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From dromocracy toward a new critical dromology

As soon as it takes power the Nazi government offers the German prole-tariat sports and transport. No more riots, no need for much repression; to empty the streets it's enough to promise everyone the highway. (Virilio 2006 [1977], 49)

Roads and anthropologists

Traditionally, most anthropological work has been devoted to studying populations that were portrayed as antithetical to the dominant trends in modern and capitalist society. Roads and automobility were considered Western and modern elements, far from the ethnographic Other. The widespread introduction of roads on a global level sparked distinct reactions within anthropology.

First, many classical disciplinary ancestors underestimated (rather ineloquently) the impact of highways on their ethnographic "objects." Most typically, Evans-Pritchard suggested that although the Azande had changed their pattern of settlement by concentrating around the newly constructed roads—instead of streams, as they had before—he could not in fact ascribe to roads "any great change in the life of the Azande" (1932, 292). Highways, in the eyes of Evans-Pritchard, brought the imagined exotic a few steps nearer to the nonexotic world. Writing "a few steps nearer" was, in fact, quite literal, as it seems that his anthropological objects were constituted mainly of walkers, rather than drivers and passengers, with a preference for barefoot walkers. Walking barefoot implied an a priori hierarchical classification of people, as Tim Ingold (2004) explains in his discussion of cultures characterized by walking versus those with a culture of vehicle mobility. Thus, Sir Evans-Pritchard's subjects were indeed walkers—and hence closer to nature. They were passive receivers of change, unaffected by highways:

I am not concerned here with those changes, which were mostly imposed on the Azande and are—when I use the present tense the reference is to

the years 1926–30—not regarded by them as part of their way of life but something to be passively accepted or to be circumvented or ignored. To give one example: though the Administration compelled them to maintain wide roads it was noticeable that when a group of Azande walked down them they did so in single file as they were accustomed to do along their bush paths. (Evans-Pritchard 1960, 311)

Given the aforesaid trend toward remote ethnographic subjects, there was, in some respects, an unspoken competition between ethnologists to reach the most isolated and remote places, and as such the most primitive and exotic of peoples. Early anthropological accounts are full of references to isolated subjects accessed by poor-quality (mostly pre-automobile) roads. In 1884, Franz Boas observed that "the natives who had visited Padli in March had reported that the road was very bad; that the land was very nearly clear of snow and that the sledge would have to be carried over high rocks" (1884, 265). Levi-Strauss's early ethnographic explorations in South America were equally explicit: "I occasionally took that step on horseback with some colleagues when we came to the end of one of the few roads available at the time" (Levi-Strauss and Kussell 1971, 45). Moreover, Edmund Leach, in an interview with Adam Kuper (1986, 375), recalled his first type of ethnographic excursion in China, while still a civil engineer: "Chung-king itself was still a mediaeval city, all steps and sedan chairs. No roads or motor vehicles except the odd half-disintegrated bus." Even Paul Rabinow (2007 [1977], 44), the most reflexive anthropologist, stated about his fieldwork that "the road for the first five miles is little more than a path—untarred, pitted, and winding and steep in places." Even anthropologists who later focused their research on networked infrastructures such as Caroline Humphrey (1989, 6) have been explicit about the difficult roads in their place of research: "the road crosses a high mountain pass which is snowy even in midsummer, and plane tickets, unless booked months in advance, are obtainable only on a who-you-know basis."

Nevertheless by the latter half of the twentieth century, ethnologists began to acknowledge that highways had marked the end of the semi-isolated, nonmodern people that comprised the discipline for most of its history. Thus, given the aforesaid enthusiasm for, and informal competition to reach, remote places, to a certain extent the implication is that generally many anthropologists somehow regret the disappearance of remote research subjects. As Levi-Strauss explained, by the 1960s, roads already implied the end of isolated ethnographic subjects: "Likewise, the establishment of the new federal capital of Brazil and the building of roads and aerodromes in remote parts of South America have led to

the discovery of small tribes in areas where no native life was thought to exist" (1966, 125). Twenty years later, Michael Herzfeld (1985) was much more clear on the potential sources of anthropological road-phobia: highways "strangulate" the traditional practices of the ethnographic subject.

Finally, as with all things, the arrival of better roads and better access brought more positive assessments of the roads that were reaching the once-isolated ethnographic subject:

> More than anything else, the completion of the jeep road opened up the Fore region, changing it almost overnight from an isolated region to one open to free travel and commerce and, more important, in contact with the outside world … The power of the road is hard to overestimate. It was a great artery where only restricted capillaries had existed before, and down this artery came a flood of new goods, new ideas, new peoples, and, above all, excitement… . It was to the Fore an opening to a new world. (Sorenson 1972, 366)

Roads and boundary crossing

Within this aforementioned context, Marc Augé's suggestion (1995, 86) that "ethnologists mistrust the journey" is hardly a surprise. At the same time, anthropologists were professional strangers (Agar 1996) and the most typical students of nomadism and semi-nomadism (e.g. see Barth 1964; Campbell 1964; Rao 1987; Vainshtein 1980), and the ones who produced pioneering ethnographic works on migrants and their communities dating from several decades ago (e.g. see Lewis 1964; Watson 1977). Thus, the aforesaid mistrust of roads was not the same as a mistrust of the journey; in fact, it implied an anthropological avoidance of studying the crossing of certain spatial and cultural boundaries rather than the mistrust of the journey per se. This reflected the similar avoidance to cross the respective boundaries of the established epistemological paradigm. These spatial/cultural/epistemological boundaries have to be seen within the culturally relativistic (but simultaneously rationalist) Boasian separation of humanity into semi-sealed culture-areas. Arguably, the issue was what Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson called place-culture isomorphism (1997). Namely that cultures are considered attached to places. Thus, to rephrase Marc Augé, the issue was not the journey or mobility generally, but a dislike for the process of crossing a series of boundaries.

This is more or less to be expected from anthropology; an epistemological offspring of modernity which indeed had as its main focus clear-cut rational classifications and thus the negation of explicitly hybrid

formations (Latour 1993) or that which would facilitate such cultural formations, in our case: roads. In the case of British anthropology, the methodological monism of small-scale groups further illustrates this fear of crossing sociospatial boundaries. For instance, while physical mobility, in reference to the Kula Ring of Trobriand islanders, was defining for British social anthropology (Malinowski 1922), the established spatiocultural boundaries of the Trobriand islands were not really crossed as part of the Kula exchange, and thus an ethnography of such mobility that remained within its spatiocultural position was, epistemologically, a safe bet. Perhaps, a potential encounter with the crossing of boundaries would lead to a disruption of the "order of [anthropological] things" (Foucault 2002 [1966]).

Following a Foucauldian line of argument, one could attribute such fear of boundary-crossing to the privileged class and ethnic background of most ancestors of the discipline and their self-determination, in antithetical terms, to the nonmodern and colonized ethnographic subject. This echoes the by now celebrated opposition—but also interdependence—between the nomadic and the settled that Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (1986), among others, discuss, or indeed what in a more anthropological manner James Scott (1998) described as the opposition between state(d) (anthropologists in our case) and stateless/moving people. Or perhaps it even reflects the other famous division between hot and cold societies, if one prefers the more classical Levi-Straussian terminology. Indeed, we should not forget the metaphor encapsulated in this terminology: according to thermodynamics, cold bodies are characterized by slower molecular motility.

Late modernity as dromocracy

Anthropology is no longer able to neglect roads; together with other infrastructures, roads have become a central subject of anthropological inquiry. This should be seen in relation to other concepts, such as mobility (Cresswell and Merriman 2011; Urry 2007), flows (e.g. Appadurai 1990), network society (Castells 2010), or fluidity and liquidity (Bauman 2000), that have entered the standard lexicon of the social sciences in reference to current sociocultural conditions. In addition to allowing for theoretical speculations and heuristic models, the current sociocultural phenomena, described by the aforesaid concepts, refers both to novel forms of sociality and also to some very explicit and tangible materialities (Miller 2005). Thus, from the increased speed and flows to the fact that they are crucial spaces of flow for network society (Castells 2010), it can be argued that highways have become one of the

most paradigmatic material infrastructures of the current sociocultural condition. This does not necessarily imply a materialist determinism: highways not only produce other modern materialities and socialities but also comprise the materialization of modernist ways of imagining the—once "utopian"—futures of a previous era.

We describe the modern world in terms of automobility (Featherstone et al. 2005; Miller 2001; Sheller 2004; Urry 2004), yet this generic term, which seems to prioritize the automobile conceptually, can be misleading. Historically, roads for automobility were developed and "produced" on a mass scale well before the mass production and mass use of vehicles (Mom 2005; Vahrenkamp 2002). As such, the priority of modern highways is not only a temporal matter—some of the most insightful students of modernity have been explicit about the "cosmogonical" value of highways for the late modern cosmos. For instance, in *Speed and Politics*, Paul Virilio (2006 [1977]) defined modern society precisely as a "dromocratic society" (from *dromos*, road, and *cratos*, state, power).

Roads of course are not a modern phenomenon; they are the most archetypal human-made networks. For example, James Snead et al. (2010) compiled a collection of archaeological perceptions of different roads and pathways. Moreover, if we consider the paths that animals make, then it becomes clear that humans do not have a monopoly on networks of inland mobility. Thus, a question which emerges at this point is what is meant by modern road-systems? A first, technical answer is that modern roads are roads made with fast, frequent, long-range mobility (of vehicles) in mind. They comprise the combination of two relatively different technologies. First, the hard-surfacing/drainage technology that, in the case of Europe, was initially found in cobbled Roman roads and later in other forms such as macadam, cement, brick, or (much later) asphalt concrete. Second, the technology of rapidly building large-scale, long and wide, hard-surfaced, linear highways with controlled and limited access. Although such infrastructure was sometimes built over older transport networks (even ancient ones), in the twentieth century it was primarily built from scratch. This technology is notoriously linked with the modernist and futurist imagination of the European far-right totalitarian states. After all, the highway built during the 1920s, the early days of Italian fascism, between Milan and the Lakes of the North, is considered to be the first example of a highway as we know it today.

Given that the two largest highway systems (built in Italy and Germany) of the interwar period were surfaced with cement, the two current technologies, asphalt concrete and large-scale, linear highway networks, came together and were standardized after WWII. According

to Mom (2005) both highways exclusively for automobility and asphalt surfacing emerge after a long war between the competing technologies. In the first case was a war between mixed and car-only networks, which followed a previous war between automobility and canals, railways etc. In the area of surfacing the fight was equally complicated as it was amongst asphalt, bricks, cement, concrete etc. It can be argued that asphalt concrete dominated the surfacing of highways because the United States won WWII.[1] Famously, Germany lacked the natural resources necessary for asphalt and sought to avoid becoming dependent on a scarce material for what was one of its key propaganda projects. As technology studies have taught us, however, there are complex politics behind the domination of one material over another. Thus, much more instrumental was the existence of a powerful asphalt lobby in the United States (Holley 2003; MacNichol 2005). Indeed, asphalt was far from the perfect material in the early era of the competition. Nevertheless, substantial amounts of capital were injected into the development of asphalt throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth century which led to its victory in that implicitly historical and explicitly economic competition with various other paving technologies. Asphalt triumphed due to the involvement of local and national governments under pressure from, and aided by, corporate agents and interests such as the owner of Trinidad's pit lake, the US petrol industrialists, and the postwar boom in the car industry, to mention but a few (Holley 2003; MacNichol 2005; Mom and Kirsch 2001).

Highways were developed over the same period, marking another victory over alternative transport technologies such as canals and most especially railways (Mom and Kirsch 2001). On a macrohistorical level, colonialism and the exploitation of natural resources in diverse terrains all around the globe contributed to the spread of roads capable of automobility versus the railways and canals which dominated the relatively flat landscapes of Northern and Central Europe. During the twentieth century, newly built networks of unpaved roads were becoming a temporary and inexpensive solution for the opportunistic development of colonial exploitation. Later, during the postcolonial period, roads became the key element in the economic development of "underdeveloped" countries, according to development theorists such as Walt Rostow (1960).

Historically, in the case of Europe, it was WWI that ensured highways triumphed in the competition with other transport infrastructures. The vulnerability of the existing—and thus known—networks played a key role in this. Moreover, outside the flat territories of some Northern European countries, the diversity of landscape in the rest

of the continent meant that roads were convenient from a practical perspective, as was the case for the Romans and during the Napoleonic Wars of 1799–1815 (see Mom 2005). The construction of these roads was facilitated by the plentiful supply of gratis labor young conscripts provided between 1914 and 1918. In addition, during this time, the various automobile clubs of Europe saw their upper-class members volunteering, together with their vehicles, to the war effort. Thus, road-building and automobility became an integral part of the technology that corresponded to a modernist perception of how wars were to be fought during the industrial, modern age, after cavalries.

Just a few years after WWI, hard-surfacing technology (cement concrete), together with the introduction of the aforesaid, linear, technical characteristics, elevated large-scale road-building projects into highways as we know them today. Although the first highway technology was a peacetime project and arguably, in the case of Europe, one with primarily aesthetic and leisure purposes, its genealogy would be linked eternally with far-right totalitarian regimes and their modernist and futurist worldview. Rather than an infrastructure with key practical purposes, the first *autostrada* (built just after Mussolini came to power) served the weekend excursions of the wealthy leisure-class of car owners. In Germany, the Third Reich's *autobahnen* of the 1930s were undertaken in order to create employment for the unemployed German proletariat rather than for the purpose of actual mobility. They also connected the nation, providing tangible propaganda for the capabilities of the most modernist regime in Europe by demonstrating its ability to tame nature and make itself visible in every corner of the country. As David Frisby (2001) implied, the straightness of these roads represented very specific perceptions of the social world in comparison to those that winding roads represented. It can be argued that highways were framed within the wider context of the aesthetics of progress, representing unlimited growth, unlimited speed, unlimited length, and a straightforward, unobstructed path to the future of the new world order.

In addition, it is important to highlight the more implicit military purposes of the interwar *autobahn* and *autostrada* systems. For example, the highways in Albania and Libya, built by the Italian fascist regime at the dawn of WWII, were later used by the Italian army to invade these countries, as were the German highways leading to Poland. Despite this, it was not until after WWII, in the United States, that new mass-built highway systems became *explicitly* linked with defense purposes (Patton 1986; Rose 1990; Seely 1987). The famous American expressways were built during the cold war in order to evacuate the cities in the case of a nuclear attack. Ironically, whether by design or by accident,

American cities were eventually evacuated not by an act of war but by
suburbanization (Baum-Snow 2007). Moreover, if intercity highways
were linked with military purposes after 1945, wide road nexuses
within cities were linked with military purposes well before that. The
nineteenth-century, postrevolution Parisian boulevards were designed
to facilitate the movement of organized military units for counter-
insurrectionary purposes, as evidenced by the Paris Commune commen-
taries on boulevards as a feared new infrastructure (e.g. Blanqui 1972
[1866]). Following the end of WWII, urban road networks would be
linked explicitly with intercity nexuses toward the so-called integrated
infrastructural ideal that gave birth to the late modern city (Graham
and Marvin 2001).

Toward a new critical dromology

Much of the critical thinking addressing the issue of automobile
highways considers them one of the most crucial elements in the devel-
opment of modern capitalism. This is probably embedded within the
wider school of thought that considers Nazism and fascism as program-
matic of late modern capitalism (Arendt 1951; Bauman 1989; Virilio
1974). For example, Arendt, in her discussion of the banality of evil
(1951), suggested that the ontology of the modern capitalist state
(dictatorial or democratic) is such that it facilitates the organization
and the performance of a potential holocaust, a process that is almost
irrelevant to the actual modern agents who were (and are) socialized
to treat their activities, even the most evil, heinous actions, in a routi-
nized, professionalized, way. Similarly, in *Holocaust and Modernity*,
Bauman (1989) suggests that one reason people are so horrified by
the Holocaust is precisely because every modern state apparatus is
capable of organizing and implementing a similar mass extermination
project. Thus, within that context, some rather romantic but celebrated
Marxist authors—based on the capitalist side of the cold war divide—
were critical of highways and the centrally organized state appara-
tuses that build them. Guy Debord (1992 [1967], 174) paved the way
for a critique of automobility when he stated that "the dictatorship
of the automobile—the pilot product of the first stage of commodity
abundance—has left its mark on the landscape with the dominance of
freeways, which tear up the old urban centers and promote an ever-
wider dispersal." The key critical thinker of modern spaces, Henri
Lefebvre, stated categorically that a "motorway brutalizes the country-
side and the land, slicing through space like a great knife" (Lefebvre
1991 [1974], 165, 124–5). Paul Virilio (1974) saw the city of Paris as

being in a permanent state of siege by the peripheral highway and the flow of cars thereon (2005, 3). As previously mentioned, he is also the person who established an explicit link between highways, fascism, and modernity (Virilio 2006 [1977]). David Harvey (1989) acknowledged the role of highway systems in late capitalism's spatiomaterial relationships—highways, as mega-infrastructures, are embedded within the organic crises of capitalism (2010).

Speed, and so-called time–space compression, is the major point of reference in the aforesaid studies of modern spaces. This phenomenon took place thanks to the increasing use of transportation and communication technologies after 1945, which resulted in what Marx had prophetically termed the "annihilation of space by time" (Marx 1993a, 539). In terms of daily life in the capitalist core of the world-system, time–space compression has become evident by the widespread use of vehicles. In the West, after 1945, highways and cars created the iconic "*autopias*" (Wollen and Kerr 2002) of late capitalism. Highways became the major reference of a gradually speeding and long-distance cultural cosmology (Baudrillard 1988).

Occasionally, however, the critical approach of the modern postwar expansion of highways was ethnocentric. Historically, in noncapitalist or non-Western contexts, the mass construction of roads was not necessarily accompanied by the widespread introduction of automobility or a similar promise. Thus, for the great majority, neither was followed by time–space compression or high speed. On the contrary, in most non-Western and noncapitalist contexts, automobility and high(er) speeds were so exclusive that the asymmetric power divisions were explicitly materialized on roads, where usually the most powerful (e.g. the elite or the colonialist) could enjoy the symbolic and practical benefits of fast(er) and (more) private mobility (see also Ingold 2004). In the *Wretched of the Earth*, Franz Fanon is very specific in his description of the divisional value of the road for the colonial and colonized landscape:

> The zone where the natives live is not complementary to the zone inhabited by the settlers. The two zones are opposed, but not in the service of a higher unity. Obedient to the rules of pure Aristotelian logic, they both follow the principle of reciprocal exclusivity. No conciliation is possible, for of the two terms, one is superfluous. The settlers' town is a strongly built town, all made of stone and steel. It is a brightly lit town; the streets are covered with asphalt, and the garbage cans swallow all the leavings, unseen, unknown and hardly thought about. (Fanon and Sartre 1963, 38–9)

   The political value of paved highways is especially evident in places where the people who had no access to automobility were the same ones who were forced to build the roads, as in socialist Albania (Dalakoglou 2009a, 2010b), Portugal (Pina-Cabral 1987), or colonial Africa (Evans-Pritchard 1960; Thomas 2002).

   Given this context, a novel critical understanding of highways and automobility, in the case of a noncapitalist Western framework, emerges as a necessary part of the debate. Moreover, what this debate implies is the need for an ethnographically informed perception of roads capable of automobility in order to understand the infrastructural world in which we are dwelling today. Thus, given the unprecedented proliferation of highways today, along with the complex politics incorporated in the macro- and microhistories of modern road construction, and also given the *dromocratic* (Virilio 2006 [1977]) ontology of late modern politics, there has been a renewed interest in automobility and highways within the social sciences (e.g. Edensor 2004; Dalakoglou and Harvey 2012; Featherstone et al. 2005; Harvey and Knox 2015; Merriman 2007; Miller 2001; Urry 2007; Wollen and Kerr 2002). Although roads are arguably less researched by anthropologists in comparison to other universal material forms (e.g. houses, clothing, art), and despite the problematic history of the relationship between roads and the choice of ethnographic sites, roads are no longer just a coincidental brief reference in ethnographies. On the contrary, we can make roads the main ethnographic subject and we can talk about a growing body of road ethnographies.

   This wealth of ethnographic material paves the way for a series of observations which can play a valuable role in the future development of an anthropology of the road. First of all, this newfound interest in roads has come about because societies and their practices have never before been so mobile and taken place over such extended distances. Similarly, never before have such frequent and long-range mobility and flows been embedded in the everyday life of such broad social classes (Urry 2007, 3–16). Nevertheless, these observations are only one side of the coin, as the majority of road ethnographies suggest. The other side of the increased mobility of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries is that never before have so many people been so deeply aware of the consequences of their exclusion from (auto)mobility and/or from accessing its infrastructures. Hence roads, together with the rest of mobility infrastructure, connect but they also disconnect, when they do not fulfill the promises embedded in a mobility infrastructure or, for example, when they violently alter existing sociomaterial orders (Dalakoglou and Harvey 2012).

Moreover, another idea that must be considered in an anthropology of the road is that, despite the common universal technical characteristics that determine a thing such as a highway or road, socioculturally, such things do not really exist as a universal category. Thus, although modern highways have a common material ancestry or obey similar international construction standards, any given road or highway is socioculturally many highways at the same time. As Lefebvre puts it in a celebrated quote: "The analysis of every space brings us up against the dialectical relationship between demand and command, along with its attendant questions: 'Who?', 'For Whom?', 'By Whose agency?', 'Why and How?'" (Lefebvre 1974, 116). Thus, attempting to conduct empirical qualitative social research on a given highway section will likely bring forth a number of very different explanations. Therefore, the Lefebvrian approach opens up a complex world with unlimited ethnographic possibilities, possibilities that were not implied by the early anthropological approaches to infrastructure such as those of Marvin Harris (1968) or Maurice Godelier (1978). In the programmatic contributions of Harris and Godelier, the necessary departure from the Marxist grand narrative toward ethnographic particularity and then back to theory did not happen in concrete and organized ways. On the one hand, these early anthropological perceptions of material infrastructures were groundbreaking in explicitly suggesting sociomaterial continuities in a manner that became popular after the cultural critique of the 1980s. On the other hand, the theoretical scheme "entrapped" such perceptions within its limits. If nothing else, a first limitation is the use of the grand category "infrastructure" which, within a materialist framework, determines everything else and simultaneously is too general to be defined empirically. This is not an effort to underestimate the Marxist perspective of infrastructures. Nevertheless, a purist Marxist perception of infrastructure does not leave much space for diversity. I do not mean only the diversity of representations by the different social and historical agents involved, but even the ontological diversity among the various dimensions of an infrastructure (e.g. the sociocultural, material, historical). By extension, the narrow limits of the theory prevent even the perception of diversity among the very different kinds of infrastructure(s): pipelines, roads, power grids, ports, landfills, or even hospitals, for example, are all labeled as infrastructure when they are radically different sociomaterial entities.

More specifically, regarding roads, the content of the Marxist scheme and its anthropological versions had to be stretched considerably in order to set the foundations for an anthropology of roads. If nothing else, there is a fundamental methodological problem in a potential purist

Marxist perception of the so-called (by Marx and Engels) communication (and not transport) infrastructures, namely, for historical reasons, most of the original references to these communication infrastructures were to canals and railways (de La Haye 1980).

Thus, the choice of the Lefebvrian perception is a very conscious decision for the current project. Lefebvre himself belongs to the school of Marxist authors who were critical of the high speeds of automobility and of the post-WWII West. The idea was that high speeds were crucial for the capitalist and industrial growth facilitating the exploitation of the working masses. The fast and mass production, transfer, and consumption of goods were transforming the Western working classes into simply consumers, alienating them from their production. Despite following this idea in principle, Lefebvre's poststructural reading of the original theoretical contribution allows us to resolve some of the limitations of Marxist theory, thus allowing for the renewal that is necessary for the ethnographic approach. Lefebvre's (2009 [1940], 88–102) historical materialist approach and his spatial analysis (1974) provide him with two methodological benefits. First, Lefebvre (2009 [1940], 1974), a theoretician, was not bound by the same compulsion to produce a scientific theory on which to base an empirical discipline—contrary to Harris and Godelier—and secondly, his main point of reference is *space*. In principle, he was analyzing an entity which may have tangible materiality, and at the same time may be relatively immaterial, yet qualitatively distinct: a concrete abstraction (Stanek 2008). As such, instead of seeing material infrastructures as a strictly materialist element that determines superstructure, he saw them as *spaces*. Furthermore, the Lefebvrian space is not neutral or objectively measured; it is a product of human action and thus a process. If space is always produced, it follows logically that it can also circulate and be consumed. In fact, the Lefebvrian space/infrastructure affords a similar analysis to the one afforded by any product of human labor. For example, its circulation is linked with its fetishization, and thus the social and economic relationships involved in spatial production are both embedded within the materiality of space/infrastructure and masked within the labyrinth of the circulation/consumption process. The users of a highway, for example, will never see the exploited migrant workers who constructed it.

The idea of an infrastructure as a product of human action easily leads to a perception of highways as technological artifacts. In this case, as is well known among scholars of science and technology studies (Khun 2012; Latour 1987; Latour and Woolgar 1979), technologies are not simply objectively and rationally created, but involve complex sociocultural, historical, and especially political dynamics, while simultaneously

encapsulating what Michel Foucault called the micro-physics of power within their materiality. For instance, one of the most famous analyses from society and technology studies (Winner 2010)—which focused on transport infrastructure—manifests how bridges may have very explicit class and race perceptions incorporated within their design and within their materiality. However, such perspectives have far-reaching implications, well beyond the designers and creators, the users or the workers who built the actual infrastructures, beyond even those people who aspire, but never get the chance, to have a direct tangible experience of these infrastructures but who still have perceptions of them. For instance, Bruno Latour (1987, 248–9) used the case of road construction in the highlands of Crete in order to discuss the relationship between local communities and their aspirations for technological/infrastructural projects without having a tangible experience of them. As Heideggerian phenomenology (1971) would imply—again in reference to a bridge—just thinking or being aware of a built form automatically assumes the (virtual or material) existence of that form and thus the existence of certain "realities" related to the knowledge of that form.

Thus, it is perhaps here where Lefebvre, as a poststructuralist, comes in. The road product is open to social manipulations: it "kills" the authority (state, suprastate, the developer, etc.) in the same way that the Barthian (1967) poststructuralist perception of the text "killed" the author. The meanings of the road as a product are open to those who use it, experience its existence, are simply aware of its existence, or even just expect it or its rhythmic flows. It is possible to extend this approach even further, toward a more culturally relativistic approach: we cannot even be sure if a road we study is considered "space" or a "product" by the people who constructed it, use it, live by, work along, or even think of it. A road and its flows may promote hope or hopelessness, expectation or fear, love or hate, stability or instability, mobility, loss, suspicion, or subordination, to mention but a few of the ways roads are described within the related ethnographies. Such affective dimensions of roads are precisely the reason that anthropologists have coined new terms such as "imagineering," combining imagination with engineering (Löfgren 2004), or "road mythographies" grasping the close relationship between local narratives and roads (Masquilier 2002).

This is not to suggest a flat morphology neglecting social hierarchies similar to the one that notions such as that of *scapes* (Appadurai 2011) or actor-network (Latour 2007; Latour and Venn 2002) previously proposed. On the contrary, the morphology of the sociocultural entities around a road is evidently hierarchical and unequal. Even the way the roads are conceived is colonized by hegemonic (Gramsci 1995) rhetoric,

which represents the perceptions of the classes in power. As Hansen and Stepputat (2001) or Foucault (2002 [1966]) suggested: the state itself is in fact a state of imagination and its infrastructures are imagined as much as they are built. Often they are just imagined and never built. Roads' multiplicity, however, is more complex and goes beyond the state. The fact that they comprise the tangible materialization of certain imaginations implies that the entire postmodern flexibility in meanings is met with certain implicit and explicit limitations. Especially in the case of a thing like a highway that carries so many political and historical meanings and ideas embedded within its materiality and more widely its historical existence. This is to say that roads—and by extension highways—are intertwined with the human mode of dwelling in the world (Heidegger 1971), as they originate from the archetypal human-made network of the bipedal mobile human subjects.

Thus overall, the parameters one has to take into account when deciding to study a road transcend most traditional social science scales (e.g. micro/macro, diachronic/synchronic, subject/object, proximate/distant, settled/nomadic, mobile/static, form/content). Perhaps this is the great methodological benefit of studying roads, and most likely this is precisely the reason that some of the most influential social science theories of late modernity try to think of the late modern world by employing the conceptualizations of networks (Castells 2010; Latour 1996). This is exactly the implications of an anthropology of the road: an anthropological approach which remains ethnographically rooted and simultaneously allows us to perceive some of the most static and traditional units of anthropological analysis such as the house, city, family, money, or architecture in direct reference to the infrastructural network's materiality and the flows on and of the road.

Note

1 The so-called asphalt lobby was already very powerful in the United States, gradually eliminating other paving technologies with the help of its political patrons (Holley 2005; MacNichol 2005).