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Staging the Driving Experience: Parkways in Germany and the United States[1]

One of the elders of the discipline of landscape studies in the United States, John Brinckerhoff Jackson, aimed high when he envisioned an academic subdiscipline called 'odology' some time ago. Deriving the name for his field of study from the Greek *hodos* (road, street), the ever-charismatic Jackson did not aim to study roads in and of themselves. Rather, odology was to be about the human shaping of roads and the ways that roads have shaped humans: „Odology is the science or study of roads or journeys and, by extension, the study of streets and superhighways and trails and paths, how they are used, where they lead, and how they come into existence. Odology is part geography, part planning, and part engineering - engineering as in construction, and unhappily as in social engineering as well. That is why the discipline has a brilliant future." (John Brinckerhoff Jackson 1994: 191)[2]

In the parlance of current science and technology studies, the co-evolution of human societies and their infrastructures were to be analysed. Jackson's call, however, has not been widely heeded among historians, as far as I can tell. Most historians of automobility have focused on cars rather than roads, with the former ones being attractive consumer goods which are privately owned and the latter ones being state-run infrastructures whose appeal is less obvious. Museums for the history of transportation and mobility mostly exhibit cars and rarely roads: To take but one example, the exhibition 'America on the Move' at the National Museum of American History in Washington, DC, is chock-a-block with trains and cars; the exception is one actual stretch of the myth-laden Route 66.[3]

One could conclude that Jackson's odology was merely an eccentric idea at an inopportune time. Few, if any, scholars have labeled their enterprises as odological; this is also true for the authors in this volume. But Jackson's call was heard: A growing number of academics in geography, American studies, and related disciplines have studied roads, roadscapes, and

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[3] To be fair, the exhibit portrays the history of interstate highways in some detail. But the artefacts are mostly those that move. Janet F. Davidson and Michael S. Sweeney, On the Move: Transportation and the American Story (Washington, DC: National Geographie, 2003).

automotive landscapes, from intricately detailed accounts to sweeping overviews. Especially in the United States, the social and physical settings of motels, parking lots, fast-food restaurants, and gas stations, not to speak of the roads themselves, have been respectable research topics for at least a generation. (see Davis 2003 and Jakle / Sculle 2008)

These researchers have treated roads, their environs, and their usage as eminently social and cultural phenomena, thus echoing Jackson's basic belief approach that there is nothing inevitable about the relationship between humans and roads and in particular between roads and landscapes. Human activities and belief systems, economic calculations and political regimes have been responsible for changes in the physical construction, the design, and the perception of roads. Particularly, the view from the road has changed dramatically over the course of the twentieth century. By the end of this period, most fast roads were built, maintained, and perceived primarily as fast transportation corridors for the swift, ideally unimpeded movement of people and freight. In the early century, several roads in some countries were built as places themselves and avenues for scenic exploration. Generality and interchangeability characterize the former, while specificity and locality were the goals of the latter. (Mauch / Zeller 2008 and Desportes 2005) Understanding such changes requires putting them in a wide historical context. From a historian's point of view, it is also helpful to no longer treat landscapes and technologies as opposites, but to consider them as part of a larger spectrum. (Nye 1999, Pritchard / Zeller 2010 and Lekan / Zeller forthcoming)

In this essay, I am trying to understand landscapes that were specifically created to be seen by twentieth century tourists in automobiles. In the United States, such roads were called parkways; in many European countries, mountain roads, lakeshore or seaside drives were built not simply to transport people in automobiles from one place to another, but to provide them with scenic views while they were travelling. Two roads stand out: the 750 kilometrelong Blue Ridge Parkway in Virginia and North Carolina, the longest American parkway, and its German counterpart, the Deutsche Alpenstraße [the German Alpine Road] extending 450 kilometers on the northern mountain crest of the Alps. Both roads were built as tourist parkways starting in the 1930s to stimulate traffic and open up relatively neglected tourist regions in the proximity of major population centres; and both presented particular versions of nature.

These roads opened a window on nature, made the natural environment accessible, and presented specific versions of nature. In the process, they acquainted millions of drivers and passengers with their countryside and rendered the surrounding scenery as easily consumable automotive landscapes. It was through these roads that many tourists learned to appreciate nature while they were on the road. Seeing and recognizing particular landscapes through the windshield became an important part of the nascent tourism industry. There was a decidedly national aspect

of these roads as well, since the specific landscapes were advertised as carrying American or German qualities, or to be more precise, the Southern variants of American and German culture Both roads began as work-creation projects in the 1930s, albeit in the politically drastically different regimes of Germany's National Socialism and the New Deal of the Roosevelt Administration in the United States.

The landscapes in question here were not simply rural, agricultural landscapes. They were mountainous landscapes, whose peaks came to symbolize natural grandeur and whose roads were understood to mean a technology in synch with nature. But not every mountain and not every aspect of mountain life were incorporated into these ensembles. Therefore, it is interesting to understand which parts of the mountain landscapes have been chosen for presentation in touristic endeavours and how, in fact, the mountains themselves have become part of these automotive landscapes that parkways embody. The goal of these roads was more than simply carrying tourists to previously faraway and inaccessible places; according to the rhetoric of the designers, such roads would be able to reconcile the tensions between nature and technology through carefully designed landscapes. Demarcating the line between technology and nature is a historical creation; at the same time, the technology (in this case, road-building technology) that was proffered was quite distinct from the landscapes that it became a part of.

In the absence of regional or national highway systems, parkways became one of the most prominent forms of roadways in the United States from the end of World War 1 to the mid-1930s. These years also saw a dramatic rise of car ownership and usage in that country. While public transport in the form of trains and trolleys still flourished in these years, more and more Americans could afford to own automobiles and used them extensively, especially outside of the cities. By 1930, five Americans shared one car, statistically speaking. Many European countries did not match this level of motorization for another generation; in West Germany, this threshold was taken in 1965. Getting around in an automobile became increasingly popular in the United States during the interwar period. State administrations, which were in charge of building and maintaining roads, engaged in a veritable road-building frenzy. According to one historian, the mileage of paved roads increased from 387,000 in 1921 to 1,367,000 in 1940. (Seely 1987: 141) While thousands of miles of roads were adapted to the automotive age, parkways delivered more prominently on the promise of new construction of automotive highways. What is more, these roads were built for Cars only, prohibiting trucks and buses by law, and promised to bring nature closer to drivers and passengers. Presenting attractive landscapes was not the only environmental boon that early automobiles were supposed to deliver; ridding American cities of the filth and muck of horse-drawn carriages was another. In the long run, however, the widespread use of automobiles created more problems than it solved. (see also McCarthy 2007) As far as roads and

landscapes were concerned, most observers agreed until the 1940s that parkways were an `international model for the harmonious integration of engineering and landscape architecture, as the leading historian of parkways puts it. (Davis 2008: 35) Originating in urban public parks of the Tate nineteenth century, parkways soon became an integral part of American city planning. One of the country's most prominent landscape architect, Frederick Law Olmsted, coined the word 'parkway' in 1868 when designing Prospect Park in Brooklyn, New York. Primarily built for carriages, it had as few intersections as possible and was designed as the unity of roadbed and adjacent trees and shrubs, as a 'narrow, elongated park'. Neither trolleys nor commercial traffic were allowed. These principles were maintained as the parkway, a way through the park or from park to park, became increasingly used for automobiles. The historian Clay McShane argues that the prohibition of common carrier traffic on the parkways assured class segregation as well as the appropriate natural feel; social and environmental decisions were intertwined from the outset in the history of the parkway. (Mc Shane 1988 and 1994) Increasingly, the design features of urban parkways were also utilized for extra urban parkways. Large rights-of-way were used to physically separate and visually screen the roadway from surrounding areas. The road itself was adapted to landform through a curvilinear alignment that preserved scenic features, such as streams and hills. Also, parkways introduced the idea of limited points of access, separate alignment for Janes running in opposite directions, and amenities such as roadside parks. One of the best-known extra-urban parkways was the Bronx River Parkway, leading to and from the affluent northern suburbs of New York, which was opened in 1922.

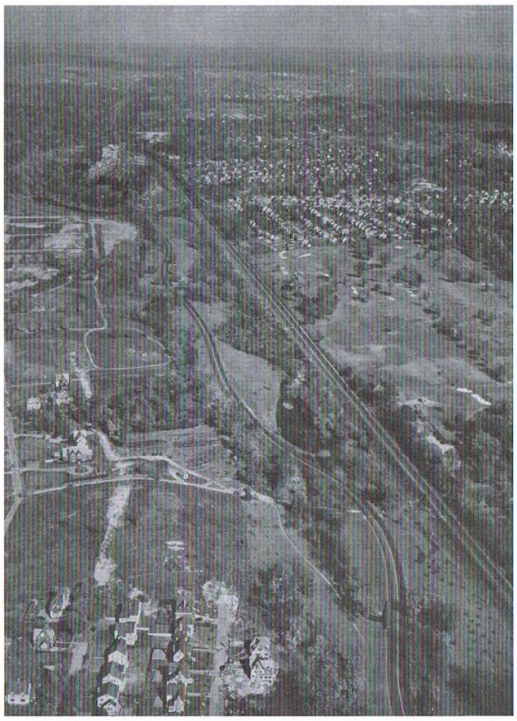

Figure 1. The Bronx River Parkway in the New York City suburbs, showing the contrast between curvilinear parkway design and straight railway design. Reproduced with permission of the Westchester County Archives, Elmira, New York.

The commute on this parkway was naturalized to the extreme, with plants and trees shielding suburban development to passengers and drivers. Curvilinear road design predominated. The designers, among them Gilmore Clarke, a Cornell-trained landscape architect, extolled the ways in which both the natural and the social environment of the Bronx River Valley were restored through the planning and construction process: Instead of weedy and unkempt waterscapes, a pleasing and complete landscape was seen through the

windshield. Poor immigrant families were displaced, as their dwellings gave way to the parkway and its wide right-of-way. The involvement of the eugenicist Madison Grant in the Bronx River Parkway project has led one recent observer to label the road as a quasi-eugenic project. (Mason 2009)

Three lasting legacies arose from the Bronx River Parkway: the emergence of a vocabulary of beauty and accessible nature; the professional coalition of civil engineers and landscape architects; and the realization that property values alongside the parkways increased. (Nolen and Hubbard 1937)[4] Between 1923 and 1933, New York's Westchester County spent over $80 million to complete a system of parks and parkways. Even more (in)famous is the work of Robert Moses as the chairman of the Long Island State Park Commission, and subsequently as Commissioner of Parks for New York starting in 1934. With Gilmore Clarke as his chief landscape architect and a heavy-handed approach to public policy, Moses pushed for the construction of public works such as beaches, swimming pools, and urban parks, connected by hundreds of miles of parkways.[5]

It is worth noting that Moses and Clarke were only the popularizers, not the inventors of this idea of motorized access to nature. (see Ballon / Jackson 2007) Still, the Northeastern parkways (including the Taconic and Merritt Parkways) propelled these modern (in terms of their engineering standards) and naturalistic (in terms of their landscaping standards) roads to widespread prominence, both domestically and abroad. (Davis 1993) Parkway historian Timothy Davis explains their popularity in paradoxical terms: `White the parkway's practical benefits are readily documented, a more intangible reason for their widespread appeal was that by being both emphatically modern and resolutely traditional, they helped Americans negotiate the disjunctive experience of modernization during the tumultuous period between the two world wars (Davis 1993: 37) Several cities in the Northeast and the Midwest planned or built parkways in the inter-war period.

Also during the 1993ies, the federal government sponsored the construction of the Mount Vernon Memorial Highway, leading from Washington to Mount Vernon and built to commemorate the 200th birthday of America's first president. The Bureau of Public Roads employed the same landscape architects who had worked in Westchester County and Bureau of Public Roads chief Thomas McDonald sought for 'as close an approach to nature as can be

[4] Of course, such an economic observation holds true for most urban parks.

[5] Many readers will be familiar with Robert Caro's and subsequently Langdon Winner's indictment of Moses as an authoritarian planner and the design of the Moses parkways as racially exclusive. In particular, Caro had claimed that some parkway bridges were built with a lower clearance in order to exclude poorer Americans, especially African-Americans,, travelling in buses from using the parkways. According to Woolgar, Cooper, and Joerges, this is factually incorrect. By the late 1990s, New York's public transport agency was running daily buses on these parkways, thus refuting Caro's and Winner's claims on the surface of the road (Caro 1974, Winner 1980, Woolgar / Cooper 1999 and Joerges 1999).

managed.' (Davis 2001) Thus, parkways defined landscapes to the urban motorists and made them the vital ingredient of the simultaneously individualistic and pre-packaged weekend experience. Bringing nature closer to city dwellers was celebrated as a democratic achievement and thus a token of Americanness. In a historically rare coalition of professional groups, landscape architects and civil engineers presented parkways as a progressive means to egalitarian consumerism that would mend the rupture between country and city.

The most prominent project of the time, however, was the Blue Ridge Parkway spanning 75o km in the southeastern Appalachians, introducing drivers to breathtaking views and pastoral ideals. As its most recent historian, Anne Mitchell Whisnant, notes, this parkway differs from the others not only in length. Unlike the Northeastern parkways, this federally funded road was not intended to ease commuting or make it more attractive. (Whisnant 2006 and 2008) Rather than serving the cultural and perambulating needs of relatively affluent urban and suburban dwellers, the Blue Ridge Parkway was intended to generate and sustain car-based tourism to one of the poorest areas of the country and to remake the landscape in view of the parkway, encompassing its human inhabitants as well as its fauna and flora.

Promoting tourism in one's own country had been the goal of the 'See America First'-movement, which exhorted Americans to spend their tourism dollars at home rather than in Europe. (Shaffer 2001) Exploring and consuming scenic landscapes was part and parcel of this movement: The natural beauty, especially of parts of the Western United States, was intended to compensate for the lack of historic buildings such as castles and urban architecture that Europe provided. (Runte 2010: 21, 34) While local tourism boosters had promoted such touristic domesticity for decades, the National Park Service, founded in 1916, and its first director, Stephen Mather, lent the Support of the national government to these plans. Mather fervently believed that roads to parks and within parks were the key to increasing visitor numbers in the parks, thus enabling more visitors to gain more and better experiences of the parks' landscapes, and to elevate domestic tourism. He argued that little had been done 'to enable the motorists to have the greater use of these playgrounds [National Parks, TZ] which they demand and deserve' and pushed for more roads to be built.[6] Rather than arriving by rail, tourists would increasingly travel to National Parks in their cars. Improved highways would bring more visitors to the parks, thus resulting in their greater popularity and more calls for expanding the park System. In 1922, Mather supported the plans for a national highway system spanning the entire United States, propelled by his observation that 'Travel is based on the enjoyment of scenery'.[7]

[6] Mather as quoted in Carr 1998: 146.
[7] As quoted in Carr 1998: 147.

Thus, it is not surprising that the National Park Service threw its institutional weight behind the idea of a road connecting two recently established National Parks, Shenandoah in Virginia and Great Smoky Mountains in Tennessee and North Carolina. Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes deemed the project to be worthwhile of federal work-relief funds, as it would put thousands of unemployed Americans to work during the Great Depression and leave a regionally and nationally beneficial touristic infrastructure.

Built, beginning in 1935, through the cooperative efforts of state highway departments in North Carolina and Virginia and federal agencies of President Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal, and completed in 1987, the Blue Ridge Parkway is still managed by the National Park Service today, and the management is total. The landscape writer Alexander Wilson has called it the 'prototypical environment of instruction'. (Wilson 1992: 35) The Parkway's landscape architect and first superintendent, Stanley Abbott, who had worked on the Westchester County Parkways, sought to build 'a museum of managed American countryside'. At stake, then, was to design a landscape that would make 'an attractive picture from the Parkway'.[8] Given their metropolitan aesthetic sensibilities, landscape architects did not consider many vernacular dwellings and many of the local farmlands to be attractive for future motorists. In Gases where farmhouses stood in the way of the new road, residents were resettled and offered new housing, often provided by the federal Resettlement Administration in the valleys.[9] The former farms were erased from the site, native succession species grew in their place. Any visitor today will realize the degree to which the National Park Service aims to establish visual control of the road and of the 'viewscapes', as the area surveyed from the inside of the car is called by planners today. In Wilson's words, 'The planners encouraged split-rail fences, grazing cows or sheep, but not abandoned cars or, for that matter, weeds'. (Wilson 1992: 35)

At least initially, soil conservation on local farms in sight of the parkway or on parkway lands rented out to locals was a priority for the landscape architects and administrators of the new road. Through newsletters and meetings, locals were to be educated in better ploughing techniques or crop rotation in order to avoid runoff and establish more attractive landscapes. While such policies were in line with other federal initiatives during the New Deal, they soon took a back seat to the goals of expanding and maintaining the extensive road.[10]

The landscape architects were keen to let native plant communities resurface on the roadside. They were also very careful in controlling the vistas. Signs of undesirable human activity, such as industrial activity in the valleys, were screened from view with fast-growing trees and shrubs. The

[8] Abbott as quoted in Wilson 1992: 35.
[9] More residents, however, were displaced for the construction of Shenandoah Park (Reich 2001)
[10] For New Deal conservation projects, see Maher 2008.

curvilinear road has speed limits of 35 or 45 miles/h; while slowing down when following yet another bend in the road, motorists are able to see for many miles. The techniques of alternating concealment and presentation, which garden and landscape architects had used for centuries to great effect in parks, thus took on automotive meanings. Given that the road is situated on the ridge of the mountains for considerable stretches, the views orient car drivers and passengers towards the valleys down below and the series of mountain ranges so typical of the Appalachian scenery. Therefore, 'motorists feel that they are on top of the world, together with their car, and in total harmony with nature. This national public landscape is organized around the private car and the private consumption of landscape'. (Wilson 1992: 36) The intimate act of aesthetic appreciation is, at the same time, deeply intertwined with state activity and state control of the Land and the view.

Figure 2 shows the harmonious relationship between fauna, flora, and drivers that the parkway planners intended to create. The overall message of this picture could be described as one of harmony. It is an expression of pastoralism in the literal sense as the sheep and their grazing grounds dominate the left half of the picture. No less harmonious is the road winding its way through the landscape and demarcating it, with a lone car taking possession of it. Split-rail fences mark the boundaries between technology and nature, but-only reinforce an environment seemingly in balance.

Figure 2: This bucolic image of the Blue Ridge Parkway dates from 1953 and was heavily used in advertising the road nationally. Reproduced with permission of the Blue Ridge Parkway Headquarters, Asheville, North Carolina.

According to Whisnant, such images obfuscate more than they reveal. She examines the way in which the parkway, as a grand public development fought over on the local, state, and federal level, deproblematizes itself. (Whisnant 2006) In fact, a multitude of conflicts has shaped the parkway on all levels, from planning to construction to maintenance. Whisnant's political history of the parkway successfully debunks some of the myths of the only other academic book-length study of the parkway which portrayed a road -mostly in harmony with its social and natural surroundings. (Jolley 1969)[11]

Whisnant's analysis can be complemented with a closer look at the kind of landscapes portrayed in this image. The geographer Stephen Daniels has coined the term 'duplicity of landscape' for such ensembles: Landscape often masks social relations and conflicts through its smooth and often aesthetically pleasant appearance. (Daniels 1989 and Cosgrove 2004) The parkway landscape, in this respect, is duplicitous. The conflicts surrounding its creation have been naturalized and are not perceptible for the casual tourist. But this is not all. The Blue Ridge Parkway's creation has engendered contradictory reactions on several levels.

The Park Service's early interpretive Plans for the Parkway reinforced urban clichés about rural 'mountaineers'. As modern as the road and the automobiles were taken to be, the pre-parkway world was portrayed as one of primitive living with few modern tools. On another level, parts of the educated, urban elites were not at all enchanted by the idea of a highway running along ridgetops in remote parts of the country. Rather than opening up this part of the Southeastern United States for touristic development and the eyes of urban multitudes, it would be better to leave it in a 'wild' state, some wilderness advocates argued. One historian notes that the Meeting leading to the foundation of the Wilderness Society, an environmental group that successfully lobbied for the legal protection of wilderness areas in the 1960s, took place along an Appalachian roadside in 1934 while the Blue Ridge Parkway and other motorways were being discussed. Roads and especially ridge roads, for these advocates, became anathema to their vision of wilderness, defined as a place where humans are only visitors. (Sutter 2002: 233)[12] One of the wilderness advocates, Benton MacKaye, was the national driving force behind the creation of an East Coast hiking trail from Maine to Georgia, the Appalachian Trail which parallels and intersects with the Blue Ridge Parkway. Less successfully, MacKaye championed valley roads over ridgetop roads since he deemed them less intrusive. The landscape architects in the employ of the National Park Service had argued for a road alternating between ridge top and valley locations in order to gain a greater variety of views. But they were overridden in a political

[11] For an examination of park roads in the American West, see Louter 2006.
[12] For some examples on the debate surrounding wilderness in American environmental history, see Cronon 1996, Lewis 2007.

routing battle between the states of Tennessee and North Carolina. The latter offered higher elevations, prompting Secretary Ickes to award it the southern section of the parkway.[13]

Finally, it is hard to ascertain how visitors experienced the lookout terraces, winding curves, and mountainous locations of the Blue Ridge Parkway. Numbers indicate success: The National Park Service today counts more visitors on the Parkway than any other National Park. Whether all of them absorb the Appalachian scenery as the designers intended, is another matter. The variegated patterns of concealment and showcasing that landscape architects have imprinted on the mountains are meant to delight and stimulate. For some observers, however, the mere thought of hundreds of miles of automotive solitude surrounded by trees evoked the spectre of ennui. A journalist writing for the New York Times in 1938 imagined a ride on the Blue Ridge Parkway describing the scenery to be enjoyed for hundreds of miles. But even before the road was finished, the metropolitan paper warned: 'Perhaps, after 600 miles of driving without sight of a truck, you are a little homesick for the ordinary nuisances of touring, a little fed up with mile after mile of empty wilderness'. (Taylor 1938) This turned out to be an astonishingly prescient commentary: While the number of visitors to the Blue Ridge Parkway soared after World War II, some motorists avoid the parkway entirely or only drive on it for short stretches before seeking refuge in the familiar rites of navigating parallel four-lane interstate highways with common carrier traffic.

The scene for scenic roads in Germany was set in the political environment of the National Socialist dictatorship, whose planning styles differed fundamentally from those in the United States, even though some of the outcomes might look similar.[14] The politics of landscape consumption in Germany was closely connected to the environmental politics of the regime. It may be surprising to some that the most violent regime in European history expended rhetorical and legal resources for conservation and landscaping the countryside. Historians are still debating to which degree the rhetorical attention translated into systematic action.(Brüggemeier / Cioc / Zeller 2005) One fruitful field of research is the roads built under Nazi rule. Directly inspired by the US parkways, the Nazi regime decided to sponsor the Deutsche Alpenstraße, a road extending 450 kilometres on the northern mountain crest of the Alps. Like the Blue Ridge Parkway, it was envisioned as a tourist road by local elites, especially in locales not connected to the railway network. In the Alpine countries of Austria and Switzerland, a handful of mountain roads were built in the 1930s with the dual purposes of luring automobile tourists and asserting national difference through the display of natural symbols such as mountain peaks. These roads

[13] For the political history oft he routing controversy, see Whisnant 2006: 34.
[14] For an interpretation stressing commonalities, see Schivelbusch 2006.

were built as to incorporate the highest degree possible of 'Austrian' and 'Swiss' values as reflected in the cultural modernity of the road and its vernacular landscape. Numbers of car ownership and the Beauty of the natural landscape were both seen as specific national achievements, thus imbuing car-driven mobility with a sense of modernity resting on state-sponsored road building. The fact that civil engineers extolled these roads as landscape-friendly as well as opening up the features of the landscape only reinforced the idea of a conciliatory triad of roads, cars, and landscapes. (Zschokke 1997, Rigele 1993 and 1998, Pagenstecher 2004)

Accounts in middle-class touring magazines testify to the popularity of these roads. Central to their attraction was the view that motorists could gain from their cars. The Alpine panorama, of being able to see summit after summit from an elevated vantage point, had been the privilege of hikers and, increasingly, tourists who took cable cars to the top of mountains. The Zugspitze, Germany's highest mountain peak, was accessible by subway train as early as 1930 (today, it boasts Germany's highest internet cafe). However, middle-class automotive tourists preferred not to be in the company of either arduous, perspiring hikers or to be part of a railway tour, not even in first class. The panoramatic journey famously described by Wolfgang Schivelbusch, the nineteenth-century landscape vision characterized by a loss of the foreground, took on social meanings as inter-war motorists aimed to regain the autonomy of movement and vision. (Schivelbusch 1986)

Increasingly, motorists preferred to be in a company of their own choosing and to drive their privately owned vehicles themselves. By the mid- and late 1920s and early 1930s, chauffeurs began to disappear from travelers' accounts. By taking the wheel, these almost exclusively male drivers reasserted control over their machines and the panorama. The rediscovery of the foreground after the 'panoramatic journey' prescribed by the railway was a major element of automotive narratives and desires. In a travelogue published in a middle-class motoring journal, Dr. Elsa Bienenfeld traversed the Furkapass, 'one of Europe's most daring roads, in 1929. On top of the Rhone glacier, she experienced a noon hour filled with 'the magic of the most modern romance: mixture of grandiose nature and the art of the machine'. By 3 pm, a car park of some 300 automobiles had assembled, which she likened to an opera premiere combined with an Enrico Caruso concert, given the way the participants had dressed up and displayed their cars. The ensemble of cars was directed by a lone Swiss policeman, who in her estimation was dressed like an Austrian general. (Bienenfeld 1929)

It was exactly this hybrid of automobiles and landscapes that these motorists were after. For many car drivers, the landscape impression was not a peripheral sideshow, but the central goal of their trip. The relatively low numbers for car ownership in Germany enabled this kind of visionary practice. Soon after gaining power in 1933, the Nazi regime promised to raise the level

of motorization, but also promised to maintain and expand the idea of a motorized access to Alpine landscapes. Hitler announced an extensive program to motorize Germany by providing inexpensive, mass-produced cars and a nation-wide network of roads. The former effort in the form of the Volkswagen failed dismally during the Nazi years. However, some 3,800 kilometers of autobahn were built in the country.[15] In addition, Hitler himself made the Alpenstrasse his pet project in the summer and fall of 1933. Work on the road began in 1934. Like the Blue Ridge Parkway, whose construction began a year later, it was supposed to connect one summit with the next and traverse and Bridge the valleys. The engineering challenges were enormous, and the design of the road changed. Instead of building a road which nestled closely to the mountains, by 1938 civil engineers resorted to building a road more domineering, less curvy, and more predictable. The plan included stretches as high as 1,700 meters. (Michahelles 1938) Costs skyrocketed, thus postponing the completion of the road.

Even though it was incomplete and has never been built according to its original plan, the Alpenstrasse was celebrated in guidebooks and left a lasting imprint on the Alpine landscape. Very much unlike its Appalachian sibling, it touched upon or connected century-old towns and Cities, which competed with each other over access to the road and thus tourism income.[16] As a result, the Alpenstrasse was routed as a pathway from one tourist attraction to another, from Hitler's mountain retreat close to Berchtesgaden in the East to Schloss Neuschwanstein, King Ludwig II's neoromantic castle, in the West. Guidebooks published under the Nazis stressed that the Nazis' push for consumerism and their supposed respect for nature had been the enabling factors for the roads. Motorists were constantly reminded that the landscapes which they experienced were German and essentially so; their car trips were supposed to reaffirm their belonging to an ethnically understood collective whose cultural values were expressed in its landscapes. The chief engineer for the road, Fritz Todt, instructed the drivers on the Alpenstrasse to be 'quiet, considerate in conduct, and reverential toward the grandiose nature surrounding you'. He also admonished them to thank Hitler. (Todt 1936: 5) Guidebooks placed baroque churches right next to valleys and mountains, thus creating a seamless web of nature and culture. Tourists were encouraged to leave their cars and go for hikes in the Alps (Figure 3). This managed landscape was an exclusionary one: Germans classified as Jewish could no longer ride their cars legally after 1938.

[15] For the highly contested lanscaping aspects oft her autobahn, see Zeller 2007.
[16] Another difference is that trucks have been allowed to use the road from the beginning.

Figure 3. The German Alpine Road promised Alpine views; its users were invited, if not instructed, to leave their cars at designated parking areas and to go for a hike. Hans Schmithals, Die Deutsche Alpenstraße (Berlin 1936). Private collection.

Not the least because of the Nazi sponsorship, work on the road did not continue immediately after the war. Some 60 kilometers were added and the road contributed to the staggering rise of Alpine tourism after World War II by opening up views of the Alps to non-hikers. But whether providing easy automotive access to the mountains was a desirable goal, a question that had not entered the public arena during the Nazi years, was very much under debate by the 1960s. When the Bavarian state government planned to construct an unrealized section of the Alpenstrasse from Linderhof to Füssen at the road's western end over the Hochplatte mountain (2082 meters above sea level) in 1965, conservationists were up in arms.

The German Alpine Club (Deutscher Alpenverein), a group of hikers with tens of thousands of members, spoke up against the project 'not because we begrudge the car tourists an attractive road link, but because a nature reserve which is unique in Germany since it is untouched, extensive, and particular, can easily be endangered'. The alpinists pointed out that the road would lead through a nature reserve established just two years earlier. Instead, the goal should be to preserve this spot of nature in its current state. (Deutscher Alpenverein 1966) The project was indeed cancelled. When mass motorization had reached Western Germany, some sectors of its society deemed its mission of opening up the landscape obsolete. The plans for the road were

never fully realized, and it was not until 2002 that road signs completed the process of inscribing the road unto the landscape.

Both the Blue Ridge Parkway and the German Alpine Road succeeded in their most obvious goal to increase car tourism to the regions through which they traversed. Especially in the Alpine case, tourism managers are now busy containing rather than attracting cars, thus questioning whether the Alpenstrasse is an unmitigated success. But less obvious comparisons between these two roads might be more helpful.

Far from being a transient moment in the history of motorization, the technology of landscape appropriation from the roadway offers a unique insight into one of the ways Western societies have tried to solve the conundrum of nature and technology. By consuming landscapes, major elites in the first half of the twentieth century aimed at bringing nature back into the technologically advanced societies of the West. In retrospect, this might seem like the opening of a Pandora's Box of nature destruction. However, the claim of the designers that they had found the means to embellish nature must be taken seriously and analysed historically.

The parkway ideal was one of total management of the land in the hand of a powerful public agency. While the National Park Service's agenda for the Blue Ridge Parkway was more discreet than Nazi Germany's blunt nationalism, in both instances the power of the state was meant to be visible, albeit to differing degrees. Interestingly, the statism of the parkway approach of consuming landscapes corresponded with a static understanding of nature: The landscapes designed were ideologically charged moments frozen in time, which required even more careful management in order to avoid succession dynamics of the flora.

These roads were built with the goal of not only offering scenic views to non-local tourists (mostly middleclass urbanites were imagined as users when the roads were planned), but also to transform the landscapes they traversed, especially in the Appalachian case. The Blue Ridge Parkway was, at least initially, unpopular with many local residents; state force, eventually, forced them to abandon hunting, logging, farming with previous methods, and moonshining in and around the parkway's landscapes. Environmental degradation narratives were instrumental for increasing experts' control. In the case of the Alpenstrasse, the reformist impulse was marginal, but the local population was often happy to serve as props in a scenery-driven automotive tourism display. In both cases these roads and their transformationist environments drew metropole and periphery closer together, established the dominance of expert knowledge, and reoriented the local economy from farming to tourism for Outsiders.

It is striking to observe the parallel desire to make presentable and present a rigidly ordered version of mountain scenery from both roads. In the Appalachian case, the parkway was to serve as a way for inhabitants of the busy East Coast corridor to escape the cities and mid-century

America. Instead, motorists encountered a monitored, prescribed, and comprehensive frontier landscape of settlers in 'primitive' terrain. The Blue Ridge Parkway narrative tended to exclude Native Americans and American history after industrialization, thus perpetuating a commonplace story of retreat and re-creation. Recreation, of course, on these roads made them into icons of car consumerism.

In contrast, the Alpenstrasse's planners took a more sweeping historical view, placing the topographical and human factors of the landscape in full view of the driver. Church steeples and mountain peaks taken together symbolized a cultural landscape with a particular Nazi bent: In a decidedly millenarian mood, the Nazi regime placed itself at the pinnacle of history; it was to be the result of landscape history and human history. The roads were presented to an ethnically cleansed German populace as a gift from its regime, indeed a gift from Hitler himself who put his political weight behind the project. Tourism as a part of the Nazi consumer culture, in this regard, was still paternalistic. (Baranowski 2004)

Thus, the Blue Ridge Parkway was more than simply 'one of man's greatest achievements during the 20th century' as the American Society of Landscape Architects declared somewhat grandiosely in 2001 when it gave its 'Classic Award' to the road.[17] Together with other scenic roads, it is a testament to the tendency of some twentieth-century societies to solve the perceived tension between technology and the environment by designing and building a medium ground in the form of a roadway which, in the end, could neither solve nor acerbate these tensions.

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[17] http://www.asla.org/meetings/awards/awdsol/blueridge.html.

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