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Impact of the Road on the Development of American Identity in the 1950s and 1960s

Gwendoline Huissoud

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Gwendoline Huissoud

**Impact of the Road
on the Development of American Identity
in the 1950s and 1960s**

Supervised by D^r Molly Chatalic

Faculté de Lettres et Sciences Humaines
Département d'Anglais
M1 Textes, Images, Langues Étrangères

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Illustration 1: "Drive-in movie, Detroit 1955," by Robert Frank, *The Americans* (1958)

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“All he needed was a wheel in his hand and four on the road.”

Jack Kerouac, *On the Road*

INTRODUCTION

The road is a place we do not often think about because of the common place it holds in our lives. Roads are so engraved into the landscapes surrounding us, and into our everyday activities, that it almost feels like they have been here forever; we rarely come to think about their history, to question their presence, or to wonder about their importance and the meanings they can carry. This capacity of being so “forgotten” and transparent yet so omnipresent and essential is what makes them so interesting to study.

From the beginning of the twentieth century on, America saw more and more cars drive on more and more roads. Over the decades, a real road culture started to establish itself, born out of the compulsive use of the car and the multiplicity of routes, highways, superhighways, freeways, and interstates implanted all over the American states. This road culture truly boomed and defined itself during the 1950s and 1960s. At the time, roads were not as overlooked as they can be today, because they were particularly new to the American landscape and enabled people to move in ways they could not before. The crucial changes highways and cars brought to America’s identity, economy, and culture during these two decades could not be ignored. Today, this all seems to have been more or less taken for granted.

In order to contextualize the subject, it may help to have an overview of some historical background. America’s first national road was constructed under President Jefferson’s government. This road, called Cumberland Road, but also Route 40, built from 1811 to 1837, was 1,000km long (Longfellow). Before that (in 1803), the president had also ordered the improvement of the Natchez Trace, a very old route used by indigenous people, and, later on, settlers and pioneers. President Jefferson built many roads at the beginning of the 19th century for he believed roads were at the basis of his democratic system, since they enabled people to move, and, therefore, to claim and own land. Property was, to him, empowering, nationally crucial, and extremely valuable (Patton 30). This was all also linked to colonialism, still prevalent at the time, and to the strong desire of Americans to explore and own further territories of the continent. Still, despite the effort the President put into building and developing roads, the 19th century was mostly dominated by the railroad, with the example of the building of the first Transcontinental connection in 1869. Roads were practical for short distances only, and mainly adapted to horses and carriages.

The twentieth century proved to be a major turning point in terms of transportation and road structures. Cars became more popular in the first decades of the century, the market being greatly impacted by Henry Ford's assembly lines and the introduction and mass production of his iconic Model T, in 1908. Before the arrival of this new model, cars were mainly meant to be sold to wealthy elitist Americans (Jakle and Sculle 9).

At the time, roads were in poor condition, often stopping in the middle of nowhere, separated by fences, and not connected. This was what inspired the creation of the Lincoln Highway by two major figures of the road industry at the time; Henry Joy and Carl Graham Fisher (Patton 39). Consequently, 44 years after the birth of the Transcontinental Railroad, the first transcontinental road was built.

The beginning of the century also saw America invest a lot of money in its roads. The country's first Federal Highway Aid was passed in 1916 (Patton 33). It "provided \$75 million in federal aid for state highway construction to be distributed over the ensuing five years, plus \$10 million for national forest roads over the next ten years" (Jakle and Sculle 53). The act was closely followed by other legislation such as the Federal Aid Highway Act of 1921, which, for instance, mentioned the need for the country's road network to display the same set of signs everywhere (Patton 45). In parallel, some power regarding highway construction was also given to associations, such as the American Association of State Highway Officials (AASHO) (45).

All of these acts, funds, and federal decisions made and passed at the beginning of the century ended up serving a bigger purpose: the construction of an Interstate Highway System. This network had been subject to public demands for decades. After World War II, car owners were more numerous than ever before, but roads remained unattractive because of their poor conditions, making car travel too sporty, risky, long, and overall not really enjoyable (Patton 42). Moreover, traffic was often bad as the number of drivers and motorized vehicles was quite high (Conzen 432). It was finally under the presidency of Dwight D. Eisenhower that the interstate system materialized. In 1956, the Federal-Aid Highway Act was approved, its aim being to build the Interstate Highway System everyone had been waiting for. Apart from being practical, faster, safer, and more connected, the system's existence was also strategical. Because of the Cold War situation at the time, the President considered, indeed, that this new system of roads would be more efficient in case of nuclear attack to evacuate the population. The roads were built to serve as

emergency escape routes, as well as military aviation runways.¹ Americans did not, in the end, need to use these roads to evacuate, but they did drive on them on a daily basis. By the end of the century, more than 44,000 miles of road had been added to the country thanks to this act. The amount of money invested in roads at the time was extremely high, as explained in a *TIME* article dating back to August 4, 1958:

Almost unnoticed in the recovery from recession, the U.S. road-building program has been gathering momentum, giving the overall construction industry a sharp lift at a time when industrial building is still declining. Builders report that \$195 million in contracts for interstate highways went out last month, almost double May's figure of \$105 million. Total contract awards since July 1, 1956: more than \$2.2 billion in interstate-highway-construction contracts for 4,938 miles of U.S. highways, plus another \$4.7 billion for 65,821 miles of state and local roads. The prospects are that highway work should keep construction activity high through the rest of the year; more than \$6 billion of the total estimated \$100 billion program will reach the industry in 1958. ("Business: Highways")

It is in this atmosphere of exponential construction and presence of both cars and roads that the timeframe of this paper is based. The road culture that developed at the time left a serious imprint on the country's identity and on people's habits, and from it emerged a proliferation of cinematographic, literary, and artistic works that will be mentioned in this thesis. The aim here is to prove that the emergence of a defined road culture in the 1950s and 1960s had a direct impact on the development of American identity, by showing how central it became to society and culture. The romanticized perception of the road will be mentioned but not glorified, on the contrary; it will be shown that the myth of the road (that tends to be idealized today) was actually limited and had its share of negative repercussions. In the historical context of this work, racism, which was prevalent at the time, will also be evoked.

The keyword of this thesis is identity, and as every part and sub-part revolves around this issue, its different aspects will be taken into account: from personal to general, from visual to "internal", and from sociological to cultural. A majority of levels of identity will be tackled so as to make the point of this paper more valid and precise. The focus on two decades enables us to have more distance and to better grasp this notion of creation and alteration of identity, as well as to better understand the imprint left on America by the road.

¹ For that reason, the Interstate Highway System was sometimes called the National Interstate and Defense Highway System.

The first part of this thesis will focus on the road and its impact on American identity from sociological and economic view points. It will try and prove that the omnipresence of roads affected the people's and the country's identities, in terms of personal experiences, global values, emerging economy, changing landscapes, and everyday life. It will show how roads and cars made their way into the American mindset and established themselves as American symbols and markers of identity.

The second part will focus on a more cultural and artistic aspect of this idea of identity, the aim being to show how roads and road culture were slowly but surely being included into the country's arts and culture. We will try and see how the art world adapted itself to the growing presence of roads, how they benefited from it, but also how roads were artistically perceived at the time, and what place they held in the cultural sphere. To do so, many different references and sources will be used, and many artists (painters, photographers, authors) will be mentioned. The plurality of sources used is essential to emphasize the idea of omnipresence, and the fact that the road was, indeed, represented everywhere and under many different aspects. The last subpart of this thesis will make a link with contemporary America and the references to the 1950s and 1960s road culture that can still be found today.

I- THE ROAD AND AMERICAN IDENTITY

The concept of American identity (and national identity as a whole) is complicated to define, as it encompasses a plurality of disciplines and perspectives. To simplify the discourses regarding this topic, we may say that national identity is based on the nation's social, political, cultural, and economic attributes. As examples, traditions, languages, arts, history, cuisines, values, and every other aspect participating in the construction of the country's customs and global image could be cited. In their work *Modern Roots: Studies of National Identity*, Alain Dieckhoff and Natividad Gutiérrez define identity as “fluid” and “malleable” (21). The two decades under study in this paper saw this malleability and evolution of identity express itself with the sudden development and national dominance of a new place: the American road.

A – Expression and development of personal identity

A country, nationally and socially speaking, would not exist without its people. It is for this reason that it is important, when studying America's identity, to take a closer look at how it is expressed through its citizens. Americans are active agents and builders of American identity, and vice versa. The following parts are, therefore, going to focus on the way personal identity was altered in the country with the development of the road and how Americans participated in the creation and definition of a new culture.

1. The individual's relationship with the road: a road to personal quests

“O public road, I say back I am not afraid to leave you, yet I love you,
You express me better than I can express myself,
You shall be more to me than my poem.”²

When it comes to personal travel and exploration, the beginning of the twentieth century was mostly marked by hitch-hikers³. In the decades that followed, those lone

2 “Song of the Open Road,” poem by Walt Whitman published in his 1856 collection *Leaves of Grass*.

3 To learn more about hitch-hikers at the beginning of the century, see “An Informal History of Hitchhiking” (*The Historian*, vol. 20, no. 3, 1958, pp. 305–327) by John Schlebecker, available at www.jstor.org/stable/24436384. (Accessed 12 May 2021.)

travelers slowly turned into proud car owners, meaning that, when the 1950s came, America's free spirits, seated on their own automobile seats, saw the open road as their own personal Eldorado.

One of the reasons why the road was seen as so attractive was probably because it offered drivers and travelers a feeling of control over their existence. On the road, one could, indeed, choose to stop or keep going, to turn around, speed up, or take another road anytime they liked. Driving was a way to escape from one's boring life and get a bit of adventure and thrill. The democratization of cars and road trips meant that more and more people were able to "hit the road."

Moreover, being on the road gave the impression one could live the present and future *now*. Driving was all about living in the moment and not caring about anything else: "Then in the late night it was just Dean and I and Stan Shephard and Tim Gray and Ed Dunkel and Tommy Snark in one car and everything ahead of us" (Kerouac 240-241). This mentality of always looking towards the future was also part of the American state of mind. The road was life; it is always linked to other roads just like one's life is always in connection with other people's existence. The road came and went, it turned, it grew, it explored the landscape and changed over the miles. It could be seen as the material representation of one's life, which explains why this feeling of control when on the road was so freeing; the driver was the master of his/her own destiny, his/her own path. Instead of it all happening in his/her head, it was happening right in front of his/her eyes.

Cars were obviously also instrumental in this feeling of control, and had their own crucial role to play when it came to the expression of personal identity in the sphere of road culture. It is important to remember that, if roads could exist without cars, cars could not exist without roads. This did not mean cars were less important, on the contrary, they were the means through which people could best experience the road. In other words, if "[the] automobile [...] [was] to most of us an extension of our self-image, of individual style, of clothing [...]" (Patton 15), then the road enabled this "extension" to express itself, to live, and to thrive. Similarly, if the car was a piece of clothing, then the road was the runway where one could show it and feel its potential. In that sense, these two entities did not go without the other. The first part of the twentieth century merged the road and

the automobile together, making the experience of one inseparable from the other. Since then, cars have always needed the road, the road has always needed cars, and Americans have always needed both.

More specifically, the road also enabled self-reflection and a personal quest. Driving down America's newly-made freeways and highways for hours offered time to reflect and think. Driving became therapeutic; it offered a special combination of time and space where self-exploration was prosperous and quite unavoidable, so much so that some Americans actually went on the road to try and find their place in the world (and in their life). Each driver had his/her own "song of the open road":

[...] American roads are a reservation of individuality and privacy. Americans have gone on the road to find America and to find themselves, following the naive Whitmanesque mode. The song of the open road is also the song of the self, a song of elusive identity, of blue skies, blue roads, and the blues. (Patton 20)

The road was a fertile land where individuality thrived and personal expression and reflection blossomed better than anywhere else, but with this self-reflection came loneliness. Drivers often metaphorically and mentally lost themselves while driving, which helped them think differently and with more freedom, but also made them feel isolated from everything and everyone:

While promising to bring us closer, highways in fact cater to our sense of separateness. The quintessential American, like the basic country singer, who is constantly singing about moving on down the road, taking the lost highway, is a connoisseur of special loneliness. The man out to see the USA in his Chevrolet, with or without family, cultivates a sense of alienation. His vacations are a continual reenactment of discovery and exploration, and for discovery, we must refresh our sense of being aliens, nurture our otherness. (Patton 20)

This "sense of alienation" and loneliness while driving could be both positive and negative. These feelings were also probably very American, the country's roads being so long and numerous that it was not rare to be alone on them and not pass by a single town, house, car, or person within miles. In the American wilderness, the driver was "voué-e à lui/elle-même,"⁴ his/her thoughts, car, and loneliness being his/her only friends.

Road trips were also interesting in terms of the expression of masculinity. In the 1950s, most people engaging in long and eventful road trips were men. The road was a very masculine place; cars and the road were all about speed, discoveries, adventures,

4 Possible translation: "given to him/herself."

empowerment and challenge. At the time, these traits were mostly linked to manhood. These also resonated with the concept of the West and America's obsession with it. Men going on manly road trips in search for excitement, experience, and themselves, may remind us of the pioneer experience, and Americans stubbornly aiming towards it. In *On the Road* published in 1957, Jack Kerouac writes: "I was halfway across America, at the dividing line between the East of my youth and the West of my future" (15-16). His main character's (Sal Paradise) trip is in the image of the American settlers' at a time when exploration was on everyone's mind. But Americans never stopped exploring their own country; the road helped them do it even faster and better, and gave them a new means to follow in the footsteps of those before them.

Driving and America cannot be discussed without mentioning Kerouac's *On the Road* more in depth. This novel is a perfect example of what the road meant at the time on a personal level: a means for escape, for quest and discovery, and for self-exploration. His characters, especially Dean Moriarty, are restless, always on the move, looking for exciting adventures and exquisite feelings of freedom:

[...] Gene was [...] crossing and recrossing the country every year, south in the winter and north in the summer, and only because he had no place he could stay in without getting tired of it and because there was nowhere to go but everywhere, keep rolling under the stars [...] (25)

The road was home, and "the road [was] life" (192). Kerouac portrays it as a sanctuary for escape, an end in itself; it was not the destination that mattered, but the journey and "the ragged and ecstatic joy of pure being" (178) that went with it; "Sal, we gotta go and never stop going 'till we get there.' 'Where we going, man?' 'I don't know but we gotta go" (217). This need to be on the road might also raise the question of boredom and senselessness felt in America at the time. The post-war era left people aimless and in search of renewed feelings of adventure and excitement. Going on the road could be the answer to "[...] an experience of the absence of momentum or flow in a person's life" (Brissett and Snow 238) and the feeling of not being able to project one's self into the future. The novel very well explores and conveys the urge to be on the road, this attraction felt by many at the time. This was even more relevant when we know that this book is partly autobiographical: it was inspired by Kerouac's own journeys traveling across the country. He represented

himself through the character of Sal Paradise, and his Beat Generation friends also appear in the novel, such as Neal Cassady under the name of Dean Moriarty, the novel's real hero (Reid).

Neal Cassady was actually also part of the Merry Band of Pranksters, a group of people traveling across the United States in the 1960s on board of an old 1939 school bus named *Further*⁵ they had painted, decorated, and transformed into a living place⁶. In the 2011 documentary *Magic Trip: Ken Kesey's Search for a Kool Place* about their experience and 1964 road trip, Ken Kesey, one of the original Merry Pranksters, explained: "We decided to go travel across the country [...] just to experience the American landscape and heartscape" (8:40-8:52). When asked what was so appealing about going on the road, he mentioned Kerouac's novel and its "new way to look at America":

We weren't old enough to be beatniks, and we were a little too old to be hippies, but everybody I knew had read *On the Road*. And it opened up the doors to us just the same way drugs did. It gave us a new way to look at America, and, it stirred us up. (14:48-15:05)

The bus itself, because of the way they customized it to their image, represented their identity as a group. They explained, moreover, that what they had in mind was a certain representation of America: "The notion of us being wild crazies wasn't true, we weren't long-haired and we weren't irresponsible, there was an American sense, that's why we always wore red, white, and blue, and flew the flag" (11:24-11:38). In other words, what the Merry Band of Pranksters did was try and create their own idea of American identity, while simultaneously living it.

5 Annex 1.

6 Tom Wolfe wrote about their trip in *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* (1968).

2. Teenagers: central actors

Teenagers have played a consequential role in the creation, development, and popularization of America's road culture and in the country's obsession with cars and driving. At the end of the 1940s, they started getting part-time jobs after school, a habit that was even more popular in the decades that followed. Thanks to that, they entered the American economy and market and became individual consumers, independent from their parents's income and budget. The popularization of this new buying power attributed to young people had a clear impact on teenage culture, since a new market was established around this new customer, responding to his/her desires. They could, therefore, spend their own money on whatever they fancied, and one of their main big purchases at the time was that of a car:

Continuing the trend that had begun in the late Forties, many teens entered the working world through part-time jobs while they stayed in school, using their wages not to supplement the family income but to pay for their own leisure activities, clothing, and cars. (Rollin 161)

As a teenager, owning a car became more than a necessary mode of transportation, it was also a valuable item one used to impose one's self and be considered respectable and popular in the teenage world. This was quite a masculine trend: having a car meant teenage boys could brag thanks to the model of their vehicle, some cars being more fashionable and considered more respectable than others:

For those few who could afford it, the ultimate teen status symbol, the Corvette, was restyled in 1963 as the sleek Stingray. The Sixties brought three major developments that made some cars more affordable for teens, and some even more desirable as status symbols: the Mustang, the muscle car, and the Volkswagen. (227)

Cars were also a way to show-off, from the way they were customized by their owner (“[A car] was also a venue for creativity. Customizing his car provided a boy with the opportunity to show off his talents or originality [...]” (175)) to his driving abilities and exploits, for example in driving races, as Lucy Rollin explains: “In a drag race, drivers in two cars accelerated from a standing start, and the winner was the first driver to get his car to cross the finish line” (175). The car helped the driver/owner to construct his/her identity

and impose him/herself in the teenage world. It was considered as an important “status symbol” (227) taken seriously by everyone their age.

From the 1950s on, because of this phenomenon, the car and the teenager became almost inseparable; the everyday life of America’s youth started to organize itself around the car and this period saw driving become one of the most enjoyed and popular activities:

Middle-class boys enjoyed their leisure time more on the street than in their homes or those of their friends. Cruising was their favorite activity. Boys piled into cars and drove around the neighborhoods, down the main streets, and around the parking lots and drive-in restaurants, eyeing the girls, flirting, and enjoying joking rivalries with each other, or sometimes engaging in more serious competition such as drag races. (174-175)

Drive-in restaurants and cinemas also quickly became very popular among young people and were great meeting points, mixing leisure with socialization.



Illustration 2: Cars and teenagers. Photo from Robert Frank’s The Americans (1958)

Moreover, the car represented a private place which was extremely appreciated by teenagers, since it was free from parental, fraternal, or any other unwanted presence and disturbance:

The teen boy’s fascination with and increasing dependence on cars was one of the dominant features of the Fifties. A car ensured dates and friends; it represented freedom from home and parents as well as privacy to explore sex. (175)

The car was, indeed, considered as well by some as a sex-accessory, and a necessary item for boys to show off in front of girls and seduce them. It became engraved into a definition of teenage (male) identity and considered as nothing less but a “rite of sexual passage”:

At a less florid level, getting one's driver's license, borrowing keys, cruising, and making out have been accepted (or popularized) as rites of sexual passage, at least for boys, within American culture. (Sanger 710)

In that sense, the car was, once again, a very masculine property, participating to the myth of masculinity where attracting and impressing girls with their acquisition and ability to drive meant gaining in legitimacy and popularity.

This consideration of the car as a private sphere had an impact on culture, first, with drive-in cinemas that grew more and more present everywhere around the country, but also with music. The car was the perfect place for teenagers to listen to their own music, on the radio, and, a few decades later, on cassette tapes. It was actually at the end of the 1960s that the first cars in the world were equipped with a cassette player (Lowbrow), and America quickly became obsessed with this new function, mostly in the decades that followed. This was the environment in which Rock music thrived and conquered the younger generations. Road culture in general also had an impact on the way teenagers dressed at the time. Motorcycle boots, for instance, became fashionable and were worn by many high-school boys in the 1950s (Rollin 171). Road culture and this clothing style were what inspired The Cheers in their 1955 song “Black Denim Trousers & Motorcycle Boots” about “the terror of Highway 101.”

Because of their association with young people, the car and the road were unavoidably linked to juvenile delinquency, which was an extremely present fear in the minds of adults at the time, so much so that it was even called an “epidemic” (150). In this atmosphere, cars were linked to teenagers as it became a common belief that their misbehavior led them to steal vehicles (150). The phenomenon of teenage delinquents was frequently mediatized and publicized, and was also adapted on screen in two of the most famous movies of the 1950s: *The Wild One*⁷ and *Rebel Without A Cause*⁸. In both movies, road culture is represented as a threat: it is associated with rebellion, trouble (the

7 Directed by László Benedek, released in 1953, starring Marlon Brando as Johnny, the young biker.

8 Directed by Nicholas Ray, released in 1955, starring James Dean as Jim Stark, the rebellious teenager.

group of young bikers causing trouble in town and “playing” with the girls in *The Wild One*, for example), danger (in *Rebel Without a Cause*, for instance, with the scene of the accident when Jim and another boy race and one of them ends up dying in his car), and freedom and emancipation of youth which was resented by adults. *The Wild One* starts with a shot of the road⁹, compiled with an introductory speech given by the main character, Johnny, who says: “It begins here for me, on this road.” In other words, from the very first seconds of the movie, the road is associated with the rest of the story and portrayed as one of the causes of misbehavior of the troublesome group of young bikers. Overall, these movies depict juvenile delinquency and the younger generation’s conflictual relationship with authority, the road being used as the tool enabling them to estrange themselves even further from their parents and their older ideas and lifestyles.

These two movies and their two movie stars Marlon Brando and James Dean were also at the core of the 1950s Greaser subculture. “Greasers” were known to be young and mostly boys, to have a certain sense of style (special haircuts, very often wearing motorcycle boots and leather jackets), and to listen to Rock music (“Greaser (Subculture)”).

There was also in the 1950s a counterculture movement that was partly anchored in road culture: the Beat Generation. An important part of the Beatniks’s way of life was based on the road, movement, and freedom, mostly represented by the life of Kerouac and his work. This movement had an impact on teenagers in the 1950s even though most of them were not directly and/or completely part of it:

Although authentic Beats were generally adults rather than teens, the Beat movement had nonetheless a powerful attraction for white middle-class teens in the late Fifties. It offered an intellectual form of rebellion and the possibility of a life different from that of one’s parents, a life less trammled by conservatism yet without the dangers of violence and illegality represented by the juvenile delinquency culture. (Rollin 152)

This counterculture was linked, if not to delinquency, then at least to rebellion, and to the need for younger generations to detach themselves from the more conservative and traditional values supported by their elders. This movement slowly gave birth to the Hippie movement in the 1960s, one of their main symbols being, once again, a product of the road: the Hippie Van.

9 Annex 2.

Finally, the road was also a common characteristic shared by some American teenage idols from that period. There was, first, James Dean and his sudden death caused by a car accident, which was an event that marked the 1950s. Cars were also closely linked to Rock 'n' Roll, and especially to Elvis Presley, who was a truck driver before becoming a famous rock star. His pink Cadillac¹⁰ became a worldwide symbol and one of his most recognized attributes, not to mention the other numerous automobiles he owned. Cars and car culture inspired him, an example of that being his song “(No Room) To Rhumba in A Sports Car” (1963).

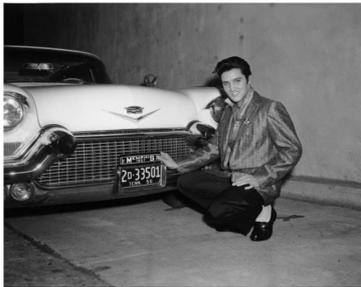


Illustration 3: Elvis Presley and a Cadillac Eldorado (1957)



Illustration 4: Boxer Sugar Ray and his Cadillac (c. 1950)



Illustration 5: Clint Eastwood and his Austin Healey (1955)

Overall, national stars, for example cinema stars from Hollywood, loved to be pictured proudly standing inside or next to their brand new cars¹¹. The vehicles they owned obviously influenced teenagers's tastes and fantasies even though most of them could not afford the same models.

As a conclusion, even though adults were the first ones to own and drive automobiles, it was teenagers who really were at the core of America's emerging car culture, and who helped the car become an American symbol and marker of identity.

¹⁰ Same model that was used in 1974 by artists Chip Lord, Hudson Marquez, and Doug Michels in the creation of the *Cadillac Ranch*, an installation of ten Cadillac cars set in the desert in Amarillo, Texas. See Annex 3.

¹¹ See Annex 4 for more examples.

3. A non-inclusive place: inaccessibility of the myth depending on personal identity

“Let’s all get together and make Motoring better.”
Introduction to the 1937 Negro [sic] Travelers’ Green Book¹²

What do Sal Paradise, Dean Moriarty, John Steinbeck, Jack Kerouac, Johnny from *The Wild One*, Ken Kesey, or even William Least Heat-Moon¹³ have in common? First, they are all heroes of the Open Road, most of them known to have gone on epic road trips across America. More importantly, they are all men, and they are all white. Saying of the American road that it was a place where unlimited freedom and the American Dream thrived in favor of everyone would be hypocritical, historically incorrect, and would limit it to a romanticized ideal to which it does not quite entirely correspond. This representation of the road can be assumed from a white American perspective, but as we take a closer look at American roads, we quickly come to the realization that African American travelers were treated very differently. The 1950s and 1960s were plunged into a deep and violent racism that roads did not magically escape from. On the contrary, as far as road signs went up and white lines stretched, segregation and the Jim Crow Laws followed.

The idea of a road as the epitome of freedom, free will, escape and a sanctuary for self exploration was only relative and applicable depending on the driver’s identity¹⁴. African Americans particularly put themselves in real danger while driving. For them, the famous U.S. Highways, praised and loved by so many such as Steinbeck or Kerouac, simply meant constant fear and omnipresent danger. In their experience, traveling did not only mean going one place to another, discovering the country and its landscapes, driving and stopping along highways for a snack. Traveling meant “navigating the identity-related obstacles and inequalities embedded within American travel” (Alderman et al. “Jim Crow” 9) and being exposed to “the harsh if not deadly realities and consequences of racism and

¹² Negro [sic] *Travelers’ Green Book*, Travel Guide by Victor and Alma Green (1936-1966).

¹³ Sal Paradise and Dean Moriarty, the two main characters of Jack Kerouac’s novel *On the Road*. John Steinbeck, known for his novel *The Grapes of Wrath* set on the road, but he also went on a road trip himself which he wrote about in *Travels With Charley*. Jack Kerouac, famous for his partly autobiographical novels about the open road. Johnny, the biker in the 1951 movie *The Wild One*. Ken Kesey, main character of Tom Wolfe’s *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*. William Least Heat-Moon, author of the autobiography *Blue Highways* (1982).

¹⁴ Identity here being considered in terms of race.

the demeaning control of Black movements, bodies, and emotions” (16). In other words, the minute they started the engine of their automobiles, African Americans were exposing themselves to the refraining, suffocating, and threatening influence of white supremacy and segregation. Highways were synonymous of aggression, brutality, and racism. Being on the road meant being vulnerable and accepting the possibility of receiving threats and being physically or psychologically harmed. As the 2017 *Washington Post* article “‘Life or Death for Black Travelers’: How Fear Led to ‘The Negro Motorist Green-Book’” written by DeNeen L. Brown explains, this concretely meant being refused many services along the road:

Stopping at the wrong roadside diner could lead to discrimination and “embarrassments.” Running out of gas on a highway could lead to an encounter with the Ku Klux Klan. Making a bad turn into a “sundown town” — where African Americans were not permitted after dark — could lead to a lynching. Some of those towns constructed signs at their borders warning, “N—, Don’t Let The Sun Go Down On You.”

The road was synonymous with danger and threats which resulted in constant fear. African American drivers along with their families felt afraid, and each mile without any kind of persecution was a win. Going on a road trip was emotionally draining, and traveling was felt as “emotional labor”:

This uncertainty and anxiety about what may happen made traveling by automobile emotionally burdensome as drivers and their passengers stayed on guard when encountering others on the road, especially law enforcement officials. [...] For Black motorists, tourism was not simply the physical and technological work of driving, but it is also required the emotional labor of managing the stress of driving within and against an atmosphere of White supremacy that always carried with it the uncertainty of how, when, and where one might encounter racial hostility while traveling. (Alderman et al. “Teaching”)

As a consequence, the African American motorists who dared travel on American roads had to prepare themselves and think of solutions, or at least of ways to try and avoid being harmed as much as possible. To do so, most of them came up with driving strategies (Alderman et al. “Jim Crow” 3). Many, for example, decided to take different routes or detours and calculate the time it would take them (17), or to drive at night when they could avoid being seen more easily (15), and, therefore, expect less danger. Families were known to use this technique a lot, since parents wanted to protect their children from any harm that could be encountered on the road (17). The authors of the article “Jim Crow

Journey Stories: African American Driving as Emotional Labor” collected testimonies on this matter:

[...] most of our interviewees stressed how they or their parents made strategic choices about routes, duration of travel, and number of trips as way of managing their feelings of discomfort and uncertainty and not provoking the anger of Whites. A number of participants mentioned the necessity of minimizing one’s time on the road in Mississippi, a state that held a strong place in their minds because of its reputation for rampant racial inequality and its brutalizing treatment of African Americans. Oral history participant Josenna (born 1936) recalled, for example, “My dad would not go to Mississippi on any kind of trip. We’d go to Florida, we’d go to New York, we’d go to Detroit, but he would not go to Mississippi.” (17)

Many African American drivers also did everything they could to stop as little as possible on their way, meaning that they had to pack enough food and drinks for the whole trip, and be very cautious in terms of gas and their use of restrooms (18).

Unfortunately, on long road trips or in case of emergency such as car breakdown, these solutions had limited efficiency. Traveling was always unpredictable, and stopping was sometimes unavoidable. It was to prevent African Americans from putting themselves in danger when stopping that Victor and Alma Green’s *Negro [sic] Motorist Green Book* was created. The book was an annual travel guide, made by Black drivers for Black drivers. Its first version saw the light in 1936 and it was then published until 1966. The *Green Book* was not the first travel guide for African American travelers¹⁵, but it certainly became the one that was most used and famous, and that had the greatest impact on the community. The guide gathered all the institutions (hotels, motels, restaurants, shops, gas stations¹⁶) across the country that were known to welcome African Americans and procure them with the service they needed:

A white motorist had to worry about his automobile’s engine as well as finding gas or a place to rest. A black motorist had the same concerns in addition to another; he had no guarantee that if he found a service on the road that he would in fact be served. The Green Books could alleviate some of this by listing both black- and white-owned businesses known to be racially tolerant. (Pesses 11)

15 *Hackley & Harrison's Guide for Colored Travelers* is the example of another similar guide published seven years prior with the help of the Negro [sic] Urban League.

16 “The affiliation with the Standard Oil Company, and its Esso gasoline stations, became the most advantageous business relationship for the *Green Book*. Standard Oil brought marketing support and a network of nationwide gasoline stations to distribute the travel guide” (Sorin 280).

The guide was a way for African American travelers to ensure that they and their families were safe when stopping on their way. In their paper “Teaching and Enlivening the *Green Book*”, Derek H. Alderman, Ethan Bottone, and Joshua Inwood present the guide as a “counter mapping”:

Counter-mapping refers to the collection, analysis, and visualization of spatial or geographic data for the purposes of challenging lines of oppressive and unjust social power. While *The Green Book* did not include actual maps, it did represent an alternative representation and realization of the travel geography of the United States by listing the location and identity of establishments that assist the navigation and planning of trips by Black travelers who would otherwise be left vulnerable to the vagaries of White supremacy.

This idea of a “counter mapping” and diversion resonates with Harriet Tubman’s Underground Railroad and suggests that, throughout history, African Americans have always had to find alternatives in order to fight and avoid the racist obstacles that stood before them. Roads, as places, represent a geographical obstacle put forward by the existence of *Green’s* travel guide:

The *Green Books* are worthy of greater study as they represent a racial ephemera of the American Road. Not only does their existence represent an extreme difference of place and space in mid twentieth century America, but their absence in images, media, and the overall mythos of ‘The Road’ also reveal a continuing racialized geography of the United States. (Pesses 5)

American roads unashamedly reflected the country’s violent and racist history, they are an important indication of the way the country treated individuals depending on their identity¹⁷. The myth of the Open Road was not inclusive, and the stories of African American drivers, although practically never spoken of, remain as real and important as any white man’s epic odyssey on the road¹⁸.

17 Other ethnicities were also excluded from the myth of the road, such as Native Americans, for example, who were never mentioned in the sources I read during my research.

18 Another category of people to whom the myth of the road was unattainable was women. Just like African Americans, they were excluded from travel guides (Jakle and Sculle 108-109). To learn more about their place regarding road culture at the time, see part I-C) 2. (page 44).

B – The country's identity

The American identity was not only altered by the road because of the imprint it left on the American people. On a larger scale, the entire country was also impacted: the road was a mode of expression, and road culture was at the origin of a societal evolution that led to the modeling and creation of a new economy and new landscapes. It engraved itself into the country, and, by doing so, made its presence permanent and irreversible.

1. Expression of American values and experience

“[...] the highway became their home and movement their medium of expression.”
(Steinbeck *Grapes of Wrath* 170)

Because of its omnipresence, of the Americans' quick attachment to it, because of what it could and did represent, of its ever growing importance in the country, in people's habits, and in culture, the road in the 1950s and 1960s started to become closely connected to the country's values, symbols, and identity. In *Modern Root: Studies of National Identity*, A. Dieckhoff and N. Gutiérrez define national identity as

[...] the maintenance and continuous reproduction of the pattern of values, symbols, memories, myths and traditions that compose the distinctive heritage of nations, and the identification of individuals with that particular heritage and those values, symbols, memories, myths, and traditions. (30)

This definition coincides with the road, as old American values were projected onto it; it became a place where they could thrive and be embodied by drivers, bikers, and travelers of all sorts.

Symbolically, the road was a reminder of the West, the Frontier, and the pioneer experience. By simply creating a network of routes and making it “asphaltly”¹⁹ permanent, America perpetuated its own history and nature:

The automobile and its highways froze the values of the frontier by making movement a permanent state of mind, turning migration into circulation. The wave

¹⁹ The use of this neologism in this context seemed relevant and appropriate.

of migration, having carried to the West Coast, rebounded with the closing of the frontier, a completion of the expansion, into an echoing succession of movements. (Patton 13)

The American road in itself also symbolized modernization, the presence of European civilization, and human's mark upon nature.

On a more spiritual level, it also became connected to a certain definition and experience of the American Dream. Both strongly resonated with feelings of freedom, escapism, and of looking for a better life somewhere else. For Americans, the road was the means permitting the Dream, the bridge between two worlds; the hopeless past, and the better future.

But there was something more to America's relationship to its roads, something deeply rooted into its identity and nature, very-well defined by John Steinbeck: mobility. In his 1962 travel diary *Travels With Charley*, the author reflects on the question of American identity regarding travels, restlessness, exploration, and the constant need to be on the move:

Could it be that Americans are a restless people, a mobile people, never satisfied with where they are as a matter of selection? The pioneers, the immigrants who peopled the continent, were the restless ones in Europe. The steady rooted ones stayed home and are still there. But every one of us, except the Negroes forced here as slaves, are descended from the restless ones, the wayward ones who were not content to stay at home. Wouldn't it be unusual if we had not inherited this tendency? And the fact is that we have. (103-104)

If Americans²⁰ fell in love with their roads and cars, it was because traveling had been in their blood all along. To some extent, roads enabled them to express their true selves, to come back to a more ancestral and almost nomadic nature, a more primitive need; to yield into the temptation of going away, of moving and exploring, and of always going further. Moreover, “[h]ighways [made] tangible the conviction that the truth about America, its heart and soul, collective and individual, [was] always to be found somewhere just over the horizon, somewhere around the next bend” (Patton 13). In other words, by building roads, Americans emphasized their conviction that moving was the answer. The construction of more highways and freeways in the 1950s and 1960s as well as the making of cars only made this mobility grow and thrive even more. This emphasis on older values was closely connected to the building of a national identity: “To possess an authentic culture is an

20 The term “Americans” here corresponds mainly to white Americans from European descendants.

imperative of nation-states and it may take the form of a systematic search resulting in revivalism, reconstruction, and reconstitution of past traditions, ethnicity or popular culture” (Dieckhoff and Gutiérrez 9-10). This was exactly what could be observed with the phenomenon of the road and the values it embodied.

Because of the Interstate Highway Act of 1956 and the idea of national defense and emergency evacuation network on which it was based, the road also became a reminder of America’s belligerent tendency. Moreover, it materialized the fear felt by the government regarding the U.S.S.R. and the Cold War, and remains, nowadays, a historical testament to the atmosphere of that period.

The accumulation and growing frequency of people driving during the two decades understudy also created a sense of community among Americans on the road. Driving connected people in a new way: “[...] the urban freeways [played] the greatest role of any type of highway as public space. There [was] a certain communication among drivers, a whole etiquette of merging and diverging, a routine of eye contact and self-presentation [...]” (Patton 110). The pleasure of motoring brought people together, giving birth to new leisure and communities, one of those being groups of bikers. László Benedek’s 1953 movie *The Wild One* portrays this group of young male bikers, riding as their way to pass the time and enjoying themselves. *Easy Rider* (1969) by Dennis Hopper is an even better example. Set on America’s roads, the movie follows the road trip and adventures of two bikers, Wyatt and Billy, and embodies many different American myths that construct the country’s identity. In her paper “Movies in Search of America: The Rhetoric of Myth in *Easy Rider*,” Hayley Susan Raynes explains that

The film is simultaneously a unique product of its time and an example of the classic American cowboy story. Cowboy myth, road myth and regional myth are all America archetypes that helped shape the American national identity. [...] Throughout the history of colonization and westward migration, myths glorifying the individual and the promise of prosperity for those who take the road have permeated American art and culture. (9)

Through its myth of the road, the movie also portrays American identity: the freedom enabled by America thanks to its roads, the friendships (for example with George) and communities (like the Hippies) found along the way (despite the two characters also facing less welcoming people acting upon their prejudices). This road movie also displays links to America’s identity thanks to visual elements such as the country’s flag shown on multiple

occasions throughout the scenes. Another visual element could be the American wilderness with the numerous shots of typical American natural landscapes and scenic roads. These two visual elements can be identified on the following illustration, the pattern of the flag on the motorcycle and the helmet, and the landscape in the background.



Illustration 6: American flag and landscape, shot from Easy Rider (53mn38s)

In other words, “[t]he mute perspectives and pavements of the highway objectify elements of the American mind” (Patton 12). American values and the different myths of the country lived through the experience of the road and were embodied by it.

2. Emergence of a new economy

During the first half of the twentieth century, the continual expansion of the automobile industry as well as the multiplication of roads forced the American economy to change, adapt, and reshape itself. The country also benefited from this emerging culture and economy. With the growing use and construction of roads came the almost immediate multiplication of roadside businesses, as well as changes in urban landscapes, and a plurality of economic developments. Roads and their economy shaped the country the same way the railroad did a few decades before them:

Transportation has always had a dominant role in the American economy. We built canals, railroads, and finally highways in advance of, not in response to, the areas they served. Thus, more than elsewhere, each new system of transportation shaped the economic and social landscape rather than being shaped by it. (Patton 13)

In other words, roads, freeways, and highways were the first steps leading to a new economical empire that soon developed around them. Overall, “[t]he interstate program served practically every large interest in the country, from the automobile industry, with its backsuppliers in steel and coal, to the petroleum and chemical industry, and all levels of government bureaucracy” (Patton 17). But what we are going to focus on is more related to franchises and small businesses rather than such massive industries.

Roadside businesses consequently thrived, and, in suburbs, for example, the number of shops and other facilities revolving around cars and drivers grew exponentially: “Accommodating to the automobile most often required adapting cores to the needs of the car, be it changing the road system or adding gas stations, repair shops, auto parts stores, car washes, and automobile dealerships” (Melosi). An entire economy was, therefore, implanted along highways in order to serve car owners, and to respond to their needs in terms of care and assistance regarding their vehicle and trip. The motel, for instance, became very popular since it was a very accommodating and appreciated stay among drivers who had to stop for the night, not to mention the cultural economy that developed around the concept of the drive-in. More surprising than drive-in cinemas and restaurants were the bank drive-ins that developed quickly all over the country:

At first, bankers adopted drive-up convenience as a means of combating downtown traffic congestion. [...] Very quickly, however, motoring convenience

ruled the day. Given a taste of “dashboard banking,” motorists came to expect and demand it, rendering obsolete bank locations without drive-up windows. After 1950, newly chartered banks in new city suburbs or suburban branches of downtown banks (in states where branch banking was allowed) were invariably constructed with both large parking lots and several drive-up windows. (Jakle and Sculle 207)



Illustration 7: Ad for the opening of the Central National Motor Bank in Oklahoma City, 1959

All these new businesses not only benefited the economy but also created a lot of jobs at the time, as can be read in a *TIME* article dating from October 1965:

Dallas' eight-mile Stemmons Freeway, part of 1-35E, is directly responsible for a \$250 million hotel and shopping-center boom along its right of way. On I-94, which carries Detroit-Chicago traffic across 218 miles of southern Michigan, five shopping centers, 19 motels and 39 restaurants have been built around the road's 130 interchanges. The case of Valdosta, Ga. (pop. 32,700), is typical: when a section of I-75 opened three years ago, the city found itself in the mainstream of Atlanta-Miami traffic, ever since has enjoyed a tourist boom that has created new jobs in motels, restaurants and gas stations. (“Highways: Transformation”)

As mentioned in the article, the country also went through a “shopping-center boom,” which was nothing less than one of the pillars of America’s car culture. The shopping center was the economic establishment by excellence and was configured so as to coincide with this automobile society:

Almost as soon as cars became practical, entrepreneurs saw the potential for developing groups of suburban stores with parking at the door. Yet half a century elapsed before such centers appeared in any sizable number throughout the nation.” (Hanchett 1083)

This boom has been connected to three important changes in American life: the development of suburbs, racial tensions in city centers, and the growing number of car

owners (Hanchett 1083-1084). Shopping-centers were usually built near highways or/and suburbs, and it has been added that

[i]t flies in the face both of conventional wisdom and of observable fact, inasmuch as an expansive parking lot not only defines the shopping center but is typically necessary to it. Perhaps the explanation for this seemingly incongruity is that highways and cheap gasoline, not cars, are the crucial variables. (Jackson 1116)

Either way, it is clear that the shopping-center was born out of car culture and created new habits for Americans, spending but also cultural ones.

The car industry in itself also impacted America's economy at the time. Americans entered the 1950s by producing, in 1950, 15% more cars than in 1949 ("Autos: Tra-la"), and yet the demand was so high they were surprised. Some numbers given by the magazine *TIME* throughout the 1950s and 1960s show a clear evolution of the production and sales of American cars: 5,500,000 in 1959 ("Autos: Dinosaur"), 8,200,000 in 1964 ("Autos: Ford's"), and 9,300,000 just a year later ("Autos: Safety Struggle").

Unfortunately, the automobile industry and economy also had negative repercussions on the country. First, America's real estate was strongly impacted by the presence of highways: the prices of any kind of property which was close to certain roads (usually highways and interstates) becoming extremely high, made these places practically unaffordable for common people, but real five-star locations for businesses and franchises (Patton 207) who could, therefore, gain a lot of new customers among drivers and offer easy access. These franchises are nowadays still part of America's economy and culture: KFC or McDonald's, for instance, but also the worldwide famous brand Coca Cola that partly gained its status thanks to the automobile (Patton 190), as can, for instance, be observed on the following ad with their slogans "Refresh at the familiar red cooler on the road to anywhere," and "Drive Refreshed."



Illustration 8: “Host of the Highways,” 1950 Coca-Cola Ad

Another impact was that of the decline of train passengers, since people became more individual in their mode of transportation and took the car instead (“Highways: Transformation”). Finally, there was a relocation of activity in cities and towns, which led to the negligence and abandonment of city centers:

Small towns across the nation, whether on the open plains of Nebraska or the winding rivers of West Virginia, have seen their downtown shopping districts wither and die. Old businesses and buildings are boarded up and abandoned; other structures, poorly maintained, struggle along with marginal firms as tenants. Meanwhile, several miles away, often adjacent to an interstate highway, a Wal-Mart, a K-Mart, or some other discount retailer rests in the midst of a large parking lot. Such is the physical shape of America’s modern consumer culture. (Jackson 1120)

This issue was linked to the migration towards the suburbs and to America’s new tendency to live dependently from their vehicles, which was also the main reason why an entirely new economy emerged at the time.

3. America's altered landscape: a new visual identity

"I had a book with me I stole from a Hollywood stall, 'Le Grand Meaulnes' by Alain-Fournier, but I preferred reading the American landscape as we went along." (Kerouac 93)

So far, we have mostly mentioned identity in relation to what could be considered as immaterial and conceptual (personal identity, values), but America's identity was also physically visible from the outside. To fully tackle the subject of identity, a few words must be said on America's landscapes, its visual identity, whether it be rural or urban, and the way the presence of roads also influenced this aspect. One question we might ask ourselves is: what did America look like in the 1950s and 1960s? The answer would probably not vary much from what we would reply today: America was the addition of different landscapes, from countryside and small towns to mountain ranges and big cities, all linked to one another by one single thread: the road.

Roads were such an important feature in American life at the time, with all the economy and culture developing around them, that they also became a visual element constructing and participating to the country's physical appearance. Highways themselves developed an identity of their own:

Each state highways system tend[ed] to have a visual personality of its own. The design of roadways and roadside, signage, rest areas, and picnic grounds all share[d] a certain commonality. Quite unforgettable, for example, [were] the sculpture gardens that gladden[ed] the motorist's heart alongside rest stops for Nebraska's interstate highways. (Conzen 355)

Roads had their particularities which made them recognizable for drivers. This shaping of highways was also emphasized by American engineers, who helped roads develop their own personality:

[e]ngineers liked to boast about their landscaping of the superhighways as "the nation's largest park"; and in many places the landscaping was lovely, with groupings of trees and bushes, vast extents of grass or ground cover. Some states and highway authorities began systematic programs to disperse wildflower seeds along their thoroughfares. (Patton 138)

These visual aspects and possible identification of highways depending on what they looked like also made some American routes (and, therefore, areas) recognizable from the sky:

The highway also set up patterns to be read from the air and from a distance on the ground. Long after the pavement is gone, the four-hundred-foot cliff of the cut on I-40 along the Pigeon River in North Carolina or the huge slope of the Interstates of the Rockies will survive as features of the land. (Patton 137)

This shows that roads marked the landscape in a unique way, enabling an identification from the ground, with drivers, but also from the air.

Roads also played a big role in the visual identity of America's cityscape. Would Los Angeles have existed without the construction of highways? Probably, but it would not look the way it does now. Where the city lies today, there simply used to be different neighborhoods, separated from one another: Beverly Hills and Culver City, where the movie industry was thriving, as well as the mythical Hollywood (Patton 114). These different quarters were geographically united with the arrival of the freeway: "[freeways] associated the city with discrete places that were part of it; everyone knew that Los Angeles had 'no center.' It was the freeways that linked these separate communities" (114). These routes assembled the city parts together. Another city center that was influenced by road culture and constructed around the car was Las Vegas and its strip. This main street was built to be experienced from a driver's point of view, with multiple road and business signs meant to be read according to perspective and speed. The city strip grew popular in the country since it was so well adapted to cars:

While the strip pretended to be an escape from everyday life, it was really reflective of how American cities would be built around the car. Instead of downtown grids with small lots, which had shaped cities during the age of the train, postwar cities were increasingly structured around commercial strip [...] (Al 56)

The strip was part of a new type of cities that Stefan Al qualifies as "pop cities" (61) because of the colorful and numerous road signs, neon installations, and other enormous additions to the urban landscape. To illustrate this "pop city age" (61) that he situates in time from 1958 to 1969, Al takes the example of the Stardust Casino constructed in 1958 on the Las Vegas strip:

A sign the length of a jumbo jet, containing 7,100 feet of neon tubing and 11,000 light bulbs, covered the Stardust's generic casino. It depicted a planetary system gravitating around a plastic globe, which stuck out exactly at the fold of the façade, positioned at maximum exposure and circled by a trailing "sputnik." Beams of light radiated from the earth into a sawtooth top, among flickering stars. On either side of the earth twinkled "Stardust" in massive Electra-jag font – the S alone contained 975 lamps. (61)

The signs most often creating this pop atmosphere in cities were very often commercial signs, which could mean that the city did not only adapt to the car itself, it also had to adapt to the market that the drivers represented, who were the main targets of these new advertising methods.



Illustration 9: the Stardust Casino on the Las Vegas strip (c.1958)

One of the country's most recognizable visual symbols was also born out of road culture: the Hollywood sign (Patton 174). Although erected earlier than the 1950s²¹, it was in 1949 that it was changed to "Hollywood" and stayed the way it still is today. This simple road sign ended up representing not only the American cinematic industry and the city of Los Angeles, but also America all over the world. On a smaller and more domestic scale, car plates were also indicators of identity. The vanity plate, which was customizable, was

²¹ The Hollywood road sign was erected in the 1920: "Created in 1923 to tout a real estate development it became something of a logo for all Los Angeles, of what millions drove cross-country to find, an equivalent of the Statue of Liberty or the Golden Gate Bridge" (Patton 174). It originally read "Hollywoodland."

created in 1965 (“Licence Plates”) and was a reflection of people’s identity since it was customizable. More than a visual artifact, it was a reflection of the driver’s identity since it was chosen and “created” by the owner.

Another change was people’s relation to the landscape and the way they perceived their environment. Roads offered a new perspective and Americans started having a tight relationship with their surroundings the moment they sat on their car seats:

Modern highways have made us look at landscape in a new way: cinematically, from the carefully tracked panoramic shots of the highway. [...] Roads are drunk with the principles of perspective. They ignite the vast spaces of the West, offering a vantage point from which to mark and appreciate the recession of desert, plain and prairie. Approaching the city, they convert its towers into sculptures provided for the exhilaration of the driver. (Patton 14-15)

The American driver wanted to experience the landscape and to find that experience pleasurable. There were even complaints after the construction of some interstates and superhighways, because “[...] as soon as the novelty of these roads of the future began to wear off, travelers were complaining that they offered no views of the real countryside, and they were dull” (133). These drivers were those who cared about the way they experienced the landscape, but there was a second category of drivers, those who decided to neglect and overlook what surrounded them. This disregard of the landscape was only made possible because of highways and the speed of their vehicle:

Both the rural freeway, for its monotony, and the encompassing countryside, for its distance, can be safely ignored in high-speed driving. Thus, the new highways have changed not only American rural landscapes, but the manner by which Americans view and experience those landscapes, as well. (Conzen 412)

People’s experience and perspectives of the city were also renewed while driving on freeways: “Since so many of them [were] elevated, the driver on most urban expressways [experienced] a sensation of floating, or aerial rather than terrestrial movement, and a wide perspective that [thrilled] the aglomeraphiliac heart” (Patton 109-110). In other words, driving on freeways made drivers feel new sensations and, more generally, roads offered a new point of view to drivers who could experience their environment differently, with more distance and more or less speed and pleasure. The road was, therefore, both a place to observe and to be observed.

C – Landscape and societal changes

American identity was prominently altered to make space and adapt to the new emerging car culture and economy. One major transformation can be observed when looking at the country's visual identity, as its physical characteristics, whether they be urban or rural, were turned upside down after the arrival of roads and cars. Their environment having been refashioned, the Americans's way of life also went through some important changes in order to respond to their new surroundings.

1. Impacts and damages on urban and rural landscapes

The addition of thousands of new miles of roads throughout the country – especially after President Eisenhower's 1956 Interstate Highway Act aiming at the construction of close to 66,000 kilometers (Weingroff) – negatively impacted the country's physical appearance.

Roads were modern, practical, and economically profitable, but they were also highly destructive. Highways were used as devastating tools in cities so as to eradicate some neighborhoods that were considered as bothersome. This practice mostly impacted the poorest communities and also served racist purposes as these communities were very often either Hispanic or African American (Patton 104). As Alana Semuels explains in her article "The Role of Highway in American Poverty," the concept was simple: "[...] if they put the highway in just the right place, it would allow the city to use federal funds to eradicate what they called a slum area in the center city." In the same article she takes the example of the city of Syracuse and its 15th Ward neighborhood:

They worried about race riots because so many people were crowded into the neighborhood and prevented from going anywhere else. They decided that the best plan would be to tear down the 15th Ward and replace it with an elevated freeway. The completion of the highway, I-81, which ran through the urban center, had the same effect it has had in almost all cities that put interstates through their hearts. It decimated a close-knit African American community. And when the displaced residents from the 15th Ward moved to other city neighborhoods, the white residents fled. It was easy to move. There was a beautiful new highway that helped their escape.

Many other cities, such as St Louis²², Missouri, went through the same process of 1950s “urban renewal,” forcing thousands of families to relocate while their homes were being forcefully removed to make way for brand new highways. It goes without saying that the people who went through this forced and violent relocation gravely suffered from the displacement and destruction of their communities.

The highways and freeways added to American cities at the time also became part of the urban expansion process, leading to the migration of people (mostly whites) from inner cities to suburbs, “the spread of the automobile [...] [serving] as an enabling mechanism” (Conzen 413) for the rush towards the outskirts. In other words, these new roads created an easy connection from the inside to the outside of cities and enabled people to come and go much faster and with much more ease than they did before. As a consequence, it was now possible and more frequent, for instance, for someone to work in the city center, and to live in the suburbs.

As we mentioned, cities ended up transforming themselves one by one so as to serve cars and be car-friendly (with the gradual addition of highways, city strips, and, as we said before, businesses revolving around the use and needs of automobiles and drivers). Apart from roads, one feature born from car culture can be studied and used as an indicator for the growth of the number of automobiles in the country: the parking lot. A study conducted in California showed that, in 1960,

[...] about 59 percent of the ground area in Los Angeles’ central business district (CBD) [...] was devoted to streets and parking, with about 35 percent of roads, streets, alleys, and sidewalks, and 24 percent for parking lots and garages not included in buildings with other purposes. (Melosi)

Approximately the same numbers were given for other major cities such as Detroit (49.5 percent in 1953), Chicago (40.7 percent in 1956), or Minneapolis (48.3 percent in 1958) (Melosi). In other words, throughout the 1950s and 1960s, areas mainly dedicated to traffic and parking became extremely pervasive (and evidently continued to grow even after that).

22 To learn more about the case of St. Louis, read Jeannette Cooperman’s article “The Story of Segregation in St. Louis” available online at www.stlmag.com/news/the-color-line-race-in-st-louis/. (Accessed 28 Apr. 2021.)

The place taken up by parking lots was also visually studied by the artist Edward (Ed) Ruscha in his work *Thirtyfour Parking Lots in Los Angeles*²³, an artist's photography book first published in 1967. The fact that his photographs were all taken in one single city and that they were taken from the sky shows how much space parking lots took, how numerous they were, and is also a perfect representation of landscape adaptation to the hegemony of the car.



Illustration 10: Ed Ruscha, *Thirtyfour Parking Lots in Los Angeles* (1967)

But cities were not the only areas affected by the presence of new highways; the American countryside was also reshaped and threatened. The expression of nature being “raped”²⁴ would probably be the best way to describe this phenomenon of the roads taking over rural landscapes. Nature and wildlife were being invaded by an unwanted and unknown entity that was about to impact and change them forever. Highways going through and coming from cities were like expansions of urban landscapes, meaning that they gradually brought with them establishments and installations from urban places, such as billboards and other economic devices aimed towards drivers (Melosi). Roads were violently and disrespectfully integrated into nature. The destructive aura of highways could also be felt in rural areas:

[highways] also destroy plant life and habitats while creating their own mini-ecosystems. To Lewis Mumford, one of the most noted critics of the automobile, the building of a highway “has about the same result upon vegetation and human structures as the passage of a tornado or the blast of an atom bomb.”(Melosi)

It is quite easy, indeed, to imagine the negative impact that the building of such roads had on the environment: it destroyed nature and vegetation, forced animals to relocate (their

23 To know more on his work see Part II. *Thirtyfour Parking Lots in Los Angeles* is available online at www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/collection/works/430.2008.a-ii/. (Accessed 13 Mar. 2021.)

24 *Deliverance*. Directed by John Boorman, Warner Bros., 30 July 1972.

natural habitat having been removed or altered to such an important degree that they could not adapt or live there anymore), brought constant danger and noise which threatened wildlife, violated the natural landscape (with the presence of asphalt, poles replacing trees²⁵, billboards, and so on), and, on top of all, spread pollution from motorized vehicles which was very harmful to both fauna and flora, as well as “the trash that littered highway margins” (Jakle and Sculle 129).

Because of the massive threat highways and vehicles represented for the environment and landscape, the government was influenced by activists to pass the Federal Wilderness Act in 1964. The act “defined wilderness as any ‘roadless’ area of at least 5,000 contiguous acres” (Patton 36), its aim being to protect certain places from humans and any kind of construction whatsoever, roads included. About 111 million acres of land is nowadays under the protection of this act (in 44 of the 50 states), in places called “Wilderness Areas” such as Ansel Adams Wilderness in California, or Bob Marshall Wilderness in Montana, two of the oldest ones²⁶.

25 “Not only were utility lines themselves unattractive, but numerous roadside trees had been removed to accommodate the poles, resulting in the outright destruction of beauty” (Jakle and Sculle 128-129).

26 To learn more about the Wilderness Act today, visit wilderness.org. (Accessed May 17 2021.)

2. Car culture and the American lifestyle

The major and most logical way in which roads brought change in the lives of Americans was movement. With interstate highways, it was not only faster but also easier to go from one state to the next, and, therefore, to travel (as well as entering and leaving cities or travel through the countryside). Cars also had their role in this evolution since they were better suited for long-distance and fast travel; they were more comfortable, more reliable, and offered, therefore, a more pleasurable experience to drivers and passengers. Moreover, they enabled access to locations that were quite often poorly served by public transport (Melosi). The hegemony of the highway also forced people to travel by car, simply because there was no other solution:

By the end of the sixties, as mass transit was coming into vogue, most American cities had already assumed the shapes and dispersions the highway generated. Three-quarters of the country's mass transit riders were in one city, New York. The rest of the country would have to depend chiefly on highways. (Patton 107)

Overall, the acquisition of a car meant leading a freer life, detached from geographical and time constraints of public transports and pedestrian movement. Due to these improvements as well as the construction of highways, Americans started to move more and more during their vacations; after the war, for example, it became habitual to see families on the road, motivated by the desire of parents to discover and see for themselves the country they had fought for (Patton 188).

People also started to enjoy the car even more than before because of the safe private space it represented. This was mainly true for African Americans, who were used to being persecuted, humiliated, and discriminated on public transports or in the streets. Short and long distances were safer by car:

Indeed, at the same time that the story of African American car travel during Jim Crow was one of control and oppression, it also was a story of African American tourists using the automobile to at least mitigate the atmosphere of fear and intimidation that would otherwise surround travel. [...] African American tourists sought to use their newly found automobility to negotiate, if not overcome, a hostile social landscape with the help of Black tourism operators, special guidebooks to safe places, the advice of other travelers, and a strategic reading of racial boundaries at destinations. (Alderman et al. "Jim Crow" 6-7)

Although this could be discussed and seen as African Americans re-enforcing racism and segregation by excluding themselves, it was still a better option than to be faced with violence on the bus home, or to avoid being faced with racist behavior in the streets:

There are instances of African Americans being dragged from their cars and beaten by angry mobs, but there are certainly far more cases of black people simply driving past whites without being detected or of outrunning a dangerous situation. Getting behind the wheel became, at times, an equalizer. (Sorin 66)

The car was also greatly appreciated by African American parents who did not want their children to have to be faced with any kind of racial conflict or discrimination (Alderman et al. “Jim Crow” 17). Despite not being completely racist-proof, cars remained a more private and safer mode of transportation. Moreover, the car enabled African Americans to visit the country more than ever before, and “[emboldened] [them] to visit national parks and monuments, historic sites and museums, and to take vacations or just go for a drive” (Sorin 69-70). Overall, it just permitted some communities to live more freely and offered them access to opportunities they did not have before.

The private place offered by vehicles was, unfortunately, not safe for everyone. Cars offered a “male-controlled privacy” (Sanger 731) in which women could find themselves isolated in the company of a man, and often risked being sexually assaulted (731). On a different note, the car enabled women to move with more freedom and ease, but, because of societal roles, they – mostly housewives and mothers – had to endorse another role, that of the family’s driver:

[...] even the men who took the morning train relied upon their wives to drive them to and from the station. And taking the breadwinner to the station was only one of a housewife's driving tasks. She also drove the children to school, to lessons, to doctors, to friends, and to the supermarket to purchase the family's groceries and supplies. (Sanger 717)

This phenomenon was mostly seen in American suburbs, and was quickly grasped by car sellers and advertisers who started using mothers as targets²⁷:

Advertising for family cars emphasized mother-friendly features: power-assisted brakes and steering, automatic transmissions, driver-controlled door locks, built-in child safety seats, and spacious trunks to facilitate the loading of grocery bags. (Sanger 719)

27 Annex 5.

In her essay “Girls and the Getaway: Cars, Culture, and the Predicament of Gendered Space,” Carol Sanger argues that “the freedom to venture into new and untried places has been controlled not by denying women the right to drive, but instead by increasing the obligation” (Sanger 715). The responsibilities that came with the popularization of the car explain, therefore, why women did not participate to the masculine myth of the road embodied, for instance, by Kerouac’s works.

Another change was experienced regarding cities and pedestrians. From the proliferation of automobiles in urban areas emerged a certain fear towards cars. In cities such as Los Angeles or Houston, “pedestrians [became] an endangered species” (Melosi), the streets being less and less adapted to them and more and more suited for motorized vehicles. This new danger also affected American social life:

It was becoming much less safe to gather in the streets without the protection of a vehicle, to let children play their games in what passed for an early playground, or to extend a front-porch culture into a road abutted by several neighboring houses. The use of the streets as social and recreational gathering places was threatened and indeed supplanted by the requirements of increasingly rapid and mounting vehicular traffic. (Melosi)

But this was not the only way in which American social life was impacted. The way people attended social and cultural events also drastically changed, one example being the boom of the drive-in theaters after World War II (which were at the peak of their popularity in the 1950s and 1960s, with about 4,000 of them throughout the country, which was equal to 25 percent of the total screens of the country) (Nelson). The car was such a private sphere, an extension of home, that going to the movies in a drive-in theater could not completely be considered as socializing anymore. The same phenomenon also happened with drive-in restaurants. The social sphere was reduced to the car, and social events evolved into more individual and intimate experiences. This privacy offered by the car was sometimes seen by some as “[sabotaging] the sense of community” (Melosi) between people.

The mid-twentieth century saw Americans start to become obsessed and dependent on their car, because of the popularization of driving and owning an automobile, and the adaptation of society life around four-wheeled motorized vehicles and highway transportation. A material proof of that could be the way cars changed the

shapes of typical houses, car owners having garage extensions to their homes – as can be seen on the illustration below – sometimes as large as the house itself: “[t]he driveway ‘became the entrance and exit ramp to domestic life,’ replacing the front porch of a bygone age. In suburban houses, especially, the garage became an essential feature like the kitchen or living room” (Melosi). The impressive domestic place reserved for car parking was so important, that, “[b]y the 1960s, the garage or carport often dominated the entire front facade” (Sanger 716-171).



Illustration 11: Ad for the Chevrolet Corvette and Bel Air Sport Coupe (c. 1950)

Americans were also given the opportunity to enjoy some new constructions and social spaces because of the work made by highway engineers. Their work of road construction having been criticized (for plenty of reasons such as ugliness or destructiveness), they decided to make an effort and change the highway’s environments, especially near or inside cities. In consequence

[t]hey would beautifully landscape the highways, they would hire members of minority groups, they would pay for relocation, they would build sound walls. They would provide parks and housing and replace the land they took. By the mid-sixties freeways had been reconceived as “urban development programs,” bringing with them parks, schools, and housing. (Patton 107)

In conclusion, some American children went to schools that had been built because of highways, they played in parks and lived in homes that were there for the same reason. More than having impacted the landscape, highways were central to the building of some communities and social places. These came to be called “megastructures,” in which the highway was considered as a spine (107).

II- THE ROAD'S ROLE IN CULTURE AND THE ART-SCENE

The American cultural and artistic environment was impacted by the road, as it was, as we have seen, a new and intrusive addition to the country's social landscape. Artists, often feeding on their contemporary environment to create, were inevitably confronted with the road and car culture. As a consequence, the arts had to identify these new elements, to understand them in order to incorporate them into their works.

A – American culture trying to identify the road

As mentioned and explained before, the road was, in the 1950s, quite a new American place. Not that roads did not exist before, of course, but as a place and a renewed network, the 1950s and 1960s saw them become hugely integrated into the American life and culture. Roads were born and they were here to stay. After having been adopted by Americans, they had to be mastered by art and artists. As humans, it is natural for us to want to know the unknown, and to try and define and understand the things we do not know about or have recently encountered. This process of identification was what happened between artists and the road: they examined this new entity, played with it, tried to understand what they could do with it, what it could mean, and what place they could offer it in their work.

1. Car crash songs: depiction of the road as a danger

One of the outcomes of this identification was the artistic representation of the road as a danger. At the time, with the growing number of cars on the road came the growing number of car accidents, which terrified people. In fact,

“[d]eath by auto [was] the most absurd and existential of deaths. It [could] be courted by speed, recklessness, or drunkenness, or it [could] come by crude chance: to some extent, any driver [was] at the mercy of all others; he [gambled] every time he [went] on the road.” (Patton 249-250)

Americans spent a few decades (mainly from the 1920s to the mid-1960s) being obsessed with car crashes, so much so that destruction derbies were organized. They consisted in deliberate car crashes people could attend as attractions (Vardi 20). The main crashes were set up to be “autos colliding in head-on crashes, slamming into brick and

flaming walls, leaping from ramps straight into other vehicles [...] and running over human ‘iron men’” (20). This “mock practice” (31) as a popular form of entertainment was so popular it was integrated into some famous fairs such as the World’s Fair in New York (in 1964-1965) (26).

Until the 1950s, Americans actually had a habit of building their roads as straight as possible, the common belief being that there was only real danger when roads were curvy and had multiple turns. This was revealed to be wrong: straight roads meant bored drivers, paying less attention, and, therefore, resulted in more car crashes (Patton 132-33). People were also more aware of car crashes since it had become common for every family, as well as for most teenagers, to own a car, which brought adults to worry about their children and to be more wary of the road and its dangers.

This rational yet slightly exaggerated fear of the road was artistically expressed in one artistic field in particular: music. Indeed, the 1950s and 1960s were the decades of the car crash songs²⁸, a special genre of songs inspired by – as the name implies – car crashes and their tragic outcomes. The songs were mostly Rock songs, a lot of them very similar to Rock ballads. The lyrics almost constantly mentioned teenagers, probably to make them more dramatic, but also because they were the main Rock audience at the time. Teenagers listening to these songs in their cars also created an interesting *mise en abyme* since the songs were, once again, about teenagers driving.

We talked earlier about curvy roads being feared; this inspired the song “Dead Man’s Curve” (1963) by Jan and Dean. It begins with two young men challenging themselves in a race, and ends up with a car crash. The fact that the curve is associated with death is important to notice, and so is the way the car is described: “You shoulda hear the whine from my screamin’ machine!” The car is like a delirious monster: loud, fast, and dangerous. The danger is dual, it comes from both the road and the car.

Another song inspired by racing was “Chicken” (1967) by The Cheers. This race was the game “Chicken” which gave its name to the title of the song, and was a very popular practice among teenagers at the time. As the lyrics say, “With their pedals to the floor / The one that held it showed / That he was not afraid to die;” racing was a way to challenge each other and to prove themselves. The song ends once again in a car accident: “There might have been a winner / But they had no way to tell / For the couples all were dead,”

28 To see the entirety of the lyrics of the songs that are to be mentioned, see Annex 6.

and death is associated with the devil's wish; "Cos the devil had his way." This association emphasizes danger on the road, insinuating that the road is a place where the devil dwells.

"The Ballad of Thunder Road" (1957) by Robert Mitchum was also a car crash song in which the road and the devil were linked: "And there was moonshine, moonshine to quench the devil's thirst. / The law they swore they'd get him but the devil got him first." In "Black Denim Trousers and Motorcycle Boots" (1955), The Cheers also mention the Devil, this time in association with the driver and his unstoppable wish to hit the road, ignoring the tears and pleading of his girlfriend: "Mary Lou, poor girl, she pleaded and she begged him not to leave," "But her tears were shed in vain and her every word was lost," "Then he took off like the Devil and there was fire in his eyes!!" It almost seems, here, like the road is an addiction from which the driver cannot escape and always needs to come back to. The "fire" in the driver's eyes also evokes folly and danger, and leads us back to hell and the devil. The regular association of the two entities (the road and the devil) in these songs was a way to demonize the road. Linking it to devil at a time when religion – more specifically Protestant traditions and beliefs – were extremely important was an effective way to warn people against its dangers, but also went with the teenage opposition to older, more conservative generations. In R. Mitchum's song, the car is also said to be loud, its engine roaring and exploding²⁹, which insists on the notion of danger, since these noises evoke trouble and threat.

Car crash songs are also known to be extremely melodramatic. Songwriters would often use young couples as victims of the road to accentuate sadness, injustice, and to move the listener: both teenagers and adults felt concerned (for themselves, and for their children). Mark Dinning's "Teen Angel" (1959) is an example of how the songs were written to try and affect the listener. First, it tells the story of a couple; the girlfriend died, which makes it sad, but the tragedy is accentuated when the persona (who is her boyfriend) tries to reach out to her, his "teen angel," even though she passed away and cannot hear him. The use of the pronoun "you" makes the listener feel even more connected to the story. On top of all, the unfairness of the situation is emphasized with the information about the girl's age: "Just sweet sixteen, and now you're gone."

But even more melodramatic than that is the song "Tell Laura I Love Her" (1960) by Ray Peterson. It is, once again, about a boy racing and ending up in a fatal car accident. The

²⁹ "And when his engine roared they called the highway 'Thunder Road'"

tragedy, this time, comes from the fact that he did not get to say goodbye to his beloved girlfriend whom he wanted to marry: “Laura and Tommy were lovers / He wanted to give her everything / Flowers, presents and most of all, a wedding ring.” Youth is once more used to add to the misfortune and unfairness of the situation: “He was the youngest driver there.” Even though the boy did race voluntarily, his death is described as a surprising accident: “No one knows what happened that day / How his car overturned in flames.” The song then ends with Laura praying in the chapel, and Tommy declaring from above that “[his] love for her will never die.” In this song, the emphasis on innocence (created with the use of youth, a loving relationship, and the accident) is contrasted with the car and the race, which can be considered as the “bad guys,” coming between the two lovers and ruining their future and happiness. “Last Kiss” (1962) by Wayne Cochran also uses a young and loving relationship to touch the listener, but this time it is not the driver who dies but his “baby”: the girl who was in the car with him. This also shows that the road is a danger not only to the driver but to everyone else present in the car.

The overall feeling we get when listening to car crash songs is that the road and the car are like the supreme force in Greek tragedies (gods, fate, destiny), keeping the characters apart from what they want (here, preventing young people from being happy by killing and separating them). Once they got into their cars, their deaths seemed fated.

One last song worth mentioning is Stonewall Jackson’s “B.J. the D.J.” (1964) since it uses another kind of relationship to create its melodrama: “At record hops he stayed out late and his mom would always wait / To see if he had made it home alive / She warned against his loss of sleep and driving fast in that old heap.” The mother and son relationship as well as their background story are touching and emphasize disaster as the boy everyone loved died despite his mother’s warnings and prayers.

The way these songs are constructed from the music viewpoint in terms of sound and accompaniment is also important to notice. The Beach Boys’s “A Young Man Is Gone” (1963), for example, does not have any instrumental melody, it is only made of vocals, a chorus almost sounding like a church one. “Last Kiss” by W. Cochran also has its own attribute: it starts with the three-second recording of what sounds like a car accident. “Leader Of The Pack” (1964) by The Shangri-Las also has a few moments of car noises to better embody the crash. One last example could be “I Want My Baby Back” (1965) by Jimmy Cross which ends with a speech and the sounds of a shovel digging in the ground,

and then the noise of what is probably a coffin being opened. All in all, these songs were made quite realistic with audio effects which added to the accuracy of their portrayal of the road as a threat.

To conclude, car crash song singers and songwriters identified the road as a danger, associating it with the devil, and using melodramatic stories with tragic car accidents to put an emphasis on the risks drivers (and mostly teenagers) ran while being on the road.

2. Feminine representation and characterization

In his 1939 novel *The Grapes of Wrath*, John Steinbeck uses the expression “Mother Road” to name Route 66. In doing so, he personified this American place and attributed to it a feminine and maternal dimension. Following the author’s statement, we can, indeed, imagine the road as being a motherly entity. In keeping with the concept of personification, the road’s appearance and behavior resemble that of a mother figure: in the 1950s and 1960s, everyone started to turn to the road (and to the car), one way or another. Like a mother, the road, despite its brand new integration into people’s lives, quickly became a point of stability in American life and society. The country soon became dependent on it, for commerce, socialization, movement, the same way a toddler would be dependent on his/her mother when it comes to food, meeting others, and going places. The road also played the role of a link between people, states, communities, cities, and the countryside. In that sense, it held a very maternal place, bringing people together.

If we do consider the road as a motherly entity, then we can make this reciprocity coincide with the pillars that are traditionally associated with the definition of mothers: the ability to give birth, the motherly protection, the raising of children, keeping in mind that all of this has to do with American culture.

From the 1950s on, the road was, indeed, at the core of the development of new artistic genres. It was, for instance, because of roads that the road movie genre was born. The same observation can obviously be made regarding road photography. In terms of literature, the road was, first, a big part of the development of the Beat Generation of the 1950s. Jack Kerouac, one of the founders of this literary and social movement was very fond of road trips and was inspired by them to write his novels, including *On the Road* which became one of the pillars of this movement. Actually, the first page of the novel portrays the road as a mother when the narrator speaks of Dean’s background story: “Dean is the perfect guy for the road because he actually was born on the road, when his parents were passing through Salt Lake City in 1926, in a jalopy, on their way to Los Angeles” (Kerouac 3). The construction of this sentence almost makes it sound like Dean’s parents encountered him on the road as they were traveling, and that it was not his mother who gave birth to him, but the place itself. He is presented as a product of the road. Moreover, to come back to artistic genres, the following decade saw the publishing

of the first novel considered as forging New Journalism (Tom Wolfe's *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*), which is, once again, a novel set on the road, and about a road trip. In conclusion, the road was at the time the starting point of different new additions in terms of culture, literature, and artistic movements, just like a mother would be at the starting point of life.

The protective side of mothers (and parents more generally) can be observed when taking a temporary step back from culture and diving more deeply into society and government concerns. The Interstate Highway Act passed by President Eisenhower was meant, as we have already explained, to enable more movement but also to evacuate cities in case of attack from enemies because of the context of the Cold War. In that sense, the road can be seen as a protective entity.

The road also "raised" America, in a sense, the same way a mother raises her children. By birthing a new culture, a new economy, and enabling people to come and go faster, more easily, and safer, the road made America grow as a country. It offered tools for it to expand its power, better provide for its citizens, and be more connected. In a way, the road made America stronger.

If we come back to culture, the femininity of the road can also be observed regarding its place in the American landscape. The American wilderness has always been presented and exploited in a rather masculine way, with the experience of the pioneers, for example, linked to the myth of masculinity and to a cultural habit of conquest and adventure reserved to men. In contrast to this raw place, the road displays more fantasies (road signs, white or yellow lines), it is more sophisticated (as it is human made and is the result of intellectual work), more modern, it circulates graciously throughout this "manly" wilderness, opposing itself to it, and, maybe, therefore, to masculinity.

The femininity of the road can also be explained thanks to its relation to travelers; the majority of people going on road trips at the time were men. The road could be seen as a partner (as well as the car). These two entities are like the embodiment of a female presence. The road being the major component of a trip (whether it be hitch-hikers, bus trips, or road trips), it remains a constant. The character of Dean from Kerouac's *On the Road* is the perfect embodiment of a man traveler and a road partner. Throughout the story, Deans engages in relationships with many different women, sometimes even

marrying them; women he constantly ends up leaving so as to go back to the road. In a sense, the road always calls him back the same way Sirens called sailors: “Sal, we gotta go and never stop going 'till we get there.’ ‘Where we going, man?’ ‘I don’t know but we gotta go” (Kerouac 217). Dean lives for freedom which he finds in his lifestyle surrounded by girls, drugs, and constant movement enabled by vehicles and roads. The road is the only entity, the only partner, even, towards whom he remains loyal. At the beginning of the novel, Kerouac also writes: “Dean just raced in society, eager for bread and love [...]” (10). The use of the verb “racing” with Dean as a subject makes it sound like he himself is a vehicle, therefore participating to the inseparable car/road duo. It is also mentioned that he had an absent mother, and he may, potentially, be finding instability in his relationships with women and stability on the road, in movement. Moreover, at the end of the book, we learn that “[...] he and his new girlfriend settle down in New York and he has no desire for wild road life or multiple sexual partners anymore. He is finally ready for a committed relationship” (Štefić 24). This opposition made between the road and a committed relationship implies that one was not possible with the other, and we can, therefore, picture the road as a love affair. This is also embodied in the song “Black Denim Trousers & Motorcycle Boots” (1955) by The Cheers, where the persona, referred to as “the terror of Highway 101,” is said to love his “doggone motorcycle” more than his “pretty girlfriend by the name of Mary Lou.” The only difference, here, is that it is not the road that has the man’s affection but the motorcycle.

Steinbeck also vaguely mentioned this idea of the road as a partner, or at least as part of a male/female relationship. In his work *Travels With Charley*, which tells his road trip in America, he writes:

Once a journey is designed, equipped, and put in process, a new factor enters and takes over. A trip, a safari, an exploration, is an entity, different from all other journeys. It has personality, temperament, individuality, uniqueness. A journey is a person in itself; no two are alike. [...] In this a journey is like marriage. (4)

Despite him focusing on the experience of the trip, we can still affirm that, since his trip was a road trip, then his journey on the road was considered as a marriage, and the road being part of it. Here, it is not really the road that is feminine but the entire process of going on the road, the devotion to the trip and the hazards that come with this sort of travel.

3. Centrality: the road as a (main) character?

In a general way, the road is always the central element of a road trip. It is what a driver sees, follows, and focuses on. In the same way, it is what the right-seat passenger absently scrutinizes. This is even more accurate as the car, with its windshield, offers drivers and passengers a vision similar to that of a photographer looking through his/her camera. The road is framed, it is central, and is the subject of the viewer's thoughts. This explains, also, why photographers have always been keen on taking pictures of the road, delivering an accurate and lively depiction (Patton 253). This parallel imagined between the road and the camera, between place and artistic device, might explain the attraction some artists felt for the road, and the centrality they proposed through their clichés.

Focusing on personification and following the perception of the road as an almost humanized entity, it is easy to imagine it as a character. Just as they had become central to the lives of Americans – Route 66 being called “America’s Main Street,” for instance – the road and its culture became central to some artistic and literary works of the 1950s and 1960s. The road was given so much importance and presence that it went beyond its simple nature of a geographical place and became a distinct predominant attribute, easily compatible with the concept of a main character. Artists enabled the road to transcend their works with subtlety and turned it into a central figure, participating in the essence of their artworks. Many artists from these two decades were interested in representing this American place, and turned it into a habit, that became, for some, almost obsessional.

Ed Ruscha's photography book *Thirtyfour Parking Lots in Los Angeles* specifically focuses, as the title indicates, on Californian parking lots³⁰. Through his camera, Ruscha presented an interesting perception of the place's different shapes and environment³¹, considering parking lots as the main object of study of his project. The point of view offered by the photographer (his pictures having been taken from the sky) enabled the parking areas to be represented in their entirety, from above, and gives the spectator a new perspective on this place everyone visited and knew, but only from ground level.

30 Here, parking lots are considered as extensions of the road, dead ends that still participate in the network of roads available to drivers, and belonging to road culture.

31 Annex 7.



Illustrations 12 and 13: Ed Ruscha, Thirtyfour Parking Lots in Los Angeles (1967)

In a way, it seems as if the photographer treated his subject the way he would have treated a person, his photographs looking a lot like portraits, the parking lots being centralized and staged in a way that revealed their visual identity. Ruscha's work does not stop at parking lots, as he also drew and painted gas stations, which were part of his 1963 art studies. The artist was almost obsessed with representing this culture of the road, as he, for example, painted many versions of his painting "Standard Station" in the course of his career³². Ruscha did not only make the road central to his projects, he made it central to a major part of his life work.

Robert Frank's *The Americans* (1958) may also be mentioned. This example is even more interesting as it seems that road culture seized Frank's work without him realizing it. The work was, indeed, meant to portray the American people, but the road, cars, motorcycles, gas stations, and drive-ins found their way through his shots. *The Americans* consists of 83 photos in total, 21 of which bring us back to elements of the road and its culture³³. In some pictures, their presence is subtle, and mainly remains in the background, but in others, it is central and as important as what is supposed to be the main subject. A few of his photographs are even simply representations of the road without any person on it, which leads the spectator to unconsciously place it as one of the main characters of the photographer's work.

The American photographer Ansel Adams also took shots of the road, mainly focusing on its place in the American landscape and setting his photos in a way that places

³² Annex 8. Painting on which he started studies in 1962.

³³ The photographs include, as mentioned above, either a means of transportation, a gas station, or the road itself. More photographs may be added to this selection if we consider that photos of people crossing the street are part of road culture.

the road as the dominant interest and object of study. The titles of his photos³⁴ also evoke this centrality; “Land of Little Rain, Road North of Mojave” (c. 1949), “Coastal Road” (c. 1953), “Road after Rain, Northern California” (1960), or “Interchanges, Los Angeles Freeway” (1967). Other photographic works may be mentioned such as the numerous clichés of roads Robert Adams took all over the country during his lifetime, including in the 1950s and 1960s³⁵. His approach is similar to Ansel Adams’s but quite different from that of Frank since he seemed to focus more on the road itself, whereas Frank’s main goal was to portray the American people and their culture, the road being merely an accidental subject.

But photography is not the only art that went through this central characterization process. In painting, the Pop artist Allan D’Arcangelo³⁶ also decided to focus mainly on routes and their environment, signs, and shapes. Throughout his career, he represented many different American highways, turning them into his one main source of inspiration. His work sometimes resembles the visions of a focused driver, his/her attention directed towards road signs and the road itself. It may also remind experimented drivers of the time when they had to learn about signs and directions. D’Arcangelo’s 1962 painting “US Highway 1” very precisely illustrates the centrality of the road and its elements in an artistic work of the period. The acrylic painting represents a highway, anchored in perspective, and attracting the eye with its discontinuous white line stretching into the distance. Along with

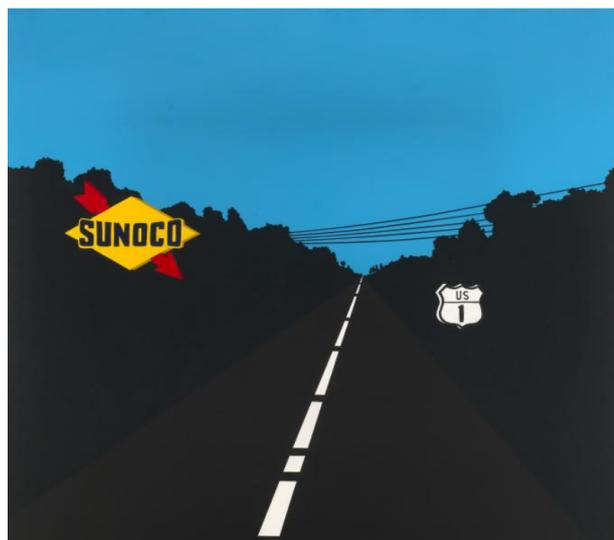


Illustration 14: Allan D’Arcangelo, “US Highway 1” (1962).

34 Annex 9.

35 Robert Adams is known to have made the road central to his lifework. In 2018, a selection of his photographs of roads were re-edited under the title *27 Roads*.

36 Annex 10.

this line, the other two main elements of the painting are also part of road culture: the “US 1” sign, on the right, and the “Sunoco” sign, on the left, indicating the close presence of a petrol station. These elements stand out even more as they are represented in colors, superposed on black tones (the road and the surrounding landscape). This artwork is one of the many examples of D’Arcangelo staging road elements and highways in his paintings, making them the major subject of his artistic study.

Lastly, in terms of literature, Kerouac in *On the Road* also wrote about the road the way he would about a character. It is not expressively personified or displayed as a person, but its presence, when compared to that of the other characters, implicitly puts it in the forefront. In the novel, Dean and Sal are the two main characters. In total, throughout the story, Dean’s name is repeated 833 times, and Sal’s 123 (for a third example, Marylou’s name is repeated 140 times). In comparison, the word “road” appears 114 times, “route” eleven times, “highway” 35 times, “car” 223 times, and “bus” 50 times³⁷. If we categorize these words, we can gather “road,” “route,” and “highway” together, making it a total of 160. In terms of means of transportation (“car” and “bus”), we get a total of 273. What this shows us is that, despite the road simply being a setting, a means to the story’s and characters’s aims, an inspiration, and a major place in Kerouac’s novel, the author still – intentionally or not – made its presence so important that it sometimes feels as if it is its own character, its own entity coming and going along with Dean, Sal, and their friends. The author also uses verbs to describe the movement and appearance of the road that make it even more characterized, and puts an emphasis on its presence “on stage”: “[...] and the road-map was one long red line called Route 6 that led from the tip of Cape Cod clear to Ely, Nevada, and there dipped down to Los Angeles” (Kerouac 11), “[...] Route 6 arched in from New England” (11), “Route 6 came over the river, wound around a traffic circle, and disappeared into the wilderness” (11). He also adds character to the road by using human adjectives, such as in his description of Denver streets: “The bus rolled out of the storied, eager Denver streets” (52). Finally, some of his descriptions may also remind us of the description of a person, for example when he explains that the road has “soft shoulders” (25).

³⁷ From my own research in an online version of the novel. The numbers include both singular and plural forms of the words, but exclude words of the same family (such as “crossroads,” for example, which appears eighteen times and could have been added to “road”).

In other words, it was hard to simply consider the road as a place (or a culture) when it was made so omnipresent and lively. Through the works of the artists of that period, we understand that the road was never a simple asphalt line; it was a true presence, almost like a soul, an aura shaped by artists to transcend their work. The road reached a level of centrality and characterization it had not reached before.

B – The arts trying to incorporate the road

Because of its striking omnipresence, artists started to incorporate the road into their works, but also to use it as a means for creation. This, coupled with the identification process we have just mentioned, permanently inscribed road culture into the arts of the period.

1. The perfect setting

In terms of visual arts and literature, the road represented a great setting. First, because it was present everywhere in the country, which offered artists a great range of locations to use. If they, indeed, decided to set their story on the road, they could very well set it in Arizona as well as in Maine or Montana. Kerouac's *On the Road* is once again a great example to illustrate this point: the story is set in many different parts of the country, such as great cities like New York, Chicago, or Los Angeles, and it follows the characters throughout many different states, but the main and absolute setting of the book still remains the road.

Secondly, the road considered as a setting could be seen as almost “virgin,” a blank page waiting to be filled with stories. Roads carry enough meaning to be interesting but are not cumbersome enough to overtake a story. Because of that, they are the perfect setting; a stage where anything can happen, where any idea, story, or character can be projected. From 1960 to 1964, the TV series *Route 66* was aired on television and is an example of how the road was used as a setting. The series followed the adventures of two main characters, Tod and Buz. Along the different plot twists and seasons, the main setting and point of stability was the famous Route 66.

More than being a setting used in fictional works, the road was also a real-life setting that became the set-up for installations shaped as road signs and aimed at attracting drivers in a consuming and competitive goal: “By the fifties, road signs had to work harder, reaching out and collaring the driver with leaning poles, curving arrows, boomerangs, kidneys, and other biomorphic shapes inflected toward the entrance of the place they advertised” (Patton 170). With the development of roadside businesses came the emergence of road signs, meant to attract customers driving down highways. Their

strategy was to have huge road signs that could be visible from afar so that drivers would have time to see them, understand and register the information, decide to slow down whether to stop or not. These road signs quickly became bigger and bigger, more sophisticated (a lot of colors, forms, lights, puns), and more and more artistic. Actually, a lot of them were handmade, which also classifies them as genuine works of art. Phil Patton classifies them as Pop works, joining Al's concept of the "pop city age" (Al 61):

The wonderful giant donuts, the tea and coffee pots, the big pigs and ducks, the camera-shaped film shops and beer halls in great kegs moved from the humorous to the surrealist, like those classic postcards of fantastic animals: jackalope, rideable jackrabbit, trout leaping over the boat, potatoes and apples on flatcars – surrealist like Magritte's apples, but created by spurious collage. They were as Pop as Claes Oldenburg's soft fans and vacuum cleaners, his giant clothespins and baseball bats." "Given the perspective of the road, the giant donut first appearing over the horizon of the dashboard, might strike the eye as about the size of a real donut: a pun of perspective. (Patton 160)

The presence of these road signs transformed roadsides into real pop art-scenes. Some businesses also went as far as to turn their own business building into recognizable artifacts such as a cowboy hat, a giant ice cream, which is called by Patton "the tradition of gigantism" (161), and the competition between businesses made the road signs even more extravagant:

The need for differentiation also led to more indirect symbols. When there were two or three ice cream stands with giant cones for signs, a creative owner of a new stand might resort to an abstract sort of expression: the stand shaped like an iceberg or like an ice cream freezer, complete with handle. The next man might have to go to a still more complicated visual/verbal pun: a giant owl, with the vending window in its breast and the explanatory sign: "Hoot hoot, I scream." (Patton 161)

In other words, during these two decades, roads were like outdoor Pop art museums, displaying a lot of colorful, funny and original art works. This period was short-lived because of the discontent of many people saying road signs affected the environment too much, and "[w]ith the liberal attack on the chaos of the roadside in the sixties and the regulation of billboards, road signs began to grow smaller" (Patton 170). But the disappearance of this road-side art did not prevent the American road from keeping its status as a setting for creation.

The road was also a setting for its own personal artistic act: some people considered it to be its own work of art, and it was even compared to sculptures:

Roads are drunk with the principles of perspective. They ignite the vast spaces of the West, offering a vantage point from which to mark and appreciate the recession of desert, plain and prairie. Approaching the city, they convert its towers into sculpture provided for the exhilaration of the driver.

In design, they offer a virtual parody of form following function: their shapes are drawn by the physics of motion. The curves of their structure describe the curves of their use. They are classic modern architecture, dedicated to the beauties of steel and concrete. (Patton 15)

Roads put everything around them on a pedestal, they framed the landscape and cityscape, in a way that they created a real setting where everything had its place, where things were more interesting to see, where they were more valuable to the eye. The fact that they turned everything into art made them similar to a stage; they revealed artistic potential.

2. A means to an artistic end

American artists rapidly took advantage of the road and of the freedom and ease of movement it allowed them. It became not only a subject, a source of inspiration, a setting, or a new American place and attribute, but also a means for producing art, a way to come and go, leading to artistic achievements and developments, as well as to get closer to landscapes or people, which enabled artists to feed on diversity. It was, for instance, easier for musicians to tour since they could travel faster and the road network was expanded and more connected than ever³⁸. Movement was used as an important tool in artistic production, and also distribution.

In photography, the best example we could mention is Robert Frank's work, and mostly his project *The Americans*. Born in Zurich, Switzerland, Frank moved to the United States in 1947³⁹, and was sent on a road trip in 1956 by the Guggenheim Foundation⁴⁰. During his road trip around America, he took approximately 27,000 photographs, 83 of which were selected to make *The Americans*; the first edition was published in France in 1958, and the second one in the United States one year later. His work was even more engraved in road culture as it was Jack Kerouac who wrote the preface of the 1959 English edition. In the first draft⁴¹, he writes:

That crazy feeling in America when the sun is hot on the streets and music comes out of the jukebox or from a nearby funeral, that's what Robert Frank has captured in the tremendous photographs taken as he traveled on the road around practically 48 states in an old used car (on Guggenheim Fellowship) and with the agility, mystery, genius, sadness, and strange secrecy of a shadow photographed scenes that have never been seen before on film.

In addition to taking pictures of strangers he met on the road, Frank also became an important street photographer and took numerous photos using cars and the road itself, as a setting, playing with its straight white line and perspective.

38 As can be seen in the movie *Green Book* (2018).

39 He settled in New York City.

40 He received a scholarship to fund his American project (from the Guggenheim Foundation).

41 Scan of the original document available at legacy.npr.org/news/graphics/2009/feb/robertfrankintro.html. (Accessed 18 May 2021.)



Illustration 15: “U.S. 285, New Mexico,” Robert Frank, *The Americans* (1958)

Thanks to *The Americans* and his one-year-long trip on American highways and roads, Frank became famous, and is still recognized today as one of the most important photographers of the twentieth century.

The road was important as well in the literary work of Steinbeck, but in a way that was different from Frank’s. The former, who wrote about America, found he did not really know the country that well. The author decided that the best way to change that was to travel around America, so, in 1960, he packed his things and embarked on a road trip with his dog Charley. He wanted to meet the people he wrote about, see the places he set his stories in, and, overall, get a better understanding of his subject. *Travels With Charley: In Search of America* is the title he gave to his 1962 travelogue which told the story of his road trip, on board of his camper named *Rocinante*⁴². In the first chapter of the book, he explains his motivation for going on the road:

My plan was clear, concise, and reasonable, I think. For many years I have traveled in many parts of the world. In America I live in New York, or dip into Chicago or San Francisco. But New York is no more America than Paris is France or London is England. Thus I discovered that I did not know my own country. I, an American writer, writing about America, was working from memory, and the memory is at best a faulty, warpy reservoir. I had not heard the speech of America, smelled the grass and trees and sewage, seen its hills and water, its color and quality of light. I knew the changes only from books and newspapers. But more than this, I had not felt the country for twenty-five years. In short, I was writing of something I did not know about, and it seems to me that in a so-called writer this is criminal. My memories were distorted by twenty-five intervening years. (5)

42 In reference to Don Quixote’s horse.

In other words, the road was a means for him to (re)discover, in order to better create, and to, later on, feed on his experience and memories to write. He then explains: “So it was that I determined to look again, to try to rediscover this monster land. Otherwise, in writing, I could not tell the small diagnostic truths which are the foundations of the larger truth” (6): his road trip enabled him to get closer to the “real” America.

Apart from Frank and Steinbeck’s road trips, it was probably in the artistic movement of the Florida Highwaymen that the road was most used in the creative process. This painting movement was born in the 1950s and ended up consisting of 26 African American artists; 25 men and one woman named Mary Ann Carroll⁴³. They painted very colorful pictures of Florida landscapes⁴⁴, often in a few hours and with cheap medium, as their aim was to make money to earn a living (“Florida Highwaymen”). The movement was based in and around Fort Pierce, Florida. Because of segregation and the Jim Crow Laws, museums and galleries would not take the Highwaymen’s artworks, meaning that they had to find another way to share their works, and mostly sell them. Consequently, they decided to sell their paintings from the back of their cars and trucks to passing motorists, locals, tourists, and travelers of all sorts (Valentine). It was not unusual, then, for drivers, to see these artists’s vehicles on Highway 1 and A1A, selling paintings, some of them still fresh.

Al “Blood” Black met with the Highwaymen in the 1960s when he asked to be their seller. He turned out to be extremely good at it; he packed the paintings into the back of his Cadillac and drove hundreds of miles to sell them. In an interview⁴⁵ he explains: “I would sell to anybody, from motels to doctors and lawyers, [...] [w]hoever I came across, I would try to get them to buy. Nobody was as good as me at selling. I could sell ice in Alaska” (Balogh). Later on, he learned to paint⁴⁶ and became one of the Florida Highwaymen.

43 Other members joined later on, but the main group and founders were the following 26 original members: Mary Ann Carroll, Curtis Arnett, Hezekiah Baker, Al “Blood” Black, Ellis Buckner, George Buckner, Robert Butler, Johnny Daniels, Willie Daniels, Rodney Demps, James Gibson, Alfred Hair, Isaac Knight, Robert Lewis, John Maynor, Roy McLendon, Alfonso Moran, Sam, Lemuel and Harold Newton, Willie Reagan, Livingston Roberts, Cornell Smith, Charles Walker, Sylvester Wells and Charles “Chico” Wheeler.

44 Annex 11.

45 Online at www.orlandoweekly.com/orlando/artist-on-the-outside/Content?oid=2246546. (Accessed 7 May 2021.)

46 When selling for the Highwaymen, he often found some of their paintings had been damaged in the back of his car, which led him to fix them before selling them. This was how he learned to paint and became an artist himself (Balogh).

In other words, the road and the artists's vehicles were used for three major things. Firstly, to go from one place to the next where they would settle for a few hours and paint (landscapes, in nature, often close to rivers). Secondly, they served to store and sell their paintings to passing drivers along highways and other smaller roads, and, thirdly, to go from door to door in order to try and sell their works. As a conclusion, the road and cars were at the core of this artistic movement, and were used as means to their ends. It could also be added that the presence and use of the road was a way for them, as African Americans, to go against the Jim Crow Laws and segregation which prevented them from participating in the country's artistic institutions, museums, galleries, and other cultural centers ("Florida Highwaymen"). This did not prevent them from being successful, as they are often called today the Last Great American Artistic Movement of the Twentieth Century. Despite the barrages of segregation and racism, they still managed to make their way through the artistic world, and have been, since 2006, part of the Florida Artists Hall of Fame ("Living Color").

3. Inclusion and what it says about American identity

To summarize the process of integration mentioned in the last parts, we may say that the presence of the road and of its culture in the arts of the period was influential, multidisciplinary, and exponential. There had, of course, been photos taken of this place before, as well as paintings focusing on roadsides (such as Edward Hopper's, for instance), or even road movies (like *Sullivan's Travels*⁴⁷), but it was not until the 1950s that a distinct road culture was frankly built. This culture was accompanied by a proliferation of artistic creations mentioning, using, staging, and studying the road and the experience it could offer, as well as the meanings it could deliver.

We may wonder what this imposing presence and growing inclusion of the road into the American cultural and artistic field meant regarding the country's identity. It showed, first, how Americans moved to different lifestyles and interests, slowly turning towards roads, cars, or motorcycles. The twentieth century saw them leave older modes of transportation behind (such as the steam engine boat, or the railroad and train). With the multiplication of the construction of roads in the 1950s on – with the example of the Interstate Highway System – the road became a symbol of progress and a sign of modernity. Adding this modern element to the arts could have been a way for artists to represent and symbolize evolution, technical progress, and changes in the perception and habits of movement. They consequently pictured America as a country on the move, turned towards development and new technology. This showed, therefore, a break with a slower, less personal, and older past that was not artistically inspiring and could be perceived as “too old-school.”

The arts were also important in the expression and transition of road culture, as they convinced Americans to identify with it:

Archetypes and stereotypes are also relevant because of their widespread popularization; people believe in them and adopt them even when they carry a mixture of fact, fiction, distortion and exaggeration. [...] People identify themselves, and others, through precise symbols taking the form of countless imagery found in iconography, popular songs and sayings, to mention a few. (Dieckhoff and Gutiérrez 13-14)

47 *Sullivan's Travels*. Directed by Preston Sturges, Paramount Pictures, 29 Dec. 1941.

In other words, photography, painting, music, and literature participated in the creation of an imagery that helped people identify themselves regarding the road and the customs that went with it. In conclusion, they enabled the creation of an identity landmark.

Historically speaking, this inclusion was sudden as it only took a couple of decades for road culture to impose itself in the American visual arts, music, literature, and society. American arts did not escape from the country's immediate obsession with roads and cars. The fact that artists represented the road and, sometimes, reshaped and revisited it, could be understood as a certain wish from them to share and immortalize this place, as well as the feelings and experiences that went with it. The American artists who focused on road elements (such as Ed Ruscha's study of parking lots) convey a certain fascination close to adoration, which is in line with the image of the country's devotion to this modern transportation method. If the road was so often mentioned, it was because there were things to say about it. It was also, maybe, a way for American artists to contribute to this new culture Americans loved. The road was also included for its practical presence, of course, such as in Kerouac's *On the Road*, for it is the major means that enables the free spirit of his characters – and of his story as a whole – to express themselves. In that sense, the road was also used strategically as a springboard by artists to enhance and highlight what they wanted to show.

Overall, routes and their culture were rich with the possibility of creating and expressing different artistic discourses. By including them in their works, painters, photographers, authors, film-makers, and song-writers participated in road culture and in its expansion. In other words, they enriched and expanded this culture by feeding on its central piece: the road. From that perspective, we may almost imagine that highways, freeways, and interstates imposed themselves on the works of artists and manipulated them into highlighting and emphasizing their own presence. Overall, we understand that the inclusion of the road into the arts goes beyond the fact that it was an interesting place with an artistic potential and inspiring metaphors and meanings.

Robert Frank's *The Americans* is also revealing in terms of art and identity. The fact that the photographer selected so many pictures of the road or in relation to it, to add them to his artist book is interesting, as his work was supposed to represent America. His portrayal of the American people, country, identity, society, lifestyle, and culture can almost constantly be brought back to elements from the road and cars. The 83

photographs of his book are windows through the past that enable us to visualize and highlight the centrality of the road in America at the time. Frank's work is even more interesting as he is not American but Swiss. His point of view and construction of American identity are, therefore, based on his European vision. Through beholding this external perspective of a European trying to identify America through his art, we are able to approach another depiction of American identity, once again closely tied to road culture.

C – The road today and what remains of these two decades

The road culture of the 1950s and 1960s never really disappeared with time; on the contrary, it even remains extremely present, popular, and fashionable in today's America. The road trip as a form of leisure is making a come back, and the road is still a very valuable American feature. Artistically and socially speaking, this place also still appears to have a lot to offer.

1. Road trip culture: re-emergence of the phenomenon

There seems to have been, for the past two decades now, a real re-emergence of these particular times regarding road culture, and a renewed fascination for road tripping in the style of the mid-twentieth century.

This re-emergence can partly be understood thanks to the development of social media and the important influencing culture that comes from it. During the last ten years, traveling has become extremely trendy and attractive, and the American road trip seems to be at the top of everyone's list. An immense number of travel blogs, vlogs⁴⁸, posts, and pictures can be found online about the experiences of people who crossed the country in this old-fashioned way. On Instagram⁴⁹, for example, the hashtag "route66" alone reached more than 1.8 million shares in May 2021. In the same month, the hashtag "Roadtrip" reached 58,6 million shares, which is 21,6 million more times than in 2018⁵⁰. The hashtag "usroadtrip" is also evolving at an interesting pace; it reached 101,000 uses in March 2021 and 103,000 in May of the same year⁵¹. These numbers alone show the growing and important number of people posting about road trips, which often coincides either to the sharing of road trip culture aesthetic, or the sharing of their own experience on the road. Either way, people's interest in this kind of traveling is growing more and more every day. A bonus point can also be added to the travelers who really decided to revive the

48 Vlogs are videos about the daily life of people, filmed and commented by themselves.

49 2010 social media, downloaded by more than a billion people worldwide, one of the most used social media platforms. It enables people to post photos and videos with or without captions, hashtags, locations, and other options.

50 Hashtag use reached 37 million in 2018 (Harpaz).

51 All numbers collected by me, from my own research on Instagram.

1960s era by traveling in a converted Volkswagen Van (about 47.4,000 publications on the hashtag “volkswagenvan” in April 2021, very often accompanied by the hashtags mentioned above).

The number of people actually going on the road is also evolving, and can be considered when studying the expenses this travel mode entails. The 2017-2018 “Portrait of American Travelers Study” by MMGY Global⁵² showed that about 66.6 billion dollars had been spent on road trips in 2015, and 113.7 billion dollars only a year later (Blount), which means that the expenses almost doubled.

In terms of traveling habits, another MMGY Global survey has shown that 51 percent of American travelers went on a road trip in 2017, which is 5 percent more than the year before (46 percent in 2016) (MMGY Global 14:50-15:00). Moreover, 60 percent of travelers said they were going to go on a road trip in the months following the survey (15:00-15:12), which shows that the number is still on the rise.

It is, therefore, an evidence that Americans are turning back to the road so as to travel and find leisure, but why? Well, there are multiple reasons. First, road trips are sometimes less expensive than other methods of transportation. More importantly, they offer more freedom, the ability to stop whenever one wants, and to go wherever one likes, which continues to be greatly cherished. Road tripping is also very appreciated because of how pleasurable it is (Harpaz). Some Americans also decide to “hit the road” out of curiosity, in order to meet new people, connect with areas they have never been to, and understand the cultural and social gap between certain regions of the country. The feeling of escape offered by the road is also very attractive to many Americans wishing to take a break from their everyday life and environment. People going on road trips nowadays are mostly millennials, driven by the nostalgia of the past road trips of their childhood. Nostalgia is, actually, the major motivator for people traveling by car on U.S. highways for leisure:

For some, nostalgia is a motivator. All these years after Jack Kerouac’s 1957 novel *On the Road*, the post-World War II Detroit auto industry boom, the AAA TripTik guides, and even the Model T Ford bringing visitors to national parks for the first time in the 1910s, the American road trip — which we’ll define broadly as any driving vacation that includes multiple stops — runs deep in travelers’ hearts. The enduring appeal of the open highway, with the freedom and serendipity that car travel allows, is still a draw. (Enelow-Snyder)

52 “[...] marketing company specializing in the travel, tourism and hospitality industry” (“MMGY Travel Tourism”) also doing research about tourism and traveling habits.

Finally, the car has also been a preferred mode of transportation since 9/11 because of its individuality, the private space it offers, and the safety it ensures (Enelow-Snyder). Since 2020, it is also possible to assume that road trips are and will become more and more fashionable because of the pandemic. It, indeed, enables people to travel while keeping their distance from others. The borders of different countries being closed might also bring people back to domestic traveling.

The return of this old traveling habit also makes us wonder if the road has become more welcoming and safe for everyone throughout the decades. The answer is mixed. The road remains a dangerous place for some drivers: racial tensions and inequalities continue to put African American drivers in danger sometimes while driving, specifically because of police brutality. Sandra Bland, an African American woman, was arrested in 2015 and threatened at gun point by police officer Brian Encinia simply because of a minor driving fault⁵³. This arrest led to her supposed suicide in prison three days later (Montgomery). Women driving alone may also find it challenging at times; they often end up using safer routes and solutions (such as not driving at night or paying for safer but more expensive places to stay) (Enelow-Snyder) in order to stay and travel safe. The road itself also remains a dangerous place with the number of fatalities still being high (36,096 deaths in 2019, and 2.35 million people injured) (Kopestinsky).

The attraction towards the road and the mid-twentieth century is also embodied by culture, and more specifically cinema and literature. A great number of 21st-century works revolve around road culture and these decades, such as, for example, Peter Farrelly's 2018 award-winning movie *Green Book*. It retraces the story of an African American artist going on tour and on the road in the Southern states, navigating through the 1960s racist atmosphere. The title is an obvious reference to Victor Green's travel book for African Americans published from 1936 to 1966. As another example, we can cite Walter Salles's cinematographic adaptation of Kerouac's *On the Road*, which came out in 2012. Some road novels have also recently come out and been adapted to the big screen, such as *Wild: From Lost to Found on the Pacific Crest Trail*, Cheryl Strayed's memoir of her journey⁵⁴. The

53 The more recent death of Daunte Wright can also be added. The 20-year-old African American was shot on April 11, 2021 by a policeman after having been pulled over "for a traffic violation related to expired registration tags" ("What to Know").

54 Which was adapted into a movie in 2014, entitled *Wild*, directed by Jean-Marc Vallée.

movie *Into the Wild*⁵⁵ can also be mentioned, adapted from Jon Krakauer's 1996 novel of the same title⁵⁶. The road movie *Little Miss Sunshine*⁵⁷ also reminds us of the 1960s with the yellow Volkswagen Transporter. One final example: the Disney Pixar animation films *Cars* (2006) is set on the mythical Route 66 and presents both the road culture and iconic cars of the 1950s and 1960s.

Chloé Zhao's 2020 film *Nomadland* also portrays the lifestyle of Americans going on the road, but her protagonists are more often than not forced to choose this way of life, as the cost of living in a house, for instance, has become too expensive for them. Living in an RV, short term for Recreational Van, is not recreational anymore, but necessary. Living on the road means paying less bills, and it is also essential for these "nomads" to be able to move from one city or state to the next in order to find small jobs. Employment also has a lot to do with the situation, and unemployment is often what brings people to leave everything behind and start a life on the road. The movie also puts an emphasis on the importance of community and friendship, since loneliness can become prevalent for someone always on the move.

Time being an endless circle, it is not surprising to see the road trip make a reappearance today, especially since it is profitable, and because its 1950s and 1960s aesthetic continues more generally to attract plenty of travelers.

55 Directed by Sean Penn. Date of release: 2008.

56 Some other works may be cited, such as the *Fast and Furious* Saga.

57 Directed by Valerie Faris and Jonathan Dayton. Date of release: 2006.

2. Relationship between contemporary arts and the road

“Joyrides, voyages of discovery, surveys, wanderings, migrations, polemics, travel diaries, and assessments of the nation. Is America even imaginable without the road trip?”⁵⁸

Despite having been explored and exploited in many different artistic ways throughout the decades, the road remains attractive to artists today; there still seems to be some artistic juice to extract from it, and artists continue to be inspired by its curves, intrigued by its place in the American landscape, and interested in the potential meanings and representations it can carry. Roads defy time as they never seem to go out of fashion.

Echoes from the 1950s and 1960s and road photography can still be found in today’s photography work. An example of that would be *Postcards from the Road*, a photography book by Jonathan Day, published in 2014. It was largely influenced by Robert Frank’s *The Americans* and is an example of the influence Frank’s work still has on today’s road photography:

These photographs were taken in America, over a period of years and perhaps 20,000 miles of road. They react to Frank’s originals, sometimes taken in the same place, but mostly not. He was searching for moments, things which caught his eye, ways of talking about the world. I knew I wasn’t going to find them in the same places—although I did, actually, once or twice. I thought about his messages, glass bottled and arcane, and how time has changed things—looked for the impressions he and the Beats made, or at their absence, the negative American space where they used to stand. (Day 8)

The artist’s aim was to paint a portrait of today’s America (and Americans) while following Frank’s footsteps in terms of places, ideas, and goal. It seems people are not ready to let go of photographers from the 1950s and 1960s yet. A new edition⁵⁹ of a collection of photographs taken on the road by Robert Adams was also re-edited two years ago. It includes his black and white photos of the open road, its infinite blackness cutting landscapes in half, shaping cities, and its turns and curves criss-crossing the American countryside and nature. This revival of older works about the road may be a way for an

58 Quote by David Company from an anthology of photographs taken on the road, published by Aperture in 2014. The anthology by author Company retraces the history of road photography over the last hundred years and is entitled *The Open Road: Photography & the American Road Trip*.

59 *Robert Adams: 27 Roads*, published in 2018 by Fraenkel Gallery (San Francisco, California) after an exhibition of the same title.

older generation to cope with nostalgia, and to look back at a distant past they cherish and romanticize. It surely portrays the eternal influence of the road on American art and culture.

However, in terms of ideology, these works carry with them a conservative aftertaste, a feeling of oldness in need of renewal and revisiting. As decades go by, ideas and mentalities evolve, old ways are challenged and put aside. Artists never fail to immortalize these changes in society, like Justine Kurland's⁶⁰ photography work does. She went on the road like many before her and took pictures of what she saw, but with a different stance; her aim was to defy the former myths of the road that had been so often praised and presented by other artists. To do so, she played with the iconography of the road and placed women at the center of her work, making them replace cow-boys, Beat characters, outlaws, turning this masculine place into a feminine one. "I staged the girls as a standing army of teenaged runaways in resistance to patriarchal ideals," she explains⁶¹. By including women she decided to challenge the traditional narrative of the road, breaking the repeated scheme of men going on manly road trips like pioneers on their way to the West. By doing so, she turned the road into a scene in favor of feminist expression, she empowered women, and gave the road trip a new figure and aim; the fight against patriarchy and societal norms.

Today's road photography also includes new challenges in terms of means and perspectives. Contemporary photographer Peter Andrew Lusztyk⁶² decided to add another point of view to road photography by taking his pictures from the sky⁶³, staging highways and playing with their form the way a painter would with the lines under his brush.

60 Justine Kurland is an American photographer born in 1969 and currently based in New York City. She travels across the country to take photographs and used to live in her van. She, like Frank, used the road as a means, a subject and a setting for her work, but she also focused on the spiritual aspect of it. She explores while taking pictures, documents and stages what and who she meets, women being central to her work. *Highway Kind*, published the first time by Aperture in 2016, is one of her most recent works of road photography.

61 As quoted on the reference website (aperture.org/new-and-noteworthy/justine-kurland-girl-pictures/. (Accessed 10 Dec. 2020.)) as on multiple others.

62 Freelance photographer since 2009 from Canada, born in 1982. Despite being based in Canada, his work on highway interchanges include a lot of photographs taken in America. (As found on his professional website www.peterandrew.ca/about. (Accessed 31 Dec. 2020.))

63 Annex 12.



*Illustration 16: “Black Canyon Freeway/HWY 101 Interchange in Phoenix, Arizona,”
by Peter Andrew Lusztyk*

He explained in the article “Aerial Freeway Photos Give Engineers Their Due as Geometric Artists” that his idea is that “[i]t’s not until you look at them from the air that you see that there is this engineered, moving system that’s really creative and quite beautiful” (Schiller). He manages to find and represent beauty where some might only see roadside constructions, industrial landscape, and where grayness and the ordinary dominate. “Photography for me is the process of turning ordinary or overlooked things into something that causes you to pause and examine and make your eyes explode because it’s so incredibly beautiful,” he explains⁶⁴. His work, unlike Frank’s, does not focus on the individual on the road, or the adventures experienced along the way. It centers more around the road’s shapes and patterns. He stages his pictures and they are taken so far up that it often takes some time for the spectator to tell these multiple tangled lines are actual highways. At first glance, his photographs look like an abstract and geometrically pleasant work of art. His work implies that you sometimes need to take a step back to understand a place, and that having the whole picture enables beauty to express itself. It also contradicts the myth of the straight infinite American road, and introduces a raw portrayal of roads as autonomous entities, partly independent from human presence.

Photographers are not the only ones still finding interest in representing the American road. In contemporary painting, the road also remains a subject, a setting, and a

64 As found on his professional website www.peterandrew.ca/about. (Accessed 31 Dec. 2020.)

source of inspiration. Jim Holland's⁶⁵ American landscape paintings very often include roads⁶⁶. To him, they seem to be part of the landscape just as much as nature. His art introduces a harmonious relationship between roads and the wilderness, they adapt themselves to the presence of the other, creating what almost looks like an inseparable bond. Holland explains that he finds a lot of artistic and representational potential in roads:

I find roads to be an interesting element in representational art. They can signify curiosity, movement and longing. I find them similar to windows and doors which I also use frequently in my paintings. My paintings rarely have people in them, so these motifs act as a portal for the viewer, pulling them into the composition or, in some cases, suggesting an incomplete narrative that they can add to. (personal e-mail interview)

This “incomplete narrative” evoked by the presence of roads is probably what has always attracted artists and stimulated their imagination; the possibility of projecting on roads any character, any story, any feeling they like. The road is a place of freedom and endless possibilities when it comes to art, creativity, representation, and story-telling.

Roads are also interesting to study in the work of Thierry Lefort. As a French painter, his point of view on American identity and visual representation is external like Robert Frank's. His website⁶⁷ offers an insight into his work, and has a category of paintings titled “California.” Most of the paintings presented there, inspired by his experience and observation of this American state, portray roads, streets, and often cars. Because of his French origin, we understand that, as a foreigner, his depiction of America relies on road culture, which springs from his works.

Singer Lana Del Rey also took advantage of this freedom by projecting her own story on the open road, and, by portraying herself as the new face of the American biker – a feminine one this time – she enters the grand narrative of Americans on the road. In her 2012 song and music video “Ride”⁶⁸ she is presented as a free woman, following her desires along the road in the company of older male⁶⁹ bikers. She is seen at the back of a motorcycle, raising her hands in the air, her hair flying with the wind. She is the perfect

65 American painter, born in 1955, most famous for his pictures of rural America, landscapes, and houses inside and out.

66 Annex 13.

67 Available at www.thierylefort.com/. (Accessed 11 May 2021)

68 www.youtube.com/watch?v=Py_-3diiyx0&ab_channel=LanaDelReyVEVO. (Accessed 15 Jan. 2021.)

69 Two other women appear in the music video, one only towards the end, and the other every time Lana and the other bikers are seen riding on the road.

personification of liberty. A few shots also show her wrapped in an American flag. The video starts and ends with a speech, added to the song. In the end, we can hear her say: “every night I used to pray that I’d find my people, and I finally did, on the open road.” She implies that the road has given her a community to which she feels she belongs, and some people to call friends and family. She also adds about them that they “had nothing to lose, nothing to gain” and that their aim in living and driving was simply to make their lives “a work of art.” Her words are the expression of a certain destiny, a simple yet beautiful life, where freedom enabled by the road is the only thing that matters, and she brings this free life to art. Lana Del Rey also states that she believes in the “the old country America used to be,” her words resonating with the past of the Open Road she clearly glamorizes and adopts as a way of life as much as an aesthetic and character trait of her entire persona. Being on the road is not only a question of place, it is also a question of personality; it is *where* she is but mostly *who* she is. Some of the images shot for her music video are either representations of freedom, or landscapes of the West, reminding us once more of the pioneer experience and the American Frontier. Lana is the new female version of the cowboy, riding bikes instead of horses.

Despite her attachment and references to “the old country America used to be,” the face she shows is a renewed one, bringing women forward, making them, like Justine Kurland did, central to this new myth of the American road trip. This vision she communicates is an interesting paradox as it presents a contradictory merging of the old and the new. What this duality really tells us is that the old tale of the American Road is evolving, whether we like it or not.

Will artists ever get tired of the American road? It seems unlikely, as the place holds perfect potential for creativity. Roads are so malleable and so adjustable to any story and energy that they will always be a great artistic medium. Even the myth on the road, which could have become slightly repetitive and redundant by now, is actually still greatly appreciated, as we will see in the following part.

3. Nostalgia: tourism and the return of old customs

As mentioned before, nostalgia remains one of the major reasons why Americans decide to “hit the road.” With time, the road culture of the 1950s and 1960s, with its movies, art, books, songs, the lifestyle it inspires, and the businesses it helped create, became largely iconic and missed by many. This strong feeling of wanting to return to a better, idealized and romanticized period is shared by many Americans, and, as surprising as it is, is also felt by those who did not live during that period, as well as by some people who are not from the United States at all.

The most representative aspect and embodiment of this nostalgia can mostly be observed when studying tourism and current American touristic habits and interests. Some famous highways, such as Route 66 or Lincoln’s Highway, have become extremely famous destinations and attractions. People are fascinated by the simple idea of driving down these mythical roads, joining a sort of historical, cultural, and identity-related pilgrimage, following in the footsteps of their favorite heroes, immersing themselves in the settings of their favorite road movies, or simply following what seems to be an American ritual.

These old roads still carry with them everything they embodied in the past, from freedom to the American dream, elements that have now been added to the myth they have become because of their place in the American cultural world and in the country’s identity as a whole; these are probably the reasons why they continue to attract so many people. They lie there, in the middle of the great American landscape, as testimonies of the past, and work as time-traveling machines. A study conducted by The State University of New Jersey (Listokin et. al. 21) showed that people traveling down Route 66 for leisure were actually looking for a 1950s – 1960s feel and experience, wanting to drive old cars, listen to music from that period, stay in hotels with neon signs and eat in diners. The impact of the Mother Road is so important that it even continues overseas, with the example of Scotland’s North Coast 500 which was renamed “Scotland’s Answer to Route 66”⁷⁰ in order to attract people and make a strong comparison and competition with the world’s most famous road.

⁷⁰ As is advertised, for instance, on www.invernesspalacehotel.co.uk/blog/the-north-coast-500-scotlands-answer-to-route-66/#:~:text=North%20Coast%20500%2C%20begins%20and. (Accessed 19 Apr. 2021.)

Mythical roads did not really change, but drivers did. First, they travel mostly for leisure (these highways having been replaced by more recent ones overtime). Not many drivers dedicate their lives to the road and its lifestyle like Beat characters or wild bikers did (except those who are financially forced to do so). The road has become a place for temporary escape, cultural enrichment, American and historical experience, and the pleasure of driving.

Apart from the old network of highways itself, a long list of attractions can be visited and enjoyed by tourists. There are, for example, a great number of route festivals around the United States such as *Route 91 Harvest Festival*⁷¹, *The Mother Road Festival*, the *Annual Texas Route Festival*, the *Route 66 Days and Nights Festival*, the *Rendezvous Festival* (Listokin et al. 23; 35; 38; 49), or Lincoln Highways' Heritage Festival, among multiple others. These venues have a very high attendance rate; in 2009, for instance, the *Rendezvous Festival*, set in San Bernardino, California, gathered about half a million people. *The Mother Road Festival* is also impressive as it gathers

[...] nearly 80,000 visitors and 1,000 classic cars on display, [and] is one of the biggest car shows in the Midwestern United States. The event combines classic car culture, Route 66, and the historic downtown (Springfield) Main Street themes. (23)

Overall, “[t]hese attendees pump an estimated \$1 million into the local economy” (50). The celebrations during these festivals are often organized around live music, car fairs, walks, parades, exhibits, and other activities meant to honor and celebrate the road as a monument of U.S. history and culture. A website⁷² offering a virtual tour of America's Main Street even exists, taking visitors to the most iconic auto repair shops, stores, cafes, tourist camp, gas stations, motels, and restaurants along the way.

Because of these events, road tourism has become extremely profitable for the country. Organized tours but also museums and other cultural activities also participate in this phenomenon:

Rutgers University researchers, working with a small panel of nationally recognized Route 66 experts, identified approximately 450 museums, cultural institutions, and related organizations/sites that were located on or near Route 66 and that were deemed likely to be of interest to Route 66 travelers. (27)

71 Country music festival near Las Vegas. This festival was short-lived as the third edition had to be evacuated because of a mass shooting (Hoffman). There has been no other edition since.

72 [Maps.springfieldmo.gov/rt66/](https://maps.springfieldmo.gov/rt66/). (Accessed 17 May 2021.)

Travelers on Route 66 alone spend about 38 million dollars annually (9). An unimaginable amount of merchandise has also been derived from America's road culture, Road 66 even having its own official online store where one can buy tee-shirts, key chains, and other kinds of souvenirs or fantasies⁷³. The economy surrounding Route 66 profits locals as it creates jobs and businesses, but it also is a great source of income for the states it crosses, and the overall national economy:

When multiplier effects are taken into account from the \$132 million annual Route 66 investment, the total annual impacts to the nation include a net economic gain of 2,401 jobs, \$90 million in income, \$262 million in overall output, \$127 million in Gross Domestic Product (GDP), and \$37 million in tax revenues [...] On an annual basis, the in-state effects to the eight Route 66 states [...] include 1,741 jobs, \$62 million in income, \$173 million in output, \$87 million in gross state product (GSP), and \$27 million in taxes (\$16.5 million federal and \$10.2 million state or local). The net in-state wealth added to the economy is roughly \$79 million annually (\$86.9 million GSP added minus \$8.2 million in indirect business federal taxes). (12)

In conclusion, road tourism is extremely valuable as it is very lucrative. This is also why so the government invests into preservation programs (8), and why so many businesses, festivals, and cultural establishments located along historical roads tend to thrive.

The American nostalgia of the road trip was also, in a way, carried by globalization and capitalism (and Americanization), as it arrived in Europe. We mentioned, first, the renaming of Scotland's most scenic route, but that is not all. The one example we can mention is the roadside restaurant. These eating places have been thriving in America but also all over the world. In France, for instance, one can have a meal at *Roadside* restaurant, or at *Happy Days Diner*. These two franchises are popular mostly among young people, and mostly present in cities. The inside of these restaurants are often full of 1950s and 1960s (but also 1970s) road culture references, from pictures and figurines of old cars, to road movie posters and photos of rock singers and musicians such as Elvis Presley. In addition to serving typical American food (mostly burgers and milkshakes), the music played in these restaurants is very often playlists of songs from the 1950s and 1960s. Moreover, the insides of these places reproduce the aesthetic of the old iconic American diners and of the

73 [Rjsroute66.com/store/](https://rjsroute66.com/store/). (Accessed 16 May 2021.)

1950s and 1960s culture in general (typical colorful diner seats, jukeboxes, fake decorative gas pumps, luminous neon, car plates)⁷⁴. The presence of such places in other countries exemplifies America’s soft power.

Finally, the road culture of the middle of the last century was also brought back today, not because of nostalgia or because of its aesthetic, but because it was deemed useful and enabled people to find answers to today’s issues. Because of the COVID-19 epidemic, people’s habits and lives have been turned upside down, and some nostalgia-related activities were revived. There has been examples of drive-in movie nights being set-up, such as in Solano, California (Brandon), because they enabled people to go out, have fun, watch a movie, and still keep their distance from one another and keep themselves safe from contracting and passing the virus to others. This phenomenon has been observed in the United States, but also in other countries such as Germany (“Germany: Drive-In Cinemas”). Otherwise, some drive-in vaccination campaigns have also been launched, which consisted of people queuing in their cars and being vaccinated while staying in their vehicles (Park). More surprisingly, Joe Biden used cars as a way to organize drive-in rallies for his 2020 presidential campaign, making it a safe solution for his followers to gather and attend his campaign meetings during the pandemic (“Joe Biden Hosts”).



Illustration 17: Joe Biden attending one of his drive-in rallies in Atlanta, Georgia, on October 27, 2020 (REUTERS/Brian Snyder)

74 All of these characteristics of the restaurants mentioned have been observed by me.

As a conclusion, today's world is both obsessed by and attracted to the road culture of the 1950s and 1960s. It may even be that these concepts and ideas from the past actually help us deal with the present and the challenges that came with the COVID-19 epidemic. The fact that this culture is making a return as a source of solution for contemporary issues is a new reason why it is not yet ready to disappear.

CONCLUSION

*“It begins here for me on this road. [...] This is where it begins for me, right on this road.”*⁷⁵

It might have become clear by now that the American road was never just a place. The Americans are known to be a restless people, glorifying movement, considering it as sacred and essential. It is, therefore, not surprising for the road, as a place synonym of transportation, to have taken up such an important place in this country. At the beginning of the twentieth century, roads started to become longer and better suited for motorized vehicles. In the 1950s and 1960s, the highway and interstate network was bettered and considerably extended. In parallel, cars gained in popularity, and vehicle sales grew exponentially. Roads and cars, like twins, were closely connected, and it was natural and inevitable for them to be included into the society of a country so obsessed with movement.

The road rapidly became an American place and attribute by excellence. The 1950s and 1960s saw the emergence of a defined road culture that shaped the lifestyle of the American people. In terms of identity, it enabled more citizens to travel and self-reflect, and led to the popular practice of the road trip. The road became a place for adventure, a means to connect with one’s self again, and to embark on a rich and fascinating personal quest. Road culture was also at the core of the development of teenage identity and was closely linked to teenage culture, the car being used as a symbol, as an emancipation tool, and as an intimate place. Whether it be for adults or teenagers, cars became a must-have accessory. At the time, the idea of the road as a synonym of adventure grew, and it also brought back old values which consistently persisted in the American mind, such as the West, the Frontier, the pioneer experience, or the need to explore and always push further.

The country evidently ended up benefiting from this new feature and culture, as an entire economy based itself on cars and road culture, expanding more and more as years went by. These were the young years of the drive-in restaurants and movies, and of the increasing number of motels and other roadside businesses. The sudden multiplication of

75 Segments of the introductory speech of the movie *The Wild One* (1953), given by the main character Johnny.

these new buildings along roads accompanied routes in their changing and reshaping of the American landscape.

It is crucial to remember that, despite its practicality and embodiment of attractive concepts, such as freedom or exploration, the road had its damaging sides. As a major and almost brutal addition to the land and territory, it modified rural but also urban landscapes, blindly damaging ecosystems, and was remorselessly used as a tool to destroy neighborhoods. Moreover, we must not forget that everything the road embodied was only accessible to a certain category of Americans, that is to say white men. African Americans were not safe from racism and discrimination when driving, and women were a minority on the country's routes. The romanticized road culture and myth that traveled the centuries and reached us is to be dealt with carefully, and approached with distance and a sense of criticism.

This thesis also linked America's identity to its culture, by emphasizing the role of artists and their works in the process of the construction of identity. By trying to comprehend how the road was considered and used by artists, we managed to grasp the idea that its definition was plural and versatile. The arts of the 1950s and 1960s crafted the vision of the road as a setting, of course, but also as a character, sometimes a feminine one, or, more often than not, a central one. Artists also benefited from the road by using it as a means enabling them to create as it made movement easier.

Overall, the major artists to keep in mind when mentioning the impact of the road on American culture during these two decades would probably be, first, the photographer Robert Frank, with his important 1958 work *The Americans*. Secondly, the author Jack Kerouac and his novel *On the Road*, for its representation of life on the road and its depiction of the cultural Beat movement of the time. Allan D'Arcangelo's pop artworks are also worth remembering as the road was his main subject of study and source of inspiration. Finally, the movement of the Florida Highwaymen was also important as they used the road not as a subject or setting, but as a means enabling them to sell their paintings.

We have seen, thanks to the use of different sources, that culture and the arts adopted and included the road, and tried to seize it and make it theirs. But, after reading

this paper, would it not be more accurate to say that, on all levels, it was the road that took over the country and made it its own play-field? As we have seen, it monopolized and interfered with every aspect of American identity, and the country continues, even today, to hold cars and roads to a high esteem. As the cradle of this popular road culture, America – and the rest of the Western world – continue to look back on this glorified past.

It seems like Americans managed to find in the road what they were looking for. They projected on this modern human-made place their fantasies, used it to achieve their goals, shaped it to answer their personal and artistic desires, took advantage of it on a daily basis, and fed on it to respond to their artistic needs. The imprint left by road culture on American society and culture at the time ran so deep that its presence is still echoed today, and continues to inspire people. On a larger scale, this road culture participated to the shaping of a new American face and era; the American Century. The country's identity was altered on many levels, and the addition of roads to the equation symbolized not only movement, but also evolution, connection, speed, power, and progress. It also re-established old cherished values, and, overall, provided America with a promising network and resourceful market.

The road and car culture became true markers of identity. As soon as cars started becoming considerably present throughout the territory, America reshaped itself to correspond to its new addition, to answer its needs. In a short period of time, starting in the 1950s, roads and cars became hegemonic.

It is difficult to imagine that the road and cars could ever be replaced in a near American future, like the railroad was. Planes, for instance, did not manage to seduce Americans the way cars did. The road's anchorage in the country is remarkable, so much so, that, the country is now dependent on its iconic place and the vehicles that come with it. But some changes might be on the way, as cars and roads raise environmental and climate change issues. Only time will tell. In the meantime, “[t]here [is] nowhere to go but everywhere, so just keep on rolling under the stars.”⁷⁶

76 Original quote: “Although Gene was white there was something of the wise and tired old Negro in him, and something very much like Elmer Hassel, the New York dope addict, in him, but a railroad Hassel, a traveling epic Hassel, crossing and recrossing the country every year, south in the winter and north in the summer, and only because he had no place he could stay in without getting tired of it and because there was nowhere to go but everywhere, keep rolling under the stars, generally the Western stars.” (Kerouac

ANNEXES

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1. Photo of *Further*, the Merry Pranksters's bus⁷⁷



2. Screenshot from the first scene of *The Wild One*⁷⁸



77 Taken from www.theguardian.com/books/2018/may/17/road-trip-how-tom-wolfes-acid-test-changed-the-way-we-see-the-world.

78 Taken from www.youtube.com/watch?v=8ecd8VJJIY&t=41s&ab_channel=danielsimone. (Accessed 2 May 2021.)

3. Cadillac Ranch, Amarillo, Texas⁷⁹



79 Taken from www.nytimes.com/2012/11/21/us/stanley-marsh-cadillac-ranch-owner-accused-of-sexual-abuse.html. (Accessed 17 May 2021.)

4. Photos of stars with their cars



Marvin Gaye and his Cadillac (c.1967)⁸¹



Ann-Margaret and Bo Belinsky (May 1962)⁸⁰



Clint Eastwood and Maggie Johnson (c.1960)⁸²



James Dean and his Porsche hours before his fatal accident (September 30, 1955)⁸³

80 From www.countryliving.com/life/entertainment/g3136/iconic-celebrities-and-their-cadillacs/?slide=3. (Accessed 17 May 2021.)

81 *Ibid.*

82 *Ibid.*

83 From time.com/4038581/james-dean-photos-anniversary/. (Accessed 18 May 2021.)

5. 1958 Buick car ad⁸⁴

*We designed this car
with mothers in mind*



When better automobiles are built Buick will build them

WE KNEW you wanted a car of true modernity—and this 1958 Buick fairly sings with it. From its graceful grille to its gleaming tail towers to its luxurious décor inside—this is the freshest fashion in town.

But we also knew you wanted other things—like fenders you can see over *clearly* when you're backing out of the drive. And wait till you see how easy it is *here*.

We knew you wanted a car with roominess and comfort, a luxurious ride and beautiful performance. And this gorgeous Buick has all that and more.

Above all, we knew you wanted a car that's quick handling—light on its feet. And this one's a joy. It seems to respond to your very thoughts.

It handles with the airiness of a ballerina—so you can slip into tight parking spots—swing around curves or into narrow drives with the greatest of ease.

When you try this 1958 Buick you'll see how completely we designed it with you in mind.

Your Buick dealer will gladly arrange matters. Call him soon.

BUICK Division of GENERAL MOTORS

See TALES OF WELLS FARGO, Monday Nights, NBC-TV and THE PATRICE MUNSEL SHOW, Friday Nights, ABC-TV

First big car that's light on its feet
the AIR BORN B-58 BUICK

GENERAL MOTORS
GOLDEN MILESTONE

84 Taken from www.chairish.com/product/341846/1958-matted-vintage-car-ad-b-58-buick. (Accessed 2 May 2021.)

6. Car crash songs

a. Jan and Dean, "Dead Man's Curve" (1963)⁸⁵

I was cruisin' in my Stingray late one night
When an XKE pulled up on the right
And rolled down the window of his shiny new Jag
And challenged me then and there to a drag
I said, "You're on, buddy, my mill's runnin' fine
Let's come off the line now, at Sunset and Vine
But I'll throw you one better if you've got the nerve
Let's race all the way
To Dead Man's Curve"

Dead Man's Curve, it's no place to play
Dead Man's Curve, you best keep away
Dead Man's Curve, I can hear 'em say
Won't come back from Dead Man's Curve

Dead Man's Curve, it's no place to play
Dead Man's Curve, you best keep away
Dead Man's Curve, I can hear 'em say
Won't come back from Dead Man's Curve

The street was deserted late Friday night
We were buggin' each other while we sat out the light
We both popped the clutch when the light turned green
You should of heard the whine from my screamin' machine
I flew past LaBrea, Schwab's, and Crescent Heights
And all the Jag could see were my six tail lights
He passed me at Doheny then I started to swerve
But I pulled her out and there I was
At Dead Man's Curve

Dead Man's Curve, it's no place to play
Dead Man's Curve

Well, the last thing I remember, Doc, I started to swerve
And then I saw the Jag slide into the curve
I know I'll never forget that horrible sight
I guess I found out for myself that everyone was right

⁸⁵ Taken from genius.com/Jan-and-dean-dead-mans-curve-lyrics. (Accessed 12 May 2021.)

Won't come back from Dead Man's Curve

Dead Man's Curve, it's no place to play
Dead Man's Curve, you best keep away
Dead Man's Curve, I can hear 'em say
Won't come back from Dead Man's Curve

b. The Cheers, "Chicken" (1967)⁸⁶

They drove the hottest hot rods
That were ever raced in years.
You could hear 'em burnin' rubber,
As they shifted through the gears.
They must have lost their senses,
In their trail of smoke and flame.
'Cause you had to be a maniac,
To play that crazy game.

(Ah-ah, ah, ah-ah,)/Chicken.
(Ah-ah, ah-ah.)/Chicken.
The winner of the game would holler, "Chicken."
(Ah-ah ah ah ah-ah ah ah-ah.)

The laughter of the couples,
Could be heard above the roar.
As they headed toward each other,
With their pedals to the floor.
The one that held it showed
That he was not afraid to die.

And the one that turned aside,
Would hear the winning couple cry.

(Ah-ah, ah, ah-ah,)/Chicken.
(Ah-ah, ah-ah.)/Chicken.
The winner of the game would holler, "Chicken."
(Ah-ah ah ah ah-ah ah ah-ah.)

[Instrumental break.]
((Chicken!))

They knew they'd all be losers,
If they ever had a tie.

86 Taken from www.metal-head.org/lyrics/chicken-lyrics-cheers-59100. (Accessed 12 May 2021.)

But the closer they could make it
Seemed the louder they would cry, (“Ahhh!”)
The kicks were always greatest,
When they had the closest shaves.
And the voices coming back,
Were like an echo from the grave.

((Chicken. Chicken.))
The winner of the game would holler, “Chicken.”

And then one night it happened,
‘Cause the devil had his way.
He was clickin’ off the seconds,
That were left for them to play.
There might have been a winner,
But they had no way to tell.
For the couples all were dead,
And there was no one left to yell.

(Ah-ah, ah, ah-ah,)/Chicken.
(Ah-ah, ah-ah.)/Chicken.
The winner of the game would holler, “Chicken.”
(Ah-ah ah ah ah-aaah-ah!)

c. Robert Mitchum, “The Ballad of Thunder Road” (1957)⁸⁷

Let me tell the story, I can tell it all;
About the mountain boy who ran illegal alcohol
His daddy made the whiskey, the son he drove the load;
And when his engine roared they called the highway "Thunder Road"

Sometimes into Ashville, sometimes Memphis town
The Revenuers chased him but they couldn't run him down
Each time they thought they had him his engine would explode
He'd go by like they were standing still on "Thunder Road"

And there was thunder, thunder over "Thunder Road"
Thunder was his engine and white lightning was his load
And there was moonshine, moonshine to quench the devil's thirst
The law they swore they'd get him but the devil got him first

It was on the first of April, Nineteen-Fifty-Four
The federal man sent word he'd better make his run no more

87 Taken from [genius.com/Robert-mitchum-ballad-of-thunder-road-lyrics](https://www.genius.com/Robert-mitchum-ballad-of-thunder-road-lyrics). (Accessed 12 May 2021.)

He said "200 agents were covering the state;
Which ever road he tried to take they'd get him sure as fate."

'Son' his daddy told him, 'make this run your last
The tank is filled with 100 proof; you're all tuned-up and gassed
Now don't take any chances, if you can't get through
I'd rather have you back again than all that Mountain Dew.'

And there was thunder, thunder over "Thunder Road"
Thunder was his engine and white lightening was his load
And there was moonshine, moonshine to quench the devil's thirst
The law they swore they'd get him but the devil got him first
Roaring out of Harlan; revving up his mill
He shot the Gap at Cumberland and streamed by Maynardville
With G men on his tail light; road block up ahead
The mountain boy took roads that even angels fear to tread

Blazing right through Knoxville, out on Kingston Pike
Then right outside of Bearden, they made the fatal strike
He left the road at 90; that's all there is to say
The devil got the moonshine and the mountain boy that day

And there was thunder, thunder over "Thunder Road"
Thunder was his engine and white lightening was his load
And there was moonshine, moonshine to quench the devil's thirst
The law they never got him 'cause the devil got him first

d. Mark Dinning, "Teen Angel" (1959)⁸⁸

Teen Angel
Teen Angel
Teen Angel

VERSE 1

That fateful night the car was stalled
Upon the railroad track
I pulled you out and we were safe
But you went running back

⁸⁸ Taken from genius.com/Mark-dinning-teen-angel-lyrics. (Accessed 12 May 2021.)

CHORUS

Teen angel
Can you hear me?
Teen angel
Can you see me?
Are you somewhere up above?
And am I still your own true love?

VERSE 2

What was it you were looking for
That took your life that night
They said they found my high school ring
Clutched in your fingers tight

CHORUS

VERSE 3

Just sweet sixteen, and now you're gone
They've taken you away
I'll never kiss your lips again
They buried you today

CHORUS

Teen angel
Teen angel
Answer me please

e. Ray Peterson, "Tell Laura I Love Her" (1960)⁸⁹

Laura and Tommy were lovers
He wanted to give her everything
Flowers, presents
And most of all a wedding ring

He saw a sign for a stock car race
A thousand dollar prize it read
He couldn't get Laura on the phone

⁸⁹ Taken from genius.com/Ray-peterson-tell-laura-i-love-her-lyrics. (Accessed 12 May 2021.)

So to her mother Tommy said

Tell Laura I love her
Tell Laura I need her
Tell Laura I may be late
I've something to do that cannot wait

He drove his car to the racing ground
He was the youngest driver there
The crowd roared as they started the race
Round the track they drove at a deadly pace

No-one knows what happened that day
Or how his car over-turned in flames
But as they pulled him from the twisted wreck
With his dying breath they heard him say

Tell Laura I love her
Tell Laura I need her
Tell Laura not to cry
My love for her will never die
Now in the chapel where Laura prays
For her Tommy who passed away
It was just for Laura he lived and died
Alone in the chapel she can hear him cry

Tell Laura I love her
Tell Laura I need her
Tell Laura not to cry
My love for her will never die (x 2)

f. Wayne Cochran, "Last Kiss" (1962)⁹⁰

[Chorus]
Well where oh where can my baby be
The Lord took her away from me
She's gone to heaven so I got to be good
So I can see my baby when I leave this world

⁹⁰ Taken from genius.com/Wayne-cochran-last-kiss-lyrics. (Accessed 12 May 2021.)

[Verse 1]

We were out on a date in my daddy's car
We hadn't driven very far
There in the road, straight ahead
The car was stalled, the engine was dead
I couldn't stop, so I swerved to the right
Never forget the sound that night
The crying tires, the busting glass, the painful scream that I heard last

[Chorus]

Well where oh where can my baby be
The Lord took her away from me
She's gone to heaven so I got to be good
So I can see my baby when I leave this world

[Verse 2]

Well when I woke up, the rain was pouring down
There were people standing all around
Something warm running in my eyes
But I found my baby somehow that night
I raised her head, and then she smiled and said
Hold me darling for a little while
I held her close, I kissed her our last kiss
I found the love that I knew I would miss
But now she's gone, even though I hold her tight
I lost my love, my life
That night

[Chorus]

Well where oh where can my baby be
The Lord took her away from me
She's gone to heaven so I got to be good
So I can see my baby when I leave this world

[Harmonizing Outro]

g. Stonewall Jackson. "B.J. the D.J." (1964)⁹¹

A story bout a pal of mine who worked down near the Georgia Line
A DJ in a little country station

Everybody loved him dear cause he played what they liked to hear
He built himself a quite a reputation

At record hops he stayed out late and his mom would always wait
To see if he had made it home alive

She warned against his loss of sleep and driving fast in that old heap
And that he had to be at work by five

BJ the DJ you're living much too fast
And if you don't change your ways don't see how you can last

Every morning just past four from the driveway he would roar
Overslept and he was late again

Then at breakneck speed he'd drive to sign the station on at five
He had lots of records he must spin

His mom said by the radio until his voice told her hello
She knew then that he made it there alright

Then she'd say a little prayer, giving thanks that he was there. And she'd wait up for him
again tonight

Then one cold and rainy morn all the tires were badly worn
But still he screeched off just as fast this time

BJ had a lot of nerve but he completely missed the curve
And he signed off down near the Georgia Line

Mom sat by the radio the voice she heard she didn't know
BJ'd never been this late before

But with the road so bad and all she'd wait a while before she called

91 Taken from genius.com/Stonewall-jackson-bj-the-dj-lyrics. (Accessed 12 May 2021.)

And then she heard the knock upon the door

BJ the DJ only twenty four a wreck at ninety miles an hour he'll spin the discs no more

h. The Beach Boys, "A Young Man Is Gone" (1963)⁹²

[Intro]

Oo oo

Ah ah ah ah ahhhhh

[Verse]

Now a young man's gone

But his legend lingers on

For so much had he to give

But his life is through

For the story told is true

For he died just as he lived

For this daring young star

Met his death while in his car

No one knows the reason why

Screaming tire, flashing fire

And gone was this young star

Oh how could they let him die

Still a young man is gone

Yet his legend lingers on

For he died without a cause

And they say that he'll

Be known for evermore

As the Rebel Without A Cause

i. The Shangri-Las, "Leader of the Pack" (1964)⁹³

Is she really going out with him?

-Well, there she is. Let's ask her

-Betty, is that Jimmy's ring you're wearing?

92 Taken from genius.com/The-beach-boys-a-young-man-is-gone-lyrics. (Accessed 12 May 2021.)

93 Taken from genius.com/The-shangri-las-leader-of-the-pack-lyrics. (Accessed 12 May 2021.)

-M-hm

-Gee, it must be great riding with him. Is he picking you up after school today?

-M-m

-By the way, where'd you meet him?

[Verse 1]

I met him at the candy store

He turned around and smiled at me

You get the picture?

-Yes, we see

That's when I fell for the Leader of the Pack

My folks were always putting him down

-Down, down

They said he came from the wrong side of town

-What you mean when you say that he came from the wrong side of town?

They told me he was bad

But I knew he was sad

That's why I fell for the Leader of the Pack

One day my Dad said, "Find someone new"

I had to tell my Jimmy, "We're through"

-What you mean when you say that you better go find somebody new?

He stood there and asked me why

But all I could do was cry

I'm sorry I hurt you, the Leader of the Pack

He sort of smiled and kissed me goodbye

The tears were beginning to show

As he drove away on that rainy night

I begged him to go slow

Whether he heard

I'll never know

No, no, no, no, no, no, no

Look out, look out, look out, look out

I felt so helpless, what could I do?

Remembering all the things we've been through

In school they all stop and stare

I can't hide my tears, but I don't care

I'll never forget him, the Leader of the Pack

Ooh, ooh-ooh-ooh

Leader of the Pack, now he's gone
Leader of the Pack, now he's gone
Leader of the Pack, now he's gone
Leader of the Pack, now he's gone

j. Jimmy Cross, "I Want My Baby Back" (1965)⁹⁴

I want my Baby back
Got to have my Baby back
I miss her oh so much
Can't live without her touch

I don't hardly know where to begin
I remember we were cruising home from the Beatles concert
I'd had such a wonderful evening sitting there
Watching my Baby screaming and tearing her hair out and carrying on
She was so full of life
Then

Well we were about three miles from home
When all of a sudden it started to rain
And I do mean rain
I couldn't hardly see nothing
Well we kept driving for about another mile
When all of a sudden
I see this stalled car right smack in front of me
Well I wasn't about to slam on the brakes
Cause I didn't have none to start to with
So I swerved to the left and what do I see?
Some mush-head on a motorcycle heading right at us
And I knew at last me and my baby were about to meet
The Leader of the
Pack
Well when I come to I looked around
And there was the Leader
And there was the Pack
[And over there was my baby](#)

94 Taken from genius.com/Jimmy-cross-i-want-my-baby-back-lyrics. (Accessed 12 May 2021.)

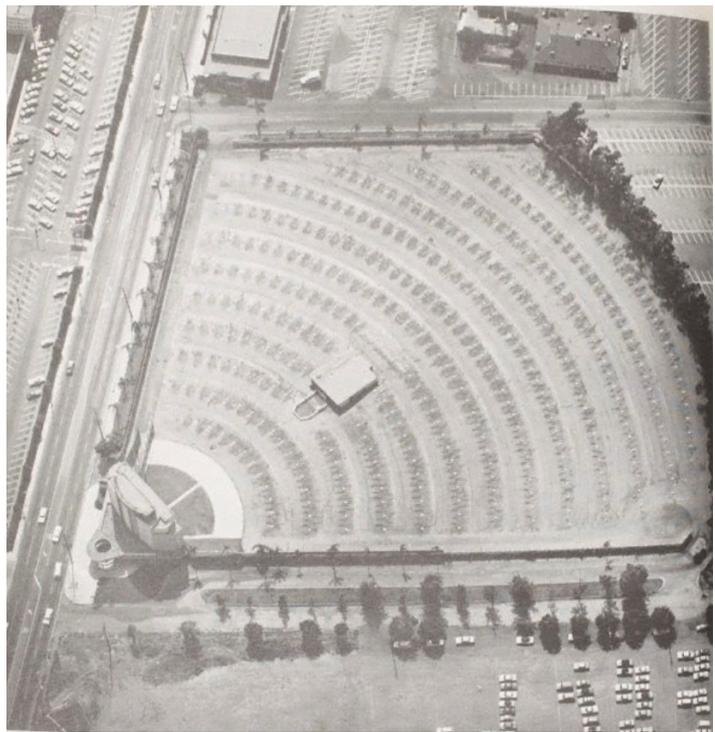
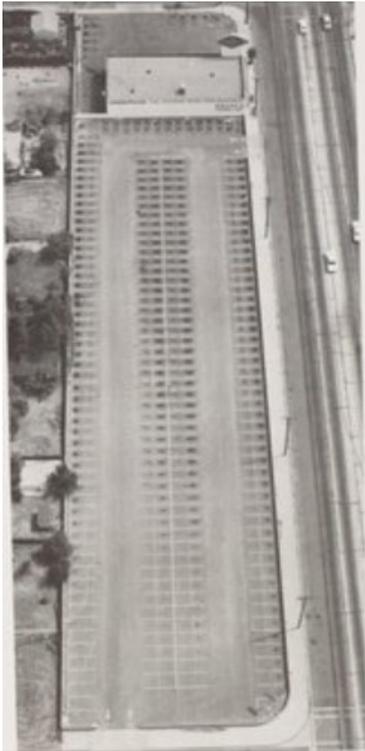
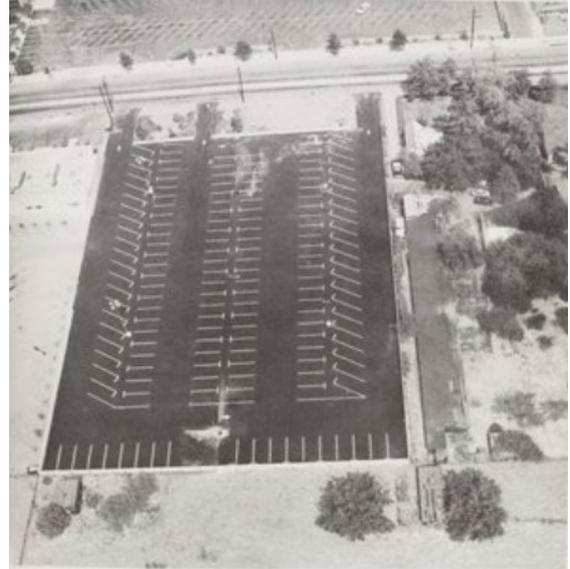
And over there was my baby
And way over there was my baby

I want my baby back
Got to have my baby back
I miss her oh so much
Can't live without her touch

It's been many months now since that fateful night
And you know something, I've tried
Believe me I have tried
But I just can't make it without my Baby
So I've decided I'm going to have back
One way or another
Oh Baby, I dig you so much
Hot dang. Pay dirt

I got my Baby back
Now I got my Baby back
I love her oh so much
Can't live without her touch
I got my Baby back

7. Some of Ed Ruscha's photos of parking lots⁹⁵

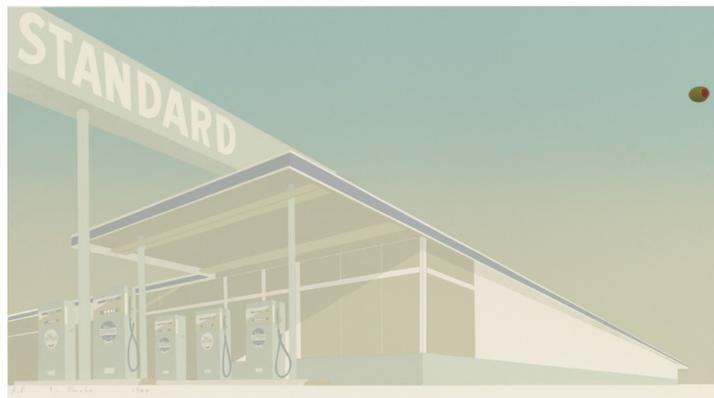


⁹⁵ From his art book *Thirtyfour Parking Lots in Los Angeles*, available at www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/collection/works/430.2008.a-ii/. (Accessed 2 May 2021.)

8. Some of Ed Ruscha's "Standard Station" studies⁹⁶



"Standard Station" (1966)



"Cheese Mold Standard with Olive" (1969)



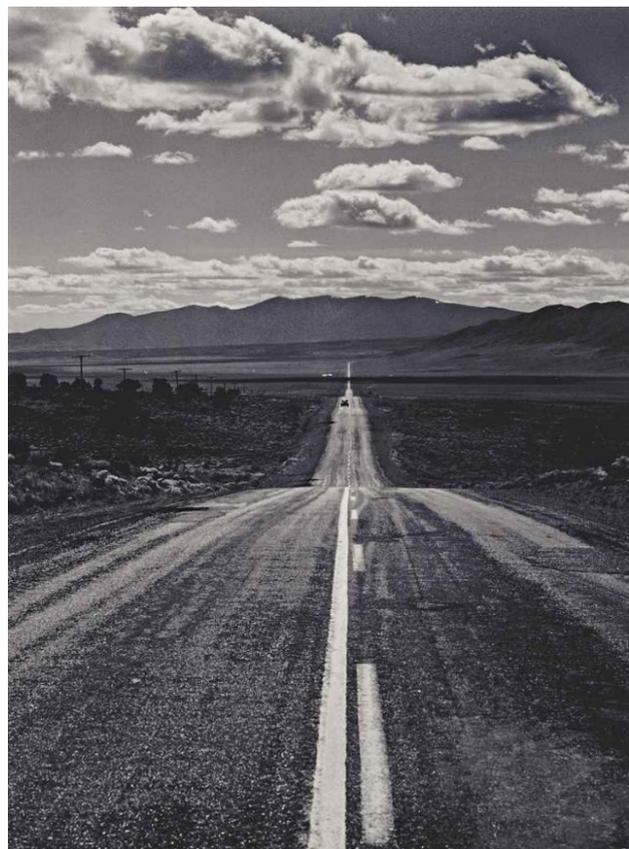
"Double Standard" in collaboration with Mason Williams (1969)

96 Taken from (top to bottom): www.moma.org/collection/works/76637, www.moma.org/collection/works/91514, and www.moma.org/collection/works/91515. (All accessed 4 May 2021.)

9. Road photos by Ansel Adams



“Little Rain, Road North of Mojave” (c.1949)⁹⁷



“Coastal Road” (c.1953)⁹⁸

97 Taken from www.artnet.fr/artistes/ansel-adams/land-of-little-rain-road-north-of-mojave-gTp2FvZSyUKit5fU2lLynA2. (Accessed 2 May 2021.)

98 Taken from www.artnet.fr/artistes/ansel-adams/land-of-little-rain-road-north-of-mojave-gTp2FvZSyUKit5fU2lLynA2. (Accessed 2 May 2021.)



“Road after Rain, Northern California” (1960)⁹⁹

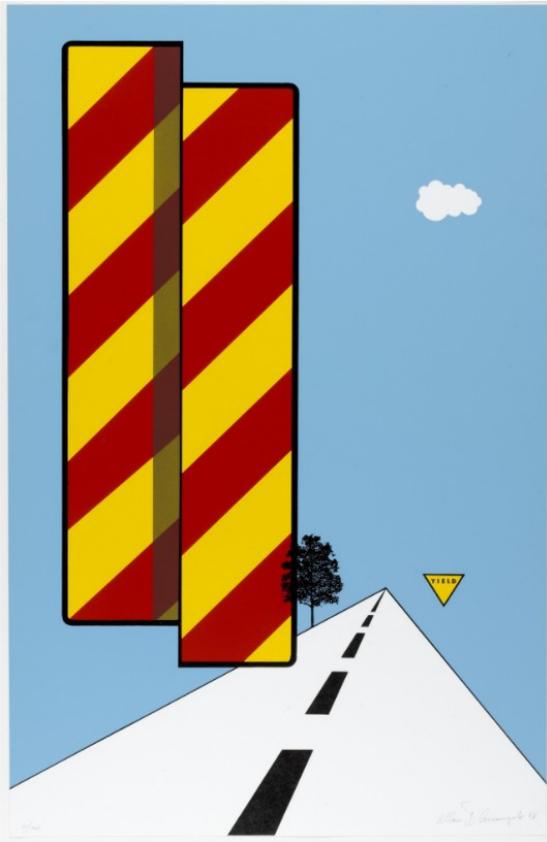


“Freeway Interchange, Los Angeles” (1967)¹⁰⁰

99 Taken from onlineonly.christies.com/s/ansel-adams-american-west-photographs-center-creative-photography/ansel-adams-1902-1984-34/81954. (Accessed 2 May 2021.)

100 Taken from artblart.com/tag/ansel-adams-freeway-interchange/. (Accessed 2 May 2021.)

10. Works by Allan D'Arcangelo



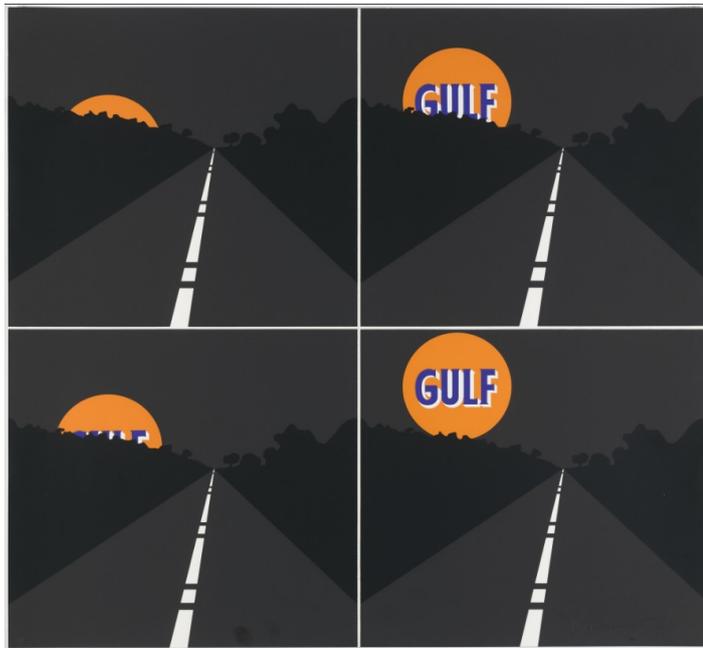
Untitled
(1968)¹⁰¹



"Aspen Center of Contemporary Art"
(1967)¹⁰²

101 Taken from www.moma.org/collection/works/73698?artist_id=1349&page=1&sov_referrer=artist.
(Accessed 2 May 2021.)

102 Taken from www.moma.org/collection/works/8954?artist_id=1349&page=1&sov_referrer=artist.
(Accessed 2 May 2021.)



“June Moon” (1969)¹⁰³



“Landscape II” (1965)¹⁰⁴

103 Taken from www.moma.org/collection/works/75883?artist_id=1349&page=1&sov_referrer=artist. (Accessed 2 May 2021.)

104 Taken from www.moma.org/collection/works/65787?artist_id=1349&page=1&sov_referrer=artist. (Accessed 2 May 2021.)

11. Examples of paintings by the Florida Highwaymen

“Moonlit Bay” by Mary Ann Carroll
(c. 1967)¹⁰⁵



“Rough and Windy Coastal Scene” by Harold Newton
(c. 1968)¹⁰⁶



“Orange Sky, Breaking Surf, 3
Birds” by Alfred Hair
(c. 1965)¹⁰⁷



105 Taken from nmaahc.si.edu/explore/stories/collection/florida-highwaymen. (Accessed 2 May 2021.)

106 Taken from nmaahc.si.edu/object/nmaahc_2014.185.6ab?destination=edan-search/collection_search%3Fedan_local%3D1%26edan_q%3Drough%252Band%252Bwindy. (Accessed 19 May 2021.)

107 Taken from nmaahc.si.edu/object/nmaahc_2014.185.9ab. (Accessed 2 May 2021.)

12 Some photos by Peter Andrew Luszyk¹⁰⁸



1



2



3



4

1. “Santa Ana/Riverside Freeway Interchange in Los Angeles, California”
2. “Papago/Red Mountain Freeway Interchange in Phoenix, Arizona”
3. “I-696/Mound Road Interchange in Detroit, Michigan”
4. “I-40/HWY87 Interchange in Amarillo, Texas”

¹⁰⁸ All taken from www.nationalgeographic.com/photography/article/visualizing-the-fast-lane-from-above.
(Accessed 16 May 2021.)

13. Some paintings by Jim Holland



“Road by the Pond” (Undated)¹⁰⁹



“Winding Road” (Undated)¹¹⁰

109 Taken from www.jimholland-art.com/landscapes.html . (Accessed 16 May 2021.)

110 Taken from www.jimholland-art.com/archive2.html. (Accessed 16 May 2021.)



“Crossroads” (Undated)¹¹¹



“Shore Road” (Undated)¹¹²

111 Taken from www.jimholland-art.com/archive1.html. (Accessed 16 May 2021.)

112 Taken from www.jimholland-art.com/archive2.html. (Accessed 16 May 2021.)

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Nomadland. Directed by Chloé Zhao, Searchlight Pictures, 11 Sept. 2020.

Rebel Without A Cause. Directed by Nicholas Ray, Warner Bros., 27 Oct. 1955.

Route 66. Produced by Herbert B. Leonard, Sony Pictures Television, 1960-1964.

Sullivan's Travels. Directed by Preston Sturges, Paramount Pictures, 29 Dec. 1941.

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