

**A Motor-Flight through early Twentieth-Century Consciousness:
Capturing the Driving Event 1905-35.**

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Introduction

It is thought-provoking to observe the extent to which motoring has long been, and still is, associated with madness. While, today, the psychopathology of car culture may turn upon its environmental insanity and the widely-reported tabloid-phenomenon, ‘road rage’,¹ a century ago, when motoring was still in its infancy, there was wide concern for how the altered states of consciousness brought about by travelling at speed might constitute, or at least lead to, a kind of madness.² Sometimes this was indexed as a benign ‘motor mania’ (as in Mrs Kennard’s ‘witty and amusing’ middle-brow novel, *The Motor Maniac* (1902)); in other texts (fictional and otherwise), however, the ‘mania’ takes a rather more disturbing turn.

The following extract from Elizabeth Bowen’s *To the North* (first published in 1932) represents a limit-point – both historical and psychological– of the literary works I shall be discussing in this chapter, but also serves to introduce all that is most fascinating about the impact of the ‘motor-flight’³ upon human consciousness:

Nervously shaking her hair back, gripping the wheel beside Markie, Emmeline, who said nothing, drove, as though away from the ashy destruction of everything, not looking back. Running dark under their wheels the miles mounted by tens: she felt nothing – like a shout from the top of a bank, like a low chord struck on the dark, she

saw “TO THE NORTH” written black on white, with a long black immovably flying arrow.

Something gave way. [. . .]

As though hearing her name on his lips for the first time, dazzled, she turned to smile. Head-on, magnetised up the heart of the fan of approaching brightness, the little car, strung on speed, held unswerving way. Someone, shrieking, wrenched at a brake ahead: the great car, bounding, swerved on impetus. Markie dragged their wheel left: like gnats the two hung in the glare with unmoving faces. Shocked back by the moment, Emmeline saw what she was past averting. She said: “Sorry,” shutting her eyes. (Bowen, 1932, pp.304-306)

This episode, the climax of Bowen’s fine novel—which tells the quietly tragic story of Emmeline’s affair with a man (Markie) who is unable to commit to her because he is not ‘the marrying-type’-, is both a magnificent depiction of early-twentieth driving and the altered states of consciousness⁴ to which it can give rise, and an index of just how far literary representations of motoring had progressed since the first decade of the twentieth century. The purpose of this chapter is to document this evolution in texts spanning the period 1902-1932, paying particular attention to the nexus of sensation, cognition and affect (Sheller, 2004: see note 4) occasioned by a ride -- or more particularly a *drive* -- in a ‘horseless carriage’.

The Bowen extract, meanwhile, is an excellent showcase of several of the states of consciousness with which the act of driving has long been associated: from the euphoria that accompanies all journeys made in the spirit of escape, through out-of-body transcendence of the self, to the final annihilation of consciousness itself through all-consuming speed.

Although, as I have discussed elsewhere (Pearce, 2012; Pearce, 2013), the contemporary

driving-event regularly delivers affective and cognitive experiences that soothe the mind rather than spike it, Emmeline's cognitive trajectory is homed on that spot (the 'magnetic North') where all thought stops. Notwithstanding the fact that she comes to her senses in the split-second before impact, and recovers a fleeting sense of Markie and herself, this is very much a tale about the driver's endgame: the suicidal tipping-point seemingly inherent in speed itself (note how Bowen's text has 'speed' and 'Emmeline' become grammatically synonymous with one another as 'speed streamed from her unawares' (p.305)).

To better understand the popular appeal of this articulation of motoring with madness in early twentieth-century literature it is first necessary to turn to my further consideration here: namely, the history of the *representation* of mobility in literary texts *per se* and, in particular, the poetic appeal of automobility and speed for writers trying to capture the *zeitgeist*. In other words, it is crucial to recognise that, invaluable as these early representations of driving are for automotive theorists and historians, they must be seen to exist alongside more scientific accounts of motoring. While these fascinating novels, stories and autobiographies do, of course, serve to capture something of the cultural specificity of the driving-event⁵ in its earliest years, many of their authors also exploit the automobile's symbolism to connote an era where all has 'changed utterly' (Yeats, 1974 [1921], p.93).⁶ This conscription of the experience of driving to narrative poetics and symbolism is vividly illustrated in the Bowen extract quoted above: at the same time that the text breathtakingly captures something of what it would, indeed, have felt like to stream out of London on the Great North Road⁷ at 60mph, late at night, so too is the event being used to dramatize the interior workings of a mind rendered furious, numb and ultimately insane by months of emotional abuse and betrayal: a technique made visible in those textual interstices where Bowen pulls back from the representation of the internal workings of Emmeline's consciousness to allow the narrator to reveal the metaphor:

Blind with new light she was like someone suddenly not blind, or, after a miracle, somebody moving perplexed by the absence of pain. Like earth shrinking and sinking, irrelevant, under the rising wings of a plane, love with its unseen plan, its constrictions and urgencies, dropped to a depth below Emmeline, who now looked down unmoved at the shadowy map of her pain. (Bowen, 1932, p.304)

With reference to an earlier episode in the novel when Emmeline and Markie fly to Paris together for a weekend trip that will see the consummation of their relationship, the narrator picks up on the sense of distance facilitated by both motoring and aviation as a metaphor for Emmeline's desire to evacuate both mind and body: in this surreal moment, motoring does, indeed, *become flight* and Emmeline is gifted the temporary relief of an out-of-body experience. But this is a moment of resolution not only for Emmeline but for the novel itself as Bowen skilfully pulls her narrative and imagistic threads together into a compelling dénouement. Yes, this is an evocative account of early-twentieth century motoring but it is also, as it were, an annexing of mobility for artistic ends.⁸

It is between these twin concerns, then – the evolution of the representation of driver-consciousness in the early twentieth century and its literary-symbolic function --, that the discussion that follows situates itself. In the first section of the chapter, I explore some of the earliest literary representations of motoring in a group of texts by women writers⁹ from the first decade of the century; in the second section, working now with texts that extend from 1908-1927, I investigate the way in which an intellectual awareness of motoring's unique 'phenomenology of perception' (Merleau-Ponty, 1962) enters literary works; before returning, finally, to the era's preoccupation with the altered states of consciousness occasioned by speed in a section entitled 'Motomania'. Theoretically, the discussion is

informed by my earlier and ongoing work on the phenomenology of driving (Pearce, 2012; 2013; Pearce, forthcoming), and pays particular attention to research on motoring, speed and theories of human consciousness (Jeremiah, 2007; Kern, 2000[1983]); Bergson, 1950; Husserl, 2002; Thrift, 2008).

Early Motor-Flights

Considering that transportation by the earliest automobiles would be roughly equivalent to the present-day experience of driving a ride-on lawnmower, it is hardly surprising that sensation rather than cognition dominates the earliest accounts of ‘motor-flight’. The latter term was popularized by the publication of Edith Wharton’s *A Motor-Flight through France* in 1908, and the text opens with what was to become a popular characterization of the motor-car as a uniquely liberating mode of transportation and tourism:

The motor-car has restored the romance of travel.

Freeing us from all the compulsions and contacts of the railway, the bondage to fixed hours and the beaten track, the approach to each town through the area of ugliness and desolation created by the railway itself, it has given us back the wonder, the adventure and the novelty which enlivened the way of our posting grandparents.

(Wharton, 2008 [1908], p.10)

Numerous automotive historians and mobilities-theorists have now researched and commented on this perceived benefit of car-travel (Filson Young, 1904; Jeremiah, 2007; Urry, 2007; Dennis and Urry, 2009) in terms of social life and tourism,¹⁰ though rather less attention has, as yet, be paid to the way in which its somatic, cognitive and perceptual novelty was reported. In literary terms, there is also an interesting generic issue at stake here

inasmuch as many of the earliest accounts of motoring and motor-touring take the form of autobiographies (or lightly-fictionalized versions thereof), many of them authored by upper-class or aristocratic women. Indeed, the unashamedly light, amusing and middle-brow register of these volumes would seem to go to the heart of how motoring was perceived and understood in its earliest years: an aristocratic sport, or hobby, with the guaranteed potential for ‘misadventures’ of a kind that would resolve themselves as comedy.

The fact that more women than men recorded these early exploits in their writing probably speaks to their greater willingness to be laughed at, as is well-illustrated in several accounts of the lady-driver’s first turn at the wheel. For Mrs Aria, a recent divorcée, the event reads like something from the pages of Mills & Boon novel inasmuch as her attention regularly wavers from the technicalities of learning to use the clutch to the ‘handsome’ chauffeur sitting at her side (‘He drove back while I leaned contentedly against the crimson leather cushions, watching the nervous grip of his sunburned hands’ (Aria, 1906, p.145)); meanwhile, the heroine of Mrs Kennard’s quasi-autobiographical novel, *The Motor Maniac* (1902), begins her tale with a comic account of her instructor struggling to get his modest Benz Ideal up a hill. Here, as across all the texts, however, the automobilist’s first experience of *speed* is described as a serious thrill; whether as driver or passenger, the sensation is repeatedly described as being ‘unforgettable’:

The mere contemplation of such speed took one’s breath away. Going downhill, when Mr Long dared to let the car out, they simply raced. And what a glorious sensation it was! In its exhilarating effects Mrs Jenks could only liken it to a good run in the hunting field.

It may be gathered from all this that the little lady had caught motor fever in a very acute form . . . As yet, she was only in the first throes. Already her head was full of nothing but motors. (Kennard, 1902, p.59)

As he spoke he turned into Cliff Road and changed to a greater speed. The sensation was exhilarating in the extreme, the rapid motion causing the salt air to fan our faces pleasantly . . . From Newhaven to Seaford the road was very aggressive, but still we rushed on at an outrageous pace, and still I could have cried “Faster! Faster!” (Aria, 1906, pp.53-8).

We both climbed into the high perched seats, first gear was engaged, the engine raced, the clutch was let in, and for the first time in my life I was “being pushed by a pint of paraffin”. It was an exciting moment, and one I shall never forget [. . .] (Edge, 1934, pp. 15-16)

The fact that the last of these extracts is taken from the ‘Reminiscences’ of champion racing-driver S.F. Edge, and looks back to the very earliest days of the internal combustion engine (1895), at least mitigates the impression that the excitement and thrill of being transported by automobile was entirely a consequence of a susceptible female temperament. Repeatedly, these early texts – whether authored by male or female writers – recount the ‘first drive’ as an extraordinarily vivid and visceral experience whose impact is primarily registered by the automobilist’s body which is variously ‘shaken’, ‘exhilarated’, ‘fanned’ or rendered ‘breathless’.

It is therefore not surprising that within five years of the motor-car becoming a commercial venture, owners were desperate to depose their chauffeurs and become drivers

themselves (even if this meant still bringing the chauffeur along as a mechanic). The early literature reflects this enthusiasm for ‘becoming-driver’ (a step on the way to what recent theorists, following Deleuze, have figured as ‘becoming-car’(Dant, 2004; Thrift, 2004)) in its tales of blustering male ‘road hogs’ (from Kenneth Grahame’s infamous Toad (1978 [1908]) to E. M. Forster’s Charles Wilcox (2012 [1910]) and, as we have already seen, excitable lady enthusiasts, but there appear to be few texts from the first decade that bring the uniqueness of auto-mobility to *intellectual* consciousness in the manner of later texts (see discussion following). One obvious explanation for this is that, in the early days, driving oneself was such a technical challenge that there was little opportunity to reflect upon its existential peculiarities. Driving, today, may be held up by psychologists as the supreme example of a quasi-mechanical ‘complex everyday skill’(Groeger *et al*, 2000), but for the motorists of the early 1900s it was presumably as mentally all-consuming as, for example, rock climbing. Only at a certain point in the car’s mechanical evolution -- and the individual driver’s skill-set -- does it become possible to think about other things, and to reflect upon what is being seen, while we drive (Pearce, 2013).

It is arguable, however, that the driver’s awareness of the car as a *living* machine was keener in this early period than subsequently: not only did serious drivers (including women) have to learn to be mechanics (in order to be able to go driving on their own), they also had to learn to anticipate break-downs through listening attentively to every whirr and clatter of the engine and chassis. Viewed from this perspective, early drivers were, indeed, engaged in far more than mere sensual and somatic experience: they demonstrated cognitive understanding of the link between the mechanics of their vehicle and the sensation of driving in a way that few drivers do today. The fact that women drivers shared, and evidently enjoyed, developing this technical knowledge is seen to confirm the success of the post-World War 1 discourses in

subsequently returning the erstwhile ‘new woman’ to the domestic sphere (Jeremiah, 2007, p.88).

One early-twentieth-century driver who evidently knew most of what there was to know about her cars mechanically was the amazing Dorothy Levitt: the female racing-driver who, amongst other things, broke the land-speed record for women at Blackpool in 1906. Here she achieved a speed of 91 mph driving a ninety horse-power six-cylinder Napier (Levitt, 2012 [1909], p. 11). In her book of 1909 entitled *The Woman and the Car: A Chatty Little Handbook For All Women Who Motor or Who Want to Motor*, Levitt devotes a whole chapter to ‘The Mechanics of the Car’, another on ‘How to Drive’ and a third to ‘Troubles—How to Avoid and to Mend Them’. In the latter, she exhorts the aspiring driver to:

Train your ear to distinguish the slightest sound foreign to the consistent running of the engine. A single misfire means that there is some little thing needing attention; but always remember to turn off the electric current before touching anything – if you do not you will get a shock. (Levitt, 2012 [1909], p.52)

Indeed, if we were to put together a sketch of the pre-1910 motorist -- driving, it will be remembered, largely open-topped cars — it would be of a subject entranced, and a little frightened, by the sensation of speed and being jolted about, at the same time as being acutely aware of the sound of the vehicle that transported them and what the various squeals, splutters, knockings and bangs might signify.

Preoccupied as they were undoubtedly were by the care of their vehicles, most early drivers and passengers nevertheless registered the novelty of seeing the landscape flash by at speed. Although this is rarely theorized or reflected upon in the pre-1910 texts, a close reading of the early tourist literature evidences the radical changes in perception that

automobility had brought about. Those relaxed enough to look about them (typically passengers rather than drivers) and, of course, the wherewithal to write-up their experiences afterwards, have bequeathed us some vivid accounts of the early twentieth-century landscape as seen from the unique vantage point of the moving car. Here is just one of a great many quotable passages from Wharton's elegant travelogue:

Certainly we got a great deal of the Loire as we followed its windings that day: a great sense of the steely breadth of its shores, the sweet flatness of the richly gardened and vineyarded landscape, as of a highly cultivated but slightly insipid society; an impression of long white villages and of stout conical towns on little hills; of old brown Beaugency in its cup between two heights, and Madame de Pompadour's Menars on its bright terraces; of Blois, nobly bestriding the river at a double bend; and farther south, of yellow cliffs honeycombed with strange dwellings; of Chaumont and Amboise crowning their heaped-up towns; of manoirs, walled gardens, rich pastures, willowed islands; and then, toward sunset, of another long bridge, a brace of fretted church-towers and the widespread roofs of Tours. (Wharton, 2008 [1908], p.45)

Immediately striking is the use Wharton makes of the periodic sentence with its long tail of sub-clauses that seek to capture, and arrest, the rapid sequences of places and impressions that flash past the car in its headlong motor-flight through the French countryside. It is interesting to note, in particular, the ways in which specific, named locations ('old brown Beaugency', 'Madame de Pompadour's Menars', 'Chaumont' and 'Amboise') are interspersed with generic ones ('long white villages', 'stout conical towns', 'manoirs', 'willowed islands', 'a brace of fretted church-towers') as the motor-tourist effectively *fails* to capture, and retain, distinct perceptions of all that passes before her eyes unless, it seems, she

can attach some particular significance to it. This is, for sure, one of the most radical mutations in the ‘tourist gaze’ (Urry, 1990) resultant upon travel at speed: by foot or on horse-back, local information would ensure that one ‘long white village’ or ‘fretted church tower’ was memorably distinct from another; from the motor, as from the train, they remain distant and anonymous until retrospectively composed into an aesthetic unity (a phenomenological practice to which I shall return in the following section).

For many early motoring enthusiasts, such as those whose stories are featured in the pages of *The Car Illustrated*, this ability to scope the landscape in all its fast-changing glory is viewed as nothing short of a miracle. Take, for instance, this extract from Sir Gilbert Parker’s account of his first motor-tour in Ireland which replicates Wharton’s syntax (the same long ‘elastic’ sentences are needed to cram everything in),¹¹ but who acknowledges the role played by the car more directly:

I have just returned from my first motor tour, after sweeping through Connemara like a blustering wind and sailing through Galway like a clansman’s signal. The fresh green of noble Rockingham; the bog-lands of Loch Mask and the purple hills thereby; the waters of Leenane, the wide valley where the weaver sits and toils an arm’s length from his bed and his fire, and his children swarm between in the smoke and the gloom; the long reach of lonely gorse-bright moor; the group of shy, wild scarlet-skirted women on the hillock; the Twelve Pins rimming the horizon; the sunset waters; the abandoned homes; the oasis of green and rhododendrons at Recess – these and a thousand such impressions in the first day’s flight. (Parker, 1919, pp.15-17)

A little later, Parker even goes part-way to bringing his driving-event to consciousness in the manner of the later authors discussed in the next session:

The mind is bemused by a myriad impressions, and yet, contrary to my previous contentions and beliefs, real pictures remain, real records are printed on the mind. It had always seemed to me that the traveller by motor car was so engaged in thinking of speed and of his machinery, of the nature of the dusty road and the next objective, of the sharp curve and the “pig on the highway”, that he had no time to observe and enjoy, to note and ruminate. The railway traveller had appeared at an immense advantage on an even rail and a steady course [. . .]

I am not quite so sure now. Over one of the toughest courses a car could travel, and frequently hurled like a catapult into the arms of my fellow travellers, I saw and observed, enjoyed the countryside, took in the wide picture as I never had done in a railway carriage; that much I will say.’ (Parker, 1919, p.15)

As I now go on to discuss, the battle between perception, cognition and memory implicit here takes us to the heart of some fascinating speculations on how motorists, both drivers and passengers, order and process so many fleeting impressions and also, by implication, how we are to distinguish the events of consciousness from the acts of memory (Thrift, 2008, p. 7).

Kinaesthetics

Edwardian writers’ preoccupation with time and space, and its representation, is a well-researched facet of early twentieth century literature, especially in the context of Modernism. Furthermore, certain texts – such as Proust’s *In Search of Lost Time* (2003 [1871-1922]), Dorothy Richardson’s *Pilgrimage* (1989[1917]), Virginia Woolf’s *To the Lighthouse* (1978

[1927]) and James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1969 [1922])— have earned philosophical as well as literary status *vis-à-vis* the period's attempt to account for the disjuncture between external or 'public' time and what Husserl later designated 'internal-time consciousness' (Husserl, 2002 [1964]). Writing about this revolution in our understanding of how the human consciousness locates itself in time and space, Stephen Kern concludes: 'The thrust of the age was to affirm the reality of private time against that of a single public time and to define its nature as heterogeneous, fluid, reversible' (Kern, 2000 [1983], p. 34). How motor-travel and what may broadly be thought of as the phenomenological practice of driving¹² (or being driven) contributes to these debates (now, as then) is both complex and fascinating as I now hope to show with reference to some texts from the period.

Perhaps the best starting place for an understanding of the signal role of the motor car in this re-conceptualization of time and space is a simple recognition of the extent to which automotive travel *mimics* the movement of the human mind if perceived, in modernist terms, as a 'stream-of-consciousness'. While William James's definition of this now popular way of understanding the flux and flow of human consciousness suggests a 'steady flow [of thoughts] in a fixed course' (Kern, 2000 [1983], p. 28), other formulations of a similarly dynamic consciousness (most notably, those of Husserl (2002 [1964]) and Bergson (1950)) emphasise the mind's tendency to move backwards as well as forwards in time in much the same way as a moving vehicle continually re-orientates itself between present, past and future locations. For although the car's direction of travel is most obviously future-bound (like James's 'stream'), each new journey has a start point in the recent past and many journeys *repeat* routes taken on previous occasions. Further, as I have discussed elsewhere, it would seem that the car-driver's own consciousness – already flitting back and forth within its own temporal matrix – is peculiarly responsive to the prosthetic temporality of the driving-event: lulled into optimistic day-dreaming, perhaps, by the car's re-assuring propulsion towards the

future, or into a pleasant stirring of nostalgia from the fleeting sight of a cherished landmark from the past. The car journey, in other words, may be seen both to replicate the temporal flux of consciousness and to help model it, not least because the speed of motor travel causes visual prompts (Pearce, 2013, pp.101-3) to follow each other in quick succession and because the fleeting impressions of the landscape itself approximates the fuzziness of our memories.

In 1927, Virginia Woolf, already a celebrated exponent of the literary representation of the ‘stream of consciousness’ in her fiction, wrote an essay called ‘Evening Over Sussex: Reflections in a Motor Car’ (Woolf, 1941 [1927])¹³ in which she appears to make a connection between the dizzying succession of impressions encountered on a ‘motor-flight’ and the equally alarming dance of everyday consciousness in which the present, past and future are whirled mercilessly together. Acknowledging, first, the split within her psyche between the ‘self’ who wishes to enjoy the beauty of the evening as it is, and another, ‘stern and philosophical’, who wants to account for its meaning (and passing), she paints a colourful picture of the Sussex landscape as it rushes by:

There they [her two selves] sat as the car sped along, noticing everything: a haystack; a rust red roof; a pond; an old man coming home with his sack on his back; there they sat, matching every colour in the sky and earth from their colour box, rigging up little models of Sussex barns and farmhouses in the red light that would serve in the January gloom. (Woolf, 1941, p.12)

Superficially similar to the other accounts of landscapes seen from cars sampled above, Woolf’s depiction – on closer inspection – nevertheless bears the brushmarks of a painter’s abstraction. Like her sister, Vanessa Bell,¹⁴ and like Lily in *To the Lighthouse* (1927[1927]), Woolf’s third persona (the narrator of the essay) reveals herself to be an artist intent on

subduing all she sees to abstract forms, colours and (inasmuch as her medium here is *writing*) symmetrical patterns of words. Understood thus – as an *artistic representation of landscape*, mobility and the driving-event --, this is a text that is unlikely to sustain the interest of automotive historians in search of texts that will ‘authentically’ capture the experience of driving across the rolling hills of Sussex in 1927. At the same time, for those prepared to shift up a gear or two, and move from memoir to what Woolf styles ‘reflection’, this essay possibly comes as close as any pre-1930s text to explaining the peculiar synergy that exists between thinking and driving and, in particular, our profound need to *fix* the fast-fleeting images of what we see and what we think in order that we don’t drown in an endless sea of impressions. On this point it will be noted that the ‘two selves’ travelling in Woolf’s car are already busy ‘rigging up little models’ of all they see in order to fix and rationalize the scene, and the essay concludes with a passionate declaration that such fixing, such ‘art’, is the only way to manage the overloaded consciousness, especially when beauty excites the nerves:

The sun was now low beneath the horizon. Darkness spread rapidly. None of my selves could see anything beyond the tapering light of our headlamps on the hedge. I summoned them together. “Now,” I said, “comes the season for making up our accounts. Now we have got to collect ourselves; we have got to be one self. Nothing is to be seen any more, except one wedge of road and bank which our lights repeat incessantly. We are perfectly provided for. We are warmly wrapped in a rug; we are protected from wind and rain. We are alone. Now is the time of reckoning. Now I, who preside over the company, am going to arrange in order the trophies we have all brought in. Let me see; there was a great deal of beauty brought in today: farmhouses; cliffs standing out to sea; marbled fields; mottled fields; red feathered skies; all that.

Also there was disappearance and the death of the individual. The vanishing road and the window lit for a second and then dark. (Woolf, 1941 [1927], p.13)

Reflecting, in true phenomenological fashion, upon which things that have ‘intuitively’¹⁵ pressed themselves upon one’s consciousness in the course of the drive, Woolf’s narrator – her ‘presiding self’ – calls for a ‘reckoning’ that will resolve the myriad impressions into *one* defining thing that will somehow sum up and memorialize the event. Challenging as this may seem, the essay implies that the alternatives are worse: either you forget the evening in all its glory and hence lose it forever, or you drown in its detail and go mad. Artistic abstraction, symbolized here by a little clay figure, is thus presented as a necessary survival strategy:

We sat and looked at the figure we had made that day. Great sheer slabs of rock, tree tufted, surrounded him. He was for a second very, very solemn. Indeed it seemed as if the reality of things were displayed there on the rug. A violent thrill ran through us; as if a charge of electricity had entered into us. We cried out together: “Yes, yes”, as if affirming something in a moment of recognition. (Woolf, 1941 [1927], pp.13-14)

Further, although this end point may, at first, appear to have left the motor-car behind, it should be noted that this cathartic distillation of perception and memory are effectively made possible *by* the car. Returning to the earlier extract, it may be seen that things only begin to become clear for the travellers when darkness falls and the myriad impressions trailing the fast-moving car are narrowed to the selective few that can be seen in its headlights.

For Woolf, mobility, and the ever-changing perspectives to which it gives rise, is the revelatory mystery at the heart of all perception and the fact that her ‘Sussex’ essay ends with

stasis (the clay figure) should not lead us to the conclusion that she was somehow ‘against’ the moving world as seen from the car. Indeed, the endpoint of the essay would seem to come quite close to my own past theorization of the driving-event as a series of discrete thoughts (perceptions, retentions, protentions, memories)¹⁶ folded back together, like a deck of cards (Pearce, 2012, p.100), when the car finally comes to rest at the end of its journey. It is as if at this moment all the thoughts and impressions we have gathered on that particular drive suddenly fall together and define it. While few – if any – of the thoughts and perceptions will remain intact for future recollection (especially if the journey is a familiar one) the final impression of the whole (or, to invoke Raymond Williams’s terminology, its ‘structure of feeling’: Williams, 1979) may linger: and this, I would suggest, is what Woolf’s essay recognises in the necessary production of the ‘little figure’ at the end: not rest, or stasis, as such, but rather the fixing of mobility and perspective in *kinaesthetic* form.¹⁷

Motormanía

While Woolf’s essay ends with a triumphant solution to the problem of ‘knowing’ a world of mobility and what Nigel Thrift has termed ‘non-representational space’¹⁸ it is also, of course, a story about the looming presence of madness of a very modern kind. Indeed, all those aspects of the narrative that would give a psychiatrist cause for concern – the splitting of the self, not once but four times; the heightened consciousness, tipping into neurasthenia; the threat of nihilism – are indicative of a widely-documented modernist angst associated with the frenetic pace of modern life and the specific dangers of overloading the brain with too many fleeting impressions (Kern, 2000 [1983], pp.125-6). Aside from Kenneth Grahame’s well-known tale of the ill-fated Toad (*Wind in the Willows*, 1978 [1908]), probably the best known of these texts is the Russian writer, Ilya Ehrenburg’s, experimental fiction work of 1929, *The Life of the Automobile*, which opens with the story of Charles Bernard. Charles, a

dowdy, recently-retired paper-manufacturer of modest means, falls under the spell of ‘the motor’ as the result of a visit to his local cinema:

In the dark theater, amid the smooching couples and the comforting rattle of the projector, Bernard unexpectedly started trembling: A car raced across the screen. The entire audience was racing in that car. Bernard suddenly felt that he too was racing somewhere. Everything else was quickly forgotten . . . Bernard did not go home. He walked swiftly through the deserted streets. He wished that the houses could always flash by like the bushes. He was far away, perhaps in Granada or at the North Pole. (Ehrenburg, 1999 [1929], p.2)

The fact that Ehrenburg has Charles first experience the thrill of a motor-flight in the cinema is not surprising given that the changed perception of the world afforded by the moving picture and the automobile have much in common: Charles’s experience reminds us of the general similarity between the camera’s ‘panning’ shots and the motorist’s sliding view of the world from his or her car. The text is, indeed, at pains to emphasize that what captivates Charles, in particular, is the sight and sensation of the world flashing by at speed.

Immediately, then, Charles is seized by a desire to surrender himself to the very experience – mobility in its most extreme and pure form – that doctors and social commentators had long-identified as a modern evil. Having passed his driver’s test within two weeks of learning to drive, Charles sets off on a journey to see his sister who lives in the country; sadly, he never makes his destination on account of his immediate, non-reversible addiction to speed:

At first, Bernard drove slowly and sedately. He knew that you musn’t drive a car fast for the first five hundred miles . . . Still, thirty kilometres an hour seemed like a furious

flight to Bernard. He couldn't distinguish hills, trees, or people. Everything flashed by as in the movie-theater. He halted. He almost wanted to see if there were any linnets about . . . Then he drove on. Forgetting himself, he increased the speed somewhat. The needle shot forward, and the wind suddenly became as huge as the world . . . Charles the second [the title Bernard was known by] knew only one thing: surge and wind. He squinted. He was drunk, as though he had polished off a bottle of cognac. He grinned. He was zooming faster and faster. (Ehrenburg, 1999 [1929], p. 5)

A few short paragraphs later, both Charles and the car are lying together at the bottom of ditch ('iron splinters, glass shards, a warm lump of flesh' (Ehrenburg, 1999 [1929], p.6)), the adventure over.

Yet even within the context of a volume which, taken as a whole, reads like a premonition of today's ubiquitous 'car-system' (Dennis and Urry, 2009, pp.47-61), it would, I think, be a mistake to read 'Charles Bernard' simply as a moralistic tale on the addictive pleasures and dangers of speed. At the heart of the story, just two paragraphs short of this salutary yet comic ending, we discover what must be one of the earliest representations of a driver's inner-consciousness and the way in which everyday thought-processes are shaped and directed by the driving-event: in other words, this is a text which *performs* a fascinating phenomenology of driving and its associated affective states:

A train is faster than an eagle. But a fly, a teeny fly, can outstrip an express train. A swallow flies faster than a fly. But any swallow is outstripped by a car. Bernard had once read about that in the Sunday papers. But now he wasn't thinking about the swallow. He wasn't even looking at the needle: What did he need numbers for? The car raced for dear life. A long, straight highway. Perhaps he should slow

down? . . . It was a new car, after all . . . However, the car ought to know itself. After all, it was the car that was zooming. Bernard had nothing to do with it. He had merely bought it on the instal[ment] plan . . . Besides, he was insured. . . And his life? The sparrows? Too late to think. He had already stopped smiling. The wind struck his face painfully. His eyes stuck together. Bernard couldn't see anything. (Ehrenburg, 1999 [1929], pp. 5-6).

Therefore, although evidently a portrait of a driver's mind half-way to madness, I would argue that this is also a brilliant exposition of the cognitive processes involved in driving generally; in particular, the way in which perception and memory bounce off one another in a temporal present which, at speed, is already in the process of becoming the future. The significance of Charles's story, in other words, arguably exceeds its tragic ending.

In Bowen's text, meanwhile, to which I now return, Emmeline's insane motor-flight North is less about the extraordinarily vivid driving-event itself, than a metaphor for her escape from a failed love affair. In this instance, the psychology of the heroine and the 'spirit of the age' that specifies her neuroses *pre-exist* the driving events that come to define her; Emmeline was doomed without even stepping foot in a motor-car, even if her subsequent mad motor-flight symbolizes the modernity of her demise perfectly:

The cold pole's first magnetism began to tighten on them as street by street the heat and exasperation of London kept flaking away. The glow slipped from the sky and the North laid its first chilly fingers upon their temples, creeping down into his collar and stirring her hair at the roots. Petrol pumps red and yellow, veins of all speed and dangerous, leapt into their lights [*sic*]. (Bowen, 2006 [1932], p.296)

For poor, ill-fated Emmeline, the Great North Road – icon of freedom and adventure for the ever-increasing numbers of motor-tourists who exited London via its gateway (see note 7) -- can only ever be a road to annihilation, never escape. As Markie, misreading Emmeline's desperation entirely, but nevertheless speaking truth, observes: "Keep driving all night, angel: you won't get away from this!" (Bowen, 2006 [1932], p. 303).

Conclusion

This chapter has explored some of the different ways in which early twentieth-century literature featuring motoring understood the association between driving and consciousness. Although a good deal of my focus, especially in the latter part of the chapter, has centred on the way in which certain authors amused themselves with the seemingly widely-held belief that car ownership was an obsession and driving, especially at speed, a sure road to madness, others – most notably, Wharton, Ehrenburg, Parker and Woolf – glimpsed the deeper significance of this new mode of perception, and its impact on consciousness, that motoring afforded. Without explicitly theorizing their observations, these literary-automobilists all marvel at the fact that, as drivers or passengers, they were, quite literally, seeing something for the first time. By virtue of the multi-perspective mobile viewpoint (the Cubist paradigm) facilitated by the motor-transport (especially on winding country roads), and the myriad 'impressions' to which this gave rise, the writers concerned – though often struggling to articulate the precise novelty of the experience – contribute to a radical new apprehension of consciousness and, in particular, the way in which perception and memory continually bounce off one another.

One writer so far unmentioned – the motoring correspondent, Bart Kennedy, who was a regular contributor to *The Car Illustrated*) – went further even than Woolf in realizing the

automobilist's unique experience of the world in philosophical terms. In an extraordinary feature-column from 1919 entitled 'The Magic of Speed', Kennedy explains the wonders of motoring in terms that are explicitly phenomenological, and captures superbly the way in which driving (at speed) not only induces altered states of consciousness but, more profoundly, opens new windows onto consciousness itself:

You are gripped with the might of a strange potent wine. This magic is about you. It surrounds you. Flaming vividly within you is the life-force. You are larger, stronger, keener. You have more power. To your eyes have come a sharper vision. And these pictures that flash through your consciousness as this magic of speed is enveloping you! They come from the mind's deepest recesses. They whirl from a darkness and live for an instant before you. Pictures from the past, and pictures from out that time which is upon you now, and pictures, perhaps of things to come.

Speed! Speed! Speed! [. . .]

You are rushing along enveloped in a fine madness. For this madness of speed is indeed a great and splendid madness. An illuminating madness wherein your faculties are fired and burning to the full [. . .]. (Kennedy, 1919, p.115).

With echoes of Marinetti's Futurist manifesto (1909), not to mention a wild amalgam of Modernist writers (D.H.Lawrence now, as well as Woolf and Joyce), Kennedy's text captures several of the mechanisms of driver-consciousness that I have identified in my earlier work (Pearce, 2012; 2013), most notably the way in which, alongside the perceptual present, 'pictures from the past' and 'pictures of things to come' swirl into consciousness alongside (and possibly by virtue of) the re-ordering of time and space that is intrinsic to the driving-event. In common with several of the texts considered in this chapter, Kennedy also returns,

repeatedly, to the ‘clarity’ of vision and insight afforded by adrenalin-fuelled consciousness, and the mind’s capacity for problem-solving when thus ‘fired and burning to the full’.

At the philosophical core of Kennedy’s text is, moreover, a question about what happens to ‘the present’ when squeezed into a ‘now’ experienced as a succession of split-seconds. This is the very same question that challenged Bergson, Husserl and Merleau-Ponty, all of whom came up with slightly different answers as to how present-tense perception and / or cognition could, or could not, exist independent of the past. While Bergson developed the concept of duration (*durée*) in order to demonstrate the way in which the past *always* intrudes upon, and informs, the present (i.e., past and present are best understood as a continuity), Husserl and Merleau-Ponty, as phenomenologists with a particular investment in defending the ‘intuitive’ *moment* of perception, developed theories to keep the past at bay: for Husserl, this was a distinction between ‘retention’ and ‘recollection’ (see note 16); for Merleau-Ponty, an insistence that we see *before* we associate or recollect (Merleau Ponty, 2002 [1962]). For today’s mobilities-theorists, meanwhile, the argument remains a live debate on account of the way in which the concept of a finite ‘now’ becomes ever more tenuous (Thrift, 2008: 114-21). What our *auto*-mobilities’ research would seem to suggest is that these early-twentieth-century writer-drivers anticipated the ‘finishing line’ before the philosophers even got started. Apart from these insights into our further understanding of internal-time consciousness, this chapter has touched upon a number of other issues that will, I trust, have been of interest to mobilities-scholars. First, was the hypothesis – seemingly borne-out by the texts themselves – that the century’s earliest drivers were too pre-occupied with handling their cars, listening to their engines and processing the novel sensation of travelling at speed under one’s own direction to ‘think’ very much about *anything* else. A subsequent distinction was nevertheless drawn between driving and ‘passenger-ing’ in this regard inasmuch the latter clearly provided

more opportunity for apprehending the landscape as seen from a moving vehicle and the sort of second-level ‘reflections’ presented by Wharton, Parker and Woolf.

In addition, the chapter has sought to advertise the significance of the different literary genres that feature motoring: while many texts from the first decade of the century are in the form of autobiography or quasi-autobiography (many by women) and reveal the ‘first-hand’ sensation, temerity and thrill of motoring, the second- and third-decades saw the publication of increasing numbers of middle-brow novels and stories ‘about motoring’ whose tone was typically frivolous, comic and / or ironic. Although a great many of these texts ought properly to be deemed ‘tragic’ on account what becomes of their hapless drivers and enthusiasts, the mood remains light: for a good many years, motoring – and those who indulged in it – was clearly the butt of snobbish humour. When dealing with the fictional works, meanwhile, I was also at pains to make visible the distinction between texts for which motoring was an object of interest in its own right (Ehrenburg and Woolf) and those which, although of genuine historical interest for their period-representation of cars, roads, petrol stations and associated driving-events, were also figuring the ‘motor-flight’ symbolically: most typically as a metaphor, or metonym, for some worrying aspect of the ‘spirit of the age’ (Bowen).

The distinctions on which the preceding summary of my discussion turns are, nevertheless, far from absolute and it is important to register that texts as rich as Bowen’s *To the North* can be annexed for automobilities-research in any number of ways. Finally, it should also be noted that thematic focus of this chapter – ‘motomania’ and the altered states of consciousness afforded by driving --, though undoubtedly entertaining, is in some ways a distraction from the deeper, and ultimately more interesting, discussion-point that most of the texts prompt to a greater or lesser degree: namely, what the driving-event reveals about *everyday* consciousness. Given that the habitual nature of driving today has served to dull

such insights, those literary texts from the early-twentieth century that feature motoring are clearly an invaluable resource for automotive theorists and historians.

Notes

- 1 'Road rage' was a term first coined in the 1990s. As Jack Sergeant (2002) explains: 'the term covers a wide range of infractions – from shouting abuse at a driver for taking a parking space, tailgating another car or aggressively cutting in front of another road user, to more serious confrontations involving slamming on the brakes, leaping from the car and attacking another driver – with occasionally fatal results.'
- 2 The concerns expressed by the medical establishment regarding the impact of speed on the human mind and body have been well-documented with respect to both rail travel and automobility. See Stephen Kern's *The Culture of Time and Space 1880-1918* (2000) for an excellent overview of this (frequently amusing) literature.
- 3 'Motor-flight': a term used widely in early twentieth-century motoring literature to describe motor-touring but with clear connotations of romance, freedom and escape as is evident in titles such as Edith Wharton's *A Motor-Flight through France* (2008 [1908]) discussed here.
- 4 Although recent research has begun to pay attention to the psychological and somatic dimension of automobility (e.g., Sheller, 2004), I am proposing that it is also possible to relate the cognitive states associated with some (though by no means all) driving events with a range of psychologically-recognized altered states of consciousness such as day-dreaming, sexual fantasy, hypnagogic dreaming, meditation and drug-induced reveries (see Tart, 1972).

- 5 Driving-event: I use this term to describe the correlation between particular car journeys and the states of consciousness to which they give rise. While in many instances (e.g., the short journey, the commute to work) the journey will be synonymous with a single driving-event (i.e., the driver's / passenger's thoughts will gather together into one cognitive / affective sequence), longer journeys or, indeed, road trips, will necessarily see the driver (or passenger) follow several different trains of thought. My current hypothesis is that breaks in a longer journey typically initiate a new chain of consciousness though it is, of course, possible for the driver to 'change track' *in medias res* (possibly as the result of a perceptual prompt or change of music). While driving-events defined thus are more obviously associated with solo car journeys it is, of course, possible to become absorbed with particular chains of thoughts while travelling with others and / or engaging in conversation.
- 6 Most of these changes are dependent on the technological innovations that followed, first, the harnessing of steam-power and subsequently the mass-production of electricity. However, the changes in the social and cultural fabric of the Western world that resulted in the 'speeding-up' of virtually every aspect of everyday life were, for the first decades of the twenty-first century, almost unnoticeable (see Kern, 2003).
- 7 The Great North Road: one of the first-established arterial routes out of London. See 'The Great North Road' by J.J.Hissey, *The Car Illustrated* (1902) (featured in the 'Best Ways out of London' series).
- 8 The collection, *Geographies of Mobilities* (Cresswell and Merriman, 2011), includes several essays that focus on the representation of mobility in, or through, art. See also Merriman's excellent *Mobility, Space and Culture* (2012).

- 9 Before World War 1, female accounts of driving rivalled those of their male counterparts in terms of sales and popularity (Jeremiah (2007) is an excellent bibliographic source for this material). While some of these texts were explicitly autobiographical, others favoured a fictional treatment of what were clearly autobiographical experiences.
- 10 The importance of ‘escaping the city’ and its unhealthy mayhem were observed by the sociologist Georg Simmel in his essay, ‘The Metropolis and Mental Life’, as early as 1903 (see Bridge and Watson, 2002). The motor car’s ability to deliver the population from the excesses of other aspects of modernity and technology is an interesting counter-argument here. (Thanks to Sara Upstone for this observation).
- 11 ‘Long elastic sentences . . . of the feminine gender’: although stream-of-consciousness writing style is now predominantly associated with Virginia Woolf herself she first identified its existence in the writing of Dorothy Richardson. See Woolf (1979, pp.188-92).
- 12 See Pearce (2013) for further discussion of this. In brief, I have posited that – inasmuch as driving regularly gives rise to a second-level reflection upon a wide range of ‘intuited’ phenomena (both in response to visual prompts encountered while motoring and thoughts / recollections that occur to one in the process of the driving-event) – it may be thought of as facilitating the practice of phenomenology.
- 13 Although it is unclear exactly when Woolf wrote this essay, Rachel Bowlby (1997, p.275 n.10) believes it to be c.1927. It should also be noted that several other scholars have written about this essay *vis-à-vis* both automobility and phenomenology. See, in particular, Minow-Pinkney (2000) and Schroeder (2007).

- 14 Many critics have commented upon the fact that the painting Lily Briscoe works on in the course of Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* (1927) appears to correspond in style / form with Vanessa Bell's more abstract work. See Shone and Morphet (2001).
- 15 'Intuition': 'Givenness and intuition are correlative terms; the character of the intuiting corresponds to the character of the givenness or manifestation . . . Phenomenology does not speculate about essences or make inferences, it is supposed to grasp them in an immediate "intuition"' (Moran and Moody, 2002, p.7).
- 16 'Retentions and protentions': the distinction between a 'recollection' and 'retention' was crucial to Husserl's attempts to defend the autonomy of the 'instant' against the incursions of time-past: 'As a perception fades away from the present it becomes one [a 'retention'] and then another [a 'recollection']. We first experience a "now-point" which then becomes a fresh retention that remains attached to the next now-point [i.e., a 'protention']. In time retention fades away entirely and ceases to be part of the present as immediately given. To be experienced again, it must be reconstituted as recollection' (Kern, 2000, p. 44).
- 17 Kinaesthetic form: the Modernist movement, and Futurism in particular, gave rise to many innovative attempts to capture movement in representational art, such as Balla's well-known *Dynamism of a Dog on a Leash* (1912), and the spatio-temporal multi-perspectivism of Cubism. However, early photography was notoriously bad at capturing speed and most of the motoring periodicals preferred the use of drawings over photographs until well into the twentieth-century (see Jeremiah, 2007).
- 18 'Non-representational theory': drawing on the work of a number of recent geographers and philosophers, Nigel Thrift understands the *mobilization* of contemporary life to have changed forever the human subject's relationship to time and space to such a degree that theorizing itself must become 'non-representational' :

‘What is most useful and interesting for me here is the temporalization of space and place as the phenomenological world is increasingly understood to be a collection of “hybrid” and ‘mobile’ assemblages: “concretions, settings and flows” (Thrift, 2008:9).

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