INTRODUCTION

Charon's Boat and Other Vehicles of Moral Imagination

David Lipset

Marx and Engels regretted the consequences of the "icy waters of egotistical calculation" on moral order ([1888] 1969: 11). The solidity and sacredness of meaning were melting away and being profaned by bourgeois capitalism. At the same time, they viewed the change as potentially diagnostic. "Man" might now be "compelled to face with sober senses, his real conditions of life, and his relations with his kind" (12). However, more than 150 years later, it seems that their qualms, rather than their bittersweet optimism, abide in modern social thought.

What has won conceptual privilege? *Absence.* Absence is perceived in metaphors and significations of the moral, of community, personhood, and other collective forms of experience. According to idealist (e.g., poststructuralist, postcolonial, feminist, queer, postmodern aesthetic) critiques of realism, the very relationship between signifier and moral object has been called into question. Changes in capitalist production, from a decline in industrial production to the rise of finance capitalism independent of labor power, state devolution as well as multiculturalism have exposed gaps, indeterminacies, and instabilities in meaning (Mulvey 1993). Referentiality itself has come to be viewed as infinitely deferred: it is discursive, relative, and recursive rather than determined and real. Difference and simulacra—the desert of the real—are all that remain of the moral (Baudrillard [1985] 1994).[1]

In this volume, however, we adopt what could be called a position of methodological ambivalence about referentiality. Metaphors of the social, in our view, may be both exemplary yet problematic, but not null or

void. However immersed in, or degraded by, capitalism they may have become, signifiers of the moral—like love—are nevertheless credible and persuasive (see Illouz 1997). Indeed, they may comprehend the signifying process itself (see Seidel 2000).[2] While we concede that the signifying hyphen may no longer be drawn authoritatively, that is, in gold, or by the state, and thus falls short of constituting comprehensive or totalized meaning, signifiers exist that do draw together, elaborate, and conceptualize the *presence and absence* of the moral (cf. Ortner 1973). They may not inspire the certainty that the body of Christ evokes to his faithful, but their elicitive capacity can hardly be lamented as having been drowned by rationality.

Our focus in this volume is on one such class of objects: *vehicles*. Why vehicles? For us, the significance of boats, carts, cars, airplanes, trains, etc. not only arises from their functional utility—e.g., they literally transport people and goods through space; it is also caused by the metaphor or trope they provide to imagine the social, and in particular to imagine its movement across and askew moral boundaries, a mobility that depends, in turn, on human, or at least humanoid, agency.

In other words, vehicles lend themselves as phenomenological images for both the mobility of persons through society and space, as well as for the movement of meaning across semantic domains in general, and moral ones in particular. Fixing upon the vehicle *qua* metaphor, we notice, also has etymological and theoretical virtue. The Greek root of metaphor means "to transfer" or "carry over," which not only suggests that the synthesis or integration of two ideas into one involves topographic movement through semantic space, but intention as well (Wheelwright 1962; see also Fernandez 1986: 37).

In semiotics, literary theory, and symbolic anthropology, moreover, a vehicular view of signification and metaphoric association is well-known. Peirce's signs were composed of three elements: a sign-vehicle; the object for which the sign-vehicle stands; and the *interpretant*, the consequent understanding of the sign-vehicle/object relation. Although the two theorists differ considerably (Petrilli 2004), recall that Morris (1938) also divided semiosis into the same three components: "Semiosis is accordingly a mediated-taking-account-of. The mediators are sign vehicles; the takings-account-of are interpretants; the agents of the process are interpreters; what is taken account of are designata" (Morris 1938: 4). For his part, I. A. Richards (1936) divided metaphoric meaning into a double unit: the "vehicle," which was the "figure," and the "tenor," which was the principle subject. The relationship between the two was social/interactive and contextual.[3] And not least, Victor Turner, invoking or adopting a concept of semiosis to symbols whose "multivocality enables a wide

range of groups and individuals to relate to the same signifier-vehicle in a variety of ways" that motivate action in public culture (1975: 155).[4]

If both metaphor and the signifying process may be conceptualized as a vehicular movement of meaning through semantic space, notions of totemic descent propose a useful contrasting view, one which is not vehicular, but embodied. That totemic signifiers are understood in and through ideas of reproduction, reincarnation, consubstantiality, etc. reminds us that vehicles may not just be abstract, semiotic images, but more specifically, they express the social via the social. Take one of the most celebrated examples—Wollunqua, the rainbow serpent. In central Australia, the Uluuru moiety of the Warramunga tribe claim ancestry back to Wollunqua, the rainbow serpent, who slithered through the landscape trying to wend his way back to his subterranean home. As he did, he left behind Uluuru spirit-children who "came out of his body" (Spencer and Gillen [1899] 2010: 229; Durkheim [1912] 1995: 380). In other words, the hyphen, linking signifier to signified, is conceptualized as filial, rather than vehicular. Now, although vehicles may or may not signify common descent, they seem to possess totem-like qualities. Not only do they comprehend how metaphor works to bring together dissimilar pairs of ideas and phenomena in semantic and cognitive senses; they are also understood to provide the agency by which the moral boundaries of collective life may be traversed (see Lakoff 1993).

The anthropology of material culture has contributed many insightful and creative studies of particular vehicles (see, e.g., Munn 1973; Miller 2001; Tilley 1999). Indeed, the linguists, Lakoff and Turner (1989) analyzed the *machines as people* metaphor as well. However, the signifying value of vehicles, as a whole category, seems to have gone unrecognized up to this point. The following two sections of this introductory chapter, on boats and cars, are thus meant to propose something of extent of the metaphoric capacity of vehicles to cross, or travel along, the moral edges of society, which is the volume's general theme. Both sections start with a brief overview of ordinary usages of these two vehicles before going on to discuss a few examples in detail (see also Whorf [1939] 1964: 145–46).

Boats

Boats are often used to express various scales of moral order, e.g., the "ship of state," being a well-known metaphor for governmental sovereignty. But perhaps more elaborate is the *person as boat* metaphor from which attributes of ships and other vessels are imputed to identity and face-to-face solidarity, as well as to states of being. One's background

can thus be "anchored" in the values of a traditional upbringing. Whether or not one is literally entering a boat, "Welcome aboard!" is a common enough salutation acknowledging a person's joining a group for the first time. Being "on deck" may refer to times when one is responsible for what is taking place in a social setting. Similarly, when adhering to a common set of goals or agenda, people speak of being "on board" with it. Or, a group of co-workers may be called a "crew." People caught in a shared or collective predicament are sometimes said to be "in the same boat." Persons express desire to participate in a group activity by wanting to "put their oar in." One can "launch into" a discussion or an agenda. The admonition not to "rock the boat" is an injunction against defying norms or a collective status quo, a status quo over which leaders may "take the helm" by "changing or staying its course." People, advised to improve their performance, may be admonished to "shape up or ship out."

By contrast, people confess to being "up a creek without a paddle," when they lack resources or agency. "Two ships passing in the night" refers to people who have failed to start or maintain a relationship. "That ship has sailed" usually denotes someone who has missed an opportunity. Or, to be "foundering" on "rocky seas" or to be "on the rocks" express experiences of difficulty. To find a "port in a storm" may refer to getting help during a time of uncertainty. People who abruptly quit a group may be accused of "jumping ship." Lastly, boats have served as a metaphor for the passage of persons across gaps in moral order. The "journey to the … Isles of the Dead … [is] found in the beliefs of ancient Egypt, Assyro-Babylonia, the Greeks in various times and regions … These beliefs undoubtedly are the reason for the practice of giving the deceased a real or miniature boat and oars" (van Gennep [1914] 1960: 153).

Charon's Boat

In ancient Greece, Charon, the ferryman of Hades, transported shades of the dead—newly arrived from the world above into the lower world across the unbridged River Styx. A coin to pay Charon for passage was sometimes placed in or on the mouth of a dead person (Grinsell 1957). But those who could not pay the infernal ferryman's fee, or whose bodies were left unburied, had to wander the shores for one hundred years. By contrast, heroes—such as Heracles, Orpheus, Aeneas, Dionysus, and Psyche—travel to the underworld, but are returned, still alive, by Charon's boat.

In his comparison of Charon's Boat narratives in classical antiquity to later appearances in Dante through the mid seventeenth century, Ter-

pening divides the story into distinct narrative units (1985: 11–12). Motivations for the hero's or the soul's descent to hell may vary, but they inevitably arrive at an obstacle, which is not necessarily a river. The boatman appears there. Dialogue may take place. A prerequisite, like proper funerary rites, having been fulfilled, the ferry is boarded. By one means or another, the boat then crosses the river. Passengers pay a fee and disembark, and the ferry returns for another crossing. Death is thus construed as a vehicular movement across a barrier, a moral *aporia.* The gloomy, fierce oarsman drags boatloads of recalcitrant souls across the River Styx in his little ferryboat. The boat, as van Gennep observed, serves as a metaphor for the transition of persons across one of the preeminent boundaries of society—between life and death—which Charon mans.

British Naval Ships

In addition to the *person as boat* metaphor, the personified image, *boat as person,* appears in launches of British Royal Navy ships. According to Sylvia Rodgers, launchings resemble rites of passage, as if the new ship were a liminal person passing across space, from land to water, changing from an inanimate thing into an animate, moral being—namely, a woman. Far from becoming a numbered object when launched, the ship receives a name, which is to say, an individual, social identity, with life essence, luck, and femininity (Rodgers 1984: 2).

The ocean being understood as big, unpredictable, and unforgiving in the West, seafaring has been often portrayed as masculine. Maritime activity requires physical strength and endurance, and it involves adventure and danger. In taking to the seas, a man risks his life, battling the elements, using science and the best technology to improve his chances, while always challenging nature. These are "manly" struggles. Yet sailors refer to a ship by the feminine pronoun. In the Royal Navy, as well as the merchant navies, sailors talk about a ship as having a life, a soul, and a character of "her" own. These qualities are not always attributed, and the terms are used interchangeably. What is constant is the gender of the ship. In the English language, which otherwise only assigns gender to human beings and animals of determinate sex, it is nonetheless the rule to refer to a ship as "she" or "her."

The metaphor *ship as woman* is legally encoded in naval and legal documents, and it is celebrated in poetry and prose. But what kind of woman is "she"? A ship is imagined as possessing the moral attributes of more than one kind of woman. Two images predominate: the all-powerful mother who nurtures and offers womb-like protection; and the enchant-

ress of whom a man can never be certain. Figureheads that are no longer affixed to British ships were looked upon as particularly efficacious in the sheltering capacity, especially if bare-breasted (Kemp 1976). There are some grounds for concluding that "she" symbolized the mother who suckled the infant god of the sea, and that this made her a powerful guardian, especially against the devil.

The metaphoric relationship of women to ships made by mariners continues to inform meaning in British fleets. At launching, the two most important personages are feminine: the ship and "her" patron. It is the role of the latter, a woman of high rank, to exercise mystical powers that imbue the ship with agency by naming her in accordance with strict adherence to ritual procedure: she should strike the ship with a bottle just as it begins to move and pronounce "her" name (to give luck and life)—all in a moment (Rodgers 1984).

The Titanic

Žižek (1989) developed an intriguing (Lacanian) view of the sinking in 1912 of the great ship, not as a vehicular metaphor of human agency or id, but, of course, as loss. In psychoanalysis, although the meaning of symptoms may be discovered retrospectively, such insight is limited by what Žižek and Lacan call "the Real," e.g., the trauma that resists being, and ultimately may never be, signified, but at the same time may never be removed, or at least domesticated, by being talked over. The wreck of the Titanic, Žižek argues, was this kind of collective and historical symptom. The age of progress and stable class distinctions was ending and society was threatened by labor movements, anti-Semitism, nationalism, and war. For Žižek, the great ocean liner was a signifier of order, stratification, gentility, and so forth whose meaning has been supplemented not just by its destruction, but now, by the contemporary sighting of its remains at the bottom of the sea:

> By looking at the wreck we gain an insight into the forbidden domain, in a space that should be left unseen: visible fragments are a kind of a coagulated remnant of the liquid flux of *jouissance* [pleasure], a kind of petrified forest of enjoyment … The wreck of the Titanic … functions as a sublime object: a positive, material object elevated to the status of the impossible Thing … permeated with … [terror and] enjoyment. (1989: 71)

Now Žižek argues that the Titanic was such a self-evident symbol of moral order and its ruin that a novelist had already imagined the sink-

ing of a transatlantic ocean liner about fifteen years *before* it sank. The figural conspicuousness, and efficacy, of a great ocean liner I would add, consisted in its very vehicularity. The ship was not just a mode of prestigious transportation for elites and an image of progress; it was a material metaphor that transported these meanings across icy waters. The sunken wreckage becomes no less of a vehicular metaphor, not of moral order, but inexpressible trauma.

Cars

Like boats, the metaphor *person as car* has a lot of usage in daily language, for example, to express agency. To "hand the car keys" over to somebody means to let him or her make decisions. Tough negotiators "drive a hard bargain." We talk about "switching gears" when changing the subject in conversation. When people want to stop doing or talking about something, they may say that they are "applying the brakes." A person who is exhausted may allude to being "out of gas." To "get a lot of mileage" out of a project, object, or idea is to work at or exploit it for a long time. A person may "drive something into a ditch," by which is meant that he or she has wrecked it. A person may be "ticketed" or penalized, for having committed a wrong. People who feel a sense of failure, or helplessness, may speak of "spinning their wheels." Alternatively, a person who has been deceived by a falsehood or defrauded by a scam is said to have been "taken for a ride." If the *person as car* metaphor appears to convey familiar aspects of agency or its lack in face-to-face spaces, reciprocally, the *car as person* metaphor has assumed no less communicative and conceptual importance phenomenologically. But it also has a become refractory signifier of compound forms of modern relations with technology as well as of modern identities, both individual and collective, both insubordinate and glorified.

Automobility

Urry has nominated the automobile as one of the principle socio-technical institutions in contemporary life (Urry 2000; Sheller and Urry 2000: 738; Featherstone 2004). It is a manufactured object, an item of individual consumption, an economic complex, an environmental agent, as well as, of course, a form of mobility. "Automobility" is his term for a set of political institutions and practices that organize, accelerate, and shape the spatial movements and impacts of cars, while simultaneously regu-

lating their many consequences. Automobility is also an ideological or dialogic formation (see Basquet/Gorz 1973) in the sense that cars are imagined to possess human qualities and attributes. They are associated with ideals of freedom, privacy, and autonomy, ideals that are celebrated and/or analyzed in popular and academic discourses alike. What is more, automobility entails a set of ways of experiencing the world that both serve to legitimize its cultural dominance and unsettle taken-for-granted boundaries separating the human from nature, from technology and so on. Diverse as the elements that comprise automobility are, Urry insists that they are not reducible to *the* automobile itself.

Urry employs automobility in a double-sense. On the one hand, "auto" refers reflexively to the self, as in "auto" in autobiography. On the other hand, "auto" refers to objects or machines that possess a capacity for movement, as expressed by automatic, automaton, and especially automobile. This dual meaning of "auto" suggests that the car-driver is a "hybrid," a fetishized assemblage, not simply of autonomous persons, but simultaneously of machines, roads, buildings, signs, and entire cultures of mobility (Haraway 1991; Thrift 1996: 282–84). The car becomes an extension of the driver's body, creating new subjectivities organized around the disciplined "driving body" (Hawkins 1986: 63; Morse 1998, cf. Brottman 2001: xxv). It becomes a metonym for the person, and, simultaneously, the person becomes a metonym for the car (see also Latour 1999).

The car can be thought of as an extension of the senses; the car driver can feel its contours, shape, and relationship as a hybrid of human and metallic skin. So the driver is habitually embodied within the car as an assemblage, a "driver-car" that becomes an aspect of bodily experience carried into taken-for-granted perceptions of and engagements with the material world (Dant 2004: 61). The car does not simply afford the driver mobility or independent agency; it enables a range of embodied actions available only to the driver-car. The driver-car is neither a thing nor a person; it is an assembled social being that takes on properties of both and cannot exist without both.

As people inhabit, and interact through, moving cars, automobility makes instantaneous time and the negotiation of extensive space central to how such life is configured. Automobility extends the individual into realms of freedom and flexibility whereby inhabiting the car can be positively viewed, but can also be constraining. Car "users" live in spatially stretched and time-compressed ways. The car, Urry worries, is a literal version of Weber's "iron cage" of modernity. Automobility is a world of anonymous, violent machines pre-occupied by the other who is moving too fast to know directly or especially to see through the eye.

Car as Nation

While images of desire and sexuality, adventure, freedom, and rebellion splash across the mass media in the West, they also circulate globally as car cultures become increasingly internationalized. Still, cars belong to nations (Inglis 2004). Cars denote national identity (Edensor 2004: 103, Sedgwick 1970). They are well-known, iconic objects arising from historic systems of production and expertise.

Between World War I and World War II, overcoming France's lead in production, the car became a necessary feature of middle-class British life (Church 1979, 1994; Foreman-Peck et al. 1995; O'Connell 1998; Richardson 1977). Germany lagged behind, which prompted Hitler to argue that the modern nation was by definition a motorized nation (Koshar 2004; Nolan 1994).[5] By contrast, as Barthes remarked in 1963, the automobile was a vehicle for nostalgia and anxiety about the integrity of French national identity. Despite its symbolic omnipresence in society, the automobile tended to be perceived by intellectuals and others as a foreign, colonizing influence on French life. Baudrillard's view of tail-fins ([1968] 2002) indicated that objects like birds and shark fins were being appropriated into the design of cars. De-natured, they were reduced to little more than a series of abstract and artificial signifiers of sleek movement through space. In this way, the car-commodity was destroying an older and more apparently French environment, in favor of a wholly man-made setting in which natural phenomena only appeared as stylized parodies.

Americans, in turn, shamelessly drive their national values without qualms. In particular, cars are viewed as allowing independence from schedules and the desires of others: "the car is experienced as the ultimate tool of self-reliance" (Lutz and Fernandez 2010: 15). Obtaining the first drivers' license is as revered a moment in the passage to independent maturity as there is for American teens. "Carless adults" must cope with anxiety or guilt about having to ride with others and the shame of seeming immature, inadequate, or incompetent (Lutz and Fernandez 2010: 15). Americans imagine themselves as driving to unexplored places, crossing the frontier, as it were, even if they are only going to the supermarket. Model names—such as the Expedition, the Explorer, the Sierra, and the Mustang—invite drivers to see themselves as trailblazers in a "fantasy that another life is possible down the road, just over the horizon, or in some faraway exotic locale" (Lutz and Fernandez 2010: 17). If cars are vehicles of freedom, they also become vehicles for American anti-stateism according to which seat-belt regulations, speed limits and gas taxes are fiercely opposed and resisted, however beneficial they may

be, as governmental interference. That is, as Daniel Miller has observed, cars "become more a means to resist alienation than a sign of alienation" (2001: 3).

What do Urry's anxiety-ridden view of automobility as a new "iron cage" and Charon's boat ferrying souls to hell have to tell us about vehicles? Where, that is to ask, do vehicles take the myriad meanings that they convey? What kind of cultural work does this metaphor perform? Both automobility and Charon's boat, I would say, illustrate that vehicles pull the moral imagination along so as to express the disquiet and apprehension that pervades social life, uncertain as it is. In elaborate and diverse ways, vehicles transport the moral in no single direction. That is, while they provide material forms of movement and convey restive unease, they are also useful to think with—about important ethical issues, problems, and questions as they arise in the course of the historical moment.

Rather than by vehicle-type, history, or geography, we have therefore divided up this volume around the general theme of how vehicles are used to express constructions of the moral. Specifically, the collection consists of fine-grained, ethnographically informed analyses of canoes, airplanes, and cars in relation to three, interrelated topics: 1) vehicular constructions of personhood in general, 2) vehicular constructions of gender in particular and 3) of vehicles that express equivocal views about the nation-state as well as bittersweet attitudes of minorities oppressed within it. We prefer this thematic order for several reasons. At the same time as we want to foreground the cultural variability of the vehicle metaphor, we want to magnify the degree to which vehicles may serve cross-culturally as master-signifiers of the moral. We want to disrupt self-evident historical binaries, like tradition-modernity. And lastly, we want to highlight the critical attitudes which vehicles may express.

The Vehicles

The first part of the volume thus focuses on vehicle metaphors in two rather different settings, rural Papua New Guinea and mid-twentieth-century North America. Lipset introduces cosmological and postcolonial canoe metaphors among the coastal Murik of the Sepik estuary. Among the Murik, the "body is a canoe" that transports and protects spirit-passengers through otherwise hostile space. However, these vehicles are also personified: the "canoe is a body" whose ornately decorated prow is its head that defends its safe passage. Although the scene then shifts in an unexpected direction, to the urban street in North America, Handler dis-

covers a strikingly resonant conceit there. In his chapter on the twentieth-century history of traffic codes, pedestrians and cars come to be viewed as "vehicular units" that possess morally equal bodies. Negligence by either (as jaywalkers or reckless drivers) could result in their being held legally responsible for causing crashes. Lipset and Handler tie the emergence of these vehicle-metaphors to unrelated processes of technological and political history. Lipset looks to the prehistory of coastal Papua New Guinea while Handler discusses interest-group politics led by automobile insurance companies. Together they document that vehicles—canoes and cars—serve as an important trope for changing concepts of moral personhood in their respective settings.

Part II recalls the gendered image of British Naval ships as providing sailors support and protection on the high seas that we introduced above. In the first of its two chapters, Wayland analyzes meanings of the metaphor, "airplanes are women," as used by retired North American men who restore and fly World War II legacy warplanes. These vehicles, alternately viewed as affectionate, nurturing, and demanding, are decorated with erotic pinup art on their 'noses.' One restorer even allowed that airplanes had "menstrual periods" when several things went wrong with them at once, especially after long intervals of working well. Like Murik persons whose bodies are vehicularized, these men also think and talk about "women as airplanes." Wayland argues that the metaphoric gender of World War II airplanes serves broader historical and norms. And he goes on to draw a useful conclusion: the airplane-woman metaphor all but precluded restorers' consideration of the violence these vehicles once inflicted.

In Japan, as Roth then discusses, cars express moral differences between male and female. Not only do men and women drive different types of car; the way they are expected to drive them conforms to gender roles and stereotypes in the society at large. Men typically experience driving as an activity that frees them, if just temporarily, from the constraints of workaday masculinity. This possibility is embodied in the Mazda RX-8 or other sports cars, which are impractical for daily use but appeal to ideals of speed and power. In contrast to the sports car, the compact, or the even smaller K-car, typifies practicality. Women drive these tiny, fuel-efficient vehicles for shopping or to take children to and from school. Rather than providing a release from routine, K-cars tie women to domestic duties. No less than the "airplane as woman" metaphor, in other words, the homology between cars and gender maps out and sustains this moral status quo.

The chapters of Part III focus on cars in Serbia and China, as well as among Mexican-Americans and Afro-Americans in the United States, four

cars that are all construed in terms of decidedly ambivalent attributes and sentiments. Though these vehicles represent quite distinct cultures, they make the general point that cars may express morally equivocal, rather than conservative or uniformly critical, views of the historical transformations through which they are driven.

Živković teases out multiple meanings in contemporary Serbia of the Fića, a little vehicle that is at once considered to be "kin" as well as a kind of souvenir of and for family history. In addition, the Fića has wider significance. It signifies the make-do *zeitgeist* of life in the former state of Yugoslavia, and for a kind of nostalgia about the present in which life is less given to reciprocity and has become more rationalized, and alien, than it is recalled to have been during the communist past.

If Serbian cars evoke nostalgia, and imply a critical view of the capitalist present, the careful investigation of images of cars in contemporary "capitalist" China that Notar carefully analyzes, suggest no love lost for the past as well as no straightforward commitment to the present. Here, as elsewhere, the human body can be vehicularized: a poor man is portrayed as a vehicle that transports wealthy elites who "ride" him. Or, cars may also be personified as gas-guzzling sports utility vehicles that caricature public officials. Yet, as more consumers in China become able to afford their own cars, cars are being morally differentiated between transgressive "public" cars that signify official corruption and "private" cars that belong to and signify the purposes of a rising middle class, recreational or otherwise.

The final pair of chapters focus on vehicles among two different minority groups in the United States. In Chappell's essay, which is an exegesis of lowrider automobiles that Mexican-Americans customize, ambivalences are conveyed about the status of Mexican-Americans on the outside of a dominant society. Concentrating on what he calls a "lowrider aesthetic sensibility," Chappell argues that these flamboyant cars should be viewed as rich and authentic expressions of the dual loyalties of Mexican-Americans. In lowrider iconography, Chappell perceives a "both-and" logic of identity in such problematic images as the Alamo chapel, as well as in a "Smile Now/Cry Later" motif that also seems to comment on moral contradictions in *barrio* life as well.

Lastly, Auslander recalls the Fića in contemporary Serbia, when he turns our attention to another trouble-prone, morally equivocal, vehicle, which, in his case, is a vintage Lincoln Town Car. This vehicle appears during an annual re-enactment of a 1946 mass lynching in the rural American south to transport four African-American victims to their deaths. Auslander argues that although the car evokes terrifying memories, its role in the reenactment nevertheless serves as a potent metaphor

of moral redemption. Among its several references, the Town Car seems to convey the story of African-American martyrdom, from whose moral force no one can claim to be excused. That is, the immoral past is not gone by any means, but it is being reclaimed and remade by this vehicle, in addition to much else.

A Capacity to Move the Moral

At the beginning of this introduction, I suggested that by privileging the vehicle metaphor, we were adopting a position of methodological ambivalence with respect to the politics of representation, one that was not entirely given over to poststructural nihilism. Like the rainbow serpent of the Arunta, that is to say, vehicles serve as totemic metaphors for moral personhood in society and history. However, the way they do so combines action with collective forms of identity, nation, gender and the ancestors. Being manufactured, maintained, and driven, the moral reference of vehicles requires agency (Osgood [1957] 1978). By the same token, the cultural work of making vehicles metaphorically meaningful would seem to address an absence, lack, or indeterminacy of meaning that must be crossed, or remedied (Gibbs 1994: 124ff). Linguists have called this view of metaphor, the inexpressibility hypothesis (Fainsilber and Ortony 1989; Ortony 1975). But, as cultural anthropologists, we adhere to Durkheim. The lack between the vehicle and its signified is not just any lack, it is a lack in and of the social. Vehicle metaphors seem to convey moral *lacunae* of one sort or another in response to which something figural is done to imagine that transportation across the missing relationships is possible, if not necessarily secure. Vehicles thus carry shifting, often equivocal, viewpoints about moral identity in society, as well as the moral identity of society.

Now of course this collection is not meant to be encyclopedic. We do not, nor would we seek to, examine the moral signification of every kind of vehicle. No chapters, for example, on carts or trains are included in the volume, although both these vehicles call to mind two rather fundamental moments in Western moral imagination. I refer to the "road rage" of Oedipus, who inadvertently kills his father after they quarrel over right of way on the path to Thebes, or the railway cars now used as monumental metaphors in museum exhibits for the Holocaust. No, the ethnographic accounts that now follow are meant to evocative, not exhaustive. They are meant to indicate a little bit of the strong referential capacity of vehicles to convey the moral, whether in normative, contrary, egregious, or ambivalent registers.

NOTES

1. At the same time, of course, there are political and theoretical constituencies that continue to assert essentialist positions in which the real is unproblematic. The right insists that God, the state, patriarchy, and the family are immune from, and should not be infected by, global modernity. From their points of view, man and nature, man and technology, and territorial sovereignty remain distinct and dichotomous. Human agency remains unilateral and autonomous. The signifier refers to a signified rather than to a lack of one.
2. See also Levi-Strauss ([1962] 1966); Tambiah (1969); Gibbs (1994); Buchli (2002).
3. In contemporary theory, Glucksberg and McGlone (1999) also divide metaphors into constituent parts that they call the "metaphor topic" and "vehicle." The two may share "candidate properties" which determine meaning through a process of attribute identification and selection arising from the context of the utterance.
4. Sapir and Crocker (1977: 6) developed a view that metaphor consists of a process involving three constituent moments: departure, intermediary, and arrival, which again connotes an image of action and movement in a vehicle.
5. For example, in 2002, Jeremy Clarkson, "doyen of laddish commentary on motor matters," remained so annoyed about the German purchase of the Rolls-Royce company four years earlier that he was prompted to complain: "The whole point of the Rolls was the brylcreemed men in Crewe. German-built Rolls-Royces make as much sense as *sushi* at a Buckingham Palace garden party" (cited in Edensor 2004: 104).

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