing the expense as money later saved in the opportunities garnered to him in consuming goods in bulk or from specific retailers on sale, and also as an inevitability of adulthood; Thomas, looking for the same kind of economic security in a different way, tries to maximize his means of generating income while symbolically affirming his own identity as one of capitalist utilitarianism. This is strengthened even more as he actively contrasts it with what he sees as the excessive nature of his parent's car; Ted rationalizes the cost-benefit of a reliable car over the unreliability of busses through a kind of heuristic model built around the reputation of certain brands in his experience. This is a model which seems to maximize a sense of economic utility (as measured in reducing unexpected costs and inconveniences) while simultaneously increasing the actual and predictable outright cost of doing so. In

¹³ I use the word "calculation" not as a reflection of a reality in which individuals *literally* calculate and optimize their efforts for economic gain, but in reference to the belief that individuals have in the general ability to optimize the various domains of their lives.

essence, for all of my participants there is some quality like this at stake, whereby cars are seen as a cost one makes in and for oneself to assure continued access to those opportunities.

4.7 Auto-reliability (or Self-reliance Through Cars)

The necessity of the car for production and consumption is apparent and easily accepted as a given fact of life among my participants, yet the lens of human capital only tells part of the story. Arguably, a society which contributes to a public transportation system is making, in equal parts and for the greater benefit of the entire community, a mutual investment in the human capital of everyone within the city. The distinction is in the feelings associated with that outcome: independence, reliability, control, and routine. For my participants, relying on others (in the form of public transit, shared cars, or taxi services) created strong negative feelings of discomfort, perceived as unreliability and an impediment upon their ability to engage in economic activities freely. Personal cars were associated with an ability to overcome unexpected events, like a late bus, or some change with longer term impact (such as an unexpected need to find a new job).

A very telling example of this came up during an interview with my participant Mark. Mark is 26, he lives downtown with his partner. He owns an SUV, which he mentioned he purchased recently when he and his partner bought a dog. They wanted “more space” and more comfortable features. Mark currently works for the federal government and did not mention having any jobs or work on the side of that. What is interesting about Mark is that despite liking similar kinds of cars to Thomas’ mother (larger, more luxurious, and comfortable), he was just as preoccupied with reliability.

This concern was articulated to me through his preoccupation with planning, scheduling, and ordering his life to the best of his ability. This routine-making activity, to which car ownership was integral, was not so much about accurate prediction, but about the “gut feeling” of predictability that came from having control and sole responsibility over his transportation outcomes. This “what if”-ing of my participants was quite commonplace as an explanation for why their cars were so important.¹⁴

Mark: For me I'm a very high scheduled person. If I'm bringing ... I don't know, say I'm bringing a bunch of stuff to the office and I'm taking a bus, you don't know if you're going to have a seat that day on the bus, if you're standing or holding everything on the bus. Or if there's even space on the bus. One day I might get on the bus and the bus driver might be like, "No, you're taking the next one. The bus is too full." The next day there will be nobody on the bus. But this time, everyone's on vacation. There's nobody on the bus. Or the very first week before school begins, it's so busy. You can't get in.

It's different in the sense that when you're trying to plan your life, and if you need to get from A to B, and if the bus is full, or if the bus doesn't come. It's just something you have to plan for and you have to be ready for. I like to be places on time. More early than on time, because I have to be at work for 9:00 AM. I like to be there for 8:30. If the bus shows up at 8:50, I'll probably take a bus at 8:20 instead. But you can't plan for that because if the bus is late, the bus breaks down, the bus ... You feel like you have less control. At the end of the day if you're driving, you're the one being responsible for maintaining the vehicle. I'm responsible for if it has a flat tire or if it needs an oil change. If it gets in an accident, it's a 50/50 chance it's my fault or it's the other person's fault.

I feel like when you drive, you have more control of ... certain outcomes. Meanwhile, if you happen to rely on public transit or a different method, then it's ... There's only so many times you can go to your boss or, for example, your teacher and be like, "Oh, I didn't do my homework. The bus was late." They're only going to take that so many times until there will probably be repercussions."

Yes, I can walk to work. But keeping a car, there's always an expectation that if my lifestyle changes, if something happens or whatever, I have that

¹⁴ I raise this point again in Chapter Five, although more so in the context of how types of cars serve as markers for specific points in people's lives and "lifestyles".

option. I have a car sitting in my driveway. I can go do something. Meanwhile, if something substantial happens in my life, something changes, who knows if I'll be able to take a bus where I need to go or take a walk to get places I need to go if I didn't have a car.

Tyler: Okay. That makes a lot of sense. Basically, what you're saying is "you'll hang onto the car because where you might be working or where you might be living, that might change. You might not have the options and the sort of luxury of walking to work that you have now at that time."

Mark: Correct.

Although Mark hedges his attitude and motivations by saying he is a "very scheduled person", this concern for having a routine was common to other participants I met with. Furthermore, what Mark (and others) saw as a personal tendency towards self-reliance and routine-making was not just a method of saving themselves from the unreliability of public transit specifically, it was about saving themselves from having to deal with the inconveniences of relying on or accommodating nearly anyone else at all. For example, as Amber and Melanie describe below (and previously Thomas), this applies to car sharing solutions as well as sharing owned cars with other people in the household.

Tyler: Is it possible to supplement your need for a car [with car sharing] as much or to the point where you would no longer need your own car?

Amber: I suppose it is possible. But impractical in reality. It's too hard because you have to compete with the demand for the cars. So, it might not be available at the moment you need it and I mean it's not cost prohibitive, it's actually quite reasonable. But the thing that makes me want to have my own car, and this is going to be through everything I've said, is the freedom and the independence. So, if I need a car right now for whatever reason, I have it. But with virtucar or other car shares, maybe it's booked, maybe it's unavailable, and maybe all the cars within walking distance from me are taken. So again, going back to me wanting to control the universe, it doesn't give me that control that I want.

Tyler: And so, you mentioned that when you have more money you'll buy a nicer car?

Melanie: Yes. So, I think... Well, hopefully, once my husband gets a job again, then we'll start to save up towards that, 'cause I think he wants a second car again. It's not often that conflicts or issues arise with only one car. When they do come up they can be really difficult, like he wants to go away for the weekend, or I wanna go away for the weekend, and if the other person can't go away or doesn't wanna go away, then they're kind of trapped at home. Or we go out to a party, and I go to bed much earlier than he does. So before, sometimes we would take two cars or someone would show up earlier and leave earlier or show up later and... Yeah. And then also my car is 10 years old and has issues. And it's not too bad, but he's used to having a diesel car, so I don't think he would go back to diesel, but he wants better fuel mileage than my 10-year-old thing. [chuckle] Also, he wants cruise control and my car doesn't have cruise control.

For my participants, car ownership means a detachment and disentanglement from others, something which was highly desirable and contrasted with other forms of transportation including public transit and shared cars. Cars also meant control and routine: something which a dependence on other entities takes away. Cars represented something “reliable” and trustworthy, capable of prioritizing the need of the individual owner and providing a feeling of freedom: a removal of perceived impediments (in the form of other entities within society) and freedom in provisioning the resources and means by which their individual autonomy and self-actualization could be achieved and controlled. In essence, the reliability of the car was the precursor to their own self-reliability and through that self-reliance, despite the constraining bureaucracy of road rules and organizing technology of road infrastructure, they felt free.

Claire: You can customize your journey. So, if you know what a bus is, a bus usually goes on set routes, it's only at certain times or sometimes it doesn't show up at all because it's Ottawa. So, a car is a really great machine because it's in your control pretty much. So, you can go wherever you wanna go within reason.

Tyler: Do you enjoy driving?

William: Yes.

Tyler: What do you like about it?

William: Just the independence it provides, the feeling of being in control rather than, say, on a bus where you can be jerked around, stop, go, and, if I'm not the one driving, I tend to get carsick or more impatient.

Tyler: You mentioned independence. What do you mean by that?

William: Not being tied to a schedule, just being able to go when it's convenient for me.

For some of my participants, this cultural construction of the car as something which can free you from dependence on others has been instilled from a very young age, for example:

Melanie: So, the only way for me to get around was if my parents drove me. By the time I was 16, my parents had split up and I was living on with my dad who wasn't really around all that much, he was usually always at work and stuff, so I basically, I've been working since I was 13-14, and I've been saving up and then bought a car because my parents had always said "this is something you're gonna need once you're 16 or 17, we're not gonna be driving you here and there, you're gonna have to get your own car, if you wanna get to work and stuff, if you wanna go see your friends, make sure you're saving for a car, make sure you're saving for the insurance, make sure you're looking into how much gas cost 'cause is something you're gonna need once you're old enough to drive. We can't be chauffeuring you around for the rest of your life" type thing.

So, I feel like my sister got a car too, and she bought her own car as well when she was 16. we actually both worked at McDonald's together... So, I think it was just something I always expected I was going to do just because of where I lived, and the expectations that my parents had.

Amber: So, in my hometown, up in northern BC, you can't not have a car. It's not like there is a bus that's going to stop by your farmhouse on the way to the corner store. If you don't have a vehicle, you are completely isolated and you're probably going to die because you can't get food. So, it was a very real shift in terms of culture and how you live, where on my 16th birthday the fact that I didn't have a car yet was problematic because I had

no independence. So, for me in a way I was brought up, in addition to everyone wanting to have a truck you had to have a car. And that's how I started to get my first beater cars and I learned how to take care of them a bit because you can't afford anything nice and there's always going to be problems.

But a very big cultural and personal shift in terms of that dynamic, that relationship to the vehicle. Because back home, I mean your car is your baby, your car is your lifeline, your car is your oxygen. So out here and throughout all layers of education when I was a pedestrian, it changed. And it was almost nerve racking to be perfectly honest when I left behind cars and relied on public transit and walking. I don't like relying on public transit if I can avoid it, which is why I have always tried to put myself within walking distance, even if it's long walking distance, to even my school or my place of work so that no matter what happens I'm not stranded. So, I'm not losing that control, you know what I mean?

Tyler: Interesting. Sorry, just to reiterate, you would rather find a way to make sure you're within walking distance from places you need to be, work or wherever than put yourself in a position where you have to rely on public transit?

Amber: So, if I don't have a car, I feel like I am naked. I feel like I don't have a security blanket to get where I need to go. If the transit line is down or it's a blizzard and the buses aren't running, back home I would probably have chains to my vehicle and I could figure it out. But out here where I'm not a driver as much, I need to rely on myself to get where I need to go. So, my feet are the next best thing. Yeah. It's one of those things where you wait at a stop, and you hope that the bus will come or the train will come. You can't control it. If I need to be somewhere at a certain time, I am at the mercy of this public transit system and if anything goes wrong there is nothing I can do about it.

4.8 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have tried to show that one of the major reasons that people buy and own cars is because cars feel like the most reliable way of securing the mobility needed to participate in the economy: car ownership offers pragmatic economic benefits which maximize individuals' ability to engage in economic activities, and it satisfies those pragmatic economic needs in a manner which is ideologically conducive to neoliberal capitalism by providing an independence from other people whom the car

owner would otherwise be reliant on for accessing those needs. The subtext of this chapter has been how the social and cultural construction of work has engendered this need for independence and discomfort with interruption. Centering around “commuting” as the habitual practice and need to travel between places of home and work, I reviewed key moments with my participants which captured the car as a kind of human capital which both practically and symbolically serves as a guarantee for reliable and continued participation in the economy, and which is in turn a practice that reaffirms a neoliberal orientation to everyday life.

Cars are understood by my participants as the most reliable form of mobility compared to forms of public, personal, or shared transportation. Reliable, that is, for ensuring continued engagement and participation in the economy of the region. Cars are justified as necessary for their economic advantages but prevail over other forms of transportation because of the manner in which those economic advantages are accessed which, in the case of my participants, helps achieve important cultural values of independence and self-reliance. Cars also provide car owners with a sense of control and predictability to their mobility by reducing variability of travel time, as cars transport their owners in a timeliness which seems to be determined only by the car owner and not some external force of scheduling or demand. The sense of control and predictability that comes with cars thereby stems from that basic self-reliance and independence. This preference for an individual sense of control and routine is contrasted with the discomfort the car owner feels in a position of dependence on others for their mobility, a dependence which is constructed as a kind of negotiation between the transportation needs of the individual and that of the others in society. This

dependence is also perceived as the root of potentially avoidable complexities which cause delays or impede movement.

In conjunction with the other meanings of cars raised in this dissertation, contemporary trends in working may provide some answer to why my participants feel so uncomfortable at the idea of dependence on others for mobility, and primarily in the context of commuting. My participants' behaviours and attitudes which strive to practice independence, control, and predictability, are at least in part explainable and contextualizable by the cultural construction of work, labour and the moral value of productivity. In the context of their integral function as modes of commuting, cars are a means to work and as such have influenced the construction of what it means to be productive. Recalling my participant's earlier comment: "There's only so many times you can go to your boss or, for example, your teacher and be like, 'Oh, I didn't do my homework. The bus was late.' They're only going to take that so many times until there will probably be repercussions." In essence, I am offering some conjecture that it is in part because work is socially constructed as morally intrinsic to modern life, because working relationships rarely account for the realities and inevitable interferences of life outside of work, because work is increasingly precarious, and because the onus for being involved in the workforce is understood to exist at the level of individual responsibility, that cars and their ability to insulate their occupants from those unacceptable interferences are so desirable and dominant as a form of mobility.

While this approach begins to address what I believe is the root cause of the incessant "reliability" rationale among my participants, much more work needs to be done to understand the connection between work and choice of mobility in greater

depth, particularly to take a purposeful look at varied experiences of paid and unpaid work at the intersections of gender, race and class as they relate to choice of mobility for commuting. Furthermore, looking towards the future with the expectation that flexibility and self-responsibility become more frequent conditions of employment, the human capital value of the car appreciates and its symbolic role as an unavoidable and necessary means of conveyance is increasingly reified as a cultural phenomenon.

5. Chapter 5: Creating & Maintaining Relationships of Care

5.1 In Summary:

In this chapter I interpret car ownership and specifically car buying through the lens of Daniel Miller's theory of shopping, which presents shopping as a kind of ritual sacrifice primarily aimed at constituting relationships of care within and between households. In this chapter, I explore how the specific kind of car that is purchased plays a role in symbolically constructing people's relationship to those within the household, between the household and its descent groups, and between the household and its extended kinships. This approach de-centers individualistic interpretations of car use and focuses the discussion on the relationships at stake in continued car ownership and use. In conclusion I argue that buying cars is a potent symbolic ritual in the constitution of the household, and that the continued ownership of cars is integral to the construction of mobile social networks.

5.2 Introduction to Chapter 5

Tyler: You mentioned you're looking forward to getting a new car?

Apurav: Yeah.

Tyler: Why?

Chandra: Why? Don't you like the Prius?

Tyler: I've heard nothing but good things about your Prius.

Apurav: Yeah, I like it. As a second car, I wouldn't get rid of this one because it's so practical. But, I don't know, I like shiny, new things.

Chandra: But why would you want a second car when I bus and you already drive the one car?

Apurav: Maybe I like trucks.

Tyler: It's like t-shirts. You own more than one?

Apurav: That's right. You got to have a Tesla right... I just really like Teslas. They seem new and fancy and shiny. I don't even know if I would want to own one for a long time eventually.

Chandra: Are you actually thinking of a second car, though, or are you saying you would sell this one?

Apurav: No, I wouldn't sell this one. I wouldn't sell this one or until we've beaten it up more. At least 10 years, maybe. Maybe longer. The finances also kind of work out a little bit better on it, but a second car, yeah. That would be... to have something that goes a little more "vroom, vroom". Just a little more. And maybe nice.

Tyler: Seems more like a question than an answer.

Apurav: Well, I'm asking for permission, here. Yeah.

Tyler: Does a second car interest you, [Chandra]?

Chandra: No. Not at the moment.

Apurav: I knew the answer to that.

Chandra: I could foresee it at some point in our lives. My parents had two cars when I was a kid, and your parents have two cars. It's not a crazy idea to me, it's just that there's no way I would drive to work because I'm not going to get parking downtown. So, unless I was off on leave and needed a car on a regular basis or changed jobs or something like that, where it became... I'm happy to take transit, personally. I prefer it. I like that I get the freedom to do whatever I want on the bus.

Apurav: And if you have kids and stuff, though, when your life changes.

Chandra: That's the only thing. Right now I can't imagine wanting a second car, but it's possible that with changes in life circumstances it would be worthwhile.

Apurav: This one's great for kids.

Chandra: I wouldn't get one to go "vroom, vroom". That seems crazy. That wouldn't happen. But if there was a reason that we both needed to be driving, not just so one could sit in the garage.

Apurav: My expectations for vroom, vroom are not crazy. My expectations for “vroom, vroom” are more than 150 horsepower.

Chandra: But what I mean, there has to be an actual reason for it, not just to have two cars. I would only do it if people needed to be driving somewhere every day and it wasn't doable on a bus.

Apurav: When I'm retired, though, then I might. But it would be used though. I wouldn't just go buy a new car for fun. But like yeah.

Chandra: Sure.

Tyler: Something to look forward to...

Chandra: Yeah.

Apurav: Come home with a beaten up, trashed version of a 65' Corvette.

Tyler: Bit of a project maybe?

Apurav: Yeah.

Back at Apurav and Chandra's home, they tell me about their thoughts regarding getting another car. It is filled with idealized images of cars: for example, the symbolic references to “a 1965 Chevrolet Corvette Sting Ray” conjures up images of classic muscle-cars, inefficient, old V8 engines in fragile cars that break down all the time and whose parts are no longer available. It might as well be the *anti-car* compared to what sorts of cars Apurav (and most of my participants owned). This imagery, and similar comments from other interviews with other participants, seems to reveal the selfish and individualist elements of cars. For example, as a reference point to masculinity, the 1965 Corvette, like the 1969 Mercedes W111 208 that was mentioned by Donovan in another interview, is owned by an older man with distinguished taste, someone retired and wealthy (at least enough to own the car and keep it running), and knowledgeable enough about this niche cultural icon to be able to do that with minimal cost. But this individualist narrative also subsumes a relational one: that the car is owned by someone

who wants to relate to someone else, either real or imagined, as a specific kind of person.

For Apurav and Chandra, this relational aspect is also revealed in a discussion of the cars of teenagers: for example “wheee” cars (named for the onomatopoeic expression of joy as if one was riding a rollercoaster but more closely representative of the expression of joyriding with teenage friends as they revealed they had done in their youth - Apurav actually having crashed a rather expensive sports car during such an event); they also had “beater” cars, cars they bought simply to have some manner of independence from their parents or guardians, and bestow that independence on their peers by being “the friend with the car.”

There were also cars that sensible adults had: practical cars, like the Toyota Prius, that were “great for kids”, had enough room for the groceries from Costco, and even space for large dogs. These cars saved the family money by being efficient, both with gas and with space, and reflected the hopefulness of establishing productive and independent households: a future of children, trips to visit family in Nova Scotia, or driving loved ones to appointments and social engagements.

In this chapter I hope to highlight another major reason for the continued priority of cars over other forms of transportation. I argue here that it comes from the car’s capacity as a commodity that can be made symbolically meaningful through purchase and ownership. Specifically, is the car’s ability to express and maintain relationships of care within and external to the immediate household. It is via this ability that the importance of owning and using cars emerges in comparison to other forms of

transportation which, by their very nature, cannot be owned or purchased and therefore do not have the capacity for this kind of transcendental power.

I analyze this through Daniel Miller's approach to material culture, particularly his "theory of shopping" (1998), which argues that the purchase and use of commodities can be interpreted as the ritual mechanism by which [social] relationships are constituted. For shoppers, they are usually highly dynamic relationships re-ordered by the very contingency and specificity of each act of shopping (1998, 151). In Miller's words, that "the shopper is not merely buying goods for others but hoping to influence these others into becoming the kind of people who would be the appropriate recipients for that which is being bought" (1998, 8).

I start by discussing how cars have been approached as the means for creating and maintaining relationships of care (and how that aspect has been overlooked). For the bulk of this chapter, I have roughly aligned my analysis and ethnographic data with Miller's theoretical structure of shopping-as-sacrifice. Therefore, this chapter predominantly follows the stages of sacrifice he laid out in his work (vision of excess, smoke ascends to the deity, the treat, and the sacrificial meal), expanding on the details of the theoretical approach to as it pertains to Miller's everyday shopping as compared to car shopping.

5.3 Relationships of Care

My findings presented in this chapter, regarding the ways that cars create relationships of care, have also been informed by the work of Simon Maxwell (2001). Maxwell found car use bound up in the maintenance of relationships of care both inside and external to households in the United Kingdom. Maxwell's work intended to

understand the gap between action and thought regarding car use and ethical dilemmas (such as environmental issues caused by car use and pollution). He identified that the meanings of car use are fundamentally embedded in social relations of everyday life, and that greater attention to “positive social frames of meaning of car use associated with care and love for immediate others, as well as care for others within wider social networks [was needed] ...and have been almost completely neglected in academic and policy discussions of car use” (2001, 217-218). Unfortunately, despite his call to attention, this approach to car use has been largely unstudied in the past two decades since Maxwell’s work. The exceptions to this include a recent study of everyday mobility in Finland motivated by practitioners of “futures studies” (Raleigh et al 2019); and transportation studies on the negative feelings of social exclusion caused by “carlessness” in Montreal and France (Villeneuve and Kauffman 2020). My work here intends to continue the discussion that Maxwell started about cars and further it by attending to car shopping-as-sacrifice, and to the role of the car in my participants’ relationships within and outside their immediate households.

Looking at existing literature surrounding the meaning of cars (excepting the above), the role in cars of maintaining social relationships is notably absent. John Urry’s work in *Sociology Beyond Societies* (2001) presents a useful summary of the kinds of meaning that cars are usually interpreted as being wrapped up in. I have reproduced it here in a somewhat abridged version with original emphasis:

- [Cars act] ...as the quintessential *manufactured object* produced by the leading industrial sectors and the iconic firms within twentieth-century capitalism (Ford, GM, Rolls-Royce, Mercedes, Toyota, VW and so on)

- as the *industry* which has generated key concepts, Fordism and Post Fordism, employed in understanding the development of, and changes within, the trajectory of contemporary capitalism
- as the major item of *individual consumption* which provides status to its owner/user through the sign-values with which it is associated (speed, home, safety, sexual desire, career success, freedom, family, masculinity), as well as being easily anthropomorphised (given names, having rebellious features, seen to age, etc.)
- as a *machinic complex* constituted through the car's technical and social inter-linkages with other industries, including...petrol refining and distribution; road-building and maintenance; ...suburban house building; new retailing and leisure complexes; advertising and marketing, and so on
- as the single most important *environmental issue* resulting from the exceptional range and scale of resources used in the manufacture of cars, roads, and car-only environments...
- as the predominant form of 'quasi-private' *mobility* which subordinates other 'public' mobilities of walking, cycling, travelling by rail and so on, and reorganises how people negotiate the opportunities for, and constraints upon, work, family life, leisure, and pleasure
- as the dominant *culture* that organises and legitimates socialities across different genders, classes, ages and so on. It sustains major discourses of what constitutes the good life, and it provides potent literary and artistic images and symbols... (2017, 57-58).

Given some of the more recent work conducted by Maxwell and others, and based on the ethnographic data I have collected, I argue it is necessary to add another item to this list: cars as a major item in the maintenance of relationships, to spouses, children, families, friends, ancestors, descendants, both real and imagined, and so on. Though Urry wrote this summary over two decades ago, I have not yet seen "cars as a means of maintaining social relationships..." listed in any other comparable contemporary summary of the importance of cars within society.

The contents of my other chapters speak to some of the dimensions of the meaning of cars listed above: e.g., as a system of infrastructure, as a socio-technical relationship which influences our relationships to our bodies, as a private and independent form of mobility, and in the following chapter, as an environmental issue. This chapter is oriented towards understanding how the car is used to create social relationships to meaningful others, and it appears as a direct contradiction to the points raised in Chapter Four regarding people's desire for independence through the use of the car in everyday settings. This contradiction is somewhat addressed by the observation that relationships of care are created primarily in the act and justification of the car purchase, and more specifically in terms of the specific car which is purchased. For these reasons, I turn to Daniel Miller's framework of shopping-as-sacrifice to understand how cars are purchased to engender relationships with specific transcendental qualities, and how from a utility point of view, cars are used to intentionally deploy distance/proximity as a tool for managing their relationships to others.

5.4 Miller's "Theory of Shopping"

The basic premise for Miller is that the act of purchasing everyday commodities has a latent symbolic function mainly directed at two forms of 'otherness': 1) a relationship between the shopper and "a particular other individual such as a child or partner, either present in the household, desired or imagined" (1998, 12), and; 2) a relationship to a goal or value which transcends utility, something "best understood as

cosmological¹⁵ in that it takes the form of neither subject nor object but of the values to which people wish to dedicate themselves” (1998, 12). According to Miller, these relationships are made manifest or influenced through the mechanics of shopping which are akin to the fundamental structure of ritual sacrifice present among various cultures and communities around the world.

Miller’s particular orientation to the behaviour of shopping is corollary to his theory of consumption (Miller 1987), which suggests that even as individuals confront most objects as alienable symbols of the market or the state, consumption of the object through purchase, time of possession, use etc., transforms some objects into inalienable symbols. According to Miller, it is based on a splitting of expenditure into two elements: “One of these passes through the commodity to the individual as in the case of possessions such as items of clothing or jewellery which over time become highly personal symbols of the self. The other trajectory of consumption... becomes part of the objectification of larger social units within which the self is subsumed”, namely the objectification of the household (1998, 131-132).

Miller’s shopping-as-sacrifice formulation is based on what he sees as the comparable structure of both activities as they aim towards an outcome of influencing and manifesting those two relationships mentioned above. Take the following ethnographic description of grocery shopping provided by Miller as an example of the

¹⁵ “‘cosmology’ and ‘transcendent’” he writes, “suggest values that are long lasting and opposed to the contingency of everyday life. They are intended to imply that although we focus upon the particular persons, children, partners and friends who occupy our concerns at a given moment of time, the way we relate to them is much influenced by more general beliefs about what social relations should look like and how they should be carried out” (1998, 19-20).

kind of influence and relationship of “love” (in Miller’s terminology) that is sought to be created through the act of grocery shopping:

Mrs. Wynn acknowledges that she is constantly monitoring, even researching, the desires and preferences of her household. These include both foundational goods which are expected to be constantly present and available in the house, but also transient desires which arise from a preference for at least a subsidiary element of change and innovation. But she would by no means regard herself as merely the passive representative of these desires. Indeed, if she merely bought what the other members of her household asked for, shopping would be relatively easy. The problem is that she wishes to influence and change her husband and children in quite a number of ways. She is constantly concerned that they should eat healthier foods than those they would choose for themselves. By the same token she wants them to wear either better quality or at least more respectable clothes than those they prefer. She sees her role as selecting goods which are intended to be educative, uplifting and in a rather vague sense morally superior... In short, her shopping is primarily an act of love, that in its daily conscientiousness becomes one of the primary means by which relationships of love and care are constituted by practice. That it is to say, shopping does not merely reflect love, but is a major form in which this love is manifested and reproduced. This is what I mean to imply when I say that shopping in supermarkets is commonly an act of making love. (1998, 18)

In the above example, Mrs. Wynn hopes to influence her children and her partner (relationship 1) in ways which manifest the transcendent qualities of the ideal family (relationship 2). It is worth noting that Miller also acknowledges that what he terms “love” here could also be described as “care, concern, obligation, responsibility and habit”, as well as perhaps “resentment, frustration and even hatred, should these comprise ingredients in a normative ideology which typifies long term relationships with particular real or imagined individuals” (1998, 19). While there are exceptions to love in shopping, for example there are more hedonistic and selfishly oriented acts, or even acts of tradition, which are made to manifest a different kind of ideal of the self and

others, Miller, claims that “that love is not only normative but easily dominant as the context and motivation for the bulk of actual shopping practice” (1998, 23).

There is an important nuance in Miller’s description as well regarding the first type of relationship, and that is the notion of the real or imagined specific other. As Miller noted in his ethnography of shopping, “the concept of making love in shopping is even more problematic when the issue is not one of lack of money, but lack of a relationship to which love can be directed” (1998, 32). He remarks on several types of individuals for whom despite being relatively alone within a household are still shopping for someone. For example, with single young professionals, there is a desire to shop for the relationships that they hope to have with a future partner, future family, existing friends or even pets (1998, 33-34). Additionally with older persons who may be alone in their household from death of a spouse or having never married, shopping was primarily an act of manifesting relationships with ancestors, future descendants, or neighbours (1998, 32). Teenagers presented a certain kind of unique category, in that their orientation to otherness was “primarily a mirror-other and their activity was seen as primarily a development of relationship and identity with/of the self” (1998, 35). However, they often engaged in shopping as an act of manifesting certain types of relationships with others, sometimes of care and obligation, but other times of jealousy and rivalry.

The features that make shopping and sacrifice comparable are based on the recognition that both activities express a fear “of mere mundane or materialistic consumption and the rituals are designed to ensure that goods are first used for reaffirming transcendent goals” (1998, 73-74), and that both share the same structure

i.e. three component steps which allows the individual to communicate with, call upon, or otherwise exercise the transcendent ideal in a way which imbues or manifests in a quality of relationship with the real or imagined others for whom the sacrifice is made.

For Miller, the premise of shopping (like sacrifice), is that it is “the precise moment when everything that had focused upon the accumulation of resources is about to turn into the moment when those same resources are expended” (1998, 94).

It refers backwards to all the labour that has gone into working for the money to be spent, which may carry with it the resentments, the achievements, and a host of other experiences of work.... prior labour is first reduced to the abstraction of money... that seem to harbour such potential but also seem such a fragile monument to what had gone into its production. For those who do not work but live on state benefits there is just as much ambivalence, potential mixed with resentment, asserted rights and stigmatized guilt, bound up in what is faced as a quite frightful substance – money. (1998, 94)

It is at the precise moment of this transformation of production to consumption that there arises a vision of excess, this marks the first stage of the structure. The “vision” is the discourse of shopping and consumption in which “all the hard work and labour that went into accumulating money is fantasized as being destroyed in a sheer exhilarating bout of transgressive freedom” which is “purely destructive, a marvellous envisaging of complete waste” (1998, 95). Shoppers confront the discourse of shopping in which, “consumerism becomes the primary image for the destruction of the world [and] a violent rape of ‘mother earth’s’ natural resources through mindless destruction, such that commerce itself becomes subsumed by consumption” (1998, 97). These visions, as Miller argues are, in shopping as in sacrifice, negated by a second stage of the ritual which Miller terms “smoke ascending to divinity” (1998, 97).

In rituals of sacrifice, the 'smoke' is that which is separated off from the mundane elements of the object and consumed by the transcendent other, the deity, "mana" or some other cosmologically divine force. The essence of shopping is also separated off from the mundane elements and consequences of shopping, i.e., the commodity. Miller argues that what plays the analogous role as the central ritual transformation of shopping is "thrift". Thrift is the image of money saved which transforms "the practice of shopping, its skills, its labour and its primary goals...into an ethos that is the very negation of expenditure, being thoroughly absorbed in the vision of money saved" (1998, 101). Miller summarizes as such:

Thrift is instrumental in creating the general sense that there is some more important goal than immediate gratification, that there is some transcendent force or future purpose that justifies the present deferment. In the absence of any belief in a deity, thrift transcends particular relationships and rises to a higher level that evokes something above and beyond their immediacy. What thrift thereby achieves is made more evident when we return to its starting-point, which was the discourse of shopping. This discourse was understood as the self-consciousness of the negative potential of shopping as the mere dissipation of resources, without these being used first to establish a transcendent object or purpose to life. So just as sacrifice is in practice the negation of that vision of excess identified by Bataille, so shopping centres upon thrift as the effective means to negate an extremely similar vision of excess in consumption. (1998, 104)

The ethnographic permutations of 'thrift' are varied such that thrift is an inevitable aspect of the shopping experience: thrift appears in the difference in price between two similar goods, in the savings achieved by purchasing a more expensive good which is higher quality and which might "last longer," the savings found in a good which is "marked down" such as in the event of a sale, the savings of not wasting goods such as those in smaller packages or smaller servings might offer, and so on (1998, 50-54). 'Thrift' in this second stage has been "used to construct an imaginary and ideal

household created as the objectification of the larger values and goals of the shopper, which thereby stands in relation to shopping as God does to sacrifice” (1998, 107).

The third and final stage of shopping-as-sacrifice is marked by a turning back to the social relations of society and the social consequences of the activity, what Miller terms “the sacrificial meal”. In the third stage the ideal household or relationship is replaced by the actual individuals, but they “retain a sense of the idealized relationship and the individual as standing for idealized role ‘child’ or ‘wife’, as well as all those particular traits that make up the specific character of the person and the relationship” (1998, 107). Returning to the example of Mrs. Wynn:

Having become sanctified through her agency in the self-sacrifice of thrift, she returns with the blessing of love to her family... She expresses her love and devotion to the same degree to which she is able to tease out the very specific and often transient desires of each individualized object of love. She buys this particular brand or flavour, in relation to her sense of not only what the individual wants, but her reasoning as to what would improve that individual. In practice the two may be compromised in the form of what she can get that wretched object of love to actually eat! (1998, 108)

Given the exposition above, my intention through the remainder of the chapter is to highlight the meaningful similarities between the weekly provisioning (shopping for groceries) that Miller has explored and the comparatively infrequent and much more expensive activity of car buying. I make the claim that there remain some important consistencies between the two activities that make it relevant for me to deploy the shopping-as-sacrifice lens to help uncover another answer to why people still own and use cars: namely that buying a car is also generally about manifesting caring relationships to others, both real and imagined, and imbuing those relationships with idealized qualities. Cars, among other things, are purchased outside of routine and constitute the type of shopping that Miller explicitly excludes from his study of shopping,

namely, “the purchase of homes, cars, holidays, [or] the consumption of state services” (1998, 11). Given this, I will also discuss the meaningful differences of car buying and consuming compared to the experience of everyday provisioning explored by Miller.

5.5 A Vision of Excess

A few points are important to first identify within Miller’s theorization of the first stage of shopping-as-sacrifice: the vision of excess, which marks a moment when the shopper is confronted by the idealized imagery of shopping - waste, consumerism, frivolity, etc. For Miller, the abstract ideal of shopping is a form of “absolute freedom that fantasizes a separation off from being defined by any social relations and obligations” (1998, 97). This is what his informants called ‘real’ shopping, the shopping “...which is an imagined act of blissful annihilation of the socially constituted self in favour of a self-constructed through the process of individualistic hedonism” (1998, 97). In this view, the vision of excess is bound in the image of ideal shopping and essentially removed from the object of purchase - whether it be a bag of avocados from a supermarket or a child’s toy from a department store. There are points in Miller’s ethnography that establish the basis of the materiality of the good as being connected to the divine quality that one wishes to manifest in the relationships, so it stands to reason that the material nature of the goods being shopped for may also make some contribution to the specific nature of the profane discourses encountered in the vision of excess. This is in the same way the qualities of the good are incorporated into the other two stages of shopping-as-sacrifice: the negation of the profane in the pursuit of thrift, and into the qualities which imbue the relationships manifested.

I believe that Miller was not so concerned with this aspect of the vision of excess because the type of object was only of occasional importance in his reference material. In various examples of sacrifice, the object itself may have meaning in rituals involving a totemic animal in which the object's materiality has the capacity of a medium to the transcendent other (Cipriani 2017, 47), but this matters only for some rituals. Meanwhile, sacrifice always involves the sublimation of excess, such as sublimating the guilt caused in hunting and killing an animal or in reciprocating the animal if interpreted as a gift from the transcendent other (2017, 180). In either of the latter cases, it only matters that the object is the thing which is hunted (its social construction via the practice). On these grounds I include the type of car (its physical qualities) in the vision of excess.

The second major consideration is that Miller's act of shopping is the mundane and routine kind of sacrifice compared to a form of sacrifice which might be made a grand spectacle. Concerning this comparison between the grand spectacle and the routine sacrifice, he writes, "[grand spectacles] are moments when one expects a people to have been highly focused upon the awe and majesty of the deity," while the more mundane and routine sacrifices serve to "...constantly remind the sacrificer of the awe and power of those occasions that become in their grandeur the quintessence of sacrificial relationships to the divinity" (1998, 79). The act of buying a car, for all of my participants for example, is firmly not the routine kind of sacrifice that Miller is concerned with. These two points mark the most significant differences between Miller's ethnographic encounters and my own.

In car shopping, the vision of excess is not just the excess of consumerism bound in the act of shopping, but a vision which is made all the more potent by the social fact that cars are essentially totems of capitalism. As I raised at the outset of this chapter, cars are, as many scholars have endeavoured to point out, heavily laden with the discourse of dangerous excess and capitalist production/consumption.

Recalling to the exchange between myself, Apurav and Chandra from the beginning of this chapter, the thought of buying a car calls forth simplistic references to these complex discourses: the hedonistic pleasure of speed captured in the notion of “vroom, vroom”, the chasing of modernity (or at least compulsive consumption) through “shiny-ness” and emerging technology; anxiety and excitement at the thought of the excessiveness of having more car than is needed; a concern for the complicated integration with socio-technical systems of parking, work, fuel; the guilt of environmental damage and social cost; the selfish individualism of being associated with a sought-after reference group (e.g. visions of older men with particular “classic” cars which serve as expressions of wealth, leisure and status). These elements constitute the vision of excess, the profane grandeur of capitalism, bound up in the discourse of the object and the abstracted act of shopping which is the ritual expression and negation of that profanity.

5.6 Smoke Ascends to the Deity

As mentioned, the second stage of shopping-as-sacrifice is the pursuit of thrift: “just as sacrifice is in practice the negation of that vision of excess...so shopping centres upon thrift as the effective means to negate an extremely similar vision of excess in consumption” (Miller 1998, 104). In shopping for cars, the pursuit of thrift is central, not

just in the price paid but also manifested in the qualities of the object. For example, as my participant Christopher illustrated when he recalled the story of his car buying experience:

From the outset Christopher qualified his interest in buying a new car with the rationale that after his previous car broke down, he “didn’t feel like his car really owed him anything” - in essence that from a cost perspective he was not being wasteful or excessive in his pursuit of a new car. He also conveyed with substantial emphasis that cost was a primary factor: he started his story by saying “I haven't bought a new [car] before, I had the cash set aside for it and that was fine, but it's the same thing before you first move out of your parent’s house, you kind of look at your finances and you're like, ‘will I be able to do this [afford this]? I don't have tons of money, I don't make tons of money, but is this something I can swing?’” He continued by saying that he was “pretty cheap”, and “kind of looking at the bottom-line Hyundai, the stuff that is generally the lowest trim, that won't have AC”, and “not worried about any fancy bells and whistles”.

One of the things that Christopher was very much concerned with was a warranty to ensure his car was reliable and he would not be surprised with expenses related to unforeseen maintenance later on. I interpret this concern (in conjunction with the ideas raised in the previous chapter), as the pursuit of thrift. A desire to have a warranty was the reason that Christopher decided against the purchase a used car (which would have

made this car his third used car). Christopher recounted part of his story which felt like a frame-by-frame negation of the vision of excess during the test drive:¹⁶

And [during the test drive] it was like this weird thing where they're asking you, "How do you like it? Does it drive just like you imagined?" and stuff and I'm in such a shitty situation, and being not much of a car guy, I just need a tool to get me to work. I'm not looking for like the smoothest thing, it drove smoothly and everything, but I was a little concerned about how much it would end up costing me with the higher interest rate a bit being a used car and not having as much of a warranty on it and stuff like that.

Christopher continued to wait over a month in his pursuit of a "good deal" in the form of monthly promotions (such as manufacturer discounts, 0% financing, etc.). He ended up finding himself a small Mitsubishi Mirage at 0% financing with free winter tires, but it was during his moment of purchase that he described an ordeal for the pursuit of thrift in the form an extended standoff with the "Warranty Person":

We're sitting there and he's just like, "I can give you the gold warranty, which is bumper to bumper for 10 years, and your payments will be, it was like \$125 or something like that." ...But I got so comfortable in that first 10 minutes of bliss thinking about my originally quoted \$87 biweekly.

And yeah, I'm like, "for almost \$130, and when you add up the biweekly payments over seven years of paying it off at 0%, that ends up being a pretty big chunk of cash". So, he's just like, "But I could do the silver, the silver warranty package." I was just like, "okay, how about you give me the gold warranty package for \$114?" And he's just like, "Well, I can't do that." And it's kind of a funny part of the story where I know to a certain extent that they're working me [negotiating].

And I'm like, "there's got to be a better deal somehow", and he's just like, "I could do the silver for \$115." And I was just like, "yeah, but I want the gold, I don't know, I don't know". So anyways we had these two minutes, two to

¹⁶ It's fascinating to note that due to the long time it takes for shopping for a car to culminate in a transaction, the vision of excess appears almost as a quasi-religious gauntlet that purchasers, hoping to be worthy of overcoming, must endlessly face in the form of marketing imagery, sales tactics, and their own lingering concerns with other aspects of the discourse of capitalism via cars.

five minutes stretches of dead quiet in the room, and the guy's just like, "it's completely up to you."

I'm like, "yeah, I know", and I'm just sitting there, I'm not saying anything and staring at him and he's staring at me and he just kind of uncomfortably looks at his monitor and I'm just sitting there. And he's just like, "Do you have any inclination?" And it's like, "I don't know, I just really want the gold warranty for \$115". And then he's just like, "Okay, since you're a family friend type deal with them, I could do the gold warranty for \$120." And I'm like, so then we go for another stretch of silence, and I don't know, I'm like, could you do... I think we were riding on \$114 because I specifically remember, I'm like, can you do the gold warranty for \$115? And then he's just like, "I really can't, at this point, we're not making any money."

That's what he's telling me, and I'm like, "yeah, I don't know". So, we sit there and my wife's just kind of consoling me because I'm kind of putting on... She's not in on the joke, so to speak, she doesn't know I'm putting on a show, she thinks I'm really rattled by this, she's rubbing my back and stuff and I'm just staring off into space. So, he was just like, "Hey, I can do the gold warranty for \$119, that's the final offer." And I'm like, can you do the gold warranty for \$116? And he said fine. So, yeah, figure out the papers and that, and my wife and I get back in her Chevy and I just start howling laughing.

And she's like, "Was that all an act?" I'm like, "yeah, it was." Legitimately, there definitely was some legitimacy to being bummed out because I was in the mindset of "I want to get super cheap payments," but I understood what the warranty would offer me and at the end of the day, \$116 biweekly is still pretty standard, I would say.

Like Miller, I observed that the pursuit of thrift was not just based on some economic precarity, it was a phenomenon common to even my wealthiest participants. For example, Julien a successful lawyer (married to another lawyer), told me that for his first new car purchase he assembled a binder of comparable cars for sale in the area which he took with him to dealerships as he shopped for a car: "it was also part of my personality; I like to shop for stuff and I like to find the absolute best value proposition for everything in life. For instance, if I am buying a kettle, I am going to be researching kettles. I am very patient. I will use price-tracking software and I will track something or wait to purchase something and I will spend years waiting." He continued, "It is partially

because, with this car, I recognize an opportunity where it is possible for us to resell it very close to its full value and considering overall costs of ownership, because it retains its resale value and because it is so economical in terms of fuel economy, insurance costs, and reliability.”

Another interesting example of this was Josh, who recounted his experience of buying a brand new Mercedes AMG GT in which he also (ostensibly, half-heartedly) pursued a discount in the price in conjunction with what he argued to be the purchase of a high-quality and long-lasting automobile: “I asked the sales person basically, ‘I’m not looking to haggle or anything, but is there any amount of discount you can apply to the car?’ and the salesperson basically said ‘sure, I can take a bit off the price’. I think it was discounted by a few hundred dollars, which was good enough for me to feel like I wasn’t totally throwing money away.” Interestingly enough, Josh told me he added the optional Mercedes crest-embroidered leather seats in his order, which was a relatively meagre additional \$300 option in a \$115,000 automobile. This to me was evidence to suggest that his pursuit of thrift was out of a habitual sense of obligation to an ideological commitment. Similarly, it supports Miller’s observations that in cases of shopping, thrift can serve as a justification for spending more money (1998, 137).

Miller writes that the pursuit of thrift is not universal. In some times and places thrift is clearly just the expression of poverty. This may also be true in car buying, although as mentioned in previous chapters, the cost of a car still far outweighs that of public transportation, and further requires the purchaser to already have good standing in credit and income to be approved for what are generally purchases made based on financing agreements (if not based on having a large sum of disposable cash on hand).

Additionally, 'thrift' may exist as something completely different for those outside the scope of this ethnography such as the "super-wealthy", the buyers of not mere Mercedes but of Lamborghinis, Ferraris, Bugattis, etc.¹⁷ For the participants of Miller's ethnography, as well as my own, the act of saving money was a symbolic commitment to the continued process of objectifying the household.

Up to this point, I have discussed how the act of shopping for a car includes the same pursuit of thrift that Miller identified. In essence, thrift works to negate the vision of excess in consumption. Relatedly, we can also see an act of negation in the choice of car itself. As the excerpt with Christopher earlier alluded to, his concern for the car to be a "tool" was at odds with the salesperson's attempt to augment the vision of excess in the car by asking "How do you like it? Does it drive just like you imagined?" This utilitarian attitude towards the car as a "tool" or practical purchase was common among all of my participants, and it is by this rationale I argue that the vision of excess as constituted by the car is also negated by the materiality of the car selected.

One might expect the case of Josh's Mercedes AMG GT to be an exception to this analysis, but it is not. Josh's Mercedes was his household's third Mercedes: the first was his entry-level Mercedes purchased in the early 2000s (which he still owned), the second, a Mercedes SUV, was purchased with and primarily for his wife's daily use, and now the third, this Mercedes again purchased with his wife but primarily for Josh's everyday use and in part justified by the material aspects of the car as integral to "thrift" (the longevity of the car and its brand, the efficiency of its engine), and by the fact that

¹⁷ Miller does explore some historical writing by Gudeman and Rivera (1998, 134) to suggest that a "bourgeois" approach to thrift is more similar to a working-class idea of thrift than one would expect.

with the new car purchase he would be able to give his first Mercedes to his son now currently learning to drive. Of course, none of this is meant to deny that at least some aspect of his purchase was not selfishly-inclined.

5.7 The Treat

For Miller, an essential part of the theory of shopping-as-sacrifice is “that there exists a normative expectation that most shoppers will subordinate their personal desires to a concern for others...”

As is often the case the norm is perhaps best determined by focusing upon the exception that defines it, in this case the treat. Although (as will be seen) the treat varies considerably in its usage, in most cases the treat is an element of shopping that is directed at a particular individual and is thereby excepted from the rest of the shopping where that is understood as being on behalf of the household as a whole. Furthermore, the treat is usually regarded as an extra extravagance that lies outside the constraints of necessity, thrift or moderation that binds together most mundane provisioning. (1998, 40)

In Miller’s ethnographic research, the treat was constituted by a multitude of things: a candy bar eaten by the shopper prior to reaching the checkout counter or hidden at home after a return from shopping for later consumption; a particular item to indulge a child if they were included in the shopping labour; an “eat-out” for the shopper before or after the shopping trip, either as lunch or coffee or a snack; one spouse may buy a gift for the other, or the shopper may buy and hide a particularly expensive personal item for themselves and fail to disclose it to the other partner, such as in the case of expensive clothes, and; in some cases the treat is directed to the household as a whole, such as in the case of taking the family out for a meal.

Miller connects this act of self-indulgence to the same kind of shopping that one might do when one is depressed, in essence in an effort to reaffirm the shopper's sense of self when that sense of self is threatened or weakened: "such as a book for an academic, chocolate for the food shopper, cosmetics or an accessory for younger women, [these] are precisely the kinds of items that are also purchased as treats" (1998, 47). The treat, in other words, is a hedonistic act of materialistic self-indulgence and individual consumption which conforms to journalistic generalizations about shopping in the abstract. Despite this, Miller writes, "very few people attempt to make shopping into constant treating" (1998, 48). The treat confronts thrift in the same manner that the individual confronts the idea of household.

As I mentioned at the outset of this chapter, using this theoretical lens to frame the identity-making role of car ownership and purchase subordinates the individualist-orientation of car consumption to relationship-oriented motivations. There is no shortage of scholarship available so far on the individualist nature of car consumption, particularly as it relates to identity-formation or affirmation/construction of the image of the individual vis a vis society (for example, Miller 2001; Redshaw 2008). This section will find generally common ground with those perspectives, the only difference being that those concerns are not the primary motivation for continued car ownership according to this analysis.

The treat aspect of cars is generally part of the car itself (choice of colour, features or even in the choice of one car over another in a comparable vehicle class) or as an accessory to the car (like decals, modifications, or accessories). Unlike with everyday shopping where the treat is consumed almost instantly, the long-life nature of

the car as an item of almost daily consumption opens up the range of considerations for what in the car might constitute the treat. As raised earlier in this chapter, cars are often interpreted as signifying status and a sense of identity to their owners through the various values with which they are associated: speed, home, safety, sexual desire, career success, freedom, family, masculinity, rebelliousness, etc. I have explicitly identified some of these as constituents of the discourse of cars earlier in this chapter, for example, regarding the imagery which confronted Apurav and Chandra when thinking about buying a car.

As other scholars (Redshaw 2008) have also identified, individual-oriented meanings of car use in everyday life may also serve subtle social functions such as creating of meaning around patterns of consumption to construct and maintain social difference or 'distinction' (Bourdieu 1987), or in allowing the individual to relate and construct their identity relative to wider issues concerning morality and social ideals (Miller 1987; Maxwell 2001, 201). These themes generally encapsulate the same stories that I encountered with my own participants.

Among my participants, a few interesting examples emerged which add to this general conversation around the identity-making capacity of cars, specifically, how my participants used cars to 1) to associate themselves with a value system or meaningful reference group; 2) to contest or affirm gender norms; 3) to deploy brands, aesthetics and materiality as a means of maintaining social difference. These things are important because they reflect how purchasing a type of car is not necessarily associated with buying into an identity portrayed in marketing or advertisements, but also about buying

the materials necessary to create, maintain, and refine an identity which is meaningful in relation to specific others that are cared about.

Examples of the first category include my participants such as Alisha and Donovan, who both associated their particular choice in cars (or desire for a future car) with specific reference groups who embodied certain values. Unlike the other aspects of individualism mentioned above, these symbolic aspects are not purely to articulate the identity of the purchaser, but indirectly serve to qualify their roles within a larger structure of a household. In Alisha's case, she felt that she had chosen a "mom car", practical, no frills, efficient:

Tyler: And so, why the Toyota Corolla?

Alisha: Comparably the Honda Civics were really sporty. They were going for a sporty look then and they were ugly, and they had weird sports car features that I didn't like. I liked my mom car.

Tyler: And sorry, you called your Corolla a mom car?

Alisha: Yes. It's a very practical space efficient car. There's nothing cool about it. It is a very practical vehicle. I can tell you that it looks like a very boring, it very much blends in with all the other cars kind of sedan ... It's very, I don't know, standard ... You wouldn't pick it out of a crowd.

Tyler: I can't tell if you're saying that in a good way or a bad way.

Alisha: In a very neutral way. It's very practical, so it's not like a green Lamborghini sitting in the parking lot. It's a very ... If you're in a parking lot, it's one of just blends in nicely. There's nothing standoffish about it or obnoxious about, which I hate. It's just very me.

In Donovan's case, he wanted a car that might associate him with a stereotypical version of an old man with a sports car (similar to Apurav), these things for him embodied values such as conscientiousness, tradition, and a very different sort of practicality than Alisha, which was defined in a sense of do-it-yourself and uncomplicated beauty.

Donovan: My dad just never taught us about it. It's something that I do want to learn about, and I think that when I do get a car ... And I thought of it this last year. Algonquin has this course and it's a once a week for a semester, and you go everything from changing your oil to just learning more about how the car works and the various components. It's basically ... It's a course for people who want to be more confident in talking to their mechanic, want to be able to do their own stuff around the car, and want to get start to figure out more stuff about how to do stuff with the car. It's four different ... It's for a bunch of different people who want to learn different things about cars. I might do that. I don't know. I just don't really know very much. I am interested, and cars do ... Have you ever seen *The Kominsky Method*? We've had this conversation before. It stars Michael Douglas and Alan Arkin. Michael Douglas has this beautiful old car, and I just want to be an old man and drive around in an old car. I think it would be beautiful. I think it would be wonderful.

Concerning the second type of individualism, a few of my participants described their choice of car as being related to an attempt to either perform or contest particular gender normative behaviour. For example, one of Samantha's favourite things about her car was that it was a manual transmission which was "unexpected" for a woman to have, particularly of her age.

Samantha: Okay. I drive standard, and I think my favorite thing about driving when I am driving standard is that people are surprised because (a) they don't expect a lot of young people to drive standard anymore, (b) they don't usually expect women to drive standard, which I find ridiculous. So, there's a very distinct satisfaction of being like, "Yeah, fuck your expectations. I do drive standard," because that's not an unreasonable thing to expect someone to do. It's a weird type of empowering,

Tyler: So, your favorite thing is that you defy other people's expectations?

Samantha: Yes, even though I know I'm driving a brand of car which is totally conforming to other kinds of expectations.

The third and most common kind of individualizing treats were those used to manifest social class distinction. This was done through specific choices of vehicle colour (or actively choosing colours that were not seen as having specific distinctions) such as the example given to be by Fannie:

Fannie: I think certain colors, but I mean I'm just a bit more picky about colors. When I see these burnt orange or purple cars, I just don't really get it. I mean if it's certain styles for people, then that's fine. It's also maybe people's personalities in how they want their cars, but that's just for me. I like certain regular colors, but I think they offer certain colors for going well with people's personalities and that's fair. But it doesn't mean that it's not right for them, it just means maybe it's right for me. Right?

Tyler: Okay. You mentioned that your Santa Fe you bought new is white. Did you pick the color?

Fannie: I did, yeah.

Tyler: Do you remember why you chose white?

Fannie: Well, I chose white because I saw it on the lot in a different style, and I really liked it because it's a white but was really shiny and I just really liked the shade of it. And then we were looking at vehicles and I said to my husband, "Okay, well I will agree to get the SUV, but I want it in white," so that's how we ended up getting it.

This also appeared in my participants' discretion of certain types of aesthetics or materials used in the cars, for example as Mark described:

Mark: I don't like plastic accents on the car. If it has plastic ... I don't know, just plastic mirrors for example. Or I don't know how to ... I don't want it to look cheap. I don't want it to look dingy. I find looking at a car from the front if it has fog lights, I find that appearance makes it look the nicest. It looks better. Same thing with the back end of the vehicle, I find if it has dual exhaust looks better. Some vehicles only have the one tail pipe, it just looks cheap. Not cheap, but it looks incomplete.

Tyler: Interesting. Why do you say that? Why is that?

Mark: Not to call anyone out or bash any vehicle brand or anything like that, if you were to look at a 2019 Acura ILX. If you were to look at the rear of that vehicle, you see it only has one tail pipe. Just looking at that car, personally it looks incomplete. It looks that if you're looking at the back of it, it should have two to make it full. It looks almost lopsided. Personally, that's what I get ... It doesn't look right. There's something off about it.

Tyler: And what about the plastic? You mentioned you don't like plastic looking things.

Mark: Yeah. I find it looks more thick on the car. Where it may be a ... dashboards or a side bumper, sometimes there's a side panel on the doors,

or the mirrors are made of plastic, but just doesn't match. I find it looks cheap and it looks like the manufacturer cheaped out on a mirror or something. You're buying a \$20,000 vehicle, you want the best. A vehicle is give or take your second most expensive purchase in your life. You don't want to cheap out on a mirror. You know what I mean?

Other materiality that designated social class was in the noises of the car, this was something to be avoided (as it was in the case of Claire's Toyota Yaris), or pursued (in the case of Josh's Mercedes):

Claire: I don't know, if it was super loud or something that would probably indicate there's something wrong with the car, and I just think it would just annoy people, and I don't wanna do that. Yeah, just being considerate of others, and just for my own enjoyment as well. If it didn't run well or was super noisy, then it would impact me as me. So...

Lastly, and most commonly, my participants actively sought cars that distanced themselves from what they saw as "car culture", which were defined as expensive, bright colours, impractical:

Claire: I'm not trying to avoid it, but I just never identified with car culture, being super proud of what car I have. I feel like that's more like a male thing. And yeah, I'm just like... Cars aren't a personal interest of mine. If they are for somebody else, that's great. But to me, as I mentioned, it's just to get from point A to point B.

Thomas: Oh, okay. Yeah, I'm not a car fanatic. There are a lot of things with higher end cars that I don't understand. Like if you were to go to, I don't know, a Porsche 911 or something, there's just a bunch of terms that I don't know in regard to customization.

Robert: I'm not really a huge muscle car guy, like those guys that go to parking lots and farm boy, or something, and they just look at each other and their muscle cars and stuff like that. I'm not really into that. I like this kind of a sleek car, that's nice to ride. But I usually associated it with the negative aspects about it. Which would be repairs, the actual price, monthly payments, everything that goes with the car financially.

5.8 The Sacrificial Meal

The third stage of the shopping-as-sacrifice structure is the consumption of the good in question, that which is left over after the transcendent other consumes their share. For Miller, this is the point where material composition of the purchased commodity now has consequences for the effort of realizing ideal relationships and identities. The qualities which are meant to manifest in the relationship are those bound in the abstracted and particular aspects of the object: the discourse of the object and category (Miller calls this “genre”) of the object, and of the particular material of the object, for example:

The shopper is not building up a portrait through layers of images, but rather moving in tandem with the changing context... It is possible to account for a considerable range of the current commodity forms and genres... For example, from the point of view of commerce a key (and highly bankable) asset is the long-term brand, that is a specific make of commodity that has existed for generations. An example might be Heinz tomato soup. From the point of view of the family, such brands become appropriated into the desire to constitute the family as a descent group. The notion of a descent group is often infused with a cyclical element, where the role of parent to child returns to the models and guidance that they received from their parents. There are a number of key brands such as Heinz or Kelloggs which are available for objectifying the concept of descent group simply because of their actual longevity as a product and their use in the romantic memorialization of the love that was borne between an earlier generation. In direct opposition to long-standing brands are fads and fashions whose whole purpose lies in their very transience. A mother who is concerned that her child always has the latest thing so that he or she will not be looked down upon in the playground is expressing her love for and anxiety about that child just as much as when she buys Heinz tomato soup. (1998, 142-143)

In Miller’s ethnographic examples, these things emerge as, for example, the certain brands socially constructed as descent group-making; or specific items of food constructed as health-giving; certain clothes constructed as grown-up-making; certain toys or books constructed as status-giving, etc. In his work, his participants sought

these items to tap into transcendental qualities and manifest them in the relationship they had with the others in their household.

For the remainder of the chapter, I will focus on elaborating upon the role of the car in forming relationships to real and imagined others through its consumption, having already addressed its role in individual consumption by relegating that aspect to what Miller called “the treat”. This is not to say that individuals would never use cars as a means primarily to construct their personal identities, rather, this is my conscious effort to de-prioritize the selfish aspects of car purchases in the same manner that it appeared to be de-prioritized by my participants. The following subsections discuss the qualities of cars which were meant to manifest in caring relationships through their purchase.

5.8.1 Relationships Within the Household

We can interpret much of the concern for independence and freedom explored in previous chapters as the most relevant combination of transcendent values at stake in cars within household relationships. As I mentioned in a previous chapter, relying on others (in the form of public transit or shared cars, or taxi services) created strong negative feelings of discomfort, perceived as unreliability and an impedance upon their ability to engage in productive activities freely; independence, conversely, is framed as self-reliance. Building on this premise, these qualities of the car are used in the construction of relationships within the household, firstly, in manifesting an ideal image of a household, and secondly, in providing a manner of independence to the individual members of the household.

The style of car that was purchased was also significant in terms of establishing a sense of household. This was particularly salient for me in my participants’ comments

about how certain types of cars suit certain lifestyles (similar findings in Sattlegger & Rau 2016). For example, while practically speaking Melanie's current car would fit five people, she reflected on the fact that it was a car that she bought for herself "when she was single", now that she has a partner and a dog, she feels the need to find something that suits her lifestyle now:

Tyler: Tell me about your current car.

Melanie: My car is a 2009 Hyundai Accent. I got it right when I graduated university, 'cause I was going to do field work and I needed a car. I wanted an orange hatchback with a sunroof, and I found one. That would have been in 2013 when I bought it. I had gotten my license... Actually, I still didn't have my full license when I bought it.

When I was single I was basically looking to replace that with essentially the same thing 'cause my lifestyle would be the same where it was just me, no significant other, no dog. So, I didn't need to consider anything more than groceries. There was no furniture that I was buying, or anything like that as a renter, really.

Now [my husband and I] are looking at hybrids, and so I haven't really looked at bigger cars at this point, or I haven't looked at cars for my lifestyle now.

Tyler: How does your lifestyle affect the kind of car you might have?

Melanie: Mostly it's size and what I would need to do with it. So, when I was just renting by myself, I only really needed to fit myself and some groceries, whereas now with when we own a house, I need to fit myself, my husband, and our dog, and maybe we wanna buy furniture or stuff for the garden, or a lawnmower or something, and fitting that in... Right now, I have a little three-door hatchback, there's no back doors for it. So, when we tried to move a six-foot shelf out of that poor little car, it was interesting to say the least. It was just sticking way out back, driving three miles an hour.

The idea that certain cars were understood as being for certain kinds of people was something I heard quite frequently. My understanding of this situation is not necessarily that the car is chosen because it reflects that specific individual, but that the car reflects the role of that individual as a constituent member of an ideal kind of

household. In other words, while thrift constitutes the household in the abstract, the kind of car that is purchased constitutes the household as a specific constellation of individuals and salient meanings.

Many of my participants were also acutely aware of car ownership and of learning to drive as a “rite of passage” (Turner 1960), for example as my participant Lisa commented, “car ownership does kind of seem like a rite of passage [to become] an adult, to some extent... Still being a student, most of my friends don't have cars now. But it's something where I'm thinking, ‘Oh you finish school, you graduate, you get a job, you get a car, you get a house, you start a family, whatever.’ That's part of the package.” This acknowledgement of having a car as a moment or action which brings about adulthood was also clearly visible from the side of parents of adolescents, as another of my participants, Fannie, remarked:

Fannie: [my daughter] doesn't have her license yet. She just has her G1 I guess that is, so she drives, but only if I'm with her.

Tyler: So just a learner's permit.

F: Exactly. It's just like, "Fine. Take your time."

T: Why do you say that?

F: Oh, that's a mother thing. When you grow up, then they're all grown up, right? So, it's like I want to slow down the process a bit.

The shopping-as-sacrifice approach raises some implications for renewed understanding of the car and North American rites of passage into adulthood. Considering the following from the relatively small amount of evidence I have currently: when the car is purchased by the parent, they then have an active role in their child's rite of passage, and the car (even a shared one) constitutes both the caring parent and the formation of the young adult; when the car is purchased by the child, then the child

constructs themselves as a caring and responsible member of the household and manifests a relationship of equality with the parent built on a mutual desire for each one's independence from the other. This latter point was well illustrated by Thomas (previous chapter) in his desire to cease borrowing his parent's car out of respect for their need for independence (in conjunction with his own sense of needing to be independent from them). In either case, the situation casts the car as an important means for by someone is seen as an adult within the configuration of their household.

5.8.2 Relationships Between the Household and its Descent Groups

Another important relationship which is created in the purchase of the car is the relationship between car buyers and their ancestors/descendants. As Miller highlighted, there are particular objects of provisioning which by their nature as long-standing brands might symbolize the continuity of the household, for example:

So far from consumption standing for change and modernity, the legacy of such brands is that they have remained constant, predictable and little changed during a century which has seen the most immense shifts in social structures and cultural ideology. As such, commodities become the objectification of family tradition, stability and history, which may be one of the reasons that the elderly shoppers seemed particularly conservative with respect to brand choice. (1998, 142)

This was the case for some among my participants, who would speak to me about their inclinations to buy certain cars and brands based on the ones that their parents purchased, but also of their memories of cars and the legacy of their family's relationship to cars. For example, my participant Claire describes her impetus for buying a Toyota Yaris as in part based on the familiarity and long-standing and respected nature of Asian brands within her family:

Tyler: And did your family have cars when you were growing up?

Claire: Yeah, we always had I think sometimes two cars. My parents each had one in the earlier days, or we always had at least one and always bought used, usually an Asian brand. So, something that's really respected and reliable like Toyota, Honda, Nissan. Those are some I remember we had. So yeah, I definitely grew up having a car. Yeah... My car is a Toyota Yaris, hatchback style.... My mom has the same model, so I knew it from going in her car, that it was a pretty reliable car. She never had any major issues with it. Easy to drive, a lot of storage, like I mentioned. So yeah, I pretty much already had experience with that exact model, so I knew that I liked it.

A similar story was one I heard from William, who bought his Volkswagen in part justified by a sense of “father-son” continuity:

Tyler: Can you tell me a little bit about the circumstances around buying that? You said you bought it new.

William: I wanted to buy something that would last me at least 10, 15 years. My father always owned a Volkswagen, so it's a father and son thing, and wanted something with better range than any other car that was sold at that time, so advertised at 1,000 to 1100 kilometers range.

Josh's case with his Mercedes, in part justified to give his older Mercedes to his son also presents an example of this kind of phenomenon. For Josh, the Mercedes-as-inheritance, the uniformity of the brand across the household members, and the connotations of longstanding and high-quality nature of the brand itself all showcase the role of the object in the formation of a sense of both household continuity as a marker of the identity qualities of the particular household (rather than the household in abstraction).

5.8.3 Relationships Between the Household and its Extended Kinships

The car plays a particularly unique role in manifesting individuals' relationships to people outside of their immediate household. I use the term kinship here in line with

what Furstenberg et al. (2020) have categorized as: 1) variations of formal marriage or other legal basis; 2) alterations in the reproduction process, such as families created through adoption and the recent innovation of children born through assisted reproductive technology; 3) the formation of voluntary bonds that are deemed to be kinship-like, in which affiliation rests on neither a biological nor legal basis (I refer to these as extended kinships).

Staying connected with friends and family over longer distances was one of the often-mentioned reasons for owning a car. With respect to these kinds of relationships, the car appears to be deployed in such a way as to close the distance between members of the extended household and of extended kinship groups. In some cases, the car was used to mitigate the conflicts which arose in the need to be physically present with each set of parents of the adult members of the household, who generally lived in different regions (intra and inter-city). For example, Julien described how the car was used to allow him and his wife to visit both of their parents despite their distance from themselves and each other (between themselves in Ottawa, and their parents on the north shore of Montreal and the south shore of Montreal):

When we bought the car, my partner and I at the time, she had family on the north shore of Montreal, and I had family on the south shore of Montreal and the logistics involved in visiting our families or maybe going somewhere for a little vacation using alternative means of transportation was not realistic in terms of the amount of effort involved. We tried using the [car share service] to accomplish that, but because sometimes you want some flexibility in your schedule. For instance, we did not know how long we wanted to stay with her family, and we would say "well, maybe we will stay longer if things go well but if the family starts arguing with each other we might bail out early." But, because of the [car share], the way you rent the car for a specific time, that was not really an interesting value proposition based on their parking fee.

Over the holidays it was particularly painful because of the rarity of cars, so I would live on the southwest part of Montreal, and I would sometimes have to take the Metro maybe half an hour to go to a parking lot that had a car that was available for the time period I wanted. So, it was extremely inconvenient to have to go around to fetch the car very far away and then bring it back there. Especially if your timing...if you are coming back home and it is late in the evening and you think "oh right, I have to bring it to that parking lot and then I have to take the Metro and I cannot miss one before it closes down." All of that stress involved with that aspect of the car share service was something that was not really great.

It was a similar story with William, whose family was even more spread out: he was driving his car to visit family located in the Laurentian Mountain range of Quebec, to southern Ontario, and to Florida. For William, the fact that there is no public transportation to the Laurentians where his parents are means that he has no other choice than a car (owned or rented). Even for participants whose families lived in areas of relatively high access to public transit, it was again the "reliability" of cars which prompted a need to buy a car and ensure that the relationship could be maintained.

Similar to the excerpt above provided by Julien, other participants also cited that shared cars (e.g., rentable cars) were generally unavailable or prohibitively expensive during key family holidays, and so again, unreliable:

Tyler: So just to reiterate so that I understand, even if the cost of renting is a little bit less, even though your car is going to depreciate, you still have the reliability?

Victoria: Yeah, just to have the reliability of it, yeah, yeah, yeah. Just to have it there because there's a lot of weeks of the year where you go to a car rental agency and it's like ... Man, I used to rent cars every Christmas when I was going through university and after university before I had a car because it was quite a few years before I had a car after university as well, and I would rent a car to go home for Christmas and it would cost. I'd get the bill at the end, and they would always quote you for so little and then I'd get back and they'd be like, "It's 600 and whatever dollars." I remember once just in an Avis just being like, "I'm not crying because I expect to get anything, I'm just in shock right now and I'm processing this because I have no money, I'm a student and I just wanted to go see my family." The buses

were fully packed, bus and the trains were just more expensive than a car rental based on the estimate. So yeah, when you factor in those things as well, it does seem to start to be like, "Okay this is the more reliable option."

These relationships were also apparent from the other side (of the older member of the family). For example, John an older retiree, used the car for "pretty much everything", used the car to stay connected with his son (although he jokingly mentioned that his son was more frequently coming to visit him at his age). These sentiments were also prevalent with discussions about relationships to friends among both my younger and older participants. Many of my participants commented on how integral the car was to help them maintain relationships with friends who were non-local. In large part, this tended to be related to the fact that friends might be made at a time when they were local to a given neighbourhood and then, pursuing different interests or future prospects for themselves (such as expanding their families, relocating for new jobs, etc.), they moved apart. For example:

Tyler: Okay. You mentioned it's much more convenient and reliable, can you kinda tell me a little bit more about that?

Melanie: ... if I wanna go see my friends on Sunday in Nepean, the buses on Sunday are never fun, especially... It wasn't too bad when I was in Centertown 'cause a lot of my friends were downtown at that time too, so I would just walk everywhere to all my friend's places, 'cause parking in Centertown is annoying. But now that we're more settled down and spread out it's just easier and faster to drive. It would be... Oh, I don't even know how I would get to Nepean by bus anymore. I guess I'd have to take one bus to Rideau and then hop on the stupid train that I still haven't taken. Then get off somewhere, probably at Tunney's Pasture, and then take another bus to get there, or Uber. And I haven't Ubered a lot, so I don't know how much that would be. It'd probably be much more convenient, but I don't know how expensive it would be. And then because we're down to one car now...

The same was true for Victoria, who described how all of her friends have moved away from the city, but she still wanted to "stay social with those people":

Tyler: Right, I guess just to clarify, are you saying that if public transportation was maybe more reliable that reliability wouldn't be the most important thing in a car for you, or are you saying that you wouldn't need a car at all?

Victoria: Well, I think even still ... No, I think I would still want a car or need a car but at the same time, I have lived without one and it's a conversation that we definitely have and what it always ends up coming back down to is just being able to go drive out to our friends' houses that have all moved just outside of the city to be able to stay social with those people, to be able to visit our families, to be able to do all of that and previously, when I didn't have a car for a good two years, I was just renting vehicles when I needed them.

Secondarily, cars are also served as the place for social experiences regarding friends and family, as Lisa noted:

Lisa: Usually, I just wait until a friend with a car is available and they're like, "Hey you would like this. You want to tag along?" But that's definitely something I have considered before, because there are for sure things that are not really convenient not owning a car in Ottawa, and when I do have friends in the city who are available with cars, it feels like a lot more opportunities open up in terms of places you can go, Ikea dates are a great one. You can get some Swedish meatballs and pick up furniture to bring home. Don't need to worry about the cost to Uber there.

Yeah. Or Costco. Costco is another big one. I would always... It would be a mission to find one person with a Costco card and one person with a car to drive us. And try and coordinate that, and I would just tag along and organize everything. Because it's the sort of thing where I can and I have gotten Ubers to come back from Costco before, but it's a lot easier if somebody's got a car, and usually you can entice the car person with the Costco membership person to get them to all work together.

To say that the people hope to imbue their relationships to those outside their immediate household with a "mobile" quality sounds over-simplistic. I would instead clarify that cars make kinships mobile in the same way that telecommunications technologies do. This idea finds company with how Urry described contemporary societies as a "network and flow" (Larsen & Urry 2016; Urry 2001). What I mean here by mobile is an implicit un-fixedness rather than any kind of positive sense of movement. I

mentioned in a previous section that thrift constitutes the household in the abstract, but the kind of car that is purchased constitutes the household (and its kinship connections) as a specific constellation of individuals and salient meanings. In other words, my participants use their cars to maintain their social relationships in such a way that the car is the antithesis of an individualizing *cocoon* or cage - it is a kind of relationship *turtle*. Cars effectively bring their owners' social relationships with them wherever they go, reducing physical distance and reducing symbolic distance. Cars enable a kind of virtual co-locality, and the purposeful maintenance and creation of meaningful social relationships by choice, imagined to be unrestricted by spatial or temporal conditions, and the specific configuration of the car further articulates the qualities of the household (physically or virtually co-located).

5.9 Conclusion

It is easy to focus on the individual and individualizing aspects of car ownership, particularly when attention is paid to the discourses surrounding them (i.e., what cars appear to mean based on advertisements and media). These discourses are packed with potent meanings of good capitalism: individuality, self-expression, power, competition, excess, speed, risk. Yet, what I have tried to show by using Miller's theory of shopping to frame my ethnographic evidence, is that the act of buying a car is a ritual effort to negate these discourses and constitute something meaningful within the bounds of capitalist production and consumption in the form of relationships. Miller writes that...

In our society... both society as transcendent goal and property as reified possession have become condemned as vicarious goals of devotion. Today

only human subjects and relationships may stand as inalienable. Objects are therefore judged on their ability to objectify personal and social values and condemned when, as Marx argued of the commodity, they fetishize or in some other way diminish those values. Yet ironically as transience and ambivalence become crucial attributes of relationships it has become primarily commodities that have emerged with the flexibility and abundance to objectify them. Fully alienated through the forces of production and distribution, they become through consumption resaturated with human projects of value creation. (1998, 152)

The car is a powerful mode of symbolically and physically constituting meaningful relationships in the form of the household and in the form of the chosen social connections that individuals and households have to others (i.e., kinships and extended kinships). Purchasing a certain car to suit a certain sense of “lifestyle” is, to me, evident of the same kind of dynamic ways in which relationships are idealized in shopping.

It is of course a painful truism to say that in contemporary society communities are not just composed of the local place and local groups of people into which we are born and raised. However, we should be conscious of the fact that it is in many ways because of the car that communities are chosen and purposefully maintained across tremendous geographical distances. These communities are mobile social networks of relationships, simultaneously local and non-local in their physical form. For my participants, kinships and extended kinships are “multi-sited” (Marcus 1995); they are often physically non-local, if not sometimes national or global. The car has made these kinds of relationships possible and unmaking the car will have both positive and negative consequences for the ways that communities are experienced as a network of both chosen and circumstantial relationships.

6. Chapter 6: A Vehicle for Ideologies

6.1 In Summary:

In this chapter I argue that one of the reasons people buy cars is to articulate their politics in the form of ideologies. Ideologies are plural and defined as prerequisite aspects of culture which enable individuals to act out their autonomous politics, and by which phenomena and experiences of the world are made intelligible within existing symbolic structures for right action. In this case, I explore cars as sublime objects of an ideology of 'sustainable capitalism' and argue that people buy different sorts of cars as a means of exercising ethical action and to constitute work-in-progress realities-as-fantasies. In conclusion, I argue that by oversimplifying people's avoidance of an electric vehicle future as being "misinformed", we essentially shortchange the dialectical process by which people understand important phenomena, in this case climate change.

6.2 Introduction to Chapter 6

The purpose of this last chapter is to look forwards and backwards with respect to car ownership. Forwards at the current politicization of the car with respect to environmental ideologies, and backwards at the arguments I have made so far in this dissertation. On the former point, I wish to argue that owning and using cars has become an expression of politics—not only voluntary, conscious politics, but also autonomous, instinctive and dialectic politics. Specifically, with respect to how cars operate as symbolizations of social and environmental stewardship for their owners. On the latter point, I hope to point to ideologies as the reason cars have so far symbolized

what they do (despite discernable contradictions in this symbolic power). For some, car ownership is an expression of a deep commitment to behaviour change and for others it is a form of ‘making sense of’ discourses that challenge and problematize everyday behaviour and ethics.

Through this chapter, although I define ideology in a different way, I look to complement the work that other scholars have done in criticizing an emerging ideology of the “greening of capitalism” (Goldstein 2018). Such critics have argued that environmentalist discourse has been subsumed within a capitalist frame of reference as a kind of “false consciousness”: the way, for example, ‘green’ rhetoric obscures precarious and exploitative work practices (Castellini 2019); the use of ecotourism to subsume efforts of environmental conservation (Brockington, Igoe & Duffy 2008); the obfuscation of the continued unequal power relations between the global North and global South (Brown et al. 2014); the establishment of a technocratic zeitgeist to address urban environmental issues (Leon & Rosen 2020). While these scholars have spoken explicitly of this as ideology, it is not the meaning I intend for it in this chapter (or dissertation broadly).

Ideology, as I will take pains to describe in detail in this chapter, is not an aspect of class consciousness, or a commentary on the veracity given political statements. This kind of ideology which I have so far been referencing has been the common approach to ideology which invoked Geertz’s reflection that no-one would intentionally or willingly “...call himself an ideologue or consent unprotestingly to be called one by others. Almost universally now the familiar parodic paradigm applies: ‘I have a social philosophy; you have political opinions; he has an ideology’” (1973, 194). I therefore deploy this term in

a way more consistent with what Geertz originally outlined in his essay “Ideology as a Cultural Structure” (1973), which found support among other scholars later (Giddens 1979, 188-195; Griffin 2006, 79-81; Ortner 2006; Zizek 2008). Ideology is a kind of cultural structure which makes autonomous politics possible in society. It is completely necessary, internally contradictory, unavoidable, and a product of human “intellectual sophistication” (1973, 231).

In this context I step away from a political economic interpretation of cars as objects interpellated by a hegemonic ideology of “green capitalism” in which, for example, the global shift toward electric vehicles is by-product of a discursive power that reinforces the persistence of capitalism globally (through new patterns of international exploitation, through continued maintenance of the forwards and backwards economic connections of the automobile infrastructural system, etc.). I focus, instead, on this particular moment in time in which I interpret adoption of and avoidance of the electric car as a meaningful demonstration of the ways that individuals exercise their autonomous politics in order to make sense of the world: in this way, I see adopting electric cars (or not) as an act of culture-making. More specifically, both the adoption of and avoidance of the electric car reflect each individual’s attempts to form an understanding of climate change, and make it compatible with already established ideologies surrounding cars (concerning freedom, property, mobility, etc.)

The purpose of this alternative interpretation is to argue that: 1) buying electric cars and avoiding electric cars is not necessarily a kind of true or false consciousness, but are both examples of the same dialectic phenomenon of ideological sense-making which seeks to form an understanding of environmentalism which is compatible with

established ideologies; 2) to expand on the ways by which objects can be made political (Winner 1980) via their incorporation into ideologies as sublime objects, and 3) to advance on a working theory of ideology as a valuable analytical concept for cultural and social analysis. Fundamentally, I hope to show that people also own and use cars to articulate 'right ways' of being in the world.

6.3 Ideology as Autonomous Politics

Ideology, in this research, is defined as an integral cultural structure by which autonomous politics is made possible (Geertz 1973, 218; Giddens 1979, 188-195; Griffin 2006, 79-81; Ortner 2006; Zizek 2008). It is a persuasive cultural call to action, inevitably loaded with contradictions, but necessarily so in order to make action possible. It serves as a bridge between the ontological language which describes the nature of that which *is* and the ethical language that describes that which *ought* to be.

Ideology names the structure of situations in such a way that the attitude contained toward them is one of commitment. Its style is ornate, vivid, deliberately suggestive: by objectifying moral sentiment through the same devices that [neutral language] shuns, it seeks to motivate action... it is the attempt of ideologies to render otherwise incomprehensible social situations meaningful, to so construe them as to make it possible to act purposefully within them, that accounts both for the ideologies' highly figurative nature and for the intensity with which, once accepted, they are held. (Geertz 1973, 231)

Ideology is the cultural process by which people overcome the is/ought dilemma (Black 1969) and actively defend their patterns of belief and meaning, but it is also the means by which variation and change occur within society and with culture. Varied interpretations of 'right action/right belief' are most visible in moments of cultural turmoil where existing political and moral frameworks struggle to make sense of lived

experiences and invite a process of meaning-making/sense-making which is not always homogenous. According to Geertz:

[when] hallowed opinions and rules of life come into question, the search for systematic ideological formulations, either to reinforce them or to replace them, flourishes. The function of ideology is to make an autonomous politics possible by providing the authoritative concepts that render it meaningful, the persuasive images by means of which it can be sensibly grasped... And it is, in turn, the attempt of ideologies to render otherwise incomprehensible social situations meaningful, to so construe them as to make it possible to act purposefully within them, that accounts both for the ideologies' highly figurative nature and for the intensity with which, once accepted, they are held. (1973, 219-220)

In these situations within a society, there can be multiple symbolic meanings ascribed to somewhat identical phenomena by different people at the same time. This observable quality of ideology underscores its nature as inherently contradictory. Its contradiction is predicated on the cultural applicability of multiple symbols, or from another perspective, the incorporability of the phenomenon into multiple sign systems. Examples of this include the adoption of organic farming methods in the United States, which has been taken up as a formal political symbol by Democrat and Republican farmers alike, capable of representing religious traditionalism, progressive communism, as well as political agnosticism (Sayre 2011). In essence, how else can individuals with radically different political views incorporate the same phenomena into their cultural schema and in doing so defend their particular political values, if not for the capacity of ideologies to be essentially a means of overcoming and ignoring the antithetical positions of those radical others, and obscuring this dysfunctional aspect inherent in society?

Geertz writes that “[n]o social arrangement is or can be completely successful in coping with the functional problems it inevitably faces” (1973, 203). Societies are rife

with antagonisms, for example, between freedom and order, stability and change, logic and emotion, precision and flexibility. Societies also face discontinuities between norms, between roles and between sectors of society (the economy, the state, the family, etc.). "Social friction is as pervasive as is mechanical friction—and as irremovable" (204). In his essay, Geertz calls for a more thorough investigation into the process by which these strains are "expressed" in symbolic forms (1973, 213-214). I argue that Zizek's theory of ideology and sublime objects provides a productive example of such a process which is surprisingly compatible with the thoughts laid out by Geertz.

For Zizek, ideology is "a crucial paradox" (2008, 15) which is the 'default' of human cognizance, a kind of fundamental ontological *modus operandi*. It is a crucial paradox because language (and thought) are both necessary to interpreting the phenomenological reality and, coincidentally, obscures the logic of that reality (2008, 16). That is to say we necessarily interpret our phenomenological existence in terms of structures of signification which hide reality from us, but on which reality is nonetheless dependent for its very existence.

This is the fundamental dimension of ideology which Zizek argues is not a false consciousness (a veil of representation over some true reality), but rather "the reality in itself which is already to be conceived as ideological" (2008, 16). In other words, ideology is not a dream-like illusion that we build to escape reality, but rather it is a fantasy construction which serves as a support for our 'reality' itself: an 'illusion' which structures our effective, social relations by masking some insupportable, real, impossible kernel (2008, 45). These kernels of reality are the things not present in the symbolic structure; they represent a lack in the structure. In a more Geertzian

interpretation, this “lack in the structure” is the transcendent cultural value that individuals might hope to realize in society by virtue of subscribing to the ideology and expressing its autonomous politics. The symbolic structure masks a void and it implies the foreclosure of a certain signifier (2008, 78). The thing which is foreclosed, returns as a signifier, as a symptom of the Other (2008, 81).

The symptom, for Žižek (following Lacan) is *enjoyment* (*jouissance*) and desire. It is a kernel of the real which is incompatible with the truth of its logic as represented in the semiotics of thought, fundamentally misrecognized as a positive presence rather than a negative presence (a simple lack in the symbolic structure). As Žižek puts it: “what is at stake in ideology is its form” (2008, 92); the goal of an ideology is to justify its means, to cover its symptoms, which appear as inconsistencies or paradoxes that remain in it as elements that subvert its own universal foundation (2008, 92). Žižek uses the example of freedom in the context of a capitalist ideology: freedom of press, of consciousness, of commerce, of political action, etc. are all subverted by a specific freedom, that of the worker to freely sell his labour on the market—for which the worker must sacrifice his own freedom to the mechanisms of the market (2008, 17). It is by discovering this kernel which reveals the enjoyment (*jouissance*) of ideology that it is in some sense ‘destroyed’ and creates a different ideological form through a kind of dialectical process.

For Žižek, every ideology presents to its subjects certain objects possessing an apparently surplus quality: these are sublime objects. The sublime object is the materialization of the impossible thing, that kernel of the real as a constituent of another ordinary object, which when positioned in this dialectic turn reveals itself to be a

symptom. Žižek highlights the role of the commodity as the sublime object of capitalism as the “indestructible and immutable body which persists beyond the corruption of the body physical” (2008, 12). This surplus quality, an excess, is something unattainable, impossible, but yet visible in a kind of inversion of the ideological interpellation of the object (2008, 107).

The ideological interpellation of the sublime object makes its surplus quality, its excess, appear as positive attribute in the context of the ideological structure in which it is quilted into place. This process is synonymous with the basic “act of recognition” (Geertz 1973, 215) by which phenomena are made familiar through the symbolic act of perceiving something as being something, i.e., an individual’s efforts to subsume the phenomenon within an existing symbolic model. It is within this symbolic model that the sublime object’s descriptive characteristics appear to posit a positive “pure” signifier which gives “unity and identity to our experience of historical reality itself” (2008, 108). It is this point of reference, the excess not intrinsic to the descriptive components of the named thing, but an implicit impossible object which represents “the agency of the signifier within the field of the signified—pure difference” (2008, 109).

For Žižek every subject is interpellated by the ideological structure all the time. The subject necessarily constructs a fantasy for itself in the misrecognition of his own place within the structure, a product of what Žižek calls the *che vuoi?*. This *che vuoi?* is an introspective question posed by the subject, who sees in the structure a place for himself through the positing of his own action. Fantasy is coincidentally a misrecognition of the lack in the Other (the void, the kernel, the thing hidden by ideology, e.g., the Other wants to recognize me, so that I am constituent within its symbolic network), and

the co-ordinates of one's own desire, which are contained by the very ideological frame enabling him or her to desire something (2008, 123-126). The fantasy/illusion hides the fact that the real enjoyment does not exist; that desire is always out of reach, and the subject is struggling to address the impossible, the excess, the kernel of the real.

Lacan, in contrast to other post-structuralists, presents a subject who is not subjectivated, rather their subjectivation simply masks the way in which the subject misrecognizes him/her-self as a lack in the structure (2008,197). Per Zizek: "the subject cannot find a signifier in the structure which would be his own (he is always saying too little or too much, he never finds his desire, etc.)" (2008, 198). The subject misrecognizes himself as an answer of the real (of the object, of the kernel) to the question of the big Other. According to Zizek, the impossible question produces in him a shame or guilt, it divides him, and this hystericization is the constitution of the subject (2008, 204). The process of interpellation-subjectivation is an attempt to evade this "traumatic kernel" through identification; "in assuming unto himself the symbolic mandate, recognizing himself in the interpellation" the subject avoids inducing in him a kind of existential paranoia or hysteria (2008, 205).

Ideologies are authoritative concepts, descriptive propositions meant to orient subjects' lived relations to and within reality; they are cultural "blueprints" or right action and belief. They may be highly metaphorical, e.g., "war is hell" (as per Geertz), or they may appear to be strictly ontological, e.g., "the King is the King" (as per Zizek). They are an integral and necessary part of cultural production and reproduction. They bridge the cultural is/ought problem between ontology and ethics and inform the autonomous political actions of individuals. As such, they exist, persist, and change at the level of the

everyday interactions of individuals as they make sense of the world around them in a kind of dialectic movement.

Ideologies are most visible when societies encounter experiences and phenomena that trouble the existing cultural schema of meanings, values, beliefs, traditions, and habits. People within a society create ideologies or adjust old ones to make sense of these new phenomena (to make them meaningful and recognize them). Their inherent contradictions interpreted in the literal meanings of ideology is not necessarily an indication of false consciousness, but essentially is a way for individuals to construct “novel symbolic frames against which to match the myriad of unfamiliar somethings that are produced by a transformation in political life” (Geertz 1973, 220). Moments of cultural tumult reveal the contradictions which are usually hidden by ideologies, as emerging ideologies may oppose each other in efforts to manifest conflicting or complementary transcendent values, particularly with respect to their attachments to objects. These values are perceived by individuals as a positive presence in the sublime nature of objects, and correlate to a corresponding ‘lack’ in the symbolic structure. Ideologies are interrogatable by looking for sublime objects which embody symptoms of ideology and critiquing the naturalized values at stake within them.

Both Geertz and Zizek provide compatible and productive methodological orientations for understanding ideology. Their outlined goals are also compatible. For Geertz, the goal of a social science understanding is first to understand “what they are, how they work, what gives rise to them” (1973, 232), and secondly to critique them, to make them “come to terms with reality” (232). Zizek answers this first goal and rather

frames this second goal as more to the effect of forcing ideology to come to terms with “the real” (2008, 140), and enacting a dialectic process of ideological change. In the remainder of this chapter, I will use Žižek’s outlined methodology for interrogating cars as sublime objects of multiple ideologies: a discursive symptomatic reading of the object (i.e., as a constituent of an ideological field), and; as a kernel of enjoyment (i.e. the designed object as a sublime object, a kernel of the real).

6.4 The Sublime Object of Capitalism

Up to this point in this dissertation, I have argued that my participants buy cars because the place they live has been designed to afford them; because they feel their bodies are not able enough or not convenient enough; because they need the additional human capital of mobility and the comfort of security and independence which that human capital provides, and; because buying cars is a symbolic act by which to constitute a sense of household that transcends the limitations of geography. In each of these cases, I have endeavored to show that, correspondingly, car ownership means these things: it means living in a frictionless environment, to have the capital by which to realize a complete flexibility and independence in economic and social pursuits, to untether ones familial and kinship relationships from the limitations of physical geography and to have a body with which these goals are conveniently pursued. But these meanings of car ownership (convenience, flexibility, freedom, frictionlessness, independence, etc.), such that they are symbols and significations, are just floating in a sea of possible signifiers. Why do these symbols matter and why do they matter in concert with each other?

The car is a matrix of contradictions, and yet these values emerge in a kind of cultural harmony, masking their inversions. Why is it that my participants, for example, are not outwardly concerned with the inherent contradictions of pursuing a convenient body, which is a self-perpetuating cycle that undermines itself? Or why does the car not, in so far as it is related to economic and social pursuits, provoke a symbolization of the erosion of social stability and support structures, rather than appear as a valorized form of human capital required for flexibility and independence?

The impetus for these particular constructions of meaning is in ideologies. If we acknowledge that ideologies are simultaneously statements of how things are, and of how things ought to be, then we must assume that an individual has a historically and experientially contextual reason to interpret ontological claims or behaviours, as also ethical ones. In other words, statements such as “I own a car because it gives me convenience” should be interpreted as simultaneously an affirmation of an ethical position in the form of “I ought to be/have/feel/experience/do/etc. that which is convenient”. In this way, we treat the meaning of cars as not just a result of some subjectivation of the individual (i.e. one who is made to feel, by virtue of the material relations of the economy, that they must become flexible & independent) but that the meaning of the car is also a deployment of a kind of autonomous politics which seeks to make the world one in which flexibility and independence are valued, and as such are experienced as the positive presence of those values in the object.

Zizek proposes that in order to understand the fantasy¹⁸ at stake in ideology, we can do two things. Firstly, deconstruct the network of symbolic overdetermination which is invested in its role to overcome the contradictions inherent in the “real” (2008, 140). This can be done by analyzing how the car displaces and condenses the antagonisms of society. By doing this we can see that the car is bound up in multiple ideologies: capitalism, modernity, individualism, mobility, and potentially others. The second thing we can do is read the car as a symptom of fantasy: what is the vision of society constructed by this sublime object—what is being said about the lived reality? Other scholars have done some of the work to explore these ideologies already: Bauman’s “liquid modernity” (2006); Paterson’s automobile ecology (2007); Urry’s lives “on the move” (2010), and; Ortner’s examination of American individualism and social class (2006).

With respect to an ideology of capitalism: cars (and more specifically, the automobile industries) are as Urry wrote, the quintessential manufactured object which reflects a contradiction between society’s infatuation with the “innovative disruptor” and the idealization of longstanding iconic brands. It is also the industry which reflects the productive capacities and perils of industrial and automated modes of production, which simultaneously makes goods cheaper by eroding the value of the labour required to produce them (and buy them). As my ethnography has also shown, they simultaneously reflect a valorization of flexible capital and an erosion of stable working relationships. The fantasy at stake in the car is the unfettered growth of capitalism. In other words,

¹⁸ A construction which serves as a support for our ‘reality’ itself, not as an illusion or escape from reality.

instead of saying “there is no such thing as perpetual growth”, society says “we could grow forever, if only we all had cars and their automobile infrastructure.”

Cars displace the antagonisms of modernity and mobility: they are old, dirty, polluting; but they are also efficient, sleek, and clean. They represent the antagonisms present in society’s desire for order, structure, routine, and optimization, in contrast to its desire to be free, flexible, unrestrained. Cars exist within a regime of forwards and backwards socio-technical linkages of roads, transportation bureaucracies, and other physical and social restrictions upon ways of moving; but they also represent a kind of super-human enablement to move about within those constraints. The fantasy at stake in these ideologies is comparatively similar, that our activities can be optimized, and we can move without restriction. In other words, instead of saying “there is no such thing as the optimal organization of society” and “there is no such thing as unrestricted movement”, society says “we could be optimized if only we used cars”, “we could be totally untethered from geography if only we had cars.”

Cars displace the antagonisms of individualism and independence: they represent hedonism, individual status through sign-values (speed, sexuality, gender, success, risk, etc.). But as I have attempted to show in my ethnography, they are also simultaneously the thing which erodes and supplements the geographical distancing of kinships. They are devices by which we avoid dependence upon others within our communities or societies, but which create other kinds of international dependencies on global political economic supply chains, social policies, and regimes by which to organize the use of cars, massive social infrastructure programs created through taxes, etc. The fantasy at stake in this ideology is that we can be independent individuals. In

other words, instead of saying “there is no such thing as an independent person, an individual who has sole responsibility for themselves,” society says, “we could be independent individuals, if only we had cars.”

Without diving too deep in to the many ideological pools that the car is bound up within, suffice to say that, as Fernandez wrote in the afterword to Lipset and Handler’s collection of ethnographic descriptions of vehicles of moral imaginations, these ideologies are bound in the car in such ways that they give it “a kind of ethical invulnerability to our misgivings about it even in the face of the pollution, energy dependency, personal isolation, roadway mayhem, and social congestion it creates” (Fernandez 2014, 201). There is however another ideology now being bound up into the car, and which I intend to focus on for the remainder of this chapter: an ideology of sustainability.

6.5 Cars are an Environmental Problem (and Solution)

I believe that the historical politicization of the car via sustainability is as much an example of the ideological dialectic as is the configuration of the electric car within that dialectic by individuals today (next section). The ideologies which have historically constructed the car as ethically invulnerable are now being reconciled with a relatively new ideology of sustainability. This ideology, though not universal, reflects society’s efforts at preventing a kind of socio-cultural meltdown resulting from the gutting existential problematization of everyday capitalist activities and behaviours as fundamentally self-destructive.

There are a number of historical, contemporary, local, and international moments that have constructed the car in terms of sustainability or concern for environmental

degradation. I present only a small and relevant selection here. First, it emerged as an environmental problem—the Internal Combustion Engine (ICE) car as something which creates pollution in the form of degraded air quality and contributes to global warming in the form of greenhouse gas emissions. Second, as a solution to those problems—the electric car as a means of transportation which is better for the environment and reflects a kind of social environmental conscientiousness. The following is a very small collection of moments by which we can see the car as constructed as a new kind of sublime object which, following its historical incorporation into the very essence of what it means to be a modern, industrial, and capitalist society, then inhabits a place of profane problematization and then, a place of transcendent solution.

Beginning, at least noticeably, in the 1970s cars have been implicated into the growing and changing discourse of environmental science and environmentalism within the federal political landscape. Though in 1971 Canada first began to regulate exhaust emissions for on-road vehicles under the *Motor Vehicle Safety Act*, in 2000, legislative authority was passed to Environment Canada under the *Canadian Environmental Protection Act* (CEPA) 1999. This optically had the effect of positioning car emissions within a trifecta of pollution prevention, protection of the environment and human health (Canada 2021).

Similarly, cars were problematized by the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) “oil crisis”, which further heightened consumer attention (in Canada as well as elsewhere) on oil and on the economy’s dependency and susceptibility to foreign interests (Macdowell 2012, 148). In conjunction with scientific findings regarding the connection between energy production and air pollution, it

focused political attention on shifting energy needs (Weart 2008, 102). Subsequently, different forms of energy production (electrical, nuclear, wind, solar, etc.) positioned themselves as ideal substitutions. Weart argues that it was in only into the late 80s when journalists began to ask questions, not about oil, but about the erratic and dangerous weather patterns (heatwaves, hurricanes, droughts, etc.) that “the greenhouse effect” began to take a general household significance (2008, 150-151).

Environmental issues in Canada shifted over time from pollution (the nuclear threat, water, air pollution) in the 1960s and '70s, to things like acid rain, the “hole” in the ozone layer, to forest and wildlife protection in the 1980s and '90s, and subsequently to energy consumption, biodiversity, and a greater emphasis on climate change (Macdowell 2012, 246). In the '70s and '80s, scholarly work problematized most if not all aspects of daily life, particularly: industrial production, population expansion, agricultural processes, transportation, and centrally, any activities contributing to the depletion of non-renewable resources (2012, 247). In the late '80s, an ideology of ‘sustainability’ was more or less formalized as an international transcendent symbol (i.e., an ideology): a goal of achieving a point of equilibrium between meeting the needs of the current population and expanding production without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (2012, 247). It was not until 2005 that emission and fuel economy standards were oriented to address not just air quality and pollution, but also greenhouse gas emissions within this general attitude towards sustainability. The first mandatory emissions program was introduced in 2010 (the previous one having been a voluntary agreement for vehicle manufacturers).

Most recently, the federal government has issued a missive which promises to prohibit the sale of combustion-engine vehicles in the country by 2040, coupled with incentives to reduce the upfront costs of zero-emission vehicles for consumers, investments in zero-emission charging infrastructure, and partnerships with auto manufacturers as integral to building “a cleaner, more prosperous economy that fights climate change and creates good jobs” (Government of Canada 2021, para. 6). The symbolic positioning of ICE cars as antithetical to what constitutes a ‘good’ economy situates the car as a prime suspect for an interrogation of ideology, and situates zero-emissions vehicles (i.e., electric cars) as the ideological antithesis of ICE vehicles.

The current and local state of environmental politics within Ottawa also points to such a conclusion. For example, during the 2021 Canadian federal election, candidates running for election as members of provincial parliament in the Ottawa Centre riding participated in a debate focused on the environment. The most popularly voted audience-submitted question (“what is the most pressing environmental issue facing our riding?”) was answered by three of the four candidates (for the Liberal, New Democratic, and Communist parties) with the same essential topic: transportation.

Alex McDonald of the Communist Party: community emissions are 44% from transportation. Our government has done nothing but accept the fossil fuel burning cars and trucks currently on the market, even though people have enjoyed electric cars in California since 2000. We should nationalize the Canadian operations of the Detroit three and retool them to produce zero emission cars and busses. We can wait eight years for electric vehicles to become affordable or we can act now.

Yasir Naqvi of the Liberal Party: the biggest issue is the transportation sector. You can see the congestion in the streets on the main roads, etc. you can see the impact on safety, and air pollution. I want to work with community groups like the Sierra Club, address air quality in cities, and find ways to reduce pollution to make it better for people who are walking and

cycling so that we are not affecting their health. We are looking to electrify our busses and deploy them for local use to do that.

Angella MacEwen of the New Democratic Party: I think that solutions are at the municipal level, and concern investing in [transportation] infrastructure. We see the LRT disaster, there was so much possibility to make it a public good rather than a private company. As the federal government we need to make sure we use it to make 'public' transit, we need to complete streets and bike lanes, we need to focus on infrastructure that can shift people away from cars and start making our cities work for busses, bikes, and pedestrians in a way that's accessible for people with disabilities.

The politically divisive nature of cars was also present in my engagement with participants. They often expressed the feeling of being in a double bind. I frequently investigated the discursive connections that my participants had with cars, by asking them about some of the things that they associated with cars. Alongside concepts like convenience, freedom, independence, and the other values I have so far worked to interrogate in this dissertation, were sometimes expressions of guilt and work to minimize the conflicting values and meanings at stake within car use and ownership. "They're wasteful. And it's sad," Samantha, for example, told me. "Again, I see all these things with the air. I know that it's hypocritical to be like, "I think cars are bad, but I still drive to work even though there's a bus route that goes there every single day." I think that they're wasteful but convenient. And I think that it's such an assumed convenience at this point that... Can you imagine ever not using one?"

As different kinds of cars are discursively associated with being either part of the problem or solution of climate change, these associations are not being uniformly adopted. In the following sections of this chapter, I will show how my participants seemed to form at least two ideological constructions of these narratives in an attempt to reconcile the goals of sustainability with the goals of capitalism and mobility.

6.6 Electric Cars Are Better for the Environment

During my efforts to recruit participants for this research, I realized that it would be difficult to find owners of electric-powered cars. Most of my participants had gasoline ICE cars, two of them had diesel-powered ones, there were three hybrids, but no electric cars. It was for this reason I specifically reached out to members of a local Facebook group in Ottawa for electric vehicle owners. I circulated my call for participants among them and found no shortage of friendly people willing to share their experiences of ownership with me.

Within the camp of those in favour of moving to electric cars (both in terms of those who already owned them and those of my participants who expressed that they were seriously considering an electric car as their next car purchase), the most prominent reasons were: 1) that electric cars are better for the environment than ICE cars because of their reduction of the carbon footprint and that they are not dependent on regimes of oil extraction and refinement; 2) that electric cars are cheaper to own and maintain because their motive power source is electrical (no engine or transmission, no oil changes, no cost of gasoline, etc.) and; 3) that by their nature, electric cars could be more effectively kept up to date with features and capabilities (key examples were the Tesla self-driving program, more efficient battery management software to improve battery life, etc.). A unifying symbolic theme of these comments was that electric cars were the way forward, and that the continued use of ICE cars (and combustion power) was somewhat evident of people “burying their heads in the sand”, as my participant Juan put it.

Regarding being better for the environment, a number of my participants connected gasoline and other combustibles/combustion-powered vehicles with guilt about environmental degradation. For example, Ben communicated his sense of guilt to me with what seemed like as much poetic power as possible, illustrating the symbolic connection between guilt, waste, pollution, and gasoline:

Ben: I was having a tough time adjusting to normal life after a long cycling trip, and a friend said, "Why don't you come up to a cottage with me and a whole bunch of friends. Why don't you come join us?". I was the only one coming from Ottawa. It was in this remote place where public transportation doesn't get there. I'm like, "Okay. If I'm going to go to this cottage, the only way I'm going to go is by driving a car". Otherwise, as soon as I get there I'd have to turn around and come home, on public transportation. There's no point in doing anything else.

I had to sit and stop and think about it, and think of, picture the size of a gas tank. It's quite large. It's 35, 40 liters of liquid. It's roughly four kitchen sinks full of gasoline. Just thinking of lighting all that on fire, and just letting all that gas into the air, it didn't sit well with me. Doing that purely for the purpose of my recreation didn't feel right. Didn't feel in line with my values.

But I was also having a really hard time. I'm like, "You know what? Time at a cottage is therapeutic. I think I kind of need this", and so I went. Ever since then, every time I turn the crank on a gas vehicle, that thought is in the back of my mind. "Ugh, I really don't want to have to do this". This is despite now having owned a vehicle for six years. Every time I turn on that engine, I think, "I don't want to do this."

The second major theme of motivation for electric car ownership was the cost-effectiveness of the option. For some of my participants, such as Juan, he couldn't fathom why electric car detractors could not be excited by the idea.

Juan: Well, what I've noticed about people's car purchases is that for such a huge purchase, and let's face it, for most people it's the second largest purchase they'll make in their life. It's really only houses, and houses at least appreciate in value, you put money in there's a really high chance you'll get it back out. Cars are just a flat expense. The money you put in is gone for the most part. People talk about resale, but if you look at the amount of depreciation you're taking, it's a huge expense and yet, there seems to be... People don't give it much thought. They'll say... I've talked to

lots of people about what their fuel consumption is and how's the mileage on this car and they'll answer with, "Oh, I only have to fill it up once a week." Well, that's an absolutely meaningless measure. How often you have to fill the tank tells you nothing.

A pickup truck has a 100-liter tank, or even larger, whereas the Prius had a 40-liter tank, so that fact that he fills his once a week and I fill mine once a week, doesn't make them equivalent. Especially if I'm actually the one driving more kilometers. So, at this point, people are very thoughtless about their car use, and they rarely think about what they actually use their car for.

There's no cars that are perfect, the thing about the electric car is just how low the maintenance is. Regular cars have an oil change roughly three times a year, but it's just not an issue and there's no cost instead of maybe \$150 a year. And because the mechanisms on electric cars are so simple, there is no transmission per se, it's just the electric motor running forward up to speed or running backward to reverse. There's no shifting. Either manual or automatic, it's just a one speed, hard connection. Even in neutral, all you're doing is un-powering the motor so that it's coasting. But if the wheels are turning the motor is spinning.

You have to take the whole picture into account, and I think people often don't. A number of friends I've tried to convince to at least test drive a Prius, while we owned one, and the number who actually did was zero. People are just so unnerved by a change in technology, they just can't... It's amazing to me that people just can't envision it.

The third main theme of this "pro" electric car attitude was with respect to the technological capabilities electrical cars entailed for drivers. The best example of this attitude was demonstrated by my participant Fintan, who gushed about the technology of his car both as it pertained to driver benefits, and consumer benefits:

Fintan: So, this is the reason I got my Tesla: when I got my [ICE] old Chevrolet Equinox, the job that I had involved driving around a lot, and taking calls while you're driving around. For that, I needed an upgraded kind of Bluetooth [wireless connection]. So, jumping ahead a bit, I was getting my car serviced and while there I asked can you upgrade it? Just replace it, so I ask, can you do that? They said, "No, you got to buy a new car." I was like, [that's ridiculous].

Yeah. On the other hand, I'm looking at Twitter and seeing an announcement that all Model S's, on the road at that point, were going to

get an update. In case you don't know, all Teslas get regular software updates that add features to the car.

But this was the first time where this update was significant in that that update improved the zero to 60 [mph] time of every Model S on the road. Every variant, everything after a certain date, they all saw the zero to 60 time reduced by a significant amount. My realization was like, here's a manufacturer saying if you want new Bluetooth, buy a new car, and Tesla on the other hand is giving an update for free to everyone that improves the base specification. When you talk about cars, that's one thing you talk about, what's the zero to 60, right? It is insane. At that point I said to myself, "The rest of these guys are idiots. I want a Tesla."

My participants' understanding of the electric car reflects the compatibility of multiple ideological constraints (capitalism, modernism, mobility, independence and now sustainability). The motivations for buying an electric car are framed in the context of its compatibility with multiple ideologies simultaneously interpellating the subject: it is a means of manifesting sustainable capitalism by reducing our outputs of greenhouse gases, by remedying the structural vulnerabilities of the oil-oriented global economy, by being essentially more cost effective, and by virtue of its characteristic as a dynamic kind of commodity which will improve over time, which forces companies to improve the way they do business.

However, as Geertz advised, in periods of cultural tumult ideologies are made visible. The contradictions inherent in the electric car are as such made visible in the interpretations of those who have not yet bought one (or who do not intend to buy one).

6.7 Only Rich People Will Save the Planet

Among detractors of electric cars, or among those who have not/are not planning on buying an electric car, the following attitudes emerged as reasons: 1) electric cars are too expensive, they reflect a kind of classed environmentalism reserved only for

“wealthy” people; 2) range anxiety, and an apprehension about not being able to continue with already established mobility habits (or at least feel somewhat confined by the prospect of having limits imposed); 3) that the technology is “not that clean”, or at least not so much cleaner than efficient gas engines to warrant the personal cost of making the switch, and lastly; 4) a narrative of discomfort with the technology and a lack of understanding (which is not the same as “misunderstanding” as was somewhat characterized by some electric car owning participants), was apparent in all of these kinds of responses.

Regarding the first theme, a number of my participants noted that the electric car was really more so a form of conspicuous consumption that symbolized environmental responsibility rather than a conscious effort to bring about meaningful change in ways of living. For example:

Tyler: Why haven't you considered buying an electric car?

Thomas: I know [electric cars] are insanely expensive. And I know that if I go on a road trip, which, I mean, admittedly, I don't do very often, but if I were to go on a road trip, I'd have to plan out where to charge it up in advance, which is kind of inconvenient. But it's not a determining factor. The determining factor is price. It's over twice what I paid for my car.

Samantha: When I see Teslas in a parking lot, my first instinct is like, "Oh. That person must have a lot of money." My second thought is always like, "This is somebody who cares about the environment." It's never the first thought. Looking at a Tesla is not saying, "This is someone environmentally conscious." This is like, "This is somebody who has a lot of money and has a secondary goal of being environmentally conscious."

The second major issue was the fact that electric cars do not really fulfill the needs of my participants to be mobile and independent. Electric cars jeopardized their need for reliable transportation by being beholden to an incomplete assembly of

infrastructure (e.g., the means by which to fuel them). They could not be understood on the same terms of reliability, because of the apparent unreliability of the system which enables them to exist. This conflict is compounded by apprehensions about cost, and uncertainties of long-term ownership.

Tyler: In terms of fuel economy and cost and things like that, what are your thoughts on electric cars? Have you ever thought about owning one?

Ted: No. I haven't. I'm not sure of the reliability. I don't know a whole lot about them for one thing. What's the range? How far can you go? Where can you charge them? What is the cost to charge it? I don't know any of that, so it's all new to me. I've driven in them, I took a Tesla cab in Montreal, \$100,000 vehicle, it was unbelievable. The dashboard looks like the inside of a plane. It was incredible, really, and it makes no noise. There's no sound when you're driving, there's nothing. It's just like sitting in a parked vehicle, I thought it was cool. I liked it, it drove well, too. That one, I would buy. If I could afford it, I would certainly drive that vehicle, it was nice. But like I said, my knowledge of them is minimal.

Tyler: Okay. Why do you say that electric cars are out of reach for most people?

Claire: Well, I haven't really researched it a lot so I don't think I know that much about it. But to me, when I think of an electric car I think of Tesla. Obviously, I know they have different price points, but it's definitely more than if you bought a used Toyota or a Honda obviously, even if you do save money on gas in the long run. Also, I feel like that maybe they don't run that well in a colder climate. So, I'm not sure people have them here. I know they do in Cambridge; I've seen charging ports. But I feel like they run better in warmer climates. So that might be another issue is if it gets really cold in the winter, which it does here, maybe there are some issues with the battery. But yeah, those would be the two main things, I think, costs, even though I know there are rebates available and becoming more available, but I still think it's definitely more expensive obviously than buying a used economical car.

Another major theme in resistance to electric cars was the challenge that they are not "clean enough". Some of my participants questioned the claim that they were better for the environment by juxtaposing the benefits of fewer greenhouse gas

emissions from the tailpipe, with the unknown environmental impact of battery production and decommissioning.

Tyler: I wanna just get your overall thoughts on electric cars, what do you know about them?

Guillaume: I know that the distance you can drive with them is getting better but it's still not that great. I know that cities are trying to accommodate users by more putting recharge stations around, a lot more and more, which I think is a great way to encourage people to do that.

I do also hear a lot of debates in terms of the true environmental benefit. I know there still is an environmental cost when you're considering the battery and how they make it and how you have to dispose of it later on. So, this is not an educated response, but I do believe it's way better than gas, but still not perfect. So, I don't think it's as great as people might say, or as the companies are trying to sell it to advertise it. Also, it's way too expensive for the way I see cars. A car is like a tool, and it just has to be the cheapest possible thing, so I'm not willing to pay. I don't know what the cheapest one is, but I would assume it's still over \$35,000 or something, so, or \$40,000 maybe. So, I don't think it's for me, I think maybe if you drive a lot and you live two hours from your work and you have a recharge station at your work, then maybe it's a good buy, but I don't think it's that great for someone like me.

Other participants simply looked to minimize the environmental benefit of electric cars by pointing to bigger polluters:

Tyler: Okay. Okay. Why did you buy a diesel? Why not a hybrid or something like that?

William: Well, at the time, the hybrids on a highway were less fuel efficient than a diesel car was, so for a long trip, diesel was still preferred. For a shorter trip, then hybrid would have been better, but the limited range of all electric puts me off of them.

Tyler: Okay. That makes sense. Hybrids are getting better at this point. Does the fuel economy and the range interest you more now or do you prefer the diesel?

William: Well, because no diesel cars are available since 2015, then I figured the next one will probably be a hybrid, like a plug-in hybrid, which I'm already thinking 2022 and on, I would prefer if they did have a diesel hybrid available. There are still some problems with range and charging for

me. Even though my house is a new building, a fourplex, the outside parking that is provided has no electrical outlets, not even for a block heater, much less an electric charging station. So that's going to be an issue, a thing for me and maybe a lot of people further on.

Tyler: I wanted to ask you. You've owned this car for a while, what was your opinion when the whole diesel thing with Volkswagen surfaced?

William: Let's say it didn't affect me that much. Reputation took a short-term hit where I work because then it was like, "Oh, the guy with the polluting car," even though, putting it in context, there was only about 100,000 of those sold in North America and they say a single cruise ship, in a day, emits as much as 50,000 diesel cars, so people have to look at it in context as well.

Predominantly, my participants expressed a difficulty in incorporating the electric car into their understanding of carness. As my participant Fannie articulated: "I only know a little bit about electric cars. I've seen some people with electric cars. I've seen a lot of places where there's charging stations for electric cars, but I don't see a lot of people actually using those, so I don't know, honestly, a lot about them." This black boxed nature of the electric car makes it difficult for my participants to interrogate within the realm of their current mental models of carness, however the discursive construction of electric cars in political discussions of global warming is something that, I believe, largely informed my participants overwhelming belief that electric cars were "a good concept" but "not well understood".

When we put the motivations associated with adopting the electric car against motivations for continued (at least for the present time) purchase of ICE vehicles, we can start to deconstruct an ideology of sustainability, and the electric car's role as a sublime object. The electric car now displaces and condenses the inherent antagonisms of sustainability: the car is "clean" in the discourse of air pollution and CO2 emissions, but still remains "dirty" in the discourse of resource extraction, manufacturing and its

geopolitical entanglements; the electric car is also the means by which every person may do their part to improve the condition of the environment, but also recognized as a commodity reserved for the wealthy or at least the wealthier; the electric car is also a better kind of capitalism which uses an even more mobile form of power (electricity), and yet which for some feels even more restricting and antithetical to the prevailing ideologies of mobility and independence. In large part, these latter contradictions will cease to be a problem in the subjective sense of the inevitably more widely available infrastructure of charging, but in a more ideological sense, will always be apparent in the same way that the gasoline car currently faces its own restrictions based on a regime of automobile infrastructure (of gasoline production and transmission).

6.8 Conclusion

The fantasy at stake in the car in this new ideological context is that the capitalist way of life is sustainable, that culture can (depending on whether we are optimistic or pessimistic) have a symbiotic or parasitic relationship with nature. In other words, instead of saying “there is no such thing as the perpetual destruction of the environment”, society says “we can destroy and reconstitute our environment forever, if only we all had these new electric cars and this new regime of global political economic automobile relationships”.

What in other interpretations of ideology seems to be an argument that greening capitalism serves as a hegemonic ideology by which a powerful structure manipulates subjects into believing in the power of technology to save us from capitalism, *actually* emerges as a set of conflicting responses to the *che vuoi?*—on the one hand, the ideological statement (we must act to make capitalism sustainable) interpellates some

to buy electric cars, to say “look, electric cars are better for the environment, they reduce our global system’s vulnerability to malevolent foreign oil interests, they enable us to be better capitalists, to save us money and reshape the very process of exchange and purchasing.” In this way, their electric cars become the sublime objects of one version of the fantasy-as-reality of sustainability. On the other hand, it interpellates others to buy ICE cars, as they say equivalently “How can electric cars save capitalism if only the richest in our society can do it, if they are not compatible with our capitalistic interest in flexibility and our capacity to independently and freely sell our labour, and if they cause environmental damage in other ways (such as through rare earth mining, battery decommissioning)” or they simply say “I do not understand electric cars well enough. They are not compatible with my understanding of mobility, neoliberalism, freedom, etc.” In this way, electric cars become sublime objects of another fantasy-as-reality of sustainability.

This conclusion is both concerning and hopeful. The concerning aspect of this assessment is that, through a kind of mutual intelligibility and compatibility, the ideology of sustainability may simultaneously be constructing correlating fantasies of not just sustainability, but also mobility, independence, work, freedom, and all of its other intersecting ideologies as also “sustainable”. This is problematic given the many scholars who do work to productively criticize the problematic arrangements of labour, mobility, freedom, neoliberalism, etc.¹⁹ Despite this, we must also try to understand both those who adopt electric cars and those who do not are participating in a dialectic movement. In many cases they are actively trying to bring “sustainability” to life, make it

¹⁹ Such as those referenced throughout Chapter Four.

real, give it concrete form, and to exercise emerging structures of values and behaviour change, as one of my most consciously political participants expressed:

Ben: As a child, all my family is actually in the UK, and so as a child, all of our travel and vacation time was always going over to the UK to visit there. I'm very thankful for it. I just realized as I got older that we live in Canada, and in North America. We live in a beautiful place, and I've seen very little of it.

We bought this [electric] car because it's a car capable of road tripping. It's got a big enough battery that charges fast enough, that we can drive anywhere in North America on the charging network, and it will be a pleasant-enough trip. We saw this as, "Okay. This money that we're paying is basically pre-paying for the next 10 years of flights somewhere".

So instead of flying to Florida or something like that to do the D-I-S-N-E-Y, I don't want to say it out loud because the kids are right here, that sort of trip. Instead of flying down there, we can drive down there. Or instead of flying to Europe or southeast Asia, or somewhere else in the world to see interesting things, we're going to focus on the beauty in North America, over the next 10 to 15 years. Then when these guys get old enough, they can then choose to travel more abroad. Hopefully electric flight by then is more viable.

But yeah, so flipping it around from the experience my wife and I had as kids. In that we're going to travel domestically. Pre-paying with this car, for those flights that we're not going to be taking. Then let them travel the world when they're a more independent age. But yeah, so that was my mental journey around finding out what an electric car was, and to now having one in our driveway.

We should think alternatively and consider that this is not some kind of self- or structural- manipulation or duplicitousness (as in that *kind* of ideology), and these actions should not invoke some criticism of my participants e.g., that they are confused, misguided, or otherwise inadvertently attempting to manifest their own demise. Rather, it should be seen as a productive and in some ways conscious deployment of effective political engagement and a meaningful act of making sense of the world. Specifically, a productive kind of making sense of a global situation which calls into question almost everything upon which their lives are based—an inevitably traumatic notion to face.

7. Chapter 7: Discussion

7.1 The Exception that Makes the Rule

In June of 2018, I attended the Montreal Formula One Grand Prix weekend with my wife and some of our friends. We still joke amongst ourselves that Montreal is a place where people never have to grow up. In many ways it calls to mind the very antithesis of how Ottawa is normally constructed—not a sleepy bureaucratic bedroom community (Davidson and Scott 2016), but a cosmopolitan metropole that does not sleep at all. During the Montreal Grand Prix weekend, this attitude is amplified. People travel from all over North America (as well as other parts of the world) to see this spectacle of automobile performance and become immersed in the automobile culture of the crowded city streets.

In the automobile universe, Formula One is the pinnacle of achievement and entertainment: twenty vehicles worth millions of dollars in pricey rare earth metals, carbon fiber, and refined petroleum (and worth millions more in the labour hours of research, development and driver salaries) race against each other at roughly 260 kilometers per hour, enduring exception levels of gravitational forces and with nearly superhuman reflexes. The sponsors are of the highest social capital: Rolex, Pirelli, Air Emirates, among others. The teams represent the most exclusive automobile brands: Mercedes, Ferrari, Aston Martin, Alfa Romeo, and more. The technologies are at the furthest edges of mechanical development, and teams use complicated software to gather and analyze data to find the tiniest measures of time as each tries to be just that much faster than the next.

The fans are intense, if not zealous. They brandish the names and colours of the teams, the images and names of the drivers, the logos and sponsor titles. They rage when their champions lose, they rage when they win. The streets of downtown Montreal become traffic jams of rare and expensive cars: not just of Mercedes, Ferraris, and Porsches, but Bugattis, Paganis, and Koenigseggs—brands that most people have never heard of. People block traffic just to “rev” their engines and make noise, be seen, show off their support and their wealth. Some streets shut down completely, they become the sites of concerts, fan activities, sponsor and team merchandise retail, and vehicle demonstrations among other events.

These places are a far cry from the sites of my participant encounters in Ottawa, and my discussions of using cars for getting groceries or visiting parents for the holidays. The places of pure excess, conspicuous consumption, hedonism, speed, risk, and status, work to contrast the everyday experiences of owning cars: the mundane, pragmatic, and unconscious consumption of a taken-for-granted set of meanings. Of course, these places are not just in Montreal for a weekend. They can be found on smaller scales in Ottawa where they become the accessible ritual spaces of this version of pure “carness”. In the west side of Ottawa during the summers, there is a car enthusiast meet-up every Friday night. On the east side, it is on a different day.

But these moments of difference and exception catch us out, we notice their meaning and remark upon it. They impress us, not just as moments of “carness” that become reference points for our own actions, but they impress upon us the connections between cars, wealth, technology, status, competition, speed, excitement, risk, and other concepts we encounter in the mundane. They occupy a large share of the

discourse, despite having a small share of our experiences. There is certainly opportunity to explore those exceptional spaces more thoroughly, but what I have hoped to do in this dissertation is complement the exceptional and more noticeable expression of cars with the mundane, everyday expressions of them where discourse, attitude, and behaviour are reconciled. I hope that this reorientation to the everyday can support the ways we deal with our car-enabled/constrained lives, in particular by drawing attention to the needs and situations of those for whom the car is not an obvious and loud cultural symbol, but a mundane machine necessitated by a complex system of equally mundane structures and conventions.

7.2 Review of Findings

Each of the chapters of this dissertation has explored a set of reasons and meanings for why people own and use cars in Ottawa. These perspectives reinforce and modify each other and so the discussions and implications raised with respect to them cannot be held or addressed in isolation.

In Chapter Two, I argued that people in Ottawa buy cars because the City of Ottawa is a place that makes them feel needed. I argued that people in Ottawa buy cars because it is a place that has been designed explicitly to accommodate and facilitate car ownership over any other form of transportation. In conclusion, I raised the issue that the current city plan published in 2021 may still be ignoring the interpretive aspect of human interaction with the environment. That on one hand, the many places outside our proposed 15-minute communities are what might make Ottawa a nice place to live for some people. There is an intended effect to deploying the city as a constraining or

affording design, but which takes for granted that the intended effect will be interpreted as such.

What I have hoped to show in the second chapter in particular, is that interventions to address car use and ownership (whether to decrease its prevalence, as the plan intends, or increase it if that should ever be the goal), needs to consider the interpretive action of the person or people. It may be feasible and usable to have amenities within the neighbourhood (as Gréber himself proposed as self-contained and self-sufficient neighbourhood zones), but they may not be *desirable* in their configuration (Dundonald Park may *technically* be a greenspace but does not *feel* like one to the people who are meant to use it). Or worse, the localization of amenities may not coincide with other political-economic conditions (e.g., the healthcare system of Ontario, for which there is a waitlist and under which a person may have to travel to the other end of the city and be unable to change their doctor without risk of losing it).

This chapter is meant to prompt us to consider factors beyond the built environment (although, not to dismiss it as an important way to create a change). It is also meant to prompt us to acknowledge that meanings are not given but interpreted (sometimes as intended, but sometimes not) based on the surrounding context of that environment which is not always physical. In this line of thinking we might rather be asking how we can change the meaning of car-oriented spaces as the infrastructure with the potential to afford other things: how might driveways become spaces for gardens; how might streets be used for community events; how might city parking lots become areas for pedestrian activities; how might low-density housing be used for public good? The potential changes with this approach are numerous.

In Chapter Three, I explored how my participants use cars to create different experiences of their bodies within a networked series of relationships. Drawing upon a mix of anthropological works discussing the social construction of the body and inspired by thinking near-Actor Network Theory, I worked to complexify the idea of cars as conveniences by revealing that driver-car embodiment constructs various bodies in the context of mobility. In conclusion, I argued that we ought to subsume and/or subordinate discussions and debates about convenience in mobility to a more productive and potent framework like disability studies. The experience of the convenient body is not something that is easily replicable in other alternative modes of transportation. This is not only because accessibility is a more important social issue than convenience, but because both are about how people experience their body in the world, and both are concepts which can be expressed in similar terms (e.g., measures of normalization, ideologies, relationships to capital, etc.). As I mentioned in Chapter Three, just because alternatives save time, it does not mean they will satisfy peoples' desires for specific experiences of their bodies. In a similar vein, just because public transit may provide accessibility, it does not necessarily mean it provides a sense of normalcy, or convenience, or be seen as an attractive or enticing replacement for cars.

In this context, it may be pertinent to ask if we can change the way we think about the demands we have for convenience. For transportation and mobility, some things appear as immediate targets: the built environment, the time-value of money, the discourse of productive bodies. But what else is at stake in the pursuit of convenience and how might we tackle longstanding ideologies of productivity and independence to undermine a relatively unhealthy pursuit of convenience? For example, can public

efforts turn the tide on the discourse of convenience in transportation in the same way it has for “fast food”? Or can we construct mobility solutions which do not pretend to be convenient (such as public transit), can we reshape them to emphasize other values which they might deliver on more effectively? These attempts to think about solutions should automatically raise a caveat related to the downfall of current forms of public transit: whatever seeks to be a convenient solution for everyone, will inevitably only serve some. Convenience in general has received relatively little attention in anthropological scholarship, there is much more room to be done in understanding it.

In Chapter Four, I argued that people in Ottawa buy cars because they want the human capital that it creates, particularly in the face of extraordinary demands for flexibility placed upon them by neoliberal capitalism. My participants buy cars because they believe they are the most reliable way of securing and routinizing their economic activities. In conclusion, I posited that independence is essentially freedom from other people. In this way, car use is a way to eliminate the complexity and uncertainty created in the perceived unreliability of others. Self-reliance, what the car creates in the car owner, may become empowering and critical vis a vis the increasing precarity of work relationships.

Addressing the contemporary trends in work and labour which I have highlighted in Chapter Four might make reducing community dependence on cars possible, however, clearly there are more ingrained dispositions regarding the need for each individual to develop their human capital. What might a future, where the responsibility for participating in the workforce lies at the collective level rather than the individual level, look like? What might a return to stable working relationships look like, and is it

possible to do without pushing those who cannot work standard hours out of the economy entirely? If “buying local” can serve as a model, how might individuals also “work local”, and would they want to?

In Chapter Five, I argued that buying cars is a potent symbolic ritual in the constitution of the household, and that the continued ownership of cars is integral to the maintenance and construction of mobile social relationships. In conclusion, I raised the point that we should not overlook the inherently social capacity of the car, not just on the road but as a means of creating and maintaining relationships of care. The car facilitates chosen relationships that aim to transcend geography. Kinships and extended kinships are increasingly “multi-sited”. What this means for the car is that we have to acknowledge and consider what kinds of relationships individuals are actively trying to constitute, how they might constitute them otherwise, or if it is possible to change the way we organize our social relationships. Can kinships return to being limited by geography, or can geography be overcome in other ways outside of the car?

In Chapter Six, I argued that people in Ottawa buy cars to articulate politics—not just formal and conscious politics, but the kind of autonomous politics inscribed within each individual through ideological structures. Using the concept of ideology as read through Geertz and Žižek, I analyzed car ownership and use as a means by which individuals make sense of, for example, sustainability. In conclusion, I argued that by taking ideology as the process by which individuals make sense of new phenomena and take ethically-oriented actions, we should think of both the adoption and refusal to adopt electric cars as a dialectical moment in the construction of a new understanding of global capitalism through the lens of sustainability.

We should continue to encourage people to buy electric cars because it opens the ideological doors to receiving new information about the relationship of their way of life to the environment, however, we should not see it as a panacea for solving climate change, or even see it as the best option. What some of my participants have shown is that this is a potent moment for ideologies to form: in most cases those ideologies reinforce the status quo of technologically-enabled environmentalism, but they do bring with them subtle behaviour changes and consciousness around car use (for example, as they consider how far they can drive with a charge, how much energy is being used, where that energy comes from, etc.). These things are not aspects of car use some of those consumers have been cognizant of before, and as I argued, it furthers this dialectic process of understanding climate change, and one's behaviour in relation to it.

Fundamentally, however, we need to accept that transportation will remain car-centric (at least as long as people can afford it, and perhaps beyond) unless the ideological connections that give the car its cultural invulnerability are somehow dealt with. How might we disentangle the car from ideologies of individualism, or from the discourse of freedom (particularly as it relates to consumer choice), for example?

7.3 Towards a Politics of Intentional Automobility

There is another important take-away from the imagery I started this chapter with: cars as objects of inspiration, of productive and positive enthusiasm, of creativity, ingenuity, and passion. In some ways, but certainly not all, the crazed fanatics, employees, and volunteers of motorsport can remind us that cars need not be just about global warming, preventable accidental deaths, idiocy and hooliganism, or corporate fraud. We can maintain a positive relationship to this technology if we *pay attention* to

what is happening and to what we are doing with cars, rather than pursue their continued use out of a sense of status quo, a fear of missing out, an expectation of convenience or out of necessity. I strongly believe, following this research, that cars (whatever the means of combustion) should continue to exist if we want them to, but only if we want them to. That said, we can only exercise this intentional kind of relationship, and make a conscious choice, if there is room to feel that the choice exists at all – to exist in a situation where the ownership and use of a car truly feels “optional”.

In this line of thinking, we also need to be considerate about what cars are, what they do to the environment as a basic result of consuming energy and the way that energy is created. A pursuit of continued car ownership out of a sense of necessity (i.e., the car as shackles of modernity), or impulsive convenience, is no better or worse than the pursuit of car ownership as a statement of pure excess (whether it is wrapped in electric vehicle wrapping paper or not) (Hogan 2022). In an effort to contribute to this kind of an intentional relationship with cars, the following section proposes some themes and questions for everyone to think about with respect to living with cars and designing for a future in which cars might continue to exist, but only if we choose to have them, not because we feel we have to.

7.4 Insights for the Design-inclined

It is a convention in design research to punctuate a research findings presentation with “insights”. Insights are catchy and compartmental phrases which reduce and condense observations and interpretations into digestible nuggets that spur on creative action. Insights directly raise productively-oriented questions, and simultaneously inform the audience of the need, desire, and/or context for which they

are trying to create a solution. In that line with this tradition, I have below a list of insights that I think might be helpful in advancing a politics of purposeful and deliberate car ownership by first addressing the meaning of cars for residents of the city.

7.4.1 People Need to See the Possibility of Alternatives

- The physical infrastructure of the city currently affords the perception that car ownership is the clearest (or only) option for necessary mobility.
 - How might we leverage the car-centric physical infrastructure of Ottawa (such as the abundance of street parking) to make other forms of mobility more visible, effective, or appealing?
 - How might we empower residents of Ottawa to find new meanings and purposes for their existing car-centric spaces?
- Residents will inevitably travel to places outside their 15-minute neighbourhoods, and as things are now, cars are the obvious choice by which to do so.
 - How might we reveal, highlight or provide alternative means for residents to get to the many places which are meaningful to them, the places that make the city one they want to live in?
 - How might we change our relationships to the places outside of our 15-minute communities and make occasional travel more acceptable than an expectation of any-time travel?

7.4.2 Convenience is a Product of Experience

- The city's car-centricity has created a culture of drivers, and as such many residents are habituated to the logic and disposition of drivers. Combined with the

infrastructural deficiencies towards alternative modes of transportation, cars have become not only the most convenient, but the least intimidating mode of travel.

- How might we show residents of Ottawa the convenience of other modes of transportation?
- How might we alleviate the intimidating nature of other modes of mobility, such as cycling?²⁰
- How might we make car ownership mean inconvenience rather than convenience or how might we change the narrative of “cars as convenience” to be intrinsically disincentivizing?²¹
- Convenience is not experienced uniformly through cars. For many people cars are a source of achieving a sense of normal and able-bodied mobility.
 - How might policies which seek to reduce convenience-motivated car use not also negatively affect ableness-oriented car use?
 - In cases of the car as something convenient, how might we alleviate the feelings of inconvenience associated with discarding car use?
 - Similarly, how might we make living with inconvenient bodies more socially and culturally acceptable?

²⁰ The City of Ottawa currently only offers programs aimed at teaching children and adults who do not know how to ride a bike, as well as a public messaging program about sharing. Given the embodied nature of mobility, a public training program aimed at training the bodies of residents as urban cyclists, might be helpful to build empathy for cyclists among drivers, and reduce the intimidating factor of urban cycling.

²¹ Such as, for example, how the convenience of fast food was transformed by new concerns over physical health and well-being.

7.4.3 Cars Are the Modern Safety Blanket

- Cars have shifted from a ubiquitous role in transportation, to one of employment assurance. The increasing demands of work upon individuals to be flexible, available, and self-reliant, position the car as a means to continued participation in labour.
 - How might we alleviate people's dependency on cars as a source of economic stability?
 - How might we make the economic waste (both real and opportunity cost) created in car ownership, visible?

7.4.4 Cars Let Us Live Apart, and Together, at the Same Time

- Cars facilitate the virtual co-location of social networks and relationships of care, whereby distance can be purposefully deployed to reduce or increase co-dependence. Cars are also a means by which those relationships can take on certain important cultural qualities.
 - How might we reconfigure our attitude to social relationships to reduce the ways in which we seek distance from each other?
 - How might we symbolize rites of passage (e.g., towards independence) in new ways?
 - How might we encourage residents to become more comfortable with taking-up forms of co-dependence with each other?

7.4.5 We Can Decide What Cars Are, for Better or Worse

- The current climate of ideological conflict around electric cars serves as a valuable case for considering that the meaning of cars is not fixed. For many, electric cars are not really seen as cars at all, but as a new kind of mobility technology that problematizes what cars are (and how they work). This opens creative possibilities for beginning to reconstitute the meaning of cars in an intentional way.
 - How might we craft and perform a new narrative around electric cars which does not position them as a direct replacement for ICE cars, but as technology which brings about a new way of thinking about our mobility practices? What kinds of mobility practices surrounding electrification should be encouraged for the benefit of climate change (or of energy consumption, or traffic, or public safety, etc.)?
 - How might we practice a new narrative for ICE cars which is attentive to the growing knowledge around the impacts of carbon emissions? What kinds of mobility practices should be encouraged or discouraged, and how might we do it?

7.5 What Next?

I hope that the conclusions and questions I have begun to raise here can start a different kind of conversation around cars, one which sees the effort to curb their use with a greater understanding of their current necessitation. I have used a technique above from design thinking theory called the “how might we” question (Rosala 2021), and I encourage others to do the same to think about the possibilities of engaging with these other aspects of car ownership and imagining alternative futures of mobility going forward, which are not limited to mobility solutions per se, but begin to address the

factors of social and cultural organization which currently position the car as the technology of convenience that many cannot choose to live without (or cannot see any alternative choice available).

The Covid-19 global pandemic has also shaken up everything in this dissertation. In the year following the completion of my fieldwork, everyday work shifted to being remote where it was seen as feasible. Meanwhile the delivery of goods by individual car owners working on contract with various online companies proliferated, not only as a response to flexible and destandardized working relationships, but also as the demand for delivery has increased by consumers no longer wishing to leave their homes. Traffic also receded, making driving even more appealing than taking public transit. This is compounded by the fact that public transit became associated with the vague risk of disease contraction. The effect of these new conditions on car ownership and use is unknown at best, but certainly it calls for a renewed exploration into these practices in a few years, and in other places. Furthermore, the connections between car ownership and the city infrastructure, work, the family, the body, and to ideologies, can also be more explored as they may continue to change as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The future presents additional reasons to continue study, even outside the pandemic. As the City of Ottawa enacts its new proposal for city planning, its plan for 15-minute communities, densifying efforts, and other changes beg for a future investigation. Will these curb car use and ownership or will they succumb to the same fate as Gréber's plan for self-contained neighbourhood zones? Further, will they change how people think about cars and car ownership, will it mean something different to them at that point, or will behaviour change happen regardless? Similarly, as the global shift

towards electric cars accelerates, and particularly in Canada where it will soon be prohibited to sell anything but zero-emissions vehicles, there should be a renewed exploration into how the ownership and use of these kinds of cars might change compared to the currently dominant ICE cars (or at least, to explore if anyone other than a few of my participants have started to use the technology to consciously enact their own shift in behaviour). On the same grounds as the city planning efforts: will these changes encourage more car use or less; will the infrastructure of electric vehicle charging convey the same sense of limitless mobility that regimes of oil do now? Fundamentally, we all need to remain attentive to the ways that behaviours and meanings of car use might change if we hope to be intentional and purposeful about the role they have in our communities.

Appendix A: List of Participants

Unless otherwise stated, all data for the following was collected at the date of first interview of the participant.

Table 2. Participants by age and sex (self-identified)²²

<i>Age Group (years old)</i>	Female	Male	Sum of Age Group	Age Group as a Percentage of Total Participants
<31	7	5	12	37.50%
32 - 41	5	6	11	34.38%
42 - 51	1	2	3	9.38%
52 - 61	3	1	4	12.50%
60 +	0	2	2	6.25%
Total Participants	16	16	32	100.00%

Table 3. Participants by neighbourhood of residence

<i>Neighbourhoods of Ottawa</i>	Participants	Neighbourhood as a Percentage of Total Participants
Downtown Ottawa (including Byward Market, Glebe, Chinatown, and Little Italy)	11	34.38%
East of Downtown (including Vanier, New Edinburgh, Rockcliffe Park, and Gloucester)	2	6.25%
Outside the “greenbelt” (including Kanata, Orleans, Barrhaven, and Manotick)	4	15.63%
Quebec including Hull, Gatineau, & Aylmer	1	3.13%
South of Downtown (including Alta Vista, Heron Gate, Elmvale, South Keys, Greenboro, and Blossom Park)	6	18.75%
West of Downtown (including Westboro, Carlington, Carleton-heights, Centerpointe, and Bayshore)	7	21.88%
Total Participants	32	100.00%

²² “intersex” excluded from table (results nil).

Table 4. Participants by visible minority status (self-identified)²³

<i>Visible Minority Status</i>	Participants	Visible Minority Status as a Percentage of Total Participants
No, I am not a visible minority	25	78.13%
Prefer not to disclose	1	3.13%
Yes, I am a visible minority	6	18.75%
Total Participants	32	100.00%

Table 5. Participants by body style of their personal vehicle

<i>Body Style of Owned Vehicle</i>	Participants	Body Style of Owned Vehicle as a Percentage of Total Participants
Compact Coupe	6	21.43%
Compact Sedan	4	14.29%
Full Sedan	4	14.29%
Hatchback	10	35.71%
SUV	3	10.71%
Wagon	1	3.57%
Total Participants	28	100.00%

Table 6. Participants by vehicle mode of combustion

<i>Mode of Combustion of Owned Vehicle</i>	Participants	Mode of Combustion of Owned Vehicle as a Percentage of Total Participants
Diesel	2	7.14%
Fully-Electric	4	14.29%
Gasoline	19	67.86%
Hybrid, Plug in hybrid	3	10.71%
Total Participants	28	100.00%

²³ Phrased to participants as: *Would you like to identify yourself as a visible minority?*

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