The Problem of the Road: The Road and the Street in the Twentieth Century American Road Novel

Joel David Roberts

PHD 2019
ABSTRACT
This thesis offers a historiography of the twentieth century American road novel, arguing that it consistently presents the road as a problem of governmental order. Road narrative scholarship to date has read the twentieth century American road novel as an extension of the frontier narrative. In contrast to this, I analyse novels by Dashiell Hammett, Raymond Chandler, Chester Himes, Richard Wright, Ann Petry, Ralph Ellison, Thomas Pynchon, Samuel Delany, Gerald Vizenor, and Leslie Marmon Silko to argue that they both participate in and resist the orderly discourse of the road through three key phases: city planning, urban crisis, and the Oil Crisis. Relatedly, I suggest that these authors also identify that the order of the road is imposed upon black communities in America. In these texts, the road narrative’s assertion of order is made upon the black life of the street – of gathering together and of the riot.

I trace the historical destruction of street life by the development of the road in these texts, arguing that the Great Migration formed the life of the streets upon which the order of the automobile and its road was asserted, as the discourse of the road developed in the early twentieth century as a component of city planning. This, I suggest, can be illuminated via a reading of Hammett, Chandler, Himes, Wright, Petry, and Ellison. I then argue that the rebellions of the 1960s occasioned the emergence of a discourse of the road as productive of ‘urban crisis’, as well as representing a return of street life, as charted by Pynchon. Finally, I argue that Delany, Vizenor, and Silko suggest that the life of the street could return again with the breakdown of the order of the road during the 1973-1974 Oil Crisis.

I also argue that the destruction of the street operated at a metaphysical level. Drawing on the work of Denise Ferreira da Silva, I suggest that the order of the road is that of the self-determining subjectivity of the driver – the subject that possesses things and can act upon and navigate the world in a predictable, knowable way. By contrast, the street is a space of what da Silva terms affectability; it is a space where people are acted upon and affect one another, producing a life that is collective, unowned. Accordingly, I also trace the ways that these novels preserve the affectable life of the street via their deployment of sonic metaphors and practices to describe this space. Here, my project contributes to work in Black Studies, such as Alexander Weheliye’s Habeas Viscus: Racialising
Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human (2014), which seeks to theorise resistance in ways not dependent on a self-possessive, agentic subject.

**Keywords:** road novels, road narratives, Black Studies, American Studies, Fred Moten, Denise Ferreira da Silva
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to everyone who has helped me to learn to read, conventionally and otherwise, over the past thirty-one years. If there are any good bits in here, they are yours.
AUTHOR’S DECLARATION

I declare that the research contained in this thesis, unless otherwise formally indicated within the text, is the original work of the author. The thesis has not been previously submitted to this or any other university for a degree, and does not incorporate any material already submitted for a degree, except, to the extent indicated below, material already submitted as part of required coursework for

MA Literature and Philosophy

which was awarded by

University of Sussex, 2014.

Joel Roberts
30th May 2019

Parts of pages 189 and 190 are adapted from two paragraphs in the MA dissertation ‘A Tale of Four Cities in The Crying of Lot 49’, submitted 2014.
**Introduction: The Problem of the Road**

‘Historically, it is true both for war and peace that transportation has been formative and controlling in our national life’ – United States Secretary of Commerce William C. Redfield, addressing the 1918 Conference of Regional Chairmen of the Highways Transport Committee

**The Argument**

This thesis offers a historiography of the twentieth century American road novel, arguing that it consistently presents the road as a problem of governmental order. This problem is apparent in the road novel’s relationship to three key discursive stages of the road: city planning, urban crisis, and the Oil Crisis. In the early twentieth century in America, there is an absence of order on streets newly populated with cars. During this phase, the protagonists of hard-boiled detective novels by authors such as Raymond Chandler and Dashiell Hammett assert the new order of the road as a space centred on the automobility of the suburban city plan. With the hegemony of the automobile secured, the post-war development of 65,000km of road via the Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1956 sees the road become a vast expanse. The socioeconomic problems wrought by this expansion coalesce into a discourse of the road’s production of ‘urban crisis’, which Thomas Pynchon’s *The Crying of Lot 49* (1966) proposes can be remedied via economic redistribution. Finally, with the Oil Crisis of 1973-74 threatening, for a moment, the ordering of American life via the automobile, the novels of Gerald Vizenor, Leslie Marmon Silko, and Samuel R. Delany attempt to reimagine mobility within the possibility of this decline.

This historiography also demonstrates that the development of an automobilecentric order in America required the transformation of the *street* into the *road*, and that such a transformation is a racialised one. The governmental order of the road is consistently imposed upon areas of America’s cities with predominantly black streets, which are perceived as a disordering threat. In turn, the novels under my consideration register and grapple with this racialised dynamic. In the early twentieth century, this disorder was manifest in the social life of the street in predominantly black communities formed via the Great
Migration, such as the thriving jazz scene of Central Avenue in Los Angeles, in Harlem in New York, and in the South Side of Chicago. The black life of the street that this automobile culture disrupted is registered in the work of a number of early twentieth century writers, including Chester Himes, Richard Wright, and Ann Petry. Himes’s African-American protagonists are subject to the brutal law enforcement of the road in Los Angeles, which imposes itself on their dreams of the street. This is evident in *If He Hollers Let Him Go* (1945), which concludes with the Bob Jones’s arrest just off Central Avenue, the end of the social life of the street. Wright’s *Native Son* (1940) exposes the violence that underpins the possessive subjectivity of the driver in Chicago, whilst Petry’s *The Street* (1946) makes clear the extent to which the developing automobilecentric suburbs of early twentieth century America depended upon and exploited predominantly black urban areas such as Harlem. In addition to registering the enforcement of the life of the road upon the street, these novels also keep alive the disrupted and dispersed social life of the street. This is apparent in *Hollers* via its formal commitment to improvisation – that is, to the possibility of the unknown, to the chance encounter of the street. In *Native Son*, it is apparent in persistent images of the street as the only space that belongs to its protagonist Bigger Thomas, whilst in *The Street* it is apparent in the network of gossip that exists in the street and that sustains its impoverished population of black workers.

*Hollers, Native Son,* and *The Street* each tell the story of the destruction of the black life of the street by the road. Following these texts, Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible Man* (1952) narrates the conclusion of this life of the street, with its protagonist driven underground by the infection of the deadly life of the road into the streets of Harlem. In retreating underground, the Invisible Man seeks to preserve something of the life of the street that has been destroyed by the road. Following this, the post-war development of the interstate highway again broke up, defunded, and disrupted majority black neighbourhoods, which erupted into revolt in the 1960s in response. Pynchon’s *Lot 49* acutely registers this destruction, specifically as it played out in the Los Angeles district of Watts, as well as desiring economic redistribution as a means of addressing the disordering rebellion in Watts in 1965. In spite of this pull toward redistribution as a means of restitution, *Lot 49* also carries a trace of the resurgence of the street represented by these revolts, as is apparent via the multiplicity of voices at work in it – the
return of the street life of *Invisible Man*. Finally, the resurgence of the street reaches its climax in Vizenor, Silko, and Delany, who explore possibilities for a movement rooted in the social life of the street on roads depopulated by the Oil Crisis of 1973-74, with Delany’s conflation of the space of the Oil Crisis and the revolt of Watts in *Dhalgren* (1975) suggesting this resurgence of the street.

In seeking to understand the discursive order of the road, this thesis traces the deployment of the metaphor of circulation as a way of understanding the government of it as a space. The protagonists of many of the road novels under my consideration desire to bring ordered circulation to the road. Relatedly, the road is often spoken about in circular terms from the 1920s onwards, as circulation and its absence becomes something of a theme across the three discursive phases of the road: city planning, urban crisis, and the Oil Crisis. I conceptualise this order of circulation via Denise Ferreira da Silva’s notion of self-determination; those who are able to act upon the world and thus to determine themselves and their lives, and affectability; those are simply *acted upon or affected* by the forces of the world and who are thus unable to act upon it and to determine themselves.¹ The self-determining subject, the subject who understands the forces at work in the world, produces the order of circulation – a total, encapsulating order in which the world circularly returns to it. The subject who does not understand, or cannot master, the forces at work on the road is instead merely *affected* by them. This, I suggest, is the life of the street; a space where people try to live out their mutual affectability, rather than making a claim to possessive, totalising self-determination, which circularly returns the world to itself, as with the road and its driver.

This thesis reads the aforementioned road novels for the way in which they demonstrate the imposition of automobile culture upon America in the twentieth century, and for the way in which they suggest that this regime of circulation was imposed on the black life of the street. In making these arguments, this thesis contributes to the field of road narrative scholarship. Specifically, it challenges the dominance of the frontier as an interpretive motif in this field, suggesting that the problems of circulation, possession, mastery, and race raised by certain road

novels demand another way of reading them. Indeed, it is by starting from the problems of the road identified by Hammett, Chandler, Himes, Wright, Petry, Ellison, Pynchon, Vizenor, Silko, and Delany that this thesis extrapolates a reading of the twentieth century American road. Such a reading is one that, as the road narrative scholar Ann Brigham puts it, ‘interrogate[s] the term, and terms, of the road’ as presented by these authors. This reading seeks to complicate what Brigham describes as ‘the understanding of the road story as, by definition, a form of liberation or subversion’, as it is often understood in existing scholarship via the motif of the frontier, by suggesting that the road is a space in which the drama of mastery, self-determination, racialised violence, and dispossession plays out. In turn, instead of considering narratives of cross-country travel, as many road scholars do, this thesis focuses on the road’s role in the development of city space.

Finally, this thesis also draws upon and expands recent work by Black Studies scholars. In particular, in seeking to understand the black life of the street in these texts, this thesis contributes to work in Black Studies that conceptualises blackness in relation to the space of the street. This conceptualisation is apparent in Lindon Barrett’s *Blackness and Value: Seeing Double* (1999), which understands ‘the street’ as a name for the black American ghetto that signifies a site of knowledge later coded and institutionalised by the academy. The relationship between blackness and the street is also apparent in Dhanveer Singh Brar’s ‘Blackness, radicalism, sound: Black Consciousness and Black Popular Music in the U.S.A (1955-1971)’, which explores how the (black) life of sound persists within automobile culture, as well as Sarah Cervenak’s *Wandering: Philosophical Performances of Racial and Sexual Freedom* (2014), which seeks to understand black movement in and of the street. Here, my contribution is the argument that the black life of the street must be understood in conjunction with the historical development of the automobile-road (simply, the road in the age of mass automobility from the 1910s onwards). If, as these authors variously claim,

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3 Ibid.
there is a relationship between the street and black life, it is important to note the extent to which the development of the road in the twentieth century amounted to an attack on this black life of the street, as well as the ways this life persisted in spite of this.

More broadly, in attempting to excavate the traces of a besieged social life in these texts, this thesis contributes to a rethinking of resistance and agency that is being undertaken in Black Studies. This reconsideration of the form that political resistance takes is exemplified by Alexander Weheliye’s 2014 *Habeas Viscus: Racialising Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human*. Here, Weheliye argues that ‘as explanatory tools, these concepts [of resistance and agency] have a tendency to blind us, whether through strenuous denials or exalted celebrations of their existence, to the manifold occurrences of freedom in zones of indistinction’.\(^5\) Weheliye continues that ‘[a]s modes of analysing and imagining the practices of the oppressed in the face of extreme violence (...) resistance and agency assume full, self-present, and coherent subjects working against something or someone’.\(^6\) This assumption that a ‘full, self-present, and coherent subject’ is necessary for political action forecloses the possibility of understanding ‘occurrences of freedom in zones of indistinction’ – that is, of moments of freedom not dependent upon a self-present, self-possessive subject.

Rather than thinking of resistance in terms of the formation of an agentic subject that might act in a particular kind of way, instead I understand it as a form of life that is historically and metaphysically enacted in ways that are indeterminate and improvisatory. Historically this is apparent in the life of the street that automobile culture disrupts, such as Central Avenue in Himes’s Los Angeles, the streets of Chicago in *Native Son*, those of Harlem in *The Street* and *Invisible Man*, and Watts in Pynchon’s *Lot 49* and Samuel R. Delany’s *Dhalgren*. In addition to the historical traces of this form of life that I find in these novels, I also read them for the ways that they play out the being-together of the street at a formal level. In so doing, this thesis hopes to contribute to what Weheliye describes as ‘a more layered and improvisatory understanding of extreme

\(^6\) Ibid.
subjection’.\textsuperscript{7} That is, this thesis seeks to contribute to conceptualisations of resistance that understand it as a form of being-together, something that occurs in ‘zones of indistinction’, rather than as the determinate undertaking of a particular political actor or subject.

**The Road and the Street**

In the trailer for Walter Salles’ 2012 adaptation of Jack Kerouac’s *On the Road* (1957), the road is represented as a vast, open expanse that offers the opportunity for self-discovery. One of the first shots of the trailer is of a seemingly endless road, which cuts through a dry, sunlit landscape. The trailer then moves through images of the protagonists Dean Moriarty and Sal Paradise on the road: hitch-hiking, speeding through the American countryside, and of sexual activity and narcotic excess. Taken together, these images suggest that the “openness” of the road is that it allows for indulgence and reinvention. The road leads away from the restrictions of the familiar and the everyday and toward the unknown, as Sal’s declaration that he is ‘trying to take off’ in the voiceover of the trailer suggests.\textsuperscript{8} This depiction of the American road as ‘open’ and seemingly endless is dominant in cultural representations of it. Indeed, it would only take a brief glance at American popular culture to realise that the frontier – that is, a vast, uninhabited space at the edge of a metropolis available for self-making and self-determination – is central to the national imaginary. From nineteenth century dime novel Westerns, to the films of John Wayne, to the twentieth century road narratives of *On the Road* and *Thelma and Louise* (1991), to the frontier’s incorporation into popular political discourse from Franklin Roosevelt onwards, with his declaration that ‘[t]here is still today a frontier that remains unconquered – an America unreclaimed. This is the great, the nation-wide frontier of insecurity, of human want and fear. This is the frontier – the America – we have set ourselves to reclaim’, to Nissan’s (1997) branding of its Navara truck as the Nissan Frontier in North America, the frontier is a ubiquitous metaphor in American life.\textsuperscript{9}

\textsuperscript{7} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{8} ‘On the Road: Official Trailer’, *YouTube*, November 2012 <www.youtube.com/watch?v=su75_mcryO4> [accessed April 22, 2019].
However, the frontier is not the only type of road. Whilst novels about the ‘open’ road, about the road as frontier, and readings that utilise this interpretive motif have dominated road narrative scholarship, there are a number of twentieth century American novels that contain a different kind of road. In particular, the texts of Chandler, Hammett, Himes, Wright, Petry, Ellison, Pynchon, Vizenor, Silko, and Delany are more concerned with the development of the road as a city infrastructure than they are with the road as frontier expansion. Their texts highlight interrelated problems: of the claustrophobia of infrastructural circulation, of the desire for control, mastery, and possession of this surrounding, of an accompanying sense of racial tension, and of the possibility of being and moving otherwise than the circulatory regime of the road. As I will demonstrate, reading these authors as road novelists is important because their texts are thus far absent from road narrative scholarship. Where this scholarship has mainly focused on cross-country road narratives, it has neglected that texts dealing with urban and suburban space are also important to the genre. As I argue, these texts highlight that the development of the road and its subjectivity of the driver was a new form of order in twentieth century America. They also demonstrate the destruction of the life of the street that this development enacted, whilst simultaneously maintaining a trace of this life. Thus, these novels offer an important corrective to the frontiercentrism of road narrative scholarship to date.

Raymond Chandler, Chester Himes, and Thomas Pynchon all represent the road as a labyrinthine, circulatory, fluid space. For example, in Chandler’s *The Big Sleep* (1939), set in Los Angeles, the road is an interwoven network of labyrinthine turns. This is evident when the protagonist Philip Marlowe describes the following scene when pursuing a suspect: ‘[t]he coupe went west on the boulevard, which forced me to make a left turn and a lot of enemies (...) I caught sight of him two or three times and then made him turning north into Laurel Canyon Drive. Halfway up the grade he turned left and took a curving ribbon of wet concrete’.¹⁰ Similarly in Chester Himes’s *If He Hollers Let Him Go* (1945), which is also set in Los Angeles, when the protagonist Bob Jones is out for a drive with his partner Alice, he describes a scene in which ‘she turned west, went out past the broadcasting studios, past Vine, turned left by the Garden of Allah

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into the winding Sunset Strip (...) At Sepulveda Boulevard she turned south to Santa Monica Boulevard, then west again toward the beach'. 11 These consistent, multidirectional turns in *The Big Sleep* and *Hollers* indicate a complex, circulatory, interconnected network of roads, a fluid space of movement that generates a sense of entrapment and enclosure, rather than of boundary-eras ing expanse.

In Pynchon’s *Lot 49*, the comparison of the network of roads in its fictional Californian city of San Narciso to a circuit suggests a similarly labyrinthine topology. When the protagonist Oedipa looks out over San Narciso near the beginning of the novel, she thinks of ‘the time she'd opened a transistor radio to replace a battery and seen her first printed circuit. The ordered swirl of houses and streets, from this high angle, sprang at her now with the same unexpected, astonishing clarity’. 12 When Oedipa is later ‘reminded of her look downhill this noontime’, the novel draws the comparison again, remarking ‘there again, some promise of hierophany: printed circuit, gently curving streets’. 13 When she checks into a hotel, the novel further links driving the streets of San Narciso to a complex, interwoven structure, this time of the hotel itself, describing a moment in which Oedipa had ‘driven straight through, and all at once the fatigue of it had caught up with her. The clerk took her to a room with a reproduction of a Remedios Varo in it, through corridors gently curving as the streets of San Narciso’. 14 Finally, *Lot 49* also represents the road network in circular terms via its description of the freeways as ‘vein[s]’, and as ‘arterial’, such as when Oedipa imagines the road she is on as a ‘hypodermic needle, inserted somewhere ahead into the vein of a freeway, a vein nourishing the mainliner L.A.’. 15 As if to avoid any doubt, at this point, Pynchon’s novel makes it clear that the road is *not* the space of frontier expanse, describing this as the ‘illusion of speed, freedom, wind in your hair, unreeling landscape’. 16 What the road is instead, the novel suggests, is a seemingly inescapable system of circulatory movement.

For Chandler, Himes, and Pynchon, then, the road is a complex, multidirectional, circulatory, interwoven network. This is apparent in the

13 Ibid., p. 20.
14 Ibid., p. 69.
15 Ibid., pp. 9, 16.
16 Ibid., p. 16.
accumulation of turns when *The Big Sleep* and *Hollers* describe driving, which serves to recreate something of the experience itself, with their regularity, separated each time by a comma, representing the turns they describe. Pynchon’s metaphors of the circuit and the hotel, as well as of the circulation of blood, similarly position the road as something multifarious and interlinked.

For Chandler and Pynchon, as well as for Chandler’s contemporary hard-boiled author, Dashiell Hammett, what the circulatory road is also about is *control*. In *The Big Sleep*, Marlowe is seeking to understand the forces that have caused a car to crash mysteriously off the end of a pier, and thus to restore order – predictable, self-regulated movement – to the roads of Los Angeles. Similarly, in Hammett’s contemporaneously published *The Dain Curse* (1929) and *Red Harvest* (1929), the detective protagonist The Continental Op is likewise seeking to restore order to the road via the solving of the crime of an automobile crash and the quelling of a gang warfare that plays out on the road, respectively. In *Lot 49*, Oedipa too wants to bring about order, by redistributing the wealth that has been produced by the expansion of the post-war road to address the racialised impoverishment it has brought about and the threat of revolt that subsequently lingers. There is thus a desire for control in these novels, a desire to understand, to know and to be able to master, the forces at work on the road and to therefore be able to govern it in a way that maintains it as a space of uniform, predictable movement.

The experience of the labyrinthine, circulatory road is not presented altogether positively in these novels, particularly *Hollers* and *Lot 49*. Jones’s Los Angeles is, as Blake Allmendinger puts it, a ‘web that entangles the hero and limits his freedom’. At the end of the novel, he drives and drives, going ‘ahead to Central, turn[ing] south to Slauson, doing a slow twenty-five, observing all the traffic rules, stopping at the boulevard stops, putting out my hand when I turned. At Slauson I turned toward Soto, stopped at Soto for the red light’, but he still ends up caught by the police, entangled in the web of the road. In *Lot 49*, Oedipa’s road travel is shrouded in apprehension. She travels in a *rented* car, eventually feels the need to abandon the road and to ‘drift’ instead, wandering

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across San Francisco, before being pulled back to the road, upon which she drink-drives ‘with her lights out, to see what would happen’. In both *Hollers* and *Lot 49* there is thus a sense of entrapment, claustrophobia, and inescapability to the road. Jones tries to escape on the road but is eventually caught, as turn after turn only leads him back to the police. Oedipa attempts to escape the road but eventually concludes that it is inescapable, as she attempts suicide on it. Having gone off the road, what Oedipa encounters, as we will see, is only more lives disrupted by the road. The road cannot be escaped, this scene suggests, so instead Oedipa will simply allow it to take her.

How might we understand this sense of entrapment on the road? Here, Richard Wright’s *Native Son* (1940), Ann Petry’s *The Street* (1946), and Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible Man* (1952) can shed some light. Each of these novels is similarly beset by the interwoven topology of the road that is found in the Los Angeles of *The Big Sleep* and *Hollers*, and the California of *Lot 49*. The Chicago of *Native Son* is one where the automobile and its road dominates public space. For example, the centrality of the car to mobility is clear in the fact that the protagonist, Bigger Thomas, finds employment as a chauffeur for the wealthy Dalton family. In *The Street*, when the protagonist Lutie Johnson is taken for a drive by Boots Smith around New York, she describes the following scene: ‘[t]he road kept turning back on itself, going in and out and round until she was dizzy. They went through the abrupt curves so fast that she had to hold on to the door with both hands’. Similarly, the New York of *Invisible Man* is a place of ‘neon signs, plate glass and roaring traffic’, where cars ‘circl[e] swiftly through long stretches of snow-covered landscape lighted here and there by street lamps and the nervously stabbing beams of passing cars’.

The road as a circulatory space, then, is present in the Chicago of *Native Son* and the New York of *The Street* and *Invisible Man*, too. These latter three novels also offer an insight into the sense of claustrophobic inescapability found on the road in *The Big Sleep*, *Hollers* and *Lot 49*. In *Native Son*, *The Street*, and *Invisible Man*, the development of the road has impinged upon the social life of the street. This is apparent in the narrative of *Native Son*, where Bigger moves

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from his life on the street, spending time with his friend Jack, to his work as a chauffeur to the Daltons, which concludes with his incarceration for the murders of Mary Dalton and Bessie Mears. In *The Street*, the automobile is a symbol of violence, ripping through Harlem’s streets and ‘break[ing] off’ the conversations of its black population ‘in the midst of a sentence’.

In *Invisible Man*, the automobile is similarly violent, with the police working to ensure that the political gatherings of black people in the streets of Harlem do not disrupt the ‘traffic moving with the lights’. Thus, these novels raise the possibility that the claustrophobia of the road and its automobile is that it has suffocated the black life of the street, imposing instead the individualised, privatised life of the road.

The problems of the road encountered in *Hollers, Lot 49, Native Son, The Street*, and *Invisible Man* are curiously and variously absent from the late twentieth century road novels of Vizenor, Silko, and Delany. Neither Vizenor’s *Darkness in St. Louis Bearheart* (1978), nor Silko’s *Ceremony* (1977), nor Delany’s *Dhalgren* allude to the road as a circulatory space. Further, in both *Bearheart* and *Dhalgren*, the road’s circulation of goods and people is malfunctioning, with ‘the national supplies of crude oil’ having ‘dribbled to nothing’ in *Bearheart*, and with the toll booth at the edge of the city having its ‘front pane shattered, stool overturned, no drawer in the register’ in *Dhalgren*. Here, in the decade of the 1973-74 Oil Crisis, the road as a space of ordered circulation is not operating as it should. Moreover, in contrast to the circulatory movement of vehicles that is depicted in *The Big Sleep, Hollers, and Lot 49, Bearheart, Ceremony*, and *Dhalgren* all focus on the wandering movements of their protagonists, rather than the repetitive movements of the highways. *Bearheart* follows Proude and Rosina Cedarfair as they venture across America in search of the fourth world; *Ceremony* follows Tayo as he wanders in search of healing from the traumas of the Second World War and of colonisation; and *Dhalgren* follows the Kid and the Scorpions as they navigate the streets of a semi-fictional American city deprived of gasoline.

The road, the claustrophobia of infrastructural circulation, an

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accompanying sense of the racialised destruction of the street, and the possibility of a movement beyond the road’s strictures, a movement of the street. How might one explain this curious and seemingly disparate constellation of phenomena in these texts? This thesis proposes a historiography of the twentieth century American road novel wherein narratives of order on the road are asserted against the threat posed by the black life of the street. The hard-boiled detective novels of the early twentieth century restore order to a road that is ultimately threatened by the disordering life of the street, as *The Big Sleep, Hollers, Native Son, The Street,* and *Invisible Man* all make clear. *Lot 49* registers the destruction of black neighbourhoods wrought by the expansion of the road, whilst also being haunted by the revolts that this produced – the return of the street – such as Watts in 1965, which its gesture toward a narrative resolution of economic redistribution seeks to quell. Finally, *Dhalgren’s* conflation of the 1973-74 Oil Crisis and of Watts in the city of Bellona suggests that the Oil Crisis opened a space for the reassertion of the life of the street, the return of the life of Watts. Similarly, the drawing together of black and Native identities in the figure of the Kid, a Native American who leads a group of African-Americans, suggests a relationship between the (black) life of the street and Native practices of movement, which is apparent in the endorsement of an improvisatory form of movement in *Bearheart* and *Ceremony,* which is rooted in Native practice but which bears an affinity to the black life of the street found in *Dhalgren.*

This thesis also argues that the split between those protagonists who can assert control, mastery, and possession of the road, such as Hammett’s *The Continental Op,* and those who cannot, such as Bigger Thomas (as chauffeur rather than driver) is a racialised one. One history of the difference between whiteness and blackness, I will argue, is between those who can and cannot possess, control, and master their surroundings, who can and cannot govern the circulations of the road. Denied the self-determining subjectivity of the driver, what the black characters in these novels have instead is the affectable life of the street, a life made in common and against the privatised, possessive subjectivity of the driver. Further, these texts preserve this form of life, even as they narrate its erosion with the development of the road and the imposition of the subjectivity of the driver.
Challenging the Frontier in American Road Narrative Scholarship

Given the importance of the road to twentieth century American life, as well as its centrality to a number of twentieth century American novels, there is not quite as much road narrative scholarship as one might expect. In her introduction to the 2013 collection *American Road Literature*, Ann Brigham notes that in spite of the (at least) century-long history of the American road narrative, ‘the first book-length study to define the genre did not appear until 1996’.24 Brigham speculates that this is because of scepticism about whether it could really ‘constitute a serious academic pursuit’.25 She contends that ‘popularity’ might have ‘something to do with the scarcity of scholarly books’ on road novels, suggesting that many were sceptical about whether ‘road narratives develop meaningful observations about social experiences, identities, or ideas’, and whether there is ‘complexity in plots about rebellious romps or aimless wanderings’.26 The publication of Ronald Primeau’s *Romance of the Road: The Literature of the American Highway* (1996) signalled an end to such scepticism, and a body of road narrative scholarship has since begun to cluster together.

The overriding emphasis in road narrative scholarship is on an examination of the productive function of mobility at the ‘frontier’. For example, in Primeau’s genre analysis of the narrative conventions that frame the mobile self-discovery of the road, in which he reads texts by authors such as Ralph Waldo Emerson, Walt Whitman, William Least Heat Moon, Robert M. Pirsig, Joan Didion, Mona Simpson, and Jack Kerouac, road narratives celebrate the ‘residual values of the pioneers on the frontier (...) The automobile (...) add[s] its own unique merging of the frontier spirit and the worship of the machine as a complex icon’.27 Primeau’s inaugural study is a genre analysis of the narrative conventions that frame the mobile self-discovery of the road. For Primeau, the journey of the road narrative is facilitated by ‘protest, the search for a national identity, self-discovery, and experimentation or parody’.28 He contends that along

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25 Ibid.
26 Ibid.
28 Ibid., p. 15.
the way, ‘narrators converse with the people they meet, as well as others along for the ride’, and that consequently, ‘readers are drawn into participation in the questioning and reshaping of values and attitudes’. For Primeau, then, the mobility of the road facilitates discoveries that engender questioning, dialogue, and the (re)formation of values. Primeau elaborates how the road narrative works structurally, though this elaboration could also be said to apply to a pre- or non-automobile frontier narrative, and as such – and like much road scholarship – it does not get to grips with the specificity of the road narrative per se.

Kris Lackey’s interrogation of the undeclared racial coordinates of the road narrative, *RoadFrames: the American Highway Narrative* (1999), similarly argues that ‘[t]he automobile reinvented the frontier’. Lackey’s text explores how the road narrative facilitates the pursuit of an idealist, Transcendentalist self, whose ostensibly ahistorical co-ordinates are shown to be the preserve of whiteness – that is, of people who are positioned as able to determine, rather than to be determined by, their context(s). As Lackey puts it, ‘[m]any white highway writers (...) assume that distance untethers identity: the farther you go from home and work, the more freedom you have to adopt a new self (...) Black road writers (...) have found no such solace in American space’. For Lackey, deconstruction of the road narrative occurs through 1950s African-American road narratives such as those of John A. Williams and Carl Rowan, which reveal the inaccessibility of this transcendental self to America’s black population, who are granted no such point of ‘neutrality’ in the landscape through which they move. Whilst Lackey raises the important point that the American road narrative is circumscribed by the racialised dynamics of the nation, he nonetheless continues Primeau’s focus on the frontier as interpretive lens.

Alexandra Ganser’s exploration of ‘women (...) writers [who] have told cross-country journeys as pleasurable and empowering, as a chance for personal discovery and exploration, and as cultural critique’ seeks to challenge the idea that the frontier is a ‘monolithic masculine formula’ of expansion and possession through an analysis of the interaction of women writers with the motif of the

29 Ibid., p. 88.
31 Ibid., p. 21.
32 Ibid., pp. 111, 125.
quest.\textsuperscript{33} Ganser’s reading of post-1970 road authors such as Doris Betts, Sharlene Baker, Barbara Kingsolver, Hilma Wolitzer, Anne Roiphe, Diane Glancy, Cynthia Kadchota, Joan Didion, Aritha van Herk, Michelle Carter, and Katherine Dunn argues that their texts ‘rewrite the mythical ‘open road’ as a textual space in which powerful regimes of gender, cultural and social difference are destabilised’.\textsuperscript{34} It is in this way that ‘the American highway’s mythical, iconic status, signifying the heroic quest for freedom (…) is questioned and challenged, rejected and revised in manifold ways’.\textsuperscript{35} For Ganser, the road narrative is about movement through a number of ‘gendered spatialities’, and it is this that the writers under her consideration illuminate and challenge.\textsuperscript{36} As Brigham explains, Ganser’s work problematises the commonly held belief that road narratives are about flight from domesticity, arguing that women’s road narratives have ‘different relationships to home: the quest seeks “the ideal home,” the nomad “dismantles the duality of home and away, private and public,” and the picara disdains “the necessity of home altogether”’.\textsuperscript{37} Further, these narratives undermine the road as an unencumbered space for the pursuit of freedom by demonstrating that whilst ‘women may take to the road to escape confining domesticity (…) they also find spatial limitations on the road (…) In short, roads are not always a space of liberation’.\textsuperscript{38} Whilst Ganser thus offers an important critique of the gendered conditions of the road narrative, she nonetheless still takes the (disputed) frontier as the paradigm for understanding them.

Finally, Ann Brigham’s analysis of the relationship between mobility and subjectivity, in which she seeks to problematise the notion of the road narrative as transgression, nonetheless contends that ‘transcontinental automobility exemplifies the frontier ideology espoused by Frederick Jackson Turner’, and whilst she elsewhere remarks that road narratives are ‘[d]efined by mobility rather than by place (even one as unsettled as the frontier)’, her work on incorporation is consistent with the frontier motif of the possessive subject at the edge.\textsuperscript{39}

\textsuperscript{34} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 14.
\textsuperscript{35} \textit{Ibid.}
\textsuperscript{36} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 17.
\textsuperscript{37} Brigham, ‘Critical Meeting Places’, p. 29.
\textsuperscript{38} \textit{Ibid.}
\textsuperscript{39} Ann Brigham, \textit{American Road Narratives: Reimagining Mobility in Literature and Film} (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2015), Kindle edition, Chapter 1.
Reading cross-country road narratives from across the twentieth century, including Thomas W. Wilby and Agnes A. Wilby’s *On the Trail to Sunset* (1912), Sinclair Lewis’s *Free Air* (1919), Jack Kerouac’s *On the Road* (1957), John Howard Griffin’s *Black Like Me* (1961), John Steinbeck’s *Travels with Charley: In Search of America* (1962), John A. Williams’s *This Is My Country Too* (1964), Barbara Kingsolver’s *The Bean Trees* (1985), and Mona Simpson’s *Anywhere But Here* (1986), Brigham argues that road narratives are not simply a moving away from something; they are also an ‘incorporation’ into and of something else.\(^{40}\) She suggests that ‘transgression’ – the assignation ‘of mobility as unfettered and free-floating’ – is bound up with ‘a process of incorporating otherness or consolidating identity through the shoring up of sameness and exclusion of difference’.\(^{41}\) Brigham’s analysis is framed by the ‘politics of scale’, by which she means the “divid[ing] and order[ing] of space” in hierarchical formations – ‘such as the local, regional, national, and global’ – which themselves produce scales and subjectivities therein.\(^{42}\) Brigham examines “how mobility is one of the processes whereby scale “is made, reorganised, and transformed””.\(^{43}\) Mobility, then, produces scales that it also moves across, and this movement has been deployed to both affirm, and at times subvert, hegemonic subjectivities. Such mobility is nonetheless still the mobility of the frontier; it is the incorporation that occurs via the journey to the edge of the metropolis.

These studies thus persist with the notion of the frontier as the defining narrative in American life. This is for good reason. As Ganser observes, ‘the parallels between the 19th-century frontier myth and the ‘American road genre’ are ‘neither negligible nor coincidental’.”\(^{44}\) Nonetheless, the frontier motif is not without its critics, and I wish to extend this critique to the frontiercentrism of road narrative scholarship. Whilst the frontier myth is undoubtedly an important lens through which to read American culture, I contend that it misses something of the specificity of the automobile-road as presented in Hammett, Chandler, Himes, Wright, Petry, Ellison, Pynchon, Vizenor, Silko, and Delany. Further – and relatedly – I argue that the pervasiveness of the frontier in road narrative

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\(^{40}\) Ibid.
\(^{41}\) Ibid.
\(^{42}\) Ibid.
\(^{43}\) Ibid.
\(^{44}\) Ganser, *Roads of Her Own*, p. 84.
scholarship is to the neglect of other important interpretive frameworks.

The first problem with the reliance of road narrative scholarship on the frontier is that, as Brigham herself notes, as well as analysing interstate travel, road narrative scholars also need to ‘focus on “the spatiality of society” (…) in order to interrogate the term, and terms, of the road’.45 Road novels are not only narratives of escape (however contested that escape is); they are also narratives of the entrapment of intracity and intrastate road networks, and more fundamentally of the entrapment of the automobile-road itself. Thus, instead of a focus on interstate automobile travel, the majority of my focus will be on the road as an urban city infrastructure. I suggest that the road novels under my consideration identify the infrastructure of the road as a seemingly inescapable space, one which comes to dominate every aspect of American life, imposing the subjectivity of the driver on other ways of being in and occupying the road.

The focus on the frontier in road narrative scholarship is understandable, given its ubiquity in American culture. When looked at closely, however, it is actually rather difficult to understand exactly what the frontier is, or how it works. As Patricia Nelson Limerick argues in a critical engagement with the frontier as a mode of analysis, as a trope it does a “miserable[e]” job of ‘describing, explaining, and encapsulating the story of the colonisation of North America’.46 For Limerick, this is for a number of reasons, including that ‘using the frontier as an analytic concept puts the historian at risk of adopting the point of view of only one of the contesting groups’; because ‘it is nearly impossible to define either the beginning or the ending of a frontier’; and because ‘[t]he term "frontier" (…) throws a veil over the similarities between the story of American westward expansion and the planetary story of the expansion of European empires’.47

Considering the intangibility of the frontier, then, one is led to wonder how it has endured as a central metaphor in the Euro-American imaginary. The frontier is of course an important motif in both Euro-American literature and its historiography, which can be traced all the way back to the captivity narratives of

47 Ibid., pp. 73, 75.
early settlers such as Mary Rowlandson. My point is not to contest the possibility of this genealogy. Rather, drawing on the representation of the road in Hammett, Chandler, Himes, Wright, Petry, Ellison, Pynchon, Vizenor, Sliko, and Delany, I suggest that the frontier is not the only way to understand the road narrative. More than this, in these novels, I argue that frontier expansion is not the dominant understanding of what the road is.

Indeed, the development of the road network in twentieth century America might in fact be understood as the end of the frontier. This is a point that is made in John Updike’s *Rabbit Redux* (1971). Near its end, as Cynthia Dettelbach explains, the novel depicts the protagonist, Rabbit Angstrom, ‘driving around aimlessly with his wife Janice’. When he happens upon the street where his former mistress used to live, he:

> thinks Ruth’s street will open onto “a brook, and then a dirt road and open pastures; but instead the city street broadens into a highway lined with hamburger diners and drive-in sub shops, and a miniature golf course with big plaster dinosaurs, and food stamp stores and motels and gas stations that are changing their names, Humble to Getty, Atlantic to Arco. He has been here before”.

Thus, in *Rabbit Redux*, there is no longer the open space of the frontier; there is only the road. Indeed, the road has brought an end to the frontier. Therefore, to propose a reading of the road novel that focuses on the road as a space of governmental order rather than of frontier expansion is to follow a line of thought present in twentieth century American road novels.

Studies that have analysed the symbolism of the automobile in American literature are also important for reading the road novel. These studies include Jerry W. Passon’s *The Corvette in Literature and Culture* (2011), which analyses the myriad different deployments of the Corvette as ‘an object of both power and

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50 Ibid., pp. 43-44.
desire’ during the twentieth and twenty-first century. David L. Lewis and Laurence Goldstein’s edited collection, *The Automobile and American Culture* (1980), contains a range of essays on the cultural significance of the automobile, from its early incursion into American life in the first decades of the twentieth century, through to contemporary anxieties regarding its decline and potential obsolescence. John Heitmann’s *The Automobile and American Life* (2018) offers a similar sweep of the changing cultural significance of the automobile over the course of the twentieth century, from its coming to dominate American life via Fordism, through to the restructuring of the automobile industry around non-American producers and consumer markets.

Aside from these cultural studies of the automobile, there are a handful of works that focus primarily on representations of the automobile in literature. These include Cynthia Golomb Dettelbach’s *In the Driver’s Seat: The Automobile in American Literature and Culture* (1976), which analyses the car as a signifier of the end of youth, the pursuit of freedom, and of success in American literature. Roger N. Casey’s *Textual Vehicles: The Automobile in American Literature* (1997) likewise offers an analysis of the symbolic significance of the automobile in American literature. Smoak outlines that Casey reads Sinclair Lewis, F. Scott Fitzgerald, John Steinbeck, and William Faulkner for the way that they: use the automobile to ‘critiqu[e] religious practice’; as ‘an image to encapsulate American decadence’; as ‘a symbol of hope and salvation’; and as an ‘image of the New South’. Smoak’s own work analyses ‘three subversive patterns or paradigms which reflect representations of the automobile in American literature’. These are of the automobile as a ‘site of violence, of sacredness, or of consumption’. These three sites broadly map onto the early, middle, and late decades of the twentieth and early twenty-first century respectively, and Smoak’s contention is that a number of texts subvert the dominant representations of the car during these times, characterising it variously

52 See Dettelbach, *In the Driver’s Seat*.
54 Ibid., p. 5.
55 Ibid.
as dangerous, as a site of failed sacrality, and as questioning the commodity culture of late capitalist consumerism.

Since Smoak’s 2007 thesis, there has also been Deborah Clarke’s *Driving Women: Fiction and Automobile Culture in Twentieth-Century America* (2007). Clarke’s book examines the symbolic significance of the automobile over the course of the twentieth century in relation to the question of gender, arguing that the automobile ‘functions as a contested site in which the very notion of femininity is challenged and ultimately reformulated’. 56 In addition to Clarke’s text, there is also Jason Vrendenburg’s 2013 thesis, ‘Motorcars and Magic Highways: The Automobile and Communication in Twentieth-Century American Literature and Film’. Vrendenburg ‘examines the nexus between transportation and communication in the development of the automobile across the twentieth century’. 57 Vrendenburg reads: hardboiled detective fiction, demonstrating the entanglement of the two-way radio and the work of the detective; post-war road narratives for their critique of the curtailment of the two-way radio; and late twentieth-century road narratives for their representation of the ‘decline and collapse’ of the emancipatory potential that the automobile initially presented, as the car became increasingly integrated with ‘intelligent traffic systems’ that circumscribed its movement. 58

Each of these studies makes valuable observations of the (changing) symbolic significance of the automobile over the course of the twentieth century in American literature. However, they still leave relatively unanswered the question of the particular relationship between the automobile and the road narrative, and certain related aspects of the relationship between automobility, the road, and subjectivity. As I explore in chapters 1 and 2, the development of the road network in America’s cities facilitated suburbanisation and the concomitant impoverishment of these cities’ racialised urban centres. The representation of the driver on these roads is of someone in possession of the

58 Ibid.
world around them, as the car becomes a symbol for the reinforcement of suburban home ownership. I thus argue that the material development of the road and the symbolic significance of the car are inseparable, as each reproduce the possessive subject. Further, neither road narrative scholarship nor scholarship that analyses literary representations of the automobile considers in any depth the development of the road as a city infrastructure, and the impact of the development of this infrastructure on the life of the street. My thesis seeks to correct this via its analysis of these themes.

**A Genealogy of the Twentieth Century American Road Novel**

Hammett, Chandler, Himes, Wright, Petry, Ellison, Pynchon, Vizenor, Silko, and Delany raise a number of questions about the road that suggest the necessity (or possibility) of reading it in a way that does not draw on the motif of the frontier, and which attends instead to ‘the term, and terms, of the road’. Such questions include: why is there a desire for possession and mastery on the road? Why is this so often presented in the terms of “race”? Why do these novels consistently contain a trace of some other kind of movement, the movement of the street? These things are, in Michel Foucault’s terms, a *problem* for thought – the desire for control upon, and the consistent racialised violence of, the road in these texts calls for an analysis of ‘how and why certain things (behaviour, phenomena, processes) [become] a *problem*’. That is, these novels raise the question of how and why being on the road is such a problem in twentieth century America.

What underpins these problems becomes clear at the conclusions of *The Dain Curse*, *Red Harvest*, *Hollers*, *Native Son*, and *Lot 49*, each of which end in spaces of juridical authority. At the conclusion of *The Dain Curse* and *Red Harvest*, the institutions of state authority are punishing those who have brought disorder to the road, with the national guard brought in to police the roads of the fictional city of Personville in *Red Harvest* and to ensure that order is maintained. *Hollers* and *Native Son* conclude with their protagonists as the objects of juridical authority, whilst *Lot 49* concludes with Oedipa in an auction house, fantasising about economic redistribution, the legislative power of the state. Indeed, the

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central question at the end of *Lot 49* is of who possesses the legacy of Pierce Inverarity, the complex circulations of the America he has helped build as a ‘founding father’. These road novels thus find at their end the juridical and legislative power of the state; in *Lot 49* in particular, it is this that is offered as a possible solution to the (circulatory) problems of the road it has documented. Moreover, much like Hammett and Chandler’s detective fictions of the early twentieth century, *Lot 49* focuses on the desire (and ultimate inability) of its protagonist to return order to the road – to understand, possess, and master the forces at work and thus ensure that circulation continues unhindered.

Relatedly, one of the defining features of *Dhalgren*, *Bearheart*, and *Ceremony* is the absence of the institutions of the law and the related dispossession of their protagonists – the Kid in *Dhalgren* who has a past that he cannot remember, Proude Cedarfair in *Bearheart* who is dispossessed of his land at the beginning of the novel, and Tayo in *Ceremony*, who is dispossessed of any stable sense of himself or his past. None of these characters are returned to a position of being in possession of these things, with the Kid’s past remaining a mystery, Proude remaining exiled from his land, and Tayo only finding healing in collective practices of reconciliation. The racialised Others of whiteness – Bob Jones, Bigger Thomas, the Kid, Proude Cedarfair, and Tayo – are thus not granted access to the position of, and to the institutions that facilitate, the self-possessive subject. This is to say, then, that the condition of possibility of the problem of the road in these novels appears to be that of (self-)possession and the assertion of order that it facilitates. The Continental Op and Marlowe understand the forces at work on the road and restore order to it; Oedipa wants to be able to act, to correct the economic injustices of the road; whilst Jones, Bigger, the Kid, Proude, and Tayo are defined by their dispossession.

Novels such as the hard-boiled fiction of Hammett and Chandler, as well as Pynchon’s *Lot 49*, thus feature protagonists who seek to restore the order of possession to the road. They describe this order via the metaphor circulation – the seemingly endless but interrelated twists and turns of the roads of *The Big Sleep* and *Hollers*, and the road as ‘vein’ in *Lot 49*. Moreover, in these novels, this order of circulation – of predictable, responsibilised movement – is imposed

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60 Pynchon, *Lot 49*, p. 16.
on the life of the street. The street is a site of disorder in these novels, of unpredictable movement. As Lutie observes when riding the bus home to Harlem, ‘[i]t was like a circle. No matter at what point she started, she always ended up at the same place’. Indeed, this circular order of the road is viciously imposed upon the predominantly black streets of Harlem when Lutie’s son is snatched from the street by two postal theft investigators, with the automobile speeds away ‘not pausing for the red light at the corner’. The protagonists of these road novels, then, desire the order of circulation – the ‘pulsing stelliferous Meaning’ of the ‘printed circuit, gently curving streets’, as Lot 49 puts it. The road’s order of circulation is imposed upon the street, with a racialised split between who is the subject of this order and who is its object. Moreover, to achieve circulation is to return the world to oneself, as The Op, Marlowe, and Oedipa seek to do by discerning the forces at work on the road.

To argue that metaphor plays an important role in the consideration of black life is to draw on a precedent established by Tim Armstrong in The Logic of Slavery: Debt, Technology, and Pain in American Literature (2012). Armstrong sets out to consider ‘the figural implications of slavery’s presence in Western tradition, the way it subtly infiltrates the fabric of other modes of thoughts and shapes what is thinkable’. He undertakes this consideration via an analysis of metaphor, arguing for its necessity on the grounds that it is via metaphor that the power relations and subject formation(s) of slavery and its afterlives occur. Indeed, Armstrong notes that analysis of the figural has been central to ‘the African-American tradition’, with writers and critics such as Phillis Wheatley, Toni Morrison, and W.E.B. DuBois all finding ‘ways to understand the history of race in America (...) which register its conceptual underpinnings, language, and psychic consequences’. Armstrong goes on to investigate metaphors of debt, technology, and pain in literature, as well as in ‘legal writings, musicology,

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61 Petry, The Street, p. 134.
62 Ibid.
63 Pynchon, Lot 49, p. 56.
65 Ibid., p. 2.
66 Ibid.
histories of technology, art, sculpture, and writing on sculpture’ for the ways in which they are formed by and perpetuate the history of transatlantic slavery.67

Armstrong understands the legacies of slavery as persisting in contemporary deployments of the metaphors he reads because ‘ideas have a psychological and social legacy; because cultural memory has a politics; [and] because we think in a language marked by history and agency’.68 In the road novels under my consideration, the circulatory order of the road contains something of the ‘psychological and social legacy’ of slavery in the dynamic of possession and dispossession that plays out in the split between the road and the street. The possessive subjectivity of the driver is inextricable from the legacy of slavery, as the Invisible Man’s drive with Mr Norton into the old slave quarters of Trueblood makes clear, as I will explore in more detail in chapter 4.

Whilst the road network is developed after the end of slavery as a juridical system for the ownership of people, the road novels under my consideration suggest that something of it persists on the road; that slavery has what Saidiya Hartman describes as an ‘afterlife’ that inheres on the road.69 Hartman’s formulation of the ‘afterlife of slavery’ suggests that something of the slave trade persists beyond its abolition.70 ‘If the ghost of slavery still haunts our present’, Hartman remarks, ‘it is because we are still looking for an exit from the prison’, and indeed, I argue that this haunting presence resonates most clearly in the road novels I read in their split between those free to be the subject of the road and those not.71 The novels that I read suggest that the persistence of slavery occurs on the road via the racialised split between those who can and cannot be its subject. As Gus remarks to Bigger after a white driver speeds past them, ‘[t]hey got everything’: the road is a white space, what Pynchon describes as a ‘white culture’.72 Following Armstrong’s work, this thesis analyses this afterlife via the metaphor of circulation in road novels and the ‘psychological and social legacy’

67 Ibid., pp. 5-7.
68 Ibid., p. 4.
70 Ibid.
71 Ibid., chapter 7.
of slavery that is contained in who is and is not the subject of circulation.

In addition to the precedent set by Armstrong, deconstructing the metaphor of circulation is also important for understanding the afterlives of slavery because of metaphor’s tendency to erase that which exists *between* two things. As Adam B. Seligman and Robert P. Weller observe, ‘[m]etaphor’s work (...) is to overcome the gap between one thing and another’. Metaphor bridges a gap – the road becomes circulation. In attempting to open up the metaphor of circulation, I am thus simultaneously attempting to rediscover that which it has covered over. As I explore across the thesis, the role of the protagonist of the road novel is to restore circulatory order to the road. Uncovering the metaphor of circulation as a way of describing the road reveals the street, that which was erased by the development of the road.

To attend to the problem of the order of circulation in these novels, this thesis proposes a genealogy of the (self-)possessive, self-determining subjectivity of the driver, who brings about the order of circulation. My analysis is genealogical insofar as it takes this racialised problem of self-possession on the road and seeks to understand its historical emergence. In tracking the historical emergence of this problem of the road, I trace what Foucault describes as ‘the accidents, the minute deviations’ that give rise to its self-determining, self-possessive practices, highlighting in particular the ways in which it is the consequence of a process that moves ‘from domination to domination’. To write a genealogy is to write a history of a problem, one which illuminates this problem by narrativising its historical traces in such a way as to *reveal* this problem as historical, contingent, and bound up in a struggle for domination, rather than as the consequence of the seamless unfolding of “progress”. I undertake this task

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74 The importance of the metaphor of circulation to literature and to understandings of city space has been analysed previously, specifically by Marjorie Hope Nicolson and Ross Exo Adams. Nicolson explores the importance of the metaphor of circulation to Renaissance literature in *The Breaking of the Circle* (1950), whilst in *Circulation & Urbanisation* (2019), Ross Exo Adams explores the extent to which circulation became a marker of order from Early Modernity onward. I expand on Nicolson and Adams’s work by suggesting that road novels deploy the metaphor of circulation as a marker of governmental order.
with the road novel, seeking to demonstrate that its primary subject, the driver, emerges as part of a process that moves ‘from domination to domination’. As I outline in my analyses of the road novel’s relationship to other contemporaneously published documents about automobility, it participates in a broader discourse of the road and of automobility, and the narratives of the road novels I read in many ways contain the same conditions for order as, for example, city planning documents in the early twentieth century. However, I argue that what they also contain is a trace of the form of life that this discursive order has sought to contain, the life of the street.

Foucauldian genealogy, of course, proceeds by way of archaeological analysis of a discourse – that is, the various different ways that objects of knowledge are spoken about and produced. Discourse, as Foucault puts it, is ‘a certain “way of speaking”’, which is delimited by a set of rules that produce a ‘group of objects that can be talked about (...), a field of possible enunciations (...), a group of concepts (...), [and] a set of choices’. As Cotten Seiler has outlined, from the early twentieth century onward, there is a proliferation of discourse that takes the road and its automobile as its object, including ‘bodies of knowledge, laws, techniques, institutions, environments, nodes of capital, sensibilities, and modes of perception’. This discourse ‘has regulated, legislated, aided, and compelled the motion of bodies mechanical and human; it has established and delimited a horizon of agency, social relations, political formations, self-knowledge, and desire’. I analyse this discourse of the road and its automobile across the course of this thesis, demonstrating its proliferation from the early twentieth century onward and placing the novels under my consideration in the wider discursive context of city planning documents, driving manuals, government reports, and presidential statements.

Archaeological analysis of discourse works by reading a text for its positivity, for what is said and the rules that establish its intelligibility. Archaeological analysis of discourse maps the ‘surfaces of their emergence’, as Foucault puts it, before then elucidating the practices of domination that are

77 Foucault, *Archaeology of Knowledge*, p. 213.
79 Ibid.
established in the subject positions produced by these conditions. I have suggested that an analysis of the surfaces of these texts reveals their condition of possibility to be that of the self-possessive, self-determining subject. My analysis is thus far Foucauldian. However, in order to understand the racialised implications of this self-possessive subject, I extend this Foucauldian analysis by way of Denise Ferreira da Silva. In *Toward A Global Idea of Race* (2007), da Silva traces the formation of the self-determining subject through the European philosophical canon. In doing so, she positions her project as one that takes Foucault’s work as its starting point, noting that Foucault’s ‘analyses of power show how knowledge institutes the subject, that is, how the transparent I, the subject of freedom, is but an effect of the rules of production of truth, of the mode of power’.

This is to say, then, that da Silva acknowledges that Foucault’s work makes possible a historical analysis of the self-determining subject and its relationship to practices of power.

What da Silva suggests, however – joining a number of other scholars – is that Foucault’s work does not adequately articulate the extent to which the production of this subject is imbricated in the emergence of ‘race’ as a defining category of modern human being. This, da Silva argues, is because of an insufficient attention to the role of *spatiality* in Foucault’s analysis of the modern episteme, remarking that Foucault ‘spots’ a ‘haunting spatiality’ at ‘the core of modern thought’, which he ‘never fully explore[s]’. Consequently, ‘Foucault’s excavations do not reach the place where European particularity is but an effect of the strategies of this productive ruler’.

This is to say, then, that whilst Foucault’s work does much to historicise the emergence of the interior, self-determining subject, it lacks an adequate consideration of the role of spatiality in modern thought. This means that for da Silva, he misses that the interior, self-determining subject of Europe is defined by a problem summarised in Newtonian physics: that the modern empirical subject is acted upon by forces that operate

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81 Da Silva, *Toward*, p. 23.
83 Da Silva, *Toward*, p. 25.
84 Ibid.
according to abstract laws, without necessarily being sovereign over these forces.\textsuperscript{85} For da Silva, the concern in European thought is that these forces may also govern man himself.\textsuperscript{86} That is, the interior, self-determining subject of Europe is produced by a concern that it is simply a \textit{spatial, affectable} being.

Kyla Schuller suggests that what da Silva’s work identifies is that with the development of empiricism as the primary basis of knowledge in Europe from the sixteenth century onward, ‘[t]he subject is constructed in Western philosophy as a highly vulnerable entity, for it is wholly dependent on sensory impressions from the environment for its own self-development and acquisition of knowledge’.\textsuperscript{87} That is, the empirical subject depends on sensory impressions, its capacity to be affected by things, for its knowledge of the world, and yet this dependency renders it vulnerable to and seemingly not sovereign over the very same forces that act upon it. Da Silva argues that this problem is solved in European thought by writing the mind of man as intimate with these forces, and that this mind is written \textit{in contrast} to the spatial, exterior, \textit{affectable} racialised Others of Europe.\textsuperscript{88}

Had Foucault paid closer attention to spatiality, da Silva suggests, he would have spotted that the superiority granted to interiority and self-determination in modern European thought is done so in contrast to and retreat from being a spatial being, which is acted upon by forces in the world and thus unable to determine itself. It is this latter position, da Silva suggests, which comes to define racialisation in modern European thought.\textsuperscript{89}

Reading the road novel via da Silva helps elucidate its historical \textit{a priori}, that is, the subject that possesses and can master the forces that act upon it. This is the subject of the institutions of the law with which these novels conclude. As I have suggested and will explore further, these novels racialise this problem of self-determination – Bigger Thomas is unable to access it, to be the driver; Oedipa is troubled by the affectability of the African-American population of California and wants to rectify the effects of this; and the Kid, Proude, and Tayo are dispossessed, unsovereign, affectable wanderers. Therefore, analysis of the

\textsuperscript{85} Ibid., p.47.
\textsuperscript{86} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{88} Da Silva, \textit{Toward}, p. 117
\textsuperscript{89} Ibid.
The problem of self-determination in these road novels must move beyond outlining the deployment and functioning of the interiority of the self-determining subject in them, to acknowledge that such a subject is produced in contrast to and in retreat from the racialised position of spatiality-affectability.

Da Silva’s categories of self-determination and affectability name the dynamic of the central problematic in these texts. As she puts it:

> the science of the mind produces bodies and social configurations as signifiers (...) of two kinds of minds, namely, (a) the transparent I, (...) the kind of mind that is able to know, emulate, and control powers of universal reason, and (b) the affectable “I,” the one that emerged in other global regions, the kind of mind subjected to both the exterior determination of the “laws of nature” and the superior force of European minds.\(^90\)

The self-determining subject ‘is able to know, emulate, and control powers of universal reason’. This is to say that the basis of the self-determining subject is *epistemological possession* – the possession of knowledge of the world around it and an ability to make that world conform to its knowledge of it and its will for it. As Alva Gotby puts it in a reading of da Silva’s work, ‘[t]he transparent I is a form of subjectivity that is constituted as a nexus of self-determination and knowledge’.\(^91\) The self-determining subject acts according to knowledge of the forces that act upon it, which are first and foremost properties of its mind, its thought.\(^92\) Relatedly, the self-determining subject always knows its will, its desire toward, an object, since this is its purpose: to know what it is going to do, to avoid the perils of a ‘dangerously unproductive will’, acting without knowledge of exactly what one is doing or the consequences of that action.\(^93\)

Da Silva’s project identifies the primacy of the self-determining subject in modern Western thought. As Gotby explains, ‘[t]his is not to suggest that all philosophical or scientific statements have been the same or have articulated

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\(^90\) Ibid., p. 117.
\(^92\) See Da Silva, *Toward*, p. 79.
\(^93\) Ibid., p. 266.
subjectivity in the same way'.\(^9^4\) Instead, ‘da Silva identifies a multitude of differing but often complementary statements of subjectivity, the effect of which is to defer the outer-determination or affectability of the subject, in order to institute subjectivity as self-determining’.\(^9^5\) Consequently, ‘[t]he transparent subject thus does not appear in a pure state in any one text, but becomes a discursive construction in post-Enlightenment understandings of subjectivity’.\(^9^6\) Over the course of this thesis, I seek to highlight the ‘differing but often complementary’ instantiations of the self-determining subject in the road novel.

Gotby further outlines that for da Silva, ‘[s]patiality has become a menacing outside, which threatens to break down white, self-determined subjectivity’.\(^9^7\) This is because ‘spatiality and affectability can never be fully eliminated from any modern writing of the human subject. To eliminate affectability would be to eliminate death, that ultimate signifier of the subject’s existence as an affectable being’.\(^9^8\) Unable to overcome death, the self-determining subject instead defers affectability by ‘placing it as something outside white subjectivity, something primarily affecting outer-determined others’.\(^9^9\) The consequence of this is that ‘the racialised subject [is constituted] as a potential threat to the white subject’.\(^1^0^0\) The affectable subject signifies death, signifies uncertainty, a lack of knowledge of the world around it or of exactly what it wants and what it is going to do.

The split between self-determination and affectability underpins the road novels I read. For example, Hammett and Chandler’s protagonists are able to enact the law of and on the road. By contrast, ‘the affectable “I,”’ is ‘subjected to both the exterior determination of the “laws of nature” and the superior force of European minds’: the African-American population of Los Angeles in \textit{Lot 49} are determined by the post-war expansion of the road; the Kid, Proude, and Tayo are determined by the structures of racial and colonial violence, with the road chief amongst them. In choosing Black Studies to engage with the problem of the road as identified by these authors, then, I am exploring the problems presented by

\(^9^5\) Ibid.
\(^9^6\) Ibid.
\(^9^7\) Ibid., p. 17.
\(^9^8\) Ibid., p. 18.
\(^9^9\) Ibid.
\(^1^0^0\) Ibid.
these texts. Further, it is reading the metaphor of circulation that offers a way into this problem of self-determination, since it is the order of circulation – the governing of the motions brought about by the actions of forces upon objects – that the self-determining figure of the driver seeks to bring about.

I also turn to Black Studies to address the problem(s) identified by Hammett, Chandler, Himes, Wright, Petry, Ellison, Pynchon, Vizenor, Silko, and Delany because, whilst other theoretical frameworks might provide important and lucid descriptions of the representations produced by the problem(s) these authors identify, they do not adequately attend to the conditions that make such problems possible. For example, one other field that has been influential in discussing the relationship between literature and the question of race in the academy since the mid-twentieth century is Postcolonial Studies. Whilst of course a heterogeneous field, one of its most influential theorists – especially for thinking about the relationship between literature and race – is Edward Said, particularly his 1993 text *Culture and Imperialism*. Building on *Orientalism* (1978), Said positions *Culture and Imperialism* as an attempt to ‘describe a more general pattern of relationships between the modern metropolitan West and its overseas territories’. Said locates the specificity of this relationship in representation, asserting that ‘[w]e live of course in a world not only of commodities but also of representation, and representations – their production, circulation, history, and interpretation – are the very element of culture’. Accordingly, *Culture and Imperialism* analyses imperial cultural artefacts, particularly the novel, for the role their representation of racialised Others plays in the formation of ‘attitudes, references, and experiences’ toward those racialised Others in the metropole.

Thus, a postcolonial theoretical framework facilitates an important description of representations of racialised Others and their political import for the “West”. However, such analysis does not, in the end, speak to the conditions of the problem itself. Jones in *Hollers*, Bigger Thomas in *Native Son*, the narrator of *Invisible Man*, the Kid in *Dhalgren*, Proude in *Bearheart*, and Tayo in *Ceremony* are all represented as being unable to access the subjectivity of the driver in the same way as the white protagonists of road novels, such as The Continental Op.

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102 Ibid., p. 56
103 Ibid., pp. xii, xvii-xviii.
in Hammett’s work, Marlowe in *The Big Sleep*, and Oedipa in *Lot 49*. Beyond the observation of this representation is the question of the conditions that make it possible. Himes, Wright, Petry, Ellison, Pynchon, Vizenor, Silko, and Delany’s depiction of the road, wherein being on the road is, in the end, a racialised problem of *possession*, demands a methodological framework adequate to the task of explaining this, which can outline the necessary metaphysical conditions of such representations. Thus, whilst my analysis does include an interrogation of the representations of racialised Others in the texts under my consideration, it proceeds via an understanding of their necessary conditions.

**The Affectable Life of the Street**

*Toward A Global Idea of Race* outlines the way in which the self-determining subject is formed in retreat from spatial affectability. What it does not do, however, is expand on the extent to which the position of affectability might contain its own way of being and knowing. This is again suggested by the road novels in this study; the life of the street in these texts is defined by being together, by people acting upon and affecting one another. This is apparent on Central Avenue in *Hollers*, where Jones describes himself as ‘lik[ing] it with my folks’, which is to say that he enjoys being with others in that space.104 This affectability is also apparent in *Native Son*, where Bigger Thomas’s life on the street with his friends is one where they act upon and form their identities in relation to one another, as well as in *The Street*, where a network of gossip that understands the vulnerability, the affectability of the workers who live on the street, sustains them through their precarious employment, and in *Invisible Man*, where the street is a space of uncertainty and doubt – of the capacity to be affected, to be acted upon and changed. Likewise, in *Dhalgren*, the Kid becomes part of the Scorpions, a group of people who support one another to survive in Bellona, whilst in *Bearheart*, Proude travels across America with the support of a group of people called the Pilgrims.105 This is to say that the narratives of these road novels are infused with moments of affectability, where characters act upon and depend upon one another – where they only make sense of themselves via their

105 Ibid.
relationship to and with others: where they ‘like it with [their] folks’, as Himes puts it.

In these novels, this affectable form of life occurs in the *street*. The street is the space of affectability, of black social life, whilst the road is the space of self-determination. In analysing the connection between the street and black life, I contribute to work in Black Studies that has sought to understand this relationship. In *Blackness and Value: Seeing Double* (1999), for example, Lindon Barrett argues that ‘the street’ as a name for the black American ghetto signifies a site of knowledge later coded and institutionalised by the academy. In particular, Barrett reads Ann Petry’s 1946 novel *The Street* and Edgar Allan Poe’s ‘The Purloined Letter’ to argue that the street is a space of fluidity, ambiguity, and breached boundaries. Barrett argues that Petry’s text represents the fluidity and ambiguity of the street,

expos[ing], by virtue of both the terms of its narrative and its fortunes in the literary academy, the fact that borders are carefully contrived, carefully managed, and profitable enterprises whether they happen to separate all-American suburbs from African American communities or the literary from the extraliterary.

As Barrett outlines, in Petry’s novel, the (ostensibly) impoverished streets of New York are inseparable from ‘the stately wealth of Connecticut, or any all-American suburb’. That is, the ‘street’ and the suburb are inseparable from one another. Barrett claims that the fluidity of boundaries that Petry’s text is aware of only enters the academy in the 1960s with poststructuralism, which, in its various Derridean, Foucauldian, and Lacanian guises, poses a challenge to the boundedness of literary study, particularly as it had been articulated by New Criticism. As Barrett puts it, poststructuralism ‘put into question with unprecedented far-reaching force institutional imperatives maintaining the

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107 Ibid., p. 7.
108 Ibid., p. 135.
109 Ibid., p. 95.
110 Ibid.
putatively autonomous ontology of literary texts (...) [with poststructuralism], the literary text is placed in "the street".\textsuperscript{111}

For Barrett, then, the street is a space of black life as a certain kind of fluidity and transgression of boundaries. A second critic who also identifies a relationship between the road, the automobile, and black life is Dhanveer Singh Brar. In ‘Blackness, radicalism, sound: Black Consciousness and Black Popular Music in the U.S.A (1955-1971)’, Brar outlines the relationship between the black radicalism of the 1960s, the car manufacturing plants of Detroit, and the output of the Motown Recording Company. Brar analyses the extent to which sound was disruptive of the automobile production line. Drawing on the work of Fred Moten, Brar outlines that black life as an articulation of vulnerability persists even under the duress of Fordist production. Brar analyses the sonic qualities of the League of Revolutionary Black Workers’ film about wildcat strikes at Detroit car manufacturing plants in the late 1960s, as well as in the output of the Motown Recording Company, to argue that it is these that articulate the positionality of the black worker.\textsuperscript{112} The black worker is the sound that disrupts the monotonous rhythm of the production line, the predictable, self-determining movement of the driver in the automobile. Thus, for Brar, black life persists even in the disciplined, standardised world of Fordist automobile production.

Sarah Jane Cervenak’s \textit{Wandering: Philosophical Performances of Racial and Sexual Freedom} (2014) interrogates the theme of wandering in Enlightenment modernity. Cervenak analyses a range of philosophical and literary texts to argue that wanderings both material and epistemological underpin the formation of the Enlightenment subject, as well as a potential site of resistance to this self-possessive self-determination. As Cervenak observes, Early Modern Europe’s voyagers wandered – they did not know exactly where they were – though they always returned to knowledge of the time and space in which they were located; wandering always resolved into location.\textsuperscript{113} Cervenak draws on da Silva to theorise this movement, describing this wandering as a form

\textsuperscript{111} Ibid., pp. 135-136, 139.
of affectability (uncertainty regarding one’s location) that was consistently resolved into self-determination (certainty regarding one’s location and thus an ability to act and determine oneself). In turn, this need to return to knowledge of one’s location pathologised those who continued to wander. She remarks: ‘the rational, self-same, self-possessed, and self-mobilising subject (…) inspires an antiwandering ethos targeted particularly at the nonnormative’. Consequently, ‘black movement is, more often than not, read as disruptive physicality’. In response to this pathologisation of (black) wandering, Cervenak calls for ‘a new way to think about wandering as a philosophical performance, one not contingent on its availability to discourse or to analytics of bodily enunicativity, exterior-oriented narratives of kinesis, and individual agency.’

There is scholarly precedent, then, for an exploration of the relationship between the street, sound, black life, affectability, and the city. In addition to Barrett’s focus on the relationship between black life and the street, in his essay ‘Cartography at Ground Level: Spectrality and Streets in Jeremy Wood’s My Ghost and Meridians’, Simon Ferdinand notes that there has also been a modernist fascination with the street. Ferdinand observes that much of this fascination has been with ‘mapp[ing] out’ the street, with ensuring that ‘street practices [are] disentangled and set to rational order’. He finds evidence of this in ‘Baron von Haussmann’s pseudo-medical discourse on the necessity of clearing ‘clogged arteries’ in the medieval city’, as well as in ‘Le Corbusier’s famous moratorium on the street in The Radiant City’. As he explains,

[t]o the modernising mind (…) old streets become an “incoherent and contingent by-product of uncoordinated and desynchronised building history”, obstructing the “platonic sublimity, mathematical orderliness” and

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114 Ibid.
115 Ibid.
116 Ibid.
117 Ibid.
119 Ibid.
seamless functional division that urban modernity – so it was hoped – would usher in.¹²⁰

Whilst Ferdinand here identifies European examples of this desire to order the street, I suggest, along with Barrett and Cervenak, that this impulse existed in the Euro-American context, too. Indeed, where Ferdinand observes that ‘[d]espite the modernist aggressivity towards it, there is something irreducible and intransigent about street sociality’, I suggest that, in the road novels I read, this ‘street sociality’ is racialised as black, and that it bears a complex, ultimately aporetic relationship to the road and its self-determining driver. The road needs the street and its unpredictability, I will argue, but it needs it in order to destroy it, to govern it into nonexistence.

Before going any further, it is worth offering a brief definition of what this thesis means by the street. In the first instance, the street can simply be defined as a public thoroughfare. In cities where the automobile begins to encroach, the street can be understood as the sidewalk, those ‘unassuming, standardised pieces of gray concrete that are placed between roadways and building’, as Anastasia Loukaitou-Sideris and Renia Ehrenfeucht put it.¹²¹ As the automobile encroaches, the street also becomes the name for the attempt to widen the sidewalk, to reclaim the thoroughfare as a space without the automobile and its possessive subjectivity of the driver. Further, drawing on the novels it reads, this thesis suggests that the street is a space of ‘irreducible and intransigent (...) sociality’, of uncertainty and vulnerability (affectability) in the face of the possessive certainty of the driver. That is, this thesis investigates what the Black Studies scholar Ashon Crawley describes as ‘the capacity of the street to carry and be sociality’.¹²² The street, Crawley continues, is ‘a space of social gathering where all types of unavoidable, improvisational choreosonic modes of life [are] relayed and interplayed’.¹²³

¹²⁰ Ibid.
¹²³ Ibid., p. 111.
This thesis argues that the street, as a historical and metaphysical site of racialised ‘irreducible and intransigent (...) sociality’ can be understood via the affectable, sensory metaphoricities of sound. Indeed, as I will explore from chapter 2 onward, *Hollers, Invisible Man*, and *Lot 49*’s accounts of twentieth century street life present it as a space of sonic performance. To understand the street as a space of affectability articulated via metaphors of the sonic is thus to follow the understanding of the street in the texts under my consideration. The street, as Ellison puts it, ‘gives one a slightly different sense of time, you’re never quite on the beat’; for Pynchon, it is a space of ‘remarkable empathy, or whatever it is that jazz musicians feel on certain nights’; for Himes, it is a space of improvisatory performance.\(^{124}\) That is, the street is a space of *sound*, of the life of the sonic.

What I also wish to add to Black Studies readings of the relationship between the street and blackness is that this street life is broken up by the development of the automobile-road. I suggest that this story is told by the road novels that I read herein. As Hammett, Chandler, Himes, Wright, Petry, Ellison, Pynchon, Vizenor, Silko, and Delany demonstrate, one function of the road was to produce self-determining, responsibilised, privatised subjects. In turn, this broke up the life of the street. Following Cervenak, I theorise this life as something that is not readily available ‘to discourse or to analytics of bodily enunicativity, exterior-oriented narratives of kinesis, and individual agency’, but instead as something that is articulated via the more tentative mode of affectability, the sonic life and practices of the street.

Fred Moten’s study of black performance, and particularly of noise, sound, musicality, and improvisation, offers a way of thinking about the form of life that exists within the affectability of the street. Other scholars have explored the relationship between black life and sound, including Stephen Best in *The Fugitive’s Properties: Law and the Poetics of Possession* (2004), where he analyses ‘the question of voice as property’.\(^{125}\) Best contends that the problem of the ‘voice as property’ addresses a similar set of concerns as the problem of the fugitive slave as property. Best links nineteenth century concerns about the recorded voice escaping the possession of the speaker to concomitant legal

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concerns about the slave escaping the possession of the master. Best states: "[o]n the evidence of the fugitive slave clause, ownership of slave property assumes an indebtedness of persons in which past volition and present liability (...) occupy the same juridical “moment”." Fugitive slave law establishes that that which escapes can still be the property of the person it has escaped from, and this premise underpins later laws regarding the voice as the property of the speaker.

A second analysis of the relationship between blackness and sound is Tim Armstrong’s, which centres on the theme of pain. Specifically, Armstrong is interested in ‘the traces of the somatic in the sonic’, which allow for the (paradoxical) transmission of an unspeakable pain. As he puts it,

the transition from inner experience to an outward understanding of pain is most readily imagined as sonic: the cry or groan (...) the very ephemerality of sound – the fact that it is radiated and ‘lost’ or at best faintly apprehended or echoed – makes it a figure for that which is not easily retained across time.

Thus, ‘the persistence of the suffering of slavery find[s] such focus in notions of a sonic residue’ because sound has a particular set of qualities that communicate the unspeakable pain of slavery. Sound is the instinctive, visceral response to pain, whilst sound is also not easily captured, making it a ready and appropriate sense through which to explore the history of slavery and its afterlife.

Best draws a provocative parallel between the capture of the voice and the capture of the slave, whilst Armstrong carefully argues for the relationship between sound and slavery. The reasons for primarily utilising Moten’s work on blackness and the sonic as a way of talking about the affectable life of the street are twofold. The first is because of the relationship Moten has drawn between his work and da Silva’s concept of affectability. In an interview with his collaborator

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126 Ibid.
127 Ibid., p. 81.
128 Ibid., pp. 63-64.
129 Ibid., pp. 63-64.
130 Ibid., pp. 63-64.
131 Ibid., pp. 63-64.
132 Ibid., pp. 63-64.
Stefano Harney, Moten clearly links their work to an articulation of affectability, describing their project as an attempt to elucidate a form of life that can be understood via ‘what Denise Ferreira da Silva would call affectable bodies, beings that open through and onto each other, that flourish through a proximity that is always changing, always unsettling’. Moten’s work is outlined in his 2003 *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition*, as well as in *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study* (2013), *Black and Blur* (2017), *The Universal Machine* (2018), and *Stolen Life* (2018). Fundamentally, Moten contends that black life, as it has historically been lived and as it is articulated in black music – and more abstractly, blackness – is a set of practices that are rooted in affectability. As he puts it in the introduction to *Black and Blur*, his work, ‘in bent echo of Hartman and Spillers, of Denise Ferreira da Silva and Laura Harris, is invested in the analysis, preservation, and diffusion of the violent “affectability” of “the aesthetic sociality of blackness”’. Moten describes the racialisation of affectability as an act that grants blackness the radical potential of the ‘indetermination of self’. In being marked as affectable, the lived experience of black life is of a self that is not granted what he describes as the ‘brutal fiction’ of self-determination, that must continue to rely (and to acknowledge that reliance) on the Other(s) through whom it constitutes itself – the Other(s) who affect it and who it in turn affects. As he puts it, blackness ‘plays itself out (...) outside and against the grain of the very idea of self-determination’. Moten finds a particularly potent example of this affectable black life in twentieth century avant-garde jazz music. As the thrust of *In the Break*’s investigation of the improvisatory practices of Duke Ellington, Cecil Taylor, Amiri Baraka and others suggests – placing their work into ensemble with each other, with prior critical work on them, and with canonical texts of continental philosophy – these performances make sense in relation to others. Indeed, *In the Break* itself is a kind of improvisation that performs with the array of voices it draws on, as is apparent via the regular lengthy quotations of others’ work in the

136 Ibid., p. 224.
text. As Brar summarises it, Moten is ‘working on a theory of blackness as a condition for radical possibility’ – the possibility of a form of life that is not rooted in the singular epistemological possessiveness of the self-determining subject, a theory that he enacts in the form of his writing in *In the Break*.\(^{138}\)

The necessity of being with others that underpins *In the Break* makes it an example of some key concepts in Moten’s work, which I will elaborate on over the course of the thesis: improvisation, ensemble, and fugitivity. These concepts offer a way of describing affectability and its lack of epistemological possession, since they imply uncertainty, reliance on others, and escape, respectively. To improvise is to not know exactly what one is doing; to be in ensemble is to only know what one is doing in relation to others, to not be in total possession of what is happening; whilst to escape is to suggest an incompleteness to what is, to move without the certainty of knowing exactly where one is going. Thus, improvisation, ensemble, and fugitivity are ways of conceptualising affectability, of speaking about a condition that, as Cervenak puts it, is not readily available ‘to discourse or to analytics of bodily enunicativity, exterior-oriented narratives of kinesis, and individual agency’.

These practices in Moten’s writing are those of affectability. Improvisation acts upon the ensemble – Moten’s work reframes the ensemble of thinkers he engages with for his ensemble of readers. Moten’s work also occurs in ensemble – togetherness – necessarily (and consciously) relying on others in order to form itself. Finally, his improvisation is also an act of fugitivity, since it escapes from the rules of the ensemble in which it exists; Moten’s improvisatory reading of the authors he engages in *In the Break* is fugitive from prior understandings of them. For Moten, such life is the life of sound, of music, which simultaneously is the life of affectability, of being acted upon by those that one is making music with and the necessity of improvisation that this produces. This, as he puts it, is the “affectability” of “the aesthetic sociality of blackness”, the aesthetic practices of avant-garde jazz. As Brar observes, for Moten, ‘[b]lack resistance is the affirmation of social life in constant escape and this constant escape is at work in the sound of black music’.\(^{139}\) In the improvisatory ensemble, no one possesses

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\(^{138}\) Brar, ‘Blackness, radicalism, sound’, p. 25.
\(^{139}\) Ibid., p. 25.
what is happening, since it is an event that is negotiated and open to change, that exists between, rather than within, the people involved.

This is to say that improvisation, ensemble, and fugitivity are not the properties of a self-determining subject. In this sense, as Moten’s collaborator Stefano Harney puts it, affectability is a ‘condition of life’.\textsuperscript{140} One’s self is always formed with and through others. To claim self-determination as (epistemological) possession, a power to make a situation conform to one’s will or one’s apparent knowledge of it, is to enter into a ‘brutal fiction’, to deny the irreducibly affectable condition of life itself. It is to refuse to accept that the subject cannot completely possess that which acts upon it, that what Moten describes as the ‘insistent previousness’ of an experience means that it escapes any final or total understanding of what it is.\textsuperscript{141}

As I will argue across the course of this thesis, the desire for mastery, control, and possession on the road is the desire to reassert the sovereignty of the knowing subject in the face of affectability, of indeterminacy, the black social life of the street. What Moten’s work offers is a way of imagining and articulating this indeterminate, affectable life of the street. This is the second reason for drawing on Moten’s work to explore affectability: because, as I explore in chapters 2 and 3, Moten’s concepts of improvisation, ensemble, and fugitivty may well be descriptors of the street, of the sonic life of the street as it is found in the texts I analyse. Further, Moten’s work also allows for the articulation of the affectable, poetic aspects of road novels at a formal level, in order to suggest that it is this that is suppressed by their narratives of self-determination. This affectability inheres in the narrative of the road novel as a trace. I seek to excavate this trace by reading the novels under my consideration for the way their formal practices demonstrate the affectable being-together of the street. In turn, this affectable life of the street is an articulation of what Weheliye describes as ‘the manifold occurrences of freedom in zones of indistinction’.\textsuperscript{142} That is, it is the articulation of a form of political resistance that is unrecognisable to a ‘full, self-present, and

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coherent subject’ precisely because such a subject – the subject of the road novel – is predicated on its eradication, on knowing exactly what is happening and where it is going.\textsuperscript{143}

The value of Moten’s work is that it allows for a description of affectability, which in turn contributes to work in Black Studies that seeks to describe a form of political resistance that is not predicated on an agentic subject. This itself is rooted in an analysis of a particular historical moment – the gathering of black workers in the streets of North America following the Great Migration in the early twentieth century, particularly during the Great Depression. Rendered affectable by the forces of political economy and driven by these forces into the streets, I suggest that the novels I analyse demonstrate some of the ways that these workers sought to stay with, rather than escape from, their condition of affectability. Indeed, in my reading of Hollers, Native Son, and The Street, I consider the different ways that these novels propose that affectability can both be defended against and embraced. If, as I explore, the writing of America’s black population as symbolically and materially affectable was necessary for the production of the self-determining subjects of the white suburbs, I argue that these novels – in particular The Street – simultaneously insist upon defence against and embrace of affectability. In short, I argue that Petry’s novel suggests that to the extent that affectability is a violation, it is to be resisted, but that it also insists upon staying with affectability, remaining in the street, acknowledging that it is an inescapable ‘condition of life’.

The Road Novel, 1929-1978

As a corrective to the frontiercentrism of American road narrative scholarship, I read road novels for the way in which they contribute to the imposition of the discursive order of the road upon the life of the street. California – and Los Angeles in particular – is pioneering in the development of a road network in America, funding such projects at least six years prior to the first successful legislation for federal funding. It is thus an early adopter of the automobile, which means, as I argue in chapter 1, that what I call ‘driver-detective’ fictions – novels that assert the circulatory order of responsibilised, self-determining subjects upon

\textsuperscript{143} Ibid.
the road – are first set there. In this chapter, I begin with an outline of the
development of the road network in the United States as a whole, tracing its
beginnings in the movement for good roads, which was pioneered by cyclists. I
then chart the gradual morphing of this into a project for the federal development
of roads fit for automobile traffic.

At this point I move to California and the 1920s, as mass automobility
begins to roll off the Fordist production line. Reading Raymond Chandler and
Dashiell Hammett, I suggest that they contribute to the imposition of the
circulatory regime of the automobile on the road, which is the dream of city
planning documents in the 1920s. They do this via their favourable representation
of automobile culture, as well as via their driver-detective protagonists’ solving of
automobile crimes, which assuages contemporary anxieties about the power and
speed of the car by assuring readers that state or state-adjacent actors will
govern the road. In one sense, as I outline in this chapter, the road was a massive
technology for the production of self-determining subjects, as was apparent via
the proliferation of driving manuals and the pathologisation of ‘incompetent’
drivers during this time, and to which I suggest these road novels contributed. In
Chandler and Hammett’s novels, unpredictable movement, driving without
knowing exactly where one is going, is to be eliminated: the driver should be self-
determining, in possession of his desire and thus able to move predictably. In so
doing, they participate in an emergent discourse of the order of the road that is
found in city planning documents and driving manuals in the 1920s and 1930s.

The consequence of this assertion of the order of the automobile, I suggest
in chapter 2, is the destruction of the black life of the street. This is a story that is
told in African-American literature set in various major American cities in the early
decades of the twentieth century: in If He Hollers Let Him Go, which is set in Los
Angeles; in Native Son, which is set in Chicago; and in The Street, which is set
in New York. The narratives of these novels each feature the destructive nature
of the road, as well as how this destruction is of the street and the social life that
is found there. In Hollers, the protagonist Bob Jones discovers that the road has
been imposed to quell the life of the street, of Central Avenue, where he enjoys
spending time and whose vibrant social life was historically broken up by the
entrenchment of automobile culture. This is registered in Hollers via Jones
regularly waking up from dreams of the street into the nightmare of the road, as
well as his arrest on Central Avenue, which concludes the novel.

In addition to analysing how *Hollers* makes clear that the ultimate target of the development of an automobile culture in Los Angeles was the black life of the street, in chapter 2 I also demonstrate that this culture was being imposed across America’s cities. In *Native Son*, the development of the narrative mirrors the spatial development of Chicago in the early twentieth century, with the focus of the novel moving from the urban streets of Chicago’s Black Belt to the suburban world of the Daltons. *Native Son* highlights that the automobile was central to this development, and – via its association of the automobile with the violence enacted upon Mary and Bessie – that this development was a violent one. Here, I also argue that Ann Petry’s *The Street* makes clear that the automobile was disrupting the black communities of New York, with the central event of the narrative – the snatching of the protagonist Lutie’s son by postal theft investigators – occurring in an automobile that speeds through Harlem and curtails the unknown chatter of its streets.

In chapter 3 I explore the idea that one threat of the gathering of black people in the streets of America’s early twentieth century cities was that they were a surplus labour force that might begin to organise in the streets against their exploitation. Here, I highlight one limitation of the politics of *Hollers* and *Native Son*, which, I suggest, is that they understand the articulation of the gathering black labour of the streets of Los Angeles and Chicago to be a demand for recognition as self-possessive, self-determining subjects: to be recognised as drivers. I suggest that both of these novels highlight the tragic impossibility of this demand, with both their protagonists incarcerated at their conclusion. I then look to *The Street* for an alternative articulation of black labour gathered in the street. I argue that in Petry’s novel, black labour articulates itself as a network of uncaptured, unknown gossip and chatter. Rather than a claim to self-determination, the subjectivity of the driver, this network of gossip acknowledges the affectability of black workers and suggests that they work together to protect themselves in this situation precisely by preserving their affectability in the face of its being governed into nonexistence by the self-determining driver. Further, I argue that this network of unknown, semi-coherent chatter threatens to rewrite the road as the street as a space of mutual vulnerability and dispossession, rather than as a space of the possessive subjectivity of the driver. I also suggest that a
trace of the street persists in *Hollers* in its improvisatory relationship to genre, with Himes improvising a new kind of driver-detective novel in ensemble with Hammett and Chandler, and that *Native Son* keeps alive the possibility of street life in the exhortation of Bigger’s lawyer to take to the streets at the novel’s conclusion.

In chapter 4, I read *Invisible Man*, arguing that Ellison’s novel marks the end of the life of the street, with the narrator’s retreat underground indicative of this decline. I also argue that *Invisible Man* tells the story of the rise and fall of the street in microcosm, with the narrator migrating to the north, taking to the streets as a dispossessed black worker, and eventually coming to realise that the streets are no longer habitable because of the ubiquity of the automobile and the self-possessive subjectivity of the driver. I argue that the memory of the street life that is destroyed by the automobile nonetheless endures, and that it returns with the urban riots of the 1960s. I analyse the post-war road narratives that developed with the building of the Interstate Highway System, reading a relatively neglected text in road narrative scholarship, Thomas Pynchon’s *The Crying of Lot 49* (1965). I outline that Pynchon’s text critiques the destruction wrought to develop the interstate system. However, I contend that implicit in *Lot 49*’s critique of this destruction is an ongoing attachment to the order of the road, as Pynchon’s novel retreats from the consequences of a more radical critique of the racialised destruction in which the post-war road participates. Consequently, whilst *Lot 49* acknowledges the destruction that the road wrought on places such as Watts in Los Angeles, it suggests that this damage could be repaired via Oedipa’s fantasy of the redistributive powers of the nation. In so doing, it contributes to a discourse that desires order on the road in the face of urban crisis, which is present in reports such as *Violence in the City – An End or A Beginning?*, published in December 1965 in the wake of the Watts rebellion, as well as the *Report of The National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders*, which was released in 1968 in the wake of a spate of urban rebellions in America. I also argue that the irruption of the street that occurred in the Watts rebellion of 1965 inheres in the ensemble of voices in the text, which mirror Pynchon’s understanding of the rebellion as a kind of jazz ensemble in his essay ‘A Journey Into the Mind of Watts’.

I then move to the 1970s, tracking the shift from the urban crisis discourse of the road to that of the Oil Crisis. I outline the emergence of this discourse in
government and media pronouncements on the United States’ conflict with the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) in the early 1970s, suggesting that it was an attempt to maintain order on the road. I then read *Dhalgren*, *Bearheart* and *Ceremony* as novels that contest this discourse of order via the resurgence of the streets that they contain. In *Dhalgren*, I locate this contestation in the conflation of the rebellion in Watts with the event of the Oil Crisis. *Dhalgren*’s protagonist wanders the streets of the novel’s city of Bellona, re-forming the social life of the street via his being part of a gang called the Scorpions. *Dhalgren* suggests that this reassertion of the street in the space of the Oil Crisis bears a resemblance to Native practices of movement outlined in other contemporary Oil Crisis novels via the figure of the Kid, a Native American who leads a group of African-Americans living in a post-Oil Crisis waste-scape. I theorise such movement by bringing together Moten’s formulation of ‘fugitivity’, which he understands as a contextualised escape, with Vizenor’s concept of ‘transmotion’, understood as possession of the land precisely via a dispossessive movement across it.144 Such movement, I suggest, is similarly predicated on a practice of escape.

This practice of transmotion, I suggest, underpins Vizenor’s *Bearheart* and Silko’s *Ceremony*, both of which engage with the coloniality of the road. Vizenor and Silko articulate the settler colonialism of the road, such as when the protagonist of *Ceremony* looks out at ‘headlights and taillights strung along Highway 66’ and remarks: “They took almost everything, didn’t they?”145 In this sense, *Ceremony* and *Bearheart* evidence the extent to which the road is the frontier that is everywhere, the frontier that has become circulatory. Such spatial domination has its origins, I argue, in the figure of the map. Here I trace how the road as a map, and specifically the Pershing Map, is the point where the logic of the destruction of the street meets the logic of settler colonialism. As I outline, the map of the road is an ocularcentric one, which excludes the aural practices of the

street and of the Native. *Dhalgren, Ceremony, and Bearheart* highlight that the potential breakdown of the order of the road threatened by the Oil Crisis opened, for a moment, the possibility of living otherwise. Importantly, such living otherwise is rooted in a particular type of *reading* that is based on listening; one first must listen to and understand the context that one is in before knowing how to escape from it. Such fugitivity is the basis for imagining alternative modes of movement and social arrangement outside of the strictures of the road’s circulation. I end with the Oil Crisis not only because it represents a crisis of the twentieth century’s dominant circulatory order of the automobile-road, but also because, from the 1980s onwards, this dominant order mutates into something else – something that also incorporates the internet. In the conclusion, I thus elucidate this transition, whilst also gesturing toward possibilities for further work on the intersection of the novel and circulation.

It should be remarked that my exploration of the importance of the street to these novels is not one that seeks to offer a reading of the way that every aspect of these texts speaks to this theme. In this sense, I leave these readings incomplete. I do so in order to remain faithful to the practice of the street, of affectability and its attendant vulnerability and incompleteness. As Cervenak remarks in the introduction to *Wandering*:

> opacity (...) is the undetectable place of an errant movement, an interior kinesis that resists forces attempting to trace, follow, and read (...) I take care not to replicate the very same epistemological impulse I otherwise critique. I do this by refusing to offer totalising readings or diagnoses of that which resists a reading.146

Following Cervenak’s call to ‘not to replicate the very same epistemological impulse I otherwise critique’, which is carried out ‘by refusing to offer totalising readings or diagnoses of that which resists a reading’, I thus seek to trace the representations of the street in these texts as a space of incompleteness and openness that I replicate in my reading of them. I do so by only gesturing toward

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what the street is as unknown, affectable space, whilst trying to describe some of the practices of this affectable life: improvisation, ensemble, and fugitivity.
Chapter 1

‘If I seem to talk in circles’: Hard-boiled Detective Fiction and City Planning in Dashiell Hammett’s Red Harvest (1929) and The Dain Curse (1929), and Raymond Chandler’s The Big Sleep (1939)

‘we are talking about acts of government, in other words of the political control of the highway, aiming precisely at limiting the “extraordinary power of assault” that motorisation of the masses creates’ – Paul Virilio, Speed & Politics (1977), p. 51

The Development of the Automobile-Road

The movement for the development of roads in America began in the late nineteenth century, with the League of American Wheelmen (L.A.W.). The bicycle had made its way to America from Europe in the mid to late nineteenth century, and was subsequently disrupting established understandings of the road.¹ In Peddling Bicycles to America: The Rise of an Industry (2010), Bruce D. Epperson explains that the L.A.W. initially spent its time fighting bicycle bans. Toward the end of the decade, these fights were diminishing, as successful legal battles meant that a ‘growing number of state supreme courts recognised the bicycle as a legitimate road-going vehicle’.² The L.A.W.’s success created a lack of an organisational focal point. This was a problem, as it had, over the course of the decade, become divided as a result of the ‘proletarianisation of bicycling’, which some L.A.W. members believed was ‘chasing away the gentlemen who had established the sport’.³ Epperson explains that the ‘league needed a unifying issue’, and that ‘[t]he good roads campaign fit the bill perfectly’.⁴ The infighting had coalesced around issues of ‘sectional representation, membership eligibility, and especially racing’, so the good roads movement was used by the L.A.W. to ‘decentralise autonomy to its state chapters while preserving itself as a national

³ Ibid., p. 91.
⁴ Ibid., p. 92.
organisation’.\(^5\) Outlining the specifics of this process, Carlton Reid explains that in 1887, ‘league officials recommended’ that a good roads campaign ‘be afforded equal status to that of securing cyclists’ rights, and the organisation of races’.\(^6\) The following year, L.A.W. membership voted unanimously to establish the National Committee for Highway Improvement.\(^7\) The committee immediately began producing propaganda to distribute to local officials, as well as soliciting the support of interested businesses.\(^8\) Further, in 1892, the L.A.W. prepared a bill for Congress that, had it been successful, would have created a National Highway Commission.\(^9\) It failed, but as Bruce Seely explains, Congress nonetheless ‘earmarked $10,000 in the Department of Agriculture’s 1894 budget for investigations of road construction and management’.\(^10\) The Secretary of Agriculture formed the Office of Road Inquiry in 1893, and appointed one of the leading Wheelmen – Roy Stone – to run it.\(^11\)

In the late nineteenth century, development of the road was touted by the L.A.W. as a way of incorporating the nation’s rural population into its industrialising, urban economy.\(^12\) Ballard C. Campbell explains that at this point in America, ‘[t]owns levied a road tax on residents, but the law allowed them to satisfy this obligation with a day or so of labour’.\(^13\) In rural America, this option was ‘the most popular by far’.\(^14\) Within the burgeoning political economy of Gilded Era industrialisation, the rural populace was unproductive. They did not pay a tax that could be invested in the development of the road, and as Epperson explains, they ‘lived a largely cashless lifestyle. A small farmer and his family consumed or bartered as much as half their annual production’.\(^15\) With the development of the automobile-road, this population was gradually brought under the developing influences of industrialisation.

\(^{5}\) Ibid., p. 193.
\(^{7}\) Ibid.
\(^{8}\) Ibid., p. 149.
\(^{10}\) Ibid.
\(^{11}\) Ibid.
\(^{14}\) Ibid.
\(^{15}\) Epperson, *Peddling Bicycles to America*, p. 93.
order of domination through the wage-relation, taxation, and control of their movement and production. Peter J. Ling notes that the Cash Tax Act of 1907 ‘replaced statute labour by a cash tax’. The rural population could no longer satisfy the road tax via the provision of their labour. As an example of this evolution toward the incorporation of the rural population into industrial capitalist social relations, some citizens paid their road tax through wages that were obtained from working the road.

The gradual encroachment of the road into rural life in late nineteenth and early twentieth century America is testament to investment in it, though it did not yet come to dominate the infrastructure and economy of the nation. This began in the 1910s, as the production of the Ford Model-T, drawing on the efficiencies of Taylorism, began to make the possibility of mass automobile production a reality. Accordingly, the ratio of cars in America increased from one car for every 9,500 persons in 1900, to one car for every 4.8 persons by 1940. It was around this point, Cotten Seiler claims, that American individualism was rewritten to mean the freedom of the car and the road, which offered itself as a compromise for the restraint of the factory. This development of the automobile-road was also benefiting from what Timothy Mitchell describes in his book *Carbon Democracy: Political Power in the Age of Oil* (2011) as concerted efforts by the American government in the early twentieth century to change their economy from one dependent on coal, over which workers could exercise much power by ceasing its production, to one dependent on oil, over which it was not as easy for workers to exercise power, insofar as the ‘production’ site of oil is a fractured series of processes of extraction and refinement. Such a shift both relied on and was a boon for burgeoning automobile culture, to the detriment of the (coal-powered) railway. This transition is evident in ‘the close hard roar of Diesel trucks’ in *Hollers*, which are both part of and facilitate the circulations of the road.

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18 Smoak, ‘Framing the Automobile’, p. 54.
19 See Seiler, *Republic of Drivers*.
explore the breakdown of these circulations with the Oil Crisis in more detail in chapter 5.21

The first federal funding for roads was authorised in 1916, followed by further investment in 1921. Between 1920 and 1929, the number of railroad passengers thus declined by 62 percent.22 Indeed, from 1920 to 1940, the number of railroad passengers dropped from 1.2 billion to around 456 million.23 The impact of the automobile on railroad passenger traffic was clear. Whilst the new industry of the car was initially a boon for railroad freight revenues, Carlos A. Schwantes explains that by 1932, trucks had taken over the shipment of ‘fruits, vegetables, grain, coal, automobiles, tires, cement, sand, gravel, canned goods, livestock, and lumber, all of them once part of the prized mix of railway traffic’.24 Further, Paul Eric Teske, Samuel Best, and Michael Mintrom note that a ‘Lake Michigan agricultural port shipped out 90 percent of its produce by railroad in 1925 (…) but only seven years later the same port was shipping 90 percent of its produce by truck’.25 Indeed, less-than-carload (freight that does not fill a container) railroad freight dropped from 13,910 tons in 1920, to 3,754 tons by 1940.26

**California and the Road**

Arguably, the state that embraced the automobile earliest was California. California was at the forefront of the development of the automobile-road even before national legislation was introduced, and it is thus unsurprising that a key form of road novels – what I will call driver-detective fictions – are predominantly set there during this period. Whilst scholars such as Shelby Smoak have focused on the representation of the early twentieth century automobile as violent, and Peter D. Norton notes in *Fighting Traffic: the Dawn of the Motor Age in the*
American City (2008) that there are novels that resonate with his historiography of street regulation, early twentieth century detective novels are a thus far under-theorised member of the road novel genre.\(^{27}\) In hardboiled fiction from the 1920s onwards, the automobile is central to the work of the detective, particularly in the novels of Dashiell Hammett and Raymond Chandler. The navigational mastery of these fictions’ protagonists and the prominence of automobile accidents within their plots asserts the burgeoning order of state regulation over the space of the automobile-road – a regulation that was embodied in city planning documents of the 1920s, as I will demonstrate over the course of this chapter and the next.

Here, I implicitly draw on Foucault’s understanding that the ‘state’s power (...) is both an individualising and a totalising form of power’.\(^{28}\) He goes on to suggest that ‘the political, ethical, social, philosophical problem of our days is not to try to liberate the individual from the state and from the state’s institutions but to liberate us both from the state and from the type of individualisation which is linked to the state.’\(^{29}\) The private detective’s work, I argue, is done in service of the production of individuals – drivers – on behalf of the state institutions with which these novels conclude.

Whilst it might be disputed whether these fictions can even be read as road novels, I contend not only that they can, but that understanding the centrality of the road to them is vital to problematising dominant readings of the genre. Detective fictions complicate what Brigham describes as ‘the understanding of the road story as, by definition, a form of liberation or subversion’.\(^{30}\) Detective fictions in the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s are road novels, but they are not about the road as the (contested) adventure and escape of the frontier. Instead, they are about the road as the establishment of the circulatory regime of the self-determining subject, and the forms of governance that this requires. The road novel in the early twentieth century is not only about ‘the advent of automobile culture and cross-country motoring’, that Brigham identifies in Thomas W. Wilby and Agnes A. Wilby’s On the Trail to Sunset (1912) and Sinclair Lewis’s Free Air


\(^{29}\) Ibid., p. 785. Emphasis added.

(1919); it is also about the road as a developing space of regulation.\(^{31}\)

Relative to many other parts of the country, the development of the road in California began early. In 1911, the California Highway Commission (CHC) was established. The function of the CHC was to survey the most appropriate routes for highways and to pioneer new road surfaces and paving techniques.\(^{32}\) Kevin Starr explains that from 1910 to 1920, the state issued highway bonds for a total of seventy-three million dollars, and that consequently, ‘[b]y 1925 (…) California stood criss-crossed by a 6,400-mile network of highways, the majority of them paved, augmented by paved and unpaved county roads’.\(^{33}\) Here, a highway is understood as a road connecting two major population centres, such as a town or a city. The 1910 bond stated that the roads built would connect ‘the county seats of the several counties through which it passes and join (…) the centres of population, together with such branch roads as may be necessary to connect therewith the several county seats lying east and west of said state highway’.\(^{34}\) In 1923 the state bureaucracy expanded, as California imposed its first gas tax in order to help finance the expansion of the highway system.\(^{35}\) By 1940, California also had its first freeway – that is, a road with limited access onto it and that is not interrupted by junctions – in the Arroyo Seco Parkway, which runs from Pasadena to Los Angeles. Following that, plans were immediately afoot to develop much of California’s highway system into freeways – ostensibly in the name of safety, though in a move that would increase the length of seemingly unencumbered open road in the state.\(^{36}\)

Los Angeles in particular was being transformed by the automobile. Starr explains that with the emergence of automobile culture, roadways in Los Angeles became ‘commercial arteries (…) upgrading the auto court into the motel and recreating the restaurant, the laundry/dry cleaner, the movie theatre, even the

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\(^{34}\) The state highways of California; an engineering study conducted jointly by the California State Automobile Association and the Automobile Club of Southern California, July, 1920-January, 1921: California State Automobile Association*, *Archive.org*, Los Angeles, 1921 <https://archive.org/details/statehighwaysca00caligoog> [accessed October 09, 2017], p. 16.


\(^{36}\) Ibid., pp. 246-247.
bank, into drive-in facilities’. 37 David Brodsly notes that the ‘early and continuing pattern’ of the ‘primary matrices’ of highways (and later freeways) in Los Angeles was set by the first Spanish settlement, and its ‘five lines of movement (...) toward other Spanish settlements’. 38 Whilst the development of highways and freeways broadly followed the colonial pattern of footpaths and railroads, Brodsly also notes that ‘[t]he chief effect of the automobile was in further removing spatial constraints to the region’s development’. 39 He explains:

[t]he streetcar had permitted decentralisation only along well-defined corridors. City maps drawn between 1902 and 1919 show what one would expect: that few streets existed more than five or six blocks from streetcar lines. The automobile, however, permitted settlement of any area to which a road could be cleared. The result was the real estate boom of the 1920s. 40

This residential decentralisation facilitated a commercial decentralisation: between 1920 and 1930, the majority of ‘physicians (...) banks, department stores, movie theatres, and real estate offices’ moved away from the downtown area. 41 This was in part due to the decreasing costs of short haul truck transportation, which provided the ‘crucial complement to the auto in the distribution of raw materials, goods, and services’. 42 The development of the automobile-road in Los Angeles thus rewrote the landscape, transformed industry, and generated new consumption habits.

This development of the automobile-road and its encroachment into areas of life previously undisturbed by it did not pass without resistance. As Norton observes, ‘[u]ntil the 1920s, under prevailing conceptions of the street, cars were at best uninvited guests’. 43 According to Norton, the city street was a particularly contested space in terms of whom it was for and what its function was. The battle

37 Ibid., p. 246.
39 Ibid., pp. 2-4, 82.
40 Ibid., pp. 82-84.
41 Ibid., p. 92.
42 Ibid.
was waged between parents, worried about the safety of their children, pedestrians, who understood the street as their space, and motorists, who contested this.\textsuperscript{44} The concerns of parents and pedestrians were not unfounded, with over 200,000 people dying from motor vehicle accidents in the 1920s in America, with a high incidence of deaths amongst young people.\textsuperscript{45} Indeed, Norton notes that ‘[i]n the first four years after Armistice Day more Americans were killed in automobile accidents than had died in battle in France’.\textsuperscript{46} Los Angeles saw year-on-year increases in accidents and fatalities from 1920 onward, with Jeremiah Axelrod noting that ‘[a]ll the metropolis’s major newspapers made a daily ritual out of reporting collisions’.\textsuperscript{47} What was particularly confrontational about the presence of the car in the street was its speed. Faster and thus deadlier than any other type of transportation on the street at that time, parents and pedestrians generally wanted to restrict the speed of the automobile so as to give it no advantage over other forms of transportation.\textsuperscript{48}

The violence of the speed-driven automobile in American literature is famously apparent in \textit{The Great Gatsby} (1922), which culminates with the death of Myrtle after she is hit by ‘[t]he “death car” as the newspapers called it’.\textsuperscript{49} As Smoak has observed, the automobile thus begins the century as a site of violence in literary representation.\textsuperscript{50} The story of the development of the automobile-road in the early twentieth century is one in which the automobile industry and its supporters eventually reframed this problem of speed as one of population management, efficiency, and personal responsibility.\textsuperscript{51} Over the course of the 1920s, the street was redefined as a space for the car. The automobile industry and its advocates achieved this via safety campaigns aimed at pedestrians, via discursive and rhetorical interventions in newspapers, particularly in order to change the reporting and perception of traffic accidents by challenging the

\textsuperscript{44} Ibid., pp. 16-18.
\textsuperscript{45} Ibid., pp. 21-23.
\textsuperscript{46} Ibid., p. 25.
\textsuperscript{48} Norton, \textit{Fighting Traffic}, p. 31.
\textsuperscript{50} Smoak, ‘Framing the Automobile’, p. 5.
\textsuperscript{51} Norton, \textit{Fighting Traffic}, pp. 113, 127.
assumption that the driver was at fault, and via their insistence on the street as a space that could be ordered by the science of population management.52

Los Angeles led the way in the redefinition of the street as a space of population management, controlled and calculated speed. Axelrod has outlined that mass automobility brought a sense of indeterminacy to Los Angeles. By the 1920s, the speed of the automobile, coupled to its regular collisions with passengers, its disruption of the streetcar, and its rewriting of the city’s geography, made it difficult to coherently conceptualise what Los Angeles was.53

Los Angeles’ city streets were filled with unpredictable pedestrians and motorists, as well as with streetcars that automobiles were liable to collide with.54 As the Los Angeles Times put it in March 1920, ‘[t]he Monday morning papers are regularly filled with accounts of the horrors occasioned by this speed mania and the undertakers make a special provision for an extra rush of business immediately following Sundays and Holidays’.55 Axelrod explains that streetcars were also forced into being rerouted ‘in an attempt to avoid conflict with the throng of automobiles on downtown streets’.56

During this time, the Hollywood film industry also produced movies that used the Los Angeles’ streets as their set and that depicted them as chaotic and disordered.57 This uncertainty about the role – and the safety – of the car is summed up by Laurel and Hardy’s 1928 Two Tars, which was shot in Culver City and Santa Monica and in which the protagonists continuously crash their car, as can be seen in figure 1, before they get stuck in traffic and the automobile is ‘pulled to pieces by angry men’.58 Tellingly, in an allusion to the fluid, circulatory movement of the road, the first pedestrian they nearly crash into remarks: “– what do you guys think you’re doin’ – – Driving or rowing? –”.59 Thus, films such as Two Tars – and Hollywood productions more generally at the time – represented Los Angeles’ roads as an unstable infrastructure, one where crashes were

52 Ibid., pp. 208-209.
53 Axelrod, Inventing Autopia, pp. 71-82.
54 Ibid., p. 71.
55 Ibid.
56 Ibid.
57 Ibid., p. 79.
58 Ibid.
59 Stan Laurel and Oliver Hardy, ‘Automobile accident scenes from Two Tars’, Two Tars, YouTube, 1928 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NTF1OFykQAg> [accessed March 01, 2019].
common and conflict never far away. Put differently, in newspapers and in Hollywood movies in the 1920s, the road was *unreadable* – a space of what Axelrod calls ‘chaotic visuality’ – which is to say that there was not a shared agreement in the city’s population about what the road was, who it was for, and how it should be navigated.\(^{60}\)

This material is unavailable due to copyright restrictions

**Figure 1.** Stan Laurel and Oliver Hardy, ‘Automobile accident scenes from *Two Tars*’, *Two Tars*, YouTube, 1928

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NTF1OFykQAq](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NTF1OFykQAq) [accessed March 01, 2019].

The consequent ‘popular fervour for a cure to the congestion and danger in the city streets’ in Los Angeles presented an opportunity for both city planners and downtown businessmen to propose their visions for urban order.\(^{61}\) Downtown businessmen proposed a parking ban as a solution to growing congestion. Its implementation in 1920 was confronted with widespread opposition, as it was flouted by drivers in a public protest, which was led by the actress Clara Kimball Young, who suggested that it restricted (middle-class) women’s access to the public sphere.\(^{62}\) The failure of the ban necessitated an alternative approach to downtown congestion. Axelrod suggests that at this point, the Los Angeles Planning Commission and the Los Angeles Regional Planning Commission saw an opening, and ‘began to emphasise the power of “good planning” (...) to reduce traffic congestion’.\(^{63}\) What these planners meant by ‘good planning’ was a decentralisation of the city that posed a fundamental threat to the commercial dominance of the downtown area.\(^{64}\) Inspired by the garden city movement, they envisioned Los Angeles as a ‘decentralised region of autonomous garden cities’.\(^{65}\) Were such a vision to be implemented, downtown would no longer be a

\(^{60}\) Axelrod, *Inventing Autopia*, p. 81.

\(^{61}\) Ibid., p. 91.

\(^{62}\) Ibid., p. 65.

\(^{63}\) Ibid., p. 92.

\(^{64}\) Ibid., pp. 102-104.

\(^{65}\) Ibid., p. 102.
privileged site of work, living, and commerce.

*The Major Traffic Street Plan* of 1924 represented something of a middle point between downtown businessmen and city planners. As is apparent in their support of parking bans, downtown businessmen effectively saw the automobile and its congestion as a disruption to the ‘proper traditional functioning of the business district’.66 Were the automobile to be removed, order and commerce would be restored.67 On the other hand, the city planners desired wholesale deconcentration of Los Angeles. *The Major Traffic Street Plan* was compiled by the urban planners Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr., Harland Bartholomew, and Charles H. Cheney for the Automobile Club of Southern California and the Los Angeles Traffic Commission, in response to the growing congestion downtown.68 The Plan proposed: to widen a number of streets, particularly those thoroughfares that led into and out of the downtown area; to create new streets around the business district to ease congestion; and to separate different types of traffic on the road.69 As Axelrod highlights, with these recommendations, the Plan ‘failed to match the ambitions of either local expert planners of downtown elites’.70 The Plan’s proposals would deconcentrate the city centre, but not so thoroughly that it would lose its importance, with the Plan emphasising that ‘the central business district should be directly accessible from all parts of the city’.71 However, the Plan also lamented that ‘[t]here are few streets in Los Angeles today that afford direct and adequate communication between the various centres of importance other than the downtown business district’, and that consequently, ‘[t]here should be as complete a system of direct, wide interdistrict thoroughfares of this character, doing a service similar to that of the radial thoroughfares connecting directly with the downtown business district’.72 As Axelrod summarises, what this meant was that ‘suburban “subcentres” (…) would receive the same street access as the city’s heart’.73

The Plan thus satisfied neither the desire of downtown businessmen for

66 Ibid., p. 92.
67 Ibid.
72 Ibid.
the business district to remain at the centre of Los Angeles, nor the planners’ desire for a wholly decentred city. What the plan offered instead, as Axelrod notes, was an ‘attempt to make the existing city come to terms with the flexibility inherent in automobility’, with its major provisions sharing ‘a common goal of facilitating increased automotive transport throughout the expanding city’. That is, the Plan offered a picture of what the city was already becoming, what the city was being made into, by the automobile – a sprawling city in which people would be able to live their lives in their cars, to rein across the city’s topography. The Plan offered a way to make this possible without encountering congestion.

The Plan’s vision for a congestion-free Los Angeles was of an ordered, automobilecentric city, with traffic distributed evenly so as to avoid congestion. One crucial component in this vision was speed, which the Plan suggested could be utilised for the predictable, repetitive, uniform movement of vehicles. The Plan’s section on ‘roadway capacity’ outlines this, detailing the ideal speed for consistent movement of traffic. The section begins by stating that ‘there is a fairly definite relation between speed and space interval between cars, and it is from this relation that a fair estimate of roadway capacity can be obtained, average conditions prevailing’. It goes on to outline that ‘[i]n order to determine the space interval corresponding to various speeds, a number of observations were made both in crowded and high speed thoroughfares, and the approximate space intervals were plotted and the curve obtained’. From the data gathered, the Plan concludes that, with all vehicles travelling at a consistent speed, the space interval between cars remains consistent. It further notes that for maximum capacity of a roadway per hour, the ideal speed is 22.5 miles per hour, but that drivers reach their destination quicker when travelling at 30 miles an hour, even though this decreases the capacity of the road due to the increased interval between the vehicles (see figure 2). What is important here is the emphasis on speed. The Plan suggests that when deployed consistently – that is to say predictably, repetitively, and uniformly – speed can be measured and used to ensure the smooth, uncongested flow of traffic.

74 Ibid., p. 105.  
76 Ibid., p. 55.  
77 Ibid.
Such usage of speed was dependent on drivers acting predictably and uniformly. The production of these behaviours was one focus of driving manuals of the time, which encouraged what Seiler describes as a simultaneous ‘emphatic performance of self-directed agency and amenability to regulation’.

The American Automobile Association’s 1938 publication, *Sportsmanlike Driving*, illustrates this conflation of ‘self-directed agency and amenability to regulation’ in relation to speed on the road. The introduction to the pamphlet presents the problem of speed, stating: ‘One typical question . . . important almost every minute we drive . . . is: “What is sound speed and how can we judge whether we are using it?”’ A later section of the pamphlet, ‘Driving Speeds Under Various Circumstances’, addresses itself to this question. It argues that ‘[i]t is not speed itself but *speed too fast for conditions* that is really a big cause of accidents. The speed of the car is controlled by a wise or a foolish foot on the accelerator or the brake. The driver and not the car determines the speed’. The pamphlet then goes on to list various ways in which speed should be used responsibly, advising that ‘[d]riving speed should approximate the speed of other sensible drivers’, that the speedometer should be consulted when transferring from the highway to urban or suburban areas, and that driving too slowly can ‘interfere with the smooth flow of traffic’. As Seiler notes, in the pamphlet, ‘driving [thus] becomes a performance of energy and speed whereby one affirms one’s disciplined subjectivity’.

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78 Seiler, *Republic of Drivers*, p. 133.
80 Ibid., p. 65.
81 Ibid.
82 Ibid.
83 Seiler, *Republic of Drivers*, pp. 143-144.
A driver should choose their speed, then, so as to ensure the smooth flow of traffic. Indeed, the Plan conceives of the movement of traffic using the metaphor of circulation, declaring in its opening paragraph its desire to develop 'a comprehensive plan for the reconstruction of the ill-arranged collection of streets of Los Angeles into a well ordered system of traffic arteries'. The report further notes that its authors have: studied ‘the main body of the city’; that it is ‘a balanced scheme for handling a tremendous traffic flow’; that ‘step by step, as occasion permits, the execution of this, that and the other project must be secured until gradually a complete and satisfactory traffic circulation scheme is evolved’; and that one of the causes of congestion is ‘[n]atural or artificial obstructions to circulation’. The impulse of the plan, then, was toward the better managed, ‘well ordered’ circulation of automobiles in Los Angeles. Drivers must self-regulate their speed so as to ensure the uncongested flow of traffic around the city. Moreover, this circulation was conceptualised in bodily terms, suggesting that this self-management should be undertaken for the health of the city as a circulatory body. The Plan also included a proposed map of the way in which Los Angeles would be developed toward this end (see figure 3). The map interpellates a detached, omniscient observer, whilst also homogenising space in the service of movement, and measuring distances for the purpose of transportation. That is, the drawing of the map assumes a position that can observe the entirety of Los Angeles, and that, from this position, can calculate the movements of its populations so as to ensure ‘well ordered’, congestion-free circulation around the body of the city.

Following its completion, the Plan was unanimously approved by the City Council and funds allocated to the work it recommended. However, only a
fraction of the Plan’s recommendations were implemented, and Scott L. Bottles suggests that the Plan only improved the downtown congestion problem for a couple of years. Nonetheless, the Plan was as significant for what it represented, and for the image of Los Angeles it produced and thus perpetuated, as it was for what it did. What the Plan demonstrated was that the street was becoming the road; that streets were becoming spaces for cars. Indeed, the plan developed simultaneously with increasing regulation of pedestrians. Along with Olmsted, Bartholomew, and Cheney, the commission also hired Miller McClintock, who published a book titled Street Traffic Control in 1925, to produce a code of conduct for its city streets. Norton summarises that McClintock’s ‘new code introduced an evening rush-hour parking ban downtown, regularised turns at intersections, and required the city to post signs informing street users of rules’. It also included ‘strict pedestrian control measures, with fines for jaywalkers. In downtown streets pedestrians would have to keep within crosswalks. Where there were no signals, they would have to raise a hand to halt oncoming motorists’. McClintock’s code was adopted in Los Angeles in January 1925.

Tellingly, McClintock also conceives of traffic in circulatory terms, opening Street Traffic Control with the declaration that ‘[s]treets have been called the arteries of the city, and the French refer to the traffic which moves through them as circulation. The burden which is carried by the streets of a great city, when analysed is found to be the life blood of its economic and social life’. His task in Street Traffic Control was to produce prescriptions that would bring about such well-ordered circulation. As Simon Ferdinand observes, ‘[i]n the received practices of modern urbanism (…) cartographers and planners have taken the street as an object of not just surveillance and representation, but planned

89 Norton, Fighting Traffic, pp. 163-164.
90 Ibid., p. 163.
91 Ibid., p. 164.
92 Ibid., p. 165.
93 Bottles, Los Angeles and the Automobile, p. 117.
reformation too’. In McClintock’s vision, the street was to be reformed into a space ordered around the automobile.

The Plan represented an urban sprawl that was already occurring, with road’s becoming the domain of automobiles, and automobile-facilitated movement to the suburbs pulling custom away from downtown, without producing a wholly decentralised city. What emerged instead was automobile culture; that is, a city that required its suburban residents to drive everywhere, since their homes were separated from their work, shopping, and leisure spaces, which were not reachable on foot. Drivers were to circulate themselves around the city in an orderly manner, moving in predictable ways at a self-regulated speed.

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**Hard-Boiled Driver-Detectives, or, Phillip Marlowe as Traffic Engineer**

The new forms of regulation and definition of the street that emerged from the 1920s onward required enforcement. If the street was to be the site of the car, this needed to be asserted and policed. Part of the legitimation of the road as a space primarily for automobiles, I suggest, came via hard-boiled detective fiction. In driver-detective fictions, the solving of crime and the mastery of speed by the protagonist (re)-asserts the road as a space of ordered and regulated circulation and population management. The ‘individualising (…) form of power’ of the state, as Foucault puts it, is enacted in these texts via the production of a particular type of subject, the responsible driver, who must move predictably around America’s cities.

Three quintessential driver-detective texts of the 1920s and 1930s, Hammett’s *The Dain Curse* (1929) and *Red Harvest* (1929), and Chandler’s *The
Big Sleep (1939), all feature attempts to navigate and master the speed of the highway in ways that assert the authority of the state over it as a space. Their protagonists master the speed of the road, and they are allowed to break its laws precisely to enforce the law that sustains the ordered circulation of the self-determining, self-possessive population. Further, if the disorder of Los Angeles’ streets and the threat of the automobile’s speed could be solved by the calculated, uniform movement of vehicles, the return of this threat with automobile accidents had to be addressed. What these novels suggest is that these incidents could be attributed to individuals themselves, rather than to anything specific to the event, or, indeed, to the automobile. These incidents occur because of the actions of particular individuals, rather than because of any problem with the road infrastructure or the automobile itself. Indeed, the plots of these novels are arguably focused on producing these individualising explanations.

This individualisation of motor accidents is consistent with national policy. Daniel M. Albert has identified a ‘move from identifying behaviours which caused accidents to identifying individuals who caused accidents’ from the 1920s onward.\(^\text{96}\) In the court-affiliated psychiatric clinics that were set up across America between World War I and World War II, drivers on trial for violation of the rules of the road were pathologised, with their accidents attributed to their personalities – to their identity – rather than to any problem with the road infrastructure itself.\(^\text{97}\) Accordingly, in The Dain Curse, Gabrielle Leggett crashes her car because of her grief at her deceased husband and in her attempt to avoid her kidnapper. Similarly, in The Big Sleep, Owen Taylor’s car is driven off the end of the Lido pier either because of Joe Brody’s greed, or because of Taylor’s suicidal passion for Carmen. These are problems caused by individuals, then, not by speed itself. It is Gabrielle’s grief and Whidden’s identity as a kidnapper, and Joe Brody’s identity as a criminal or Owen Taylor’s excessive passion, that causes these accidents. In resolving the mysteries in this way, these novels allow the road to continue to be a space of uniform circulation, suggesting that any deviation from this is an individual problem. If disorder threatens to return to the


\(^{97}\) Ibid., pp. 337-343.
road in Hammett and Chandler, it is assuaged by these individualising explanations for the motor accidents they contain.

In *The Dain Curse*, which is based in San Francisco, The Continental Op works for the Leggett family, who have been victims of a diamond robbery. In so doing, The Op must come to understand the mystery of ‘The Crumpled Chrysler’, in which the missing daughter of the Leggett family, Gabrielle, is believed to have been travelling, and which is found ‘a foot or two off the road, on the left-hand side, standing on all fours with its radiator jammed into a eucalyptus tree’. Here the speed of the automobile presents a risk to be mastered. When The Op travels with Eric Collinson, partner of the missing Gabrielle, he describes a scene in which ‘[t]he speedometer showed a 50, and people on the sidewalks began looking after us as we whizzed by’. Moments later, the speed at which they are travelling causes them to crash. Here, then, The Op does not master speed, but he is at the centre of it; he is part of those who are allowed to do it. Moreover, it is only by solving the mystery of the crumpled Chrysler, which is witnessed ‘whizz[ing] past’ by an onlooker before it crashes into a eucalyptus tree, that The Op is able to locate Gabrielle Leggett.

If The Op does not master the speed of the car in his own navigations of the road, he nonetheless does so in his solving of this mystery, as he tracks down Gabrielle, who informs him that she crashed the car as she was trying to escape from a house that she had been taken to after being kidnapped. The Op’s accident in the Chrysler with Collinson is something of a mirror image of Gabrielle’s crash. In solving the mystery of the missing Gabrielle, The Op as detective is valorised as he who is able to work out what has gone wrong with a speeding vehicle and why. Speed is mastered by the private detective, and order is restored to the road as a space of managed population circulation.

If The Op struggles to master the speed of the road in *The Dain Curse*, he has no such troubles in *Red Harvest*, in which he investigates the murder of the publishing mogul Donald Wilsson. In so doing, he ends up embroiled in a war between bootleggers in the novel’s semi-fictional city of Personville. Here, The Op witnesses scenes in which the police assert their monopoly on the power of

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99 Ibid., p. 45.  
100 Ibid., p. 112.
assault that is the automobile-road, such as when ‘a load of coppers buzzed past, throwing lead at the first car’.101 This contentious power of assault is also apparent when one gang attempts to rob a bank and make a quick getaway, ‘running down to the car at the curb’.102 Further, The Op rides with the police in moments when their capacity to break the rules of the road in order to assert the rule of the road is made apparent, such as when ‘[p]anicky automobiles darted right and left, regardless of traffic rules, to let us through. It was a lot of fun’.103 Finally, The Op himself ends up in a drive-by shoot out when working strategically with the mobster Reno, who ‘lean[s] out’ of the car ‘to try for a shot at the guns that were tossing lead all around us (...) A lot of people had done a lot of shooting, but so far as we could tell nobody’s bullets had hurt anybody’.104 The Op’s position at the centre of this action legitimises him as the figure of authority over the speed and power of the road. It is The Op who is trying to solve the mystery of Willsson’s death, and in doing so to restore (state) order and sovereignty over the road and its circulations, which is disturbed by the warring bootlegging and gambling gangs. The chase and shootout scenes mark The Op as a character who has mastery over the speed of the road; it is he who knows how to utilise speed in service of the (state’s) law of ordered circulation. He will use speed in order to restore a managed regime of speed, as in The Major Traffic Street Plan.

It is perhaps The Big Sleep that most clearly demonstrates the detective’s role in maintaining the order of Los Angeles’ roads, set as it is in the city. In Chandler’s novel, much like in Hammett’s, Marlowe attempts to navigate and master the speed of the highway in ways that assert the authority of the state over it as a space. The automobile receives a favourable presentation in The Big Sleep, playing a pivotal role in the solving of the crimes at its centre. Marlowe spends a considerable amount of time in his car, the effect of which is to suggest that the car can be utilised virtuously, for the solving of crime. Car ownership is desirable, presented as an essential component of the stoic, heroic subjectivity of the detective. Further, the mastery of speed demonstrated by Marlowe works to assuage cultural anxieties regarding the speed of the automobile, suggesting

101 Hammett, The Four Great Novels: Red Harvest, p. 100.
102 Ibid., p. 113.
103 Ibid., p. 108.
104 Ibid., p. 122.
that such speed will be managed and governed via the production of responsible individuals. Chandler’s novel is a labyrinthine detective story in which Private Investigator Philip Marlowe attempts to solve a blackmail mystery that revolves around the wealthy Sternwood family. In doing so, he is also attempting to understand the circumstances around the death of Owen Taylor, who drowns when his car is driven off the end of the Lido pier. Importantly, this detective work does not challenge the legitimacy of the car’s presence on the street; rather, it is an attempt to account for and reincorporate an abnormality in the road’s managed order of circulation, its regime of responsibilised, self-determining subjects.

Franco Moretti argues that ‘[i]n detective fiction everything that is repeatable and obvious ceases to be criminal and is, therefore, unworthy of “investigation”’, and it is precisely that Taylor’s drowned car is not a repetition, is not part of the repetitive circulation of automobiles, which makes it suspicious. The uniformity of movement, the managed utilisation of speed, which is prescribed by The Major Traffic Street Plan and Sportsmanlike Driving, has been disrupted; what has happened to Taylor is not a repetition, and thus it must be investigated. In this sense, Marlowe’s investigation of that which is not ‘repeatable and obvious’ is an investigation into an abnormality within the circulations of the road, in order that it be explained and that uniform, predictable movement – driving to and from the suburbs, for example – be restored. That is, Marlowe works to facilitate The Major Traffic Street Plan’s desire for smooth access to ‘neighbourhood centres for local shopping’, that ‘the daily surge of city workers and shoppers’ on the road move smoothly and predictably.

Indeed, much driving in The Big Sleep is not criminalised, such as when Marlowe ‘turned back down the driveway and home’ after spending the evening with Vivian, or when he ‘choked [his] car to life and rode off home to a shower, dry clothes and a late dinner’ after visiting Geiger’s house. This is movement where Marlowe knows where he is going and why. It is movements where the driver does not know where they are going or are not totally in control of themselves that are criminalised in The Big Sleep, suggesting that it works to

107 Chandler, The Big Sleep, p. 166, 45.
produce predictable, knowable automobility. For example, when Marlowe gets a flat tyre near the end of the novel, the man at the garage consistently quizzes him about his movement: '[s]tranger in town you said? (...) Where from, stranger? (...) Come the long way, eh?', until Marlowe retorts: '[@]ny law against it?'.

Thus, in *The Big Sleep*, the road is to be a space of predictable, knowable movement, as unknown or uncertain movement is treated with suspicion. In solving the mysteries of the crumpled Chrysler and of Owen Taylor’s crashed car, The Op and Marlowe discern the details of the ‘speed too fast for conditions that is really a big cause of accidents’, as *Sportsmanlike Driving* puts it. After all, ‘[t]he speed of the car is controlled by a wise or a foolish foot on the accelerator or the brake. The driver and not the car determines the speed’.

Marlowe’s mastery of the urban environment is synonymous with his coming to be able to discern the meaning of events. He regularly stakes out various suspects in his car as a means of coming to know which direction he should travel. For example, it is as a result of surveilling Geiger’s bookstore that he is led to the house where Arthur Geiger – who has been blackmailing the daughter of the Sternwood family – is killed. Marlowe masters the Los Angeles geography in his car, and this mastery is essential to solving the mystery. This is apparent not only in his ability to follow suspects, but also in the fact that, as Blake Allmendinger puts it, ‘*The Big Sleep* produces what Fredric Jameson calls a “cognitive map” of Los Angeles’. Marlowe’s geographical knowledge and navigational craft are pivotal to his investigatory prowess. In one sense, Marlowe is able to solve the crime because he comes to understand and know the speed of circulation on the road, its order of regulation, and the times at which people and things come and go. It is through following and staking out suspects that Marlowe comes to be able to speculatively reconstruct their movements, such as when he follows Geiger home and hears him being shot. This later allows Marlowe to speculate that it was Owen Taylor who shot Geiger, on account of his affection for Carmen and Geiger’s perceived mistreatment of her, and that Brody then pursued and killed Taylor, on account of Taylor having taken the lucrative photos of Carmen that Geiger was taking when he shot him, and which Brody

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109 Allmendinger, ‘All About Eden’, p.120.
had been using to blackmail Carmen’s family.

Marlowe thus reconstructs a whole series of movements from his act of geographical detection, his following Geiger home. This crime solving is epitomised in Marlowe’s – and the detective’s more generally – role as someone who untangles a web of causes and effects in order to reveal the ‘real’ series of events, or circulations. The detective, we might say, is he who orders circulation, he who understands who has moved where, when, and why. Marlowe’s cognitive map of Los Angeles, his piecing together of the various movements of the novel’s characters in order to understand why Taylor’s car was driven off the end of the pier, that abnormality in circulation, places Marlowe in the position of traffic engineer, the omniscient observer of the map in *The Major Traffic Street Plan*. Much like Olmsted, Bartholomew, and Cheney, Marlowe works to remove abnormalities from the circulations of Los Angeles’ roads, and he does so by building a picture of the city akin to the Plan’s map, adopting a position from which he can see how this abnormality in the order of circulation has occurred. In this reading, *The Big Sleep* is a novel that seeks to restore order to circulation, to restore health to the city as body, as the Plan’s description of roads as arteries suggests; to ensure the ordered movement of a “‘million automobiles moving in a million different directions, with their paths of travel conflicting at a million different intersections, a million times a day’”.

Here, the problem is affectable movement – the passions of Taylor and Fitzstephan, which have caused an abnormal set of movements on the road. These are the wrong kinds of movement, driving without self-control, moving without knowing exactly where one is going or what the outcome of such movement will be. It is this that The Op and Marlowe diagnose and seek to remove from the circulatory order of California’s cities.

**Reading the Road: Restoring Order in Hammett and Chandler**

Marlowe and The Op are masters of speed, able to possess it and thus be sovereign over it. The texts diverge, however, in their endorsement of the institutions of this possessive subject at their conclusions. In *Red Harvest*, The Op turns the warring gangs that run Personville against one another, leading to

their death and decline. He then uses love letters he has obtained to blackmail Elihu into

tell[ing] the governor that your city police have got out of hand, what with bootleggers sworn in as officers, and so on. You’re going to ask him for help – the national guard would be best (...) You’re going to have the mayor, or the governor, whichever it comes under, suspend the whole Personville police department, and let the mail-order troops handle things till you can organise another.\textsuperscript{111}

The Op thus insists on the (re-)assertion of the (possessive) law of the nation-state, insisting on the authority of the governor of the city and the national guard. Similarly, at the conclusion of \textit{The Dain Cuse} the institutions of the law are resolving the crimes that have been under investigation in the novel, as numerous characters are convicted for their involvement in the complicated network of murder and deception that has unravelled from The Op’s initial attempt to solve the mystery of the diamonds that were stolen from the Leggett family. This conclusion with the institutions of the possessive subject suggests that it is such a subject that can master the forces of circulation – such as speed – at work in the novel, and that it is the disciplinary failure of such a subject that has disrupted this predictable movement. In contrast to the chaotic Los Angeles streets of Laurel and Hardy’s \textit{Two Tars}, The Op and Marlowe are able to bring about the well-ordered circulation desired by \textit{The Major Traffic Street Plan} and \textit{Street Traffic Control}, and they do this by insisting upon the road being a space of self-possession and self-determination, where subjects are responsible for themselves, and in being so, produce movements that are uniform and predictable.

The restoration of possessive order in these novels occurs textually too. In \textit{The Dain Curse}, the mystery of the curse of the novel's title is solved by its conclusion, bringing stability to the chain of signifiers associated with it. ‘The Dain curse’ is primarily related to: the Leggett family; to diamond robbery, and to the Christian cult the Temple of the Holy Grail. The Op comes to understand these

\textsuperscript{111} Hammett, \textit{The Four Great Novels: Red Harvest}, p. 179.
signifiers, to possess the meaning of them, by understanding the web of causes and effects that they are bound up in. The Op seeks to stabilise the idea of the mysterious ‘Dain curse’ by solving the murders occurring in and around the Dain family, revealing them to be the consequence of romantic jealousy. The diamond robbery, too, is part of this series of events, given as a bribe by Mr Leggett’s wife to someone who is aware of Mr Leggett’s shady past. The Temple of the Holy Grail is likewise brought into intelligibility by the novel’s conclusion, revealed to be part of the elaborate plot of Owen Fitzstephan to win the love of Gabrielle Leggett – a plot that runs through nearly every event in the novel. Thus, by the conclusion of *The Dain Curse*, the mystery and indeterminacy of the title is solved by The Op’s deciphering of the causes and effects at work in the novel: this is how The Op comes to possess the meaning of the title. By the end of the novel, the ‘Dain curse’ in simply the name for the effect of the cause that is the web of murder and deception that The Op has unravelled.

This restoration of meaning to key signifiers in the novel is analogous to the way that, to restore order to the road, The Op and Marlowe must come to understand the causes behind the effect of the car accidents in *The Dain Curse* and *The Big Sleep*. The automobile accidents in these novels are scenes of violent disorientation. For example, when The Op and Collinson crash in their car, *The Dain Curse* describes:

> The lamp-post snapped, crashed down on the sidewalk. The roadster, over on its side, spilled us out around the lamp-post. Gas from the broken post roared up at our feet. Collinson, most of the skin scraped from one side of his face, crawled back on hands and knees to turn off the roadster’s engine. I sat up, raising the girl, who was on my chest, with me. My right shoulder and arm were out of whack, dead.112

Similarly, when The Op finds the crumpled Chrysler, he describes it as being ‘a foot or two off the road, on the left-hand side, standing on all fours with its radiator jammed into a eucalyptus tree. All its glass was shattered, and the front third of

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its metal was pretty well crumpled’.\textsuperscript{113} Thus, these are moments when something uncontrollable happens – when gas pours dangerously from the crashed car, and when Collinson’s skin is scraped from the side of his face. Indeed, a crashed automobile occasions the search for – and attempt to assert – order. After finding the crumpled Chrysler, The Op and the sheriff ‘ran around in circles, straining our eyes at the ground’, searching for clues.\textsuperscript{114} Unable to ascertain anything other than that the car had crashed, they ‘got into our borrowed car again and drove on, asking questions wherever we found someone to question’.\textsuperscript{115}

This attempt to assert order when faced with the violent disordering of a crashed automobile occurs in \textit{The Big Sleep} too. When Owen Taylor’s car is found driven off the end of the Lido pier, the novel describes it in the following way:

\begin{quote}
The front bumper was bent, one headlight smashed, the other bent up but the glass still unbroken. The radiator shell had a big dent in it, and the paint and nickel were scratched up all over the car. The upholstery was sodden and black (…) The driver was still draped around the steering post with his head at an unnatural angle to his shoulders.\textsuperscript{116}
\end{quote}

Similar to \textit{The Dain Curse}, this violence occasions a search for order. Immediately following the discovery of the car, the chief investigator asks, ‘[w]hat’s the story?’ This question begins a flurry of speculation by those around him, which starts with the technical question of how the car skidded off the road, before moving on to why it did. At this point, there is an argument about whether the driver was drunk, whether he was killed, or whether it was suicide. This again reinforces that there is a desire operative in these texts to discern the causes of the events they contain. Indeed, when Marlowe later confronts Brody about the disappearance of Owen Taylor, it is the crashing of Taylor’s car that Marlowe demands Brody make sense of, asking him: ‘Know where that Buick is now?’\textsuperscript{117}

\begin{flushright}
\footnotesize
\textsuperscript{113} Ibid., p. 112.  
\textsuperscript{114} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{115} Ibid., p. 113.  
\textsuperscript{116} Chandler, \textit{The Big Sleep}, p. 49.  
\textsuperscript{117} Ibid., p. 102. 
\end{flushright}
In the immediate aftermath of discovering a crashed car, then, The Op and Marlowe attempt to discern the cause of it. The crashed car is an object to be read, as the speculation that follows their discovery demonstrates. The shattered glass of the Chrysler and its crumpled metal, and the bent bumper and smashed headlight of the Owen Taylor’s car in The Big Sleep are signifiers of force. The detective’s attempt to discover which force(s) has been at work is an attempt to render the crashed car intelligible, readable. This is apparent in the plots of the novels themselves: the causes of these marks of force must be discerned in order for the world around to become readable again. Indeed, as we have seen, discerning the forces at work in the crashing of Owen Taylor’s car is the precondition for understanding the events that have occurred in The Big Sleep, and the same is true of Gabrielle Leggett and the crumpled Chrysler in The Dain Curse. Thus, the restoration of order in Hammett and Chandler is textual, too: the instability of key signifiers is rectified via the discernment of the causes at work in the effects the detective investigates. The unreadable streets of Two Tars and of the Los Angeles Times become readable; they are spaces in which drivers are to move as if they are in possession of the forces acting upon them, and thus able to use them with restraint and to be responsible for what they do. Speed is only a problem when cars are driven by drivers who are affectable, who do not know exactly where they are going and who are under the influence of a passion that they have not wholly mastered.

In the textual restoration of order that occurs in Hammett and Chandler, we find a further circulatory operation, since the meaning of key signifiers in these texts circularly returns to the detective. The detective begins with something that he does not possess, cannot fully discern the meaning of, such as a stolen object or a crashed car. In deducing the causes behind these effects, the detective returns these signifiers to himself, enclosing meaning into a circular movement. The detective begins with a signifier that represents a set of unknown forces; by the end of these novels, the detective has come to know the forces at work behind these signifiers. As Marlowe remarks to Vivian late on in The Big Sleep: ‘if I seem to talk in circles, it just seems that way. It all ties together – everything’.118 Everything ties together, everything returns to Marlowe, who perhaps ‘seem[s] to

118 Ibid., p. 243.
talk in circles’ for precisely this reason: because he discerns the forces at work to cause the events in the novel, meaning that those events circularly return to him. As Ross Exo Adams notes, ‘the inherent virtue seen in systems that demonstrate circular motion’, is that ‘they all tend (...) to be circumscribed in a given, finite spatial enclosure’.\(^{119}\) The totality of the image of circulation suggests the enclosure of everything within it; everything returns to Marlowe, he has knowledge of all that has happened. In turn, this knowledge allows him to order the labyrinthine movements of Los Angeles’ cities that the novel depicts into the circulations that The Major Traffic Street Plan desired – into movements that are enclosed within the known, that are predictable, that are not defined by the affectable uncertainty of Owen Taylor’s final drive.

**The Big Sleep and the Disruptive Life of the Street**

*Red Harvest, The Dain Curse, and The Big Sleep* restore order to their respective cities by discerning the forces at work that have caused an abnormality in circulation. In so doing, they reinstate a regulated order of speed, based on the responsibility of the self-determining subject, as is apparent at their juridical conclusions. In turn, this restoration of order applies to key signifiers in these novels, which are rendered intelligible via the detective’s deduction of the forces that these signifiers represent. These novels represent the restoration of circulatory order on the road via the reassertion of the responsibilised, self-determining subject, set against the narrative of the irresponsible, excessively passionate drivers and antagonists who cause the crashes at the centre of their plots. In this sense, they participate in the broader discourse of the road in the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s that was also contained in city planning documents such as *The Major Traffic Street Plan*, as well as in driving manuals such as *Sportsmanlike Driving*. Both Hammett and Chandler’s novels suggest that accidents occur when drivers undertake journeys that are unknown, without a predetermined outcome. In doing so, they endorse the removal of such circulation from the city and contribute to the production of a predictable set of movements on the road that is envisioned in city planning documents of the 1920s. However, these novels also contain the suggestion that the order of the road might be being

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asserted against something else, something significantly more disruptive than the passions of unrequited love. In particular, *The Big Sleep* suggests that the order of the road is being asserted against the apparent disorder of the *street* – a disorder that Chandler’s novel is simultaneously attracted to and seeks to arrest.

At the conclusion of *The Big Sleep*, there is more distance from the assertion of the authority of state institutions than in Hammett’s texts. Marlowe is cynical about the truth of the account that the police offer for the murder of Geiger and Brody and the disappearance of Owen Taylor, and when he finally works out the truth regarding the disappearance of Rusty Regan and confronts Vivian with it, he does a deal with her in order to keep it from anyone else, including the police. *The Big Sleep* thus has a far more ambiguous relationship to the institutions of the law and its self-possessive subject than *Red Harvest* or *The Dain Curse*. Marlowe remains outside of the law, ‘part of the nastiness now’.\(^\text{120}\)

Where the conclusion of the other two novels involves the institutions of state justice ensuring that punishment is meted out for the various disruptions to the order of things that have occurred in the narratives, Chandler’s text offers no such comfort. *The Big Sleep*’s reluctance to endorse the state institutions that formally maintain order places it at a distance from them, suggesting a scepticism about their order of the road, of *The Major Traffic Street Plan*. However, Chandler does still contribute to the solving of the crime that is a disruption to the road’s order of predictable, uniform movement, and he allows the police to proceed along these lines. This leaves the novel caught between a sense that these disruptions might represent something deeper than an abnormality in the order of circulation, and the reassertion of it.

The sense in Chandler that something escapes from the capture of institutional justice might be explained by reference to the importance of the street in his novel. In *The Big Sleep*, the street is always in excess of its capacity to be governed, to be a place of predictable, uniform movement. For example, when Marlowe chases Carol Lundgren after he shoots Brody, the novel describes ‘[a] tall hatless figure in a leather jerkin was running diagonally across the street between the parked cars. The figure turned and flame spurted from it. Two heavy hammers hit the stucco wall beside me. The figure ran on, dodged between two

\(^\text{120}\) Chandler, *The Big Sleep*, pp. 250-251.
cars, vanished'.\textsuperscript{121} When Marlowe eventually catches Lundgren and forces him into his car, he remarks that he ‘looked back through the window. The whine of the siren was very loud now. Two red lights swelled in the middle of the street. They grew larger and blended into one and the car rushed by in a wild flurry of sound’.\textsuperscript{122}

Thus, in these scenes, it is the \textit{street} that is the space of criminality, the \textit{street} that needs to be governed, rather than the automobile. It is the street in which Lundgren ‘[runs] on, dodge[s] between two cars, [and] vanishe[s]’. Whilst \textit{The Big Sleep} identifies the street as a space in need of ordering, this order is not directly that of the state and the police. The street might be dominated by the ‘wild flurry of sound’ coming from the police’s sirens, but Marlowe is not particularly interested in this assertion of order on the street, as he helps Lundgren to avoid arrest. This again illustrates a tension in \textit{The Big Sleep}: Marlowe wants order on the street, but he does not (quite) want the order of the state and its self-possessive subjects.

For Marlowe, the street is also where the truth is, more so than in the institutions of the city. For example, in chapter 30, upon Marlowe leaving the Missing Persons Bureau, the novel describes the following scene:

I went down out of the City Hall and got my car from the parking lot and drove home to the Hobart Arms. I lay down on the bed with my coat off and stared at the ceiling and listened to the traffic sounds on the street outside and watched the sun move slowly across a corner of the ceiling. I tried to go to sleep, but sleep didn’t come. I got up and took a drink, although it was the wrong time of day, and lay down again. I still couldn’t go to sleep. My brain ticked like a clock. I sat up on the side of the bed and stuffed a pipe and said out loud:

“That old buzzard knows something”.\textsuperscript{123}

\textsuperscript{121} Ibid., p. 104.
\textsuperscript{122} Ibid., p. 106.
\textsuperscript{123} Ibid., p. 224.
Thus, there is a sense in *The Big Sleep* that the street somehow exceeds the institutions of justice and their self-determining subject. Marlowe listens ‘to the traffic sounds on the street outside’ and is unable to sleep, dissatisfied with the police’s refusal to investigate Regan’s disappearance any further. The sound of the street insists itself upon Marlowe; the truth of the matter is always more complicated than institutional justice will allow, and for Marlowe, that more-complicated truth is to be found in the street. There is an attraction to the street in Chandler, even as his narratives progress toward the ordering of it – toward the production of self-determining subjects and toward the possession of indeterminate signifiers.

Moments after the description of Marlowe being unable to sleep as he listens to the sound of the street, he replays the events of the novel in his mind. Here he remembers ‘getting out at an all night drugstore and phoning Bernie Ohls that I had killed a man at Realito and was on my way over to Wilde”s house with Eddie Mars’ wife, who had seen me do it’.\(^{124}\) Marlowe is thus returned to the street, which always seems to know more about what has happened than can be captured by the institutions of state justice (or, for that matter, by the narratives of these texts themselves). Indeed, it is by returning to ‘the quiet opulent streets’ with Carmen that Marlowe discovers the truth of Regan’s disappearance, as she guides him down ‘a narrow dirt road’ and then attempts to shoot him for rejecting her advances, which confirms Marlowe’s suspicion about how Regan died.\(^{125}\) Marlowe thus eventually solves the mystery of the missing Regan, who he discovers was killed by the jilted Carmen. However, he never conclusively works out how Owen Taylor dies. This, perhaps, is something that the street knows. The street is where the truth is, and the street is a space that escapes from the institutions of the state. Marlowe is attracted to the street as a space of truth and escape, even as he participates in the partial arrest of that escape via his work as a private detective. Indeed, the follow-up to *The Big Sleep, Farewell, My Lovely* (1940), commences with the seeming disorder of the streets of Central Avenue, where a commotion on the sidewalk begins Marlowe’s search for order, further suggesting that the street is the ultimate target of order in Chandler’s work.

\(^{124}\) Ibid., p. 225.  
\(^{125}\) Ibid., p. 236.
In this chapter, I have outlined the historical emergence of the road as a space of circulation and thus of order. Further, I have argued that driver-detective fictions of Hammett and Chandler contribute to the legitimation of the road as a space of circulatory order by insisting, in moments of anxiety regarding the coherence of the road, that the road can be governed via the uniform and predictable movement of vehicles. I have also argued that this assertion of order occurs via the production of self-determining subjects, as the automobile accidents at the centre of the plots of *The Dain Curse* and *The Big Sleep* are attributed to excessive, inadequately governed passions. Driving thus becomes a matter of personal responsibility, as the purging of unknown movement from the streets in these novels participates in the discourse of city planning and contributes to the realisation of the dream of predictable, circulatory movement that is found in *The Major Traffic Street Plan*. Moreover, I have argued that The Op and Marlowe work to discern the causes of these crashes so that they can restore order in these novels. I have suggested that this restoration of order occurs via the presentation of these crashes as events in need of reading. In turn, I have suggested that the restoration of order to key signifiers in these novels mirrors the restoration of order to the road: it is by deducing the forces at work that have caused these crashes, and thus made the city dangerous and potentially unnavigable, that the city becomes readable and safely navigable again. Finally, I have argued that *The Big Sleep* suggests that, beyond the disordering effects of automobile accidents, the order of the road might in fact be asserted against the life of the street. It is toward a more comprehensive investigation of what the life of the street might be, and how it is that the automobile-road and its order might be asserted against it, that I turn in the next chapter.
Chapter 2
‘They got everything’: The History of the Street in Chester Himes’s 
*If He Hollers Let Him Go* (1945), Richard Wright’s 
*Native Son* (1940), and Ann Petry’s *The Street* (1946)

‘The automobile has restored a way of life in which the individual may live in a friendly neighbourhood’ – Clay Commission Report to President Eisenhower on a National Highway Program, 1955

The History of the Street in *Hollers, Native Son, and The Street*

As we saw in the previous chapter, in *The Big Sleep*, the order of the road is asserted against the life of the street, as the road seeks to bring predictable, uniform movement to the street’s unpredictability. Chandler’s novel is also attracted to the street, even as it attempts to discipline it into the circulatory movement of the road. The street is a space of escape in *The Big Sleep* – of a truth that is not captured by the institutions of state justice. *The Big Sleep’s* fascination with the street – with it as the target of the road’s discipline, as well as with it as something that escapes the knowledge captured in state institutions – raises a number of questions. Firstly: what is it about the street that makes it the target of the disciplinary, circulatory regime of the road? Secondly, what exactly is happening on the street that escapes from the knowledge contained in state institutions, and how does this relate to the driver as a figure of self-determination?

In order to begin to answer these questions, we can turn to another novelist of early twentieth century Los Angeles: Chester Himes. Himes’s first published novel, *If He Hollers Let Him Go* (1945), tells the story of Bob Jones, an African-American dockyard worker in wartime Los Angeles. In its engagement with driver-detective fictions, *Hollers* exposes the centrality of race to the circulatory order of the road. In Himes’s novel, the road is imposed upon the street, and the function of this is to break up the black social life of the street, as is apparent in Jones’s waking from his dreams of the street into his nightmare life on the road. This has its historical analogue in the vibrant jazz scene of Central Avenue in Los Angeles, which was brought to a close with the development of automobile culture, and which symbolically concludes in *Hollers* with Jones’s
Like Himes’s *Hollers*, Richard Wright’s *Native Son* is also structured by the relationship of the street to the road. Like Los Angeles, Chicago also undertook an investigation into the explosion of automobile usage in the city in the 1920s, with Miller McClintock writing the *Report and Recommendations of the Metropolitan Street Traffic Survey*, published in 1926. Again, like Los Angeles, this document symbolised a process of suburban white flight, which is registered in *Native Son*. Published in 1940, *Native Son* identifies that the order of the road is being asserted against the black life of the street, as is apparent in the contrast between the streets where Bigger lives and the suburban home of the Daltons. Moreover, in Bigger’s murders of Mary and Bessie, Wright’s novel plays out the tragic violence that underpins the possessive self-determination of the driver, as it is through Bigger’s status as a driver that his responsibility for these incidents is constructed. Finally, Wright also suggests that the life of the street persists, even as it comes under duress from the order of the road, as Bigger’s lawyer explains to him in the final scene of the novel that, in the absence of institutional justice, the streets are all he has.

Ann Petry’s *The Street* (1946) also understands the road and its automobile as disruptive to predominantly black neighbourhoods. Like Los Angeles and Chicago, New York also had a plan for the automobile-led expansion of the city, the 1928 *Regional Plan of New York and Its Environs*. In its contrasting images of suburban Connecticut, which was considered part of the wider metropolitan region in the *Regional Plan*, and urban New York, Petry’s novel represents this development. Set in 1940s Harlem, *The Street* also refigures the deployment of the automobile as a symbol of violence. Petry’s novel identifies the violence of the automobile as its disruption to the social life of the street, rather than the temporary rupture in the smooth circulations of the city that was caused by a crash. Like Wright, Petry links the violent imposition of the automobile upon the street to the white suburbs, noting through its representation of the Chandler family that it is via the automobile that this white flight occurs.

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Again, like Wright, Petry also links the automobile to the proprietary subjectivity of self-determination, particularly via its depiction of Mrs Chandler, who names and claims objects in the landscape as she drives.\(^2\) Petry’s novel also adds New York to the list of cities where the black social life of the street was being disrupted by the automobile and its road, suggesting that this was a nationwide phenomenon that occurred in response to the communities formed via the Great Migration.

In this chapter, I attempt to illuminate the ways that *Hollers*, *Native Son*, and *The Street* represent the historical life of the street that the automobile culture of the road was imposed upon and sought to disperse. Indeed, if the city planning documents that underpin the geography of these novels did not explicitly state their intention as being automobile-led white flight, the report undertaken by the Clay Commission for President Eisenhower into the possibility of a national highway program in 1955 came closer to doing so, declaring allusively that ‘[t]he automobile has restored a way of life in which the individual may live in a friendly neighbourhood’.\(^3\) That is, the automobile restored a way of life, and a space for living, that was separate from the growing urban areas formed by the Great Migration: South Central in Los Angeles, the South Side in Chicago, and Harlem in New York. This is the story that *Hollers*, *Native Son*, and *The Street* tell; that the developing automobile order in America functioned to break up the black life of the street – the gathering together, as we will see in the following chapter, of black workers in the street.

In undertaking this analysis, I draw three novels thus far unconsidered in road narrative scholarship into its consideration. Indeed, *Hollers* continues something of the representation of the road found in hard-boiled fiction. Whilst Himes’s novel was critically received as a descendant of *Native Son*, Robert E. Skinner also notes the influence of Chandler on *Hollers*. In particular, Skinner highlights the resonances of the ‘tough, cynical narration’ in *Hollers*, and its ‘intimate knowledge of Los Angeles’, which ‘surfaces in the same concrete

rendering of the city’ as in Chandler’s work. Though critics have noted the centrality of the road to Himes’s ‘concrete rendering’ of Los Angeles in Hollers, there has been no extensive critical reading of its role in the novel. Hollers returns again and again to the road; in depicting Jones’s drives to work, his avoiding work, the harassment he receives from the police when he is out driving, his leisure time, and his attempted escape at the end of the novel. Yet in spite of this focus on the road – in spite of this being a road narrative – Jones never really goes anywhere. Jones’s Los Angeles is, as Blake Allmendinger puts it, a ‘web that entangles the hero and limits his freedom’. Roads are not liberation; they are imprisonment. Drawing on Chandler’s narration of Los Angeles’ roads, Himes thus writes a road novel that depicts the road’s imprisoning destruction of the street.

Like Hollers and Los Angeles, Native Son focuses on the order of the road in Chicago, which is perhaps most obviously apparent in Bigger’s job as a chauffeur to the wealthy Dalton family. Again, similarly to Hollers, whilst the question of geography in Native Son has been considered, such as by Catherine Jurca, upon whose work I build, the role of the road and the automobile itself in the novel is yet to be explored in any detail. I thus investigate the centrality of the automobile-road to Native Son, suggesting that it represents the self-determination of the driver as a violent, deadly, possessive subjectivity that black Americans are excluded from, since the only type of agency that is attributed to Bigger in the novel is a criminal one. What Bigger has instead – what he has at the beginning and the end of the novel – is the life of the street.

Like Hollers and Native Son, an extensive analysis of the importance of the road to The Street is yet to be undertaken. Lindon Barrett has noted the

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7 In Driving Women, Clarke offers a brief appraisal of automobility in Native Son, noting that ‘the promise of the car fails Bigger’ (2007, p. 68), though she does not link this to the development of the suburbs with the automobile, nor to the life of the street onto which the automobile is imposed.
8 As with Native Son, Clarke touches upon it briefly, noting that it ‘reflects some of the modernist questioning about race, gender, and automobility yet with greater dismay at how little the car has changed things, particularly for African-American women’ (2007, p. 69), though this is again not
centrality of the split between the street and suburbia to the novel, and this and the next chapter expands upon his work in this area. However, Barrett’s consideration of this theme in Petry’s novel nonetheless neglects to consider that the process of suburbanisation was accelerated considerably with the development of mass automobility in the early twentieth century in America. This, I suggest, is something that *The Street* is aware of. Moreover, like *Hollers* and *Native Son*, Petry’s novel suggests that the development of suburban automobile culture was disruptive of and destructive to the black life of the street. This chapter thus builds on the last by highlighting that for Himes, Wright, and Petry, the unpredictable life of the street that *The Big Sleep* identifies as being ordered by the road is the black life of the city streets of America.

**The street life of South Central Los Angeles**

From the 1920s onward, Los Angeles was decentralised by the automobile. This move to the suburbs was a predominantly white phenomenon. Indeed, Bottles cites the ‘availability of inexpensive land and housing as well as technological innovations such as the streetcar and automobile’ as the ‘means by which [white] middle-class Americans could satisfy their desire to live on the periphery’.9 It was the migrations precipitated by the Jim Crow era that led to this suburban white flight. Mark Wild’s *Street Meeting: Multiethnic Neighbourhoods in Early Twentieth-Century Los Angeles* (2005) notes that with ‘the institution of Jim Crow legislation’, a black population of a ‘mere 1,250 in 1890’ in Los Angeles ‘jumped to almost 39,000 forty years later’.10 South Central was a particular focus of black settlement during this early wave of the Great Migration. Wild observes that ‘[b]y the mid-1930s an estimated 27,000 blacks lived along [those] neighbourhoods’.11 Bottles discerns that ‘[t]his influx into the metropolitan area alarmed the largely Midwestern Anglo population and provided an impetus for these whites to move out of older neighbourhoods immediately surrounding the central business district’.12 Indeed, ‘[b]y 1920, 75 percent of all blacks living in Los Angeles resided expanded into a wider analysis of the road system in the novel and its relationship to the subjectivity of the driver.

11 Ibid., p. 33.
in three of the city’s twelve wards’, as ‘[w]hites resisted black expansion into the suburbs through physical intimidation and the use of restrictive covenants forbidding the sale of property to nonwhites’. In response to this influx, then, white residents of the inner-city entered their automobiles, moved to the suburbs, and ensured that African-Americans could not follow them.

African-Americans in Los Angeles were largely confined to the South Central area of the city. Running through the centre of South Central was Central Avenue, which was host to jazz clubs such as the Dunbar Hotel, Club Alabam, the Downbeat, the Lincoln theatre, and the Local 767. Central Avenue cultivated a popular music scene that was pivotal to the social and economic life of South Central. As is explained in Central Avenue Sounds: Jazz in Los Angeles (1998), jazz came to Los Angeles in 1908, with a group of visiting musicians from New Orleans, and gradually established a presence for itself in the bars of Central Avenue over the course of the decade. The Somerville Hotel – later to be renamed the Dunbar Hotel – opened in 1928, to accommodate visiting black musicians and intellectuals who were refused entry to Los Angeles’ white hotels, and which ‘welcome[d] among its first guests W.E.B. DuBois, James Weldon Johnson, Lincoln Steffens, and Charles Chestnut’. The nightlife of Central Avenue flourished in the 1920s, with a ‘number of clubs provid[ing] night-long entertainment most evenings of the week’, as artists such as Louis Armstrong, Count Basie, and Duke Ellington came to town. This trend continued in the 1930s, as ‘the relatively quick rebound of the entertainment scene from the crash of [19]29’ meant that ‘the Avenue continued to offer opportunities to a number of artists, professionals, and entrepreneurs’. Central Avenue’s clubs attracted prosperous, and often predominantly white, custom. Mina Yang notes, quoting Dizzy Gillespie’s trumpeter Clora Bryant:

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13 Ibid., pp. 181-182.
15 Ibid. pp. 5-7, 20.
16 Ibid., p. 9.
18 Bryant, Central Avenue Sounds, p. 10.
Central Avenue closed up when they found out how much money was being dropped over there and city hall started sending the cops out there to heckle the white people (…). They found out there was more action on the Avenue than the clubs were getting out West, or northeast, you know, Hollywood.  

Yang also draws on the observations of another of Central Avenue’s musicians, Frank Morgan, regarding the contribution of white custom to the Avenue’s economy. Morgan suggests that it was “[a]t least 60 percent of it, maybe more. The prices certainly weren’t geared to the people of the local community. You know $10 and two-drink minimums. It was stickup prices”. Similarly, “[s]axophonist Marshall Royal describes the Apex, one of the largest clubs on the avenue, as “a black-owned place that would have 90 percent white [audiences]. The blacks didn’t have the money to spend”.

The musicians that populated the clubs of Central Avenue emphasise the importance of its street culture to the jazz scene there. Multi-reed instrumentalist Jack Kelson, who played with a number of artists in the clubs along Central Avenue, described the ‘spot in front of the Dunbar Hotel’ as his ‘favourite spot on Central Avenue’, because to him it was ‘the hippest, most intimate, key spot of all of the activity. That’s where all of the night people hung out: the sportsmen, the businessmen, the dancers, everybody in show business (…) that’s where everybody congregated’. Clora Bryant recalls a similar scene, remarking that “[t]he guys were out on the street, all of the night people: the pimps and the hustlers and the ladies of the evening. There were a lot of musicians. My brother introduced me to some of the guys he thought I should meet. We stood around while Mel talked with them, the guys hanging on the corner.”

The social life of the street on Central Avenue that Kelson and Bryant recall was not allowed to persist. George Lipsitz explains:

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20 Ibid.
21 Ibid.
22 Bryant, *Central Avenue Sounds*, pp. 203, 216.
23 Ibid., p. 350.
[f]ederal highway projects combined with government housing and home loan policies that favoured development in suburban over urban locations. New shopping malls in outlying areas lured customers away from downtowns by offering shoppers branch stores with free parking (...) Migration to the suburbs pulled customers away from traditional sites of public entertainment (...) automobile-based suburban sprawl left inner-city areas like Central Avenue and Watts as spaces of last resort for people unable to escape to the suburbs.  

Suburbanization, then, contributed to the break-up of Central Avenue as a cultural hub. Bottles outlines the specifics of this process. He notes that ‘[d]uring the twenties (...) single-family dwellings accounted for 60 percent of all newly constructed residential units in the United states’, and that ‘[a]s a consequence, America’s suburban population for the first time grew at a faster rate than that of the core cities’.  

Los Angeles ‘paved the way’ for this, as it ‘deconcentrate[d] sooner and more fully than other metropolises’, with the ‘overall population density of American urban areas’ in 1970 nearly matching that of Los Angeles in 1940.  

Further, in 1928, the owner of Bullock’s Department Store, John Bullock, set the precedent for moving out of the downtown area, as he decided to ‘locate a major branch of his company on Wilshire Boulevard, a few miles west of the downtown commercial district’. This meant that his store was ‘close[r] to suburban customers’, and ‘well removed from the congestion of the central business district’, with a large and free car park opposite it. Its popularity meant that ‘[w]ithin five years, 88 percent of all new retail stores were built in the suburbs’. By 1939, the market share of department store revenue for the downtown area had dropped from three quarters to 54 percent. Consequently, by 1939, ‘only 15 percent of those living 7.5 to 10 miles outside of the downtown

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24 George Lipsitz, Midnight at the Barrelhouse: The Johnny Otis Story (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), p. 52.
25 Bottles, Los Angeles and the Automobile, p. 190.
26 Ibid.
27 Ibid., p. 194.
28 Ibid.
29 Ibid.
30 Ibid., pp. 194-195.
area bothered to visit that district on a daily basis’.\textsuperscript{31} As Bottles notes, quoting E.E. East, an engineer for the Automobile Club of Southern California, downtown was “rapidly becoming just another centre, with few notable characteristics to differentiate it from others”.\textsuperscript{32}

All of this contributed to the demise of Central Avenue. In the post-war period, following the Supreme Court ruling that restrictive covenants were unconstitutional, a number of South Central residents moved to the suburbs, such as West Adams and Compton, where they could buy a home that was better than their one in South Central, with mortgages from African American lenders such as Golden State Mutual Life Insurance.\textsuperscript{33} Sides explains that this ‘most often meant that black business owners moved elsewhere’, contributing to ‘the isolation of poor black people along Central Avenue’.\textsuperscript{34} White customers also began to disappear, fleeing the street life of Central Avenue to the automobile culture of Hollywood.\textsuperscript{35} Bette Yarbrough Cox outlines that these customers began to frequent ‘the Sunset Strip and other Hollywood and Beverly Hills nightclubs’ instead, closer as they were to the suburbs of west Los Angeles.\textsuperscript{36}

In addition to the drain on Central Avenue’s custom by Hollywood and its surrounding areas, the Los Angeles Police Department also acted as an enforcement arm for suburban sprawl, aggressively patrolling the Avenue and making arrests for nonviolent crimes, seeking to disrupt the Avenue’s culture of interracial mixing.\textsuperscript{37} As a consequence of all of this, Central Avenue’s clubs began to close, including The Plantation, which closed shortly after reopening in 1949, the Downbeat Club, which went out of business in 1950, and Club Alabam, which had entered decline by 1952, as customers were drawn away by the suburban arrangement of city life.\textsuperscript{38} As I will later argue, this hostility toward the Avenue on behalf of the LAPD was perhaps because it represented precisely the kind of

\textsuperscript{31} Ibid., p. 203.
\textsuperscript{32} Ibid., p. 195.
\textsuperscript{33} Josh Sides, \textit{L.A. City Limits: African American Los Angeles from the Great Depression to the Present} (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2003), pp. 120-122.
\textsuperscript{34} Ibid., p. 125.
\textsuperscript{38} Yang, ‘A Thin Blue Line’, p. 231.
(seemingly) disordered movement that automobile culture sought to rectify. When on Central Avenue, the white patrons of its jazz bars were not part of the official, sanctioned circulations of the road. Rather, they were off the road, harder to monitor and to regulate. Central Avenue was a threat to the system of circulation that was the road in early twentieth-century Los Angeles because it lured white subjects away from this ordered system of movement and its sanctioned entertainments such as the drive-thru, into jazz clubs that did not make them into self-regulating subjects in the way that the automobile did.

The dream of the street, the nightmare of the road

The demise of Central Avenue is registered in Chester Himes’s *If He Hollers Let Him Go*. Himes’s novel tells the story of Bob Jones, an African-American man who has moved to wartime Los Angeles because of the promise of work in its flourishing industrial sector. Across the course of the novel, Jones must navigate the insidious and not so insidious racism of the city (much of which he experiences on the road) and he subsequently ends up being forced into the army as punishment for a false allegation of rape that is made by his white colleague. Himes’s novel represents the road as a racially hostile space. One of the ways that *Hollers* depicts the road as a white culture is through the association of infrastructure and whiteness. Himes’s Los Angeles is a city in which the infrastructure is saturated in whiteness. Gilbert H. Muller notes that Jones’s observations of the ‘California sunshine’, which he describes as ‘bright (…) It lay in the road like a white, frozen brilliance’ present a vision where ‘[n]ature itself seems to be ominously and eternally white’.  

On his drive to work, Jones witnesses ‘huge industrial plants flanking the ribbon of road – shipyards, refineries, oil wells, steel mills, construction companies – the thousands of rushing workers, the lowhanging barrage balloons, [and] the close hard roar of Diesel trucks’.  

Beyond the evident function of these industrial plants in the Second World War, what they reveal is the broader raciality of the Los Angeles infrastructure. Jones describes these things in great detail, in spite of his claim that he cannot ‘see’ them. This creates the sense of an awareness of things that

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are not for him, and within this is the suggestion that the infrastructure of Los Angeles is bound up with whiteness. This is later emphasised when it is the ‘bright (...) white’ sunshine that lights up the shipyards, making ‘colours seem (...) brighter’ as Jones drives along the harbour road. The material infrastructure of California absorbs and radiates a whiteness that shines over the state. The circulations of the city are imbued with a whiteness that they both absorb and radiate.

Jones discovers that roads are what he describes as ‘racial’ because they function to destroy the black social life of the street. The road’s desire to destroy the street is apparent in Jones’s dreams, which represent a memory of the social life of the street that was under attack by automobile culture at the time of the novel’s publication. In the first one, Jones dreams that he

was lying in the middle of Main Street downtown in front of the Federal Building and two poor peckerwoods in overalls were standing over me beating me with lengths of rubber hose (...) Somebody laughed and I looked around and saw two policemen standing by a squad car to one side nudging each other and laughing. There was no one else on the street.

In this dream, Jones is being beaten in the street by two white people, whilst the police watch on and laugh. Importantly, the police are ‘standing by a squad car’ as they do this, suggesting firstly that the violent destruction of black street life was institutionally endorsed, and secondly that it was related to the life of the automobile.

In Jones’s second dream, he cannot find his partner, Alice, in the drugstore where they are shopping. Jones goes ‘outside and [sees] her up on the other side of the street about half a block ahead. Off to her right was a weedy park that slanted down to a river and when I crossed the street I saw Alice turn into the park and I hurried to catch up with her’. Upon catching up with her, he discovers that ‘[h]er head and shoulders were the same but her eyes were closed and her

41 Ibid., p. 45.
42 Ibid., p. 84.
43 Ibid., p. 124.
body had shrunk until it was no more than a foot long and she was dead'. In the third dream, Jones imagines ‘that a white boy and a coloured boy got to fighting on the sidewalk’, which concludes with the white boy ‘chasing the coloured boy and stabbing him to death with a quarter-inch blade and laughing like it was funny as hell’. In the fourth one, Jones kills Johnny Stoddart, after which he ‘wanted to run and leap and shout and roll in the goddamned street. I walked past houses and felt good, fine, wonderful’, until he is caught by a Marine.

In each of Jones’s dreams, then, his life on the street is violently disrupted – by the police, by death, or by a figure of white authority. His dreams contain a memory of the street as a space that is violently interrupted, with the violence of these images linking them to the violent representation of the automobile in Hammett and Chandler. The violence that is occurring to Jones on the street is the violence of the automobile that the two policemen stand beside in his first dream. This transition from the street to the road is mirrored in the narrative itself, as Jones consistently awakes from his dreams of the street into his life, the nightmare of the road. Almost immediately after waking from these dreams, Jones enters his car to drive to work. Once he has, Jones cannot enjoy ‘the scramble in the early morning sun, the tight competition for a twenty-foot lead on a thirty-mile highway’, because ‘to [him] it was racial’. The jockeying for position that occurs on the drive to work is an expression of the racial hierarchy of the nation, something that is repeated in images of cars passing him (he stationary whilst the white drivers are in motion), and of other drivers cutting him up. For example, Jones is unable to drive over a crossing over which a group of white people are walking deliberately slowly, which causes him to feel as though ‘[m]y arms were rubbery and my fingers numb; I was weak as if I’d been heaving sacks of cement all day in the sun’. When on the road, Jones also worries that he might get into a ‘battle royal with some cracker motor cycle cop’, furthering the idea that the road is a nightmare space of racialised violence.

The street is the target of the road; the nightmare of the road is imposed

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44 Ibid.
46 Ibid., p. 245.
47 Ibid., p. 17.
48 Ibid., p. 16.
49 Ibid., p. 12.
on the dream of the street. This is further evidenced in the animosity of the novel’s white characters toward Central Avenue. Early on in the novel, when Jones has just parked after arriving late for work, he notes that ‘[a] guard standing near by leered at me. “What'd y'all do las' night, boy? I bet y'all had a ball down on Central Avenue”’. Central Avenue is a place that causes anger in the guard, who ‘leer[s]’ at Jones, and which is marked by excess. The guard attributes Jones’s lateness to his alleged trip to Central Avenue, and describes it as a place where he expects Jones ‘had a ball’. Central Avenue is unlike the order of the car, exemplified by the parking that Jones has just undertaken in this scene, where Jones is made to move his car after he parks in a space ‘reserved for company officials’. In contrast to this order, the guard characterises Central Avenue as a space that exceeds its boundaries, spilling over into the working day.

Central Avenue was attractive to Los Angeles’ white population, as was highlighted earlier in the chapter, and this is something that Hollers acknowledges. For example, when Jones’s partner, Alice, remarks that she ‘want[s] to go slumming down on Central Avenue’, Jones replies: ‘[y]ou sound just like the other white people’. There is an acknowledgement, then, that there is something exploitative about Los Angeles' white population ‘slumming it’ on Central Avenue; that they are there for the apparent authenticity of its poverty. Here, the Central Avenue of Hollers mirrors that described by the musicians who performed in its jazz clubs, as it is one with white patrons in its bars. The intense police presence on Central Avenue – ‘the cops out there to heckle the white people’ as Bryant puts it – is likewise present in Himes’s text, as is indicated by the ‘cop [who] grabbed [a pedestrian] for jay-walking and started writing out a ticket’ when Jones is on the Avenue. Thus, the Central Avenue of Hollers is much like the Central Avenue described by Bryant, Royal, and Kelson. It is a place where the white population of Los Angeles were being drawn into its street life, into the world of the ‘gamblers and stooges’ and the ‘crap game in the rear’ of the barber’s shop.

Black migration out of South Central is also present in Hollers. Alice and

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50 Ibid., p. 18.
51 Ibid.
52 Ibid., p. 65.
53 Ibid., p. 51.
54 Ibid.
her family live on the ‘West Side’, and they are symbols of black migration out of South Central confinement. As Jones puts it, ‘[w]hen you asked a Negro where he lived, and he said on the West Side, that was supposed to mean he was better than the Negroes who lived on the South Side’.  

Jones expands on this when Alice asks him to take her to a club on the Avenue, remarking that ‘she’d been trying to get me to take her to [it] ever since it opened; I suppose she figured that the people in her class didn't patronise such places and the only way she’d get there was for me to take her’.  

This sense that a certain class of black person is confined to South Central is clear in a scene where Jones is in west Los Angeles, when he remarks: ‘I knew if I stayed there for any length of time they’d call the police. Any Negro in the neighbourhood after dark was a “suspicious person”’. As Kelly Lytle Hernández explains, during this time, the residents of South Central were ‘[o]nly allowed to leave the district during working hours, [meaning that] black men and women crossed the avenue’s boundaries in the early morning hours and returned before dark. To remain beyond the boundaries after dark was to be policed’.  

Confined to South Central, Central Avenue is thus a space where Jones spends much of his time, frequenting the Lincoln Theatre, as well as enjoying its street life, which makes him feel ‘tall, handsome, keen’. Indeed, at the conclusion of the novel, when Jones is on the run, he reflects that ‘[i]nstinct carried me over toward Central, into the heart of the ghetto. I parked in a dark spot in the middle of the block back of the Dunbar Hotel’. This, Jones remarks, is because if he ‘had to be caught [he’d] rather be caught right there in the heart of the Negro district’. He is caught moments later, having travelled only a few miles further. Jones’s instinctive return to Central Avenue – indeed to the Dunbar, the hub of street life in the district at the time – coupled to his dreams of street life, implicitly acknowledge that it is the social life of the street that the automobile culture of the road is imposed to break up. Jones’s life concludes on Central Avenue with his arrest. This is perhaps to say that the life of Central Avenue

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55 Ibid., p. 58.
56 Ibid., p. 55.
57 Ibid., p. 173.
58 Hernández, City of Inmates, p. 164.
59 Himes, Hollers, pp. 6, 51.
60 Ibid., p. 239.
61 Ibid., p. 240.
symbolically concludes with Jones’s arrest, which occurs when a ‘police cruiser pull[s] up beside’ him.\textsuperscript{62} The nightmare of the road, as symbolised by the police cruiser, that first symbol of white authority in Jones’s dreams of the street, is thus imposed again on the dream of the street. Central Avenue is a space of sanctuary, the place where Jones escapes to when he leaves work after being beaten by his colleague in a racially charged attack. His arrest on Central Avenue suggests that he has now been found; Central Avenue will no longer be a space of escape. The presence of the ‘police cruiser’ in Central Avenue mirrors this capture – its street life has now been captured by the automobile; its drawing the city’s white population into its street life, a place where they went ‘slumming’, made it a threat that had to be curtailed.

\section*{Chicago, the South Side, and Suburbanisation}

Like \textit{Hollers}, \textit{Native Son} also depicts the road as a form of order that is imposed upon the street. Wright’s novel famously portrays the death of the wealthy Mary Dalton at the hands of its protagonist Bigger Thomas, followed by Bigger’s rape and murder of his girlfriend, Bessie Mears. This violence has understandably been the focus of much critical attention on the novel. Catherine Jurca observes that ‘[f]or many critics, the most troubling aspect of \textit{Native Son} has been precisely the degree to which it insists upon the destructive effects of white racism on black personality, culture, and community.’\textsuperscript{63} Criticism of \textit{Native Son} has tended to focus either on Bigger’s disconnection from ‘“the survival values” of a black folk tradition’, as with James Baldwin and Houston A. Baker Jr.’s writing on the novel, or on Wright’s critique of community and the ‘folk tradition’ it provides, such as Carla Capetti’s analysis of the ‘Communist Party in the North’ and ‘black family life and tradition in the South’ in Wright’s work.\textsuperscript{64}

It is in this context that Jurca positions her own intervention, which insists upon the interrelated importance of ‘spatial and racial politics’ to \textit{Native Son}.\textsuperscript{65} Jurca suggests that racism perhaps appears ‘as the defining fact of black life that eclipses everything else’ in the Chicago of \textit{Native Son} because African-

\textsuperscript{62} Ibid., p. 241.
\textsuperscript{64} Ibid., pp. 101-102.
\textsuperscript{65} Ibid., p. 103.
Americans are confined by ‘hostile white neighbourhoods’ to ‘the Black Belt’, the predominantly black community of Chicago’s South Side.\textsuperscript{66} As Bigger observes early on in the novel: ‘We live here and they live there. We black and they white. They got things and we ain’t. They do things and we can’t’.\textsuperscript{67} Jurca goes on to read \textit{Native Son} as a novel that refuses the confinement of ghettoisation and its attendant compensation of enforced “community”. This is exemplified by Bigger’s murder of Mary, which for Jurca ‘signif[ies] less the desire to harm white people physically than to lay claim to white space’\textsuperscript{68}. Thus, Jurca suggests that the critical focus on Bigger’s rejection of black community and his sense of being totally engulfed by white society has missed that this rejection and sense of engulfment is intimately bound up with the spatial politics of the Chicago in which Bigger lives.

Jurca highlights the importance of city space, and specifically the process of suburbanisation, to the narrative of \textit{Native Son}. What is absent from her discussion, however, is the road that is the precondition of this suburbanisation. Like Los Angeles, Chicago’s population also boomed as a consequence of the Great Migration. As Marcia Chatelain documents, the African-American population of Chicago ‘grew from 44,000 in 1910 to 234,000 in 1940’.\textsuperscript{69} The space in which many of these newcomers settled was a region of the city known as the South Side. As Chatelain explains, this was ‘initially a small enclave south of Chicago’s downtown that grew southward from nine blocks between Twenty-Second and Thirty-Fifth Streets to an area encompassing seventy-three blocks to Ninety-Fifth Street along Lake Michigan to the east’\textsuperscript{70}.

The South Side soon become an area of black confinement. Jurca outlines that in Chicago, ‘[t]he natural trajectory of human movement was from the country to the city and then to the suburb’.\textsuperscript{71} People moving to Chicago would first live in the city, before moving to the suburbs, to what Jurca describes as ‘the “commuter zone,” where social, economic, and geographical arrival converged’.\textsuperscript{72} This movement to the suburbs was largely denied to the black population of Chicago.

\textsuperscript{66} Ibid., p. 102.
\textsuperscript{68} Jurca, \textit{White Diaspora}, p. 115.
\textsuperscript{70} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{71} Jurca, \textit{White Diaspora}, p. 109.
\textsuperscript{72} Ibid.
Craig Turnbull notes that ‘[s]uburbanisation during the 1920s was particularly pronounced in Chicago, where white middle-class acceptance of the suburban ideal offered by real estate businessmen was facilitated by the automobile’.73 Indeed, during the 1920s, ‘the population of the city of Chicago increased by 25 percent, though the combined suburban population beyond the city limits increased by almost 60 percent’.74 African-Americans were largely excluded from this suburban migration, particularly via practices such as “redlining”. Redlining was undertaken by the Home Owners Loan Corporation (HOLC), which, ‘between July 1933 and June 1935 (...) supplied over $3 billion for mortgages on one-tenth of all owner-occupied, nonfarm residence in the United States’.75 However, these loans were systematically denied to African-Americans by the grading of their neighbourhoods as “red” – ‘characterised by poor maintenance or vandalism’ and thus unworthy of financial assistance.76 Thus, as in Los Angeles, automobile-led white flight occurred in Chicago from the 1920s onward, with Chicago’s African-American population excluded from the economy that supported this movement.

Like Los Angeles’ Major Traffic Street Plan, the suburbanisation of Chicago was similarly represented by city planning documents, such as the 1909 Plan of Chicago and the 1926 Report and Recommendations of the Metropolitan Street Traffic Survey, which was assembled by Miller McClintock, architect of the 1925 manual for pedestrian conduct in Los Angeles, Street Traffic Control. Where the Plan of Chicago could largely only anticipate the impact of the automobile on city life, commenting that ‘the increasing use of the automobile [has] brought within the sphere of Chicago’s dominating influence the towns and country for a radius of at least sixty miles from the geographical centre’, Report and Recommendations sought to address the problems that the explosion in automobile ownership in Chicago in the 1920s – from less than 10,000 in 1909 to 340,000 by 1925 – had brought about.77 For white, automobile-owning

74 Ibid.
75 Ibid., p. 256.
76 Ibid.
77 Daniel H. Burnham, Edward H. Bennett, and Charles Moore, ‘Plan of Chicago’, Archive.org, Chicago, 1909 <https://archive.org/download/planofchicago00burnuoft/planofchicago00burnuoft.pdf> [accessed May 23 2019], p. 46. See also ‘Spot Map Showing Location of Child Pedestrian
suburban residents commuting to downtown, the Report and Recommendations sought to ensure a similarly smooth flow of traffic into and out of central Chicago as did The Major Traffic Street Plan in central Los Angeles. To combat congestion, McClintock recommended the standardisation of signs and signals, improved enforcement of traffic law, the creation of a traffic engineering division in the Department of Public Works, which would continue to study accidents and congestion to improve city planning and regulation, and an improved system of through streets. Like Los Angeles, McClintock’s plan was thus for a city with a smooth circulation of automobiles, driven by responsible, self-sufficient drivers.


Native Son and the tragic self-determination of the driver

The narrative of Native Son is underpinned by the geography of white flight and the transformation of Chicago into an automobilecentric city. For example, the road is that which allows the Daltons to live in the suburbs – indeed, it is why they require Bigger to work as their chauffeur. Further, Bigger’s drives with the Daltons suggest that the subjectivity of the driver is inseparable from the possessive subjectivity of the suburban homeowner, and that Bigger is excluded from this self-determination. Following Mary’s death, the question of Bigger’s agency is constructed explicitly in relation to the car: “Why did you leave an unprotected white girl alone in a car with a drunken Negro?”, the coroner asks Jan. Thus, I suggest that what Wright’s novel highlights is the violence of, and the violent exclusion of black Americans from, the self-determining subjectivity of the suburban driver. In turn, Bigger’s murders of Mary and Bessie give graphic, brutal detail to the violence that underpins the possessive, self-determining subjectivity of the driver.

Like Jones’s dreams, the narrative transition of Native Son indicates a material one: the imposition of the road upon the street. In Wright’s novel, the imposition of the road is part of the development of the narrative itself. For example, early on in Native Son, Bigger is outside of the order of the road, and instead belongs to the street, as we find him ‘stood on the corner in the sunshine,

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350 Wright, Native Son, p. 348.
watching cars and people pass’. Indeed, the novel makes the split between the road and the street clear when Bigger and Gus witness

A long sleek black car, its fenders glinting like glass in the sun, shot past them at high speed and turn a corner a few blocks away. Bigger pursed his lips and sang:

“Zooooooooom!”

“They got everything,” Gus said.

“They own the world,” Bigger said.

The automobile is thus symbolic of ‘they’ – white American society – ‘own[ing] the world’. The circulatory system of the road is as encompassing as the world itself; Bigger and Gus feel as though there is nothing outside of it. As Ellison will put it in *Invisible Man* just over a decade later, cars ‘circularly swiftly through long stretches of snow-covered landscape lighted here and there by street lamps and the nervously stabbing beams of passing cars’.

The world of ‘white secrets’, then, is one in which ‘an occasional car (…) zoomed past on swift rubber tires. This was a cold and distant world; a world of white secrets carefully guarded’. The world of ‘white secrets’, then, is one in which ‘an occasional car (…) zoomed past on swift rubber tires’, clearly associating the automobile with whiteness and the suburbs. The cars that ‘zoom past’ are headed for the suburbs, suggesting again that the managed regime of speed on the road that The Op and Marlowe seek to restore is something that serves the interests of white suburbia. Thus, the narrative transition of Chicago – from urban streets to suburban roads

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351 Ibid., p. 43.
352 Ibid., p. 52.
354 Wright, *Native Son*, p. 74.
with suburbanisation in the 1920s – is mirrored in the novel itself, which moves from Bigger’s life on the street to his life on the road.

When Bigger gets to the Daltons’ house, Mr Dalton offers him a job as their chauffeur, which Bigger accepts. “They say you can drive a car”, Mr Dalton informs Bigger, “and I’m going to give you a job”.\(^{355}\) Bigger is invigorated by this, remarking that “he had a keen sense of power when driving; the feel of a car added something to him. He loved to press his foot against a pedal and sail along, watching others stand still, seeing the asphalt road unwind under him”.\(^{356}\) However, Bigger is not granted the authority to read and order the landscape that usually comes with being a driver, as with the driver-detective. Indeed, as a chauffeur, it is those who Bigger drives around who give order to the landscape. For example, when Bigger is chauffeuring Mary, the novel depicts the following scene:

“Bigger!”
“Yessum.”
“Turn at this corner and pull up on a side street.”
“Here, mam?”
“Yes; here”.\(^{357}\)

It is Mary, then, who reads the landscape and orders the movement of the car. The sense that the ordering of the environment is an activity reserved for white drivers is reinforced moments later, when Bigger meets Mary’s partner, Jan. When Jan is driving, he does not have to take instruction about how to navigate the city. Instead, he makes these choices himself, ‘head[ing] the car back to the Outer Drive, weaving in and out of the line of traffic. Soon they were speeding along the lake front, past a huge flat sheet of dully gleaming water’.\(^{358}\)

This relationship between driving and possession persists when Bigger chauffeurs Jan and Mary, who name the environment around them as Jan drives:

\(^{355}\) Ibid., p. 81.
\(^{356}\) Ibid., p. 94.
\(^{357}\) Ibid.
\(^{358}\) Ibid., p. 99.
“Isn’t it glorious tonight?” she asked.
“God, yes!” Jan said.
(...)
“That sky!”
“And that water!”
“It’s so beautiful it makes you ache just to look at it,” said Mary.
“This is a beautiful world, Bigger,” Jan said, turning to him “Look at that skyline!”

Mary and Jan order the environment they navigate, naming the sky, the water and the skyline. Indeed, Jan interpellates Bigger into this order, insisting that he look at the skyline. This sense of ownership and ordering of the world is reinforced moments later: “‘We’ll own all that some day, Bigger,” Jan said with a wave of his hand. “After the revolution it’ll be ours’.”

That all of this takes place whilst Mary, Jan, and Bigger are driving is instructive, since it suggests that the landscape has been named and ordered in service of the automobile. Further, it also suggests that this naming and ordering of the landscape in service of the automobile has served the interests of America’s white population, such as the suburban Daltons.

As was noted earlier in the chapter, Bigger’s agency in relation to the death of Mary is explicitly constructed through his subjectivity as a driver. In court, the prosecutor states:

“On the very day that Bigger Thomas was to report to the Dalton home for work, he saw a newsreel in a movie. This newsreel showed Mary Dalton in a bathing suit upon a Florida beach. Jack Harding, a friend of Bigger Thomas, under persistent questioning, admitted that Bigger Thomas was enthralled by the idea of driving such a girl around the city.”

He goes on to remark that ‘Mary Dalton was left alone in that car with this Negro, who had received nothing from her but kindness. From that point onward, we

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359 Ibid.
360 This passage is curiously absent from the Vintage edition of Native Son, though it can be found in Richard Wright, Native Son, And, How “Bigger” Was Born (Cutchogue: Buccaneer Books, 1993), p. 478. All other references to Native Son in this thesis are to the Vintage edition.
have no exact knowledge of what really happened, for we have only this black cur’s bare word for it, and I am convinced that he is not telling us all.\(^{361}\)

Bigger’s alleged sexual crime is inextricable from his subjectivity as a driver: “Bigger Thomas was enthralled by the idea of driving such a girl around the city”. Yet, as the previous scenes of Bigger driving Mary and Jan around make clear, Bigger is excluded from the possessive subjectivity of the driver. As Clarke observes, Bigger ‘comes to learn [that] being a black chauffeur is not quite the same as being a driver (…) The car may provide him with figurative power, but it cannot change the material conditions of his life’.\(^{362}\) Instead, the only determining activity that is attributed to Bigger is a criminal one. As Saidiya Hartman argues in her study of the construction of ante- and post-bellum slave subjectivity, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (1997), ‘criminality is the only form of slave agency recognised by law’.\(^{363}\) Thus, whilst Bigger might attempt to retreat from the street into the subjectivity of the driver, the only will that the institutions of white America are willing to attribute to him is a criminal one. As Kadeshia L. Matthews observes, ‘Bigger attempts to create himself as a man through violence, but those around him will only read that violence by inserting it into the already existing narrative of the black rapist. Thus the violence that ostensibly creates Bigger as a man simultaneously ensures his destruction’.\(^{364}\) Via the incident with Mary, Bigger thus enters the tragic drama of self-determination, and the automobile is central to this drama. Bigger becomes a subject via the automobile, but the only determining activity attributed to him is that of criminality.

Once he is an actor within this drama, Bigger finds it impossible to escape from it, which is something that plays out in his relationship to Bessie. As Jurca notes, Bigger’s ‘excessive brutality [toward Bessie] is the vehicle by which he can free himself from victimisation and affirm his agency. That is, Bigger doesn’t rape and murder Bessie so that he can emerge as the text’s lone victim; he won’t have

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362 Clarke, *Driving Women*, p. 68.
to be a victim at all if he has an indisputable victim of his own’. Bigger kills Bessie because his agency in the death of Mary is not recognised. Indeed, in Mary’s death, Bigger senses a ‘possible order and meaning in his relations with the people about him’, and he ‘accept[s] the moral guilt and responsibility for that murder because it had made him feel free for the first time in his life’. Jurca notes that Bigger ‘links the meaning of Mary’s death to his powerful desire to “feel at home”’. This suggests that his motivation was an attack on the home life of wealthy, white suburban America, a returning of the violence that underpins their material status to them, as they feed on the poverty of inner city urban areas such as the one in which Bigger lives, as is symbolised by Henry Dalton’s profiteering as landlord to Bigger and other residents of the South Side. However, Bigger’s agency is unacknowledged in his trial and prosecution, as we have seen, which constructs him instead as a premeditated sexual predator. As he puts it, ‘[t]he actual killing of Mary and Bessie was not what concerned him most; it was knowing and feeling that he could never make anybody know what had driven him to it. His crimes were known, but what he had felt before he committed them would never be known’. Thus, whilst Bigger wants to be recognised as someone who has committed an attack on the violent process of automobile-led suburbanisation, he is instead only recognised as a sexual deviant.

It is in response to this lack of recognition that Bigger undertakes his attack on Bessie. Bigger’s agency is stripped from him in his murder of Mary, but not in his murder of Bessie, who only features in Bigger’s trial as evidence for his murder of Mary. Thus, Bigger is able to retain something of his agency in his murder of Bessie, as is made clear in Bigger’s remark to the lawyer Boris Max, that “[y]ou have to have a girl, so I had Bessie. And I killed her”. Bessie can be Bigger’s victim without any attempt to question or override his will, his intent. As Jurca puts it, Bigger ‘won’t have to be a victim at all if he has an indisputable victim of his own’.

Thus, Native Son exposes the violence at the heart of possessive self-determination. Moreover, it suggests that the primary conduit for the production

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365 Jurca, White Diaspora, p. 124.  
366 Wright, Native Son, p. 304. See also Jurca, White Diaspora, p. 123.  
367 Jurca, White Diaspora, pp. 120, 123.  
368 Wright, Native Son, p. 338.  
369 Ibid., p. 382.
of this self-determining subject in the first half of the twentieth century in America was the automobile. Bigger enters the automobile and becomes a self-determining subject, but one who, in the eyes of white America, can only ever determine himself through criminality. Once Bigger has submitted himself to this drama of self-determination, he is determined to see it through, enacting brutal violence upon Bessie in order to feel as though he is not a victim, as though he is not affectable, positioned by forces that he does not control. Bigger wishes for his murder of Mary to expose the violence of self-possessive self-determination that underpins suburbia and the road – the claim to private property that has so impoverished the predominantly black neighbourhood in which he lives. However, when Bigger’s exposure of this violence via his return of it goes unacknowledged, Bigger becomes ensnared in his desire to be recognised as a possessive subject – a desire that he violently enacts upon Bessie.

**The 1928 Regional Plan of New York and Its Environs**

The black population of New York – and specifically Harlem – also boomed as a consequence of Jim Crow migration. As James Smethurst explains, [b]y 1920, swelled by migration from the South and the Caribbean, Harlem had a black population of about 73,000; by 1930, 164,000 (and some thought more like 200,000–250,000)’. Like South Central Los Angeles, in Harlem, the automobile was one way that the threat of this gathering black population was addressed. Again, like these cities, the development of New York’s automobile culture was epitomised by the work of city planners. In New York, Robert Moses was influential in the development of the city’s highway system. Robert Fishman suggests that Moses selectively undertook planning projects proposed in the 1928 *Regional Plan of New York and Its Environs*. The plan sought to consider New York as a metropolitan region, including New York State, New Jersey, and Connecticut. Similar to *The Major Traffic Street Plan* and the *Report and Recommendations*, the *Regional Plan* addressed itself to the problem of New York’s roads, stating that ‘a revision of the present pattern of routes are necessary

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to deal adequately with the problems of street congestion’. In response to this, the Regional Plan argued that ‘[t]he principal regional need is the development of wide radial or arterial highways with adequate connecting roads in order to provide facilities for greater freedom of movement, for a rational degree of dispersal, and for close contiguity of industry and residence’. This plan for ‘a rational degree of dispersal’ of traffic across the New York metropolitan region is epitomised by the ‘diagrammatic scheme for regional highway routes’ in the Plan, which offered a vision of ‘radial and circumferential highways – in combination with an orderly street system – that will afford the best means of circulation’.

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It was Moses who built these highways. Robert Caro emphasises Moses’ influence on New York’s highways in his biography of him, remarking that Moses:

built the Major Deegan Expressway, the Van Wyck Expressway, the Sheridan Expressway and the Bruckner Expressway. He built the Gowanus Expressway, the Prospect Expressway, the Whitestone Expressway, the Clearview Expressway and the Throgs Neck Expressway. He built the Cross-Bronx Expressway, the Brooklyn-Queens Expressway, the Nassau Expressway, the Staten Island Expressway and the Long Island Expressway. He built the Harlem River Drive and the West

373 Ibid., p. 212.
As Robert Fitch observes, ‘it seems as if all that was necessary for Moses to do when he appeared on the scene in the 1930s was to pour concrete on the dotted lines [of the *Regional Plan*], as Moses executed the *Regional Plan*’s desire for ‘the development of wide radial or arterial highways (...) in order to provide facilities for greater freedom of movement’.\(^{376}\) As other city planners had done in Los Angeles and Chicago, Moses sought to construct a congestion-free New York, where the residents of its surrounding suburban areas could move freely in and out of the centre. Indeed, the section of the *Plan* titled ‘The Regional Highway System’ dedicates around seventy pages to discussion of development of the highway system to ensure the smooth flow of traffic into, out of, and around New York from its surrounding New Jersey and Connecticut regions – a vision that Moses realised with his implementation of these plans.\(^{377}\)

As in Los Angeles and Chicago, the consequence of this road development was suburban growth. Michael N. Danielson and Jameson W. Doig note that ‘[d]ecentralisation was speeded in the 1920s as automobile usage increased rapidly (...) By the 1940s (...) the core’s [of the city] rate of growth was less than a fifth of that of the suburbs’.\(^{378}\) Robert Fitch concurs with this analysis, remarking that ‘[t]he unprecedented system of highways designed by the RPA in the 1920s (...) massively accelerate[d] the suburbanisation of the area’, describing the New York Metropolitan Region as ‘two complementary “cities”’, the first of which he refers to as ‘Slab City’, which ‘consists of two jagged mounds of high-rise office buildings which emerge from downtown and midtown Manhattan’.\(^{379}\) The second he refers to as ‘Spread City’, which ‘comprises about 5,000 miles of less intensively developed land which forms the outer ring within a 35-mile radius of Slab City’.\(^{380}\) This suburban growth was a form of white flight.

\(^{380}\) Ibid., p. 247.

In addition to the development of New York’s roads, Moses was also influential in the building of the Triborough Bridge, which was opened in 1936 and later renamed the Robert F. Kennedy Bridge. The design of the bridge ensured that traffic would impose itself upon Harlem. As Sarah Schindler explains, ‘as it traverses the East River from Queens to Manhattan, [the bridge] “makes an almost perpendicular hard right turn north, so that the traffic lets out in Harlem, not on the wealthy Upper East Side”’.\footnote{Sarah Schindler, ‘Architectural Exclusion: Discrimination and Segregation Through Physical Design of the Built Environment’, The Yale Law Journal, 2015 <https://www.yalelawjournal.org/article/architectural-exclusion#_ftnref149> [accessed April 22, 2019].} Schindler goes on to explain that ‘this terminus location was chosen due to “a combination of regard for the wealthy Upper East Side, disregard for the residents of Harlem, and plain old-fashioned graft.” It was not selected for convenience, as most traffic would be coming from and heading to areas below 100th Street’.\footnote{Ibid., pp. 71-72.}

One solution to the gathering black population of Harlem, then, was the automobile. With the opening of the Triborough Bridge, Harlem became a thoroughfare for those seeking access to it.\footnote{Steven Paul McSloy, ‘Breaking the Power of the Power Brokers (Closing Remarks)’, Journal of Civil Rights and Economic Development, Vol. 9: Issue 2, (1994), pp. 669, 671.} Indeed, Michael C. Johanek and John L. Puckett explain that Harlem was congested even before the opening of the Triborough Bridge. They note that ‘[g]rowing up in East Harlem was risky business,’ since, by the mid-1920s, ‘an estimated 859,600 daily commuters travelled the north-south arteries from the Bronx or Upper Manhattan to areas below Fifty-ninth Street’.\footnote{Michael C. Johanek and John L. Puckett, Leonard Covello and the Making of Benjamin Franklin High School: Education, as if Citizenship Mattered (Philadelphia, Temple University Press, 2007), p. 71.} Johanek and Puckett go on to outline that one of the risks of growing up in Harlem was that ‘children habitually used the streets as playgrounds’ because of a scarcity of public parks.\footnote{Ibid., pp. 71-72.} This was again the work of
Robert Moses. Caro summarises it bluntly: ‘Robert Moses built 255 playgrounds in New York City during the 1930’s. He built one playground in Harlem’.  

**The Street: the automobile, the street, and the violence of speed**

The violence of the automobile on the roads of Harlem is an important theme in Petry’s *The Street*. Further, Petry’s novel articulates the entrapment of black life within the hostile regime of the road via the metaphor of circulation. *The Street* tells the story of Lutie Johnson, a resident of Harlem during World War Two. In a scene in which Lutie is exiting the bus to return to her home on 116th Street, the novel explains that she ‘climbed down the stairs from the top deck, thinking that if they hadn’t been so damn poor she and Jim might have stayed married. It was like a circle. No matter at what point she started, she always ended up at the same place’.  

The novel returns to this metaphor again to describe Lutie’s geographical entrapment within Harlem, remarking that ‘it was a circle, and she could keep on going round it forever and keep on ending up in the same place, because if you were black and you lived in New York and you could only pay so much rent, why, you had to live in a house like this one’.  

Lutie is thus stuck in a circle, and the deployment of this metaphor as she climbs off the bus toward home is telling, as it suggests that she is stuck within the circular infrastructure of the road, of the diagrammatic scheme for regional highway routes seen in figure 5, her journey to work and then home. As in Los Angeles in *Hollers* and Chicago in *Native Son*, the circularity of the road has imposed itself upon New York, and it is the black population of the city who suffer the consequences of this new infrastructural order.

Lutie’s feeling of entrapment within the circularity of the road raises the broader question of geographical representation in *The Street*. Lindon Barrett has noted the importance of spatial politics to Petry’s novel, observing that the streets of New York are inseparable from ‘the stately wealth of Connecticut, or any all-American suburb’ in the text. However, Barrett’s analysis stops short of considering the role of the automobile and its road in this spatial politics. In Petry’s

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389 Ibid., p. 291.
390 Barrett, *Blackness and Value*, p. 95.
novel, the automobile is crucial to the tragic events of the narrative. The narrative centres on the obsession of the building superintendent of Lutie’s block, a man named William Jones, with Lutie. Over the course of the novel, Jones grows resentful of Lutie’s rejection of his aggressive sexual advances, and plans to take revenge on her. He does this by convincing Lutie’s son, Bub, to steal mail for him. When two post-office investigators eventually visit the area to gather information about the spate of post thefts, Jones convinces them to stay around long enough to catch Bub in the act. When Bub arrives home from school, Jones encourages him to ‘start work right now’. Shortly after, the investigators catch Bub stealing post. Bub is never returned to Lutie’s care, and she leaves New York as a result.

The contrast of the street and the road is important to the scene of Bub’s capture. Moments before they catch him, one investigator remarks to the other: ‘If we catch this kid, we got to get him in the car fast. These streets aren’t safe’. As Bub struggles to free himself from them, two passers-by spot the altercation and become ‘alert, protesting, angry’. This ‘set the two men to moving with speed, with haste, with a dispatch that landed Bub on the seat between them, closed the car door. Then the car was off up the street’. Following this, ‘[t]he car disappeared swiftly, not pausing for the red light at the corner. The people stared after it’. The violence of the automobile that is found in The Dain Curse and The Big Sleep thus takes on an alternate function in The Street. In Hammett and Chandler, the violence of a speeding automobile is an individualised crime to be solved. In turn, the solving of this crime restores the order of predictable, homogenous movement to the city streets. In The Street, however, speed signifies something else. In Petry’s novel, speed is disruptive to and destructive of the social life of the street. Speed is destructive insofar as it allows the two detectives to escape from the street with Bub, who does not return to Lutie’s care. Most straightforwardly, this enacts a devastating disruption upon Lutie’s life, since she is unable to regain custody of Bub and eventually decides to leave New York for Chicago.

391 Petry, The Street, p. 274.
392 Ibid.
393 Ibid., p. 275.
394 Ibid.
395 Ibid.
Bub’s capture in a speeding automobile also entails a destruction of the social life of the street. As the two investigators snatch Bub, ‘[t]he people passing stopped to stare. The men lounging against the side of the building straightened up’.\textsuperscript{396} Further, after the car has gone, ‘[t]he men who had been leaning against the building walked back to the building slowly, but they didn’t resume their lounging positions. They stood up straight, silent, motionless, looking in the direction the car had taken. Slowly, reluctantly, the people moved off’.\textsuperscript{397} This is to say, then, that the life of the street – the casual lounging of the men against the building; the unknown conversations of the passers-by who stop to witness the events – is disturbed by the automobile. The investigators know that their work must be quick, acknowledging that ‘[t]hese streets aren’t safe’. The speed of the automobile aids them in this work. The automobile also imposes itself on the street; the residents of Harlem stare after it, angry and in shock at the way it invades their space.

The streets of San Francisco and Los Angeles in Hammett and Chandler are linked to the streets of Harlem in Petry by the car as a symbol of violence. In Hammett and Chandler, the violence of the automobile – of the crumpled Chrysler and of Owen Taylor’s car being driven off the end of the Lido pier – is a temporary aberration in an otherwise self-managed order of speed. In \textit{The Street}, the violence of the automobile is that it breaks up the black social life of the street. \textit{The Street’s} deployment of the violent image of the speeding automobile takes it out of a context wherein such speeding is an anomaly within an otherwise self-managed order, and suggests instead that the imposition of this order itself is a form of violence. Indeed, there is no authority to which the residents of Harlem can or even consider appealing to in the scene in which Bub is taken. Instead, the investigating officers are authority figures, and this suggests that the automobile and its regime of self-managed speed is being imposed on the street by those in power.

The scene of Bub’s capture can be read as a metonym for the role of the road and the automobile more generally in the novel. The role of the road in the destruction of the street is evident in the relationship between Connecticut and

\textsuperscript{396} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{397} Ibid.
New York in Petry’s text. As Barrett observes, the representation of these two spaces exposes ‘as false the apparently radical separation between the African American ghettos of New York, or any American city, and the stately wealth of Connecticut, or any all-American suburb’. Barrett attributes this relationship to the ‘scrap[s] of paper’ that blow along the street in the opening scene of the novel. Barrett notes that ‘once the narrative switches to scenes of Connecticut, similar bits of paper take on a very different significance’. This is because “[t]he reader learns that Henry Chandler, by whom Lutie was once employed as a housekeeper, "manufacture[s] paper towels and paper napkins and paper handkerchiefs . . . [because] 'Even when times are hard, thank God, people have got to blow their noses and wipe their hands and faces and wipe their mouths'”. Thus,

the system of exchange in which 116th Street exists is an economy regulated by its tree-lined, suburban antithesis (...) Connecticut (...) creates and profits by the expenditure and refuse of the street. The street remains the haunting, impoverished, and converse silence of the U.S. assurance: "Richest damn country in the world".

For Barrett, then, the streets of Harlem and the suburbs of Connecticut are inseparable from one another, as the profits of Henry Chandler’s paper manufacturing business are extracted from the streets of New York. What can be added to Barrett’s observation of the relationship between the streets of Harlem and the suburbs of Connecticut is the role that the automobile plays in representations of both. When Lutie gets her job as housekeeper and childminder to the wealthy Chandler family, her first experience with them is of Mrs Chandler driving her back to their suburban house. The novel depicts the scene in the following way:

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398 Barrett, Blackness and Value, p. 95.
399 Ibid., p. 98.
400 Ibid.
401 Ibid.
402 Ibid.
Lutie didn’t say anything on the ride to Lyme, for she was thinking too hard. Mrs. Chandler pointed out places as they rode along. ‘The Connecticut River,’ she said with a wave of her hand toward the water under the bridge they crossed. They turned off the road shortly after they crossed the river, to go for almost a mile on a country road where the trees grew so thickly Lutie began to wonder if the Chandlers lived in a forest.

Then they entered a smaller road where there were big gates and a sign that said ‘private road.’ The road turned and twisted through thick woods until finally they reached a large open space where there was a house. Lutie stared at it, catching her lip between her teeth (…) She never quite got over that first glimpse of the outside of the house – so gracious with such long, low lines, its white plant almost sparkling in the sun and the river very blue behind the house.\footnote{Petry, \textit{The Street}, p. 31.}

Thus, the necessary precondition of the suburbia in which the Chandlers live is the automobile. It is the automobile that carries them out to the house, turning ‘off the road’ and then entering ‘a smaller road’. In \textit{The Street}, the automobile that speeds through Harlem when Bub is captured by the investigators is thus also a vehicle that symbolises white flight to the suburbs.

The suburbs of Connecticut are also inseparable from the streets of New York, ‘or any American city’, as Barrett notes, because they were built for and by an automobile culture from which the African-American population was largely excluded. The presence of the automobile of the investigators in Harlem makes this clear: the automobile that speeds through Harlem rides on to the suburbs. Mrs Chandler is the quintessential subject of the \textit{Regional Plan}, which sought to facilitate automobile movement into and out of New York from its metropolitan area, including Connecticut, where Mrs Chandler lives. The cars that rip through Harlem have had the roads designed for them – roads that facilitate movement to the outer regions of the area, such as Connecticut, as the contrasting images of Harlem and Connecticut in the novel alludes to. Further, the labyrinthine, ever-smaller roads that Lutie and Mrs Chandler travel down indicates just how difficult America’s suburbs were to access for those without an automobile. The sense of
layering to Lutie’s memory of Connecticut – that it occurs whilst she is in New York – further supports the idea that the road is layered over the street.

In *The Street*, the investigators of Bub’s postal theft treat Harlem similarly to how Mrs Chandler treats the Connecticut landscape. They speed through it with little regard for it; it is little more than a thoroughfare to them. Mrs Chandler summarises this attitude when she points out the Connecticut river with ‘a wave of her hand toward the water under the bridge they crossed’. To the suburban Mrs Chandler, the point of the bridge, much like the Triborough, is the freedom of movement and access it grants. The indifferent ‘wave of her hand’ toward the river suggests this: that the destruction wrought by the construction of such bridges is unimportant to her. Further, on the drive to the suburbs of Connecticut, Mrs Chandler and Lutie eventually turn into a ‘private road’, and this naming of the road – which, as Barrett points out, can be attributed to Mrs Chandler, since she has held the power of naming throughout the journey, as with the Connecticut river – symbolises the broader project of the road in the novel. The road is a ‘private’ space, a space for self-determining subjects like Mrs Chandler – a space that necessarily breaks up the indeterminate, common social life of the street. Mrs Chandler behaves like the private detective, who names objects in the landscape in order to restore order to it.

In *The Street*, the streets of New York are inseparable from the streets of Los Angeles, as Petry’s novel identifies that the violent, speeding automobile, which is central to Hammett and Chandler, also rips through the streets of Harlem. What is happening in Los Angeles is happening in New York, too. Like Himes’s *Hollers*, Petry’s *The Street* tells the story of the imposition of the road and its automobile upon the black social life of the street. The automobile speeds through Harlem on its way to wealthier districts of the city – to the suburbs, as is suggested by the relationship between Lutie’s automobile ride to the Chandlers’ house and the representation of the automobile in Harlem. Moreover, the post theft investigators’ speeding through Harlem and snatching of Bub is symbolic of the danger of the automobile to the street life of Harlem’s children, as the district was increasingly flooded with automobiles. Lutie explains that after school, Bub

404 Ibid.
was ‘either in the flat by himself or playing in the street’.406 When describing 116th street, where she lives, Lutie notes ‘children playing in the street (…) the half-naked children playing along the kerb, [who] transformed the street into an outdoor living room’ as one of its defining features.407 The intrusion of the automobile into this space and the disappearing of Bub with it represents the disruption that the automobile enacted on the street as a space of play.

Following the suggestion of Hollers, Native Son, and The Street, in this chapter I have argued that one thing that development of an automobile culture in Los Angeles, Chicago, and New York targeted was the black life of the street. The narratives of these novels are allegorical of events occurring at the time: the symbolic end of the life of Central Avenue in Hollers mirrors its decline at the hands of suburbanisation; the transition from the street to the road in Native Son mirrors the suburban development of Chicago; and the violent disruption of the streets of Harlem by the automobile in The Street mirrors its flooding with automobiles by New York’s city planners. In the next chapter, I consider why the streets of predominantly black communities were a threat to burgeoning automobile culture, arguing that they represented a form of life that posed a challenge to the possessive subjectivity of the driver.

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406 Petry, The Street, p. 47.
407 Ibid., pp. 49, 105.
Chapter 3

‘It’s really amazing to have been on that street’: Hollers, Native Son, The Street, and the Affectable life of the Street

‘Central Avenue ran north and south. In the morning, the sidewalk in front of the Dunbar Hotel was bathed in bright sunlight. About noon, the shadow of the hotel started to shade the sidewalk, make it a perfect stage on which to perform, to see and to be seen, to teach and to be taught’ – multi-reed instrumentalist Jack Kelson describing Central Avenue in Los Angeles, Central Avenue Sounds (1998), pp. 215-217

Introduction

Hollers, Native Son, and The Street suggest that the road was imposed upon the street. The road and the suburban life it facilitated curtailed the street life of Central Avenue, left behind pockets of racialised poverty such as Chicago’s South Side, and broke up the social life of the street in areas such as Harlem. One question that is raised by these historical accounts of the destruction of street life is: why was the road deployed to destroy the life of the street? In this chapter, I argue that materially and symbolically, the road, its automobile, and its driver both needed and needed to destroy the street. The road and the suburbia it produced needed the street and its labourers to sustain it, as Native Son and The Street make clear. Similarly, the self-determining driver both needed and needed to destroy the affectable life of the street. As Hollers, Native Son, and The Street all demonstrate, the self-determining subjectivity of the driver knew itself by its distinction from the racialised, affectable life of the street, yet the fullest realisation of this knowledge was in the possessive destruction of this affectability. The driver knew himself as a possessive subject via his possessive destruction of the street, which he nonetheless needed to continue to produce in order to know himself.

Beyond the historical allegories identified in the previous chapter, then, in this chapter, I wish to suggest that these novels illuminate that the automobile was a means for reasserting the self-determining subject in early twentieth century America, and that this reassertion occurred against the threat of affectability represented by the street. Specifically, I analyse the street as a space of gathering for black workers, those affected by the political economic forces...
behind the Great Depression. I suggest that *Hollers* and *Native Son* miss something of how the black workers of the street articulated themselves as affectable, since they offer an understanding of the plight of the (male) black worker that is caught in the tragedy of the impossible desire for recognition of the black labourer as a self-determining subject. I argue that in contrast to this, Petry’s *The Street* does offer an understanding of the black labourer as affectable, particularly via its representation of the sex workers of Mrs Hedges’ brothel and the support they offer to Jones’s partner, Min. I then suggest that this articulation of the black worker of the street as affectable is dangerous to the road, since it threatens to rearticulate it as a space that is produced collectively by a group of people who do not seek to possess their surroundings, as the driver does. Finally, I argue that the affectable life of the street nonetheless persists in *Hollers* and *Native Son* in various different ways. The improvisatory practice of genre generativity in *Hollers* preserves something of the streets whose loss it simultaneously narrates, whilst *Native Son* makes clear that the street is all that Bigger has, much though he may wish to retreat from it and be recognised as a self-determining subject.

**Black Labour in Early Twentieth Century Los Angeles, Chicago, and New York**

In Los Angeles in the early decades of the twentieth century, the black population of South Central was a surplus labour force. As Josh Sides notes, ‘Los Angeles manufacturing [industry] had emerged during an era of labour surplus, and the need to hire blacks had never arisen’.¹ Robert W. Fairlie and William A. Sundstrom expand on this, explaining that it was partly because of ‘the movement of blacks [sic] across industries, especially out of agriculture, and the shift in demand away from the industries in which blacks were employed’.² The agricultural workers of the Jim Crow south were not required by the industrial sector of Los Angeles. Indeed, Sides’ observes that ‘[a]ccording to the 1930 census, 87 percent of employed black women and 40 percent of employed black men in [Los Angeles] worked as household servants. A significant proportion of

¹ Sides, *L.A. City Limits*, pp. 24-25.
employed men (17 percent) worked in the transportation industry, almost exclusively as porters and waiters. In the absence of industrial employment, African-Americans living in South Central thus worked in the domestic and service industries.

In the years following the Great Depression, South Central was also a place of black unemployment. Sides notes that ‘[i]n the first years of the Depression, an estimated 30 percent of black men and 40 percent of black women were unemployed; by 1934, half of all black Angelenos were out of work’. This, he suggests, was ‘[b]ecause blacks were disproportionately employed in the service sector, [meaning that] they were particularly vulnerable to the economic crisis that forced even well-to-do residents to scale back on luxuries like keeping servants, dining out, and traveling by rail’. When the workers of South Central could find domestic work, it usually involved travelling out of central Los Angeles using the city’s increasingly inadequate public transport system. This was particularly the case for black women living in South Central. Summarising the account of one such worker, Tina Hill, Paul R. Spickard explains that ‘[e]arly any morning, one could see them on street corners along Central Avenue, waiting for the buses that would take them to Bel Air and Santa Monica and Glendale to their day’s work’.

The black labour housed in South Central, then, was a precariously employed surplus labour force in industrial Los Angeles. The decade that preceded the publication of Native Son saw similarly precarious employment opportunities for black workers in Chicago. In the aftermath of the Great Depression, up to fifty percent of black workers in Chicago were unemployed, with the level of unemployment amongst black workers in America double that of their white counterparts as late as 1940. As a result, Cheryl Lynn Greenberg observes that in the mid-1930s, ‘[m]ore than 40 percent of Chicago’s black families lived at or below’ the minimum level estimated by the Works Progress

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4 Ibid., p. 27.
5 Ibid.
Administration to meet the costs of ‘rental, food, and clothing costs, with no additional expenditures’. Consequently, an analysis of the number of families in Chicago receiving support from New Deal relief programmes in 1934 totalled over fifty percent in a number of districts in the city’s ‘Black Belt’.

The statistics were similarly stark in New York, with Michelle Mitchell noting that ‘[i]n Harlem, the unemployment rate for blacks [sic] was about 50 percent in 1932’. The black population of Harlem were affected in similar ways by the Depression to the black population of Los Angeles, insofar as black workers in New York were disproportionately employed in domestic and service work. As Greenberg explains, ‘[c]oming from the South and often lacking urban skills and education, blacks [sic] were concentrated in unskilled and service occupations hardest hit by the Depression’, with the Joint Legislative Committee on Unemployment observing that ‘the "heavy burden of unemployment... [fell] on unskilled workers”’. Greenberg goes on to note that in the Depression, ‘[b]lack labourers saw the greatest drop in their income, in some cases to a third of pre-Depression earnings’, with ‘[b]lack domestic workers placed by the State Employment Service in 1931 earn[ing] a maximum of $15 a week (...) At those rates, few could support families, even with both parents working’. In an article in the magazine The Crisis, the civil rights organiser Ella Baker described the black domestic labour market in New York in the 1930s as the ‘Bronx slave market’, observing that ‘[r]ain or shine, cold or hot, you will find them there — Negro women, old and young — (...) waiting expectantly for Bronx housewives to buy their strength and energy for an hour (...) or even for a day at the munificent rate of fifteen, twenty, twenty-five, or (...) thirty cents an hour’.

Local authorities were concerned about the street gatherings of New York’s unemployed and precariously employed black population. For example,

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8 Ibid., p. 28.
12 Ibid., p. 45.
what Mark Naison describes as the “radical street culture” of Harlem’s Depression-era working class was articulated via street meetings that were often met with violent repression by the police. This was the case in a 1934 demonstration to honour the English suffragist Ada Wright, which the police sought to break up for blocking traffic, driving ‘a group of squad cars (...) into the crowd on the sidewalk’, literalising the function of the automobile in breaking up the social life of the street(s). Relatedly, anxieties about the “idleness” of those hanging around in its Depression-era streets proliferated in New York’s newspapers. Articles in publications such as Crisis, New Republic, and The New York Times all articulated an anxiety about the idleness of the unemployed.

Street politics also played an important role in Depression era Chicago. In The Depression Comes to the South Side: Protest and Politics in the Black Metropolis, 1930-1933 (2011), Christopher Robert Reed outlines the various incidence of street protest that defined this time in the city. These included street demonstrations outside of businesses and government buildings by predominantly male black labourers, which occurred in 1930 and 1931, and which demanded ‘the securing of jobs needed by black unskilled workers’. Black Chicagoans also took to the streets in the early 1930s against increasing eviction rates, which saw a riot break out in August 1931, and in which ‘[b]lack men, women, and children of all ages took to the streets, most often on their own initiative and with the Communists’ blessings, to prevent the court-authorised evictions from proceeding’. Indeed, ‘during the third quarter of [1931], confrontations between black demonstrators and the police, bailiffs, and real estate agents grew more numerous in the streets in front of houses where evictions were to take place’.

It is perhaps the example of Los Angeles that most explicitly demonstrates the institutional desire to control the surplus black labour force of the early

16 Ibid.
18 Ibid., pp. 84-85.
19 Ibid., p. 85.
twentieth century, with the intense police presence in Central Avenue in the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s functioning to discipline this population even in moments when they did not resolve themselves into formal political organisation. As Kelly Lytle Hernández explains, the Los Angeles Police Department patrolled Central avenue in order to corral ‘African Americans, namely the poor, into jail for nonviolent crimes, usually vagrancy, drunkenness, gambling, and prostitution’.\(^{20}\)

She further notes that ‘the cultural imperatives and spatial politics of protecting, defending, and imagining the suburbs as a white settler haven of middle-class families, (...) legislated [the] concentration of vice in the central core of the city [which] exposed Black L.A. to constant and massive policing’.\(^{21}\) The surplus labour force of Central Avenue and the ‘underground economies’ on which they relied to survive were thus heavily policed and surveyed, evidencing a fear of the black workers who gathered together in the streets of Central Avenue.\(^ {22}\)

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**Hollers, Native Son, and Black Labour in the Streets**

As these accounts of the plight of black labourers in early twentieth century Los Angeles, Chicago, and New York demonstrate, the situation was one of insecure employment and a poor level of remuneration. As is also apparent in these accounts, this near-exclusion of the black labourer from the social contract meant that they were perceived as a threat to the order of things. As Elaine Brown puts it, the ‘black lumpen proletariat’ of twentieth century industrial America ‘had absolutely no stake’ in it.\(^ {23}\) Instead, ‘[t]hey were the millions of black domestics and porters, nurses’ aides and maintenance men, laundresses and cooks,

\(^{21}\) Ibid., 167.
\(^{22}\) Ibid.
sharecroppers, [and] unpropertied ghetto dwellers'.

Gathering together in the street risked the organising of a precarious workforce with little to no stake in capitalism, as was apparent in the hostility to the ‘idle’ unemployed in the streets of New York, Los Angeles, and Chicago. Thus, the street posed a threat to white, capitalist American society in the early twentieth century because it was a space for the gathering of black workers. Affected by the political economic forces of the depression, moved into the street to look for work or to idle around, this affectable population represented a threat to the self-determining subject of state institutions.

This threat is apparent in Himes’s fiction, where one of the threats of the street is that it is a place for this gathering. Hollers offers a broad picture of the threat of the black worker to the white world of early twentieth century Los Angeles, with its story of Jones contingently entering the industrial labour force and finding that he is not welcome there. One way of reading Hollers is that it tells the story of Jones’s journey into and back out of the industrial workforce, which is simultaneously his journey away from and back to the street. Jones exits the unemployment of the street, the ‘loungers’, ‘weed-heads’, and ‘raggedy chum[s]’ that he encounters on Central Avenue, into the industrial workforce, only to be expelled from it. Jones becomes a driver, an industrial worker, a subject of the road; he escapes the street. His arrest just off Central Avenue at the conclusion of the novel symbolises the end of his entry into this world.

Himes’s other Los Angeles novel, The Lonely Crusade (1947), which also features a protagonist, Lee Gordon, trying to navigate the racism of the wartime industrial city, offers further insight into the street as a space for the gathering of black workers. At the conclusion of The Lonely Crusade, Gordon takes part in a street demonstration outside the aviation plant where he has been attempting to organise the African-American workers. Watching from a distance as the demonstration unfolds in the car park of the plant, he witnesses the brutal repression of the workers by the police, who ‘club a worker across the head, knock another down, and kick still another in the face’. He then sees ‘a deputy stand directly behind [his co-union organiser] Joe and swing a long night stick

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24 Ibid.
down across Joe’s skull'. In response, the workers ‘surge down from the parking lot’. The police prevent anyone else from breaking the line and entering the street, which provokes Gordon’s concern that they are ‘cutting off the success of the rally, the future of the union, the movement of the working people of the world’. In response, he fights through the crowd, ‘pushe[s] with all of his might into the chest of the deputy in his path’, reaches the stricken Joe, seizes the union banner, ‘and holding it high above his head, beg[ins] marching down the street’, with the police threatening to shoot him. Gordon occupies the street in the company of the workers of the plant, who implore the police: ‘Don’t shoot that boy!’ The Lonely Crusade thus concludes with a scene that defiantly asserts that the street was a space for the organisation of black labour, with the police’s threat to shoot Gordon further suggesting that the organisation of black labour in the streets posed a threat to white life in Los Angeles.

In their own way, Hollers and The Lonely Crusade each depict their protagonists acting politically by attempting to claim the position of self-determination for the affectable black labourer of the street. In turn, these depictions highlight the limitations of such political action, as well as the masculinity of this claim. In Hollers, Jones’s employment at Atlas becomes central to his identity:

I’d settle for a leaderman job at Atlas Shipyards – if I could be a man, defined by Webster as a male human being. That's all I'd ever wanted – just to be accepted as a man (…) I liked my job as leaderman more than I had ever admitted to myself before. More than any other job I could think of.

Jones is thus deeply invested in his identity at work: he liked his job ‘more than I had ever admitted to myself before. More than any other job I could think of’. Further, Jones directly links his identity at work to his identity as a driver:

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27 Ibid.  
28 Ibid.  
29 Ibid., p. 397.  
30 Ibid., p. 398.  
31 Ibid.  
32 Himes, Hollers, pp. 189-190.
I had a '42 Buick Roadmaster I'd bought four months ago, right after I'd gotten to be a leaderman, and every time I got behind the wheel and looked down over the broad, flat, mile-long hood I thought about how the rich white folks out in Beverly couldn't even buy a new car now and got a certain satisfaction.33

Jones’s employment allows him to purchase the Roadmaster, and this gives him a ‘certain satisfaction’. Here, to be employed is to be a driver. In these two passages, Jones equates his identity as a worker with his desire for employment and the access to the road that is granted by this. Read alongside *The Lonely Crusade*, Hollers suggests that the claim made upon the street by Gordon, which is to say the claim made to rights as a black worker, is a demand for employment and recognition. If the street is the space of black unemployment, Gordon’s claiming of the street, coupled to Jones’s meditations on the importance of employment, suggest that the political articulation of the unemployed black worker is the demand for employment and for access to the possessive, self-determining subjectivity of the driver.

If Hollers and *The Lonely Crusade* suggest that the articulation of the street, the space of the black worker, is the demand for employment and for access to the possessive subjectivity of the driver, the narrative of Hollers rebuts the idea that such access will be meaningfully granted, as Jones’s freedom is curtailed via the false allegation of rape made against him. Nonetheless, what the translation of the life of the black labourer on the street into this demand – coupled to the tragic entrapment within the impossibility of its fulfilment that defines its narrative – suggests is a certain limitation of Hollers’ understanding of the articulation of the life of the black labourer on the street. Put differently, in articulating the desire of black labour in the street to be employment and access to the possessive subjectivity of the driver, Hollers perhaps reveals something of the masculinity that underpins its narrative. Jones wants to ‘to be accepted as a man’, and he equates this acceptance with recognition of himself as a self-sufficient employee: ‘I'd settle for a leaderman job at Atlas Shipyard – if I could

33 Ibid., p. 12.
be a man, defined by Webster as a male human being’.

This attempt to claim the possessive subjectivity of the driver plays out even when Jones is walking along the streets of Central Avenue. Here, one of the first observations he makes is of ‘[a] little black girl in a pink draped slack suit with a thick red mouth and kinky curled hair switched by’, which is followed shortly after by his noticing that ‘[a] bunch of weed-heads were seeing how dirty they could talk’.\textsuperscript{34} This is to say that Jones’s understanding of the articulation of position of the black worker on the street is the claim to the self-sufficiency of the employee and the self-possession and determination of the driver, and that this desire to be a possessive subject plays out on the street in the way Jones relates to women. On the street, women become possessions of Jones’s gaze, as with the ‘little black girl in a pink draped slack suit’. This character is thus defined only via Jones’s gaze, whilst the ‘weed-heads (…) seeing how dirty they could talk’ in earshot of ‘a couple of prosperous-looking pimps’ similarly suggests the making of a claim upon the space of the street, the suggestion that women will be defined and thus possessed by the men who occupy it.\textsuperscript{35}

This dynamic also plays out in \textit{Native Son}. Early in the novel, Bigger and his friend Gus resemble the unemployed black workers of Los Angeles, New York, and Chicago when, following ‘a game of play-acting in which he and his friends imitated the ways and manners of white folks’, they ‘hung up imaginary receivers and leaned against the wall and laughed’.\textsuperscript{36} Bigger and Gus are ‘lean[ing] against the wall’, idling around like the unemployed black workers of the Great Depression. Indeed, moments later Bigger expresses his frustration that ‘[t]he white folks (…) don’t let us do \textit{nothing}’.\textsuperscript{37} Bigger and Gus are in the streets ‘do[ing] nothing’, idling around like those seen in figure 6. Bigger’s articulation of his status as a black worker in the street is similar to that of Jones in \textit{Hollers}. In \textit{Native Son}, the political articulation of the black worker in the street is first a demand for the violence of this poverty to be recognised through a returning of this violence upon the white middle-class body of Mary, and then simply a claim that Bigger be recognised as a subject with his own motives, will,
and intentions, as with his murder of Bessie. The articulation of the subjectivity of the black worker in the street, then, is written upon the body of the woman – most explicitly upon the body of the black woman. Bessie, the silent corpse, becomes the canvas for Bigger’s desire to be recognised as a self-determining subject, as a black worker frustrated by the fact that the ‘white folks’ will not let him do anything.

As workers, Jones and Bigger are both frustrated – and ultimately horrified – by their affectability. The interwoven forces of political economy and racism act upon them to leave them dispossessed and unemployed. Their response to this affectability is to attempt to claim self-determination, to be subjects who can determine their lives, who can be recognised as workers worthy of employment. In turn, this articulation of the position of the black worker in the street occurs on and against the black woman. Jones’s desire for self-possession and self-determination is mirrored in his possessive gaze upon the black women of Central Avenue, whilst Bigger’s desire to be recognised as a subject requires the sacrifice of Bessie. This is all to say that in their articulations of the position of the black worker, both Hollers and Native Son enact a kind of silencing of the (figure of the) black woman labourer. The black woman becomes the means by which the men in these novels retreat from the position of affectability and shore up their sense of self-determination. Ultimately, however, Hollers and Native Son also tell the story of the failure of this politics; neither Jones nor Bigger are granted recognition as self-determining subjects. This raises the question of how the (silent) black women labourers of the street in these novels might articulate themselves. For an answer to this question, we can return to Petry’s The Street.

**The Street, Black Labour, and the Order of the Road**

Black labour underpins the accumulation of value in The Street. In turn, this value is represented by the car as a status symbol. For example, for Boots Smith, the bandleader at the local bar, ‘[t]he act of driving the car made him feel he was a powerful being who could conquer the world’. Boots, who ‘believed there was plenty of money in Harlem’, drives a car that has a ‘shiny, expensive look’, with ‘red leather upholstery (…) white-walled tyres and [a] top that could be thrown

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back when the weather was warm’.\textsuperscript{39} For Boots, then, his car is a statement of his wealth. As Barrett has observed, Boots’s accumulation of wealth occurs through his work as a bandleader at the local bar, where many of the local residents frequent.\textsuperscript{40} As Lutie ruminates: ‘[n]o matter what it cost them, people had to come to places like the Junto (…) They had to replace the haunting silences of rented rooms and little flats with the murmur of voices, the sound of laughter’.\textsuperscript{41} Arguably, Boots’s accumulation of wealth via the bar, which depends upon the workers of the streets around it, suggests the extent to which the accumulative regime of the automobile and its suburbs depended upon the labour of those in streets such as Harlem. Boots’s accumulation of wealth, symbolised by his car, depends on the labour of those who live on ‘the street’, who come to spend their money in the bar where Boots’s band perform. The suburbs only survive via the work of black labourers, as is apparent in Lutie’s job in Connecticut, as well as in the symbolic accumulation of the life of the street into the value of the road, as represented by Boots’s car. For Boots, like Jones and Bigger, the car is a status symbol – one that is clearly gendered in Petry’s novel. As Clarke notes, Petry ‘documents the power of automobility to convey masculine privilege while acknowledging its significant limitations’.\textsuperscript{42} In challenging the symbolic value of the automobile, \textit{The Street} simultaneously challenges the gendered limitations of the self-determining subjectivity of the driver.

Automobile culture depends on the labour of black domestic service workers – it is the automobilecentric suburb that first separates Lutie from her family, as she leaves Jamaica to find work to support her then partner and Bub. In turn, the labour of black domestic service workers poses a threat to automobile suburbia. As Barrett has observed, the opening depiction of the street in the novel poses a threat to the stability of the sign system of the road. As Lutie attempts to ‘read the words on the sign swaying back and forth over her head’, she finds that ‘[e]ach time she thought she had the sign in focus, the wind pushed it away from her so that she wasn’t certain whether it said three rooms or two rooms’.\textsuperscript{43} Thus, the power of the street, here conflated with the wind, seems to be its ability to

\textsuperscript{39} Ibid., pp. 119, 114.
\textsuperscript{40} Barrett, \textit{Blackness and Value}, pp. 123, 126.
\textsuperscript{41} Petry, \textit{The Street}, p. 109.
\textsuperscript{42} Clarke, \textit{Driving Women}, p. 70.
\textsuperscript{43} Petry, \textit{The Street}, p. 8. See also Barrett, \textit{Blackness and Value}, p. 99.
bring indeterminacy to the sign. In Petry’s novel, the disordering power of the street is contrasted to the ordering power of signs on the road. The difficulty of the street is that signs do not present themselves with the same kind of clarity as they do when Mrs Chandler names objects on her and Lutie’s drive through Connecticut.

What The Street teaches is that the stable environment of suburbia and its signs violently stabilises the indeterminate life of the street’s chatter. The road destroys the black social life of the street, as the scene of Bub’s capture makes clear. After Bub has been taken away in the car, ‘people stared after it’, as they ‘didn’t resume their lounging positions. They stood up straight, silent, motionless, looking in the direction the car had taken’. The road silences the street. The narrative then goes on to explain that eventually

the men leaned their weight against the building; other men resumed their lounging on the steps. And each one was left with an uneasy sense of loss, defeat. It made them break off suddenly in the midst of a sentence to look in the direction the car had taken. Even after it was dark, they kept staring up the street, disturbed by the memory of the boy between the two white men.

The investigators and their automobile occasions a ‘sense of loss, defeat’. Most obviously, this is the loss of Bub, ‘the memory of the boy between the two white men’. However, the next sentence suggests another kind of loss, which has something to do with the conversation between the two men. Here, the ‘uneasy sense of loss (...) made them break off suddenly in the midst of a sentence to look in the direction the car had taken’. Thus, the car disturbs conversation on the street, causing people to ‘break off suddenly in the midst of a sentence’. This is to say that in some way, the road interrupts their speech, their undocumented chatter.

44 Barrett, Blackness and Value, p. 99.
45 Petry, The Street, p. 275.
46 Ibid.
47 Ibid.
In the scene of Bub’s capture, the description of conversations that ‘break off suddenly in the midst of a sentence to look in the direction the car had taken’ can be understood as a description of the imposition of the order of the sign system of the road upon the life of the street. As Barrett has pointed out, the post-office investigators who snatch Bub would be employees of the United States’ postmaster general. This is to say, as Barrett puts it, that the post-office investigators can ‘be understood as the “PostMaster General,” broad principles regulating the circulation of signs in U.S. culture’. The post-office investigators symbolise the government and regulation of signs and their significance in the United States. In the significance of the automobile to the scene of the post-office investigators’ capture of Bub, it can be suggested that the imposition of a regulated system of signs is something that is done by the automobile and its road to the street and its social life. The car ‘break[s] off’ the conversations occurring in the street, imposing – as with the work of the driver-detective, and similarly to Mrs Chandler when she is driving – the discursive order of the road. Prior to this, there is an unindividuated ensemble in the street; the men lounging around and leaning against buildings are unnamed and without title. The chatter of their indeterminate, unknown togetherness is broken by the car, as is symbolised by the breaking of their sentence by the memory of the post-office investigators speeding away with Bub.

The chatter of the streets in The Streets is also apparent in the sense that it is permeated by gossip, which is perhaps represented most clearly in the character of Mrs Hedges. Mrs Hedges lives in Lutie’s building and runs a brothel out of her apartment. She is described as someone who ‘knew everything that went on in this house and most of the other houses on the street’. Early on in the novel, when Lutie is leaving the building, there is a scene in which she ‘paused for a moment at the corner of the building, bracing herself for the full blast of the wind that would hit her head-on when she turned the corner. “Get fixed up, dearie?” Mrs Hedges’ rich voice asked from the ground-floor window’. Mrs Hedges’ information-gathering is metonymic of the street as a space of

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48 Barrett, Blackness and Value, p. 117.
49 Ibid.
50 Petry, The Street, p. 58.
51 Ibid., p. 24.
gossip, as is apparent in her ‘rich voice’ entering the street from her window and joining the drift of its breeze. Mrs Hedges is a conduit for ‘everything that went on in (...) most of the other houses on the street’: those conversations, unknown to *The Street* itself, are concentrated in Mrs Hedges.

For example, Jones’s partner, Min, is concerned that Jones is going to evict her as part of his pursuit of Lutie. Consequently, she seeks advice from Mrs Hedges about what to do, specifically whether Mrs Hedges can recommend a ‘root doctor’.  

Mrs Hedges informs her that ‘the girls tell me the best one in town is up on Eighth Avenue right off 140th Street. Supposed to be able to fix anything from ornery husbands to a body sickness. Name’s David. That’s all it says on the sign – just David, the Prophet’. Min visits David, who provides her with some liquid to put in Jones’s coffee, a cross to hang over their bed, and who advises her to keep the flat as clean as possible. Min follows these instructions, which causes Jones to begin sleeping in the living room and cease his attempts to evict her.

This is to say, then, that the gossip and chatter of the streets, such as the girls who advise Mrs Hedges of the best place to find a root doctor, sustains its residents. This network of chatter allows Min to stay in her flat, protected from the volatile Jones. Thus, the black labourers in *The Street* articulate themselves via chatter – a sound not entirely intelligible to the novel. This is evident in the nameless and likely unemployed men idling in the streets of Harlem, and in the sex workers in Mrs Hedges brothel. These workers are sustained by a chatter that the novel does not wholly register. The nameless unemployed of the streets of Harlem reproduce themselves and support one another via the conversations they make with one another, whilst the sex workers in Mrs Hedges brothel sustain one another and the other precariously employed women on the street via an opaque network of gossip only glimpsed in the novel. This is to say that the articulation of these workers as workers is a sound not entirely intelligible to the novel.

This network of chatter, of only-semi-coherent sound, is a threat to capital accumulation in the novel. The black workers of the street pose a threat to the

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52 Ibid., p. 89.
53 Ibid., p. 90.
accumulation that is symbolised by the infrastructure of the road and the automobile, such as the suburban Chancellors and Boots’s car. The road and the car symbolise wealth, but this capital accumulation is *predicated* on the discursive fixity of the road. The road is produced as a knowable space, as with Mrs Chandler’s naming of objects in the landscape, that can be predictably navigated and circulated in the service of capital accumulation, as envisioned in the *Regional Plan*. Thus, if the accumulation of wealth represented by the suburbs and the automobile is underpinned by the labour of black domestic service workers, as Lutie’s work for the Chandler’s and Boots’s car as a symbol of wealth make clear, then the power of these workers lies in their semi-coherent chatter, their sound. As Barrett has suggested, the sound of black workers in *The Street* can destabilise the meaning of signs and thus construct the landscape otherwise.\(^{54}\) To this I add that it is the sound of the indeterminate chatter of these workers that poses a threat, and that it specifically poses a threat to the ordered sign system of the road, the precondition of capital accumulation.

In the chatter of black workers, the road is remade. For the driver, the road is a known space of predictable movement, a space of possession. Mrs Chandler, The Op, and Marlowe all know the landscapes through which they move; this is what makes them navigable. For the black workers of *The Street*, however, the street is a space of gossip and chatter, which is to say that it is not entirely known. The black workers of the street do not claim to own it as a space in the same way that the driver does. This network of chatter on the street gives it the potential of becoming otherwise – what the street *is*, is not fixed in the same way that the road is when Mrs Chandler names objects within its landscape. Put differently, the (chatter of the) street in Petry’s novel is an *affectable* space, since it acknowledges its incompleteness, the potential for the understanding of the street to change, to be affected by something. The street is made collectively; it is the chatter of the sex workers in Mrs Hedges brothel, and the chatter of the unnamed workers on the street of Bub’s capture. Thus, in *The Street*, the articulation of the black worker of the street is not the claim to possessive self-determination found in *Hollers* and *Native Son*. Instead, the articulation of the black worker of the street, of female black labour, is a network of uncaptured

\(^{54}\) Barrett, *Blackness and Value*, pp. 112-113.
chatter, which has the potential to rewrite and leave open the definition of what the road is.

**Affectability in The Street, Hollers, and Native Son**

*The Street* contains an articulation of black labour that is rooted in affectability rather than possession. The network of chatter amongst the sex workers in Mrs Hedges’ brothel acknowledges the affectability, the vulnerability, of other female workers such as Min. However, in acknowledging the affectability of the black worker, *The Street* does not seek the corrective of recognition that *Hollers* and *Native Son* do. Min and the sex workers in Mrs Hedges’ brothel do not ask to be recognised as subjects, ‘just to be accepted as a man’ as Jones puts it in *Hollers*. Instead, they simply seek to protect one another in their position of affectability, via the network of gossip that allows them to counter its effects, as with Min, Jones, and the root doctor.

Black labour in *The Street* is a network that seeks to protect itself from affectability, in particular the affectability of patriarchal violence. This would seem to suggest that the position of affectability is undesirable, since it is the imposition of a force upon one that one does not control and thus has not necessarily consented to. Indeed, the undesirability of affectability is ostensibly central to *Hollers* and *Native Son*, too, which appear to suggest that the position of affectability is produced by and for the self-determining subjectivity of the driver. This is evident in Jones and Alice’s encounters with the police. The police are perhaps the primary symbol of automobile culture and the self-determination of the driver in *Hollers*. As has been outlined, they are the symbol of the order of the road that imposes itself on the street in Jones’s first dream, as well as regularly stopping Jones when he is out driving, provoking his fear that he might get into a ‘battle royal with some cracker motor cycle cop’.55 The car of the police who arrest Jones also functions as a symbol of the destruction of Central Avenue occasioned by the development of automobile culture in Los Angeles, the end of its social life.

With this in mind, it is worth analysing the representation of the police as self-determining drivers in *Hollers*. Whilst driving, Jones and Alice are

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represented as irredeemably affectable, which is contrasted to the possessive self-determination of the police. This is literalised in the spatiality of the scene where they are stopped by the police, where Jones explains that ‘[t]wo motor-cycle cops pulled up and flagged us down. They rolled to a stop in front of us, stormed back on foot, cursing’.\(^{56}\) Already, then, Jones and Alice are an excess, something that must be limited by the police officers stopping in front of them. Following this, one police officer remarks to Jones and Alice: “All right,” (…) pulling out his book. “Start lying”.\(^{57}\) Again, Jones and Alice are represented as an excess, as affected by a force of dishonesty that they cannot control: they will lie, it is inevitable. This is similar to the scene where Jones is late for work, where the guard remarks to him: ‘What's the matter you coloured boys can't never obey no rules’.\(^{58}\) Jones cannot obey the rules: he is too affected by a desire to disobey. This rendering of Jones and Alice as affectable shores up the self-determination of the white drivers: ostensibly, in contrast to Jones and Alice, the police and the guard do obey the rules, they are not ungovernably affected by a desire to disobey. This is again spatially represented in the scene where Jones is late for work in the contrast of Central Avenue, where Jones is accused of having ‘had a ball’, and the order of the parking lot he has just pulled into.\(^{59}\) This delimited order knows itself as such in contrast to the excess of Central Avenue; the position of affectability is produced so as to secure the identity of self-determining subjects in the novel. They know themselves as self-governing via their ability to govern that which is constructed as ungovernable.

As we saw in the previous chapter, in *Native Son*, Bigger is similarly constructed as always-already criminal. This affectable criminality is again contrasted to the self-determination of the novel’s white characters. During Bigger's trial, the prosecutor remarks: ‘[h]ow that poor child must have struggled to escape that maddened ape! How she must have pled on bended knee, with tears in her eyes, to be spared the vile touch of his horrible person’.\(^{60}\) Further, when describing Mary, Jan, and Bigger’s visit to the South Side, he remarks: ‘they invited this Negro to eat with them. When they talked, they included him in their

\(^{56}\) Ibid., p. 77.  
\(^{57}\) Ibid.  
\(^{58}\) Ibid., p. 18.  
\(^{59}\) Ibid.  
\(^{60}\) Wright, *Native Son*, p. 436.
conversation. When liquor was ordered, enough was bought so that he, too, could drink. Thus, Bigger is a ‘maddened ape’, unable to control himself, whilst Mary is a ‘poor child’ who ensured that Bigger had enough to eat and drink. Mary acts; Bigger is acted upon. Further, the rendering affectable of Bigger and the other residents of the South Side is to the advantage of Mr. Dalton, who profits from the rents they pay. The affectability of Bigger and his friends – that employment is difficult to find and thus capital hard to accumulate, and that they are unable to move out of the area because of racially restrictive covenants – is the means by which Mr. Dalton accumulates wealth. In other words, Mr Dalton depends upon the affectability of the residents of the South Side; it underpins his self-determination, his ability to live and act through the capital he has.

The marking of Jones, Alice, and Bigger as affectable, then, sustains the position of self-determination in these novels. Marking Jones and Alice as affectable makes intelligible the self-determining subjectivity of the police officers. They are *not* affectable, they are *not* liars; they can control their desires and impulses. The same is true of the contrast of Central Avenue and the car park at Jones’s work; the car park is a space of order, it is *not* the space of excess that is signified by Central Avenue. Similarly, the marking of Bigger as affectable in *Native Son* produces the position of self-determination: Mary was innocent and in control of herself, whilst Bigger was uncontrollably affected by his desire. Relatedly, the South Side is a space of affectability that ensures the ongoing self-determination of the Daltons via their profiteering as landlords. Materially and symbolically, the affectability of black labour in the street is produced by and for the self-determining suburban driver.

What this would seem to suggest is that the position of affectability is undesirable, to be escaped. What we have also seen, however, is the seeming impossibility of escaping this position: Jones and Bigger both try, unsuccessfully, to escape from affectability and determine themselves. The necessity of the position of affectability to the position of self-determination in these texts perhaps explains this: for Jones and Bigger to know longer be affectable would be for the self-determining characters in these texts to have no affectable Other through which to know and form themselves by distinction. This perhaps reveals the

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61 Ibid., p. 435.
contradictory heart of self-determination: that it requires affectability in order to know itself, but that it requires an affectability that it is always governing into non-existence to know itself. The very thing it needs is thus the very thing it destroys. As Moten and Harney summarise it, ‘[t]he state is nothing other than a war against its own condition’. In *Hollers*, the police require Jones and Alice to be affectable, but they also must govern that affectability into non-existence, as is symbolised by their insistence that they be taken into the station, spatially restrained. Similarly, white Los Angeles requires Central Avenue as a street to be a place of excess, contrasted to the predictable order of its roads, yet it also requires this excess to be governed, to be ordered into the self-determining life of the road, as symbolised by the police presence on Central Avenue in the novel, as well as by Jones’s dreams. The road requires the street it will nonetheless destroy.

Within the regime of self-determination, then, affectability is simultaneously inescapable and lethal. It cannot be escaped, as *Hollers* and *Native Son* demonstrate, because it is necessary for self-determining subjects to make sense of themselves, yet they only make sense of themselves via their destruction of it. Black labour in the street cannot be anything but affectable, yet this affectability must be destroyed. Central Avenue and the South Side are necessary spaces of excess that nonetheless must be governed. This raises the question: if being marked as affectable is both inescapable and lethal, likely to end one up either incarcerated or worse, as *Hollers* and *Native Son* make clear, what is to be done? How does one deal with an inescapable affectability that is also so subject to violence?

We can begin to answer this question by noting the impossibility of self-determination in these texts. For example, when Jones and Alice are stopped by the police, the novel describes the officers ‘storm[ing] back on foot [toward Alice and Jones’s car], cursing’. The police officers’ self-determination, their sense of superiority compared to the affectable Alice and Jones, is itself a consequence of them being affected, their rage at Jones and Alice as they ‘storm’ toward them. Thus, the police take control of the situation, they determine themselves, make the situation conform to their will, but this self-determination is itself rooted in their

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affectability, their rage at the affectable existence of Jones and Alice. What is also apparent here is that self-determination is always-already affectability, desire – the police’s anger at a perceived lack of control. Put differently, self-determination is a ‘brutal fiction’; it is the imposition of the fictive idea that self-determination is not itself rooted in affect, in feeling, the idea that the self-determining subject has come to control its desires, its feelings. As this scene in Hollers demonstrates, the desire for control is uncontrollable, deconstructing self-determination into what Moten and Harney describe as ‘its own special impossibility’. 64

Self-determination, then, is ‘its own special impossibility’. This is the case because it will necessarily continue to produce the position of affectability in order to know itself, in order to recognise itself as a subject that can govern itself via its governing of affectability. Self-determination is also ‘its own special impossibility’ because the desire for control that it represents is uncontrollable. The self-determining subjects of state institutions, such as police and prosecutors, lie about the uncontrollable affectability of Jones and Bigger; their desire for control is uncontrollable. Similarly, Native Son makes apparent that the road and its suburban bourgeoisie will continue to reproduce the street and its affectable, black lumpenproletariat, since this is the source of its capital.

Finally, the ongoing uncertainty regarding the death of Owen Taylor in The Big Sleep is also revelatory of the ‘brutal fiction’ of self-determination. Chandler’s novel never conclusively resolves who killed Taylor, revealing in a very real sense the ‘brutal fiction’ of self-determination, the imposition of Marlowe’s narrative of events upon them. To claim to know what has happened, Marlowe must enter into a fiction, just as the police officers do when speculating about the reasons for the crashing of the car off the end of the pier in its immediate aftermath. This is true more generally of The Big Sleep, and of The Dain Curse: their impossibly labyrinthine series of events require the imposition of a narrative, constructed by the detective, in order to know what has happened. These novels thus implicitly acknowledge that this knowledge, this sense of possessing and stabilising these events, is constructed – that the capacity to know and to act, to be self-

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determining, is a fiction.

The Affectable Life of the Street

If self-determination is ‘its own special impossibility’, what does it mean to remain affectable, to not pursue the ‘brutal fiction’ of self-determination and its possessive knowledge, the uncontrollable desire for control? Put differently, what does it mean to remain in the streets, in a street that is consistently produced in order to be subsumed by the self-determining subjectivity of the driver, as in Jones consistently waking from his dream of the street into the nightmare of the road, or in the ongoing production of the affectable South Side for the self-determining suburbs? If self-determination is ‘its own special impossibility’, as the scene with the police in Hollers suggests, imposed only as a denial of affectability, what does it mean to tarry with affectability as a ‘condition of life’, rather than attempt an impossible and violent escape from it?

The representation of black workers in The Street addresses itself to these questions. In Petry’s novel, the affectable black labourers of the street work to protect one another against possessive self-determination without themselves making a claim on this position. Their network of gossip acknowledges their affectability, without attempting to coalesce resistance to this into a singular, self-determining subject, as with Jones and Bigger’s claims on the positionality of the worker. Indeed, in The Street, black labour articulates itself as vulnerability – as a speech that is not totally known and captured, and which is thus open to being acted upon, affected. The black workers in The Street do not pursue the ‘brutal fiction’ of self-determination, since, as its necessary affectable Other, it is unavailable to them anyway, as Jones and Alice’s encounter with the police in Hollers demonstrates.

The network of gossip in the street also demonstrates Moten’s claim that ‘openness to being affected is inseparable from the resistance to being affected’.65 For the self-determining subject, the affectable Other is only ever produced to shore up its own sense of self-determination, which is to say that it is only ever produced to be governed into nonexistence, as is clear with Jones’s

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encounters with the police. To remain open to being affected, then, is to resist being written as an affectable object that will be destroyed, governed into nonexistence either by another or by oneself. The network of gossip of the sex workers and unemployed black labourers of the street remains affectable, vulnerable, unknown, and this suggests that the resistance of this black labour is to remain in this state, rather than to allow it to be destroyed, to enter into the ‘brutal fiction’ of self-determination, as Jones and Bigger try to do.

_Hollers_ also preserves something of the affectable life of the street, even as it narrates its destruction, and I suggest that this can be found both in its depiction of Central Avenue and in its formal commitment to improvisation. _Hollers_ is a novel that takes the hard-boiled discourse of Hammett and Chandler and, rather than using it to solve a crime on the road and restore order to it, instead depicts the road as something that has destroyed the street. However, this destruction is not total, as something of the life of the street persists in the form of the novel itself. _Hollers_’ modification of the hard-boiled driver-detective genre is a practice of improvisation – a practice that, I suggest, is rooted in the social life of the Central Avenue of the novel.

Moten describes improvisation as ‘the prescription and extemporaneous formation and reformation of rules, rather than the following of them’.66 Improvisation must know something of the rules in which it operates, but it cannot know exactly what it is going to do, because then it would not be improvisation: it must be both prescriptive and extemporaneous. As Moten summarises, ‘[i]f something is to happen you have to come unprepared, unarmed; but you don’t come with nothing’.67 Importantly, here Moten is analysing a composition by Charles Mingus titled ‘Praying with Eric’.68 Moten’s analysis of Mingus links his description of improvisation back to the street life of Central Avenue, since, as Kelson puts it, Mingus was ‘part of the family’ of pre-war Central Avenue.69 Indeed, Mingus grew up in Los Angeles and could be found, in the 1940s, playing in clubs such as the Downbeat.70 I suggest that when the extent to which Central Avenue was a space of _improvisation_ is taken into consideration, Moten’s

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66 Moten, _In the Break_, p. 63.
67 Ibid., p. 75.
68 Ibid., p. 63.
69 Bryant, _Central Avenue Sounds_, p. 222.
70 Ibid., p. 129.
The description of Mingus’ improvisation can be understood as a description of the life of the street.

The social life of Central Avenue informed the music itself. Kelson remarks:

Central Avenue ran north and south. In the morning, the sidewalk in front of the Dunbar Hotel was bathed in bright sunlight. About noon, the shadow of the hotel started to shade the sidewalk, make it a perfect stage on which to perform, to see and to be seen, to teach and to be taught: for the rest of the day, it was cool and comfortable. That’s where you would go to look and go to be seen and go to talk and exchange the joy of being alive and having the privilege of being part of the audience and being on stage (...) there was a group called the Three Rockets; another trio, the Top Hatters, a dance team, supremely meticulous and synchronised in their dancing. Just show business people, period. I’ve never seen more glamour anywhere in the world than in that one spot. Because, even if you weren’t working and if you were just part of the group, it was almost mandatory that you were sharp. Beautiful clothes, tailor-made clothes, beautiful suits and socks (...) Everybody was just immaculately, you might say, splendiferous in their appearance, and they took great pride with everything about their appearance. The way they walked, you know: proud. And they could tell stories, and the body language, and all this.

And the economy of language, sometimes there would be just maybe one verbal sound or a word or a syllable that could be used that would be more eloquent than a paragraph. A shrug of the shoulder or a gesture from the hand or an elbow or a turning of the head (...) it’s really amazing to have been on that street.71

For Kelson, then, the street existed as the precondition of the performances that occurred in the jazz clubs of Central Avenue. It was, as he describes it, ‘a perfect stage on which to perform’, a place ‘of being part of the audience and being on stage’. The street was a rehearsal space – a space of experimentation and

71 Ibid., pp. 215-217.
Kelson’s description makes clear that the inhabitants of Central Avenue were just as much performing when they were on the street as they were when in its clubs. Kelson’s description also makes clear that improvisation, which defined the music coming out of Central Avenue, was a property of the street. That is, there was a set of rules that the performers of Central Avenue abided by (‘it was almost mandatory that you were sharp’), and yet these rules were subject to revision, to improvisation. The ‘economy of language’ opened by ‘one verbal sound or a word or a syllable (...) A shrug of the shoulder or a gesture from the hand or an elbow or a turning of the head’ was there ‘to teach and to be taught’. This is to say that the rules established via the communications that occurred on Central Avenue could be revised; they were not only taught but could also ‘be taught’, could be changed, could be otherwise.

In one sense, then, Moten’s description of improvisation is of the improvisatory life of the street described by Kelson. Moten’s description of improvisation in Mingus is in turn a description of the improvisatory social life of the street that was a precondition of the music being made in Central Avenue’s clubs, of which Mingus was a product. The improvisation in Mingus that Moten describes is first the improvisation of the street that Kelson documents. Indeed, critics have suggested as much. Andrew S. Berish argues that ‘[f]rom its beginning, jazz has been virtually synonymous with the city – the music’s speed and energy understood as an analogue to the hectic, crazy dance of people, cars, and trains’. However, he suggests that the ‘unique social dynamic’ of an artist such as Duke Ellington, which contained ‘virtuosic, highly individualised voices working to create a coherent ensemble sound’ suggested to audiences ‘that all places were open to reconstruction’.

For Burish, then, jazz was not only mimetic of the city; it did not only represent the repetitive movement of automobile culture. Rather, it also contained a sense of possibility – ‘that all places were open to reconstruction’ – that movement did not have to be uniform. That is, it contained something of the street, of the construction and reconstruction of life that occurred

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74 Ibid., p. 27.
on Central Avenue.

As Moten understands it, improvisation is an affectable condition. That is, it is a practice that is necessarily undertaken with others. Indeed, in *In the Break*, improvisation is indelibly linked to *ensemble* – that is, to the question of “togetherness”, as the word’s etymology suggests. As Moten puts it when discussing Amiri Baraka’s poetry, what he is ‘talking about is ensemble and the improvisation that allows us to experience and describe it’. Improvisation is part of the experience of ensemble, of being together. This practice of improvisation within ensemble underpins *Hollers*. Himes improvises whilst performing with Chandler and Hammett; this is the ensemble in which he plays. What is apparent here is something of the affectability that the road novel is predicated on eradicating.

The affectable condition of improvisation again bears a memory of the street. That the condition of affectability is cultivated in the street is alluded to by Kelson’s description of the ‘intimacy’ of the street outside the Dunbar. Kelson’s description of life on the street outside the Dunbar is an ensemble; it is a congregation of performers that includes ‘the sportsmen, the businessmen, the dancers, everybody in show business’, to which is added the Three Rockets and the Top Hatters, ‘men [who] had their hair gassed or processed (…) Everybody was just immaculately, you might say, splendiferous in their appearance’. There are thus consistent additions to the ensemble of the street in Kelson’s account, as if it cannot survive or does not exist if it is not an ensemble, a group of people who are together, who act upon and thus affect one another.

This affectable, improvisatory ensemble is evident in Jones’s visit to Central Avenue after he leaves work early following a fight with a colleague. In this scene, Jones parks his car and ‘stroll[s] down past the Dunbar Hotel’. The novel describes that once on the street, he

felt tall, handsome, keen. I was bareheaded and my hair felt good in the sun. A little black girl in a pink draped slack suit with a thick red mouth and

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75 Moten, *In the Break*, pp. 60, 67, 83, 85, 89, 94.
76 Ibid., p. 98.
77 Bryant, *Central Avenue Sounds*, pp. 216-217.
78 Himes, *Hollers*, p. 50.
kinky curled hair switched by. I smelled her dime-store perfume and got a live-wire edge.

Everything was sharper. Even Central Avenue smelled better. I strolled among the loungers in front of Skippy's, leaned against the wall (…) Tia Juana pulled up in his long green Cat and parked in a No Parking zone. He got out, a short, squat, black, harelipped Negro with a fine banana-skin chick on his arm, and went into the hotel.79

Central Avenue, then, is a space where Jones feels things, where he is affected. He feels ‘tall, handsome, keen’, whilst also feeling the sun on his head, and the effect of the perfume that he smells coming from the passer by.

Further, Central Avenue is a space of improvisatory performance: Tia Juana exits his car and enters the street as a stage, as is suggested by the comment made by ‘some stud’, who remarks of Tia Juana’s arrival with his partner: ‘Light, bright, and damn near white; how does that nigger do it?’80 Here, Tia Juana is observed and commented on as a performer would be. Moreover, Central Avenue is also a space of those unknown and uncertain movements understood as dangerous in The Big Sleep and The Dain Curse, with Jones ‘stroll[ing]’ along, uncertain of what exactly he is going to do or where he is going.81 That is, like the other people he encounters on Central Avenue, Jones improvises, as when ‘[a] couple of my boys’ approach and ask him if he is ‘still on rubber’, to which he replies ‘[t]hat’s right’.82 They then ask him to take them out to Hollywood, which Jones refuses to do, responding that they should ‘[t]ry a fool' instead.83 Thus, in contrast to the claustrophobic space of his car, for Jones, Central Avenue as a street is a space where he can feel things, where he is acted on and affected by others, and where people perform. It is a space where he is with ‘[m]y people’, as he remarks to himself as he watches this scene unfold.84

The affectability of Central Avenue carries the possibility of mutuality and

79 Ibid., p. 51.
80 Ibid.
81 Ibid.
82 Ibid.
83 Ibid., p. 52.
84 Ibid.
reciprocity – that people participate in acting upon one another, rather than the violent affectability embodied in the acts of racial violence that Jones dreams of at other points in the novel. Jones is with ‘his people’; he understands himself via his relation to – and in being affected by – the other people on Central Avenue. Indeed, in this scene, the street is a space where characters are constantly added: first, Tia Juana arrives; then Jones encounters the ‘bunch of weed-heads’; then the ‘raggedy chum (…) from the barber shop across the street where they had a crap game in the rear’; then the ‘couple of boys’ who approach Jones.\footnote{Ibid.} As in Kelson’s description, Central Avenue is thus a kind of ensemble, a space of togetherness, where Jones is outside of himself, outside of his interior monologue, making sense of himself in relation to the accumulating others who are on the street, who give him a ‘live-wire edge’, make him feel ‘sharper’. Here, Jones is not written as affectable in order to shore up the self-determination of the driver, but rather is affected by others who he in turn affects, suggesting a mutual process that is held in common.

The improvisatory ensemble of Central Avenue in Hollers is mirrored in its form, specifically in its relationship to hardboiled fiction. Hammett and Chandler’s novels restore order to the road. This is done via the reassertion of the subject of self-determination, which is not affectable by forces that act upon it because it has knowledge of those forces and their effects. In Hollers, however, Himes improvises a different kind of text – an anti-driver-detective novel, perhaps – since he uses hardboiled discourse to depict the destruction of the street by the road. Himes takes what Skinner describes as the ‘tough, cynical narration’ and the ‘intimate knowledge of Los Angeles’ found in Chandler, and uses them instead to tell a story about the imposition of the nightmare of the road upon the dream of the street.

This is apparent, for example, in Hollers and The Big Sleep’s contrasting descriptions of driving. Marlowe is cool and collected when driving: when he is following Geiger, the narrative voice describes the journey and the places involved with the familiarity of acquaintance. He makes a forbidden left turn ‘and a lot of enemies’ in order to keep up with Geiger’s car, and drives without his
lights on in order to remain inconspicuous.\textsuperscript{86} Marlowe refers to ‘[t]he coupe [going] west on the boulevard’, with the reference to ‘the boulevard’ suggesting familiarity, whilst when Marlowe rediscovers Geiger’s car after having briefly lost its path, he is described as having ‘made him turning north into Laurel Canyon Drive’, with the description of Marlowe having ‘made’ Geiger suggestive of Marlowe’s superior navigatory prowess.\textsuperscript{87}

By contrast, \textit{Hollers} depicts Jones’s drive to work in the following way:

I straightened out and dug off with a jerk, turned the corner at forty, pushed it on up in the stretch on Fifty-fourth between San Pedro and Avalon, with my nerves tightening (…) The red light caught me at Manchester; and that made me warm. It never failed; every time I got in a hurry I got caught by every light (…) When the light turned green it caught a white couple in the middle of the street. The V-8 full of white guys dug off and they started to run for it; and the two white guys in the Olds blasted at them with the horn, making them jump like grasshoppers. But when they looked up and saw we were coloured they just took their time, giving us a look of cold hatred.

I let out the clutch and stepped on the gas. Goddamn 'em, I'll grind 'em into the street, I thought. But just before I hit them something held me. I tamped the brake.\textsuperscript{88}

Thus, Jones attempts to drive with the confidence and assertiveness that Marlowe has – speeding along fifty-fourth street and trying to beat the red light. This attempt to have propriety over the road is much like Marlowe, who makes a forbidden left turn ‘and a lot of enemies’ and drives without his lights on. However, the ‘intimate knowledge of Los Angeles’ in \textit{Hollers} is not a landscape that Jones can navigate with casual, euphemistic mastery. Instead, it is one in which Jones is unable to move easily around the city.

Himes borrows the practice of metonymic description of the city from Chandler – Jones ‘dug off’ as a metonym for driving, in the same way that

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{86} Chandler, \textit{The Big Sleep}, p. 33.
\item \textsuperscript{87} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{88} Himes, \textit{Hollers}, p. 12.
\end{itemize}
Marlowe having ‘made’ Geiger is a metonym for having located him. However, this ‘tough, cynical narration’ is combined with Jones’s subjection to the white gaze, such as the white couple who look at him with ‘cold hatred’ on the road.\footnote{Ibid.} Himes thus improvises with this tough, metonymic discourse for describing navigating Los Angeles to tell a story about the tragic impossibility of black self-determination, the impossibility of the black worker being recognised as the self-determining subject of the driver. In this improvisatory gesture, something of the street inheres.

Jones keeps alive the improvisatory practice of Central Avenue in his daily conversation. For example, when he is talking to Alice’s parents, her mother remarks: ‘Alice tells me you’re going to arrange your work so you can attend the university in the mornings’.\footnote{Ibid., p. 61.} Jones replies: ‘[o]h yes, that’s right (…) Yes, I’m going to join the ranks of the Negro professionals’, though his interior monologue informs the reader that this ‘was the first [he’d] heard about it’.\footnote{Ibid.} Jones improvises an answer – ‘I’m going to join the ranks of the Negro professionals’ – in a situation where he does not know exactly what he is doing: it ‘was the first [he’d] heard about it’. Similarly, at the conclusion of the novel, the judge offers to ‘give [him] a break’ and ‘let [him] join the armed forces as long as he ‘stay away[s] from white women and keep[s] out of trouble’.\footnote{Ibid., p. 251.} At this point, Jones ‘wanted to just break out and laugh (..) laugh and keep on laughing’.\footnote{Ibid.} Instead, however, he ‘kept a straight face, got the words through my oversized lips. “Yes sir, I promise”’.\footnote{Ibid.} Here, then, and as with Alice’s mother, Jones improvises, thinking on his feet and responding, keeping alive something of the street even as Hollers narrates its decline.

Hollers’ genre generativity is rooted in a particular kind of unknowing. Himes’s text is prescriptive and extemporaneous; he draws on hard-boiled fiction and improvises with it. Accordingly, he cannot have known exactly what he was doing writing Hollers, because he was not following genre conventions to the letter. The text thus presents itself as the product of a certain circumstance of affectability, of being at the mercy of Chandler’s text, upon which Himes relies for
the discourse of his novel, from which he generates another kind of genre, another kind of discourse, another set of relationships between signifiers. As he puts it in an interview with John A. Williams in 1970, in his writing, he attempts to ‘[j]ust let it come out as it is, let it come out as the words generate in the mind’.95 Himes moves, then, in and with the street, generating something new from a position of improvisatory (un)knowing, as ‘the words generate in the mind’. Himes has been affected by Chandler’s text, and this acting of Chandler’s text upon Himes spurs the improvisatory creation of *Hollers*. In Himes’s improvisatory creation of *Hollers*, affected by Chandler, this practice of the street inheres. ‘Improvisation’, as Ashon Crawley puts it, expanding on Moten’s work, is about ‘refusing to be done with seeking otherwise’, and in the improvisatory practice that Himes undertakes with genre, something of the street’s ‘seeking otherwise’ remains.96

‘They go in the streets and they stand outside of those buildings and look and wonder’: *Native Son* and the Street

The streets of *Native Son* hold the promise of something other than possessive, self-determining subjectivity. Bigger initially takes to the street following an argument with his mother, which has highlighted to him that ‘he was sick of his life at home’.97 The street holds the promise of some kind of escape even before Bigger enters it, with the novel describing Bigger standing at the window ‘looking out abstractedly into the street’ during his argument with his mother.98 The street allows Bigger to ask the question of what he might do in his situation: ‘Yes, he could take the job at Dalton’s and be miserable, or he could refuse it and starve. It maddened him to think that he did not have a wider choice of action. Well, he could not stand here all day like this. What was he to do with himself?’99 No sooner than Bigger has opened the space of this question – what else might he do – is he reminded of the pressure to find work. Bigger notices a group of men working across the street, ‘pasting a huge coloured poster to a signboard. The

96 Crawley, *Blackpentecostal Breath*, p. 22.
97 Wright, *Native Son*, p. 42.
98 Ibid., p. 38.
99 Ibid., p. 42.
poster showed a white face'.\textsuperscript{100} The face is that of a man named Buckley, who is running for the position of State Attorney. The novel describes Bigger looking at the poster: ‘the white face was fleshy but stern; one hand was uplifted and its index finger pointed straight out into the street at each passer-by’\textsuperscript{101} Thus, no sooner has Bigger entered the street is he interpellated by a figure of state authority, with Buckley’s ‘index finger pointed straight out into the street at each passer-by’, hailing Bigger toward self-responsibility in much the same way that his mother’s conversation with him does, as his thoughts return to whether he has enough money to travel out to the Daltons to hear more about their job offer.

If the sight of Buckley closes down the question that the street allows Bigger to ask himself – ‘What was he to do with himself’ – with the reply that Bigger should submit himself to a hostile, racially discriminatory labour market, it is nonetheless still important moment in the novel. Confined to the family home, Bigger longs for the street, and once there, he is at least able to contemplate the question of what he should do. One answer that the novel gives to this question, woven in between the narrative itself, is that Bigger remain in the street and its question of what to do. The street offers the possibility of refusing the interpellation represented by the hail of Buckley’s billboard. The depiction of the street explicitly links this refusal to the road and its automobile. The first encounter with automobiles in the novel is when Bigger is ‘stood on the corner in the sunshine, watching cars and people pass’\textsuperscript{102} Following this, Bigger and Jack ‘walked along the street in the morning sunshine. They waited leisurely at corners for cars to pass; it was not that they feared cars, but they had plenty of time. They reached South Parkway smoking freshly lit cigarettes’.\textsuperscript{103} Instead of grasping for possession, here, Bigger simply lets go: he allows the cars to pass.\textsuperscript{104} In \textit{Native Son}, the street is a space where Bigger simply lets the cars pass rather than grasping for the subjectivity of the driver, grasping for recognition of his possession of the forces that act upon him, grasping – as he does in his murder of Bessie – precisely for the subjectivity of the grasp, to be recognised as a self-possessive, self-determining, wilful subject. Put slightly differently, the street is a

\begin{footnotes}
\item[100] Ibid.
\item[101] Ibid., p. 43.
\item[102] Ibid.
\item[103] Ibid., p. 59.
\item[104] On the relationship of self-determination to the grasp, see Moten, \textit{Black and Blur}, p. 224.
\end{footnotes}
space where Bigger can admit that he is affectable, such as when he acknowledges that, faced with the prospect of either taking a job with the Dalton’s or going hungry, he does not know what to do.

The street is also the space in which Bigger spends time with his friend Jack. In the time that Bigger and Jack spend on the street, there are moments of affectability, such as in the conversation where they decide to go and see a film:

“'I'd like to see a movie,” Bigger said.  
“Trader Horn’s running again at the Regal. They’re bringing a lot of old pictures back.”  
“How much is it?”  
“Twenty cents.”  
“O.K. Let’s see it”.  

Here, in the friendship between Bigger and Jack, is an example of mutual affectability. Bigger and Jack act upon one another without seeking possession of one another; they negotiate their trip to the cinema without either one imposing himself on the other. Bigger suggests going to the cinema, whilst Jack suggests the film they go to see. The decision thus belongs to neither of them and to both of them. Indeed, in this moment, their identities are formed only as a product of their relationship to one another. In attempting to determine who has decided that they should go to the cinema, who owns this desire. Here, it is not possible to separate Bigger from Jack; each act upon and affects the other in order to produce the scene that occurs.

In *Native Son*, the street is thus a space of indeterminacy and affectability. Arguably, it is in stepping away from the life of the street, ceasing to wait ‘leisurely at corners for cars to pass’, which lands Bigger in so much trouble. Indeed, it is Buckley, whose face hovers over Bigger on a billboard in the street at the beginning of the novel, who prosecutes him in book three, and who constructs Bigger’s criminal subjectivity via his status as a driver. The road hovers over the street; the threat of being ensnared by the drama of self-determination is a constant threat to the street’s indeterminate social life.

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105 Wright, *Native Son*, p. 59.
At the end of the novel, Bigger’s lawyer explains that there is nothing that can be done for him and that he is going to face the death penalty for Mary’s death. In attempting to comfort Bigger, Max shares with him his theory of how institutions function. According to Max, ‘what keeps them in their place, keeps them from tumbling down’ is ‘the belief of men’.\(^\text{106}\) However, Max suggests that the ‘belief of men’ is no longer unable to unfold in institutions, because ‘[a] few men are squeezing those buildings tightly in their hands. The buildings can’t unfold, can’t feed the dreams men have’.\(^\text{107}\) Thus, ‘[t]here’s nothing through which they [men] can grow and unfold’.\(^\text{108}\) Crucially, at this point in Max’s narrative of institutional life, these men ‘go in the streets and they stand outside of those buildings and look and wonder….’.\(^\text{109}\) In the absence of institutional life, then, there is the streets. For Max, what is left when institutions no longer function in the service of his humanist vision, is the streets. Bigger thus ends up back where he started: on the street. Bigger cannot claim the self-determining subjectivity protected by these institutions – the ‘dreams that men have’ – because they only recognise his agency as criminal. Instead, what Bigger has, what Bigger has only ever had, is the indeterminate life of the street.

In this chapter, I have argued that the affectable life of the street is also the space of the black worker. In the early twentieth century, the street was the space where black workers, affected by the forces of political economy, gathered together. Through a reading of Hollers, Native Son, and The Street, I have suggested that the articulation of this black labour in the street is the articulation of affectability. I have argued that Hollers and Native Son both attempt to articulate the position of the black worker as self-determining, as someone who can claim their rights as a worker, and that the plots of these novels demonstrate the tragic impossibility of this claim. In a reading of The Street, I have suggested that an alternative understanding of the articulation of the position of the black worker are those moments in the text that acknowledge the vulnerability of this position, as with the sex workers who support Min against the abusive Jones. I have argued that this network of gossip acknowledges the reliance of each of

\(^{106}\) Ibid., pp. 450-451.
\(^{107}\) Ibid., p. 451.
\(^{108}\) Ibid.
\(^{109}\) Ibid.
these workers upon one another, as they share information together, as well as acknowledging their position of affectability, as they do with Min’s affectability at the hands of Jones.

Finally, I have suggested that this position of affectability is acknowledged formally in these texts. In *The Street* this is the case since the network of gossip is only present spectrally in the text, making it unknown, vulnerable, and open to being acted upon and changed. In *Hollers*, I have suggested that the formal practice of improvisation that underpins the text is derived from the life of Central Avenue, and that improvisation is an affectable condition, produced in ensemble and uncertain of exactly what it is going to do. I have also argued that the life of the street persists in *Native Son* against the impossibility of self-determination that its narrative depicts, as Bigger is left with nothing other than the street at the conclusion of the novel. In the following chapter, I give further consideration to how the life of the street might persist in the face of its increasing impossibility, as suggested by the decline of the street in the three novels analysed in this chapter and the last.
Chapter 4

‘Whatever it is that jazz musicians feel on certain nights’: The Street and the Post-War Road in Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible Man* (1952) and Thomas Pynchon’s *The Crying of Lot 49* (1966)

‘the costly and inadequate transportation from within the south central area to other parts of Los Angeles (...) tends to restrict residents of that area to the nearby stores’ – The Governor’s Commission on the Los Angeles Riots, ‘Violence in the City – An End or A Beginning?’, p. 62.

From Driver-Detective to Post-War Flight

The driver-detective fictions of the early twentieth century were bound up with the discourse of city planning and the assertion of the order of the automobile upon the road. In turn, this assertion was made to the detriment of the black life of the street. The end of the Second World War saw the emergence of a different kind of road narrative, as after the war, the automobile-road became the site of a (gendered and racialised) ‘escape’. Ann Brigham explains that post-war road narratives such as Kerouac’s *On the Road* (1957), Steinbeck’s *Travels with Charley: In Search of America* (1962), John Howard Griffin’s *Black Like Me* (1961), and John A. Williams’s *This Is My Country Too* (1964) all feature a ‘questing, and often alienated, male protagonist in search of something currently elusive – his country, himself, an authentic truth – in a time of social flux created by a growing consumer culture, the cold war and the atomic age, and racial strife’.¹ Such questing was easier for some than it was for others. As Brigham argues, in contrast to the white, male protagonists of a text such as Steinbeck’s *Travels with Charley*, Williams’ *This Is My Country Too* depicts a central character whose journey ‘rarely allows him unchecked movement in, or possession of, his surroundings’.² Williams’ text thus calls into question the frontier motif of mobile self-discovery – what Brigham describes as the ‘transcendentalist-inspired “pursuit of an ideal self”’, an unmarked subject – by revealing the disembodied whiteness of this pursuit.³ Nonetheless, as America inculcated the domestic idyll

² Ibid., Chapter 2.
in the aftermath of the War, men took to the road. The navigatory prowess and mastery of the driver-detective, with his focus on speed, movement, and place in relation to the question of the crime to be solved, made way for a narrative of post-war flight, with its emphasis on the vastness of the automobile-road and its relation to the existential interiority of the protagonist. The detective as master of speed for the state became the adventurer as master of speed for the purposes of self-discovery.

In this chapter, I begin with a reading of Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible Man*. I argue that Ellison’s novel narrates the story of the twentieth century urban street in microcosm: that it is a space of gathering for migrant black workers, that it is destroyed by the road and its suburbanising project, and that this suburbanising project is both rooted in and reinforces the possessive, self-determining subjectivity of the driver. I undertake this reading via an analysis of the relationship between the automobile, whiteness, and death in Ellison’s novel, focusing in particular on the resonances and repetitions of the Invisible Man’s drive with Mr Norton around the suburban college grounds in his later experiences in Harlem. Finally, I argue that in the prologue and epilogue, *Invisible Man* argues for the preservation of the life of the street, of affectability, even as the gathering together of black workers in the street becomes increasingly difficult because of the spatial domination of the automobile and its self-determining subject.

Following this, I consider the ongoing destruction of street life with the development of the interstate highway and the narratives that this produced. One author who addresses this question is Thomas Pynchon, specifically in his 1966 novel *The Crying of Lot 49*. *Lot 49* has not received much critical attention in road narrative scholarship, though Pynchon scholars have explored the importance of the road in the novel. Joanna Freer notes the relationship of *Lot 49* to *On the Road* as a story about mobility as a way of obtaining a sense of freedom. Freer suggests that *Lot 49* is the story of Oedipa’s ‘inability to escape along the Kerouacian road’. She argues that ‘[e]xperiencing the road as a space of radical freedom is, Pynchon suggests, no longer possible, if it was indeed ever anything

5 Ibid., p. 23.
more than a function of myth making in Kerouac’s representation’. This is because ‘[c]ities are now built to facilitate car travel (...) Dean’s dream of speed is subverted as businesses work to slow cars down in an attempt to pull in custom and streets stretch out into the suburban sprawl’. Further, Stephen Hock’s essay in the collection *Pynchon’s California* (2014), ‘Maybe He’d Have to Just Keep Driving, or Pynchon on the Freeway’, gives sustained critical attention to the importance of the highway to Pynchon’s oeuvre. As Hock notes, there is good reason for such an investigation. Hock outlines that *Lot 49* is centred on Oedipa’s adventures in her ‘rented Impala’; *Gravity’s Rainbow* (1973) ends with an apocalyptic ride along the California highway; *Vineland* (1990) follows its characters’ journeys along and between the California freeways; *Mason & Dixon* (1997) documents the foreshadowing of the road in the mapping of the ‘Line’; and *Inherent Vice* (2009) charts Doc’s automobility around California in pursuit of Mickey Wolfmann and the Golden Fang. Pynchon’s protagonists, then, are very much on the road.

Freer and Hock have usefully drawn attention to the importance of the automobile-road in Pynchon’s texts. Following their work, in this chapter I argue that *Lot 49*’s relationship to the road can also be productively read in terms of the place of the road in the mid-twentieth century discourse of ‘urban crisis’. Whilst *On the Road* has often been analysed as the quintessential post-war road novel because its narrative anticipates the expansive development of the road that occurred with the interstate highway, I suggest that *Lot 49*’s intertextual relationship to Kerouac’s text necessitates an alternative reading of the post-war road. Indeed, rather than reading the post-war road as a site of (contested) expanse, I take my cue from *Lot 49*’s scepticism toward this ‘illusion of speed, freedom, wind in your hair, unreeling landscape’, and investigate instead the

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6 Ibid.
conditions that made this expanse possible. Pynchon’s text enacts a critique of this key phase of the development of the twentieth century American road, analysing the racialised destruction upon which it depends.

For Pynchon, the road is not what Amy Peterson describes as the ‘endless frontier’ that can be found in On the Road, whose characters ‘hold some deep belief that “just going” contains the answers to all their questions’, as when Dean informs Carlo Marx that ‘[t]he only thing to do was go’ after the latter asks ‘[w]hat is the meaning of this voyage to New York? (…) Whither goes thou, America, in thy shiny car in the night’? This frontier spirit is nonetheless called into question in Kerouac’s novel. Peterson goes on to outline that ‘in his descriptions of Sal’s wanderlust, Kerouac questions the belief that frontiers are endless’. She notes that ‘[a]t the end of his first trip, frustrated in San Francisco, Sal fears that “everything is falling apart (…) Here I was at the end of America – no more land – and now there was nowhere to go but back. I determined at least to make my trip a circular one”’. As Peterson explains, ‘[t]he traditional frontier myth describes [an] endless frontier, whereas Kerouac emphasises the fact that ceaseless mobility and restlessness force us to move in circles’. If the frontier that Sal desires is bending back on him, if ‘all that road going’ that he is reminded of at the end of the novel is a circular system, rather than an endless expanse, then it is in Lot 49 that we can find a deeper engagement with the circular infrastructure of the post-war road.

Lot 49 traces the aftermath of the destruction of Central Avenue via its tacit investigation into the lives of the residence of Los Angeles’ Watts district, those left behind in the flight from Central Avenue. However, ultimately, when Lot 49 confronts the expanded circulations of the post-war highway and their attendant destruction, it proposes a programme of New Deal-style redistribution to remedy this, potentially returning its narrative to that of the order of the nation-state, to the sovereignty of the self-determining subject. Yet, Lot 49 is wholly unconvinced

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10 Pynchon, Lot 49, p. 16.
13 Ibid., p. 8, and Kerouac, On the Road, Kindle edition, Part One, Chapter 11.
15 Kerouac, On the Road, Part Five.
of this, and from this I conclude that within it is also articulated a more radical possibility. Drawing again on Moten’s notion of the ensemble, I explore the presence of this practice in Pynchon’s text, which is signalled via an unstable, at times almost unlocatable number of voices within the narrative voice, each of which works both together and in tension with one another. These themselves bear and are the trace of a road revolt that is central to Lot 49’s California: the Watts rebellion. I argue that the multiple voices of Lot 49 are the return of the social life of the street near-destroyed by the automobile; they are the return of the Invisible Man, of the ‘lower frequencies’ with which Ellison’s novel concludes.16

**The Road in *Invisible Man***

Ellison’s novel famously concludes with its protagonist’s retreat to the underground. The Invisible Man lives, as he explains in the prologue, ‘rent-free in a building rented strictly to whites, in a section of the basement that was shut off and forgotten during the nineteenth century, which I discovered when I was trying to escape in the night from Ras the Destroyer’.17 The Invisible Man’s retreat to the basement follows his move to New York from the South and his attempts to organise the streets of Harlem as part of the Brotherhood. Importantly, what *Invisible Man* does is narrate the story of the Great Migration and the street in microcosm. The story of the Great Migration, as has been argued, is of a population of black labour that moved to the cities of the north – to Los Angeles, Chicago, and New York – and took the streets. This indeterminate taking to the street was dispersed by the imposition of an automobilecentric way of life. This is the narrative of Ellison’s novel. The Invisible Man migrates to New York and lives much of his life in the street. Eventually – and this is perhaps *Invisible Man’s* crucial contribution to the history of the black social life of the street in twentieth century America – the street becomes unliveable, so he retreats underground.

My reading of *Invisible Man* expands previous observations, such as those of Andrew S. Gross and Kris Lackey, of the symbolism of the Invisible Man’s

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17 Ibid., pp. 5-6.
chauffeuring Mr. Norton around the vicinity of the college. It also builds on Gross’s observation that the Invisible Man ‘goes underground at the same time that his white contemporaries, the Beats, were setting off on journeys’, as I suggest that it is the road that drives him into this subterranean space. Further, I also draw on Moten’s reading of the novel, where he suggests that Ellison’s text ‘offers a quite devastating critique (…) of the principles and categories that would ground it’. The historical realisation of this, I suggest, is in the split between the street and the road in the novel. *Invisible Man* preserves the affectability, the uncertainty and vulnerability of the street, even as it is pulled toward the self-determining subjectivity of the driver and the road. If one strand of criticism of Ellison’s novel has centred on the consequences of its critique of radical political parties and movements, such as the Communist Party and black nationalism, I suggest that one alternative place where the political project of *Invisible Man* can be located is its attempt to preserve the indeterminate life of the street. To return to Weheliye, this politics does not propose a ‘full, self-present, and coherent subject’, but instead seeks resistance in the ongoing preservation of affectable street life.

The story *Invisible Man* tells about the life of black labour in the street is one that it suggests is applicable across the nation’s cities, as city spaces are interchangeable in Ellison’s novel. One example of this is the scene when the narrator catches the bus to begin his journey to New York. Moments after boarding the bus, the narrator begins chatting with another passenger. When he informs him of his plan to travel to New York, the passenger replies: "'New York!' he said. "'That's not a place, it's a dream. When I was your age it was Chicago. Now all the little black boys run away to New York'".

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conflation of the suburban roads of the south with the urban streets of the north, Ellison’s novel blurs together different locations, suggesting that the destruction of the street is occurring across times and spaces, that is not limited to the place it depicts. Thus, the story that Ellison’s novel tells about the streets of New York applies to those of Chicago – and Los Angeles – too.

Like *Hollers*, *Native Son*, and *The Street*, *Invisible Man* also addresses itself to the themes of the automobile, suburbanisation, blackness and whiteness, black labour, and self-possession and determination. As in these novels, the road is also a circular infrastructure in Ellison’s text. For example, as he leaves the south, the Invisible Man is described as looking at ‘the highway which circled the school’, whilst cars are later described as ‘circling swiftly through long stretches of snow-covered landscape’. As in *Hollers*, *Native Son*, and *The Street*, the circulatory infrastructure of the road in *Invisible Man* serves the interests of suburbia. Early on in the novel – like Bigger – the Invisible Man finds work as a chauffeur to a rich white person, Mr. Norton, who is a benefactor of the college he is attending. Through this work, *Invisible Man* represents the racial dynamics of the automobile-led flight to the suburbs.

In particular, chapters two and three of Ellison’s novel affirm such an understanding of race, the road, and suburbanisation. In these chapters, the narrator recounts a story from his college days, in which he drives Mr Norton around the campus, and then on into the countryside. The narrator begins by describing the beauty of the college grounds:

[i]t was a beautiful college. The buildings were old and covered with vines and the roads gracefully winding, lined with hedges and wild roses that dazzled the eyes in the summer sun. Honeysuckle and purple wisteria hung heavy from the trees and white magnolias mixed with their scents in the bee humming air’.

This suburban setting bears a resemblance to the suburb in which the Chandlers live in *The Street*, which is described in the following way:

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24 Ibid., pp. 155, 299.  
25 Ibid., p. 34.
They turned off the road shortly after they crossed the river, to go for almost a mile on a country road where the trees grew so thickly Lutie began to wonder if the Chandlers lived in a forest.

Then they entered a smaller road where there were big gates and a sign that said ‘private road.’ The road turned and twisted through thick woods until finally they reached a large open space where there was a house (…) [Lutie] never quite got over that first glimpse of the outside of the house – so gracious with such long, low lines, its white paint almost sparkling in the sun and the river very blue behind the house.\textsuperscript{26}

The college, then, has the same aesthetic as the suburb; the ‘buildings were old and covered with vines and the roads gracefully winding, lined with hedges and wild roses that dazzled the eyes in the summer sun’ in much the same way that the Chandlers’ house was ‘gracious with such long, low lines, its white paint almost sparkling in the sun and the river very blue behind the house’. Moreover, as the Invisible Man drives, he begins to feel something of the possessive, self-determining subjectivity of the suburban driver, remarking that ‘now I felt that I was sharing in a great work and, with the car leaping leisurely beneath the pressure of my foot, I identified myself with the rich man remembering on the rear seat’.\textsuperscript{27} As he drives through the suburban grounds of the college, the Invisible Man ‘identify[s] [himself] with the rich man’ – with the capacity to own and possess things, much like the possessive subjectivity that Mrs Chandler inhabits when she drives through the suburbs.

The narrative soon begins to trouble this vision of automobile suburbia. Mr. Norton notes that the suburban idyll of the campus is a recent invention: ‘I came here years ago, when all your beautiful campus was barren ground. There were no trees, no flowers, no fertile farmland’.\textsuperscript{28} The emphasis on the artificiality of the idyll inverts the universality of the transcendent suburban pastoral – suddenly the campus is an arcadian island, adrift in something far less lush. Here, the narrative vehicle is a divided car: a black man (the narrator) driving a white

\textsuperscript{26} Petry, \textit{The Street}, p. 31.
\textsuperscript{27} Ellison, \textit{Invisible Man}, p. 39.
\textsuperscript{28} Ibid., p. 38.
man around: ‘Where shall I drive you, sir? (…) Suppose you just drive. Anywhere you like’. Beyond the apparent divide between agency and affectability (you may drive whilst black, but always at the pleasure/under the orders of white authority), there is something much more interesting in where the narrator takes Mr. Norton. They quickly come out of the suburban pastoral idyll: ‘[t]here were no trees and the air was brilliant’ and Mr. Norton is suddenly discomforted, saying ‘I don’t remember this section’. This intensifies as the drive continues: ‘we were swept by a wave of scorching air and it was as though we were approaching a desert’, and as Mr. Norton looks out on the countryside: ‘I’ve never seen this section before. It’s new territory for me’.

It is then that the narrator realises he has driven Mr. Norton into the vicinity of the cabin of a disgraced black sharecropper, Jim Trueblood. The cabin, as the narrator explains, ‘[w]as built during slavery times’. The narrator is ashamed of Trueblood, who is infamous for raping his daughter, and he cannot explain how he has come to drive to Trueblood’s house. The road thus both succeeds and fails as a narrative device – it gets the narrator somewhere, but only back to what he could never escape, what the suburban idyll of the college can only conceal and displace. The narrator tries to drive ‘anywhere’ but ends up driving to the definite somewhere of the old slave quarters. The road leads out of the suburb and into a scene of racialised poverty and violence, the necessary underside of suburbia, as Native Son and The Street both observe. The drive that the Invisible Man takes Mr. Norton on is thus something of a symbolic tour of the development of America’s cities over the preceding thirty years, as he journeys from suburbia and into the space of racialised poverty that suburbia left behind.

In an attempt to hurry Mr. Norton away from Trueblood, the narrator drives him to a nearby bar, the Golden Day. Here Norton encounters a group of mentally ill black veterans, who are drinking at the bar, and Mr Norton is forced to listen, dumbfounded, as they chatter, drink and make prophecies: ‘[i]n the beginning, black is on top, in the middle epochs white holds the odds, but soon Ethiopia shall stretch forth her noble wings’. Then, the autocratic attendant in charge of the

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29 Ibid.
30 Ibid.
31 Ibid., p. 46.
32 Ibid., p. 47.
33 Ibid., p. 81.
veterans, Supercargo, appears: ‘I want order down there (...) and if there’s white folks I wan’s double order’. The veterans do not take kindly to this attempt to smash their social life, so, in a short sequence, they attack the attendant, smash up the bar and engage in a raucous party. In the midst of the chaos, Mr Norton collapses: ‘[h]e was like a formless white death, suddenly appeared before me, a death which had been there all the time and which had now revealed itself in the madness of the Golden Day’. Black social life, in raucous resistance to restraint, is deadly to self-determining, self-possessive whiteness.

In addition to the scene at Trueblood’s cabin, the Invisible Man’s drive with Mr. Norton thus also takes him to a space of black social life, the space of the street. The Golden Day is a space that is made collectively: as Halley explains, [i]t was a church, then a bank, then it was a restaurant and a fancy gambling house, and now we got it’. The bar is a space of ‘we’, of the togetherness of its patrons. Indeed, the patrons act collectively in their riotous refusal of Supercargo’s call to order, with three unattributed voices responding ‘[g]et him!’, ‘[l]et's give him some order!’, and ‘[o]ut of my way’, after which the narrator observes that ‘[f]ive men charged the stairs’. Thus, the ‘formless white death’, which ‘had been there all the time and which had now revealed itself in the madness of the Golden Day’ is provoked by the revolt of its patrons. What lies at the heart of the project of the road is the poverty that suburban development leaves behind, as is illustrated by Trueblood. What is also central to it is the destruction of the collectivity of black social life: this ‘had been there all the time’ that the Invisible Man and Mr. Norton were out driving, but only becomes apparent in the Golden Day. Whiteness as individual, possessive self-determination dies in the company of this collectivity, whilst also being deadly to it. It is this collective acting with and upon one another that whiteness seeks to destroy.

Following the trip to the bar, the road retains this sense of Otherness. When the Invisible Man and Mr Norton get back on the road, the former remarks that ‘[t]he wheel felt like an alien thing in my hands as I followed the white line of

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34 Ibid., p. 82.
35 Ibid., p. 86.
36 Ibid., p. 80. Emphasis original.
37 Ibid., p. 82.
the highway’.\textsuperscript{38} The Invisible Man no longer identifies himself ‘with the rich man reminiscing on the rear seat’; his drive with Mr Norton has revealed that the road is predicated on the ongoing project of racialised impoverishment and the destruction of social life. The ‘white death’ at the heart of the road has now revealed itself, making the road and its automobile an ‘alien thing’ to the Invisible Man.

\textit{Invisible Man and the conclusion of the life of the street}

Like \textit{Hollers}, \textit{Native Son}, and \textit{The Street}, \textit{Invisible Man} suggests that the destruction of the street is inseparable from the imposition of the life of the road. Ellison’s novel tells this story in its early chapters, before the Invisible Man moves north after being expelled from the college for exposing Mr. Norton to Trueblood and the Golden Day. Once in the north, the street is the space in which the narrator ends up each time he leaves a situation that has become unliveable, as he is consistently returned to a street that is nonetheless uninhabitable. For example, after he realises that Dr Bledsoe’s letters of recommendation for work are in fact an attack on his character, it is to the streets of New York that the narrator is returned, where ‘[t]he sun was very bright (...) and the people along the walk seemed far away’.\textsuperscript{39} Following this, the narrator secures employment at a paint factory, which leads to him being hospitalised after a co-worker tricks him into causing an explosion. This eventually leads to the narrator being returned to the street again, as he leaves the hospital and faints in the streets of Harlem. Not long after this, the Invisible Man’s political organising in the streets begins, as he organises a crowd of people to oppose the eviction of an elderly couple, whose possessions are being unceremoniously dumped onto the street by a bailiff. However, this street organising is soon curtailed by the internal politics of the Brotherhood, as he is accused of putting his personal ambitions ahead of the aims of the group, and is reassigned from his work in Harlem to ‘lectur[ing] downtown on the Woman Question’.\textsuperscript{40}

All that the Invisible Man has is the street, yet the street is a space that is increasingly hostile to him. After he is rejected for work by Mr. Emerson and

\begin{footnotes}{
\item 38 Ibid., p. 98.
\item 39 Ibid., p. 193.
\item 40 Ibid., p. 406.
\end{footnotes}
returns to the street, the Invisible Man finds it to be an isolating space: ‘the people along the walk seemed far away’.\textsuperscript{41} Immediately after this, he ‘stopped before a gray wall where high above me the headstones of a church graveyard arose like the tops of buildings’.\textsuperscript{42} The street that the Invisible Man returns to, then, is a space of loneliness and death. Further, after the Invisible Man returns to the street following his hospitalisation from the explosion, it is simultaneously a space of refuge and hostility. The street is a space of escape from his disorienting meeting in the hospital with the representative from Liberty Paints, which makes him feel as though he is in ‘the grip of some alien personality lodged deep within me’.\textsuperscript{43} However, the street is also the space in which the Invisible Man faints, making him vulnerable to passers-by. Finally, the Brotherhood curtail the Invisible Man’s organising in the streets of Harlem – streets that they will then attempt to claim for themselves. The street, then, is the place where the Invisible Man both has to and yet cannot live. It is where he is returned to when his attempts to find work are thwarted, yet it is also an ambivalent and at times hostile space – a space symbolic of death, alienation, and loss of consciousness.

The Invisible Man occupies this difficult position as a black worker. Each time he returns to the street, it is because of a problem with his employment, such as after Dr Bledsoe’s letters fail to secure him employment, or after the explosion at the paint factory. Further, when he witnesses the eviction of the elderly couple, the man remarks: ‘I’m a day labourer . . .’, to which the Invisible Man replies: ‘. . . A day labourer, you heard him, but look at his stuff strewn like chitterlings in the snow . . . Where has all his labour gone?’\textsuperscript{44} As in Hollers, Native Son, and The Street, the streets of Invisible Man are a space for the gathering of black workers. However, in line with these texts’ narratives of the decline of the life of the street, coupled to the narrative of the destruction of street life by suburbia in the early chapters of Ellison’s novel, the Invisible Man finds the street an increasingly difficult space to inhabit.

The Invisible Man’s depictions of the streets of the north are infused with his memories of the south. The college buildings that ‘dazzled the eyes in the

\textsuperscript{41} Ibid., p. 193.
\textsuperscript{42} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{43} Ibid., p. 249.
\textsuperscript{44} Ibid., p. 278.
summer sun’ repeat in his representation of ‘the buildings down the bright street slanting with sun and shade’ moments after he has come out of hospital, whilst his description of ‘[t]he long white stretch of street [that] was empty, the aroused pigeons still circling overhead’ could easily be of the college grounds. Immediately after his description of ‘the bright street’, the Invisible Man declares: ‘I was no longer afraid. Not of important men, not of trustees and such; for knowing now that there was nothing which I could expect from them, there was no reason to be afraid’. The bright street, then, reminds him of ‘trustees’, of Mr Norton and their drive through the suburban college grounds. The streets of Harlem contain the roads of the suburbs; like The Street and Native Son, it is not possible to separate the two. The ‘white death’ represented by Mr. Norton returns in these moments on the street; the Invisible Man ‘felt that I would fall, had fallen’ moments after he declares that ‘there was no reason to be afraid’, as if the white death of the suburban pastoral, of Mr. Norton’s own collapse, has returned to haunt him in the street.

This image of the road as death also occurs in representations of the automobile. For example, not long after the street revolt against the eviction of the elderly couple, the Invisible Man witnesses ‘another green and white patrol car (...) whining around the corner and speeding past me, heading for the block. I cut through a block in which there were close to a dozen funeral parlours (...). Elaborate funeral cars stood along the curb’. Here, the automobile is a signifier of death, with the patrol car that goes ‘speeding past’ the Invisible Man carrying the white death of the funeral cars into the streets of Harlem, travelling to break up the social life of the gathering resistance to the eviction.

The police and their patrol cars as symbols of the death of the social life of the street is captured most dramatically in the death of the Invisible Man’s friend, Clifton, who is shot and killed by a policeman in the street. The scene makes clear that the policeman is working to ensure that the street seller Clifton does not bring any kind of disturbance to the order of the road:

I saw the traffic moving with the lights, and across the street a few

45 Ibid., pp. 34, 249, 286.  
46 Ibid., p. 249.  
pedestrians were looking back toward the centre of the block where the
trees of Bryant Park rose above two men (...) between the flashing of cars
I could see the cop propping himself on his elbows like a drunk trying to
get his head up, shaking it and thrusting it forward – And somewhere
between the dull roar of traffic and the subway vibrating underground I
heard rapid explosions.\textsuperscript{48}

As the policeman pursues Clifton, the traffic continues ‘moving with the lights’,
with the sound of the shot barely penetrating the ‘dull roar of traffic’. The contrast
in this scene between the traffic that moves smoothly and the policeman’s
violence toward Clifton highlights that the latter works in service of the former.
Like the patrol cars that speed past the Invisible Man earlier in the novel, the
police work to ensure that the social life of the street, as represented here by
Clifton, does not disrupt the smooth, predictable movement of automobiles on the
road.

The street, then, is all the Invisible Man has, but it is infused with the ‘white
death’ of suburbia. Invisible Man alludes to the suburban road’s destruction of the
street, suggesting that the development of the former brings death to the latter.
As in Native Son and The Street, what the road imposes upon the street is the
possessive, self-determining subjectivity of the driver. As we have seen, Invisible
Man identifies suburbia with the possessive subjectivity of the driver. As the
Invisible Man later notes, this subjectivity is ‘white death (...) which had been
there all the time’ but which only reveals itself as such when confronted with the
black social life of the street in the Golden Day. The ‘white death’ of the car, of
being in control of one’s surroundings, repeats in the streets of Harlem via the
deathliness that haunts the Invisible Man.

Ellison’s novel elaborates on what this symbolism means through its
critique of the Brotherhood. To an extent, the problem with the street life of
Harlem in Invisible Man is the attempts that are made to unite it into a singular
subject of the street. That the social life of the street dies in the instantiation of
the self-determining subject is clear in a scene toward the end of the novel, when
the narrator attempts to find out the origin of a riot that is happening, which is

\textsuperscript{48} Ibid., p. 435.
worth quoting at length:

"How did all this get started?" I said.
Scofield seemed surprised. "Damn if I know, man. A cop shot a woman or something."
Another man moved close to us as somewhere a piece of heavy steel rang down.
"Hell, that wasn't what started it," he said. "It was that fellow, what's his name?"
"Who?" I said. "What's his name?"
"That young guy!"
"You know, everybody's mad about it . . ."
Clifton, I thought. It's for Clifton. A night for Clifton.
"Aw man, don't tell me," Scofield said. "Didn't I see it with my own eyes? About eight o'clock down on Lenox and 123rd this paddy slapped a kid for grabbing a Baby Ruth and the kid's mama took it up and then the paddy slapped her and that's when hell broke loose."
"You were there?" I said.
"Same's I'm here. Some fellow said the kid made the paddy mad by grabbing a candy named after a white woman."
"Damn if that's the way I heard it," another man said. "When I come up they said a white woman set it off by trying to take a black gal's man."
"Damn who started it," Dupre said. "All I want is for it to last a while."
"It was a white gal, all right, but that wasn't the way it was. She was drunk --" another voice said.
But it couldn't have been Sybil, I thought; it had already started.
"You wahn know who started it?" a man holding a pair of binoculars called from the window of a pawnshop. "You wahn really to know?"
"Sure," I said.
"Well, you don't need to go no further. It was started by that great leader, Ras the Destroyer!"
"That monkey-chaser?" someone said.
"Listen, bahstard!"
"Don't nobody know how it started," Dupre said.
"Somebody has to know," I said.
Scofield held his whiskey toward me. I refused it.
"Hell, man, it just exploded. These is dog days," he said.49

One explanation for the riot, then, is that it was started “by that great leader, Ras the Destroyer!” This attempt by Ras to claim the streets culminates with his attack on the Invisible Man at the end of the novel, which sends the latter underground. Ras attempts to turn the streets into a space of the singular, definite, revolutionary subject, who will stop “that stupid looting”, and instead “jine with us to burst in the armory and get guns and ammunition!”50 This is to say that Ras attempts to transform the indeterminate life of the street, which is rooted in a lack of epistemological certainty and thus a reliance upon one another, as illustrated in The Street, into revolutionary certainty and action.

Ras is keenly aware of the rendering affectable of black people by white American society. In a scene late in the novel, Clifton and the Invisible Man encounter Ras in the streets of Harlem. Ras castigates Clifton and the Invisible Man, accusing them of ‘go[ing] over to the enslaver’: ‘[w]hat they do, give you money? Who wahnt the dahm stuff? Their money bleed black blood, mahn. It's unclean!’51 He goes on to remind them of the taxonomies through which full human being is denied to black people: ‘You got bahd hair! You got thick lips! They say you stink! They hate you, mahn’, as well as that ‘[i]t's three hundred years of black blood to build this white mahn's civilisation’.52 Thus, Ras demonstrates his awareness of the long history of black people being violently acted upon and affected by white Euro-Americans: ‘[t]heir money bleed black blood (…) ‘[i]t's three hundred years of black blood to build this white mahn's civilisation’.53 Ras’s response to this affectability is to propose black self-determination. Ras realises that it is the forces of white society (‘they’) acting upon black people to leave them impoverished: it is they who have ‘the power and the capital and don't leave the black mahn not'ing’.54 Ras’s solution to this

49 Ibid., pp. 540-541.
50 Ibid., p. 556.
51 Ibid., p. 371.
52 Ibid., pp. 371, 376.
53 Ibid.
54 Ibid., p. 373.
oppression is black organisation for its revolutionary overthrow. He frames this in
the language of the sovereign act, exhorting Clifton and the Invisible Man to
'[r]ecognise you'self inside and you wan the kings among men!', as well as
remarking of Clifton that '[i]n Africa this mahn be a chief, a black king!' Thus, for
Ras, the solution to affectability is self-determination – to act to overthrow white
society through revolutionary violence. ‘Ras recognises the true issues’, as he
puts it, and '[b]lood calls for blood'.

This is the subject that Ras tries to produce in the streets of Harlem. Ras
urges those in Harlem’s streets to “jine with us to burst in the armory and get
guns and ammunition!” However, even as Ras attempts to reduce the
indeterminacy of the street to the determinate action of a revolutionary subject, a
subject that recognises its affectability and seeks to end it, the street nonetheless
resists this. This is evident in the conversation about how the riot started. Whilst
Ras would like to reduce the streets to the disciplined action of a revolutionary
subject, the conversation about how the riot started demonstrates the street’s
resistance to this. In the multiplying explanations for the riot – that ‘[a] cop shot a
woman’, or that it is for Clifton, or that it was because a ‘paddy slapped a kid for
grabbing a Baby Ruth’, or that ‘a white woman set it oft by trying to take a black
gal’s man’ – the uncertainty of the street abounds. Thus, whilst Ras might wish
to reduce the street to possessive self-determination – to a subject that
possesses knowledge of their affectability and thus acts to determine themselves
– the street nonetheless resists this by remaining a space of indeterminacy. This
is to say that the street remains affectable, remains a space that is produced
through the collective action of an ensemble, where one’s need for another is
acknowledged. This is apparent in the very conversation about the origin of the
riot, where the production of knowledge about what is occurring in the streets of
Harlem is a collective project.

The Descent (of Black Labour) of/to the Street

Near the conclusion of the novel, the Invisible Man is chased underground by
Ras and his men. Put differently, the Invisible Man flees the street under threat

55 Ibid., p. 372.
56 Ibid., p. 376.
from self-determination. The Invisible Man has to leave the street because it is permeated by the ‘white death’ of the self-determining subjectivity of the driver, which he sees and experiences many times on the street in symbols of death that remind him of his drive with Mr. Norton. It is this self-determining subjectivity that ultimately chases him from the street in the form of Ras. This is not to draw any kind of neat parallel between Mr Norton and Ras. The former as a benefactor clearly occupies the subjectivity of possession in a different way to Ras, who does not have Mr. Norton’s capital. My point, rather, is that in Ellison’s novel, the tragedy of Ras is that he resolves his sympathetically rendered diagnosis of his affectability into a desire for self-determination that forecloses any exploration of both the difficulty and the potential of that affectable status.

The Invisible Man’s retreat to the basement is not simply a defeat. The Invisible Man periodically returns to the street, as he outlines in both the prologue, when he bumps into a man in the street, and the epilogue, where he meets Mr. Norton in the subway. The Invisible Man’s retreat from – and periodic return to – the street offers two readings of itself, which can be understood via Moten’s analysis of it. In his reading of *Invisible Man*, Moten suggests that ‘the epilogue is a frightened attempt to retreat into the etiolated metaphysics of America’.57 He continues that it holds ‘the frightening chance of a descent into ethnocentric and separatist identity’.58 That is, in the epilogue’s fear that ‘los[ing] a sense of where you are implies the danger of losing a sense of who you are’, it threatens to reify the amorphous resistance of the Invisible Man’s descent into a fixed identity.59 In its desire for the ‘next phase’, *Invisible Man* risks fixing the uncertain resistance of his descent as a ‘full, self-present, and coherent subject’, as Weheliye puts it. Interestingly, when the Invisible Man articulates his desire for the ‘next phase’, he also remarks: ‘[o]ver and over again I've gone up above to seek it out’.60 The Invisible Man’s attempt to decipher the ‘next phase’ is articulated as a return to the street.

Thus, the possibility of an ‘ethnocentric and separatist identity’ in *Invisible Man* is related to the street. Chased from the street, the Invisible Man is drawn

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57 Moten, *In the Break*, p. 68.
58 Ibid., p. 69.
60 Ibid.
toward the idea of returning to the street with an identity centered on its reclamation: he returns to the street to ‘seek (..) out’ the ‘next phase’. To the extent that Ellison’s novel collapses the prologue and the epilogue into one another, as in its remark that ‘the end is in the beginning’, this might be one way of reading his assault on the man he accidentally bumps into in the prologue. In this reading, the Invisible Man’s assault on this unknown man would be an articulation of an ‘ethnocentric and separatist identity’ that sought to reclaim the street as a specific and exclusive site of black sociality. The (black) social life of the street has been broken up by the white, self-determining life of the automobile and its driver; this assault would mark an attempt to take back the street in line with Ras’s call to revolutionary violence.

The prologue and the epilogue complicate this interpretation of them. Moten observes that Invisible Man ‘offers a quite devastating critique (…) of the principles and categories that would ground it’, which it nonetheless ‘fatalistically cling[s] to [in] the hope of a purification’. This is to say that whilst the epilogue pulls toward a reading of itself and of the prologue in which the reclamation of the street would involve the reification of a specific, agentic subject who would act to reclaim a specific space, it also and simultaneously articulates an understanding of the street as a space of betweenness that undermines this pull toward a fixed, agentic subject of the street. Indeed, it is precisely in the Invisible Man’s back and forth between the underground and the street that it is possible to locate the endurance of the street. This endurance of the street can be elaborated via Cervenak’s remarks on Gayl Jones’s Mosquito (1999). Cervenak comments that: ‘formally speaking (…) the continual shuttling back and forth of time, image, and space – opens up portals for other kinds of errant, nonenunciative, unreadable movement’. Something similar can be said of Jones’s the Invisible Man’s movement between the basement and the street. In these scenes, there is a movement back and forth that makes the text hard to read, hard to singularly locate. The indeterminate life of the street thus persists precisely in the ‘betweenness’ of the Invisible Man’s life in the prologue and the epilogue – the ‘street’ is the persistence of this uncertain location, this sense of possibility.
The Invisible Man’s life in the basement cannot be separated from his returns to the street: as he puts it, he ‘took to the cellar; I hibernated. I got away from it all. But that wasn't enough. I couldn't be still even in hibernation’.\textsuperscript{64} The Invisible Man must return to the street; hibernation is not enough. Yet it is necessary; the Invisible Man has ‘found a home – or a hole in the ground, as you will’, a retreat from the violence of the street.\textsuperscript{65} The basement cannot be separated from the street; the prologue cannot be separated from the epilogue. Here, the life of the street inheres as this uncertainty, this vulnerability, this lack of surety that leaves the Invisible Man affectable, open to being acted upon – to living on and as the street. This is to say that \textit{Invisible Man} formally plays out the life of the street; the back and forth movement means its narrative is never wholly located in one place, is located instead in an only-partially-known space between two places. This is a movement not of a self-determining subject, of a subject that knows itself and exactly what it is doing, but rather of affectability, of vulnerability to uncertainty.

The Invisible Man retreats from the street in order to preserve it. What \textit{Invisible Man} suggests is that as the street is increasingly subject to the deadly order of self-determination – exemplified by the driver but apparent also in Ras’s desire for a singular revolutionary subject – it becomes harder for the street to be a place of affectability, a space that is produced collectively, where people act upon one another without attempting to possess one another. To preserve this affectable life of the street – the life of Central Avenue, of Bigger and Jack spending time together, and of the sex workers in \textit{The Street} – the Invisible Man must retreat from it. In attempting to maintain a form of life that is invisible, which does not know exactly ‘where’ it is and thus does not know exactly ‘who’ it is, \textit{Invisible Man} seeks to preserve the life of the street, which acknowledges that it is vulnerable, that is affectable. Thus, the experience of the street that is represented in the prologue and the epilogue is of something that is not definite, and therefore that cannot be easily fixed into and as a singular ‘ethnocentric and separatist identity’.

\textsuperscript{64} Ellison, \textit{Invisible Man}, p. 573.
\textsuperscript{65} Ibid., p. 6.
The Expanse of the Post-War Road

_Invisible Man_ narrates the decline of the life of the street that begins in _Hollers_, _Native Son_, and _The Street_. Historically, this decline accelerated from the 1940s onward. At the tail end of the Second World War, the American government was seeking to radically expand its road infrastructure. The Federal Aid Highway Act of 1956 was preceded by the Federal Aid Highway Act of 1944, which authorised the construction of a 65,000km system of interstate highways. Progress was limited because no funds were specifically allocated to its construction, but it did pave the way for the 1956 Act, which did include funding for – and facilitated the subsequent construction of – the proposed interstate highway system. Further, 25 million registered automobiles in 1944 had become 40 million by 1950, which in turn increased to 61 million by 1960 – meaning that automobiles were owned by 70 percent of American families by this point.\(^66\)

The development of the interstate highway also formed part of a boom in suburban housing. As we saw in the previous chapters, the development of the automobile-road facilitated the decentralisation of the city, reaching places that the railroad could not and acting as the catalyst for a housing boom in the 1920s. As Sarah Schrank puts it, this suburbanisation ‘accelerated significantly with the government’s passage of the Interstate Highway Act in 1956’.\(^67\) Finally, in the year of _Lot 49_’s publication, domestic production of crude oil in America was approaching its peak, which it hit in 1970, with the production of 9.6 million barrels per day that year, before it entered into decline.\(^68\)

Los Angeles was again ahead of the curve. In 1947, the Los Angeles Regional Planning Commission approved the Master Plan of Metropolitan Los Angeles Freeways (see figure 7). Funding for the Plan was made available prior to the Federal Aid Highway Act of 1956 via the California-based Collier-Burns Highway Act of 1947, which financed construction via a gas tax.\(^69\) The impact of

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\(^{69}\) Avila, _Popular Culture_, p. 198.
the Collier-Burns Act on Los Angeles’ roads was significant. As Eric Avila explains:

The Collier Burns Highway Act prompted a massive surge in freeway construction in Los Angeles and inaugurated the city’s age of the freeway. The Act initiated construction of most of the major freeways of the city’s freeway system. Between the years of 1950 and 1955, total operating mileage of the Los Angeles freeway system increased four and a half times, as large segments of the San Bernardino, Hollywood, and Santa Monica Freeways opened.\(^{70}\)

Thus, with the Collier-Burns Act, the suburbanising automobile culture of Los Angeles was entrenched even further. Indeed, the example of the emergence of Lakewood epitomised post-war, automobile-facilitated white flight. As Thomas J. Osborne explains, ‘the late 1940s saw the beginning of California’s tract housing boom. Tract houses were usually built on small, subdivided lots, adjacent to one another (…) Lakewood, located 10 miles southeast of Los Angeles, arose in 1950 out of a former beet field and within three years boasted a population of 70,000’.\(^{71}\)

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**Figure 7.** ‘The Regional Planning Commission Master Plan of Metropolitan Los Angeles Freeways’, *Regional Planning Commission*, 1947 [https://www.cahighways.org/maps/1947feplan.jpg] [accessed May 28, 2019].

A concerning effect of highway development was its impact on the predominantly black urban centres of America’s cities. This was particularly evident in Los Angeles. As we saw in the previous two chapters, the development of a way of life centred on the automobile contributed to the decline of Central Avenue as a social and cultural centre. What was left behind by this exodus to

\(^{70}\) Ibid.
the suburbs was regions such as Watts. Eric Avila summarises that ‘[d]uring the 1950s, Watts and South Central Los Angeles, which had remained two separate black communities through the 1940s, coalesced to form a broader area that became synonymous with the black ghetto’.\footnote{Eric Avila, \textit{Popular Culture in the Age of White Flight: Fear and Fantasy in Suburban Los Angeles} (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2004), p. 50.} The decline of Central Avenue and the rise of automobile culture left the population of Watts at a significant disadvantage. Sides explains that a 1964 ‘survey of Watts residents found that 57 percent did not own a car’, meaning that they were forced to shop in overpriced local stores.\footnote{Sides, \textit{L.A. City Limits}, p. 191.} Similarly, poor public transportation meant that ‘employment outside the Alameda industrial corridor brought unbearable, or at least undesirable, commutes. For example, the bus commute from Watts to Santa Monica, which included several transfers, took up to two hours’.\footnote{Ibid., p. 114.}

Avila explicitly links this poor public transport to the rise of automobile culture, remarking that ‘[t]he demise of the PE [Pacific Electric] (...) had dire consequences for communities such as Watts and Boyle Heights, which became isolated centres of racialised poverty in the subsequent age of the freeway’.\footnote{Avila, \textit{Popular Culture}, p. 189.} Pacific Electric ceased operating in 1961, leaving behind a graveyard of railcars, as can be seen in figure 8. The bus companies that were granted contracts by the Los Angeles Public Board of Utilities to replace it during its decades-long demise from the 1940s onward ‘were notoriously unreliable and inconvenient. The Landiers Transit Company was typical: it provided no bus shelters, took arbitrary and inconsistent routes, and adhered to no discernible schedule’.\footnote{Sides, \textit{L.A. City Limits}, pp. 113-114.} By contrast, those African-Americans who had moved out of Watts to areas such as Compton ‘achieved a higher standard of living than their counterparts in Watts’, with ‘better housing stock, reduced crime, greater integration, and better schools’.\footnote{Ibid., pp. 130, 121.}

The decline of Central Avenue left behind Watts, with fewer places for work and leisure for those residing there, and difficulty travelling around a city increasingly designed for automobile ownership. Indeed, Watts was not only a product of the generalised development of automobile culture in Los Angeles; it was also a victim of the post-war development of the freeway. The effects of freeway development in California – and more specifically, Los Angeles – were numerous. Freeway development dispossessed a number of South Central residents of their homes, as city planners clamoured to use freeways to clear away the urban “slums” created by the very same automobile-facilitated suburban flight.78 As Helen Leavitt puts it, freeways also turned Watts into a neighbourhood that was ‘sealed off’ from the rest of Los Angeles.79 Freeway drivers did not have to pass through – and often not even see – neighbourhoods such as Watts: as Carey McWilliams described, somewhat brutally, in The Nation in 1965, ‘[t]he freeways have been carefully designed to skim over and skirt around such eyesores as Watts’.80 The indifference of highway developers to the predominantly black urban centres of cities such as Los Angeles did not pass uncontested. As Avila puts it, ‘the planners and engineers who rammed freeways through cities unwittingly provoked sharper articulations of racial difference and conflict. In some instances, their work hastened violent unrest in the ghettos of American cities during the “long hot summers” of the mid-1960s’.81

The government response to these anti-road rebellions was to incorporate them into a discourse of urban crisis. To understand the urban crisis as

78 Avila, Popular Culture, pp. 206-207.
80 Avila, Popular Culture, p. 213.
discursively constructed is not to deny the material reality of the road’s impoverishment of areas such as Watts, as described by Avila. Rather, it is to analyse how and why this impoverishment was constructed as a crisis engendered by the road in the 1960s, as well as what the effects of this were. One example of this discourse of an urban crisis produced by the road is the report commissioned by the then Governor of California, Edmund Brown, following the Watts rebellion in 1965. Titled *Violence in the City – An End or A Beginning?*, the report was published in December 1965. Investigating reasons for the outbreak of the rebellion, the report identified the problem of what it described as ‘the consumer and the commuter’ in Watts, which it defined as ‘the costly and inadequate transportation from within the south central area to other parts of Los Angeles which tends to restrict residents of that area to the nearby stores’. Implicitly then, the report acknowledged that automobile culture, from which the residents of Watts were largely excluded, and which had contributed to the demise of public transportation that it laments, was part of the reason for the rebellion of 1965. Indeed, the report also implicitly acknowledges the automobile-led white flight of the early twentieth century, remarking that ‘discriminatory practices made it extremely difficult, often impossible, for Negroes [sic] to purchase or rent homes in many sections of the city and county’.

*Violence in the City* was followed by the report by the Kerner Commission, a presidential commission tasked with investigating the causes of the black-led urban rebellions of the 1960s in Tampa, Cincinnati, Newark, Plainfield, and Detroit. The report was titled *Report of The National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders*, and it was released in 1968. As Avila summarises, the report concluded that ‘[t]he collusion of public policy and private practices enforced a spatial distinction between “black” cities and “white” suburbs and gave shape to (...) “two societies, one black, one white – separate and unequal”’. Indeed, in its analysis of the rebellion in Atlanta, the report acknowledges that ‘the area is isolated from the city in terms of transportation’, which nonetheless allowed

83 Ibid., p. 76.
84 Avila, *Popular Culture*, p. 5.
residents to gather – to ‘mingle’ and to ‘discuss (…) their grievances’. The report also acknowledges that in New Haven, ‘since 1956, approximately 6,500 housing units, mostly low-income, have been demolished for highway construction’, as well as that '[p]oor families in urban areas are far less mobile than others. A 1967 study of low-income Negro [sic] households indicated their low automobile ownership compelled them to patronise neighbourhood merchants'.

Like Violence in the City, the Report of The National Advisory Commission thus also identifies the suburbanising road as a source of the grievance articulated in these urban rebellions. Relatedly, the purpose of these documents was the ‘control of disorder’, as the Report of The National Advisory Commission put it. That is, their purpose was to ensure that these disruptions to the road did not happen again – as the Report of The National Advisory Commission noted, ‘[i]n all 24 disturbances (...) the initial disturbance area consisted of streets with relatively high concentrations of pedestrian and automobile traffic’. The task of these reports was to provide solutions that would ensure that this interruption of the road’s smooth, predictable functioning did not occur again. As President Johnson put it when establishing the Commission: ‘“What happened? Why did it happen? What can be done to prevent it from happening again and again?”

As with the explosion of automobility in the 1920s, the development of America’s highway and freeway system was accompanied by a concern for order on the road. This order was that of knowable and sanctioned movement on the road, driving from home to work and back, or to a superstore, or to a sanctioned site of entertainment. The road, as the Los Angeles Central City Committee put it in 1964, should provide easy access to ‘place[s] to work, shop, and find various forms of relaxation and entertainment’. Indeed, the broader discourse of the road at the time was concerned with its smooth functioning, with Daniel P.

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86 Ibid., pp. 80, 139.
87 Ibid., p. xii.
88 Ibid., p. 71.
89 Ibid., p. 296.
Moynihan declaring in ‘New Roads and Urban Chaos’, published in *The Reporter* in 1960, that ‘the efficiency of our transportation system and the character of our cities’ was at stake with the development of the highway system, as well as, somewhat apocalyptically, that with the interstate highway, ‘the crisis has come’.\(^91\) Moynihan’s article is thus underpinned by an anxiety regarding the potential disorder of the interstate system. Indeed, Moynihan articulates his concern that the interstate highway would be a system of *circulatory arteries* pumping away without focus’, with his stated desire being a "radical revision of the city plan".\(^92\) Similarly, the city planning document *Centropolis: The Plan for Central City Los Angeles*, which was put together by the Los Angeles Central City Committee in 1964, urged that ‘[e]asy accessibility provides for efficiently getting to Central City, and good internal *circulation* effectively distributes the people and good so vital to its life’.\(^93\)

Urban rebellion was perceived as simultaneously caused by the development of these roads, as well as being a threat to their smooth functioning. Reports such as *Violence in the City* and the *Report of The National Advisory Commission* made recommendations to remedy this situation and ensure that the interruption to the functioning of spaces with ‘high concentrations of pedestrian and automobile traffic’ occasioned by urban rebellion would not occur again. These documents thus represented a burgeoning discourse of ‘urban crisis’ in American life, the idea that the revolts in the centres of America’s cities were a problem to be solved. As Timothy Weaver explains, ‘usage [of the term urban crisis] in English (both American and British) (...) exploded almost exponentially from the mid-1960s onward’.\(^94\) Weaver outlines that the term has been deployed at ‘specific historical junctures’ and ‘in certain geographical spaces as a way of constructing particular kinds of “knowledge” about urban problems’.\(^95\) From its emergence in the 1950s, ‘urban crisis’ as an object of knowledge has produced both ‘material, structuralist understandings’, as well as ‘cultural, individualist conceptualisations’ of itself, with the former represented by the work of scholars

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\(^92\) Ibid. Emphasis added.  
\(^93\) Los Angeles Central City Committee, ‘Centropolis’, p. 10. Emphasis added.  
\(^95\) Ibid., p. 2041.
such as Manuel Castells and David Harvey, and the latter represented by the work of critics such as Oscar Lewis and Daniel P. Moynihan.96

The Report of The National Advisory Commission conceptualises the rebellions of the 1960s as part of an ‘urban crisis’. For example, the Report remarks that ‘[b]lack in-migration and white exodus, which have produced the massive and growing concentrations of impoverished Negroes in our major cities, creating a growing crisis of deteriorating facilities and services and unmet human needs’, as well as that ‘the condition of Negroes in the central city remains in a state of crisis’.97 The report goes on to note that ‘[i]n disadvantaged areas, employment conditions for Negroes are in a chronic state of crisis’, before concluding that ‘maximum utilisation of the tremendous capability of the American free enterprise system is a crucial element in any program for improving conditions (...) which have brought us to the present crisis’, and that ‘[t]he private sector has shown its concern and capacity for making a contribution in the fields relevant to the urban crisis’.98 Moreover, as we have seen, for the Report and for Violence in the City, the ‘urban crisis' was rendered intelligible via an analysis of the development of the highway, which had confined and contained residents of areas such as Watts. That is, the ‘urban crisis' was part of the wider discourse of the road: to speak of the road in the mid-1960s was to speak of the ‘urban crisis’.

Lot 49, Racialised Displacement, and the Interstate Highway

Pynchon made his own contribution to the growing concern with the apparent urban crisis of the 1960s in his article ‘A Journey Into The Mind of Watts’, published in The New York Times in 1966.99 At points, ‘Journey’ sounds not dissimilar to Violence in the City and the Report of The National Advisory Commission, lamenting the ‘vast amounts of poverty’ in Watts, as well as echoing the Report’s emphasis on a spatial divide in American society, remarking that ‘lying much closer to the heart of L.A.’s racial sickness is the co-existence of two

96 Ibid., pp. 2042-2047.
98 Ibid., pp. 126, 313. Emphasis added.
99 ‘Journey’ has been the basis for previous critical reflection on Lot 49. See, for example, Sally Bachner, The Prestige of Violence: American Fiction 1962-2007 (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2011). Bachner argues that in Lot 49, the corporeal violence of state machinery in Watts can only be experienced as the confusion of indeterminate signifiers by the middle-class Oedipa.
very different cultures: one white and one black'. Further, Pynchon ties this spatial divide even more tightly to Los Angeles’ road network than the reports do, remarking:

though the panoramic sense of black impoverishment is hard to miss from atop the Harbour Freeway, which so many whites must drive at least twice every working day. Somehow it occurs to very few of them to leave at the Imperial Highway exit for a change, go east instead of west only a few blocks, and take a look at Watts. A quick look. The simplest kind of beginning.

Pynchon goes on to describe the road as a ‘white culture that surrounds Watts – and, in a curious way, besieges it’, as well as a ‘world full of pre-cardiac Mustang drivers who scream insults at one another only when the windows are up’. For Pynchon, the road is a white space, one that is central to ‘the co-existence of two very different cultures: one white and one black’, as those who are ‘atop the Harbour freeway’ drive to their suburban homes, with little knowledge of the poverty in Watts, or of the relationship that the freeway upon which they drive might bear to that poverty.

In its focus on the poverty of Watts, as well as on the road’s role in the production of this poverty, ‘Journey’ echoes the discourse of Violence in the City and the Report of The National Advisory Commission. Focusing on the importance of the highway and the freeway to Lot 49, I argue that Pynchon’s novel is likewise structured by the discourse of urban crisis. With its attention to the highway, as well as on the underclass produced by the highway, I suggest that Pynchon’s novel is torn between participating in the discourse of the return of urban order and smooth infrastructural circulation, which would be realised via Oedipa’s temporary remedy of financial redistribution to those dispossessed by the road, and a more radical embrace of the return of street life represented by the Watts rebellion, articulated in ‘Journey’ in the description of the rebellion as a kind of jazz ensemble. This, I argue, inheres in Lot 49 via its multiplicity of voices.

100 Pynchon, ‘Journey’.
101 Ibid.
102 Ibid.
To a point, *Lot 49* follows the urban crisis assessors in desiring a remedy to the destruction wrought by the road that would maintain its order, though it also diverges from them by containing something of the return of the street. This is apparent in the suggestion in ‘Journey’ that the rioters not only or not even wanted a remedy to this injustice, but rather that they wanted to destroy the self-determining subjectivity of the driver itself, to destroy the road and allow the street to flourish, rather than to merely be compensated for the injustice of the road’s development.

*Lot 49* is ambivalent about the virtues of the highway. At the beginning of novel, Oedipa is informed that she is the executrix of the will of her former lover Pierce. Following this, she leaves the suburbs and enters the highway. Her journey is framed by the worries of her partner Mucho, who, prior to his job as a DJ at a local radio station, made his living as a used car salesman. Aside from indicating the new markets that were opened up by America’s expanding automobile culture, Mucho’s anxiety about this work also sets Oedipa’s journey up as one that is hesitant to embrace the post-war flight of the Interstate. In spite of no longer working at the car lot, Mucho’s time there still haunts him. It is the dishonesty of the profession that particularly concerns Mucho, to the point where ‘he could still not as Oedipa did use honey to sweeten his coffee for like all things viscous it distressed him, recalling too poignantly what is often mixed with motor oil to ooze dishonest into gaps between piston and cylinder wall’. Oedipa’s road trip, which begins in the following scene, is thus preceded by the anxiety that the promise of the road is structured by more sinister dealings. Mucho’s anxiety about his job as a car salesman frames the narrative as one in which the automobile and its road – symbols of triumphant Fordist industry, expansion, and “possibility” – will be put into question. Accordingly, Oedipa travels in a ‘rented Impala’. This lack of ownership is indicative of the unwillingness of the novel to attach itself to the dominant perception of the road at the time of its production – it does not want to “own” it.

The road onto which Oedipa ventures is an expansive site of production and circulation in the novel. In the scene after she has initially left home, Oedipa

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first arrives in San Narciso and looks out across it, at which point the free-indirect discourse of the novel famously describes

a vast sprawl of houses which had grown up all together, like a well-tended crop, from the dull brown earth (...) she thought of the time she’d opened a transistor radio to replace a battery and seen her first printed circuit. The ordered swirl of houses and streets, from this high angle, sprang at her now with the same unexpected, astonishing clarity as the circuit card had. Though she knew even less about radios than about Southern Californians, there were to both outward patterns a hieroglyphic sense of concealed meaning, of an intent to communicate.105

In the description of the ‘swirl of houses’, and the allusion to the circuitous design of the city, Oedipa represents San Narciso as a place of complex and interweaving circulations. Further, the description of a ‘vast sprawl of houses which had grown up all together’ alludes to the sprawl of suburbanisation underpinned by the road. Oedipa’s view is of a California suburbanised by the automobile-road, carved up into ‘lots’ of tract housing. Vast and complex, it accordingly contains a ‘sense of concealed meaning, of an intent to communicate’.106 As in Hammett and Chandler, then, the road is presented as something in need of reading. The question at the outset of the novel is whether Oedipa can read the road, whether she can come to understand it in a way that will allow for its smooth, predictable, circular functioning – whether she can return the road to herself or not.

In addition to the circular image of the ‘swirl of houses’, Lot 49 also represents the road network in circular terms via its description of the freeways as ‘vein[s]’, and as ‘arterial’, such as when Oedipa imagines the road she is on as a ‘hypodermic needle, inserted somewhere ahead into the vein of a freeway, a vein nourishing the mainliner L.A.’.107 Further, when Oedipa is travelling in San Francisco, she is said to have ‘safe-passage tonight to its far blood’s branchings, be they capillaries too small for more than peering into, or vessels mashed

106 Ibid., p. 15.
107 Ibid., pp. 9, 16.
together in shameless municipal hickey’s’.

As with Chandler, Los Angeles, and *The Major Traffic Street Plan*, roads are thus figured as the veins of the body of the city, which must be kept flowing for its health.

Set as it is in 1964, the action in *Lot 49* occurs eight years after Eisenhower’s Highways Act was inaugurated, and this historical setting further reinforces the relationship in the novel between race and the freeway. When Oedipa drives into San Narciso and observes that it is the place where Pierce ‘beg[an] his land speculating ten years ago’, she positions him and his military-industrial empire as a direct benefactor of the highway building programme.

Indeed, San Narciso is ‘overlaid with access roads to its own freeway’, which Inverarity was instrumental in building, having ‘bought into (…) [d]ifferent highway outfits in the area’. One of Inverarity’s associates, Metzger, expresses the brazen indifference of the road building programme that was a good opportunity for ‘slum clearance’ when he remarks that ‘“[o]ld cemeteries have to be ripped up (…) Lake in the path of the East San Narciso Freeway, it had no right to be there, so we just barreled on through, no sweat”’. Pierce’s entrepreneurial pursuits are thus bound up with the highway building programme.

The effect of the development of the highway on black life is apparent in *Lot 49* when Oedipa visits the ‘Yoyodyne Cafeteria’, where she witnesses ‘Negroes carr[ying] gunboats of [food] to the long, glittering steam tables, preparing to feed a noontide invasion of Yoyodyne workers’. The relationship of these workers to the road building programme is enforced by the song that the raucous executives sing at this meeting, where they boast of Yoyodyne’s location ‘[h]igh above the L.A. freeways, And the traffic’s whine’. This song lauds over the African-American service workers their displacement by the freeway programme and their exclusion from its life. This road was built for us, the executives are saying, and your house was likely bulldozed to make it possible. Later in the novel, Oedipa ‘rid[es] among an exhausted busful of Negroes going on to graveyard shifts all over [San Francisco]’, with the noted presence of

108 Ibid., p. 81.
110 Ibid., pp. 14, 40.
111 Ibid., p. 41.
112 Ibid., pp. 56-57.
113 Ibid., p. 57.
African-Americans on the bus alluding to their exclusion from the road’s primary form of transportation, the automobile.\textsuperscript{114} That the road is complicit in the destruction of African-American communities in \textit{Lot 49} is apparent not only in the song that the Yoyodyne executives sing, but also in the fact that Oedipa encounters members of the ‘disinherited’ in the ‘concrete underpinnings of the freeway’, and in the location of the Tristero’s drop off points underneath it.\textsuperscript{115} Both of these things suggest that the roads carry a memory of their originary injustice. Further, Pierre-Yves Petillon understands the ‘horn’ of the Tristero as derived from the saxophone that ‘blow[s] throughout’ Kerouac’s \textit{On the Road}.\textsuperscript{116} Whilst Petillon goes on to note that one of the differences is that ‘Pynchon’s horn has become muted’, it can more specifically be said that this emblematic symbol of the African-American culture of jazz, of Central Avenue, adorned to the freeway and muted, is representative of the attempted silencing of African-American life through its destruction by the freeway programme, and by the development of the road and of automobile culture more generally in Los Angeles.\textsuperscript{117}

Pynchon alludes to the idea that infrastructural development is an act of racialised violence in his previous novel, \textit{V.} (1963). Part way through telling the story of Mondaugen, a scientist in 1920s, colonial South-West Africa, he reflects in the free indirect discourse of the character:

Something had changed. The blacks mattered even less. You didn't recognise their being there in the same way you once had. Objectives were different, that may simply have been all. The harbor needed dredging; railroads had to be built inland from the seaports, which couldn’t thrive by themselves any more than the interior could survive without them. Having legitimised their presence in the Territory the colonists were now obliged to improve what they had taken.\textsuperscript{118}

Here, black life matters ‘even less’ than in the moment of colonisation.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{114} Ibid., p. 84.
\item \textsuperscript{115} Ibid., pp. 86, 89.
\item \textsuperscript{117} Ibid., p. 132.
\end{itemize}
Infrastructure, and the capital that it generates and that generates it, thus circulates as part of a logic that seeks to destroy black life; its circulations are bound up in this logic. Indeed, it is telling that Mondaugen ends up working for Yoyodyne, which suggests a continuity between this anti-black colonial infrastructure project and the one that Pierce’s Yoyodyne facilitates in Lot 49.

Lot 49 is conscious of the displacement of African-Americans that the road facilitates. Pynchon’s novel understands the highway as a ‘white culture’, as a ‘world full of pre-cardiac Mustang drivers who scream insults at one another only when the windows are up’ as he puts it in ‘A Journey Into the Mind of Watts’.\textsuperscript{119} Indeed, Lot 49 reflects on who is excluded from the road when Oedipa goes off it. During this walk, Oedipa encounters the kind of people omitted from the road and its economies. As well as Oedipa’s encounters with ‘an exhausted busful of Negroes going on to graveyard shifts all over the city’, and the allusions to dispossession and segregation that cluster around the figure of the road, she also finds herself in a ‘Negro neighbourhood’ when she chooses instead to walk and take public transport around San Francisco, before then encountering ‘a Negro woman with an intricately-marbled scar along the baby-fat of one cheek’.\textsuperscript{120} This racialised exclusion from the highway and its suburbs is something that Pynchon explicitly links to race in ‘Journey’. Here, Pynchon remarks that the ‘whites [who] must drive at least twice every working day’ in Los Angeles rarely consider ‘leav[ing] at the Imperial Highway exit for a change, go[ing] east instead of west only a few blocks, and tak[ing] a look at Watts. A quick look. The simplest kind of beginning’.\textsuperscript{121} In Lot 49, the references to the way in which black life and black neighbourhoods are lodged off and between the road network are indicative of the novel’s reflexive awareness of the road’s role in racialised destruction, of the people it has dispossessed and bulldozed into its cracks and to its peripheries. It is only once Oedipa is off the road that she encounters such people, who have been forced into the spaces next to and beyond the road; they are not occupants of and do not have access to the places where the road goes, such as the suburbs.

Oedipa’s journey begins against the backdrop of Mucho’s anxieties

\textsuperscript{119} Pynchon, ‘Journey’.
\textsuperscript{120} Pynchon, Lot 49, pp. 84-85.
\textsuperscript{121} Pynchon, ‘Journey’.
regarding the underhand practices of car salesmen. By the end of the novel, Oedipa is drink driving, wishing for death. She goes ‘back to Echo Courts to drink bourbon until the sun went down and it was as dark as it would ever get. Then she went out and drove on the freeway for a while with her lights out, to see what would happen. But angels were watching’.

Oedipa then abandons her car, wanders down an old railroad, and imagines the shells of disused automobiles. *Lot 49* understands the road – and in particular, the interstate highway – as a participant in racialised violence. As such, it does not endorse its subjective emancipatory potential.

**The Watts Ensemble**

On August 11th 1965, an African-American man named Marquette Frye was stopped on Avalon Boulevard in Los Angeles by highway patrol officer Lee Minikus. Following the stop, Minikus was insistent that Marquette’s car was going to be towed, so Marquette’s brother walked to their home to get their mother, in the hope that she could claim the car and prevent it from being impounded, which would have been expensive for Frye. An increasing number of residents gathered to witness the unfolding situation, and the unrest became palpable when Frye was forcibly arrested, followed by the rest of his family. The six days of revolt that followed were characterised by the phrase “burn, baby, burn”, the slogan of Los Angeles’ KGFJ radio presenter Magnificent Montague, which became the revolt’s rallying cry.

I wish to argue that these events are perhaps the unspoken centre of *Lot 49*. I suggest that it is specifically the relationship between Watts and the roads and freeways of Los Angeles that resonates throughout Pynchon’s text. Oedipa’s journey across the California freeways is marked by the possibility of revelation: ‘[a]s things developed’, the reader is informed early on, ‘she was to have all manner of revelations’, and this sense of revelation may well be the revolt of those dispossessed by Los Angeles’ roads. Indeed, it is as Oedipa surveys the

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124 Ibid.
complex circuitry of San Narciso, the ‘swirl of houses and streets’ produced by automobile culture at the expense of black neighbourhoods, that ‘a revelation also trembled just past the threshold of her understanding’. This revelation, perhaps, is of the revolt of the black labourers who both sustain and are excluded from the circulatory world of the road. Further, it is the failure of this revelation to adequately reveal itself that sends Oedipa on her suicidal drive toward the end of the novel, which suggests firstly that this revelation is in some way inaccessible to Oedipa, and secondly that its presence – felt by Oedipa by never entirely understood – may nonetheless articulate itself in other ways in the text.

The events of the Watts revolt – the revelation that haunts Lot 49 – articulate themselves spectrally throughout the text. It is via da Silva’s remarks about urban revolt in her essay ‘To Be Announced’ that the relationship between the two can be elaborated. Da Silva argues that urban revolts should not be understood through ‘the tools of racial knowledge’ – that is, through forms of reasoning that subsume such events into narratives of causality and resolution, the progressive unfolding of the self-determining, self-possessive ‘I’. Instead, da Silva calls for an account of such events that ‘begin[s] and end[s] with relationality (affectability) — that do[es] no more than to anticipate what is to be announced, perhaps, a horizon of radical exteriority, where knowing demands affection, intention, and attention’. The point, then, is to analyse such revolts for the relationality they enact, rather than for their causality. In this vein, whilst I suggest that Watts represented a revolt against the highway and its destruction of black life, I also wish to argue that the revolt was an outbreak of the form of affectable life that the road and its self-determining subject sought to contain. There are traces of this form of life in Lot 49, even as it draws toward a self-determining conclusion at its end.

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126 Ibid., p. 15.
127 Denise Ferreira da Silva, ‘To Be Announced: Radical Praxis or Knowing (at) the Limits of Justice’, Social Text 31, no. 1, 114 (2013), p. 53.
128 Ibid., p. 44.

Harold Filan’s photo of a burned-out car on the Imperial Highway in Los Angeles (figure 9) is a snapshot of the anti-highway revolt in Watts. In the burning and overturning of cars, the destruction of the road, we might understand Watts as a defiant return of the street, of Central Avenue – of that affectable being-together that had been fractured into privatised, individualised self-determination by the imposition of automobile culture upon Los Angeles. Indeed, testimony of participants in the revolt articulates the relationality that was irrupting in its enactment. In ‘Journey’, Pynchon speaks to a Watts resident who characterises the revolt in the following way:

Others remember it in terms of music; through much of the rioting seemed to run, they say, a remarkable empathy, or whatever it is that jazz musicians feel on certain nights; everybody knowing what to do and when to do it without needing a word or a signal: “You could go up to anybody, the cats could be in the middle of burning down a store or something, but they’d tell you, explain very calm, just what they were doing, what they were going to do next. And that’s what they’d do; man, nobody has to give orders.”

What Pynchon understands the participant as articulating, then, is something of the jazz ensemble, that playing together that occurs in musical performance. Accordingly, the knowledge that is operative in (this particular description of) the revolt is an improvisatory one. It is a knowledge not dependent upon orders – that is, upon being told what to do. This is a group of people not following orders – a group of people improvising, making their own ‘orders’, rules – or what we might

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129 Pynchon, ‘Journey’.
call an ensemble; a group of people who must listen to one another and to one another’s generative moments of escape in order to be able to perform together. That is, it is the return of the improvisatory life of the street as described by Jack Kelson in the previous chapter, and which we saw in Hollers’ relationship to genre.

As we saw in the previous chapter, for Moten, improvisation is central to black life as ensemble.\(^{130}\) It is by outlining this relationship in more detail that Watts as an improvisatory ensemble that echoes through \textit{Lot 49} can be understood. As Michael Gallope explains in an analysis of Moten’s work, improvisation depends upon an anticipatory, prophetic description of what is likely to happen, which is only possible when one understands ‘both the constitutive necessity and unstable multiplicity of inscription that structure the attentive fidelity of improvisational practice’.\(^{131}\) That is, one must understand – must listen to and for – a particular context, in order to be able to offer the anticipatory description that makes improvisation possible (as with Himes, Hollers, and hardboiled fiction). Improvisation depends upon an anticipation of what is going to happen, which itself is part of shaping what is going to happen. Further, the ‘unstable multiplicity’ of these contextual inscriptions also necessitates the ‘formation and reformation of rules’, that is, the adjustment of that description.\(^{132}\) The multiplicity of (possible) contexts means that the rules within which one is improvising can be subject to change. Playing without orders, playing within the prophetic description of those orders, the ‘formation and reformation of rules’, listening to one another; these are the acts of an improvisatory ensemble.

Perhaps we can think about a moment such as that in Watts, when one could go up to ‘anybody’ and ‘they’d tell you, explain very calm, just what they were doing, what they were going to do next’ as a moment of ensemble, a series of improvisations that had undergone the (contextual) preparation of living in Watts. The description here, the anticipation of what is going to happen next, is that the violent (infra)structures of capital and the state, which manifest themselves in the (both quotidian and exceptional) act of Minikus, are likely to

\(^{130}\) Moten, \textit{In the Break}, p. 63


\(^{132}\) Moten, \textit{In the Break}, p. 63.
continue. The agreed rules of the improvisation that followed were that the oppressive infrastructures of capital and the State should be destroyed. Having studied the context of Watts by living in it, the ensemble of its residents is one based on the agreement of the necessity of the destruction of its oppressive infrastructures, such as the road. In turn, this destruction was a kind of productive destruction, a destruction of those violences that was simultaneously a performance of improvisatory black life. ‘Anybody’ participating could explain what they were doing; this was a playing together, but it was a playing together in which new participants could join and reformulate the rules, in which each member of the ensemble moved in the groove of that affectable (un)knowing, open to being acted upon and affected by another.

A Journey into the (unheard) Sound of Watts

The revolt in Watts demonstrates the practice of ensemble, the necessity of listening when playing with others. In Lot 49, it is through the multiplicity of voices in the text, which depend upon one another in order to form their coherence, that the ensemble revolt against the highway is preserved. In the penultimate scene of Lot 49, Oedipa drink drives and ends up in a ‘desolate, unfamiliar, unlit district of San Narciso’.133 Oedipa happening upon this area of San Narciso through a decision-making process that she would not usually undertake is instructive, as it is suggestive of Pynchon’s plea in ‘Journey’ to the ‘many whites’ who drive on the Harbour Freeway, to ‘leave at the Imperial Highway exit for a change, go east instead of west only a few blocks, and take a look at Watts’.134 The resonances of this ‘unfamiliar’ district with Watts are furthered by the description of the decaying railway line that Oedipa walks along when she gets out of her car. Oedipa walks ‘down a stretch of railroad track next to the highway’.135 She ‘remembered now old Pullman cars, left where the money’d run out or the customers vanished, amid green farm flatnesses where clothes hung, smoke lazed out of jointed pipes’, as well as imagining people ‘sle[eping] in junkyards in the stripped shells of wrecked Plymounds’.136 This unnamed and seemingly

133 Pynchon, Lot 49, p. 122.
134 Pynchon, ‘Journey’.
135 Pynchon, Lot 49, p. 123.
136 Ibid., p. 124.
unremarkable space bares resemblance to Watts, which, as we have seen, was served by the railcar system of Los Angeles that was rendered obsolete by the automobile and, more specifically, the freeway. In this context, the imagining of ‘old Pullman cars’, abandoned because ‘the money’d run out or the customers vanished’ thus reads as an allusion to Watts and the automobile-facilitated decline of railcar travel. Indeed, the old Pullman cars recall the graveyard of obsolete vehicles featured in figure 8. Further, the image of a ‘stripped shell’ of a ‘wrecked Plymouth’ invokes Filan’s photo of the burnt-out automobile on the Imperial Highway, as the image of the burned-out car became something of an icon of the revolt. Oedipa has wandered into Watts – as semi-fictional here as many of the other places in Lot 49 – in which she walks along a kind of timeline, past the decline of rail transportation for its residents, and into a scene from the revolt against the infrastructure that replaced it.

Oedipa does not recognise this place as Watts. Similarly, in its lingering attachment to the narrative closure of self-determination via Oedipa’s fantasy of redistribution, Lot 49 does not (quite) recognise the moments in the text when another form of life breaks out. However, whilst Oedipa might not recognise Watts, Watts nonetheless finds other ways to speak in the novel, particularly in the traces of (phonic, improvisatory) ensemble that structure Lot 49. This itself is an articulation of the silent black labour of residents of forgotten areas such as Watts that sustains the California of Lot 49. As we have seen, it is black people doing service work at Yoyodyne, and it is black people that Oedipa encounters, ‘exhausted’, heading to ‘graveyard shifts’ when riding a bus around San Francisco. This black labour does not speak at any point in the novel, except, perhaps, as a kind of haunting ensemble within its automobilecentric pastoral suburbia. Indeed, in Pynchon’s novel, the plantation pastoralism of the post-war, automobile-facilitated suburban home (such as Oedipa’s), the ordered swirl of houses, awaits the cry of the ‘lot’, a common form of allocation at antebellum slave auctions, and of property – of those suburban, neo-plantation homes.

137 Schrank, Art and the City, p. 139.
Suburbia awaits (fears, restrains) the cry of the plantation, the mid-twentieth century black domestic or service worker, such as Lutie in *The Street*. Indeed, if the crying of lot 49 is the sale of Pierce’s legacy – which is San Narciso, California, and more broadly, as the novel comments, America – then the crying of this ‘lot’, this patch of land, this plantation, truly is the sound of its unheard, unrecognisable black labourer. This, perhaps, is the ‘revelation’ that trembles past Oedipa’s understanding; the life and revolt of the black labourers who sustain the California she inhabits.

There are a number of passages that elaborate on this improvisatory, ensemble form of life. Indeed, it is telling that in Oedipa’s early encounter with the San Narciso road network, she senses a form of life that exists ‘on some other frequency (...) [where] words were being spoken’. Beneath or within the road is the life of sound. That is, somewhere within the road is the ‘other frequency’ of the Invisible Man and his retreat to the basement to preserve the life of the street. The life of the street has continued to operate and it can be heard ‘on some other frequency’. The riot was a manifestation of this ‘other frequency’ and it can be heard in Pynchon’s novel by tuning into the affectability of the text.

The life of the street articulates itself spectrally throughout the text, though particularly in its references to roads, cars, and the ways in which they have altered the urban landscape in America. For example, the passage in which Oedipa wanders into (imaginary) Watts is curiously pastoral. Oedipa’s memory of Watts is overlaid on the pastoral – the plantation becomes the urban enclosure. Here, the narrative voice becomes temporally unstable. It is not clear whether Oedipa is ‘amid [the] green farm flatnesses where clothes hung, smoke lazied out of jointed pipes’, or whether this is the scene of her memory of the old Pullman cars. What enters the narrative voice during this imagining of Watts, then, is precisely that black life that takes Watts as one of its names; the (white) ‘horror’ of the plantation, of the black, urban neighbourhood, is this multiplicity, this

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ensemble. Who is speaking here? Where are they speaking about and from? Are the ‘green farm flatnesses’ part of Oedipa’s memory, or are they part of the narrator’s framing of the place in which her memory occurs? Are they located in the present framing of that memory, or in the past of the memory itself? In this indeterminate layering of the urban on the pastoral, the ‘crying’ of the ‘lot’ occurs as a kind of spectral ensemble of voices.

Such twoness (threeness, fourness – not only indeterminate between Oedipa and the narrator, but also indeterminate in time and space) of the narrative voice is a feature of *Lot 49*, which is dialled into that ‘other frequency’ where ‘words were being spoken’. Pynchon’s sentence is an exercise in ensemble, in the poetics of affectability; each clause is qualified, added to, and (de)stabilised by each addition. Take, for example, the well-known passage that ruminates on Mucho’s time as a car salesman, when he recalls customers bringing in

the most godawful of trade-ins: motorised, metal extensions of themselves, of their families and what their whole lives must be like, out there so naked for anybody, a stranger like himself, to look at, frame cockeyed, rusty underneath, fender repainted in a shade just off enough to depress the value, if not Mucho himself, inside smelling hopelessly of children, supermarket booze, two, sometimes three generations of cigarette smokers, or only of dust — and when the cars were swept out you had to look at the actual residue of these lives, and there was no way of telling what things had been truly refused (when so little he supposed came by that out of fear most of it had to be taken and kept) and what had simply (perhaps tragically) been lost: clipped coupons promising savings of .05 or .10, trading stamps, pink flyers advertising specials at the markets, butts, tooth-shy combs, help-wanted ads, Yellow Pages torn from the phone book, rags of old underwear or dresses that already were period costumes, for wiping your own breath off the inside of a windshield with so you could see whatever it was, a movie, a woman or car you coveted, a cop who might pull you over just for drill, all the bits and pieces coated uniformly, like a salad of despair, in a gray dressing of ash, condensed exhaust, dust, body wastes—it made him sick to look, but he had to
Moten describes the (written) sound of ensemble as ‘extension and reformulation, in supplemented line and clustered sentence’, and Pynchon’s ‘supplemented line and clustered sentence’ here performs an ensemble arrangement of voices. The imagining of the lives of the car owners is interjected with reminders of Mucho’s presence (‘a stranger like himself’, ‘if not Mucho himself’), which simultaneously inflect the descriptive, adjectival prose of the narrator (‘rusty’, ‘cockeyed’, ‘clipped’, ‘pink’, ‘tooth-shy’) with the verb-driven pathos of Mucho (‘swept out’, ‘to look’, ‘no way of telling’). In this one voice, there are many; the descriptive voice of the narrator, the active voice of Mucho, and, silently, of the families whose lives the passage produces in its imagining. A certain improvisatory tension and multiplicity of voices – between description and action, and between the (imagined) time and space of the lives of the owners of the cars and the time and space of that imagining (i.e. when Mucho receives these cars for exchange) – inheres in this passage. Each voice works with and responds to the other, and almost each clause signals a change in the phrasing of these voices.

In this passage, each sentence is a phrase or a rehearsal of the ensemble of voices in it. For example, in the extension of the description of the trade-ins as ‘godawful’ into ‘motorised, metal extensions of themselves, of their families and what their whole lives must be like, out there so naked for anybody, a stranger like himself [Mucho], to look at’, the ensemble of description, action, and the time of the lives of the owners juxtaposed to the time of the description plays a musical bar, underpinned by the syllabic rhythm of each phrase. The metonymic description – the cars as ‘motorised, metal extensions’ of their owners – sets the tonal structure for the action (Mucho ‘looking at’ these cars), whilst the imagined lives of the owners (‘of their families and what their whole lives must be like’) offers an atmospheric background. Further, the descriptive voice acts upon Mucho; the cars as ‘metal extensions’ of their owners, ‘of their families and what their whole lives must be like’, compels Mucho to look – ‘he had to look’, as the end of the passage remarks. In turn, Mucho’s looking compels the descriptive voice to act again, as the passage returns to imagining the cars as ‘frame

\[141\] Ibid., p. 8.
cockeyed, rusty underneath’. The line (or bar) that follows the cars as metonymic of their owners rehearses, or repeats, this bar with a difference; the syllabic rhythm of each line remains, though they are separated by clauses that indicate a new descriptive turn, as the comma functions as the pause, the breath of the performer – of the horn player of the Tristero, perhaps – that occasions a shift of phrasing. Now, the cars are described as ‘frame cockeyed, rusty underneath, fender repainted in a shade just off enough to depress the value, if not Mucho himself’. This continued description is an improvisatory response to that which has preceded it; the following line extends the cars as metonymic of their owners to add detail to this description.

Finally, the description of the lives of the former owners itself releases an improvisatory play. The description of the cars smelling of ‘children, supermarket booze (...) cigarette smokers’, for example, sets the scene for an improvisatory imagining of ‘old underwear or dresses’ being used ‘for wiping your own breath off the inside of a windshield with so you could see whatever it was, a movie, a woman or car you coveted, a cop who might pull you over just for drill’. Here, then, Pynchon’s prose performs the negotiated act of ensemble; his excessive sentence is an act of the sensuous, of feeling, of the sonorous aurality of language.

It is notable that this occurs in Lot 49 in a passage about cars, as the prose here is infused with ‘whatever it is that jazz musicians feel on certain nights’. Much like that revolt, and much like Filan’s photo of the burnt-out car, this passage takes the car to pieces, breaks it down to its component parts, to reveal that what lies within it, what the car and its highway network contains is the street, the ensemble. Indeed, the passage’s reference to ‘a cop who might pull you over just for a drill’ alludes to the incident between Minikus and Frye, suggesting again that it is the affectable life of blackness that the road both needs and needs to eradicate. Whilst it might seem curious that this reading of the ensemble operates via such a visual scene in the novel, this can be understood as what Moten describes as ‘[s]ound giv[ing] us back the visuality that ocularcentrism had repressed’.

The gaze of the free indirect discourse in this scene is an aural one; it is a gaze that listens, that is rooted in the ensemblic practice of listening.

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142 Moten, In the Break, p. 235. Emphasis original.
We Await Silent Tristero’s Empire

Oedipa is overwhelmed when confronted with the destructive complexity of automobilecentric suburbia. What can be done, Lot 49 asks, to and for the subject rendered affectable by the development of such complex infrastructure? Pynchon’s answer to this is a hesitant and unconvinced gesture toward the emancipatory potential of the redistributive State. As David Punter puts it, Pynchon’s novels ‘are not primarily narratives but they take a diabolical pleasure in continually pretending that they are’.\textsuperscript{143} At the conclusion of the novel, Oedipa fantasises about redistributing Pierce’s wealth amongst the disinherited members of the American republic, those she has encountered on her journey who are excluded from its economy. She imagines ‘spreading some kind of a legacy among them all, all those nameless, maybe as a first installment’.\textsuperscript{144} Moments after Oedipa’s fantasy of redistribution, however, she envisages that the judge would ‘revoke her letters testamentary’, and that ‘they’d call her names, proclaim her through all Orange County as a redistributionist and pinko, slip the old man from Warpe, Wistfull, Kubitschek and McMingus in as administrator de bonis non and so much baby for code, constellations, shadow-legatees’.\textsuperscript{145}

Pétillon describes Lot 49 as a text that ‘could almost be viewed as a New Deal novel’.\textsuperscript{146} This is the thrust of the novel that resonates with Violence in the City and the Report of The National Advisory Commission’s desire to ensure that no more rebellious interruptions to this order occur. Indeed, the closing scenes of Lot 49 hover between affirming Oedipa as a subject who can know the effects of the development of the interstate highway and thus remedy them, and abandoning this subject all together in favour of something else. At its conclusion, the novel pulls toward the affirmation of the subject of thought, and of the institutions that protect and facilitate this subject. Oedipa is in an auction house, and she fantasises about involving the police in order to reveal the identity of the person bidding on Pierce’s lot of stamps. In Oedipa’s redistributive fantasy, it is

\textsuperscript{144} Pynchon, Lot 49, p. 125.
\textsuperscript{145} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{146} Petillon, “A Re-cognition,” p. 150.
the institutions of the state that can resolve the injustice wrought by the
development of automobile culture, via redistribution of the surplus of that
productive circulation. Were the redistribution to occur, the problems caused by
such complexity would be known and remedied by the self-determining subject.

Oedipa’s fantasy of redistribution is thus about the government of
circulation. As we have seen, in its images of a ‘swirl of houses’, as well as its
comparison of roads to the ‘veins’ of the city, the novel turns the road network of
California – and more specifically, Los Angeles – into a complex flow of
circulations. Moreover, it is the development of the circulatory system of the road
that dispossesses the black neighbourhoods of Los Angeles such as Watts.
Redistribution of wealth would thus remedy the injustices, and potential for revolt,
wrought by the development of the circulatory road network. That is, it would
restore order to the disorder that lurks, in Lot 49, just behind the seeming order
of the road. Beyond Lot 49’s unconvinced and unconvincing gesture toward the
self-determination of the nation and its thinking subject, however, is the trace of
the black life of affectability, the resurgence of the (ensemble of the) street. Lot
49 pushes against the erasure of affectable life that happens in such a moment,
shot through as it is with the possibility of a way of being that is rooted in
affectability, in responding to being acted upon by others, as was illustrated in the
way in which the voices of description, action, and memory act upon one another
in the passage that details Mucho’s time as a car salesman.

‘W.A.S.T.E.’, the acronym that adorns the post-horn of the Tristero, stands
for ‘We Await Silent Tristero’s Empire’.\footnote{Pynchon, Lot 49, p. 120. Emphasis added.} The crying of the lot never comes, the
empire of the Tristero is silent, and the black labourers of the novel do not speak.
But this silence articulates itself as a kind of haunting, ensemblic return of the
street; in the (absent) crying of the (worker of the) lot, in Lot 49's structuring
around the anticipation of revelation, and in its ensemble of voices. The riotous
ensemble of Watts speaks through and as the performance of silence in Lot 49.
Lot 49 cannot and does not commit to this in its overarching narrative, instead
becoming trapped in the bind of a consciousness of the limitations of the self-
determining subject. Nonetheless, embedded within the narrative of Lot 49 is an
ensemble of voices that deconstruct the authority of the singular narrative voice,
and which are the trace of the ensemble of Watts. It is perhaps not quite then, as Pynchon has it in ‘Journey’, that his readers should ‘look’ at Watts, but rather that they should listen for it.
Chapter 5

‘Does the City’s topology control us completely?’: Fugitive Transmotion in Samuel Delany’s *Dhalgren* (1974), Gerald Vizenor’s *Darkness in St Louis Bearheart* (1978), and Leslie Marmon Silko’s *Ceremony* (1977)

‘Mere conquest is never the course of empire (...) The achievement of mission can only be attained through productive utilisation of the captured ground’ – Ward Churchill, *Fantasies of the Master Race: Literature, Cinema and the Colonisation of American Indians* (1998), pp. 10-11

The 1973-1974 Oil Crisis

*The Crying of Lot 49* emerged at the beginning of a crisis in Fordist political economy that came to a head in the early 1970s. This late 1960s high point of production was, we might say, the high before the fall; overproduction in manufacturing and continued dependency on domestic oil necessitating high levels of extraction were the peaks that foreshadowed the crises of the early 1970s. Indeed, something of this overproduction can be found in *Lot 49’s* fixation on waste, which is bound up with global political economy. By the 1950s, the economies of Europe and Japan had begun to recover from the effects of the Second World War. ¹ Germany and Japan in particular were able to capitalise on production techniques developed in America over the preceding decades of the century. ² Their investment in advanced production equipment – superior to much of that which existed in America – coupled to access to cheap labour, facilitated production booms in key manufacturing industries during the 1950s and 1960s, including that of the automobile. ³ Overproduction was the result, signalled by a 40.9 percent fall in the rate of profit in American manufacturing between 1965 and 1973, which contributed to the economic downturn and crises of the 1970s. ⁴ The roots of this phenomena in competitive overseas production are referenced in *Lot 49’s* description of a ‘wildcat transistor outfit that hadn’t been there last year

² Ibid.
³ Ibid., p. 45.
and wouldn't be this coming but meanwhile was underselling even the Japanese and hauling in loot by the steamshovelful. Further, that the defense contractor Yoyodyne is a key source of employment in San Narciso is instructive, insofar as in the late 1960s, selling arms to OPEC (the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries) nations was a key way of ensuring that American dollars returned to American shores, as oil producing nations demanded a greater share of the profits of their production.

Discovery of oil in various American states in the early twentieth century led to overproduction and unsustainably low prices. In turn, as Sheldon Kamieniecki and Michael E. Kraft explain, the ready availability of cheap oil ‘encouraged patterns of U.S. economic growth and investment that were structurally dependent’ on the permanent availability of this cheap oil. Automobilecentrism was subsequently embedded in the (suburban) (re)organisation of American life, whilst ‘energy-inefficient buildings and industries’ were encouraged by this availability, as American oil production approached its 1970s peak. This overproduction is signaled in Lot 49 via the adornment of the ‘waste’ moniker to the automobilecentric cities that Oedipa navigates. The ‘waste’ sign is found on buildings in the cities built by an automobilecentric, oil dependent economy, and one of its postboxes located under the freeway, marking the site of that waste with its secret. The ‘waste’ of oil dependency – the rapid extraction and subsequent decline in availability of crude oil on American soil that resulted from the orientation of the twentieth century American economy around an inefficient natural resource – and the ‘waste’ of Fordist overproduction and subsequent crises in profit for American manufacturers, hides in plain sight in Lot 49. Within the complex circulations of production and distribution on the road, there is also this propensity toward waste, overproduction.

The most overt manifestation of global overproduction and the oil dependency that underpinned it was the Oil Crisis that ran from October 1973 to

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5 Pynchon, Lot 49, p. 43.
6 Mitchell, Carbon Democracy, pp. 156-158.
8 Ibid.
March 1974. In America, the months of the crisis saw mile-long queues at petrol stations, limitations on how much petrol customers could buy, and, in some cases, stations that ran out of petrol.\textsuperscript{9} The crisis was encapsulated by the then President Nixon’s address to the nation on November 25\textsuperscript{th} 1973, in which he announced his request ‘that all gasoline filling stations close down their pumps between 9 p.m. Saturday night and midnight Sunday every weekend’, which was widely observed.\textsuperscript{10} Nixon also lowered the national speed limit to fifty-five miles per hour, requested that people only buy gasoline on days ending in an odd or even number depending on whether their license plate ended in an odd or even number, and that consumers limited themselves to the usage of ten gallons of gasoline per week.\textsuperscript{11}

The causes of the Crisis are bound up in a complex web of geopolitics and political economy that Timothy Mitchell explores in \textit{Carbon Democracy: Political Power in the Age of Oil} (2011). In a chapter that examines the relationship between oil and currency rates, Mitchell summarises how global oil production functioned from the late 1920s until the early 1970s, Mitchell notes that:

\begin{quote}
[s]ince the 1930s, world oil prices had been governed by the international oil companies, which attempted to limit the supply of oil from the Middle East, in collaboration with a system of government production quotas and import controls in the United States.\textsuperscript{12}
\end{quote}

The restriction of oil production in the Middle East by what Mitchell describes as the ‘cartel (…) [of] seven major international oil corporations’ was an attempt to sustain the profitability of US oil companies and the oil that was found on American soil.\textsuperscript{13} Mitchell notes that the consequence of this was that ‘American oil reserves were exhausted more quickly than those of other regions. By 1971, US production had started to decline, as the volume of reserves in the lower forty-
eight states passed their peak'.

As a consequence of declining domestic production, then, America was becoming increasingly dependent on Middle Eastern oil. In addition to this, OPEC nations – the majority of which were in the Middle East – had, over the course of the preceding decades, found ways to wrestle some power over oil production away from American and European corporations and interests in the region. This, combined with America's increasing dependence on Middle Eastern oil, gave the producer countries far more say in the price of oil, which led to them demanding an increasing share of the profit. For Mitchell, the Crisis was (at least in part) manufactured by the American government and oil interests in order to stymie this burgeoning political economic power of the Middle East, and, concomitantly, to ensure that this power did not negatively affect oil companies' profits and American economic dominance.

Nixon was not the only person perpetuating a discourse of crisis and the concomitant insistence upon the maintenance of order in the face of an oil shortage. As Meg Jacobs outlines in Panic at the Pump: The Energy Crisis and the Transformation of American Politics in the 1970s (2016), Nixon was joined in this by his advisors and the national media. As she outlines, '[a]s soon as [OPEC] announced an embargo, one of President Nixon’s top advisers dubbed it “an Energy Pearl Harbour”’, in an article published in Public Utilities Fortnightly in December 1973. Nixon himself ‘delivered a nationally televised address from the White House’ on November 7th, 1973 in which he launched ‘Project Independence’, which was a mission for ‘the country to achieve energy self-sufficiency by 1980’. Jacobs goes on to note that there was also ‘a countless daily barrage’ of articles about the apparent the crisis in the national press, such as The New York Times’s ‘For Gasoline, Little Is Certain but High Prices’ in April 1974, which told stories of the lives of everyday Americans disrupted by the shortage. In December 1973, The New York Times had also published an

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14 Ibid., p. 167.
15 Ibid., pp. 147-151.
16 Ibid., pp. 166-170.
18 Ibid.
19 Ibid.
article by Paul Friedlander in which he declared that ‘chaos is come again’.  

The American government and national press constructed the conflict with OPEC through a discourse of ‘crisis’, an ‘Energy Pearl Harbour’ in which ‘chaos had come’. Jacobs further notes that ‘[e]ven the oil companies got behind this new “conservation ethic”’, with Mobil’s chairman, Rawleigh Warner Jr. remarking that ‘“the American public must develop a new national ethic with respect to the use of energy (…) because the energy shortage will be with us for a long time”’, whilst Johnny Cash delivered Amoco’s message to “Drive slow and save gas”. 

The kind of situation that the American government was trying to avoid was one such as the truckers’ strike in 1974, which followed Nixon’s State of the Union address at the end of January. Jacobs outlines that ‘[t]heir number one demand was a rollback of oil prices’, with ‘hundreds of thousands of drivers off the road’ and ‘the prospect of all interstate highways shut down’. Panicked governors in ‘Pennsylvania, Ohio, Illinois, Indiana, West Virginia, Kentucky, Maryland, and Michigan (…) called out the National Guards (…) turning the highways into zones of armed combat’. The truckers eventually returned to work in mid-February 1974, with Nixon largely having resisted their demands. Thus, the discourse of ‘crisis’ in America during the OPEC conflict of the early 1970s was one that sought to preserve America’s automobilecentric way of life and order in the nation.

The political economic turbulence of the early 1970s affected real restrictions upon the automobilecentric way of life in America. In turn, the possibility of the breakdown of the automobilecentric order of things occupied the imagination of fiction writers at the time. In ‘Retrofutures and Petrofutures: Oil, Scarcity, Limit’, Gerry Canavan explores three Oil Crisis novels of the 1970s. Canavan productively locates Isaac Asimov’s The Gods Themselves (1972), Ursula K. Le Guin’s The Dispossessed (1974), and Ernest Callenbach’s Ecotopia (1975) within this context. Exploring their dystopian imaginary, Canavan reads these novels as ones that possess a ‘pessimistic intuition that there simply is no
viable solution’ to the problem of the imminent scarcity of oil in a world where social relations are dependent upon it. For all of their science fictional futurity, Canavan claims that these texts struggle to imagine a world that is not dependent on this singular, finite resource for its energy. *The Gods Themselves* solves the energy crisis ‘by the invention of a miraculous solar “pump” that would be the perfect green energy source – if only it weren’t stealing its free energy from the universe next door’; *The Dispossessed* is able to survive its parallel energy crisis only by instituting onerous controls on all aspects of consumer capitalism, especially oil; whilst *Ecotopia* involves the ‘switch to a fantastic form of fully green energy derived (somehow, miraculously) directly from chlorophyll’. Canavan’s historiography is premised on what he calls ‘oil ontology’. Such an ontology centres oil as the engine of societal ‘progress’, which Canavan claims subsequently leads to the ambiguity and mourning of 1970s science fiction, which cannot imagine a world beyond this (narrative of) progress, whilst because of the Oil Crisis, it also cannot imagine the continuation of the world as it is. Oil makes the world progress, but the world cannot progress much further if it is running out of oil.

This historiography is complicated, however, by Gerald Vizenor’s *Darkness in Saint Louis Bearheart* (1978), Leslie Marmon Silko’s *Ceremony* (1977), and Samuel R. Delany’s *Dhalgren* (1975) all of which engage with the Oil Crisis as an event that disrupted the circulatory regime of the road. *Bearheart* follows the journey of Proude and Rosina Cedarfar as they escape the colonisation of their home in a forest that is to be burned for fuel and head toward New Mexico in the hope of finding a vision window to the fourth world, which is another dimension (of sorts). Proude and Rosina’s journey is wholly embedded in the context of the Oil Crisis, as the novel is one in which ‘gasoline [is] no longer available for automobiles’ because ‘political and executive nonfeasance’ mean that ‘the national supplies of crude oil had dribbled to nothing’. Silko’s *Ceremony* tells the story of a traumatised Native American Second World War veteran,

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27 Ibid.
28 Ibid.
29 Ibid.
whilst demonstrating the restorative possibilities of Native practices, though it is also a novel in which ‘the gas pumps ha[ve] locks on the handles’, and in which there is an uncanny focus on the process of the delivery of oil.\textsuperscript{31} Delany’s \textit{Dhalgren} follows the journey of ‘the Kid’, who is surviving in the city of Bellona after an unnamed event has left it ‘rendered helpless by lack of gasoline’.\textsuperscript{32}

\textit{Bearheart, Ceremony,} and \textit{Dhalgren} have a critical relationship to the science fictions of the Oil Crisis. When these three novels are read in this context, we find that rather than being caught in the difficulty of imagining a world with or without oil, they instead take this moment to reimagine and rearticulate ways of being that are otherwise than the privatised, individualised, self-determination of the road. In one sense, \textit{Bearheart, Ceremony,} and \textit{Dhalgren} are the culmination of a narrative that begins with the ‘diesel trucks’ on the roads of \textit{Hollers}, proceeds through the ‘waste’ of \textit{Lot 49}, and into the Crisis that they represent.\textsuperscript{33} However, unlike \textit{The Gods Themselves, Ecotopia,} and \textit{The Dispossessed,} the Crisis does not have to be an ambiguous space of u/dys/topian mourning, which, in imagining a world of technological plenty, implicitly relies on an infinite supply of oil. Instead, it can be a space in which a resurgence of the street occurs, where ways of being and moving that are denied by the self-determining circulations of the road re-emerge. Indeed, in the face of the discourse of a crisis upon, and the accompanying rationed order of, the road, \textit{Bearheart, Ceremony,} and \textit{Dhalgren} are uninterested in the restoration of circulatory order found in the novels analysed in the earlier chapters, the ‘complete and satisfactory traffic circulation’ of \textit{The Major Traffic Street Plan} and the ‘good internal circulation’ of \textit{Centropolis} that Nixon and his advisors were so desperate to maintain.\textsuperscript{34} Instead of this, \textit{Dhalgren, Bearheart,} and \textit{Ceremony} suggest the rewriting of the road via the return of the street.

Delany’s \textit{Dhalgren} is most explicit in its suggestion that the breakdown of the road with the Oil Crisis opens the possibility for the resurgence of the social life of the street, as it conflates the event of the Crisis with urban rebellions such

\textsuperscript{31} Silko, \textit{Ceremony,} p. 102.
\textsuperscript{32} Delany, \textit{Dhalgren,} p. 73.
\textsuperscript{33} Himes, \textit{Hollers,} p. 17.
\textsuperscript{34} Olmsted, Barthelemew, and Cheney, \textit{The Major Traffic Street Plan,} p. 10, and Los Angeles Central City Committee, ‘\textit{Centropolis}’, p. 10.
as that of Watts. The event that has rendered Bellona ‘helpless by lack of gasoline’ (seemingly, the Oil Crisis) is also referred to as ‘[t]he night the . . . black people had the riot’, which is described as ‘[t]he first night, I guess it was. When all that lightning was going on. They went wild. Swarmed all over. Broke up a whole lot of stuff around here’. Seemingly, then, a riot is the event that has caused the radical restructuring of space, time, and economy in Bellona. For my purposes, what is interesting about this fusion of an event that bears an affinity to that which happened in Watts and the Oil Crisis is that it suggests that the Oil Crisis can be a space for the resurgence of the street. That is, Dhalgren suggests the return of the ensemble of the street in light of the breakdown of the order of the road. Further, Dhalgren also suggests an affinity between this black social life and the life of the Native. This suggestion is made via the figure of the Kid, who is indigenous, and who leads a group of predominantly black characters, the Scorpions. The movement in and of the streets by the Scorpions, Dhalgren suggests, is also in some way the movement of the Native.

Settler Colonial Domination and the Automobile-Road: The Pershing Map

To argue that the Oil Crisis represents a potential break down of the road is to suggest that the dream of The Major Traffic Street Plan, of Report and Recommendations and of the Regional Plan, is under threat. More specifically, it is to suggest that these maps’ order of measured, predictable, repetitive, and uniform movement is no longer operative. For the oil industry to begin to malfunction, as it does in the Oil Crisis, is for the securing of the road by the calculative figure of the map to begin to come undone. If the primary commodity that facilitates the movement of things is no longer freely available, how will the

36 Delany, Dhalgren, pp. 219, 78.
calculated movement of things (that the map represents and makes possible) continue?

Here, I wish to expand the argument that the street planning maps of the early twentieth century disrupted and dispersed the black life of the street by demonstrating that these mapping techniques were also those used to colonise Native land. In his book *Fantasies of the Master Race: Literature, Cinema and the Colonisation of American Indians*, the Native literary and cultural theorist Ward Churchill observes that ‘[m]ere conquest is never the course of empire (…) The achievement of mission can only be attained through productive utilisation of the captured ground’.\(^{37}\) The form that this ‘productive utilisation of the captured ground’ takes in America changes, as Churchill notes, from farming, to market enterprise, to consolidation of ownership of the land.\(^ {38}\) To Churchill’s taxonomy of different forms of colonial spatial domination, we can add the omniscient circulations of the road.

A series of Supreme Court rulings and laws passed in the late decades of the nineteenth century and the early decades of the twentieth were important for the development of the automobile-road on Native land. Precedent for automobile-road development through Native lands was set by an 1899 statute, which allowed the Secretary of the Interior to grant, upon application, a ‘right of way for a railway, telegraph and telephone line through any Indian reservation in any State or Territory’.\(^ {39}\) Prior to this, in 1887, Congress had passed the Dawes Act, which broke reservation land up into allotments of private property and allocated them to Native peoples living on it. Any land deemed ‘surplus’ at the end of this process was available for purchase by non-Native people.

In 1903, the case of Lone Wolf v. Hitchcock was brought before the Supreme Court, which sought to challenge the division of reservation land epitomised by the Dawes Act. Lone Wolf, the Principal Chief of the Kiowa tribe, argued that the imposition of these divisions upon Native land violated the 1867

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\(^{38}\) Ibid., pp. 10-11.

Medicine Lodge Treaty. The Treaty granted tribes ‘absolute and undisturbed use and occupation’ of their lands, and which stated that

[n]o treaty for the cession of any portion or part of the reservation herein described, which may be held in common, shall be of any validity or force as against the said Indians, unless executed and signed by at least three-fourths of all the adult male Indians occupying the same'.

Lone Wolf claimed that an Act of Congress in 1900, which imposed Dawes Act-style land division upon the Kiowa tribe reservation, violated the need for consensus of three-quarters of the adult male Kiowa population in order for changes to the Medicine Lodge Treaty to be made. The Supreme Court ruled that this lack of consent did not matter, stating that ‘[p]lenary authority over the tribal relations of the Indians has been exercised by Congress from the beginning’, effectively granting control of Native land to Congress in the process. Alongside the precedent that was set by the 1899 statute that legalised the building of ‘railway, telegraph and telephone line[s]’, then, the comprehensive authority of Congress over Native land was also given precedent through the case of Lone Wolf v. Hitchcock. Accordingly, an amendment to the 1916 Federal-Aid Road Act mandated the Secretary of Agriculture to ‘cooperate with the State highway departments and with the Department of the Interior in the construction of public highways within Indian reservations’. What is apparent in these changes to the law in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century is that the establishment of the total sovereignty of Congress over Native land allowed for the development of the automobile-road as a new order of spatial domination. That this spatial domination bears a relationship to the city planning maps of the early twentieth century is apparent when we consider the ways in which the colonial development of the automobile-

road draws its governing rationalities from practices of mapping. The starting
point for such an exploration is the ‘Pershing Map’ (figure 10), which was
constructed by General John P. Pershing in 1922. Much of the impetus for the
development of the road network in America came directly from the military, as
during World War One, the nation’s underdeveloped road network, called upon
to assist its overstretched rail network, struggled to effectively transport munitions
to the east coast to be shipped to Europe.\(^{43}\) What resulted from the demonstrable
difficulty that the army had in transporting trucks across the country via the road
was the Pershing Map. Roger P. Roess and Elena S. Prassas explain that ‘[i]n
1922, the Bureau of Public Roads authorised General John P. Pershing to
construct a national highway map that would meet the nation’s defense needs in
time of war. The resulting Pershing Map became the starting point for defining
the “Primary or Interstate” highway system.’\(^{44}\)

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**Figure 10.** ‘The Pershing Map’, *US Department of Transportation: Federal
Highway Administration*, 1922 <https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/candc/timeline.cfm>
[accessed April 12, 2018].

One example of the colonising road in America is route 66. Route 66 was
first designated as a singular highway in 1926, and it continued to be developed
over the following decade.\(^{45}\) Popularised by Steinbeck’s *The Grapes of Wrath*
(1939), the route is symbolic of the interstate vision of Pershing’s map, running
as it does from Chicago to Los Angeles. It is also symbolic of the road’s role in
the ongoing dispossession of Native land, originally running disruptively close to
the village of Laguna, until local residents successfully managed to get it

\(^{43}\) Rudi Volti, *Cars and Culture: The Life Story of a Technology* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins

\(^{44}\) Roger P. Roess and Elena S. Prassas, *The Highway Capacity Manual: A Conceptual and
Research History Volume 1: Uninterrupted Flow* (New York: Springer International Publishing,

\(^{45}\) See Peter B. Dedek, *Hip to the Trip: A Cultural History of Route 66* (Albuquerque: University of
rerouted. In spite of this rerouting, Lee Marmon explains that the development of roads such as route 66 in and across reservations ‘brought significant changes’ to them, particularly for the Laguna Pueblo tribe, who are the subject of *Ceremony*. More specifically, Marmon explains that this development accelerated changes in work patterns for Native Americans, which began with the railroad and intensified with the automobile-road, as agriculture declined as the ‘mainstay of the Laguna economy’, to be replaced by work such as the production of commodities for tourists. This is something that is apparent in *Ceremony*, which remarks upon the ‘white tourists (…) driving down 66, stopping to see the Indian souvenirs’.

The development of interstate highways such as route 66 brought significant change to the life of America’s Native population. Further, the development of these highways is symbolised by the Pershing map. The Pershing map represents the process of dispossession and disruption to Native populations, such as the Laguna Pueblo tribe, enacted by highway development, as it is a vision for domination of the land that was enacted in the development of roads such as route 66. Perhaps what is most important about Pershing’s map is its presentation. Pershing’s map repeats a number of gestures of the city planning maps of the early twentieth century, including the interpellation of a detached, omniscient observer, the homogenisation of space in the service of transportation, and the measurement of distances for the purpose of transportation. Moreover, the map represents the road as circulatory, interconnected. That form of knowing that dispersed the black life of the street is thus also the form of knowing that is used to dominate Native land, to facilitate movement upon it. It is in this way that we can understand the road as the (continuing) establishment of this circulatory project upon Native land: the colonising road is produced by the same rationalising, ocularcentric, geometric gaze as that which helped to dominate the street.

The abstract form of the map represented the dispossession of the black life of the street, as well as the dispersal of the Native from their land. One

question that this poses is: what exactly is the relationship between these two practices of dispossession? One way to answer this is to consider the sensory dynamics of the map. There is an exclusionary privileging of sight within the geometric, representational form of the map, an emphasis on the gaze of the detached observer. The ocularcentrism of the modern map is something that has been noted in studies of cartography. As Barney Warf observes, the work of critical cartographers such as J.B. Harley has argued that ‘far from constituting a detached, objective viewpoint from nowhere (a view that reduces mapmaking to a technical process), mapmaking was (and is) a social process deeply wrapped up in the complex political dynamics of colonialism and political domination’.\(^49\)

This, as we have seen, is born out in the history of road mapping and city planning: it is a ‘social process deeply wrapped up in the complex political dynamics of (…) political domination’. Warf further notes that ‘ocularcentrism (…) extended deeply into the (…) discipline of cartography (…) making global space smooth, fungible, and comprehensible by imposing order on an otherwise chaotic environment’\(^50\). Cartography, as Harley puts it, is ‘a form of knowledge and a form of power’, and the power of the map is the all-seeing, and thus all-knowing, perspective from which it is drawn.\(^51\) As Simon Ferdinand remarks, ‘[c]artographers grasp space ‘from above’ in the sense of occupying a socially dominant position’.\(^52\) What is important in the map of the road is its perspective, which allows space to become ‘smooth, fungible, and comprehensible’, something over which cars can rein and routes can be mapped.

The mapping techniques of road and highway development represent the importance of the visual in automobile culture – the all-seeing eye, mirrored in the all-seeing (private) eye of the driver detective, who cognitively maps the city and deduces the origin of its malfunctioning circulations. In addition to the importance of the visual represented by the mapping techniques of road and highway planning, road novels themselves emphasise the primacy of the visual in automobile culture. For example, in The Street, Mrs Chandler’s driving clarifies


\(^{50}\) Ibid.


\(^{52}\) Ferdinand, ‘Cartography at Ground Level’, p. 145.
the possessiveness of this looking, as she ‘point[s] out places’ as her and Lutie drive, naming ‘[t]he Connecticut River’ with ‘a wave of her hand’. That is, Mrs Chandler names and claims what she sees, as is made clear by them entering a ‘private road’ moments later: Mrs Chandler’s possessiveness on the ‘private road’ operates via sight. Similarly, when Marlowe and the police begin to attempt to solve the mystery of the car crashed off the end of the Lido pier in The Big Sleep, they are speculating about what they can see, a graphically described visual scene in which ‘[t]he front bumper was bent, one headlight smashed, the other bent up but the glass still unbroken. The radiator shell had a big dent in it, and the paint and nickel were scratched up all over the car’.

This visual economy is also important to the racialised conflict that Jones experiences on the road in Hollers, such as when ‘[t]he white workers crossing the street looked at the big new car full of black faces and gave off cold hostility’, and later ‘when they looked up and saw we were coloured they just took their time, giving us a look of cold hatred’. Invisible Man elaborates on this conflation of the visual and possession on the road, with its title – and the ongoing antagonisms that the protagonist experiences on the street – making clear that the problem for black Americans within the circulatory regime of the automobile is that of visibility. We might also note that in the scene in which Mucho is processing a trade-in car in Lot 49, it made him ‘sick to look’ at it, as if he is unable to hear the ensemble it contains and instead can only see a tragic lack of possession. Thus, in these texts, driving functions via sight, but for their black characters, to be seen is to be apprehended, caught. The question that this raises is whether it is possible to escape the visual economy of the road.

**Fugitivity and Transmotion**

Arguably, the map’s privileging of the visual is an exclusion of other sense and other modes of being; it is an exclusion of listening, of improvisation, and thus of street life and its blackness. The ocularcentric form of knowledge represented by the map excludes sound, phonicity, noise, and thus blackness. As Ferdinand puts

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54 Ibid.
55 Chandler, *The Big Sleep*, p. 49.
it, '[m]aps disentangle their users from the sensuous complexity of “grounded”
practices, allowing one to grasp urban geographies without being caught up in
them. They reduce streets and urban spaces to transparently readable ‘texts’ that
allow for rationalised interventions from afar'. With the breakdown of the
ocularcentric map of the road with the Oil Crisis, *Dhalgren*, *Bearheart*, and
*Ceremony* suggest that the ‘sensuous complexity’ of the street can return.

*Dhalgren*, *Bearheart*, and *Ceremony* all contain the aural life of the street.
Here, movement is conceptualised in terms of improvisation and the contingent
acts of description upon which it depends. I refer to this movement as ‘fugitivity’,
which is (necessarily) loosely conceptualised by Moten and Harney as a(n)
(criminalised) escape from the strictures of what is, and which draws together (or
becomes a name for) the practice of improvisation within ensemble. References
to fugitivity are suitably scattered across both *In the Break* and *The
Undercommons*, with their function most often being to describe a particular type
of contextualised escape. In *The Undercommons*, for example, Moten and
Harney describe blackness as the ‘thing that cuts the regulative, governant force
of (the) understanding (and even of those understandings of blackness to which
black people are given since fugitivity escapes even the fugitive)’. This is to say
that blackness as fugitivity is understood by Moten and Harney to be that which
escapes the very understanding of blackness. As Dhanveer Singh Brar
summarises it, for Moten, ‘fugitive movement [is] constant escape’.

Fugitivity is dependent on knowing how to escape. This is to say that
fugitivity is about reading in order to know how to escape. The improvisatory
moment within an ensemble, it could be said, is a moment of fugitivity based on
reading; it is an escape from the rules of that ensemble. As Moten puts it in *In the
Break*, the “resistant orality” of blackness is a type of ‘submerged or subversive
literacy’. Further, such an escape is also, as the term fugitivity suggests, a type
of movement. In conceptualising the movement that occurs in *Bearheart*,
*Ceremony*, and *Dhalgren* as ‘fugitive’, I thus read them for the ways in which they
propose a movement of contextualised escape. In the rupture of the Oil Crisis,

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57 Ferdinand, ‘Cartography at Ground Level’, p. 145.
58 Harney and Moten, *The Undercommons*, p. 50.
60 Moten, *In the Break*, p. 256. See also pp. 41, 67.
*Bearheart, Ceremony*, and *Dhalgren* explore the fugitive, affectable movement of aurality.

Thinking movement in terms of fugitivity, improvisation, and ensemble offers the possibility for considering the relationship between black and Native forms of movement. That there is the possibility of a relationship between the fugitive, phonic movement of blackness and Native practices of movement is suggested by Vizenor’s notion of ‘the sovereignty of transmotion’.61 Deborah Madsen explains that in the concept of transmotion, Vizenor ‘would seem to reject the territorial understanding of “tribal sovereignty” as a restrictive concept that limits the practices of sovereignty to designated geographical boundaries’.62 Instead, ‘the sovereignty that “transmotion” encompasses is, as Michael Snyder explains, “rooted in traditional Native uses of land and cultural practice”. These land usages and cultural practices assume the fundamental right of unrestricted movement’.63 What is sovereign, then, is not the capacity to own land, but rather the capacity to move across it. The idea that transmotion is a form of fugitive movement is further supported by Vizenor’s description of Native resistances such as this as a series of ‘fugitive poses’.64 In the resonances that this suggestive formulation bears to Moten’s own sounding of fugitivity, we can understand one point of crossover that occurs in these conceptions of black and Native life.

Such a relationship has been alluded to in both Black and Indigenous Studies. Jared Sexton writes that ‘[i]f the indigenous relation to land precedes and exceeds any regime of property, then the slave’s relation to land precedes and exceeds any prior relation to land – landlessness’.65 Similarly, the indigenous and decolonial scholars Jarett Martineau and Eric Ritskes have written of a ‘fugitive indigeneity’, and of ‘Indigenous land, communities and cultures as the

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62 Ibid.
63 Ibid.
65 Jared Sexton, ‘The Vel of Slavery: Tracking the Figure of the Unsovereign’, *Critical Sociology* 42, no. 4-5 (2014), p. 11.
force that energises decolonisation and provides fugitive possibilities for movement', in a formulation that suggests a certain mutuality between blackness and indigeneity.\textsuperscript{66} The road suppresses this mutual fugitivity; it takes the land away from the Native in transmotion and installs circulatory regimes that destroy the black life of the street. Consequently, the Native cannot be in transmotion, and the fugitive cannot be in the street. This theoretical affinity will help unpack the mutuality between black and Native street life implied by the relationship between the Kid and the Scorpions in \textit{Dhalgren}.

\section*{The 1973-1974 Oil Crisis in \textit{Bearheart, Ceremony,} and \textit{Dhalgren}}

Samuel Delany's \textit{Dhalgren} (1975) can be understood in the context of the Oil Crisis. Critically, George Cotkin notes that Delany's novel arrived in the aftermath of a time when '[a]n oil embargo in 1973 and 1974 made gasoline expensive and scarce'.\textsuperscript{67} However, he does not explore in any depth the representation of this in the novel. The landscape of \textit{Dhalgren} is post-apocalyptic; cars on the road are a rarity, with most having been stripped for parts, whilst a toll booth at the edge of the city has its 'front pane shattered, stool overturned, no drawer in the register – a third of the keys stuck down; a few bent'.\textsuperscript{68} Similarly, near the end of the novel, a woman entering the city tells the Kid that on the way in, '[a]ll I saw was a pickup and a Willy's station wagon'.\textsuperscript{69} The road is thus not functioning in \textit{Dhalgren}: there is no smooth, total circulation of goods. Further, the Kid regularly wanders the depopulated road; he can 'walk (...) for [an] hour' and see no vehicles, and he also hitch-hikes due to this lack of available cars.\textsuperscript{70} In one scene, he 'walk[s] up the edge of the road, thinking: There are no cars, I could run down the middle. Suddenly he laughed loudly (...) and ran forward, waving his arms, yelling'.\textsuperscript{71} That the novel is concerned with a certain liberation from an ocularcentric form of mapping is made apparent both in the wandering that characterises much of the

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{68} Delany, \textit{Dhalgren}, p. 12.
\item \textsuperscript{69} Ibid., p. 876.
\item \textsuperscript{70} Ibid., p. 11.
\item \textsuperscript{71} Ibid., p. 424.
\end{itemize}
Kid’s early movement in the novel, as well as in a question that he poses to Lanya, which neatly summarises the power of the map. The Kid asks: “Do you think a city can control the way the people live inside it? I mean, just the geography, the way the streets are laid out, the way the buildings are placed?” Such a question begins to interrogate the problem of the corralling of populations into regimes of circulation, facilitated by city planning and road maps.

It is not only that *Dhalgren* signals its historical placement in the aftermath of the Oil Crisis because Bellona is a city (mostly) deprived of cars. It is also that, in the breakdown of the circulatory order of the road, a whole other set of circulations have also ceased to function. One telling example of this is the breakdown of the circulation of capital. In conversation, the Kid and Tak observe that whilst Bellona continues to have something of ‘an ordered social matrix’, it nonetheless ‘ha[s] no economy’. When the Kid tries to get Mr Richards, the father of a family he has helped moved house, to pay him, Mr Richards refuses and tells the Kid ‘[i]t doesn’t cost anything to live in this city-no food bills, no rent. Money doesn’t mean anything here any more’. Accordingly, when out attempting to solicit someone to pay to have sex with Lanya, Denny remarks: ‘Christ was it hard to find someone with any money’. Without infrastructure, capital struggles to circulate. In addition to the stalled circulation of capital, commodities have mostly ceased to circulate in Bellona, and amenities only work intermittently. In the absence of fresh food, the Kid and his friends eat tinned goods. Indeed, Reverend Tayler, whose church at one point runs a free supper program, explains to the Kid that “‘[t]aking the labels off (...) is one minor way to discourage pilfering (...) Snoopers look in on shelves full of blank cans, and don’t know whether it’s rat poison, motor oil, or green peas”’. Further, the ‘nest’ in which the Kid comes to live derives much of its heat from burning fires, as he and his friends attempt to stay warm in those ‘energy-inefficient buildings’ described by Kamieniecki and Kraft, which were built by and for the twentieth century oil industry.

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72 Ibid., p. 279.  
73 Ibid., p. 741.  
74 Ibid., p. 308.  
75 Ibid., p. 788.  
76 Ibid., p. 385.  
77 Ibid., pp. 649-650.
Scholars have made both covert and overt reference to the Oil Crisis in *Bearheart*, wherein, as a consequence of the Crisis, Proude Cedarfair and his wife Rosina are forced to leave their home amongst the cedar trees and set off on a pilgrimage to New Mexico, after the US government begins cutting down forests to burn for fuel, in order to protect the ‘interests and comforts of federal bureaucrats’. What follows in *Bearheart* is an account of their travels. Kimberley M. Blaeser comments that Vizenor’s text ‘deals with a nationwide oil shortage and the resulting upheaval of social structures’; A. Robert Lee describes it as a book ‘where oil has run out and chaos reigns’; and Arthur F. Redding positions it as a ‘respon[se] to the oil crisis of the early 1970s’. Indeed, in the passage that details how supplies of crude oil have become scarce in America, the novel remarks that ‘the executive and legislative branches of government’ were ‘[p]aralysed in [their] own political quarrels’, meaning that they ‘were not capable of negotiating trades or developing alternative fuels. The nation ran out of gasoline and fuel oil’. Further, radio broadcasts by ‘officious voices (...) announced new government restrictions and regulations on travel and the use of fuels’. Here, then, in the indictment of branches of government unable to negotiate trade deals or develop alternative fuels, and in the reference to Nixon’s broadcasts to the nation, is a clear allusion to the Oil Crisis. This was a situation in which the American government was unable to do a deal with OPEC (because of the demand for recognition of a Palestinian State), and alternative fuels were underdeveloped (because of the monopolies of oil companies seeking to maximise their profits).

As Vizenor’s novel humorously makes clear, one such response to this breakdown of the order of the road is the transparently violent attempt to maintain self-determination. When driving through the region of Big Walker, Proude, Rosina, and the rest of the pilgrims are ambushed by a group of ‘whitepeople’

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81 Ibid., p. 44.
who want to take control of their car, a functioning automobile and a tank of petrol being a rare thing in Bearheart’s Oil Crisis America. The pilgrims eventually exit the vehicle, leaving the ‘whitepeople’ to ‘fight (…) with each other for control of the wheel’. Eventually, the car is ‘[s]o loaded with bodies and firewood, the rear tires exploded’. In an extended scene, Bearheart describes the car crawling up a hill in this state until

three whitepeople had torn up the trunk floor and severed the gasoline line. When the three started a siphon flowing the sparks from the churning rear wheels ignited the spilled gasoline. The whitepeople turned to run but the tank exploded in a giant red ball of swirling flames. Flaming whitebodies were hurled against the curbs and poles and trees beside the school hill road. Others skidded and rolled across the asphalt. Whiteskin peeled like the bark from winter poplar trees. The flame flickered, whitepeople moaned and cried, the metal creaked and snapped from the changes in temperature and then it was silent.

Here, what the text humorously depicts is a desperate attempt at self-determination in the face of affectability. In the takeover of the car, and in the attempt to siphon off its gasoline, we witness the assertion of a will that wants possession – that wants the exterior world to operate in service of its interior: to drive the car, to control the supply of fuel. Further, Bearheart racialises this desire. The circulatory order of the road has collapsed, and rather than accept this exposure to affectability, the ‘whitepeople’ of the novel failingly seek the self-determination that is traditionally their preserve; the possessiveness of the driver-detective, or of Mrs Chandler in The Street.

What is striking about Bearheart is the extent to which it presents the automobile – as with so many other aspects of Euro-America in the novel – as incidental to the journey that the pilgrims are undertaking. The pilgrims acquire their car from a friend, Sister Flame, near the beginning of their journey. Even

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83 Vizenor, Bearheart, p. 51.
84 Ibid., p. 52.
85 Ibid.
86 Ibid., pp. 52-53.
87 Ibid., p. 43.
at this stage, and much like Oedipa and her rented Impala, the pilgrims’ attachment to the vehicle is under question. Sister Flame explains that the car does not belong to her, but to a recently deceased ‘rich friend’. The car in which they travel, then, is third hand, unowned. Further, in the moment when the car is ambushed by the ‘whitepeople’ on the road in Big Walker, Bigfoot advises the other pilgrims to ‘make up all the names you can think of when we pass . . . this is a parade’. The road is a space of performance for the pilgrims, of charade; it is not a space that is central to the reproduction of their form of life or subjectivity, which is to say that the pilgrims are not travelling on the road as part of any ordered circulation or production. The road is ‘whitepeople’s’ space; it is a space, much like the rest of Euro-America, in which the pilgrims perform a particular identity simply to survive.

This positioning of the road as incidental to the life of the pilgrims opens the possibility that there might be a(nother) way of living that does not depend on it. Indeed, that the pilgrims’ journey begins as a kind of road novel, that it ends so quickly, and that this end is so incidental to them (‘[w]e are not citizens’, as Proude tells Rosina as they listen to the radio broadcast about ‘government restrictions and regulations on travel and the use of fuels’) suggests a parodying of the apocalyptic narratives of other Oil Crisis fictions as identified by Canavan. If the Oil Crisis is the end of the possibility of the road narrative (other than as a violent attempt at self-determination as seen in the passage above) then this ending is framed as incidental to a group of people whose lives have never depended upon the oil economy. In Bearheart, such an end need not spur violent, apocalyptic attempts at self-determination, nor mourning for its loss. The apocalypse is over very quickly in Bearheart, as the fuel tank explodes in flames, after which the pilgrims simply move on.

The presence of the Oil Crisis is more oblique in Ceremony. Catherine Rainwater observes that ‘[a]ccording to Silko’s code of the highway, United States space is defined by a series of gas stations, motels, and road signs urging the traveler to move over the land rather than settle into it’, whilst Marija Knežević reads the ‘numerous highway codes, road signs, gas stations, advertisements,

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88 Ibid.
89 Ibid., p. 51.
90 Ibid., p. 44.
[and] motels’ in Ceremony as evidence of the ‘hyperreality of American space’.\footnote{Catherine Rainwater, ‘The Semiotics of Dwelling in Leslie Marmon Silko’s Ceremony’, in Allan Chavkin ed., \textit{Leslie Marmon Silko’s Ceremony: A Casebook} (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 120. Marija Knežević, ‘On the Edge of Meaning: Native American Sanctuary of Words’, in Aleksandra Nikčević-Batičević and Marija Knežević eds, \textit{On the Borders of Convention} (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars, 2010), pp. 122-123.} This is to say that Ceremony documents the map, those measured movements from gas station to gas station, motel to motel, across highways. Indeed, it is the novel’s interweaving imagery of the highway, the truck, oil, the gas station, and violent consumption that offers an allusion to the 1973 Oil Crisis. The novel’s depiction of the distribution of oil can be read in the context of this being a national concern; references to the delivery of oil and to closed gas stations read in a particular way in a novel that was published in 1977. Further, Ceremony’s linkage of the figure of the truck to oil distribution and consumption, excess, and violence also indicts the stability of (and the desire to restabilise) this regime as one that requires violence.

Details that read as allusions to the Oil Crisis are scattered across Ceremony, including the observation that ‘\[t\]he store in Cubero was closed, and the gas pumps had locks on the handles’.\footnote{Silko, \textit{Ceremony}, p. 102.} In the context of stations closing or running out of gas during the Crisis, such an image carries the memory of the earlier years of the decade, in a book published only three years after the resolution of the Crisis. Indeed, in Bearheart, which is much more explicit about its contextualisation within the Oil Crisis, the pilgrims encounter a similar scene, in which ‘three service stations stood bare, their islands and pumps like phantoms of a civilisation past’.\footnote{Vizenor, \textit{Bearheart}, p. 49.} Further, when Tayo hitchs a ride in a truck, the ‘driver stop[s] at San Fidel to dump a load of diesel fuel (…) Cases of motor oil were stacked in front of the counter; the cans had a dull oil film on them. The desk behind the counter was covered with yellow and pink slips of paper, invoices and bills with a half cup of cold coffee sitting on top of them’.\footnote{Silko, \textit{Ceremony}, p. 153.} This focus on the truck’s distributive function reveals Ceremony’s contextual concern with the instability of the order of the road. The bureaucratic mundanity of the scene – ‘the slips of paper, invoices and bills’, the cup of coffee gone cold – acquires a particular resonance when the novel’s publication in the aftermath of the Oil Crisis is
considered. In the contemporary moment of *Ceremony*, the successful delivery of oil and the return of the quotidian processes that accompany its circulation read as significant details – the very fact it is commented on marks it as significant.

The focus on the quotidian details of distribution in *Ceremony* thus marks a relief that oil is circulating again, a kind of fascinated indulgence of the everyday. However, in these moments, there is also a certain distancing that is enacted in the prose. It is simply ‘[t]he truck driver’ who ‘stopped at San Fidel to dump a load of diesel fuel’; the subject of the sentence is unnamed, and it immediately shifts to the interior life of Tayo, remarking that ‘he had not eaten since he had left Betonie’. The free indirect discourse of *Ceremony* is thus here intertwined with the interiority of Tayo. After we are told that ‘[t]he desk behind the counter was covered with yellow and pink slips of paper’, we learn that ‘above the desk, on a calendar, a smiling blond girl (…) He stared at the calendar for a long time’. The one dimensionality of the truck driver, then, is contrasted to the interiority of Tayo. Further, not only is the deliverer of oil impersonalised as ‘the truck driver’; the irrelevance to Tayo of ‘cases of motor oil’ as objects, which are ‘stacked in front of the counter’ of the gas station is also made clear in their contrast to his interest in the calendar. The relief that oil is circulating again is thus only experienced by a particular group of people. For others, the continuation of this circulation is at best irrelevant, at worst violent. Consequently, there is a dual functionality to the allusions to the Oil Crisis in *Ceremony*, as they indicate that resolution of the Crisis was either relief or violence, depending on your position in relation to the road.

The violence of the road is evident in its linkage to images of excess. For example, Tayo’s alcohol consumption often happens when out driving with his friends in their truck. This is apparent in the scene where his

shirt and pants were soaked with beer. Leroy was laughing; there was beer dripping off his face. Harley had the accelerator all the way to the floor.

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95 Ibid., p. 153.
96 Ibid., pp. 153-154.
The truck was swaying from one side of the road to the other, spinning up rocks and gravel that struck the underside of the truck.\(^{97}\)

When trying to abstain from alcohol consumption, Tayo acquiesces to his friends’ pressure to drink whilst out on a drive with them, as they chant “Drink it! Drink it! It’s good for you! You’ll get better! Get this man to the cold Coors hospital! Hurry up!”.\(^{98}\) In the line that follows, Leroy ‘pressed the gas pedal to the floorboard, and the speedometer dial spun around and around before it fluttered at 65. The engine whined with the strain, and the heat-gauge needle was pointing at 212. Tayo could smell hot oil and rubber, but Leroy kept it wide open past Mesita’.\(^{99}\) The destructive consumption of alcohol is thus tied to the truck’s excessive, destructive consumption of oil. Just as Tayo is encouraged to ‘Drink it! Drink it!’ in a moment of self-destructive annihilation, so too does the truck destructively consume oil as Leroy ‘press[es] the gas pedal to the floorboard (…) Tayo could smell hot oil’.\(^{100}\)

The road in Ceremony, then, is inextricable from the gas station and the self-destructive consumption of oil that it facilitates. Indeed, when one considers the relationship between the road and whiteness in the novel – it is ‘the white men who were building the new highway through Laguna’, and when ‘the tourist traffic on Highway 66 was gone’, Tayo imagines these tourists as ‘white people eating their mashed potatoes and gravy in some steamy Grants café’ – we can further read the destructive consumption of alcohol by Tayo and his friends whilst out driving, and the truck’s destructive consumption of oil, as racialised.\(^{101}\) The settler colonial road is multiply destructive; in destroying the Native relationship to the land, it also destroys the land itself through the excessive consumption of oil, as well as producing the destructive drinking of Tayo and his friends, the settler colonial circulations of the road and its map having severely damaged the possibility of reproductive and restorative Native practice.

\(^{97}\) Ibid., pp. 239-240.  
\(^{98}\) Ibid., p. 158.  
\(^{99}\) Ibid.  
\(^{100}\) Ibid.  
\(^{101}\) Ibid., pp. 57, 168.
Fugitivity and Affectability in *Dhalgren*, *Bearheart*, and *Ceremony*

In *Dhalgren*, *Bearheart*, and *Ceremony*, the structures of the ocularcentric map have broken down; circularity has ceased to function. Such a situation lays bare the condition of affectability: Proude, Tayo, and the Kid have no stable employment or home, and are variously forced to move to try and secure their lives. However, in contrast to the ‘whitepeople’ of *Bearheart*, who desperately seek a return to self-determination, the protagonists of all three novels – and indeed the texts themselves – explore the condition of affectability from which such self-determination is in retreat. In so doing, they articulate the sound, aurality, and fugitivity that is repressed within the ocularcentric map of the colonising, circulatory road. That is, they articulate the return of the life of the street, a movement based on listening. Unlike the driver, Proude, Tayo, and the Kid do not move according to the economy of the road, such as Jones in *Hollers*, who regularly has to ‘look (...) at the gas’ to make sure he has enough to travel, and can only travel as far as it takes him. In the breakdown of this economised movement with the Oil Crisis, Proude, Tayo, and the Kid enact the ensemblic movement of the street.

*Dhalgren* enacts the fugitive movement of aurality against the restrictive geometrical topos of the automobile-road. A central concern of *Dhalgren* is articulated by the Kid when he is walking through Bellona, when he wonders, ‘[d]oes the City’s topology control us completely?’ Delany appears to answer this question in the negative, as the Kid spends much of the novel wandering without the strictures of the automobile-road to contain him. Indeed, there is a certain liberation to the breakdown of the order of the automobile-road. For example, in a scene in which the Kid wanders along a car-less road, he is reconnected with senses other than vision. The fog ‘tickled the back of his arms and the skin beneath his neck’, and he is aware that the air is ‘thick’ and dry. *Dhalgren* thus suggests the restoration of (the) ensemble (of the senses) in the moment of breakdown of the ocularcentric map. Delany’s novel is attempting, as the Kid puts it to Mr Calkin late in the novel, to find expression for the life that

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103 Delany, *Dhalgren*, p. 771.
104 Ibid., p. 424.
comes ‘blaring in through the five senses’ – to listen as well as to look, to live the life of the street, able to hear again now ‘the dull roar of traffic’ described in *Invisible Man* has disappeared with the Oil Crisis.\(^{105}\)

In Delany’s novel, the Kid’s street life is rooted in listening. *Dhalgren* undertakes an exercise in what Moten describes as ‘preparing (…) to play’ within a particular context.\(^{106}\) This is to say that Delany’s novel demonstrates its awareness that the rules of a particular context demarcate what (type of escape) it is possible to articulate. The Kid listens to and learns the context of Bellona. He enters as a stranger and subsequently gets to know: an engineer, Tak Loufer, with whom he shares a sexual encounter; the people who live in the commune in the park; his lover and partner Lanya Coulson; the owner of the *Bellona Times*, Roger Calkins; the Richards family; the poet Ernest Newboy; the notorious and quasi-mythical George Harrison; and a community of friends and street gang called the Scorpions. What is telling is just how much listening the Kid does. The Kid listens to the introduction to the city that Tak gives him. He also listens to the members of the commune, who explain the workings of their space and the projects they are undertaking. Following this, he listens to Lanya, who explains more to him about the working of and mysterious situation in Bellona; to Calkins, who he learns to be the proprietor of the local newspaper; to the Richards family, who attempt to sustain a veneer of bourgeois respectability amidst the seeming turmoil of Bellona; and to and about the Scorpions, who, as Bunny tells him, are ‘the only really effective enforcement organisation in the city’.\(^{107}\)

The Kid’s movement(s) around Bellona can be understood as acts of fugitivity, of escape, within the contextual understanding of the city that he forms through this listening. As Tak explains to the Kid, Bellona ‘still has rules. You just have to find them out’, whilst Jeffrey A. Tucker notes that ‘[t]he ability to learn [this] system of rules and operate in accordance with them is a key to survival in the city’.\(^{108}\) The Kid thus moves through the city both knowing and not knowing. He moves on from the commune because he forms the impression that they were ‘going to wake [him] up and put [him] to work’, and this anticipatory description

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\(^{106}\) Moten, *In the Break*, p. 43.

\(^{107}\) Delany, *Dhalgren*, p. 358.

\(^{108}\) Ibid., p. 97 and Tucker, ‘Contending Forces’, p. 97.
precipitates his escape, as he departs with Lanya, who explains to him that ‘[f]inding your way around Bellona is a little funny at first’. One must learn the rules via listening to a context, as the Kid does, and then move according to one’s anticipatory description of those rules, as when the Kid anticipates that the commune are going to put him to work, and thus decides to move on.

The Kid’s improvisatory movement is a movement of and in the street. Depopulated of cars, the road has become the street again, somewhere the Kid can ‘walk (...) for [an] hour’ and see no vehicles. Indeed, the importance of the street to the life of the Scorpions is telling. Toward the end of the novel, they head up to Calkins’ mansion, on account of him throwing a party for the launch of the Kid’s poetry collection, *Brass Orchids*. Their journey across the city is exemplary of the kind of improvisatory, ensemblic movement that occurs within contextual understandings of it. For example, when Nightmare does not know the way, Denny does, as they move from their ‘nest’ to the house where Lanya lives, and eventually to Calkins’ mansion. As they move, they are described as ‘spread[ing] the sidewalk, the street, each beast sailing on a pool of light’. What the Scorpions have is the street that they spread across, and what it means to have the street is that they rely upon one another, as they take turns to lead the way. With the breakdown of the road, the street returns – the ‘intimacy’ of Central Avenue described by Jack Kelson, the ensemble, performance space of the street, of Watts, where the Scorpions can be seen in ‘a pool of light’, as if on stage.

With the absence of cars in *Dhalgren*, the life of the street, of a movement and activity based on listening and improvising, returns. A similar breakdown of the map and return of the street is apparent in *Bearheart*. At the beginning of Vizenor’s novel, the government official tasked with acquiring the forest for fuel arrives with a map case, which suggests that it is the role of the State to reassert the governing power of the colonial, ocularcentric map in the face of its breakdown in the Oil Crisis. Thus, Proude does not choose to leave his home; this is imposed upon him by the state’s decision to colonise the land on which he lives for energy supplies. His movement is therefore that of escape; faced with

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109 Delany, *Dhalgren*, p. 69.
110 Ibid., p. 662.
the colonisation of his land, Proude decides to get away. There is a form of reading operative in this decision; Proude reads the context of the encroachment of the settler colonial state upon his land and feels compelled to escape from it.

Proude and Rosina’s journey toward New Mexico is movement beyond the map; his consecutive acts of escape are movements not restricted to the known motility of the circulations that the map facilitates and contains. This is to say that Proude and Rosina’s movement is also a kind of street movement. ‘We are not citizens’, as Proude tells Rosina when they are in their borrowed car; they are not the self-possessing, self-determining subjects of the road. Instead of being citizens – instead of being drivers – Proude, Rosina, and the Pilgrims are occupants of the street, of the ensemble. Much of their journey toward New Mexico occurs on foot – indeed, they arrive at the scapehouse ‘tired from their walk from the circus through the woods to town’. Moreover, these movements are ones of ensemble and (improvisatory) fugitivity. Proude and his wife Rosina’s escape from the cedar nation leads them to the scapehouse of Benito Saint Plumero (Bigfoot) and Proude’s old friend Sister Eternal Flame, which was ‘organised and founded during the first national energy crisis when the price of gasoline and heating fuels soared’. Proude and Rosina thus escape to a place of living that has emerged from the breakdown of the order of the automobile-road.

Something of the way that the residents of the scapehouse live together, their ensemble, is reformulated by Proude and Rosina’s escape. Proude and Rosina’s escape affects, acts upon, the residents of the scapehouse; they ‘grieve that you were forced to leave your circus’, as Eternal Flame tells Proude. In addition to this, Proude and Rosina are also incorporated into the reproductive work of the house. This is to say that the ensemble of the scapehouse adjusts to incorporate Proude and Rosina’s escape. Once Proude, Rosina, and Bigfoot set off from the scapehouse, they themselves become affectable by the escape of another, as they pick up the hitchhiker Zebulon Matchi Makwa. This pattern of additions to the pilgrims, and of encounters with other groups of people, repeats

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111 Vizenor, Bearheart, p. 31.
112 Ibid., p. 32.
113 Ibid., p. 33.
114 Ibid., p. 35.
across the novel as they journey toward New Mexico, and is suggestive of a kind of movement that is rooted in an escape that acts upon an ensemble and of an ensemble that in turn acts upon those who have escaped to join it.

*Ceremony* also seeks to tarry with the affectable movement of fugitivity. Importantly, what *Ceremony* also does is deploy this movement at a narratological level, elevating the street movements of *Dhalgren* and *Bearheart* to the level of form, as Tayo’s story of healing is one of him coming to learn to understand how to escape the situation he is in, and more specifically, to escape the road and its life of self-determination. Similar to Proude, Rosina, and the pilgrims, Tayo’s movements are a series of escapes, of fugitive acts – they are, as he comes to learn, a transmotion rooted in listening. Tayo first escapes from his grief at his deceased Uncle, Josiah, and the death of his friend Rocky in the Second World War via the ceremony performed for him by the local medicine man, Ku’oosh. Ku’oosh’s ceremony proves inadequate, however, as Tayo continues to drink destructively with his friends. Therefore, Tayo then escapes from this to a nearby town, where another medicine man named Betonie lives. Listening to Betonie helps Tayo, though he again returns to drinking with his friends, which, as was earlier noted, happens on the road. Following his visit to Betonie, he also immediately hitchs a ride with the truck driver, as described earlier in the chapter.

What persistently returns to disrupt Tayo’s healing ceremonies, then, is the road. When drinking with his friends again, Tayo escapes by abandoning the truck they are in and wandering under the stars. He eventually happens upon Ts’eh, a woman who helps him come to terms with his grief. In the process, he finds the herd of cattle that he used to tend with his uncle and that had been stolen. In the process of liberating the cattle from their enclosure, Tayo is caught by two cowboys (who are travelling in a truck – the imposition of the discipline of the road again), who are about to take him in when they are distracted by the tracks of a mountain lion. Tayo thus escapes again, and as he makes his way down the mountain, he meets a hunter, who takes him back to Ts’eh, who has rounded up his cattle. After driving the cattle ‘from the trap in the arroyo to the corral’ with Robert, they return home.115

Tayo then escapes again, leaving home to go to the ranch to look after the cattle. He spends some more time with Ts’eh during this period, who eventually informs him that, led by his old friend Emo, who has been spreading rumours about Tayo, ‘Doctors from the hospital and the BIA police’, plus ‘[s]ome of the old men from Laguna’ are going to come for him.¹¹⁶ Tellingly, they will be ‘[d]riv[ing] over (…) in their patrol cars’.¹¹⁷ Accordingly, Tayo escapes again. The narrator here remarks that ‘he knew better than to walk the road’, that site of capture of his life of escape.¹¹⁸ Tayo’s wandering eventually leads him back to the road, until he ‘fe[els] the presence of something else’, at which point he ‘remember[s] the Army doctors in their dark green Government cars’, and moves ‘suddenly from the road into the juniper trees’.¹¹⁹ The sound turns out to be his friends Leroy and Harley. Tayo ends up drinking with them again in the truck – he is returned to that site of destructive consumption and capture. In the morning, when Tayo comes to, Leroy and Harley are nowhere to be seen. He realises then ‘that they were not his friends but had turned against him’ – that they are working with Emo.¹²⁰ When he cannot get their truck to work (the road is not a space for him), he runs again, and ends up at an abandoned uranium mine.

Tayo’s escape, then, is nearly always from the road into the street, outside of the car, into not being captured by its destructive consumption. These acts of fugitivity culminate in the scene at the mine. Critics have often read this scene as the moment in which something of the white world is incorporated into Tayo’s healing ceremony. His final healing must take place at the uranium mine because, as Drucilla Cornell and Stephen D. Seely note, ‘ceremonies are now needed to heal the specific traumas inflicted by the white colonisers, [so] the ceremonies must involve elements of the “white” world’.¹²¹ That the mine is associated with whiteness is made apparent in Tayo’s encounter with it, wherein he realises that ‘they [i.e. the white world] had taken these beautiful rocks from deep within the earth and they had laid them in a monstrous design’.¹²²

¹¹⁶ Ibid., p. 232.
¹¹⁷ Ibid.
¹¹⁸ Ibid., p. 235.
¹¹⁹ Ibid., p. 238.
¹²⁰ Ibid., p. 242.
¹²² Ibid., p. 246.
Accordingly, Tayo must come to terms with the extent to which such violence exists around him. As Shanti Elliot explains, ‘Tayo’s healing ritual is one of witnessing and not perpetuating violence’.\(^\text{123}\) Instead of retreating into action, Tayo bears witness to the brutal murder of Harley at the uranium mine in order to acknowledge the existence of the violent white world, and the extent to which it has penetrated into indigenous life.

Concurring with the critical position that Tayo’s healing occurs via his bearing witness to the violence of whiteness, I suggest that his witnessing of this violence occurs not necessarily, or not only, because this scene takes place at the mine, but also because of the centrality of the automobile to it. As Tayo is hiding in the rocks around the mine, he hears a ‘screaming (...) coming from inside the trunk’.\(^\text{124}\) Leroy, Emo and Pinkie are all drunk, having stood ‘behind the car, passing the bottle, taking long swallows’.\(^\text{125}\) Having removed Harley from the boot of the car, the three of them proceed to brutalise his body and murder him.

Following this, they:

> Heave (...) the body into the trunk and slam (...) the trunk lid and car doors shut. The red taillights shrank into the distance; the chalky ring of ashes merged into the moonlight. The wind gusted across the tire tracks and imprints of human shoulders and hands; and there was nothing left but broken bottles and a black mark on the ground where the fire had been.\(^\text{126}\)

Along with Leroy, Harley’s body is found ‘in the big boulders below the road off Paguate Hill. The old GMC pickup was crushed around them like the shiny metal coffin the Veterans Office bought for each of them’.\(^\text{127}\) The automobile is thus confirmed as a site of death and destruction. It facilitates the brutal murder of Harley, with the ‘trunk’ of the car acting as his coffin, a metaphor that is reinforced through his burial surrounded by the pickup truck ‘like [a] shiny metal coffin’.\(^\text{128}\) Further, as the automobile recedes into the distance, what it leaves behind is a

\(^{124}\) Silko, *Ceremony*, p. 250.
\(^{125}\) Ibid., p. 249.
\(^{126}\) Ibid., p. 254.
\(^{127}\) Ibid., pp. 258-259.
\(^{128}\) Ibid.
scene of violent destruction. The automobile is related to this destruction through its inclusion in a chain of violent inscriptions – the ‘tire tracks and imprints of human shoulders and hands’, and the ‘broken bottles and a black mark on the ground where the fire had been’.¹²⁹

In a sense, it is the automobile and its road that kills Harley. The automobile is his coffin, a site of death, because the colonial rationalities of the map, violently imposed on Native peoples, have condemned them to death by making near-impossible the movement of escape, fugitivity, transmotion. In not intervening in this scene, in simply bearing witness to it, Tayo resists, for the first time, the destructive pull of the road. In witnessing the tragic act of self-determination by Emo, he accepts that this violence exists, but rather than becoming imbricated in it, rather than trying to become a self-determining subject of the road himself, he escapes from it, as he has been doing throughout the novel. The way to respond to the deathly world of whiteness and its road, its map of self-determination, Ceremony suggests, is to be fugitive from it, to move via listening and escape, rather than according to the ocularcentric economy of the road. Tayo thus ceases his attempts to become a driver, the self-determining subject of the road, and instead embraces the life of escape. Crucially, this is not the activity of a solo, heroic protagonist. As I have outlined, Tayo’s escape is only ever possible with others – with the help of Ku’oosh, Betonie, and Ts’eh. This is to say that Tayo’s escape is ensemblic, is about his coming to realise his entanglement with others.

If the narrative of Ceremony is about Tayo’s escape from the destructive pull of the (self-determination of the) road and his acknowledgement of the ensemble in which he exists, this also plays out at a formal level in the novel. Tayo’s healing is predicated on his reconciliation to Native forms of storytelling. Ceremony’s participation in ensemble thus inheres in its form, which endorses reconciliation to the affectable ensemble of storytelling. As the opening poem of the novel declares, ‘I will tell you something about stories, / [he said] / They aren’t just entertainment. / Don’t be fooled. / They are all we have, you see, all we have to fight off illness and death. / You don’t have anything if you don’t have the

¹²⁹ Ibid., p. 254.
Tayo’s healing demonstrates that the telling of the story is itself a healing ceremony. Tayo is able to recover from the ravages of the Second World War, and of Euro-American colonisation, because of the storytelling advice given to him by Ku’oosh, Ts’eh, and Betonie, which emphasises precisely the importance of storytelling and language to one’s understanding of the world. After Ku’oosh describes the world as ‘fragile’ to Tayo, the narrator explains that:

The word he chose to express “fragile” was filled with the intricacies of a continuing process, and with a strength inherent in spider webs woven across paths through sand hills where early in the morning the sun becomes entangled in each filament of web. It took a long time to explain the fragility and intricacy because no word exists alone, and the reason for choosing each word had to be explained with a story about why it must be said this certain way. That was the responsibility that went with being human, old Ku’oosh said, the story behind each word must be told.  

Richard Sax notes that this emphasis on the importance of words plays out in the novel insofar as it is once ‘Tayo has grasped or recovered enough of the word to understand that he shares responsibility, though not necessarily guilt, in the deaths of Rocky, Josiah, and the nameless Japanese, [that] he is [then] ready to make the physical, plaintive effort to recover the spotted cattle’ that belonged to Josiah. This is to say that the ceremony itself is in some way that of Tayo coming to understand the importance of language (or storytelling) to his understanding of the world. He understands his responsibility by properly understanding the story in which he exists.

Understanding the ensemble of stories in which he exists is central to Tayo’s healing. The choice of word is important, as the passage above stresses, because it has a history – ‘the story behind each word must be told’ – words have contextual meanings beyond the power of a subject to re-signify them. Tayo has

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130 Ibid., p. 2.
132 Silko, Ceremony, pp. 35-36.
133 Cited in Weaver, That the People Might Live, p. 133.
to learn not to want the possessive subjectivity of the driver, to exist in a different ‘web’ of words.

Alongside this, however, is also the capacity for change. Indeed, the second medicine man that Tayo visits, Betonie, is venerated in the novel because of his openness to the generativity of ceremony. He remarks to Tayo that:

The people nowadays have an idea about the ceremonies. They think the ceremonies must be performed exactly as they have always been done (...) But long ago when the people were given these ceremonies, the changing began, if only in the aging of the yellow gourd rattle or the shrinking of the skin around the eagle’s claw, if only in the different voices from generation to generation, singing the chants. You see, in many ways, the ceremonies have always been changing.\(^\text{134}\)

What Betonie articulates, then, is the generativity of ceremonies – that they ‘have always been changing’. Importantly, he attributes this change to ‘the different voices from generation to generation, singing the chants’. Ceremonies change because the generative force of sound is at work in their transmission. Thus, insofar as Tayo’s healing ceremony is his coming to understand the performative power of language, it is in fact the musical qualities of language that he is encouraged to learn. One must know the story behind a word, its history; this is to say that one must understand its context. One must also be open to the generative power of sound operative in language. That is, one must listen to learn how to escape, to form new ceremonies.

One striking element of Tayo’s encounters with Ku’oosh, Betonie, and Ts’eh is how much talking they do. Ku’oosh ‘sp[ea]ks softly, using the old dialect full of sentences that were involuted with explanations of their own origins’, whilst Betonie has ‘a quiet round voice’, which ‘sounded as if he were explaining something simple but important to a small child’, and Ts’eh’s ‘whisper’ is part of what makes Tayo feel ‘the love [that] pushed inside his chest’.\(^\text{135}\) Indeed, listening to these voices is important to Tayo, as is apparent when he is listening to

\(^{134}\) Silko, *Ceremony*, p. 126.  
\(^{135}\) Ibid., pp. 34, 123, 125, 226-227.
Ku’oosh and ‘strain[s] to catch the meaning, dense with place names he had never heard’.\textsuperscript{136} What Tayo also learns is that one important element of this practice is escape, the production of new ceremonies, as with the scene at the mine. To escape, one must listen and learn the context, in order to know how to escape. Tayo listens to and learns from the ceremonial practitioners, before escaping from the tradition of their ceremonies and creating his own. That is, Tayo’s life of escape, of transmotion, plays out at a formal level in the text, and this life is rooted in listening.

Tayo’s healing is therefore represented as his coming to better understand and exercise the improvisatory practice of reading as it is found in the oral storytelling tradition of Native life.\textsuperscript{137} One sets a context, one understands the history of a word; from within that context, that inscription, one then improvises, one remains open to the generativity of the ceremony. As Reed Way Dasenbrock explains, stories in \textit{Ceremony} exist in a generative relationship with one another. In the Native forms of knowing on which Silko draws, ‘the opposite of the Western tradition of closure and boundedness obtains: stories are valued for their overlap, for the way they lead to new stories in turn’.\textsuperscript{138} Accordingly, the ceremonial practices of Ku’oosh have to be drawn together with the uranium mine and the road, as we have seen.

This is to say that the motif of escape inheres at the level of the ceremony itself. Silko’s text escapes from traditional ceremonies and draws in elements of the white world. Studying a context and escaping from it, which is the movement of the street in \textit{Dhalgren}, is also what occurs at a formal level in \textit{Ceremony}, and is what helps bring about Tayo’s healing. To heal from the road is to be reconciled to the fugitive transmotion of listening. ‘The fugitive enacts by enunciative force’, as Ashon Crawley puts it, and the ‘enunciative force’ of \textit{Ceremony} is Tayo’s escape from the ceremonies as they are given to him, his formulation of a new kind of ceremony in which he witnesses and then escapes from the violence of the road. That is, he remains in transmotion, moving uncertainly, affectably,

\textsuperscript{136} Ibid., p. 34.
across the land, rather than captured by the predictable movements of the road and the subjectivity of the driver.

**Conclusion**

The attention that *Dhalgren*, *Bearheart*, and *Ceremony* pay to listening and to movement suggests other ways of inhabiting space made possible by the breakdown of the order of the road in the Oil Crisis. All three novels prescribe *escape*, fugitivity, transmotion – premised on an understanding (or a reading, a listening) of the context that one is escaping from – as the form of movement made possible by the breakdown of the automobile-road. The suppressed, unspoken sound of the ocularcentric map speaks again in *Bearheart*, *Ceremony*, and *Dhalgren* – that is, in the moment that occurs in the breakdown of the map in the Oil Crisis. These novels suggest that such a breakdown is and will be a welcome possibility for the expansion of other forms of life. This transmotion, this fugitivity, these fugitive poses, stand in something of a contrast to the wandering of Oedipa that we encountered in the previous chapter. In *Lot 49*, Oedipa wanders, but she wanders in order to produce a restorative ethnography of the nation. In contrast, the protagonists of *Bearheart*, *Dhalgren*, and *Ceremony* wander in order to perform the movement of fugitivity, the escape that is improvisation and the affectability it enacts, the way it acts upon the ensemble (the Scorpions, the Pilgrims) that in turn respond to it.

These novels suggest that this type of movement, which studies its context and then improvises, is the return of the movement of the street. It is the return of Central Avenue and of Watts, as *Dhalgren* suggests, of the improvisatory, ensemble life of *Hollers* and *Lot 49*. It is also a movement that is shared by the fugitive and the Native, as *Dhalgren* also suggests. Study and escape within ensemble is the movement of the fugitive and of the Native in transmotion. This fugitivity is an affectable mode of being – to escape is to not know exactly what one is going to do or where one is going to go, as with the Pilgrims’ movements across the country, as well as with the Scorpions’ movements around Bellona, and Tayo’s various escapes in *Ceremony*. To move fugitively is to move uncertainly, collectively. Yet, as these novels also demonstrate, such fugitive movement also offers the possibility that something new, something as-yet-
unknown will happen, such as the ongoing reformulation of the ensemble of characters that make up the Pilgrims and the Scorpions, as well as with the production of a new kind of ceremony via the escape from the old in Silko’s novel. This, these novels suggest, is reading based on listening, which comes to understand the context it is in and then follows the movement of that which does not yet make sense, which escapes from that context, which forms a new ceremony, which seeks to tarry with that which comes ‘blaring in through the five senses’ as Dhalgren puts it: the Native in transmotion and the fugitive on the run.
Conclusion: The End of the Automobile Age

‘the railway, the automobile, we’re still living in this (...) But since the seventies we have entered an effect of electromagnetic proximity, through impulses’ – Paul Virilio and John Armitage, *Virilio Live: Selected Interviews* (London: SAGE, 2001), p. 133.

The IBM 7094 and the End of the Automobile Age

Roughly two thirds of the way through *The Crying of Lot 49*, the narrator relays the birth of a group called Inamorati Anonymous, which is a support group for those in love, which its founder describes as ‘the worst addiction of all’.¹ The group, the reader is told, was founded in the 1960s by a Yoyodyne executive, who finds himself, ‘at age 39, automated out of a job’, as the assessment of an efficiency expert ‘caused him to be replaced by an IBM 7094’.² Feeling as though the defining parameters of his subjectivity have collapsed, the executive is about to take his own life in his garage, having ‘douse[d] himself good with the gasoline’, when he hears his wife return home and proceed to have sex with the very efficiency expert who made him redundant.³ Following this, the executive notices that ‘[t]he stamps on some of the letters in his suit pocket had turned almost white. He realised that the gasoline must have dissolved the printing ink’.⁴ The executive subsequently notices the muted post horn of the Tristero on one of the stamps, and takes it as a sign that his ‘big mistake was love. From this day I swear to stay off of love (...) I will found a society of isolates, dedicated to this purpose, and this sign, revealed by the same gasoline that almost destroyed me, will be its emblem’.⁵

In *Lot 49*’s context of the peak production of the automobile-road, what this anecdote suggests is the earliest phase of a new technological development. Much like the automobile in the late nineteenth century, it would take a little while longer for the computer to become a mass consumer product. Also like the automobile, its rise would be rapid, as the percentage of households with a

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¹ Pynchon, *Lot 49*, p. 78.
² Ibid., p. 79.
³ Ibid.
⁴ Ibid., pp. 79-80.
⁵ Ibid., p. 80.
personal computer in America grew from 8.2 percent in 1984 to 42.1 percent a little over ten years later, in 1998. What is telling about the aforementioned scene in *Lot 49* is the extent to which it foreshadows a series of significant politico-economic shifts. That the executive is attempting suicide in his garage, the site of the car, whilst doused in gasoline, suggests a kind of prescience on behalf of the novel. The automobile and its oil economy, *Lot 49* suggests, is at the point of no return. The crisis of profitability in industrial manufacturing and in the oil industry will necessitate a shift in the national imaginary, toward the technologies of the electronic age, which is exemplified by the efficiency expert and his IBM 7094. The world that the automobile and the oil economy has built – the world of suburbia, the executive who drives to his job downtown each day – is under threat.

As the automobile age drew to a close – with the production of automobiles in North America decreasing, and the compromises of Fordism fracturing – a new mode of circulation thus began to emerge: that of the internet. As the personal computer began to replace the automobile as the primary circulatory commodity, so too did the ‘information superhighway’ begin to replace its tarmac counterpart. An early form of the internet, ARPANET, had been developing since its birth in the United States Department of Defense in the 1960s, and the National Science Foundation expanded its usage in the 1980s to include institutions such as universities. This burgeoning information network soon began to find its way into the home. By 1997, just under twenty percent of American households used the internet. By the year 2000, this had jumped to just over forty percent.

It is perhaps no surprise, then, that from the 1980s onwards, much American fiction has shifted focus to the computer, the internet, and their associated technologies. Don DeLillo’s *Americana* (1971) arguably foreshadows this transition, as its protagonist David Bell, disillusioned by corporate America, sets out on the road to make a film about his life. DeLillo’s first novel thus narrates

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9 ‘Home Computers and Internet Use’. 

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this changing of the circulatory regime, from the interstate highway of the post-war era, to the information logistics of the electronic age. *Americana* also sets the scene for DeLillo’s oeuvre’s fascination with information technologies, what Peter Boxall describes as *White Noise*’s (1985) narration of the inauguration of the ‘electronic age’ via its attention to the digitisation of supermarket pricing, up to *Cosmopolis*’s (2003) fascination with the “interaction between technology and capital”.¹⁰ From the 1970s onwards, the primary space of circulation, De Lillo’s oeuvre notes, begins to shift from the interstate to the information superhighway.

The shift from the road to the internet as the primary site of circulation raises a number of questions for any further inquiry, such as: do novels dealing with the internet deploy the metaphor of circulation to describe the distribution of information that occurs there? Does the personal computer and its later offspring, such as the smartphone and the tablet, engender the same possessive, self-determining subjectivity as the automobile? What would it mean to think about the internet as a space of sonic affectability, and what is the history of attempts to break up the internet as this kind of space, if indeed it exists as such? To explore these questions would be to transpose the questions I have attempted to answer in this thesis from the road and the automobile onto the internet and the personal computer, broadening the genealogy undertaken here to technologies other than the automobile. Beyond pointing toward the transition from highway to information superhighway that is suggested in Pynchon and DeLillo, it is beyond the scope of this thesis to offer any in-depth analysis of these questions, other than to signal that they are present in these texts.¹¹

Circulation Beyond the Road Novel

In this thesis, I have sought to write a genealogy of the twentieth century American road novel and its protagonist the driver. I have suggested that in

¹¹ A productive starting point for thinking about these questions would be Sam Halliday’s investigation of the relationship between sound, technology, and the ‘modern’ in *Sonic Modernity: Representing Sound in Literature, Culture and the Arts* (2013, pp. 1-17). For example, Halliday’s description of ‘[t]he “visuality” of listening’ (p. 3) might provide one way into thinking about the sonic qualities of the ostensibly visual technologies of the computer, tablet, and smartphone. To paraphrase Halliday, future work might ask what the listening of visuality is: what sonic qualities accompany these visual technologies, and how is this sound represented in literature?
different ways, for Hammett, Chandler, Himes, Wright, Petry, Ellison, Pynchon, Delany, Vizenor, and Silko, the road is a space where circulatory order is to be maintained via the production of self-determining subjects. Circulation on and through the road indicates order, and it is the job of the government and its institutions to produce it. I have argued that this circulation is persistently threatened by those who are excluded from this circulation, and/or those whose labour sustains the road as a system of circulation. I have suggested that in the end, this threat is metaphysical; it is the threat of the affectability that self-determination must produce and destroy. On the twentieth century American road, this life of affectability plays out as the history of the street – the road as a space for gathering together, for ensemble and for improvisation, which I have suggested these road novels preserve in various ways via their formal practices. My key contributions have been to road narrative scholarship, where I have diverged from the frontiercentrism of the field to date, and insisted instead upon an analysis of the development of the road as a city infrastructure and the symbolism of the automobile within this. To road narrative scholarship I have also contributed a consideration of the street – of the idea that the road was and is a contested space, not only or primarily there to be used by cars.

Related to my consideration of the importance of the street in the road novel, I have also sought to contribute to Black Studies by theorising the street as a space of affectability, which is articulated via the togetherness of the sonic, of the improvisatory, the rehearsal space of Central Avenue. Building on Black Studies scholarship that theorises the street as a space of black life, as well as on references in the novels I analysed to the street as a sonic, musical space, I have sought to contribute to work in Black Studies that attempts to understand ‘occurrences of freedom in zones of indistinction’. The usefulness and importance of the work of da Silva and Moten has been in facilitating a description of the street as a ‘zone of indistinction’ in the novels I have analysed, a space where life is made in common, without the coercive possessiveness of the self-determining subject. I have simultaneously sought to highlight why these novels view a political project rooted in the ‘full, self-present, and coherent subject’ as both impossible and undesirable, which adds urgency to the need to be able to articulate alternative modes of freedom and political action, those that occur in ‘zones of indistinction’. Da Silva and Moten’s work has allowed me to do this, as
well as allowing me to demonstrate that the conflict between this street life and the self-determining subjectivity of the driver is central to the representation of the American road in the novels I have analysed.

My investigation into the problem of circulation has confined itself to this problem as it manifests itself in the road novel, and to what history it is possible to write to understand this problem. This is to say that my claims have been limited to explaining the problems raised by the road novels considered in this thesis. However, the problem of circulation need not be confined to the road novel. Indeed, one avenue of possible future inquiry would be to consider the longer history of the metaphor of circulation as a way of producing order, and the racialised dynamics that it contains. For example, future work might wish to consider the extent to which the twentieth century American road novel’s deployment of the metaphor of circulation is related to the nautical history of this metaphor, which is something that is alluded to in these novels. Pynchon’s first novel, *V.* (1961), refers to nautical pathways as ‘cloudy Roads’, to the ‘sea’s highway’, and to the sea as a place where there is ‘nothing in these roads after all but ships, untenanted, inanimate, making noises at each other’. Further, its protagonist is a former member of the US navy, Benny Profane, who ‘[s]ince his discharge from the Navy (...) had been road-labouring’. This is suggestive of a continuity between his time in the navy, traversing the omnidirectional pathways of the sea, and his time as a road labourer, constructing these omnidirectional pathways on land. Likewise, in *Red Harvest*, when parking his car, The Op remarks: ‘We’ll leave the boat around the corner’.

Similarly, the road as a space that contains something of the history of the sea is also apparent in *Hollers*. The persistent yet barely avowed presence of the ocean at the edge of the novel – *Hollers* mentions the Pacific only once – is representative of the way in which it “haunts” the text. It is there at the edge – at the end of the protagonist Bob Jones’s drive to work, and in his regular journeys around the harbour roads of Los Angeles. Jones works at Atlas, a shipyard, where he leads a shipbuilding team, which is to say that he produces for the sea. Jones’s employment in this industry is indicative of the seeming inescapability of

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13 Ibid., p. 10.
the sea, as his journey to work each day ends with him stepping back out to it. At the end of the road is the sea and its history, to paraphrase Derek Walcott.\textsuperscript{15}

With these allusions to a relationship between the sea in mind, future work could consider the relationship between the sea and circulation. For example, such work might consider Ross Exo Adams’ point, that ‘from the late sixteenth century until the nineteenth century [circulation] has its root (...) in the broader notions of circularity, circumference, concentricity’.\textsuperscript{16} With this in mind, future work could explore the deployment of metaphor of circumference and circularity in the travel writing of post-Columban Europe, particularly that of Richard Hakluyt, Samuel Purchas, and John and Awnsham Churchill, for whom the expansion voyages of Early Modern Europe are ‘ordered in this Circumference, from, for, and by him which abideth at home in his Centre’, as Purchas puts it.\textsuperscript{17} The construction of a circulatory world in these texts, in which the silent object of circulation is often an enslaved person, raises questions about the longer history and origins of the metaphor of circulation as a marker of racialised order, which could be productively explored in future work.

Reading the metaphor of circulation could also be a productive way of understanding novels that may initially seem to not be engaged with such infrastructures. Giving consideration to the ways in which circulation might play out in spaces nominally unconnected to infrastructure is one way that the work of this thesis could be taken beyond the literary historiography presented here. For example, we might understand nineteenth century domestic fictions, and the engagement with so-called ‘hysteria’ through which they are often read, as grappling with the temporal affectability of the home-space. In many ways, these spaces relied on the commodity circulations of the dominant infrastructure, which marked them as temporally affectable, at the mercy of those circulations, and the arrival of the goods they distribute. Perhaps one way of figuring the so-called ‘hysterical’ female body in nineteenth century domestic fictions, then – and such a figuration begs further enquiry beyond the parameters of this thesis – is as a

\textsuperscript{17} Samuel Purchas, ‘Hakluytus Posthumus or Purchas His Pilgrimes, In Twenty Volumes, Volume XX’, \textit{Archive.org}, Glasgow, 1625 <https://ia800304.us.archive.org/26/items/hakluytusposthum20purch/hakluytusposthum20purch.pdf> [Accessed February 06, 2019], p. 130.
body ecstatically written by temporal affectability, by its production by circulations occurring elsewhere, outside of its control. Indeed, to the extent that hysteria was understood as an affliction of a complex and interrelated “nervous system”, hysteria literally presents itself as the writing of circulation upon the body.

**Black Visual Culture and the Ongoing Life of the Street**

If the road is replaced by the internet as the dominant circulatory infrastructure in American life, as Pynchon suggests, the memory of the road and the street nonetheless inheres in contemporary black visual culture. For example, the video for the 2018 single ‘Trouble on Central’ by the Los Angeles-born artist Buddy features conspicuous images of Central Avenue, of classic cars as a status symbol, of death, of the police, and of the street as a space of a relatively undefined and perhaps even threatening social life that is enacted through performance, all of which are contrasted to images of the suburban. Many of these images recur in Buddy’s video for ‘Hey Up There’, which nonetheless takes a more panoramic view of Los Angeles, offering a sense of the city as a circulatory whole that is nonetheless teeming with a life not captured in the detached perspective of the map. The 2018 video for Blood Orange’s ‘Jewelry’ contains similar themes of the (potential) freedom of the street, its ensemble togetherness, its performance space, as well as of the disruption enacted upon this by the automobile.

A final area for potential future exploration, then, is the status of the street in contemporary black visual culture. Buddy and Blood Orange’s videos raise questions of memory and of preservation, as well as of a collapsing of the social life of the street into the automobile. The automobile is a space of togetherness in ‘Trouble on Central’, with shots of Buddy riding around with his friends. Likewise, in ‘Jewelry’, the image of the automobile is one where the viewer only ever sees a passenger who is hanging out the window of a car moving slowly down a street. There is thus a suggestion here of excess that is coupled to an image of a passenger – someone who is not the self-determining driver. Thus, both Buddy and Blood Orange pose the question of how the affectable togetherness of the street might disrupt the self-determining subjectivity of the driver, and in turn of how this might reimagine the automobile and the road. The
street persists in the car – perhaps even returning to disrupt that which first disrupted it.
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