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Racing the Clock and the Culture

A problem identification study into how the United States' driving infrastructure has cultivated a dangerous culture around selfishness and the potential solutions to such problems.

American Driving Infrastructre

Unlike many other nations worldwide, the United States predominantly relies on a transportation infrastructure that is focused on personal automobiles and other likeminded vehicles. This system mostly relies on the usage of an interconnected roadway with highways and interchanges most often used long-distance travel whilst more centralized, domestic areas use loops and intersections to control and monitor short-distance movement (Mohn, 2019). Due to the high quantity of drivers, because of the lesser focus on other forms of transport such as train or waterway, roadways are very high maintenance and must be constantly tended to for upkeep and efficiency purposes.

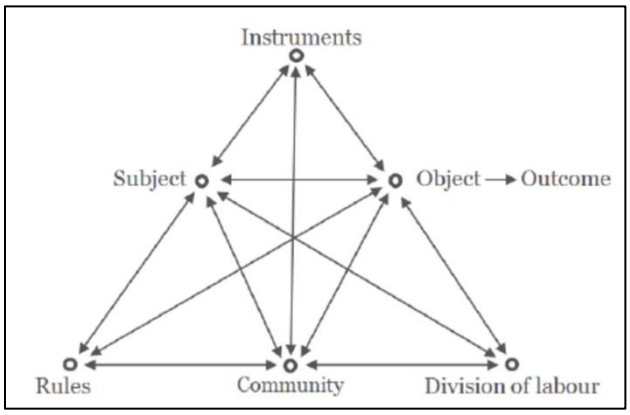
Driving Activity Theory

The concept of activity theory that will be used for the purpose of breaking down and defining American driving culture, and how the necessary infrastructure fits into it, will be that of Aleksei Leontiev's definition: activity theory is a theoretical framework that assists in furthering the understanding of how specific activities are systematically emplaced as required by social and cultural purposes (McAvinia, 2016).

Therefore, in breaking down the culture of American driving, there are several components that must be identified and defined:

- **Tools:** As used by the common populace, automobiles and similar vehicles like cars, trucks, and SUVs are the main tools within the driving culture of America. However, secondary tools are the infrastructure itself, such as intersections, roadways, and passing versus traveling lanes.
- **Subject:** The subjects are American drivers who have obtained their license when legal, typically between the ages of 16-18.
- **Rules:** Like most other western cultures, there are many rules and restrictions that must be followed when driving on American roads. Some examples are speed limits, crosswalks, exit and on ramps, and single versus double sided yellow lines.
- **Community:** The United States has a very unique driving community in that, unlike the European Union for example, there are a plethora of different vehicles to varying degrees of speeds and abilities on the roads. Some drive trucks that are built for pulling large trailers, whilst others operate slim muscle cars that are built for speed.
- **Division of Labor:** The construction of the driving infrastructure in the United States falls to the responsibility of several parties. Whilst the federal, state, and local governments work together to design and implement roadways plans, it often falls to contractors to engineer and build the roads themselves. On the other hand, when it comes to vehicles, it is the civilian market the supplies the highways with their many vehicles.

- **Object:** The operation of one vehicle to travel from one location to another using roadway infrastructure and following all the necessary rules and nuances such as following regulations and being cautious of other drivers.



- **Outcome:** In utilizing road availabilities, and safely following safety regulations throughout, individuals can easily travel from place to place in a free and accessible manner.

Actor-Network Theory

As will be touched up on later in the text, the United States' driving culture as cultivated an idea of selfishness and lack of resolve to follow procedures for safety and practicality. For this reason, a strong cultural definition that can be pulled and allocated to the given situation is that of Beau Pihlaja's concept of actor-network theory, or the framework for examining how human and non-human entities interact in a given environment (Pihlaja, 2024).

Driving in Actor-Network Theory

In this specific instance, the human entities are given due to the fact that a person is required to operate most vehicles on the road. However, the non-human entities can be represented by the vehicles themselves and how they are perceived by other drivers. On the other hand, the network that is being provided, both literally and metaphorically, is the roadways themselves and how they manage the flow of drivers on a day-to-day basis.

It is common for drivers to take this system and begin perceiving other vehicles as obstacles to travel rather than understanding there is another person behind the wheel of said vehicle. This creates a unique system where humans are more likely to begin associating each other through a non-human lens born out of frustration (Roy, 2024).

How is Driving Culture Changing?

Following the idea that the infrastructure of American roadways has created a culture of little patience and much frustration, it is evident the selfish driving has continued to become a major problem for the whole of American drivers. The most prevalent of such issues being the continued rise in the number of individuals who speed on roadways who endanger themselves as well as others (Belushin, 2024).

In observing the data at hand, it seems that the more frustrated an individual gets with the roadways, whether that be caused from backed up traffic at an intersection or due to the speed of other vehicles (not typically associated as drivers themselves), the more likely they are to begin speeding at a high rate.

Although such an issue is only becoming more problematic in America, this does raise the idea of whether or not an alternative to managed speed areas could be implemented. The greatest example of such a design is the Autobahn freeway in Germany which has little to no speed regulation in most areas and is an open-laned design with few impediments to travel, unlike the American road system which is often restricted even in long-term travel usages (Mohn, 2019, Voorst/Washington, 1992).

Therefore, in understanding how current driving infrastructure is increasing the average American's tendency to speed, it becomes evident that an alternative road system may be necessary in some areas. Some of the most ideal locations may be cities such as Dallas or Austin, Texas where there are a high number of vehicle-related incidents and fatalities.

A Personal Positive Change

As for the input of the researcher, this document relays how American driving infrastructure is beginning to create a culture surrounding frustration which leads the average individual being more selfish in the way they drive, particularly around speed. To combat such problems, there must be more alternatives implemented.

Such methods could be extraordinary tasks such as designing an Autobahn equivalent in the United States, although this would be a great expense by both the people and government. However, there are smaller ideas that could be implemented such as increasing the average number of lanes to 3 from 2, or even increasing the average speed on specific freeways.

Regardless, the American cultural identity regarding personal vehicular travel as gotten much quicker and much more selfish as time has continued. Therefore, alternative solutions must be observed and tested to create more efficient and safer roadways for the future of American travel.

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