

The Frictions of Slow Tourism Mobilities:

Conceptualising Campervan Travel

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Abstract

This paper discusses the materialities of campervan travel as a relatively 'slow' form of tourism mobilities. The research is based upon qualitative research with campervan owners and users in the UK. Previous research has emphasised notions of freedom associated with campervan travel and how it has developed its own subculture. We seek to move beyond this to examine the frictions of socially and physically embodied practices of campervan travel in order to address the call for more multi-sensory understandings of tourism mobilities. In our discussion of campervan travel, mobility is understood as intensities of circulations, uncertainties and relational affects where different aspects of friction are central. We conclude by discussing the campervan in relation to wider aspects of slow travel.

Key words: Slowness; Materialities; Mobilities; Friction; Campervans

Introduction

In his reflections on the materialities of his own travel with a VW (Volkswagen) Campervan called 'Rosie', the cultural geographer Phil Crang (2013: 277) notes that "It's an old van and it doesn't go very fast," but significantly it is a "fragment of material culture" (280) that plays a role in the construction of his own social identity. Although he is ambivalent about his ownership of this vehicle, he emphasises that his campervan is not just a symbolic appendage but somewhere and something that has relations with his family as users: "It does things, we do things with it, and it does things to us" (283). Indeed, Southerton et al. (2001, 5.4) have illustrated how the practices of caravanning involves in situ physical constraints that delimit social worlds but also that caravans are more than simply objects: "they may also set the stage, defining challenges and dilemmas as well as favouring or enforcing certain forms of action." As Sherry Turkle (2007) has noted such objects or machines are things we think with and think in and which we grow to love as emotional and embodied appendages. In this paper we develop these insights by discussing the materialities of campervan travel as a relatively 'slow' form of tourism mobilities. In particular, we seek to analyse the socio-technical frictions involved in campervan travel instead of the specific sites of caravanning (on the latter see Blichfeldt 2009).

Sheller and Urry (2000, 747) have argued that the car may be restrictive in comparison to the environmental sensations other forms of mobility such as train travel may offer. They argued that as the car acts as a form of 'dwelling at speed' individuals may lose the opportunity to attain a variety of experiences which include the "the sights, sounds, tastes, temperatures and smells of the city" which are

consequently transformed into a delimited experience due to the enclosed space they travel in. In contrast we argue that campervan travel and the frictions that this form of relatively restricted dwelling-in-motion entails affords more rather than less environmental experiences. The paper develops a novel theoretical point, namely the concept of friction which has hitherto been understood as primarily in terms of its symbolic or its material consequences. Hence our objective is to develop the concept of friction as a multi-sensory and embodied aspect of travel (using the context of the VW campervan).

Previous research has emphasised notions of freedom associated with campervan travel and how it has developed its own subculture (Caldicott, Scherrer and Jenkins 2014; Kearns, Collins and Bates 2016). In the Australian context, the proliferation of campervans has become a significant element of backpacker tourists, more elderly 'grey nomads' and also Chinese tourists renting campervans all of whom seek intimacy and sociality on the move (Jones and Selwood 2012; Redshaw 2017; Wu and Pearce 2014). Indeed, a vehicle as a place to 'dwell in' is related to concepts of home and privacy (Urry 2000). The related literature on caravanning holidays attests to the wider significance of having a home on the move (see Mikkelsen and Cohen 2015). However, we seek to move beyond this to examine the frictions of the physical and socially embodied practices of campervan travel in order to address the call for more research into the multi-sensory practices of tourism mobilities (Roy and Hannam 2013; Hannam, Butler and Paris 2014; Jensen, Scarles and Cohen 2015; de Souza Bispo 2016; Lamers, Van der Duim and Spaargaren 2017).

Whilst modern vehicles are capable of moving at high speeds, the 'classic' VW campervan in contrast rarely exceeds 40 mph at peak acceleration. The relative 'sluggishness' of the vehicle has prompted discussion about the consequences of unhurried mobility on fast paced highways. As noted by Fullagar et al (2012) 'slow travellers' in a 'fast world' have chosen to control the rhythm of their lives and in doing so subvert the dominant 'cult of speed'. Yet as tourists and leisure users attempt to use the campervan for autonomous pursuits as an expression of symbolic material freedom and identity, the challenges encountered by the campervan as 'home' as it takes to the road challenges such freedoms due to its unpredictability, discomfort and frictions.

Conceptualising Mobile Practices of Friction

Theories of mobile practices have been developed in order to help us understand the ways in which people know the world without knowing it, the multi-sensual practices and experiences of everyday life as such proposes a post-humanistic approach to the understanding of social life (Hannam et al. 2006). As Peter Adey (2010, 149) notes: "[t]his is an approach which is not limited to representational thinking and feeling, but a different sort of thinking-feeling altogether. It is a recognition that everyday mobilities such as walking or dancing involve various combinations of thought, action, feeling and articulation." Mobilities research thus examines the embodied nature and experience of different modes of travel, seeing these modes in part as forms of material and sociable dwelling-in-motion, places of and for various activities including the various immobilities and moorings that ensue (Hannam et al. 2006) From a mobilities perspective, the concept of 'friction' can be seen not just as

a metaphor but also as an integral concept for understanding the social and cultural relations in practices of mobility and immobility (Cresswell 2013).

In her ethnographic work in Indonesia, Anna Tsing (2005, 6) has developed the concept of cultural friction which she argues informs “motion, offering it different meanings. Coercion and frustration join freedom as motion is socially informed”. She emphasises that various cultural frictions occur due to processes of globalization leading to immobilities even as people and things are set in motion (Salazar and Smart 2011). She notes that “[a]s a metaphorical image, friction reminds us that heterogeneous and unequal encounters can lead to new arrangements of culture and power” (Tsing 2006, 5). Tim Cresswell (2013, 108), meanwhile, has argued that friction is also embodied: “Friction ... is a social and cultural phenomenon that is lived and felt ... The significance of friction is in the way it draws our attention to the way in which people, things and ideas are slowed down or stopped.” He emphasises the way in which friction is felt in terms of slowing down the speed of mobilities which has consequences for those who have the power to do so. Such embodied frictions can also be related to the frictions involved in transport use.

In his conceptualisation of friction in terms of transport use, Thomas Birtchnell (2016, 88) has argued that:

The reduction in friction through motorized transport has implications for automobile adoptees in the form of more convenient and comfortable travel and consequently for societies too in the design of cities to accommodate road traffic, the support for commuting and suburban living and the

establishment of automobile-use as a social norm. Automobiles are ubiquitous because they reduce friction.

Birtchnell (2016) thus emphasises the material aspects of friction and the ways in which vehicles *may reduce friction* in so far as they enable various social freedoms (commuting and so on) to be practiced. But, as we shall see, in the example of the campervan, not all vehicles reduce friction. Frictions can be created and are felt through the relations involved in slowing down (Vannini 2013). Friction should thus be conceptualised as simultaneously physical, cultural, discursive, material, embodied and suffused with dynamic power relations. In this paper we seek to demonstrate how the use of slow campervan travel emphasises these myriad frictions.

Unlike transport that cushions its passengers from the impacts of speed, weather, objects and so on, campervans (which are frequently 50 or more years old) are subject to physical geographies such as meteorological forces, driving surfaces as well as social geographies such as the influence of other vehicle users in ways that more modern vehicles are not. Hence, in this paper we discuss the nature of such frictions from the experience of campervan users in terms of the embodied experiences and material practices of such users as they become immersed in the nexus of physical and social mobilities.

Whilst the campervan is technically a slow mode of transport, we argue that it produces multiple trajectories as it traverses through space and time. Whilst 40mph may be shown on the vehicles speedometer, it is suggested that not all

velocities are observable in their own right and may be understood as material impacts that reveal themselves as other velocities (speed of light, weather, blood circulation, terrain and so on) and so contribute equally to motion affects. In other words, the multiple velocities inherent in this particular mobility form are considered as substantive elements or vectors in the narrative of movement, so they have to be addressed not as singularities but as pluralities of dispositions or as an assemblage. In our discussion of campervan travel, mobility is understood not as a linear trajectory but as intensities of circulations, uncertainties and relational affects where friction is central: “an ambiguous, two-sided form of relative stillness that is both impeding mobility and enabling it” (Cresswell 2013, 109).

Automobilities and Slow Travel

Automobility has been conceptualised as the simultaneous achievement of autonomy and mobility in contemporary society (Featherstone 2004). Indeed social scientists have frequently portrayed the car as the “avatar of mobility” (Thrift 1996: 272), or as a “universal” symbol of movement (Bohm et al. 2006: 5). The historical benefits of automobility have been well documented in academic literature, particularly from a Western vantage point in terms of driving being a leisure pursuit (Miller 2001; Law 2014). A focus on automobility allows us to critique the often unproblematised discourses and practices of ‘freedom’ implied by driving for leisure (Freudendal-Pedersen 2009; Hannam 2016). As Sager (2006: 465) argues: “Freedom as mobility is composed both of opportunities to travel when and where one pleases and of the feasibility of the choice not to travel.” The car’s ability to provide both feelings of control and a sense of freedom have become dominant in most Western and Westernised societies (Freudendal-Pedersen 2009). As Urry

(2004: 28) has suggested, “cars extend where people can go to and hence what they are literally able to do.” Hannam (2016) has further examined the gendered dimensions of driving in the context of Saudi Arabia, noting the relative freedoms and unfreedoms associated with different driving practices.

Automobility offers a range of benefits for users. Cars are seen to be a more reliable alternative to other modes of travel and provides flexibility as well as 24-hour availability (Urry 2004). Collin-Lange and Benediktsson’s (2011) research on the automobilities of young Icelandic motorists noted that many chose to use cars due to the perception that public modes of transport were inefficient and unreliable. Thus there has developed a discourse of reliability associated with the power of the motor car against other modes of transport. Conversely, Larsen (2001) argues that although trains were responsible for the initial mobilisation of tourists in the 19th century, the car has now taken over as it provides a greater sensation of unpredictability via the experience of the open road: it allows users to change their routes at will. This is in contrast to the perceived relative rigid and freedom-restricting sense of railway travel which may limit detours and ad hoc stops (although rail travel has its own rhythms – see Roy and Hannam 2013; Jensen et al. 2015). In contrast to the car then, public transportation is predominantly deemed to be both “inflexible” and “fragmented” in terms of accessibility (Urry 2004: 29). Moreover, Beckmann (2001: 598) has argued that cars can offer tourists access to ‘car-only-sights’ that exist in peripheral or rural locations inaccessible to public transport.

Beckmann (2001: 598) has further suggested that society's increasing usage of motor vehicles has transformed roads to become "grounds of battle", as space is increasingly contested. Thus automobility may not only instigate feelings of freedom and adventure but also promote a range of negative emotions such as fear, frustration, envy, anger, or distress (Sheller 2004). Indeed, the car's promise of freedom and adventure can be ironically hindered by other road users through the different and even dangerous driving techniques of other drivers (Butler and Hannam 2013). Butler and Hannam (2013) also observed that although expatriate car users would often referred to their motor vehicles as being 'essential,' 'must-haves,' or even 'lifesavers', many reported that their journeys frequently involved severe periods of immobility due to congestion.

The multi-sensory feelings that people can have towards their vehicles is captured by Mimi Sheller (2004) who writes about 'automotive emotions'; or feelings towards cars. In a close examination of automobile cultures she proposes that car consumption is not only about rational and economic logic, but also aesthetic, sensory and kinesthetic responses to driving. She also points out that familial, regional and national patterns of mobility are driven by personal and 'internal' psychological dispositions and preferences as emotional geographies of driving shaped by the character of transport choices. In addition as Sheller (2004: 106) also suggests drivers do not simply move around but are "produced by movement where both of the senses and the body" become part of it. So through immersion, the 'autopoietic automobility' of owners travelling at reduced speed on highways can lead to a particular mobile sense of place. Germann Molz (2009: 271) also adds that "Certain values come to be associated with stillness, slowness and

speed.” Based on this premise, automobility is understood to be more than just about moving from point A to point B through various spaces, but is arguably also set of social practices, embodied dispositions and physical affordances. (Sheller, 2004).

The emotional approach to slow travel, meanwhile, has been exemplified in the work of the experience of ferries (Vannini 2011), rickshaws (Wong 2006) walking (Lorimer and Lund 2003) and cycling (Spinney 2009) and train travel (Roy and Hannam 2013) amongst others. Bissell and Fuller (2011) remind us that space may be subject to turbulence such that anything that moves at a reduced pace gets ‘in the way’ of systems designed for speedy transitions. Taking inspiration from these authors who consider the emotional intensities of travel, we examine VW Campervan mobilities where both material and immaterial forces. i.e emotions and imaginaries as well as physical attributes such as weather conditions, other vehicles, road architecture impact on the experience of slow travel.

Methodology

To consider the relations of slowness in campervan travel, a range of qualitative methods were used to develop what Kincheloe (2001) describes as a bricolage of data that challenge the institutional principles of archetypal ‘fields’ of normal anthropological practice. Whilst traditional collection techniques were used, more imaginative practices of photography, drawing, filmmaking, vox-pop interviews and audio stories made significant contributions to the data collection developing a more sensuous ethnography (Stoller 1997; Paterson 2009). Indeed Stoller (1997: xvii) has

argued that social science research needs to attend to sensuous descriptions to improve ethnographic narratives but to also examine power relations and rethink the previously held positions of the researchers:

Sensuous ethnography ... creates a set of instabilities for the ethnographer.

To accept sensuousness in scholarship is to eject the conceit of control in which mind and body, self and other are considered separate.

Hence one of the authors of this paper engaged in such sensuous ethnographic practices by using a VW Campervan throughout the data collection period. As Pink (2007: 247) has argued, such an embodied sensuous approach to data collection can help us to understand how “people constitute both their self identities and place through their multisensory embodied experience.”

Data collection included making a digital film whilst driving to campervan festivals.

This audio-visual work helped to capture the embodied experience of travel as an auto-ethnographic account and was subsequently interpreted along with a field diary of observations. This also involved interviews of 53 respondents in order to understand the narratives of VW campervan owners at festivals in the North of England and Scotland. The field visits were undertaken over a two year period from July 2011 to July 2013 with most events lasting three days visited consecutively.

A total of 53 campervan owners and two families who had hired a campervan participated in the research (for demographics see table 1 below). Out of those involved, 35 were male whilst 18 were female. Whilst effort was made to attain an equal gender split, there was a masculine bias within the VW campervan community. In terms of the participant's ages, 25% were aged 20-29, 40% 30-39, 20% 40-49 and

the remaining 15% over 50. This reflected the age range of the wider campervan community. Furthermore, the respondents were predominantly of a white working class background, although approximately 15% attendees could be described as middle class based upon their occupations. Only one British Afro-Caribbean was interviewed and generally VW Campervan festivals were not multi-cultural, albeit due to their family orientated atmosphere they were open to diverse audiences and thus appeared inclusive to those who owned a VW Campervan. Approximately two thirds of the respondents appeared as heterosexual family units often with children of various ages, albeit teenagers were less prevalent than toddlers and pre-teenage children. Children were not interviewed for ethical reasons but participants often mentioned them in recollections of their experiences. Out of the 53 participants 18 undertook in-depth semi structured interviews as audio-recordings or as video vox-pops, 11 filled in question booklets and posted them back to the researcher, other participants commented to questions on an online forum and further data was captured out in the field through a range of informal conversations (for further elaboration on the ethics of the research undertaken see Wilson 2014).

[Insert Table 1 here. Table of Respondent's Demographics, Location and Date of Interview.]

Discussion: Mapping the Frictions of Campervan Mobilities

In the diagram Figure 1 below the external vectors V1 Gradients, V2 Weather, V3 Surfaces and V4 Other Vehicles are represented. In the subsequent discussion these vectors are analysed in terms of how they affect campervan travel through different types of friction.

[Insert Figure 1. here: Author Research Diagram.]

The diagram shows the external forces identified as instrumental in shaping VW campervan practices. The first frictions are *gradients (V1)* described as degrees of inclination relative to the horizontal plane. These ratios of decline and incline can be said to impact on vehicles passing through the contours of the landscape. *Weather (V2)* is also acknowledged as an important effect of interferences of high and low pressure, rain, snow, hail, high temperatures that take charge of mobility in different ways. The next friction is the affect *Surfaces (V3)* have on the vehicles ability to navigate traction, slippage and resistance and to adjust velocities accordingly. Finally *Other Vehicles (V4)* occupy the road and to some extent mediate movements when they obstruct, avoid, fall apart or react to the vehicle. In other words in accounting for the four frictions of travel mentioned above as the VW campervan travels on roads they are subjected to a number of influences seen and unseen, some of which have overt impacts on speed, whilst others are part of the atmosphere or invisible but potentially effectual. Although this diagram is by no means an exhaustive illustration of all the frictional forces that could potentially interface with the campervan vehicle as it moves, these vectors are drawn from the narratives of the research participants as a starting point for a discussion of the effects of friction on slow tourism.

Gradients

The first friction to be discussed is gravity's effect felt as the weight of a body, pulling down towards the centre of the earth. In this case the specific weight of the

VW campervan affects how the vehicle moves. This is a relevant consideration because the VW campervan is cumbersome and it moves more slowly than modern cars due to its relatively heavy body weight in relation to its engine. Thus this mobile unit is not capable of fast acceleration. External drag factors have more impact, i.e the relations between motion and stop are materialised by the specificities of the moving van in terms of sluggishness and delay due to its relative weight. The vehicles torpidity also has other ramifications, as it is not just a physical expression of its battle against the natural elements; as the earth tries to draw the object back towards the soil, but it is also as a metaphor for the ideology of the 'slow'.

One participant in this study for example was recorded to comically celebrate the difficulty their small engine had pulling a heavy load up a steep incline. In other words the fact it was this gradient affect that was part of the appeal of being in a campervan and embodied a personalization of the vehicle itself:

Yeah you start talking to it. Come on Betty you can do it! (Laughs) You either get to the top or I'm going to beat you with a piece of wood! (laughs). It's funny the way you talk to them, but I wouldn't want it any other way mind you. (Peter, Campervan owner, 2011).

[Insert Figure 2 here: Betty Boo Themed VW Campervan.]

The following quote also shows how the campervan communicated with its owner via heat emanating through the chassis. The owner commented on how they also found difficulty in finding the right gear in order to overcome the incline, this ongoing

struggle with the apparatus of the van they pointed out, was rarely faced in modern cars that handled the weight felt due to gravitational force with higher velocities:

I used to go off in this big van we called Torty, and one of us used to sit in the middle on the engine where it would get really hot (laughs) and the same VW thing, you couldn't get the gear right and you could hardly get up a hill. (Laughs) (Sonja, Campervan Owner, 2012).

Sonja further talked about being subjected to intense heat, a difficulty in using the gearing system and a reduced velocity on steep inclines. These sensations clearly changed the travel experience with affects particular to the age and strength of the campervan. Ironically most owners described these interferences as 'quirky', describing them with a sense of humour that alluded to some enjoyment derived from this felt frictions.

Michael and Amanda travelled together in the same campervan but described their experiences differently. One of them disliked the van's 'stickiness' whilst the other loved it. The following quote from Amanda suggested that different satisfactions on the trip could also determine how velocity was felt in relation to time dragging or being speeded up:

The idea was more wonderful than the reality of it. Whereas Michael was keen on sticking at it and see through those bad things so that we could have family holidays, as we are happier when we are on holiday. He was more willing to ride through those problems than I was but they stressed me out and the holiday flew over for him, whereas for me it usually dragged. (Amanda, campervan passenger, 2012).

According to Amanda's interpretation she felt that notion of time was perceived

very differently by Michael than her. Amanda's interpretation of the 40 miles per hour journey was felt to be slower than Michael's. In other words whilst the couple were travelling together their own personal perceptions of time were defined by different feelings towards the van. Sheller (2004) has pointed out that different emotional registers are produced through variations in the embodied driving experience and that whilst some may find excitement and anticipation other may be fearful and anxious. What we find here, though is a sense of time as friction, time *drags* for Amanda. It is not just the material frictions of the road but the ways in which these create relations of slowness.

Weather

Temperature and humidity also affects the ambience of the campervan impacting on both the driver and vehicle. Campervans like all automobiles are subject to weather conditions however more modern vehicles are arguably more equipped to resist inclement weather. Because of the material and mechanical limitations in an old campervan, users often responded to meteorological interferences in innovative ways. The 'elderly' nature of the vehicle meant that campervan owners drove with care and attention and did not push their machines to the limit. Because many users cared for their vehicles by not 'over doing it', this had a bearing on how they then engaged in their velocities during adverse weather. In other words campervans were not driven with only utility in mind and it was found that owners were purposeful in reducing speed due to sensitivities toward the vans' own emotional 'feelings':

To be honest it's a rusty old bucket and if I put my foot down the old girl might drop to bits. I have to be careful with her otherwise she might get

upset. (Bob, Campervan Owner, 2011).

As Miller (2001: 24) suggests “it is this highly visceral relationship between bodies of people and bodies of cars that forces us to acknowledge the humanity of the car in the first place”. Bob drove slowly because he imagined that the van may react ‘emotionally’ to being driven unnecessarily fast. It also implied that whilst the driver thinks practically about not damaging their engine, such attitudes are underpinned by an anthropomorphic interpretation of the vehicle that was manifested through a reduction in speed based upon its so called ‘humanness’: “Sometimes she rattles like a bucket o’ spanners in the back. Like it’s going to explode so I have to go carefully” (Bob, Campervan Owner, 2012). Because campervans have old mechanical parts when they accelerate often a clanking and rattling can be heard due to vibrations. Such sonic mobilities also shaped how owners responded with their driving habits and sensibilities as they reacted to the auditory aspects of campervan driving: “I tended to drive carefully and cautiously because I feared that my rattling van might start to dismantle itself. It was like screws and bolts were unwinding themselves as we went.” (Research diary, 2012; figure 3 below).

[Insert figure 3 here: Film Still, VW Campervan Speed Clock, Research diary, 2012.]

Indeed, David Bissell (2010) has explored the importance of vibrations as a way of thinking about the uncertain and provisional connections between bodies, their travelling environments and the experience of movement. He argues that the study of such vibrations helps us to understand “the shape of body–technology assemblages [and] challenge us to think about different assemblages in terms of

their capacity for absorption, diffusion and transmission” (Bissell, 2010, 479). In particular, he highlights how the routine of vibration through travel can afford embodied satisfaction: “[t]hrough vibration, once absent objects [such as the engineering of the vehicle] are made present” (Bissell, 2010, 482).

The basic engineering of the campervan in relation to how it pulls its weight, determines its ability to affect propulsion. How its shell is preserved in terms of ‘wear and tear’ is also an issue due to its age. Conversely, modern cars with light frames and turbo engines are able to challenge forces with their ability to push through them in a more dynamic way. The ‘slow’ mobility of the van due to its encumbering frame compared to the engine size makes it hard to drive and less resistant forces in and around it. Also the degradation of parts and paintwork is accelerated as outdoor elements attack aged metal. Therefore the sensations of the campervan object surging against external meteorological forces has the potential to be more ‘felt’ by the driver who is not cocooned in a high-tech pod:

Compared to my run-around car with power steering, especially when I was tired, I felt the weight of the van almost dragging along the road. The combination of its sluggishness with accompanying rattles of the mechanical bits made me feel at times that I was physically carrying the load myself.

(Research diary, 2011).

Other owners also acknowledged that the engine limitations and weight of the van affected its speed but this was, on the whole, felt to be part of the satisfaction of driving the campervan.

Ingold (2000: 97) has pointed out in his discussion of visual perception and the weather, how landscapes have in the past rarely been considered in terms of the effects of light associated with different meteorological conditions. In his essay he talks about how a dramatic shift in climatic conditions made for a short period the world look and feel completely different, despite him gazing at the same view. In this case not only does weather affect the relations of the van with the environment as it travels, but it can also have an effect on the emotions of drivers. Jonny (Campervan Owner, 2012) for example said on grey days he tended to drive even more slowly as the road had a depressing 'vibe'. Interestingly the opposite effect was experienced in the auto-ethnography undertaken:

I wanted to drive quickly just to get out of madness of window wipers swishing, poor visibility and the van being attacked by water. All the windows steamed up as well and with no air con, I had to drive one handed and try and swab the mist off the windscreen with the other. Torrential rain also disturbed the views outside and I wanted to go fast but was concerned that the van would slide around. (Research Diary, 2012, figure 4 below).

[Insert figure 4 here: Driving on the A69 in the rain, Research Diary, 2012.]

However, VW campervan owner Amanda also commented that the weather affected their mobility as well as enjoyment of the trip as the vehicle leaked in water when it rained. She also said that she proceeded with caution because they felt quite vulnerable driving what seemed like a fragile vehicle. Yet whilst many of such challenges were potentially negative effects, many campervan users still convinced themselves that these downsides could be overcome, staying loyal to the brand.

Surfaces

Cresswell (2013: 109) argues that “forms of friction are defined by the relative mobilities of the surfaces and whether or not a conversion of energy happens, which typically results in heat, light or sound.” The vector ‘surfaces’ in our research diagram thus represents the tractions of surface textures encountered on roads by campervans as their technologies engage with the roads themselves. In mobilities research roads have been considered in terms of their production (Dalakoglou and Harvey 2012) as well as the aesthetics of the relatively smooth surfaces of motorways (Merriman 2009) yet little attention has been placed upon the embodied interactions between roads and different types of transport.

In terms of our research, observed conditions included smooth surfaces, tarmac, gravel tracks, muddy by-roads and parkland which had been impacted by different weather conditions. Whilst these topographies usually only have minor consequences for the user in conventional modern transport, due to the old age and often fragile nature of the campervan in terms of how it moves across these different terrains is subject to adhesive frictions which contributed to its relative immobility compared with cars. Considerations included the physical weight of the vehicle pressing down on wheels and suspension and the relationship between vehicular speeds in relation to the abrasion of tyres rubbing against contrasting plains. The velocities produced were dependent on factors to do with how the campervan grips, holds and slides on the ground. The issue however was not only the speed that

owners were confident with when driving, but also how the changing textures of surfaces affected the experience of travel:

When I was at Druridge bay I parked by the lake on the grass. Unfortunately due to rain during the night, the next day the conditions were so wet, the van had to be towed away from the water's edge and back up the hill onto the farm track. (Research Diary, 2011).

Due to it being used as a holiday vehicle, campervans find themselves in challenging locations, muddy byroads, mountainous roads and busy motorways. This coupled with the volatility of weather meant that road surfaces would change dramatically in a short space of time. Due to these ongoing affects experienced as unknown probabilities both on and off the highway, they often resulted in campervan owners being anxious about their trips. Particularly in wet weather users worried if their campervans would manage to climb steep hills or if water might 'get into the engine'. Also as many Campervan festivals were outdoors, this meant that inclement weather would confine them to their vehicles on the campsite, so environmental conditions played a huge role in how users moved around. In the following quote the impacts of rain contributed to immobility and stillness:

It was cold and raining but it was fine. It just totally chucked it down with rain and it leaked everywhere and the awning leaked generally but, the bus leaked through the sunroof as well so the seals needed doing. There were things which caused problems and we could have had happy times but the stress it caused due to holes in it was just shit. ... If it was raining we would basically go out and find some indoor activity for the day like soft play which we could

have done in Newcastle without the bloody bus anyway. (Amanda, VW Campervan – Owner-passenger, 2012).

Due to the age of their campervans, it was usual that they would have reoccurring faults allowing the inclement weather to seep into the vehicle. Water leaks, dangerous road surfaces and inconveniences caused by temperature complimented the holiday experience. In terms of navigation most campervan festivals were also held in fields, so rain also created difficulty in driving on and off site due to slippery and uneven coverings. Thus because more often than not the user was not as shielded from direct environmental conditions as with more modern forms of transport, participants became embedded within the environment by the ways in which they attempted to move with and through it. Thus surfaces of mobility and the tractions involved become significant both aesthetically and symbolically (mud on the campervan) as well as in terms of slowing down mobilities and enhancing the feel of the vehicle.

Other vehicles

The vector 'other vehicles' was concerned with analysing the relationship between the campervan and other vehicles. Vehicles moved in front and behind the VW campervan which caused it to be driven at a speed not always preferred by the driver. Thus how the road was populated with other vehicles was combined in an assemblage with the variable speed limits and the actual driving conditions, and determined a sense of pace. In simple terms; having other vehicles trailing behind or in front prompted an urgency to move faster, slower or to remain at a constant speed.

Thus other drivers had a frictional effect on the speed and transmission of the VW campervan:

On my way I drove down a busy motorway. I had to dodge out of the way, try to keep up sometimes and other times pull in at a service station to have a rest from the hectic road. People seemed to hate me trundling along. I didn't mind the experience but it was at times quite stressful having to avoid what was a chaotic situation that wasn't relaxing. (Research Diary, 2011).

Yet while the effects of road occupation are not exclusive to VW campervans, they challenged conventional road behaviour in many respects due to their slowness, design and public reaction to them. Campervans also developed the sociality of the road in ways that conventional cars do not by virtue of the ways owners engaged with each other through their vehicles.

Hence, it was not only the speed of the vehicles on the road that set velocity, but interpretations of the spaces of other drivers. For example when campervan users acknowledged each other in waving, smiling or beeping their horns, startled reactions from other drivers led to changes in velocity. Some campervan users also actively 'chased' other campervan drivers, hurrying to catch them up so they could connect:

I mean we get waved at by normal cars never mind other VW campervans, Scarlet (6 year old) loves that in the front. Simon (partner) keeps saying stop waving at people (laughs) (Gilly, VW campervan passenger, 2012).

Whilst some car drivers avoided this sociality of the road, most made a point of reciprocating reactions from other VW users, changing their driving tactics to suit:

People do beep at you and wave and it makes people smile. We sometimes get carried away and flash our lights at them as well (Margaret, VW campervan owner, 2010).

Usually road users only signaled in anticipation of perceived danger, the VW campervan promoted reactions that promoted alternative ways of 'being' with people on the move. On the other hand, some respondents highlighted some negative reactions from other vehicle users:

Well we have had the opposite as well. We have [people] going 'Get out of the way you stupid hippies'. We did have extremes urm, people beeping but 'Get out the ... way, slow coaches you ... hippies' (Amanda, VW campervan passenger, 2012).

Their response to negative public reaction was to actually speed up to avoid further social friction. On other occasions campervan users showed an indifference and ignored the gestures of others and continued at a 'slow' pace in order to 'relax' on the road:

De-stressing after a week of work and inwardly laughing at the big cars flying past trying to get where they want to be because they get less time to spend in their car- we are the opposite, ours is a pleasure to be in so we take our time. (Kenny, VW campervan owner, 2012).

Kenny maintained that a 'slow' choice allowed for a more enjoyable road experience. He implied that the VW campervan unlike cars were designed to be 'lived' in whilst cars were not. He also expressed smugness about the value of travelling using more time in contrast to conventional road users that seek speed. Ultimately, the frictions of

sociality of the road transform the way VW campervan users constructed their identities and their mobilities.

Conclusions

This paper has considered the embodiment of campervan travel through the frictions of various material mobilities. By considering this 'slow' vehicle not only moving on the linear trajectory of A-to B, but as part of a fragile and volatile assemblage 'rubbing against' various unstable vectors, it is argued that whilst observable at 40mph it contains, absorbs and produces multiple frictions. In other words as the driver-vehicle assemblage materialises velocity, the kinaesthetic and emotive 'driving body' aligns or retracts from adhesive surfaces, weather conditions, mechanical turbulence and other drivers to sense different aspects of mobilities.

According to Dickinson and Lumsdon (2010: 78) travelling at a slow pace and engaging with places along the way is by no means an innovation. Indeed prior to widespread car travel much of tourism was slow. Travel on foot, horse, stagecoach and ship led to limited speeds due to various frictions. The contemporary idea of 'slowness' though also embodies the importance of the travel experience to and within a destination, as patrimony and culture at a slower pace supports the environment (Dickinson 2010). With the sociability of travel emerging as a critical context, Urry (2007) also adds that even something as simple as travelling to commune with others also engages in the slow travel itineraries as people stop, socialise and inhabit places. Nevertheless, as Vannini (2013) has argued: "A profitable way to understand slowing down as an effort, as an accomplishment, is not

only by understanding it relationally, but also by understanding it contextually and phenomenologically. Moving slower or moving faster is something that must be apprehended as an embodied sensation and performance.” In this paper we have sought to understand the frictions of campervan travel and its slowness as a multi-sensory and embodied aspect of contemporary mobilities.

Hajer (1999) has emphasised the importance a ‘zero-friction society discourse’ has had on urban planning and attributes this to the ubiquity of the automobile (Birtchnell 2016). However our discussion of the campervan also points to a form of travel that highlights the ambivalence of the notion of freedom that is associated with automobilities (Freudendal-Pedersen 2009). While understandings of friction as a metaphor for the reduction of distance are well known in the geographical and mobilities literature, we have argued that friction needs to be conceptualised by both its social and physical characteristics in order for the materialities of tourism to be further understood.

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