ENACTING MOBILITY: 
Studies Into the Nature of Road-related Social Interaction

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ABSTRACT
Mobility has become a keyword for contemporary western society. It encompasses both 
global flows of ideas, goods, money and people as well as ordinary movements of 
everyday life. Focusing on the mundane features of mobility, this thesis highlights two 
vital assemblages – the road and the roadside – as disregarded phenomena in 
accomplishing mobility. The aim is to counterbalance the predominance of insufficient 
or inadequate road conceptions by providing alternative sociological observations and 
interpretations of road interaction. This is achieved by taking a closer look at road-sides 
and the residents, representational objects and mediators that inhabit them.

Instead of dwelling on the inherent ‘horrors of representation’, my attempt to 
contribute to a sociology of the road, will be fuelled by an overarching ambition to learn 
more about how representations actually are made strong - how they are repaired, how 
they are framed, how they are used and distributed, how they are tended and not 
at tended to, how we ‘muddle through’ and accomplish things - despite their 
insufficiency and pitfalls. Cast as two complementary challengers of current models of 
representation, ethnomethodology and actor-network theory are comparatively 
analysed, tracing out a theoretical underpinning of alternative interpretations and 
and studies of road/roadside interaction.

Additionally, I contribute to a more profound understanding of road use and road 
interaction by looking in some ethnographical detail at three sites of ‘roadside 
negotiation’. I have followed bus-drivers as they move between bus stops, as were they 
bees visiting flowers. The mutual understandings of locations are crucial for these 
mobile occupational groups, enabling to successfully perform collaborative tasks. I have 
participated at the work of a petrol station where a continuous flow of vehicles, 
commodities, money and people is sustained and made accountable. From the 
production and recognition of fluency, the constant negotiation and articulation work 
of situations, to continuous maintenance and repair of movement, petrol stations tend to 
mobility.

Finally, I have documented the population of private, personal, moral and illicit 
signs mounted along the roads. These signs enable intermediate interaction between 
roadside residents and their passers-by. But the signs are also carefully edited through 
the maintenance work as editing the road. The ultimate ambition, empirical and 
thetical, is to counterbalance inadequate conceptions of ‘the road’ and ‘the social’ 
while casting the road as media enacting mobility.

Keywords: mobility; road; roadside; road-related social interaction; ethnomethodology; 
actor-network theory

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