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Alienation and Mobility

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ABSTRACT: This paper will explore matters of alienation in personal mobility. It begins by outlining the present car system that dominates and has led to transport becoming an increasingly large issue in terms of sustainability. The car system will then be located within the process of reification, an approach to alienation that identifies the car as a capitalist commodity pushed onto ordinary people. The paper will go on to explore the legacy that these developments have had on the 21st century landscape with cities made for cars and a countryside rendered car dependent. Possible alternatives to overcome the current car system will be identified, paying specific regard to schemes in Finland and Wales. The paper suggests that mobility should be construed as a common right and that there is a need to see past the current car system.

Key Words: mobility, sustainability, reification, consumption

This paper takes discussions of alienation into a new area, namely personal transportation. The emerging field of mobilities theory is led by Urry (2007), for whom mobility must be recognised as a central concept within contemporary social science because our life today is lived in relation to movement. At any and every moment, we are either on the move, in-between movements or reliant upon others moving. The 21st century is a time of constant flux. His critique of traditional social science claims that mainstream sociology assume stasis – people have generally been seen as static entities tied to specific places. In contrast, the mobilities paradigm encourages us to look at movements and the forces that drive, constrain and are produced by those movements. Such a lens can shed new light on aspects of alienation, specifically following the idea of reification and treating alienation as a social issue played out in the organisation of our communities and shared spaces. By this line, commodification has moved beyond the economic realm with alienation having entered every aspect of modern life and culture.

The Car System

Mobility is essentially about public space – it is a set of shared places in which we choose to spend time. A road is not simply a means of getting from A to B but also a location in which people come together and social practices are engaged in – norms, habits, conventions are all played out. If mobility is a crucial component of contemporary society, the dominant representation of it within consumer capitalism is the car. The car has grown over the past century to assume a massive degree of social, cultural and economic power. Cars define the modern age: for the vast majority of readers, the automobile forms an essential part of their daily lives as a technology on which, for better or worse, they rely on in some

fashion, directly or indirectly. The significance of the motor vehicle has spread from country to country as one of the most all-encompassing facets of globalisation. This automotive creep has led to the tacit acquiescence to the ascendancy of the car, leading to the dominance of what can be termed *the car system*. We now accept cars as a necessary, almost natural part of our lives. The 20th century was the century of the car and its central position became locked-in to an extent that automobiles emerged as the de facto mobility leader for the 21st century.

The automobile monolith has subsumed all of society under its dominion. Although people invented the car, its status has grown to sublimate the surrounding society by orienting a culture of automobility around itself. The culture of automobility involves an interconnected web of car-based living. As a result, the private car is not only a means of transport, but also becomes a status symbol and a part of an individual's personal space that provides comfort, protection and privacy while travelling. For Featherstone (2004:2) automobility should be understood as a "social and technical system … which links together cars, car-drivers, roads, petroleum supplies and other novel objects, technologies and signs." Sheller (2004) speaks of our automotive emotions – the manner in which car cultures possess affective dimensions relating to our aesthetics, subjective judgements and sensory responses. By showing how people feel so strongly about their cars, she underlines how automobilised life has become hardwired into our society.

The ascendency of the car system can be found in there being over two billion cars on the world's roads (Souanis 2011). However, the success of the car system is increasingly recognised to have come at great ecological cost: private automobiles are not environmentally sustainable. Transportation makes up a fifth of global oil usage – the vast majority of which comes from cars – and 23 percent of current global energy-related carbon dioxide emissions, almost three-quarters of which are generated by cars (International Energy Agency 2012). As a finite resource, oil will likely run out within the lifetime of many readers of this paper. The carbon dioxide produced in burning it slowly chokes the planet and plays a major role in man-made climate change. The present car system cannot go on indefinitely. Either we run out of materials to construct the cars or we run out of people to drive them. In recognition of the destructive nature of the car system, local, national and transnational organisations are imposing ever more stringent regulations to try to reform the automobile and render it more sustainable, such as the European Union's 2020 proposals targeting the car with a 20 percent reduction in greenhouse gas emissions.[1] As a result, the major car manufacturers have been pushed to improve their vehicle technologies with each new generation of petrol and diesel car more efficient than the last. Increasingly, though, the internal combustion engine is being seen as an intractable problem in and of itself, and there is currently great momentum behind a state-subsidised drive for alternatively fuelled vehicles, most prominently electric cars. Changing the fuel has the potential to overcome a large degree of the reliance on oil, and dramatically cut down on the harmful toxins produced. These benefits increase when renewable energy sources such as solar, hydro or wind power are used over fossil fuel power stations, and further again as alternative materials are developed for building the cars: lighter, less polluting options such as carbon fibre or recycled aluminium. Electric cars are the current great hope for those who want to preserve the idea of private car ownership but with a more environmentally friendly sheen.

Cars and Commodification

The drive for greening cars is of little value with regards to sustainability in that it only addresses the environmental components, while sustainability must be understood as a tri-polar concept also involving economic and social aspects. Environmental protection, rather than social justice or economic fairness, has been the focus of much sustainable transport policy and activity to date. Matters of social equity need be involved in discussions of sustainable transport, ensuring that planning and development aims for an equitable distribution of social benefits. Promoting social equity in transport policy means making decision to conserve and enhance of quality

1 http://ec.europa.eu/clima/policies/g-gas/index_en.htm.

of life, social capital and individual resources. In these terms, the current car system is neither economically nor social sustainable. In the UK, for example, 21 million households are suffering from transport poverty where over 10 percent of income is spent on transport, mostly owning and running cars (RAC Foundation 2012). Transport poverty is especially pronounced in rural areas where owning a car is considered a necessity not a luxury. The countryside is characterised by low population density with jobs and facilities located some distance from the housing stock. With inadequate public transport and long distances rendering active transport impractical, cars are sometimes considered the only option for those living in villages and hamlets. The car system is also damaging in the way that private automobile usage is implicated within commuting practices as two thirds of UK residents drive to work and, as a result, claim to feel stressed, anxious and depressed (Office for National Statistics 2012). Psychological damage is caused by routines of driving back and fore to work each day and community cohesion is challenged by neighbourhoods of strangers who simply drive past one another in their isolated metal boxes.

For Manno (2000), the possibility of sustainability is precluded by, what he calls, commoditization; a generalised Darwinesque pressure for economic evolution to push for ever greater levels of development. In so doing, he links issues of environmental degradation in with wider socio-political concerns, wherein the prioritising of commodities over, both, non-market goods and, also, non-market relationships oppresses those who lack power in or regard for the capitalist system of accumulation. Much of the social damage caused by cars can be found in the presumption of private car ownership. This norm ties the car system into Lodziak's (2000:111-112) ideology of consumerism, whereby "consumption has become the cognitive and moral focus of life." Newman (2013:464) explains that the:

> ideologues of consumption advocate the purchasing of products as an integral and essentially fulfilling part of contemporary living: we do not just need to buy new things, but we need to want to do so. In this scheme, consumption allows us to properly construct and experience a satisfying sense of self. In this perspective, the supposition that we have moved from passive to active consumers is implicit: we make lifestyle choices in our purchasing.

Any variety of car would be covered by this consumerist characterisation: a greener model simply reflects the latest marketing fad. Newman's (2013) analysis of alienation and the car system outlines how automobility has led to the reification of the car in everyday life. Reification here refers to the dual process whereby people are reduced to things and things acquire the social characteristics of people, a circular process that, both, naturalises relationships in capitalism, while also socialising the objects of capital. For Marx (1973:514-515), this reification is an essential feature inherent in economic value, as:

> The production of capitalists and wage-laborers is therefore a major product of the process by which capital turns itself into values. Ordinary political economy, which concentrates only on the objects produced, forgets this entirely. Inasmuch as this process establishes reified labor as what is simultaneously the non-reification of the laborer, as the reification of a subjectivity opposed to the laborer, as the property of someone else's will, capital is necessarily also a capitalist. The idea of some socialists, that we need capital but not capitalists, is completely false.

We are thus unable to accept the capitalist system without also agreeing to the effect it has on the self-understanding of those who live within it. The impact of fetishising commodities as such is developed by Lukács (1971), who describes the fragmentation of life into distinct and, atomised activities. Objects are converted into subjects just as subjects are turned into objects. Through objectification, subjects are made passive while, concurrently, thingification constructs objects as somehow active. Inverting subjects and objects in this manner ensures that commodities come to control the people who created them. People and their relationships are reduced to the level of traded produce, while that produce becomes all-important in defining the nature of the social world. As a result, the masses come to accept the assimilation of a multitude of cultures and experiences into

identikit sameness. Everyone adopts a standard issue capitalist worldview. With the car so important to the capitalist project, it is little wonder that private automobility should arise as a key element of this reified standpoint.

Highly influenced by Lukács, the Situationist movement applied the idea of alienation to all areas of everyday life. Plant (1992:4) outlines how the development of capitalism entailed the extension of the means, objects and intensity of alienated experience. For the Situationists, no area of experience is free from the permeation of capitalist relations of production and consumption. As such, citizens are reduced to the level of spectators of a world that acts to preclude their active participation. Such alienation is produced by the capitalist system of relations, meaning that it appears to be a part of the human condition rather than a system of class-based oppression. The Situationist analysis of contemporary capitalism took Marxian commodification to its end stage. Here social control is based on consensus and not force; consumers are neutralised through being drawn into *the society of the spectacle*. We thus consume a world created by others rather than creating one of our own. The society of the spectacle is a commodity-based society still premised upon production but reorganised at a higher level. The notion of the spectacle is complex and somewhat diffuse: on the one hand, it refers to media and consumer society, organised around the consumption of images and commodities but the concept also refers to the immense institutional and technical apparatus of contemporary capitalism and all the hegemonic methods used by power to render subjects passive to societal manipulation, and obscure the nature of capitalism's deprivations. For Debord (2009), the spectacle represents the decline of being into having, the "historical moment at which the commodity completes its colonization of social life." We buy into capitalist so fully and enthusiastically that we become little more than what we consume.

By this reading, we can appreciate the central role cars take in consumption: nothing typifies consumer culture more than the automobile. In the *Situationist Thesis on Traffic*, Debord (1959) claims it would be a mistake to regard the automobile as simply a means of transportation, rather:

> it is the most notable material symbol of the notion of happiness that developed capitalism tends to spread throughout the society. The automobile is at the centre of this general propaganda, both as supreme good of an alienated life and as essential product of the capitalist market.

Capitalism manufactures demand for the car and mirrors this back through the car system to suggest that car ownership is a privilege, reserved for those lucky enough to benefit from the capitalist system. Cars are capitalism's great gift to society. The car system, then, represents a political act to trick the masses into conformity. In addition to convincing the masses to work hard for their reward, it also acts to preclude what the Situationists called *dérive*, or drift. This idea refers to unplanned journeys through urban landscapes, whereby the aesthetics the city's architecture and geography subconsciously direct travellers. There is no necessary end point; the only goal is to encounter a new, more authentic experience. For Debord (1958), the dérive represents "a mode of experimental behaviour linked to the conditions of urban society: a technique of rapid passage through varied ambiances." This genuine experience is lost within the car system, since cars act to detach humanity, hindering the potential for spontaneity considered so vital to true freedom from oppression. The layout of roads artificially channels humanity, the rules of the road regulate behaviour and the car standardises interaction. By this line, it is inherently alienating that contemporary capitalist society is organised around the imperative of the car, yet this is the situation we are faced with – and most seem to accept. While it was active the movement advocated alternative experiences of life in opposition to the conventional living permitted under advanced capitalism. The Situationists developed the idea of psychogeography, to reimagine unitary urbanism, a call to reclaim the streets from capitalism and introduce a revolution into everyday life. By this line, it is

important to understand how capitalism casts our mobility as automobility and realise that the car system has been made normal through some manner of automobile indoctrination centralising the product (and our relation to it) deep into our culture.

The City and the Countryside

That the car has come to dominate contemporary life is a social fact as true in the city as it is in the countryside. This paper will now draw on a pair of examples that highlight how the prominence of the capitalist car system can be identified in an urban area (Indonesia's capital, Jakarta) and in a rural location (the highlands and islands of Scotland).

Indonesia

Jakarta is the capital city of Indonesia, the largest city in Southeast Asia and one of the most populous urban areas on the planet. It has a population of 10.2 million (12 million in the working week) in an area of around 480km^2 giving a very high population density of 14,464 people per km^2.[2] All this in a location originally intended for 800,000 when designed by Dutch settlers. With so many people squeezed into a relatively tight space, it might be supposed that cars were not necessary to move around the city but historical development over the past half century ensures that private automobile use is central to life in Indonesia's biggest city as revealed in the study conducted by Danisworo et al. (2003). Here it emerges that motorised transport in Jakarta is growing by 11 percent a year, with at least 90 percent of the 3.9 million cars in the city privately owned. In contrast, only 2.5 percent of traffic in the city is public transport. As a result, congestion is so bad in the city that they operate a three-in-one policy during rush hours, where there must be a minimum of three people per car though this scheme has simply created a black economy of unemployed, children and students who offer their services to car drivers for a small fee. The domination of cars is reflected in the city's infrastructure. On main boulevards, facilities other than roads are negligible with narrow sidewalks and no cycle lanes. Almost all buildings have drop-off points for cars and it is rare for a building not to have a car park. Mobility in Jakarta is inherently automobility, it is writ into the culture of the city.

The particular embodiment of the car system found in Jakarta can be traced back to two key political regimes. Initially, the autocratic rule of Indonesia's first president, the nationalist Sukarno, in the period of *Guided Democracy*, tried to make Jakarta look like a vibrant city on the world scale. Investing heavily in a road building programme from the late 1950s to encourage the vision of Jakarta as a modern metropolis akin to those he saw in the United States, Sukarno saw mobility as about national pride. These infrastructure projects involved borrowing heavily from other nations saddling the country with a huge foreign debt. In the late 1960s, he was succeeded by General Suharto, whose *New Order* administration reacted to the country's fiscal problems through three decades of strong, military-dominated government. His chief priority was economic development, which he tied to the policy of promoting cars and building more roads. As Indonesia did not hold sufficient capital, Suharto followed a deregulation policy in transport, privatising the provision of infrastructure and giving up the state's role in planning or providing facilities. Mobility was reduced to the channelling of people and promotion of goods for economic development. Cars won out as the market economy demanded.

The situation of automobile dependency in Jakarta reflects Rajan's (1996:6) view that the car system has not emerged from the choice of the community (there are few civil debates on what we want to do with cars) but rather come from above to shore up the capitalist system:

> Implicitly or otherwise, automobile use has typically belonged to the private domain of individual decision making, even though it is evident to all concerned that these personal decisions … are themselves influenced by the collective outcome of countless individual and government decisions.

Jakarta shows how capitalism leads to business and economic decisions trumping those of ordinary people who must live on busy, noisy and dirty streets in a city blighted by smog and noxious gases.

2 http://worldpopulationreview.com/world-cities/jakarta-population/.

Scotland

In the British countryside, structural factors render private car ownership vital but nowhere is this necessity more pronounced than in rural Scotland as shown in Gray's (2000) research. A little over five million people live in Scotland, one million of which reside within rural areas and, although only 18 percent of the population live there, the countryside accounts for 94 percent of the land mass in Scotland, 69 percent classified remote rural.[3] There means there is a lot of open space and much distance between developments. Here access to transport has been identified as the single biggest concern of the local population as reflected in car ownership levels and car use; 89 percent of households in rural Scotland have access to a car and cars are used for 76.5 percent of all journeys. In the countryside, settlements are more spread out than in urban areas, with greater distances between housing stock and employment opportunities, leisure facilities and essential services necessary to participate in 21st century society. These distances plus piecemeal distribution of the privatised rail infrastructure and increasing cuts to bus services under Conservative austerity economics combine to emphasise the important of access to cars amongst the populace. This car dependency can be found in a report by the RAC Foundation (2012), which shows that 85 percent of those who live in such areas would find it very difficult to adjust their lifestyle to being without a car, against 69 percent of those residing in towns and cities. Rural dwellers need their car more than urbanites for work (81% to 48%), medical issues (69% to 38%), school (74% to 36%), shopping (73% to 46%) and a social life (68% to 27%).

The need for cars stems from the organisation of consumer capitalist society starting with the notion that car ownership is somehow aspirational and normal. Thereon government privatisation of public transport meant the less profitable, but most important, rural lines have been steadily phased out. In addition, there has been a pronounced centralisation of services under free market capitalism, with a focus initially on the large cities and, more recently, on out-of-town developments sighted around major motorway junctions. The car system is not inevitable and proper planning and regulation could have curbed its excesses but governments hell-bent on pursuing neo-liberal ideologies have allowed it free reign to shape social experience. Even the House of Commons Transport Committee (2014) recognises such trends. In their latest sitting, they accepted that rural communities, and especially those in Scotland, have become more isolated in recent decades as centralisation and consolidation have led to key infrastructure being organised with a tacit assumption of access to transport that is often not present without access to cars. Chief among the explanations that emerged was the self-fulfilling prophecy whereby lack of workable public transport options mean there is no alternative but to invest in private automobiles, whose normalcy thereon becomes accepted in future planning and budgetary decision making processes. But little is being proposed to redress the transport problems of rural areas, lest to propose tax reductions on fuel, which is more expensive in the most remote areas of Scotland, though even this policy will only act to further reinforce the desirability of private car ownership.

The situation in rural Scotland ties into Paterson's (2007:18) views that the "autonomous mobility of car driving is socially produced … by a range of interventions that have made it possible." He refers to the manner that the capitalist state has worked to ensure that conditions are correct to stimulate demands for private cars thus facilitating the accumulation of capital to shore up the present system. It is no accident that rural development has resulted in a separation of people and services and the lack of state intervention to protect people in the countryside from the subsequent social harms is because it's capitalist nature desires to push them to buy automobiles or, at least, move to the cities as a self-sufficient, community-orientated local way in rural areas of life is of less value to wider system goals than is a large but disparate urban mass. Further, car-oriented land use policies can only thrive when the outright consumption of land for private use is unchecked and seen as morally unproblematic, alongside cheap means to have such destinations connected to resources and services.

In city and countryside, alike, then the car system imposes order onto human activity, compelling

3 http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2011/09/29133747/2.

people to run automobiles and conform to consumer capitalist ideals.

Alternative Models of Personal Transport

Despite existing problems of car dependency in urban and rural areas seeming ingrained and intractable, alternative systems of operating mobility are evolving (often making use of new technologies to create spaces for innovation). Such arrangements recognise the primacy of automobility but seek to adapt it in more sustainable ways rather than simply abandon it wholesale, with examples to be found in Finland's capital, Helsinki, and rural West Wales.

Finland

Finland has a population of a little over five million and a reputation for good public transport services linking the residents to the key services of the city.[4] The Finnish capital has announced plans to transform its existing public transport network into a comprehensive, point-to-point mobility on-demand system within the next decade.[5] This would link together taxis, shared cars, ferries, trains, shared bikes, driverless cars, buses, trams and, also, the Kutsuplus –a minibus that lets riders select where they want to be picked up and put down via smartphone. It has been suggested that the Finnish set up would render car ownership essentially pointless in the city. The driving force behind this move is that the younger generation want practical travel options. With incomes falling and motoring costs rising, cars are an increasingly unwelcome burden rather than being valued as the liberating symbol of personal freedom they once were. A recent report shows Generation Y (18 to 29-year-olds) hold different attitudes to cars than their predecessors (TNS 2013). For Generation Y, being debt-free is suddenly sexy, while less than one in five consider car ownership a reflection of personal success. This is reflected by the lower car ownership levels among Generation Y (68%), compared to the previous Generation X (81%). Young Helsinki residents view transportation differently from their parents so are thought to be more flexible to reshaped transport provision. They want simple, flexible and inexpensive transportation leading to a mobility model based on how services are provided in the telecommunications industry.

Like internet service providers or mobile phone companies, people would move around by paying by the kilometre, or by purchasing a monthly package with kilometres included. This integrated approach goes beyond traditional public transport, with transport procured in real time through a single app giving residents a variety of options at the touch of a screen. Users specify a start and destination while the software acts as a journey planner to identify and book the most efficient means of completing the trip. This approach allows users to tailor their journeys point-to-point, offering all the convenience of owning a car without much of the cost. The city's transportation will continue to be run as a public utility but will include competition to make sure that the services which most benefit residents succeed as commuters exercise their right to choose what works for them. This is Nordic capitalism in action: public authorities facilitating capitalist innovation to improve the overall standard of living, partnership between the state and private sector to promote the most comfortable standard of living practicable for citizens.

The Helsinki vision, then, falls within the scope of what has been referred to as the Nordic model of strong government utilising the private sector, what is often referred to as a social democratic middle ground beyond free market capitalism and state socialism (Wooldridge 2003). As other European economies continue to suffer from the global economic crisis, the Nordic model of capitalism is gaining increasing attention. The Scandinavian approach makes a pragmatic judgement on public services: as long as they work, it barely matters who provides them and this is just what has been proposed for Helsinki – making use of the more sustainable private businesses that provide mobility services such as bus companies in order to topple the dominance of the unsustainable automotive industry. Of course, this model of strong government would not appeal to the particularly libertarian take on Marxism held by the Situationists but they would have been impressed with the oppor-

4 http://www.indexmundi.com/finland/population.html.

5 http://www.hel.fi/static/public/hela/Kaupunkisuunnittelulautakunta/Suomi/Esitys/2014/Ksv_2014-06-03_Kslk_17_El/4612BA69-A916-4377-BA22-B9E1D340618C/Liite.pdf.

tunity for spontaneity provided by residents being able to select from such a diverse array of mobility options on a whim and travel wherever they desire without the need for pre-planning. For those who can tolerate a role for the state, at least in the immediate future, the Finnish approach offers the prospect of changing our relationship to the automobile and posing a significant challenge to the primacy of the car system within the urban environment.

Wales

Pembrokeshire is a rural county in West Wales combining expansive coast with sparse countryside. It is the 18th most densely populated local authority in Wales, with 77 people per km^2 meaning that there are only four counties with a sparser spread of residents.[6] In light of the generally underdeveloped geography of the area, agriculture and tourism are the heart of the economy. There are no motorways in Pembrokeshire, only four A-roads that carry the county's traffic, little of which is dual carriageway. While the main towns in the county are well served by trains and bus routes, those living in more remote villages and hamlets do not tend to have easy access to public transport so are largely dependent on cars. This reliance locks many into car dependency with other areas of their spending duly restricted. Some decide they no longer want to live in an area where participation in everyday life is dictated by car ownership, so will leave their homes leading to community break up. For those that do travel back and fore in their cars, the carbon footprint is significant. To overcome these challenges to sustainability, REV Cymru have emerged as a collection of community car clubs.[7] Unlike many car clubs, they use only plug-in electric cars, powered largely by renewable energy.

The founding member is based in Cilgwyn, located with the National Park near the small of village Newport. The Cilgwyn Community Group is a collective of around 40 households with a history of growing their own food, locally distributing it by bicycle, encouraging and installing renewable energy, sharing renewable electricity, and developing a local currency to trade. In March 2013, a £25,000 grant from the Big Lottery Village SOS saw the group purchase a Nissan Leaf and became the first electric car club in Wales. They operate a membership scheme with the vehicles booked out for certain periods. They currently have 15 members with over 50 bookings per month. Members book online, entering their destination and time on any chosen day. Other members can see bookings, so they can arrange to share a lift or request an alteration (if someone without a car needs the vehicle booked by a car owner, the member in most need gets the club car). Income is generated from membership fees and mileage charges are re-invested back into the scheme to make it self-sustaining. Cilgwyn Community Group bought a second Leaf but, rather than use this for their own members, they leased it to another new electric car club: the St David's Eco City Group. Over the following year, four more clubs sprung up in villages across the county. There are also hopes to continue this expansion with clubs outside Pembrokeshire as the group attempt to spread the message of this sustainable mobility to other rural communities across Wales.

What started as a scheme primarily looking to provide environmental sustainability, quickly became more about the socio-economic needs of community members. Economically, the cars provide access to transport for those who might otherwise become isolated due to their inability to run a car of their own thus sharing the cost of motoring across the community. They calculate members save money if they make proper use of the car club as compared to private vehicle ownership. In term of social impact, the clubs are slowing down the trend for centralisation of services and amenities, curbing the drain to urban areas, by making more remote communities viable again. In addition, they judge community cohesion to have been enhanced by bringing neighbours together through their shared asset, rather than leaving them to the socially atomising private car system. There has also been an increase in community pride accompanying the clubs. This is a bottom-up attempt to reclaim power from the car system for local communities in the countryside and, as such, represents a stand against the worst excesses of consumer capitalism that can be readily adopted in other

6 http://www.pembrokeshire.gov.uk/content.asp?nav=101,649,1928.
7 http://www.revcymru.co.uk/.

such areas. While the Situationists gave little attention to the countryside, the way this model brings ordinary people together in a shared experience of the built landscape would have impressed, especially so as they do so on their terms rather than being corralled into the dominant system of commodified private automobiles that capitalism attempts to push onto people as consumers.

Each of these models, urban and rural, offer a foretaste of contemporary living freed from the car system. The models offer glimpses of hope from within a capitalist system that encourages consumerism and promotes automobility, which should be considered and developed in order to, either, reduce the harmful effects of capitalism or point towards something more positive beyond. Here mobility is not fetishised but, rather, exists as a way to move people around and ensure that communities function properly as it should do freed from the consumerist imperative that has transformed mobility into automobility.

Conclusions

The alienating nature of commodity capitalism and the subsequent manner that the car system has organised mobility around consumption-based lines should be considered in the light of Newman's (2016) argument to conceive mobility as a part of the commons of shared community assets. Mobility should not be carved up based on the ability of citizens to own cars for such division should be considered to constitute harm in zemiological terms as significant as many of those penalised by criminal sanction within legal systems. Work is essential to earn money, medical services are vital for health, shops crucial to buy food and clothing, while leisure facilities are central for socialisation: these aspects of the social fabric cannot justly be reduced to the by-product of a capitalist commodity. The idea that citizens must buy into the car system to take part clearly prioritises products over people, conflating the constituent parts that form the bedrock of a society. In particular, the idea that the young, elderly or poor might be shut out of ordinary life because they cannot afford to buy or run a car is a challenge to notions of a fair and democratic society. This is an argument for social justice in mobility. Commoning points to our right to shape our own lives, to have control over who and what we are and to and the system of automobility curbs this.

Capitalism transforms life into a quest to get the money necessary for living the prescribed acceptable life. It pushes us to act always with an end point capitalist achievement in mind, meaning that we often overlook the content of our actions on the way. The logic of alienation is that the individuals are made into an inherent other, rendering them foreign to what they do, who they are and to other people as we live out our lives at a distance from our true essence, one step removed through capitalist commodities we use and rely on. When private cars are considered to be needed in both urban and rural areas, it is important to realise that the car system holds sway throughout society and has ensured that, in place of communities, we are left with collections of consumers. Cars are the products of the economic arena and should not be allowed to shape our lives in the social to the degree that they do. Moving beyond the presumption for private automobility offers a means to fight back against one particularly pervasive aspect of commodification – if victories can be won against the might of the car system, other areas in which social alienation operates may follow.

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