

**THE RISE OF UBER AND THE [RE]CONSTRUCTION OF
THE NORTH AMERICAN DREAM**

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ABSTRACT

The road – while on the surface often perceived as merely a means of allowing individuals to move from one location to another, has during recent decades become deeply intertwined with both individual and mass narratives related to the pursuit of freedom. The freedom narrative began when the United States highway system, developed during the early 1960s and thematically charged by the Beat Generation's road-trip literature, became imbued with new meaning and new freedom-facilitating potential. The road, an architectural feat once thought of largely as a means of providing mass mobilization, came to be understood as both the road *to* freedom, and the road *as* freedom. However, today we find ourselves experiencing a new road narrative, one that still speaks to freedom but that differs vastly from the road narratives of the 1960s. Today, as individuals experience the road through sharing-economy services such as Uber, a narrative shift has occurred whereby freedom on the road is no longer experienced individualistically and/or destructively but, instead, communally and constructively.

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DEDICATION

For Matt,

Thank you for having faith in the journey and allowing me to take you on the road less traveled by—in the words of Robert Frost, that has made all the difference.

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

The North American road, and particularly the expressways that led individuals out of the suburbs and across massive expanses of the nation at top speeds, has since the 1960s consistently been associated with freedom. Defined by narratives of endless journeys, the road has figured as an escape route from control, orthodoxy, and destruction while acting as an expanse upon which to search for a better life. At the same time, the destructive potential of speeds accessed through road travel have also largely been imagined as an inherent aspect of the experience. The road, as imagined by the Beat Generation of the Cold War era, could provide the post 1960s North American with the promise of a journey that can never end or, at the very least, a transformative or redemptive experience capable of transcending mainstream imperatives and concerns. By drawing on these traditional understandings of freedom and the road, this paper—*The Rise of Uber*—seeks to critically analyze how discursive narratives and understandings of the road and freedom have fundamentally shifted from those found during Post World War Two North America to those found in the present day. Uber here will serve as a case study and representative example of the Sharing Economy, and provides a platform through which one can begin to consider the shifting ways freedom is conceptualized through, and related to the road and the way these shifts are a reflection of the changing nature of freedom—or what comes to be understood as freedom—and of freedom's relationship to the individual. **With these shifts in mind, the primary question that I seek to answer is this: How have narratives of freedom, as pertaining to the road, changed in an era motivated by the Sharing Economy and what role, if any, has Uber played in facilitating these narrative shifts?**

In order to address these questions I will examine the ways Uber—as a representation and extension of the Sharing Economy—has created new digital, material, and social conditions that allow for new road narratives to be written.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

To address the topic of the rise of Uber and the ways the Sharing Economy has contributed to the reconceptualization of the road's relationship to freedom, it is important to approach the literature on the road as freedom from two temporal perspectives: 1) the road as freedom during the Cold War era, and 2) the road as freedom during the present day. By doing so, distinct trends and themes begin to emerge. When considering the foundational narratives that first associated the road as a means to freedom during the Cold War era, literature produced by the Beat Generation and other works pertaining to the road that were created post World War Two come to the forefront. Today, however, although they persist, the Beat Generation's visions of freedom as being synonymous with individual voyages on empty roads are being met with new road narratives that today are imagining freedom and the road differently. Narratives are today emerging that equate freedom and travel and roads with themes informed by the Sharing Economy, digitally-enabled mobility, and even—as I will be suggesting here—Uber itself.

2.1 FREEDOM IN A NUCLEAR NORTH AMERICA

2.1.1 The Threat of Nuclear Warfare

Initially, the narrative of the road as freedom stemmed from the dispersion of individuals from cities to suburbs during the Cold War era. With the persistent threat of nuclear warfare looming post World War Two, the belief emerged that it would be safer to dilute the concentration of individuals living together in one community; that being the case, the notion of the suburbs, or smaller more secluded communities began to arise as a viable and safer option (Featherstone 2004). With this trend of social diffusion, however, came new and romanticized notions of the road which, with the creation by President Eisenhower of the "Dwight D. Eisenhower National System of Interstate and Defense Highways" in 1956, began to cover greater and greater expanses of territory. As a means of escaping from the current situation, and to quell a potentially panic prone public, the proverbial road began to be positioned as a

means to freedom and as a potential escape to safety. Notably, however, the road-bound individual was not always attempting to outrun or escape what lay behind them but, instead, was moving towards a life free of their current situation and away from the threat of danger—a danger that included the very real threat of nuclear warfare (Kerouac 1951). It was during this time period that the road as a “space between town and country... as an empty expanse, a *tabula rasa*, the last true frontier” (Dargis, 1991, p 18) came into circulation and the popular imagination. What manifests itself through the literature that arose during this period, and from author’s who have written on it such as Dargis (1991), Creswell (1993), and Kerouac (1951)—authors whose work oscillates between fiction and non-fiction—is that they all speak to, and work towards reinforcing the narrative of the road as being synonymous with freedom during the Cold War period.

2.1.2 The Road to Freedom

A large part of the literature that is used to provide historical context for the road as a means to freedom draws on the idea of the road as a remedy to the oppressive and ever present threat of destruction. Kerouac’s novel, *On The Road* (1951), provides a glimpse of how the road was understood. This novel became especially important since later writers and thinkers built on Kerouac’s vision to envision their own perspectives regarding the road’s impact on both drivers and passengers as well as its role in society. Ideas such as those expressed in Kerouac’s *On The Road* and others from the Beat Generation—ideas that speak to the way in which the road is the path that one must take to reach freedom, yet one that inevitably offers a relentless and never ending journey—present the masses with an evocative manifestation of their epoch’s zeitgeist. These road narratives were explored by Cresswell (1993), and Dargis (1991) who began to understand the road not simply as a means to freedom but also as a tool of resistance; immobile stability and consistency came to be seen by these authors as enemies that needed, at all costs, to be outrun—the road as escape route, and the car, taken in the middle of the night with no passengers, the

getaway vehicle.

2.1.3 A Journey with No End in Sight

Dargis's (1991) and Cresswell's (1993) literature reflects upon experiences of the road as shifting from passive experiences to active encounters. Each time an individual takes to the road they are simultaneously leaving something behind while actively pursuing something new that adds to their life. The road, because of this, comes to be seen as "an alternative 'flight,' based less on luxury and consumption than on a romantic notion of the free hobo, unencumbered by possessions—a free spirit roaming the road" (Cresswell 1993, p. 413). The idea of being free of possessions but always moving forward in an attempt to possess freedom becomes a crucial piece of the road narrative. Searching but never finding the idealized freedom alluded to through road narratives later began to manifest itself in pop culture—consider iconic road films such as *Thelma and Louise* (1991)—and brought to light the idea that the road may not necessarily be the route to freedom it was originally believed to be.

2.2 DESTRUCTIVE SPEED

2.2.1 The Necessity and Promise of Destruction

With the road, of course, came speed, and speed contributed to the road being imagined not solely as a route to freedom, but as a path to destruction. The narrative of speed as a destructive force that is both necessary as well as inherent to the road was broached more and more throughout later literature by those who questioned the simplistically utopian nature of narratives of freedom. The socio-cultural effects of speed are, for example, explored in the work of thinkers such as Der Derian (1990) and Baudrillard (1993) who challenge the idea of the road as freedom through their development of concepts such as surveillance, simulated realities, and the absence of a journey with a predetermined end point or goal. In their work critical perspectives and deconstructions of the utopian narratives surrounding the road are

brought to the forefront. In large part, the idea of speed as being inherently destructive stems from the idea that if the road is always being used as an escape route—one with no precise end in sight—to stop on the road is to obliterate oneself by stopping a journey to freedom (Baudrillard 1993, p. 247) (assuming one doesn't become catastrophically destroyed in a speed-induced accident). The car and the road, although presenting the option of a new start, also represented the potential destruction that could occur while searching for freedom; in the process of attempting to flee the ever looming threat of nuclear warfare, the new threat of self destruction through speed (or calling of the journey) arose.

2.2.2 The Role (Or Lack Thereof) Of The Passenger

Connected to the idea of speed as destruction is the notion that this type of experience—the road as freedom—is one that necessarily needs to be experienced by the lone individual; the passenger in Beat Generation literature, when encountered at all, is simply a fleeting or inconsequential character—someone who does not assist in moving the driver's search for freedom forward (Beckler & Marecek 2008, 1770). Because of this, speedy travel along desolate highways come to be seen as individualistic attempts to reach a sort of self-actualization through the process of becoming free via the road (i.e. of out-accelerating fate and responsibility). The Cold War conceptualization of the car and freedom can then be read as an individual pursuit that must start and end on the road—a tangible end point can never exist. Instead, the individual must either constantly be in motion or obliterate themselves in their search for freedom. Freedom, in this context, can be read as being found only when the individual is able to destroy themselves on the road, whether literally or symbolically. They are constantly moving and constantly alone. As a result, a majority of the literature that deals with the theme of speed as destruction relies on the initial belief that the Cold War road narratives were positioned to allow individuals to escape destruction when, in reality, the road was inherently destructive as well.

2.3 THE SHARING ECONOMY

Turning to the 2000s, the Sharing Economy—grounded in ideals of communal and collective endeavors that are understood to be more beneficial to all parties involved than traditional non-sharing models—began to take hold. The traditional conceptualization of the “American Dream” in turn, started to become more fluid and the founding capitalist mentality that it was grounded upon began to deteriorate as the value of shared and second hand goods began, following the Great Recession in 2008, to rise. The emergence of the Sharing Economy is evidenced by the success of platforms such as Ebay, Kijiji, AirBnb, and Lyft, to name a few. It is for this reason that as we enter the second decade of the 2000s, the Sharing Economy has rapidly gone from being considered a passing fad to a mainstream *counter-culture* (of sorts) that has firmly entrenched itself into contemporary culture, paving the way for a new more collaborative, connected, and communal future (digitally) driven forward by the likes of Uber.

2.3.1 Uber as a Manifestation of the Sharing Economy

Literature on the Sharing Economy and Uber’s role within this ever growing sector becomes relevant when considering the way that the narrative of freedom via the road has shifted from being motivated by individualistic and/or destructive towards collective and/or constructive forces. Likewise, the notion of freedom that lies at the heart of motivating individuals to take to the road has shifted.

Today, freedom via the road is not necessarily perceived as being synonymous with one’s ability to use the road as a direct route to escapism and freedom. Instead, the road to freedom—or at least self-determination—more often than not is synonymous with having access to the road where one currently resides in order to make a living and which allows for the road-goer to effectively and efficiently operate within their given socio-economic reality. Indeed, we could argue that freedom in today’s world is not so much achieved by escaping social constraints as it is by having access to employment, mobility, and

purchasing power. Because of this, where the Beat Generation was perceived as being the driving force and counterculture that facilitated widespread uptake of Cold War road narratives, the contemporary counterculture of the Sharing Economy can be said to be doing the same.¹ In this case, authors such as Lamberton (2012)—who discusses the shift towards the Sharing Economy and its importance—as well as Herman (2015), and Rosenblat and Stark (2015), who deal more specifically with Uber, bring to the fore ideas relating to Uber's role in the Sharing Economy. One of the key themes these authors discuss is the idea that there has been a general trend away from a primarily individualistic culture and a move towards a more communal one (Lamberton 2012). When this idea is applied to Uber and, by extension to the road, I argue that what can be extrapolated is the idea that the road, and the experiences that occur on it, are also becoming more communal and less resistant to sharing as dependency on the role of the passenger further becomes an integral part of the Sharing Economy and today's on-road experience. As such, today's road can be figured as diverging from the Beat Generation's characterization of the road as a space for individualistic searches for freedom. Likewise, one of the key themes within the literature that discusses the Sharing Economy is the idea that it allows for greater levels of mobility and fluidity to occur in regards to individual's positions in life (Lamberton 2012). Likewise, relationships within a Sharing Economy can be optimized to allow for more growth and, in a sense, freedom. When this is applied to the car and to the road, if there has been a move towards a Sharing Economy—as seen via Uber—it is not unreasonable to think that the freedom achieved through the road is similarly being facilitated by communal, constructive, and shared experiences.

¹ It's worth mentioning that whether or not the Sharing Economy is a counterculture is up for debate, especially in so far as today's Sharing Economy—as manifested by Uber or AirBnB—continues to operate within and according to larger neoliberal imperatives; however, we might be able to say that today's Sharing Economy is countercultural in the sense that it disrupts entrenched economic modalities and extracts value from collaborative consumption rather than one-way modes of distribution.

3.0 METHODS OF COLLECTION & ANALYSIS

For my methods of collection, I will be looking to texts produced by the Beat Generation in order to identify foundational themes of freedom and their relationship to the road. In order to limit the scope and to focus on what it means to experience the road as freedom I will primarily draw from Jack Kerouac's novel *On the Road*. I will compare the ways the themes of the road and freedom are later articulated vis a vis the emergence of Uber. Since Uber is a very recent phenomenon my research focus will be on blogs and other public texts that discuss the merits of Uber. The texts I will look at that focus on Uber will be first person artifacts written within the past year that directly describe an individual's experience or feelings toward Uber in North America.

Likewise, my methods of analysis will be comprised of two techniques. In regards to the first set of texts collected—the novels and additional fictional works produced by Jack Kerouac during the Cold War Era—I will use thematic analysis in order to identify themes related to freedom via the road. When considering the public texts written about Uber, I will also be using a content analysis for a quantitative overview of how many times the original themes of freedom and the road manifest themselves. However, since I am interested in seeing how it is that new narratives of freedom manifest themselves—if they can be said to exist—and not simply if there has been a shift, I will also be doing a thematic analysis on these texts; my expectation in doing so is that I will find that while narratives of freedom persist in popular culture and in relation to the road, these narratives are diverging from traditional ones when considering the role of the passenger; moreover, I hope to locate evidence that in today's Sharing Economy road travel is increasingly being viewed as collective and constructive endeavour rather than one that is individualistic and destructive.

4.0 FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

4.0.1 Contextualizing the Road as Freedom Narrative

In order to understand how it is that a new narrative of freedom has come about and the implications that this carries with it, it is first crucial to be aware of the narrative of the road that developed during the Cold War era in North America and against which new constructs of freedom via the road are positioned. In doing so, it becomes apparent that while the road continues to be associated with freedom, there has been a fundamental shift in the counter-culture that facilitates the road's meaning and the way that access to freedom via the road now manifests itself.

The initial narrative of the road as freedom can be seen as developing and coming to its peak during the Cold War era; a time period that, while relatively calm on the surface in comparison to World War Two, carried with it the ever present threat of mass destruction. Nonetheless, while citizens were no longer faced with warfare on their doorstep, their safety was no more guaranteed; the threat of nuclear destruction stood in as an ever present, yet evasive and somewhat abstract, reminder that nuclear obliteration was a very real possibility. Moreover, individuals recognized that were they to remain where they were—located in the cities that would be in the cross-hairs during a nuclear attack—they would not be free to live a life unencumbered by fear of potential social and physical annihilation. In a large scale response to the implicit and potential threat of mutual destruction, in the mid-1950s President Eisenhower put forward the notion that the public would be safer were they to disperse into smaller communities surrounding the social and economic hubs where they resided and worked (Featherstone, 2004). In turn, the masses took to the road to start their new lives elsewhere. However, while the new focus on the suburban home satisfied the needs of many in so far as it created a sense of freedom, control, and security, not everyone was placated into believing that traveling from one stationary location simply to hunker down in another was sufficient. The result: a widespread counter-culture that would later become

self-identified as the Beat Generation took hold and begin playing with the idea that the suburban home was not the only access point to individual freedom during the Cold War. Instead, they turned to the car and to the promises afforded by the road.

By taking the car and heading out on the road, “the car rivaled the house as an alternative zone of everyday life; the car, too, is an abode, but an exceptional one; it is a closed realm of intimacy, but one released from the constraints that usually apply to the intimacy of the home, once endowed with a formal freedom of great intensity” (Baudrillard, 1996 p. 67). And so the road as freedom began with the need to embark on an ever changing and adaptable journey wherein freedom wasn’t necessarily a destination but an ephemeral *feeling* that was constantly able to be pursued. It was this desire to seek a *sense* of freedom that was neither stagnant nor necessarily tangible that came to underpin the Beat Generation’s perspective regarding the role that the road would come to play in their search for freedom. And so with the emergence of the Beat Generation the idea of the road as more than simply a means to a destination but, instead, as a part of the journey, took hold and thus began the deconstruction of the traditional American Dream. As a result, a type of American individualism facilitated by the road and rooted in the “endorsement of self-fulfillment as the ultimate life goal, its promotion of self-improvement via personal effort, and its narrow sense of the social” (Becker and Marecek, 2008 p. 1767) began to take hold.

When considered at a glance, the road as a means to freedom is positioned as an experience that is within the reach of all and as a journey that is capable of uniting individuals who take to the road. Kerouac’s *On the Road* serves as a fundamental and foundational artifact in so far as it positions the road not simply as a means to freedom, but as freedom in and of itself. In large part, he does this by using the road “to express frustration with and resistance to the Dream. Simultaneously, however, [he] uses mobility as part of a search for his own, reconstructed, America” (Cresswell 1993, p. 259), as well as to allude to the idea

that a new and imagined America is accessible to all providing they take to the road. Within *On the Road*, this notion of accessibility is conveyed early on when Kerouac writes, “it’s an anywhere road for anyone anyhow” (1957 p. xxi). The positioning of the road in this manner speaks to a new construction of cultural geography in so far as access to spaces that may not have otherwise been granted to individuals are able to be accessed through the use of the cars on roads made for high speeds.

Cresswell, in *Mobility as Resistance*, says that the notion of mass accessibility to areas and objects creates a new sense of freedom since open and unyielding physical access to space is something not traditionally granted which, in turn, challenges the dominant hegemonic structures that had a role in creating and structuring said space initially (1993). Therefore, by Kerouac saying that the road is a space that can be used by anyone to achieve any end goal, regardless if it aligns with the initial purpose for which the road was constructed—in this instance, the mobilization of individuals away from a nuclear threat but with a specific destination in mind—there is a power shift in how the road is understood and defined. Those who created the road no longer have sole control over defining its use value and purpose since those who are taking to the road are doing so for reasons outside of what the road was initially designed for—to reach an end point—rather than to simply be experienced in and of itself. What the Beat Generation’s road can then be seen as doing is challenging this limited idea of mobility. Therefore, when the road is discussed in terms of moving individuals out of the epicenter of where a nuclear strike would likely occur, it is positioned “as a means to get somewhere. Both social and special mobility are encouraged and connected as long as they result in ‘improvement’” (Cresswell, 1993 p. 259). The Beat Generation challenges this, however, as they take to the road with the idea that they are going to experience freedom and that the experience they seek is fundamentally rooted in engaging the road as more than a means to a final destination.

This notion of altering a space or object's use value through the way that individuals interact with it also lends itself to constructing the Cold War road as a means to freedom when considering Foucault's belief that, traditionally freedom that has been granted in political and institutional spheres has only been done so as to reinforce social complacency and, in turn, is merely an illusion. For Foucault, power is exerted through either discipline or control and while both are effective in reasserting dominant hegemonic norms and power dynamics, control is often the preferred method as it is less explicit and more constructive; the internalization of control manifests itself in individual self-regulation. In regards to the road, Deleuze later draws on Foucault's understanding of control and believes that "you do not confine people with a highway. But by making highways, you multiply the means of control. I am not saying this is the only aim of highways, but people can travel infinitely and 'freely' without being confined while being perfectly controlled. That is our future" (2006 p. 32). In other words, when the masses took to the road in order to be made free from the constraints placed on them by the threat of nuclear warfare, they were still constrained by the very nature and fixity of the road in so far as it was constructed to be used for linear journeys with both drivers and passengers taking to it with a designated end point in mind. It is through the Beat Generation's use of the road, however—an aimless journey with no real aim beyond being "free"—that this notion of control is challenged. So while the road remains a regulated spatial and temporal construct with highly physical limitations—one that typically speaks to a journey with a defined start and end point—the Cold War search for freedom on the road becomes an almost senseless and open-ended search.

Even the way that the Beat Generation chose to drive on the road speaks to the way that its accessible yet controlled nature can be manipulated and modified in order to grant a type of freedom. There comes a point in Kerouac's novel that he discusses the way that, when Dean drives, he enjoys playing chicken with on-coming trucks, swerving back into his lane at the last second in order to avoid being hit (Kerouac, 1957

p. 211). In these instances, Kerouac conveys the idea that while traveling on the road is indeed a means to search for freedom, it is only by veering back into the correct lane that he and the other individuals in the car are saved and able to continue their journey; their salvation can never necessarily be found on the road, yet the road acts the platform upon which they are able to actively search for and exercise their freedom and self-determination. This search does not need to have a tangible end point, but instead requires a constant fluctuation between using the road in the manner that it was designed and how the Beat Generation chooses to use it. Therefore, the notion of the road as having low or very few access barriers, coupled with the fact individuals are able to oscillate between using it how it was intended (or not) is pivotal to the Beat Generation's constructing of the road as freedom. While anyone is able to take to the road it is fundamentally a self-serving journey that, one that requires engagement and agential action (i.e. the road must be acted upon) in order for individuals to be able to truly actualize and experience freedom.

The second tenet that underpins the Beat Generation's initial narrative of the road as freedom, and which is closely tied to the road as accessible to all, is the emphasis on the autonomy of the driver; indeed, the individual who takes to the road and is in control of the vehicle is imagined as also being in control of their own lives. To return to *On the Road*, this is conveyed in the way that Kerouac and the fellow drivers and hitchhikers he writes about were viewed as "cowboys of the night" (1993 p. 23). This type of allusion to the cowboy persona becomes crucial in three respects: 1) the cowboy is consistently positioned as a heroic frontiersman, 2) he stands in as a manifestation of lawlessness, and 3) in the traditional cowboy narrative there is always a journey into the wilderness that concludes with a type of self-actualization (Hudson, 1956). By making reference to himself and other riders of the road as cowboys, Kerouac implicitly draws on this type of imagery, elevating what could otherwise be a banal drive on the road to a

journey through the American (cultural) landscape—viewing the road as an expanse that allows for uninhibited discovery both of America and also of oneself.

Beyond this, when the cowboy is described in the literature, he is positioned as moving “not into the limbo of the past . . . but into the long future” (Hudson, 1956 p. 254). He is seen as challenging present day norms but doing so by moving amidst the preexisting landscapes that he finds himself in while mediating them in ways that have not been done previously. Likewise, to return to the idea of Dean running the car off of the road as a means of just missing what would be viewed as intentional accidents, he is seen as leaving the past in the form of nuclear threats behind while hurling himself into an unknown future by using the road in a way that it was not intended; he does not use the road to reach safety. Instead, he puts himself within reach of other potentially destructive situations, but ones which he has control over. By engaging with the road in this manner, it comes to take on new, darker, and more dangerous potential—a potential that was not yet explored or sought out prior to the Cold War. As a result, the references to the cowboy reassert the idea that the road *to* freedom and the road *as* freedom is essentially a journey into a new and untouched frontier as the driver, through their own autonomous and conscious decisions, chooses to engage with the road in new and previously unprecedented ways.

In large part, it is these two ideas—the road as being accessible to all and as affording individuals a greater sense of autonomy upon starting their journey—that serve as a starting point for the road narrative during the Cold War era and that reinforce the road *to* freedom and the road *as* freedom as something that must be experienced individually. These key themes carry over into modern road narratives but in different ways. This is due to the fact that although the Beat Generation may have developed this narrative, today’s new counter-cultures are reshaping what the road means today. Consequentially, the meaning of the North American road is at a turning point. While it is still viewed as a

platform upon which freedom can be actualized, the counter-culture that drives individuals' understanding of the road and how this freedom can be achieved is no longer the Beat Generation. Looking to the late 2008s, a new trend arose in response to the 2008 recession that occurred following the bursting of the housing bubble. Shifting away from traditional and linear modes of production and consumption new and collaborative forms of consumption—the Sharing Economy—began to gain traction and began creating new understandings of the road and what it could mean.

Today, collaborative consumption is often viewed as operating as a sort of hybrid market. Instead of revolving around the idea of sole individual ownership, the focus is often on the redistribution and reallocation of goods (Matzler et al, 2015). While there can be a monetary exchange, there does not necessarily need to be; an exchange that is perceived as equally beneficial to both or all parties involved, however, is still required or expected. As the notion of collaborative consumption began to develop further, it took on the form of the Sharing Economy which fundamentally required the “using and sharing of products and services among others” (Puschmann, 2016 p. 93). However, there has been contention surrounding the naming of this system and a belief that referring to it as the Sharing Economy is actually a misnomer. Instead, prominent thinkers who focus on the Sharing Economy have put forward the idea that it would be more apt to refer to what is occurring as an Access Economy. Whatever it's called, the Access/Sharing Economy is contributing to new ways of understanding the road.

Of course, the Sharing Economy alone cannot be held fully accountable for shifting the narrative of freedom that surrounds the road; however, if we look closely at a platform such as Uber, insights can be gathered about how new road narratives are developing and reconstituting what freedom via the road means today. In regards to perceiving the Sharing Economy and Uber as fundamental in creating a new road narrative, the sharing enabled via Uber needs to be understood as “anything to which access is

enabled through pooling of resources, products or services and...which allow members to share multiple products that are owned by companies or by private persons” (Matzler et al, 2015 p. 72). This definition responds to the observation that Uber requires a monetary transaction and is not inherently grounded upon the notion of sharing. Therefore, while sharing in the true sense may not be occurring—an exchange of goods or services that are not dependent on monetary compensation—Uber can still be understood as an extension of the Sharing Economy since the nature of collaborative consumption and the access economy allows for it to be positioned as such.

4.0.2 On the Road With Uber

Uber, a peer-to-peer car sharing application and service developed in 2009, was created with the intention of providing individuals who had access to smartphones a platform over which they could request a ride and, upon doing so, could then be directly connected to their soon-to-be driver (Goode, 2011). Unlike traditional taxi services, Uber can be viewed as offering a service that blurs the lines between public and private. Whereas taxis and other communal or mass transit options have previously been designated as public in advance of passengers entering the space, the individual ordering an Uber is not entering into a space or vehicle that carries with it the same connotations. Instead, being accepted into what has traditionally been understood as a personal space (someone else’s car), the Uber passenger experiences the road in a way that is similar to the hitchhiker of the Cold War era; the driver and passenger, both beginning as strangers with a similar tangible destination in mind, come together to experience a communal journey but from different perspectives and with different goals. It is this similarity that then allows for comparisons to be drawn between how the road is experienced by the two differing counter-cultures and the implications that this has on the road as freedom narrative. While there currently is limited scholarly literature on the subject of Uber, both drivers and passengers of Uber have taken to the internet to share their experiences and unwittingly have begun to lay the foundation for understanding

how Uber—as an offshoot of the Sharing Economy—has begun to impact the way that freedom is experienced via roads, highways, and freeways.

Now it is important to understand that when comparing the narratives of freedom that were developed by the Beat Generation to those being created by individuals who now participate in and comprise the new counter-culture of the Sharing Economy—specifically individuals who engage with Uber either as passengers or drivers—the road is still positioned as a way to access freedom. Therefore, the previous themes of the road as freedom in so far as it is accessible to all and the road as freedom on the basis that it allows for individuals a greater sense of autonomy still holds. But although the road may still be positioned as a means to freedom, what constitutes this freedom is changing.

To consider the way today's narrative of the road as being accessible to all has evolved, we need to look at the figure of the aspiring entrepreneur. Whereas accessibility to the road was initially viewed during the Cold War era as a readily achievable goal—the narrative being that all an individual needed to take to the road was access to a vehicle and a dream—today, accessibility to the road is understood from the more instrumentalized standpoint of individuals being able to use and optimize the road as a means of allowing them to make a living by entering into a shared market. Therefore, what begins to arise in modern day road narratives of freedom is a change in what is meant when we speak of the road as being accessible to all. It is no longer enough to say that freedom via the road can be actualized by merely taking to the road in one's car—this no longer constitutes the accessibility necessary for the road to allow drivers and passengers to achieve freedom. Instead, accessibility to the road today means being able to take to the highways and byways in hopes of “obtaining value from untapped potential residing in goods that are not entirely exploited by their owners” (Matzler, 2015 pg. 71). When access to the road is understood this way, all persons are assumed to have the means and opportunity to pursue a type of freedom within the

marketplace. Working from this perspective, then, accessibility for all comes to be understood as having greater accesses to social and economic benefits through access to the road, and not merely access to the road itself.

Uber, for example, allows for freedom to develop by optimizing the road as a more efficient platform upon which a market arises where individuals are able to benefit and profit from shared, and indeed publicly funded, resources—that is, roads built for high speeds. This returns to the idea that in taking to the road via Sharing Economy platforms such as Uber—in this instance, primarily in the case of Uber drivers—individuals are able to access goods or services that they may not have otherwise been able to previously. Being aware of this, access to the road through the use of Uber becomes tied to the idea of access to self-empowerment: individuals are empowered to get what they need from each other and, by harnessing the collective resource of the crowd, are able to realize their dreams (Stephany, 2015).

Therefore, when looking to the modern day narrative of the road as freedom and considering how the idea of the road as being accessible to all plays into the overarching narrative, it is crucial to understand that today, when referring to the road as being accessible, what is indirectly being discussed is the belief that the road, when coupled with the Sharing Economy, provides access to self-empowerment (and, perhaps, self-employment?).

Consequently, access in modern day road narratives needs to be understood in two ways. While there still exists the idea of the road as being tangibly accessible to all who have the means to take to it, accessibility to the road also implies being able to access the Sharing Economy. It is upon entering into the Sharing Economy via the road through a platform such as Uber that gives individuals access to shared products and services that they may not have otherwise had before and, in doing so, presents them with a means of self-empowerment and, by extension, freedom. Likewise, the central notion that the road allows for a

greater sense of autonomy, which is fundamental to the road as freedom narrative, still exists today. The idea that freedom is achieved through the road as it allows for individuals to achieve greater autonomy comes into play when one considers the environmental and social ethos that is embedded in the ideology of the Sharing Economy. An intrinsic component of the Sharing Economy is that it plays off of the idea that as labourers, there is the inherent desire for individuals to be in control of their own lives (Stephany, 2015). It is this desire that the Sharing Economy capitalizes on in so far as it works to create systems that satisfy individuals' desires to provide for themselves and achieve a state where the human need for freedom and self-reliance can be satisfied (Stephany, 42). Therefore, the belief that the road facilitates greater individual autonomy when people are given access to and control over the road is manifested through shared platforms such as Uber on the basis that Uber allows for the above stipulations to be fulfilled. The platform inherently relies on individuals constructing their own work schedules and utilizing the shared platform at hand in order to shift the onus of achieving freedom from being dependent on others back onto themselves; Sharing Economy participants are understood to have the ability to take control of and actualize a sense of freedom within their own lives.

So while this manifestation of the road as facilitating greater individual autonomy varies from that found across the Beat Generation's road, a similarity remains. In both instances, individuals can be seen to be taking to the road as a means of developing autonomy by pursuing a goal rooted in a shared sense of purpose; in turn, this shared sense of purpose and access is imagined as a means of creating a better world (Stephany, 44). Although the notion of working towards a "better" world may manifest itself more readily in Cold War narratives—individuals taking control of their lives by taking to the road in search of a world that is not under the threat of imminent destruction—the pursuit of a better world occurs in modern times through the way that Uber evokes a future where all individuals will be given equal

opportunity to succeed. As well, shared purposed is actualized in both time periods but manifests itself in different forms. During the Cold War era, the road as freedom speaks to a shared sense of purpose as searching for a life free of implicit constraints put in place by warfare and social norms that limit social and economic movement (Jensen, 2011). Today, Sharing Economy services that make use of the road fulfill the same role on the basis that “they come with a sense of humanness and belonging ... and are able to scale meaningful social experiences” (Stephany, 44). Therefore, the narrative of freedom which manifests itself through the road, in both past and present instances, speaks to a type of freedom that is rooted in a search for belonging in so far as mobility “widens our language for engaging with questions of self and the political and social reality of possible futures” (Jensen, 2011 p. 255). Freedom, then, is granted via the road in so far as it serves as a platform upon which individuals are able to take control of their lives in a pursuit of a variable number of futures that would otherwise not be accessible to them were they to remain stationary.

4.0.3 Speed and Destruction, Yesterday and Today

Moving beyond the initial fact that the modern day road still carries with it certain associations with freedom—in the sense that roads constructed for high speeds allow individuals to feel free by allowing them to take some control over their own lives—there has been a shift in the belief that freedom and the salvation granted via high speed roads must necessarily always be coupled with themes of destruction. Instead, today the road becomes destructive/disruptive in, „oddly enough, a constructive sense: individuals are not escaping from an active threat that is coming to destroy them but, instead, escaping the idea that if things stay the same, they will eventually be destroyed by stagnancy—they will not be able to continue living the life that they currently have if they do not alter their life to respond to the demands of speed and mobility.

Prior to considering the implications of how the facets of escape and rescue manifest themselves in the modern day road narrative and the implications that these have on the road as freedom, it is important to understand how roads that are conducive to high speeds became associated with themes of destruction. The creation of the car itself was not enough to usher in associations between speed and destruction; rather, it was when thinkers such as Paul Virilio reflected back on the late 1920s and 30s in America and the mass uptake of cars such as Ford's Model T, that a distinct correlation between the two began to develop. In the early 2000s Virilio began to write on what he would come to refer to as the *original accident*. For Virilio, once the car began to be used to reach high speeds in order to supersede the constraints of time and space (Virilio, 2007) it became an archetypal tool of destruction, one that led to inevitable destruction in pursuit of unachievable experiences of escape and disembodiment.

For Virilio it is important to distinguish the difference between the "natural" and "artificial" accident. In most cases, "the accident is an unconscious oeuvre, an *invention* in the sense of uncovering what was hidden, just waiting to happen. Unlike the 'natural' accident, the 'artificial' accident results from the innovation of a motor or of some substantial material" (Virilio, 2007 p. 9). What Virilio is here identifying were the potential catastrophes that were born with each new technological creation—such as the emergence of the potential for total annihilation with the invention of nuclear weapons. For Virilio, accidents were not accidental but, instead, an intrinsic component of the creation of the technology itself. When this type of mentality was then applied to the Cold War road and, by extension, the car journeys that occurred on these roads, what arose was the unconscious idea that when one took to the road to escape the threat of destruction one was always at risk of being destroyed oneself. From this perspective, the Beat Generation's road at once rescued them from the threat of nuclear destruction by providing them with a means to get away from it, while simultaneously bringing them closer to a different type of self-imposed technological destruction.

Kerouac, unlike Virilio, does not explicitly describe his journeys on the road as always carrying with them the potential of self destruction stemming from the actions that are made possible via the car on high speed freeways. Nonetheless, he still often alludes to the potential for accidents on the road. He describes, for instance, the way Dean tempts fate and seeks thrills by playing chicken with oncoming cars: "Dean came up on lines of cars like the Angel of Terror. He almost rammed them along as he looked for an opening...and always by a hair we made it back to our side as other lines filed by in the opposite direction and I shuddered" (Kerouac, 1957 p. 235). In describing the manner that Dean controls the car and the situations that he is able to put himself and his passengers in, Kerouac is inadvertently foreshadowing Virilio's belief that the "artificial" accident is contained within high speed car travel itself by alluding to the near accidents that Dean continues to nearly get into. It is here that the notion of high speed car travel itself becomes potentially destructive as the driver's actions or lack thereof are viewed as premeditating the accidents themselves.

Baudrillard similarly notes that destruction is inherently embedded in the road when he raises the concept of the vanishing point and the desert of the real. He argues that within the space of hyperreality—a realm that individuals come to inhabit during the postmodern era—what can be understood as real versus fabricated no longer exists on the basis that individuals no longer even operate within the realm of the real: "the latter is new and taken for 'real,' more real than the other" (Baudrillard, 1994 p. 3) This does not necessarily mean, however, that individuals can not regain access to the real but that it will bear little to no resemblance to the symbols that they have come to associate with reality. Therefore, in taking to the road, Baudrillard argues that both passengers and drivers seek freedom and obliteration simultaneously as they move towards the vanishing point—a state where even simulated reality does not exist. The vanishing

point, or what can likewise be understood as the desert of the real, is the point on the horizon where “reality” is no longer visible—it is the point where all territorial and spatial references are lost and a state that, he argues, can only be reproduced when traveling at high speeds (Baudrillard, 1993). The reason why he states this is because speed reduces all landscape markers to pure objects that no longer hold specific or fixed meanings; they are merely markers of the outside world, markers that no longer have any impact on the inhabitants of the car.

Baudrillard’s vanishing point recalls the idea that individuals during the Cold War era often took to the road in search of freedom, but not necessarily a tangible end point or an idea as to what this notion of freedom would look like. Because of this, Baudrillard posits the idea that instead of moving towards a goal, passengers and drivers alike are always moving towards the horizon until they can no longer be seen against the horizon by those who remain at the place from which they left. Once they cross this threshold a symbolic self-obliteration occurs (Baudrillard, 1994). This mentality is also similarly captured in the way that Kerouac describes the horizon or road disappearing away in the rearview mirror (Kerouac, 1957)—unknowingly making allusions to the desert of the real and the symbolic self-annihilation that comes with it. He is watching his past slip away and, with it, the grasp he has on the present. As individuals, therefore, enter into the desert of the real, they are removing themselves from the present. Freedom or escape velocity is, therefore, achieved by driving as far away as possible until one is no longer visible to the naked eye or so fast that even if the driver or passenger are still seen by those outside of their vehicle, they are reduced to blurred objects and, therefore, can not be fixed in the landscape that those who are moving at slower speeds occupy.

Virilio similarly speaks of escape by observing that when one is on the road there is nothing but the reality contained within the car and no true liminal points of reference outside of the vehicle and its inhabitants

(Virilio, 2007). Upon engaging with artificial accidents, he believes that “man has in a way joined the omega point, which means there is nothing other than man any more and there is no outside any more outside him” (Virilio, 2007 p. 50). Upon entering into the vehicle, there is an erasure of ties to the outside world. Again, the 1960s narrative of the road as freedom plays off of this idea and situates the road as a means of escaping from reality. Freedom in this case is viewed as being able to remove oneself from reality by being in a constant state of motion. What arises is an experience whereby the individual is outside of, and untouched by, everything on the basis that what constitutes their new reality—the inside of a vehicle—excludes everything outside (Virilio, 2007). Escape is, therefore, not true escape since individuals are never free from the threat they seek to run from; however, what is achieved is an experience of detachment from the current social landscape they are embedded in from which they are trying to flee. Understanding this, freedom granted via the road during the 1960s must always be understood as destructive since it requires an individual to detach themselves from their social reality in order to feel free. It is, then, through the themes of rescue and escape that the freedom granted via the Cold War road has often been associated with destruction. However, as the counter-culture that largely guides and influences the discourse of the road has changed in current times, the narrative of necessary destruction in the pursuit of freedom is changing as well.

4.0.4 On the Road to Today's Versions of (Entrepreneurial) Freedom

The way that the themes of rescue and escape manifest themselves today are no longer as closely tied to the theme of destruction. Because of this, the freedom that is granted via the road is often far more constructive and can even be viewed as sustainable. One of the ways this shift from a destructive to a constructive road experience can be understood is by looking at the way Marinetti discusses speed in *The New Religion-Morality of Speed*. For Marinetti, there has traditionally been a dichotomy between speed and slowness, with speed being associated with great divinity (Rosa et al, 2009). Speed, understood

through this lens is always constructive, while slowness—the pace of humans in relation to technology—has necessarily been nostalgic and, therefore, destructive as it does not lend itself to “progress” (Rosa et al, 2009 p. 58). Approaching the topic of high-speed transit from this perspective leads us away from conceptualizing high-speeds facilitated by freeways as moving individuals *away* from something, towards the idea that what is being *moved toward* is progress. The road becomes an escape from nostalgia and a call to live in a better future. The concept of taking to the road to escape is replaced by the idea that taking to the road is a way of actively pursuing progress.

Positioning the road this way opens the potential for highways, freeways, and the relationships that individuals have with these types of roads to be viewed as progressive in so far as the individual must always be present to engage with the road. This can be understood in the sense that it is not the past that is motivating them or holding them back from taking to the road but, instead, that it is the promise of the future that spurs their desire to engage with the road. Because Marinetti’s conceptualization of speed and, by extension, the speeds facilitated by roads are constructive and inherently viewed as progressive, when coupled with the Sharing Economy and the experiences that occur via platforms such as Uber on the modern road, the theme of escape is largely transformed. To understand how this occurs, one can consider how often, in regards to the Uber driver, when s/he is asked why they wanted to take to the road to pursue an Uber job their response tends to return back to the notion of entrepreneurship—of building a better future for themselves. Prior to unpacking this, it is important to note that for many, entrepreneurship “is widely recognized as an integral component of local economic development and is designed to address limited livelihood opportunities” (Roxas et al, 2014 p. 134).

The Sharing Economy and Uber represent a type of progress that is constructive instead of destructive in that they are rooted in an innovation and entrepreneurial network. In this context, an innovation network

can be understood as a part of business network “that create new products or processes, which in turn radically change the current value chain” (Purchase et al, 2014 p. 1). As well, these tend to be closely associated with entrepreneurial aims as “innovation networks need to mobilize and re-configure network resources in order to survive” (Purchase et al, 2014 p. 2). How this impacts our understanding of the contemporary road is that by the modern day counter-culture of the Sharing Economy using the road—either as a product in-and-of itself, or as a platform for a service—in a way that deviates from its traditional use value, it alters the value chain that it operates within and, in turn, changes of the meaning of the road in the process. In doing so, road travel via Uber modifies the values of the road itself. Both driver and passenger transit within the Sharing Economy can then be viewed as an experience that allows individuals the “opportunity to create something new that is discovered or created by use of various means to exploit or develop existing structures and in doing so produce a wide range of outcomes” (De Carolis et al, 2009 p. 527). This idea of using the structures and systems at hand differently, while maintaining a level of awareness of the limitations and previous value of these systems were, creates a thrilling sense of rupture for the driver and passenger in today’s Uber economy, one that makes visible the shift from the road as primarily destructive to the road as constructive.

Individuals come to operate on the modern day road in a constructive and progressive sense through the use of Uber since it serves as a platform that effectively adds a new layer of value to the road by parceling entrepreneurial aims and leveraging existing infrastructure to meet individuals’ needs. One Uber driver’s experience in particular speaks to this notion of using the road as a constructive platform when he “shared his enthusiasm for the part time gig, allowing him to work on his tech start-up while earning money to pay the bills as he pursues his dream” (Gilbert, 2016). In this instance what becomes clear is that the road is being used to supersede its initial and primary purpose as a platform used strictly for transit. Instead it becomes a safe space and outlet whereby its adaptable nature allows individuals to pursue a variety of

constructive goals that may not necessarily be directly tied to the road but that are made possible by the way that Uber has adapted the road to become more flexible and to work to meet the needs of the individual. The road in this sense becomes far less rigid, becoming instead a platform for the creation of more-than-transport solutions. On today's road individuals are no longer limited to the linearity and merely moving from point A to point B. Because of this, when a person takes to the road, they are no longer viewed as being forced to use it merely as an escape route from destructive forces but, instead, as a platform upon which they can work towards new progressive outcomes. Uber, in this case, creates a new constructive value system as it re-configures the network of the road to be more malleable. Individuals are not constrained to taking the road to reach specific destinations. Instead, roads can now be used as a means to achieve an end goal whereby drivers are not looking for salvation elsewhere but looking to optimize the means that they currently have so that they can find salvation where they presently reside.

Similar to the way the theme of escape and freedom have been transformed, the meaning of rescue is also beginning to shift and become more constructive when seen through the lens of the modern road. That is, while the theme of rescue does manifest itself today, it does not do so in the same way as that found within the Beat Generation's—and particularly Kerouac's—writings. Instead, whereas the individuals of the 60s were positioned as taking the road as a means of saving themselves from the threat of nuclear warfare, the modern day road is depicted as rescuing individuals from the banal and stagnant. To return to Marinetti's idea of speed as progress, this notion of salvation from that which is unchanging ties into the idea that individuals do not want to slip into or revert back into a nostalgic state whereby, if they do, the act is positioned as them becoming complacent with their present situation. To do so would be to disregard the advantages offered by the Sharing Economy and the entrepreneurial mindset that drives its mass adoption. To contextualize, while a woman was visiting Toronto for a technology summit, at the end of her stay she recounted her experiences of using Uber for the first time while in the city. She stated: "I

spent a week in a city that is embracing innovation and isn't scared to disrupt the status quo and foster an environment that supports creative entrepreneurship. Uber is just one part of that. Every one of my Uber drivers was personable and engaged" (Gilbert, 2016). From this excerpt alone on the interactions that occurred between her and her Uber drivers, what is clearly conveyed is the idea that the way the Sharing Economy allows individuals to use the road is in an innovative and entrepreneurial manner.

In sum, innovation and progress are integral parts of the modern day road. Nostalgia for the past is separated from the present day road narrative. New conceptualizations of freedom granted via the road, "rather than offering a renewed sense of the authentic reality that is obscured in nostalgia and cliché to the point of blindly modifying the historical conditions of [individuals] lives" (Holton, 1995), seeks to understand how the road can be adapted to serve individual progress. Uber's success, then, is partially due to the fact that this Sharing Economy platform seeks to address and serve as a solution to present issues (e.g. congestion, the expense of car ownership, etc.). Therefore, the rise of UBERnomics—"an emergent form of economic organization that facilitates peer-to-peer exchange which is transforming the economic bedrock of global transportation markets while it shatters the foundations of traditional mobility architectures," (Motala, 2016 p. 468) inherently counters nostalgic tendencies as it relies on reconceptualizing and reorganizing preexisting transit structures—along with the romanticized narratives embedded within them—in order to create a more efficient and effective means of mass communal transit.

Nostalgia is replaced by an awareness of the social conditions that make it necessary to engage with nascent counter-cultures; that is, both drivers and passengers of Uber need to be aware enough of their present surroundings to understand that the mainstream culture of the road—that outside of the Sharing Economy—is not working and not socially or economically beneficial to them. Rescue, therefore, becomes

proactive instead of reactive. Whereas rescue during the 1960s was largely conveyed through the idea that the road allowed individuals to flee from a threat, the modern day road allows individuals to take active control of their lives and work towards a better tomorrow.

So while the road can still be viewed as allowing both drivers and passengers to actualize a type of freedom, this sense of freedom is no longer rooted in destructive forces. Instead, the freedom granted to individuals who take to the road—and which is sought after—has become constructive. The reason for this largely resides in the way that the entrepreneurial nature of the Sharing Economy and, by extension Uber, allows for additional value systems to be overlaid on preexisting structures by adapting the platform of high speed roads to meet goals that are not strictly tied to the road itself. Instead, today's drivers and passengers can now take to the road to disrupt the status quo and use it as an economic platform that will allow them to access the resources they need to pursue their dreams off of the road.

4.0.5 The Masses' Shifting Sense of Mass Transit

Another shift in the way the road is perceived relates to mass transit. For the Beat Generation, while freeways were frequently positioned as escape routes away from the threat of nuclear obliteration—a concern that gave rise to many individuals taking to the road to seek safety or freedom—the journey itself was ideally to be experienced individually. The issue, of course, was that not everyone had access to the road or to their own vehicle. Because of this, many turned to public modes of transit in pursuit of their dream of freedom.

For the Beat Generation public transit is not only a denigrated form of travel, but it is also one with no real direction. Because of this, writing from the 1960s often contains passages describing shared voyages as

empty and as a void of sorts whereby individuals are in a type of limbo; riders using mass transit are moving but, at the same time, are going nowhere since they lack direction (and control). This can be seen when Kerouac describes one of the first times that he rides the bus upon deciding that he will meet up with Dean in the west. He writes "We rode in the bus in the weird phosphorescent void of emptiness" (Kerouac, 1976 p. 4). The theme of a void to describe the road when experienced communally becomes prevalent, being reiterated continually to convey the feeling of individuals being caught between liminal boundaries.

The denigration of mass transit evolves such that transit riders often find themselves *stuck* on the road—their realities are contained within the vehicle instead of moving independently towards a new future. Kerouac again touches upon this idea when he writes that, "the floors of bus stations are the same all over the country, always covered with butts and spit and the feeling of sadness" (Kerouac, 1976 p. 34). The reason as to why this becomes problematic for the rider and inhibits them from actualizing a new free future is because it harkens back to the idea of nostalgia. Without directly referring to it, this sort of imagery touches on a type of stagnancy that is facilitated by nostalgia. No matter where passengers of mass transit go, they are always reminded of home and of the past; they are continually brought back to a place where nothing has changed. Therefore, while they are actively pursuing a future, they keep returning to bus stations, shelters, and buses themselves that all resemble those from the life that they are attempting to leave behind. What this then effectively does to the passenger's pursuit for freedom is revoke their ability to situate themselves within a life that is moving forward.

This perpetual process of return that inhibits escape again recalls Baudrillard's notion of the desert of the real—a place where all tangible identifiers become irrelevant and lose their meaning (Baudrillard, 1993); the signs that should punctuate the passenger's travel become replaced with repetitive and banal signs—such

as bus stations and the interior of buses—which means that no matter where a passenger goes, they could be anywhere at all. What is, therefore, insinuated is that communal travel simply becomes self-referential. The only thing that the passenger comes to know are the various, yet unchanging, stations and buses that populate their journey. They become trapped within a cyclical movement whereby no matter how far away they are from the threat that they were running from, the means by which they travel will evoke nostalgia and harken back to signifiers from their past.

4.0.6 Just Along for the Ride (or the Passenger an Impediment to Freedom)

In addition to mass transit being positioned as destitute—as it does not fully allow the passenger to move out of the past—distain for shared modes of transportation also manifests itself through the Beat writer's dislike for the passenger. For the Beat Generation, what began to arise was the idea that when mass and public transit were spoken about during the Cold War era, they were largely done so in terms of being a less desirable and denigrated means of travel due to their regarding passengers as a burden and not beneficial to drivers. Today, however, based on the sample data found across blog posts, this opinion about passengers does not appear to be the case. Instead, the passenger is depicted as necessarily having a bi-directional relationship with the driver, one that works to construct a road experience that allows for both the driver and passenger to achieve certain freedoms. What is, therefore, conveyed is the idea of collective engagement as a prerequisite in the creation of shared outcomes that are beneficial to all.

However, in order to once again contextualize, it is necessary to first situate the role that the passenger occupied within the North American Cold War narrative of the road. While the passenger—often taking the form of a lone hitchhiker or confidant to the driver—consistently makes appearances throughout the 1960s road narratives, their presence is frequently both fleeting and insubstantial. In addition to this, at the heart of the narrative of the pursuit of freedom via the road, what is conveyed time and time again is

that the journey and search for freedom is necessarily an individualistic task; while the passenger can be a sort of spectral presence—drifting in and out of the driver's quest for freedom—they do not necessarily assist in moving it forward and, in many instances, actually hinder freedom's actualization.

To an extent, what arises is almost a type of fear directed towards the passenger. For Kerouac, he encapsulates this in the way that he constantly revisits the struggle of the hitchhiker. He notes that "one of the biggest troubles hitchhiking is having to talk to innumerable people, make them feel like they didn't make a mistake picking you up" (Kerouac, 1976 p. 14). While, on the surface then, fear of the passenger may appear to be rooted in the fear of the unknown—as drivers could be putting themselves in potentially dangerous situations—it is more appropriate to tie it back into the idea that the road journey must be experienced alone in order to actualize one's own search for freedom. Therefore, the presence of a hitchhiker is continually painted as eliciting feelings of regret and tension within the drivers who stop to pick them up as there is the unconscious recognition that the presence of a passenger is impeding their efforts to use the road as a means of actualizing freedom. Being aware of this, it becomes clear that the passenger of the 1960s Cold War road was viewed as both impeding their own, as well as the journey of those who assisted them along the way. In regards to the passenger themselves, this occurred based on the fact that their role as a passenger within mass transit never allowed them to move beyond the past.

Unlike the 1960's road narrative, however, the modern day passenger assumes a very different role. No longer are they viewed as preventing the driver from achieving freedom on the road. Instead, they become an integral part of the driver's pursuit. Whereas in the 1960s little attention was given to the passenger's own pursuit of freedom—to the extent that what was conveyed was the idea that they would never be able to achieve a state whereby they were truly free—this is no longer the case. This can first be understood through the lens of the necessary relationship that arises between Uber drivers and their

passengers, as facilitated and mediated within the context of the Sharing Economy. In the most basic sense, Uber—and the Sharing Economy—requires a bi-directional relationship to occur between those providing a good or a service, and those on the receiving end. This returns to the initial idea that what must occur within a Sharing Economy is an exchange of resources that is viewed as beneficial to both parties (Matzler et al, 2015) and, in turn, lends itself to fostering an environment with a stronger sense of community and a means to create shared resources and outcomes.

The role of the passenger also comes into play when one considers the passenger-driver dynamic of Uber in relation to the bi-directional rating system that acts as a core component in the ride-sharing platform—a feature that serves as a means of maintaining levels of transparency and quality amongst users and service providers. Beyond the fact that Uber requires passengers to function at all, it also depends on the interdependent nature of the passenger-driver relationship since the better the relationship between the passenger and driver, the more likely both parties are to receive a higher rating. An example of the way that this manifests itself and conveys Uber drivers' reliance on passengers is in the way that "some drivers report strategically ending a trip early, and thus lowering the fare for the passenger, in the hopes of getting a higher rating" (Herman, 2015). With this in mind, what can be seen as occurring is almost a shift in the power dynamic between driver and passenger. Whereas the passenger of the 1960s was viewed as having very little autonomy in pursuing their own goals of freedom, and as contributing very little to their driver's pursuit, this is now reversed. The driver's ability to achieve economic stability and autonomy through Uber is contingent upon how the passenger rates the experience of being driven.

However, while the majority of research up to this point has been working towards promoting the idea that the modern day road narrative is imbued with a type of freedom that is both more constructive and communal than that conveyed during the 1960s, it is important to note a limitation to freedom that arises

out of the communal and bi-directional nature of the Sharing Economy—particularly in the case of Uber. It is at the point where the passenger, driver, and employer dynamics that make the Sharing Economy possible on the road are considered that the freedom that individuals seek by engaging with Uber can be inhibited. The reason as to why this can occur resides in the fact that much like the road itself presents inherent physical limitations based on the nature of its structure—those who take to the road in a car are confined to its lanes—Uber is faced with regulations that can constrict how drivers and passengers utilize it, therefore hampering how they choose to pursue their goal of freedom via the platform.

Similar to the way that the road of the 1960s allowed individuals to move away from a threat, but only by following a linear and prescribed route, Uber permits individuals to actively pursue a lifestyle that will allow them a sense of freedom providing that both drivers and passengers still operate within pre-ordained laws, rules, or guidelines; it is understood that straying from the designated path or the implicit preferred legalities that surround the road and Uber are likely to result in repercussions that will inhibit an individual's journey towards freedom. Therefore, although Uber is positioned as allowing the driver and passenger to be more in control of the road journey, in order to create a structure that, on the surface, appears to be more flexible requires self-regulating structures of monitoring. Therefore, "Uber's digitally and algorithmically mediated system of flexible employment builds new forms of surveillance and control into the experience of using the system, which result in asymmetries around information and power for workers" (Rosenblat et al, 2015). It becomes this facet of surveillance and control that is embedded within the very structure of Uber, in the form of the rating system, that comes to inhibit the platform standing in as a means through which individuals can actualize and pursue a sense of freedom since their behaviour is restricted to the types of behaviour expected of "good" passengers and drivers.

The reason why Uber's rating system can also hinder freedom is that the process of drivers' choosing passengers is not organic. There is a level of freewill that is removed from the equation. Therefore, drivers and passengers often feel pressured to behave in a particular manner to ensure that their ratings remain high, since doing so will reassert the likelihood that they will continue to succeed at using the service. Indeed, many drivers display an unconscious behavioral conditioning "to align [their] goals and motives with that of the company through the articulation of social bonds—even when they are distinctly out of alignment" (Gregg, 2011, p. 85). Therefore, while the driver has the right to structure their fare and working hours how they choose, these can indirectly impact their score. This forces them to alter their behavioral patterns. It is at this point that the argument can be made that although their utilization of the platform is not being directly inhibited, they are in fact not free to use it how they please.

Still, while the way that the relationship between the two parties is tracked and regulated may appear to revoke a type of freedom, it is done so in order to facilitate a sense of community. The algorithms put in place stand in as a way of ensuring that passenger and driver interactions are standardized and normalized to reassert "that beyond cost-related benefits of sharing, the perceived lowering of risk related to sharing becomes a central determinant of its attractiveness" (Lamberton et al, 2012 p. 109). Therefore, the manifestation of modified behavior and individuals willingly engaging with the rating system shows that there is an understanding of dependency that all users of the Sharing Economy share.

Although implementing methods of regulation may then appear to inhibit and impede certain freedoms, what it instead points to is the necessary codependence of both parties on each other. In order for individuals to achieve optimal levels of freedom on the road, there needs to be a level of sacrifice. To an extent, then, what can be seen as beginning to occur is a more utilitarian approach to the road whereby the greatest good for the greatest numbers is enforced (at the expense of the individual). Therefore, the

action of giving up one set of freedoms in order to obtain a more overarching and far reaching sense of freedom can be understood through the way that “choices reflect a balancing of two classes of goals: goals that are strictly individual and goals that are triggered by the existence of the group. The latter sometimes results in choices that undermine personal satisfaction in the immediate future but increase long-term and collective satisfaction” (Ariely et al, 2000 p. 279). With this in mind, road travel and the journey to freedom is necessarily positioned as communal and collective and one that is predicated on bidirectional relationships that involve a give and take on all sides.

Considering the sample size of research presented, then, what manifests itself when looking at modern day narratives of the road that are derived from first-hand encounters of those who engage with and operate within the Sharing Economy, is that the notion of freedom is still a fundamental component to the road narrative. Both on an individual and mass level, the notion of the road as providing a platform that is conducive to the pursuit of freedom—freedom in these instances being understood as a state of being whereby individuals are free from a variety of constraints—is still attainable by individuals taking to highways and byways.

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