“Details of An Education:

The Mechanics of Eco-Social

Resilience Amongst Vehicle Dwellers”

Rhiannon Craft

Supervised by Prof. Tom Hall and Dr. Charlotte Bates

Cardiff University School of Social Sciences

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Abstract

This thesis documents an ethnography with various vehicle dwellers in the UK, from the position of a vehicle dweller who began living in vehicles in 2018, after spending much time with an array of individuals living in vehicles for 15 years. During the data collection period, I spent time living on the road and on various encampments, most of which was spent on private land in Wales during the pandemic. Through a life lived with others as a vehicle dweller, "*an education*" undergone over four years is presented here. This reveals ways of thinking and relating to other beings and things in the world that may be useful: sociologists can benefit from exploring the ways in which people have responded to their own experiences of crises. Having engaged with ideas about Anarchism, degrowth and prefigurative politics, it is shown how we may uncover knowledge beyond the academy that can assist us in knowing ways of living within the world at a critical time of collective climate and economic crises. It is shown that much of the education I have undergone has been helpful in developing a kind of what Claudio Cattaneo calls "eco-social resilience." Through adopting Tim Ingold's theoretical frameworks, we can pay close attention to the ways in which we can *improvise* with what is around us: from salvaging discarded materials, sharing skills and resources, and by listening to what the landscape provides. Ingold's work offers a promising framework for the development of Green Anarchism, which remains underdeveloped. And finally, this thesis demonstrates the importance of the ability to experiment with alternative forms of self-provided housing, bringing into question the state's repeated attempts to disrupt and control such forms of housing and the stress and trauma this can create for individuals who are simply trying to live their lives.

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Introduction

This thesis was inspired by a popular notion that there had been an increase in "vehicle dwelling" in the UK in recent years. While it is difficult to quantify a transient (often underground) population, there does appear to have been somewhat of an increase in awareness of vehicle dwelling. Indeed, "vanlife" has become a popular Instagram sensation, while a variety of local and national news outlets describe "van dwellers" escaping an escalating housing crisis (e.g. Burrows, 2017; Davis, 2017a; 2017b; 2017c; Matthews, 2017; Jones, 2019; Mariano, 2021; Hattenstone and Lavelle, 2021; Pritchard-Jones, 2022). This moment is arguably comparable (albeit different) to the "rise of New Travellers," which attracted significant attention within and beyond the realms of academia four decades ago, with media attention exploding in the 1980s, with some academic work following behind mostly in the 1990s into the early 2000s. Despite this, there is yet to be a detailed ethnographic study on contemporary vehicle dwelling in the UK beyond undergraduate level.

Regardless of whether or not there has been an increase, vehicle dwelling is by no means a new phenomenon in the UK. As shown in the literature review, a variety of people have come to live in vehicles or adopt forms of nomadism for different reasons for a long time in the UK and are continuing to do so today in other parts of the world too. It can be said that vehicle dwellers and other nomads have often responded and adapted to different social and economic conditions (Okely, 1983; Helleiner, 2000): from the growth of a "landless" population between 1500 and 1630 (Mayall, 2005), to the privatisation of social housing and mass unemployment in the 1980s that led to an influx of new people living on the road (Martin, 2000; Hetherington, 2000). That is to say that people have lived in vehicles – or taken to wandering lifestyles in other ways – for centuries, and for different reasons as various social and economic forces push and pull. Today there are an array of people living in vehicles in the UK: this includes several generations of New Travellers continuing their cultural heritage, a variety of people working mobile occupations or developing creative solutions to escape high rent prices as well as others who are simply finding alternatives to rough sleeping as a matter of survival. As this thesis will show, there is often a mixture of reasons underlying people's motivations, as people display different levels of choice and necessity. This also brings into question what we might mean by "choice" or necessity," which are arguably not always so easy to distinguish between.

In order to investigate this, participant observation has been utilised. Following Ingold (2014), what I document here is a process of *education* that I have undergone (and will continue to undergo). My exploration began in 2018, when I carried out my MSc Dissertation and moved into a caravan on a site in Bristol with a circus collective, who were struggling to obtain planning permission for piece of land they had purchased. Since then, I have lived in different locations with different people, spending most of the data collection period on private land in Mid Wales. In this time I have learned much from the people I have spent time vehicle dwelling with, who have shown me how to tune into the world in a new way; allowing me to practice new ways of understanding and creating my own domestic space in my own way that was inspired by their own ways of knowing and intermingling with the world.

Such an approach responds to Santos' call to move towards "ecologies of knowledges" (2007a) whereby we might transcend the "colonial abyss" (Savranksy, 2017) by taking more seriously the knowledge that exists outside of the university. Such an approach compliments Ingold's calls to learn from others beyond the academy (2014), which includes an active engagement with people who engage with materials (2007) and those who spend time caring for plants and animals (2000). In this respect, through engaging with different ways of knowing beyond the academy, we might uncover alternative forms of social organisation that can contribute to the knowledge we need in order to respond to economic and climate crises. It is hoped that this may simultaneously work towards repairing the tarnished identities of vehicle dwellers who continue to find themselves up against a hostile policy context.

Revealing the level of diversity that I have observed, Chapter One explores how vehicle dwellers come from a variety of political dispositions and backgrounds. At times these different people come together (albeit often momentarily) in various times and places, through overlapping flows of mobility and upheaval as multiple social and economic forces of different magnitudes push and pull people into alternative housing. There is not a dichotomised - or "clear cut" - understanding of choice and necessity implied here. Instead, we might recognise that amongst the huge variety of people who might be labelled as Travellers, New Travellers, New Age Travellers, Vehicle Dwellers, or Van Dwellers, there are many forces of push and pull at play operating at different magnitudes at different points in time and space. For this reason, the Anarchist goal to move away from the "scientific impulse" (Kuhn,

2010) to create rigid classifications and definitions is helpful. Having engaged with theoretical debates about conceptual frameworks in the literature review, I adopt

Tim Ingold's concept of the "meshwork" to describe the social entanglements of interest here. Supporting previous research (Mackay, 1997; Hetherington, 2000) that emphasised diversity among New Travellers, I have found that vehicle dwellers are particularly diverse. I have also found that despite radical differences, many vehicle dwellers cross paths, at times encountering one another on encampments, festivals, protest camps or even on social media. For those who do not cross paths, it can be said that as people who are living in vehicles, or have done at some point for a significant part of their lives, there is a kind of education that they have undergone (albeit in their own way) that unites them.

Through my own personal experience, Chapter Two gives a close-up account of self built housing. Responding to Ingold (2011: 10), I provide an "alternative account of building" whereby I show processes of working *with* materials. I use my own account of providing my own housing (with help from others) having left the rental sector as a close-up view of ways in which the social relations underpinning housing can be transformed. It is shown in detail what is involved in the process of through gaining more control of housing, which is advocated by Anarchist housing scholars, such as John Turner and Colin Ward. In this respect, an "Anarchist spirit" (Sitrin, 2019) continues to surface, as self-provided housing enables people to dismantle hierarchies or inequalities experienced in other forms of accommodation. This reveals how this can take place though freeing up more time and other resources, introducing new forms of social organisation that prompt a consideration of different ways of conceptualising "the economy" which are introduced in the literature review. This is where ideas about Artistotle's "oikonoma" (the Ancient Greek origins of the English word "economy") and more contemporary adaptations of this concept can begin to assist us. This is helpful in that we can move beyond dogmatic understandings of economics towards ideas about social organisation that place ethical judgements and well-being at the core.

Chapter Three delves deeper into this endeavour, by showcasing ways in which people I have lived with have effectively transformed waste into resource and directly provided for their own needs: to build homes, to engineer artistic job opportunities, or to make homes for animals and plants. It was shown how waste is effectively a social

construct and a result of poor social organisation, which can be contrasted with efforts to deconstruct waste. In effect, alternative economies (or oikonomia) are – to use Ingold's terminology - *grown* through engaging with materials in different ways. In all cases, participants show how they have reduced the need for wage labour, while reducing ecological damage impacting other humans and non-humans. Participants also demonstrate a different approach to building and making, whereby they *improvise* with what is available to them: geographically, and also within their social network. This can be conceptualised as a form of mutual aid as builders and makers effectively provide a bottom-up waste management service through salvaging and reclaiming discarded materials, or through sharing resources.

In Chapter Four, I explore the ways that previous research has suggested that some vehicle dwellers (New Travellers specifically) have been known to value their "connection" with the land or "nature" and experiment with new ways of being with the land (The Children's Society, 2010). Agreeing with Ingold, I argue that a new way of talking about this is necessary: as the idea of being "closer" to nature arguably reinforces a view that we are still separate from nature, and some are closer to it than others. Instead, it is shown that there are ways of thinking that position us within nature. Moreover, it is shown how alternative economics can thrive through engaging with, again, *working with what is available to us,* as natural processes are harnessed at a local level. Indeed, to echo Ingold (2000: 81), we might "submit" to the dynamics immanent in the natural world. This takes us to the relevance of permaculture: a body of thought and practice that has tacit alliances with much Anarchist thought and practice. If we are to consider acts of mutual aid as examples of *symbiosis,* we might pay closer attention to the interweaving and *collaboration* of a variety of humans and non-humans. These dynamics include cooperation *within* species, as humans help one another. Moreover, Kropotkin's conception of mutual aid can be extended to include non-humans, as we can observe collaborations between *different* species. It was shown how these processes can often make this way of life possible, as animals, plants and humans make transactions, rendering the waste of one into the resource of another. Through actively engaging with these processes through enacting biomimicry, effective alternative economies can emerge which can allow wellbeing to flourish amongst a great variety of species. That is to say, we might observe an array of social relationships that can and do constitute processes of care and repair (Centemeri, 2019). Moreover, in this respect, we might look at alternative

housing as a form of *prefigurative politics* as people enact the changes they wish to see in the world. While, of course, remembering that for some people this may be intentional, for others it may be quite mundane and/or merely a survival tactic.

Chapter Five continues to show the ways in which vehicle dwellers often continually read and respond to their environments. This shows the way in which everyday life is *achieved,* through tuning into the environment and helping one another. Mutual aid is shown to be, at times, a matter of survival and necessity, as information, objects, tools, and even physical strength are shared in order to keep everyday life going. The chapter also shows how mutual aid can at times be essential, as are processes of improvisation, as vehicle dwellers move through different places, and have to adjust their positioning in relation to the landscape and social context. Moreover, it is shown that vehicle dwellers do not simply “move” and “arrive:” there are careful procedures that underly these processes. This involves mutual aid: it is often essential that vehicle dwellers help one another in order to achieve everyday life on the road. This can involve interactions with non-humans as people find themselves stuck in the mud and need physical help from others to get out, or more experienced vehicle dwellers who are attuned to the social context can give others advice on how to manage social encounters in order to avoid enforcement action. Different everyday processes of living on the road were explored, showing how an array of forces shape the movement of vehicle dwellers. These forces are not only material forces, but they can also be social forces or legal forces. In this respect, following

Hornborg (2018), attention is paid here to “abstract” economic and social systems, which have an inevitable impact the entanglements of interest here. Indeed, it is important to recognise the ways in which flows of energy and materials are utilised in order to generate social organisation. For Hornborg, it is essential that we pay close attention to this, highlighting power imbalances that are produced and reproduced. Or, with the case of prefigurative practice, contested. And finally, Chapter Six delves deeper into the impact of the legal system on the everyday lives of vehicle dwellers. It gives voice to a group of vehicle dwellers who do not have access to authorised stopping places. This group experiencing enforcement, which I witnessed from the receipt of the eviction notice to the arrival of bailiffs. The ways in which the group worked together and responded to this is shared, showing the ways in which people work together, using different knowledge and skills to manage the situation as a group. Diversity among vehicle dwellers is shown to generate differentiated

experiences of displacement, while also shaping the ways in which this process is managed and responded to by those facing enforcement action. Mutual aid serves again as an essential practice, allowing people to survive in the face of oppression. It is worth reiterating here that this eviction was particularly heavy handed. Therefore, this is not generalisable as such. However, it does reveal the extent to which enforcement can and does take place, which is chosen as a costly alternative to tolerance and provision. The chapter ends with a critique of the political trajectory, as the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022 effectively generates a more hostile policy environment for vehicle dwellers. Combined with an oppressive planning system, this has concerning implications for our ability to experiment with alternative housing (Ward, 2004) and the kind of relations underpinning these arrangements that have been shown in this thesis. To reiterate Hornborg again, we must not lose sight of the reality that power imbalances are “inextricably *constitutive* of the machine” (2018: 262; emphasis in original text). In this respect, vehicle dwellers everyday lives are inevitably shaped by the forces of enforcement action, which effectively enforces sedentarism and capitalist property relations (James, 2004; 2005; 2006; 2007); effectively hindering processes of prefigurative politics, as well as basic survival.

Therefore, the aim of this thesis is to outline the everyday life of a vehicle dweller among other vehicle dwellers through ethnography, revealing the diversity and complexity of a life of entanglements within the social world comprised of a variety of people, animals, plants and materials. A suitable theoretical framework is identified and developed through this process. Furthermore, a valuable critique of a changing policy context is put forward, signalling a concerning trajectory within a historical process of oppression and discrimination. While illuminating these injustices, this thesis also aims to highlight the remarkable eco-social resilience observed through this study, effectively offering an account of a valuable education that can inform a wider education during a period of social, economic and environmental crises

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Literature Review

Introduction

This chapter provides a brief outline of the historical and policy context of vehicle dwelling in the UK. Ireland will also be considered, as many vehicle dwelling communities in the UK have travelled from Ireland. A small body of international literature regarding contemporary vehicle dwelling and other similar lifestyles is then outlined, revealing a silence in contemporary academic literature (which contrasts with the volume of contemporary media reports aforementioned). It is demonstrated that vehicle dwellers are incredibly diverse, being shaped by a variety of external forces. A key debate in the literature is identified and developed, regarding ideas about choice and necessity underlying people's movement into vehicle dwelling. The relevance of the notion of "prefigurative politics" as a form of resistance is illustrated, signalling the significance of Anarchist literature and what can be learned from what effectively serve as lived social experiments beyond the academy, as people try out different ways of living. I then move on to conceptualise vehicle dwelling as a form of self-provided housing, revealing the role that this thesis has in the illumination of what is surprisingly unacknowledged in this area of academic literature. Moreover, by paying close attention to the everyday details of enacting prefigurative politics via alternative, self-provided housing, the concept of "subsistence-oriented oikonomia" is found to be useful, whereby social organisation is geared to ensure that all actors have access to what they need (Cattaneo and Engel-Di Mauro 2015). Following the work of Claudio Cattaneo (2008; Cattaneo and Engel-Di Mauro, 2015; Cattaneo and Gavalda, 2010) – who studied squatters as a squatter in Spain - Aristotle's ideas about "flourishing" and "well-being" are considered in relation to "eco-social resilience," showing the utility of exploring alternative living practices that shed light on forms of social organization that can allow well-being of many humans and nonhumans flourish. This is developed by considering the applicability of Anarchist theories about freedom and mutual aid, which can be expanded to encompass nonhumans as well as humans. Finally, Tim Ingold's theoretical frameworks are shown to provide as a useful conception of (and approach to) the social world when exploring alternative housing, prefigurative politics, ecological oikonomia and Anarchism.

A Brief History of Vehicle Dwelling Communities in the UK and Ireland

As aforementioned in the introduction, in recent years, there have been reports of an increase in vehicle dwelling in the UK (e.g. Burrows, 2017; Davis, 2017a; 2017b; 2017c; Matthews, 2017; Jones, 2019; Mariano, 2021; Hattenstone and Lavelle, 2021; Pritchard-Jones, 2022). Despite category changes, it can be said that like what was seen with “New Travelers” previously, a sense of a new wave of vehicle dwellers in the UK has evoked a strong media response. Firstly, it must be warned that quantifying a transient group is extremely difficult, if not impossible (James, 2005), which casts some doubt over what we can realistically know about the number of vehicle dwellers. What is more, a review of literature reveals that this is not a new phenomenon: there have always been people living in vehicles in the UK.

When tracing the historical roots of vehicle dwellers in the UK, it appears that a myriad of vehicle dwelling folk – from the “exotic” foreign Gypsy, to the indigenous vagrant - have attracted significant attention: from that of legislators to playwrights, who were often simultaneously outraged, frightened and fascinated by their differences (Mayall, 2004). Mayall explains how many of these people were mobile as migrants, others were on the move in search of work, many lived on the road to carry out mobile occupations and trades, and some were wandering having been discharged from previous work (for example, as ex-soldiers or ex-monks). For many of these people, living in moveable forms of housing would have facilitated this. Indeed, there have historically been an array of economic purposes involved in the mobility of people and their dwellings.

Furthermore, Helleiner (2000) explains how previously the UK had had a decentralised political system, whereby many people would move between lordships, in order to sell their skills and services (Foster, 1988 in Helleiner, 2000: 31). Similarly, during Pastoralism in Ireland, there were always people living on the road carrying out a variety of nomadic occupations, from doctors to poets. The place of the nomad in society can also be considered in relation to internal colonialism and other broader economic and social structure and shifts (Okely, 1983): in the Elizabethan and early Stuary period in England, nomads were considered to be a growing “problem” (Mayall, 2004). Of course, this may have been a case of a *perceived* increase. Mayall describes significant economic changes during this period, whereby the population was seen to have doubled between 1500 and 1630.

Consequently, more people became “landless,” and the insecurity of wage labour grew alongside anti-nomadism. This was a period of “masterless men” (Beier, 1985), coinciding with the start of a historical process of the enclosure of land in the UK (Mayall, 2004), which led to the criminalisation of a “loose attachment to land” via anti-vagrancy laws (Kitching, 2014: 25-16). In other words, this can be seen as a period of dramatic economic shifts. The same can perhaps be said today as we observe another perceived increase in vehicle dwellers, as we endure worsening housing crises.

The significance of a historical process of land enclosure for vehicle dwelling communities has been noted elsewhere (e.g. Hardin, 1968; Earle, et al., 1994; Power, 2004; Bancroft, 2000; Tyler, 2013). The enclosures are often referred to in contemporary debates about unequal land distribution as “the forcible theft of land in Britain” (Shrubshole, 2019) as people’s capacity to provide for themselves was effectively withdrawn (Linebaugh, 2014). The loss of the commons and encroachment of the gradual enclosures on the rights and daily life of common people is sometimes referred to as “the tragedy of the commons” (Hardin, 1968). This is a common narrative in campaigning discourse for more general land rights and the rights of nomadic people in the UK (e.g. Nfats, 2022).

Throughout history, when dealing with nomads in the UK, the state has had a difficult task of “combatting” a “myriad of actual, imagined and potential problems among a group so varied in origins, habits and behaviour” (Mayall, 2004: 64). In the past, authorities appear to have tried to distinguish between different kinds of “vandweller:” old police reports from the late 1800s and early 1990s show that police would distinguish between “Gypsies” and “Van-dwellers.” The former were claimed to be an ethnically distinct group, whilst the latter represented a “mode of living” (Cressy, 2018). Debates regarding the relevance of ethnicity are notable in literature regarding Gypsies and Travellers, with the rise of New Travellers prompting questions about the validity of arguments about race and ethnic identity when assessing the rights of people living in vehicles. Moreover, it is has been argued that it is problematic to resort to hierarchical divisions that render some nomads more “deserving” of protective rights than others (Sandland, 1993, Okely, 1983, and Clark and Dearling, 2000). Interestingly, Helleiner (2000) explains how it was colonial academics that were responsible for racialisng different groups of vehicle dwellers, creating hierarchies whereby racialised “others” (such as Irish “tinkers” and Gypsies)

were considered to be superior to “the English lumpenproletariat” (2000: 39). This classism was shown again when “van towns” in impoverished parts of towns and cities began to emerge in the late 1880s, being considered a nuisance and “growing problem” (Mayall, 2004: 292-3). It is also argued that the obsession with racial purity – a characteristic of colonialism – was flawed (Mayall, 2003; Helleiner, 2000; Sandland, 1993) and that “the very notion of the “real” Gypsy raises more questions than answers” (Okely, 1983: 1).

As a remedy to this, it has more recently been argued that it is perhaps more useful to consider the need to protect ethnicity *in combination with* nomadism, representing a more inclusive, wide-ranging approach (Clark and Dearling, 2000). Or in other words, perhaps a focus on *difference* rather than race alone is needed here (James, 2005). It can also be said that it is also important to recognise the rights of those providing for their own needs as a matter for survival. It may also be considered essential that we protect those experimenting with alternative housing (Ward, 2004), rather than only those who have survived oppression long enough to be considered worthy of such rights. In this respect, it could be said that innovation must be valued and respected as well as tradition. It is also notable that identifying nomads and vehicle dwelling groups appears to have been historically problematic. This is tackled further in findings Chapter One. Despite being incredibly diverse, these groups are often melded through their shared nomadism (Mayall, 1988): from the “catch all” definition of vagrancy was introduced from 1531, to the deliberately broad definitions we have seen again more recently in the contemporary Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022 (PCSCA). In response to this, vehicle dwellers have at times come together to contest enforcement. For example, the creation of the “Van Dwellers Association” (VDA) in 1889 to (successfully) resist the proposed Moveable Dwellings Bill (ibid.) which was formulated at the time to monitor and control “rootless people” (Assael, 2005: 41) through intense surveillance. More recently, a wave of social action arose in response to the PCSCA (details of which can be found in findings Chapter Six).

A Hostile Policy Context

Although research in this area remains relatively limited, many problems have been highlighted with the contemporary policy context affecting vehicle dwelling communities in the UK. While there are significant cultural differences observed

between (and within) these groups, enforcement policies group them together through broad aims to control all people living in vehicles. Academic narratives have highlighted the injustices of the gradual loss of authorised spaces provided for vehicle dwelling communities: for centuries, these communities had had access to common land that had survived centuries of enclosure. However, by 1960 the Caravans Sites Control and Development Act required that licensed sites were needed for the situation of caravans, and effectively gave authorities the power to close the commons to vehicle dwellers (Willers and Johnson, 2020). Echoing campaigners in this field, it is argued that contemporary legislation impacting vehicle dwellers can be seen as a continuation of this process of enclosure, as access to land is withheld.

Despite the provision of licensed sites becoming a legal obligation for local authorities to provide in 1968 under the Caravan Sites Act (CSA), councils failed to provide a sufficient number of sites for these communities and could expel those who remained without an authorised site. It is worth noting here that an “authorised” site is a site that has been given formal permission by local authorities, opposed to an “unauthorised” site which has not been granted formal permission. Authorised sites can be both privately owned or council owned. There are also instances where sites are “tolerated” whereby they are not formally authorised but are not actively being sought to be dissolved. It is also worth mentioning here that sometimes a landowner may authorise a site on their land, but without permission from planning authorities, it cannot be entirely authorised.

To return to the CSA 1968, the process of providing council-owned authorised sites was not unproblematic: it was considered to be a form of social cleansing, as authorities were selective when choosing who would be provided for under this policy thus revealing, yet again, how authorities sometimes seek to tactically distinguish between vehicle dwellers. This was largely due to a reluctance to provide for New Travellers (Okely and Houtman, 2011). A revised legal definition contended that nomadism was only to be provided for when out of cultural or economic necessity, and it was largely felt that most New Travellers had not successfully proven their necessity (Okely and Houtman, 2011; Halfacree, 1997).

However, overall, the CSA was a positive development that is said to have stemmed from “a flowering…radical rights-based agenda” at the time, representing a long-

awaited departure away from a history of persecution and discrimination (Bancroft, 2000: 46). Despite the repetition of patterns of oppression as authorities apply derogatory “filters” to site provision, some contemporary policies represent a comparatively positive development. However, there is by no means a uniform approach to “managing” vehicle dwellers across the UK as it stands: a situation that has somewhat persisted since the 1990s, whereby the huge variety of different local approaches makes an unclear situation for many Travellers (Dearling, 1997). For example, in Wales, the state obligation to provide sites was reinstates via the Housing Act (Wales) in 2004. Furthermore, some local authorities in the UK have chosen more diplomatic approaches, such as the “negotiated stopping” policy in Leeds whereby an NGO serves as a bridge between Traveller groups and local authorities, allowing a process of negotiation in the absence of authorised sites (LeedsGate, 2017). Moreover, in Bristol, some vehicle dwellers currently have access to “meanwhile site provision” whereby the local authority allocates temporary pitches to vehicle dwellers on disused council land that is awaiting development. However, much like the CSA, this does appear to involve an oppressive selection process, as some vehicle dwellers are more likely to be given access to these spaces than others as project managers make informal decisions about who they cater for with little transparency. Indeed, concern has also been raised about how local authorities were found to have tactically distinguished between ethnic and nonethnic vehicle dwellers when deciding who they were obliged to provide accommodation for.

This represents a shift since the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 (CJPOA) was introduced nationally. This legislation removed the obligation for authorities to provide sites under the CSA, while boosting power to expel vehicle dwellers from areas through increased eviction powers and new seizure powers. Academics have argued that the CJPOA was introduced in response to a media fuelled “moral panic” (Cohen, 1972) about an array of social movements that grew between the 1960s and 1990s – most notably here, the rise of New Travellers (Clark and Greenfields, 2006; James, 2004; 2005). There was also concern about taxpayers’ money being used to accommodate Gypsies and Travellers under the Caravan Sites Act (Okely & Houtman, 2011). Various vehicle dwelling communities effectively socially constructed a “productive” nation juxtaposed to a “parasitic” other, as processes of dual nation-building (Jessop et al. 1988) were observed in the negative stereotyping

of New Travellers (Halfacree, 1997). Interestingly, Lloyd (1993) states that broader economic hardship effectively amplified prejudice towards these groups. The media's role in perpetuating discrimination towards vehicle dwelling groups is well documented (e.g. Morris, 2000; Richardson, 2006; Okely, 2014; Halfacree, 1997; James, 2004; 2005; Tremlett, 2014). This has also been observed in relation to squatting movements across Europe, often being considered a key factor leading up to criminalisation (e.g. Vasudevan, 2017; Dadusc & Dee, 2014; Dee, 2016; Martinez-Lopez, 2018; Nowicki, 2020).

Some scholars warned near the time of the implementation of the CJPOA that such measures would magnify social exclusion and breakdown community networks (Lloyd, 1993; Davis et al, 1994; Campbell, 1995; Clements and Campbell, 1997). It was considered to be "the criminalisation of a way of life" (Campbell, 1995). Despite these warnings, expert opinion was dismissed, representing a trend in this area of policy (Clark, 1997). Zoe James (2005) – who carried out her PhD thesis with New Travellers two decades ago – documented the ways in which police managed New Travellers in Devon after the act was introduced, explaining how this effectively forced them to camp in increasingly marginal spaces. She describes an array of cavalry used against them: from police helicopters to the tactical positioning of boulders. (James' work is drawn upon further in the methods section).

As a result, today many vehicle dwelling communities continue to struggle with nowhere to legitimately park their homes and endure "vicious cycles" (Richardson, 2007) of displacement. Since the 1990s, the act has continued to receive criticism as experts report issues with its enforcement. For example, significant economic and social costs have been identified with regards to "managing" unauthorised sites, which increase in the absence of authorised sites (Crawley, 2004; Niner, 2006; CRE, 2006; Department for Local Communities and Government, 2007). Recently, Friends, Families and Travellers estimated that 10,000 Gypsies and Travellers have no place to stop because of the shortage of authorised stopping places. As a result, 3000 families are currently have limited or no access to basic water and sanitation, again due to the lack of authorised stopping places (FFT, 2022). It is worth noting here that this is also occurring in a context where public water, toilet and washing facilities are lacking in the UK more generally – a point made by a Bristolian vehicle dweller in the Bristol Council Cabinet in 2018.

There is a consensus in the literature among experts that inadequate site provision and discrimination are often mutually constitutive: discrimination often leads to public resistance to the development of authorised sites, as planning permission procedures have persistently been a barrier (Bancroft, 2000; James, 2004; Crawley, 2004; Niner, 2006; CRE, 2006; Department for Local Communities & Government, 2007; Greenfields & Brindley, 2016). The poor conditions on unauthorised sites can effectively perpetuate discrimination as communities are left in unliveable conditions with no facilities or access to public services. It has been reported that the only way to resolve these tensions is to reinstate site provision and to use education to eradicate discrimination (James, 2004; Crawley, 2004; Niner, 2006; CRE, 2006; Department for Local Communities and Government, 2007). However, working with these communities to develop sites is also a difficult task: having experienced a long history of maltreatment, distrust of authority is rife (James, 2020). Indeed, forced eviction causes significant trauma (Cernea, 2000). Due to this hostile policy context, many vehicle dwellers are continuing a process of migrating to more tolerant spaces beyond the UK, and England in particular. This process started largely in response to the CJPOA, being considered an “exodus” as New Travellers began to flee an oppressive policy context (Dearling, 1998). Many other Travelling communities were reported to have been forced into bricks and mortar (Smith & Greenfields, 2013). This can be considered to be anti-nomadic and evidence of the dominance of sedentarism.

The Enforcement of Sedentarism

Throughout literature regarding vehicle dwelling communities, “anti-nomadism” is considered to be the root cause of the mistreatment of and hostility towards those living in moveable dwellings. It has been claimed that the legal system works in the favour of sedentarism in the UK (Bancroft, 2000). McVeigh (1997) explains how “sedentarism” is a form of social organisation that underlies capitalist property relations. He explains a process whereby the fluid “nomadic” majority of people were fastened into settled (or sedentarist) lifestyles as a way of ordering and controlling them. McVeigh conceptualised this as a key feature of modernity and the nation state, as does Bauman (2000). The state’s fixed notions of land ownership clashes with the occasional, variable use of land by irregular users (Okely, 1983). Or, in other words, a nomadic conception of space (as “smooth”) conflicts with a “sedentarist” notion of (“striated”) space (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987 in Halfacree, 1997).

In a similar vein, Kendall (1997) considers conflicting conceptualisations of place and identity: while those living a sedentary lifestyle attach their sense of belonging and identity to place, nomads often do not. Indeed, nomads throughout history have been seen as a threat to multiple conventions and orders: while mobile entertainers may bring together crowds (and therefore riots), fortune tellers were practicing alternative religious beliefs and considered to be collaborating with the devil (Beier, 1985: in Mayall, 1988: 64). Here we see the relevance of arguments that conceptualises "nomadism" as something beyond movement: representing "a state of mind rather than a state of action" (Kenrick & Clark, 1999:29). It can be said that nomadism is about adaptability and transformation with the *possibility* of travel in mind (Shubin & Swanson, 2010), *freedom* (Palladino, 2015) or, indeed, *fluidity* (Bauman, 2000). For Deleuze, the nomad will often stay in the same place, and "continually evade the codes of settled people" (1985: 149). In this sense, nomadism is more about breaking boundaries and conventions.

Bancroft (2000) claims that this "sedentarist" (or anti-nomadic) context, which is largely shaped by the CJPOA 1994, represented a significant means of regulating space and placing nomadic people within a discourse of discipline and punishment. The CJPOA also represented a significant part of a series of post-war legislative developments that enforced the new industrial order at the time via the enclosure of space and enforcement of boundaries (James, 2006). Today we see a dramatic movement further in this direction as the Police, Crime, Courts and Sentencing Act (2022) has come into force, being referred to by campaigners as the "criminalisation of trespass." Resembling The Trespass Act (2002) in Ireland, this act brings about significant changes for people "*residing*" or *"intending to reside"* in vehicles on land that they do not own or have permission to be on. This includes highways, private land and common land. Once again, we see an all-encompassing approach to enforcement, which impacts an array of vehicle dwellers. Meanwhile, we have also seen further efforts to bring together different vehicle dwelling groups impacted by these blanket enforcement measures, including organisations such as Friends, Families and Travellers (which was developed in the 1990s by New Travellers) and contemporary campaign group Drive 2 Survive (which emerged in response to the PCSCA, having been set up by people with Romany heritage).

As it stands, the impact of this legislation in relation to non-ethnic vehicle dwellers remains untouched in academic discourse. Despite this, it is particularly important

because enforcement (or potential enforcement) constitutes a significant part of the experience of living in a vehicle for a lot of people. Almost 1/3 of participants in Glastonbury reported being where they were having been moved on from somewhere else (Smart Communities, 2020). Some participants also noted how eviction negatively impacted their life satisfaction, mental health and feelings of stability. Despite this, there is little detail on how contemporary "Vehicle Dwellers" or "New Travellers" experience and manage the threat (and actuality) of enforcement on the ground. In this thesis, I will shed light on the impact this has on the lives of those on the receiving end of such policies.

Contemporary Accounts of "Vehicle Dwelling"

So far it has been shown that, various kind of vehicle dwellers in the UK and Ireland have been present for a long time, coming from various backgrounds and living in vehicles for different reasons. Indeed, it cannot be said that this is a "new" social phenomenon as such, despite the increased media attention in recent years. The variety of vehicle dwelling groups in the UK and Ireland includes Romani Gypsies, Irish Travellers, Scottish Travellers, Welsh Travellers, Travelling Show People and New Travellers. There are also other people living in vehicles in the UK, who are not recognised as distinct ethnic or cultural groups as such. While literature regarding all of these groups is relatively scarce, the latter group mentioned are overlooked the most in academic literature. This thesis breaks this silence having involved people identifying as New Travellers, "Vehicle Dwellers," or "Van Dwellers," while bringing into question the process of distinguishing between different categories of vehicle dweller in Chapter One.

Studies that explicitly focus on New Travellers are hard to come by, and New Travellers and other "non-ethnic" vehicle dwellers are also often neglected in wider discussions about other vehicle dwelling groups. However, the literature that does exist generally holds a rough consensus about the origins of those called "New Travellers" initially emerged as a part of a wider set of evolving transgressive social movements in the post-war period, as many people are said to have come to live in vehicles as a way of moving between protest camps and free festivals (Clark, 1997; Clark & Greenfields, 2006; McKay, 1996; Martin, 1998, 2000, 2002; Hetherington, 2000; The Children's Society, 2010; James, 2004; 2005; Frediani, 2017). There is emphasis on the diversity amongst New Travellers, who are described as group (or

group of groups) that are difficult to categorise or define (Lloyd, 1993; Clark, 1997; Heelas, 1996; Hetherington, 2000). It has also been stated that different social and economic contexts have generated diversity among New Travellers (Martin, 1998; 2000; 2002; Frediani, 2017). It could be said that the “rise in vandwelling” being documented in Britain (and beyond) today represents a new generation of New Travellers that remains incredibly diverse, being shaped by different social conditions. The first findings chapter of this thesis tackles this head on, using Anarchist literature to illuminate a problematic process of rigid categorisation that is common in the social sciences. The significance of Anarchism will be returned to later.

As it currently stands, there is little academic literature that directly address “vehicle dwelling” or “van dwelling” in the UK and Ireland, despite seldomly been found when referring more broadly to Gypsies and Travellers (Smith, 1889; Mayall, 1988, 1995, 2004: 253; Cressy, 2018) and the circus (Assael, 2005: 41-45). However, “newer” modes of vehicle dwelling have begun to receive more academic attention. For example, Ruth McAllister carried out her MSc dissertation in 2018 in Bristol, which is considered to be somewhat of an “epicentre” of vehicle dwelling in the UK. She carried out 13 interviews with roadside vehicle dwellers in Bristol, identifying their housing pathways by recording their routes in vehicle dwelling, and how they wanted to live in the future. During the same period (and in the same city), I carried out my own MSc dissertation. I carried out an ethnographic study with vehicle dwellers who, in contrast to those interviewed by McAllister, were living on an authorised site trying to get planning permission. Later, in 2020, I worked with a small research team to compile an independent report to Mendip Council who declared a dramatic increase in roadside vehicle dwellers in Glastonbury (Smart Communities, 2020). This took the form of a survey and set of case studies, put together using survey interviews. I carried out 30 of the 83 interviews, and 3 of 7 case studies with my colleague and friend (who was also a vehicle dweller herself). Beyond the UK and Ireland, research recommendations have been put forward asking that local authorities reduce the harms and precariousness for people living in vehicles in Los Angeles, which is portrayed as a growing “problem” in need of prevention (Giamarino et al, 2023).

Another group worth consideration here is the live-aboard boater community, who have also attracted some academic attention (e.g. see Bowles, 2015; Cowan and

Hardy, 2021; Flutter, 2023). Firstly, Bowles' (2015) thesis draws upon thirteen months of fieldwork with boaters in Southern England and identifies remarkably similar themes among these communities as those found among those in this thesis. For example, he describes the process (and necessity of) acquiring the skills to be a boater and the reciprocal relationships between boaters, who often help one another in order to achieve life on the waterways. He also describes the problematic relationship between the state and those living an itinerant way of life, as the former hinders the latter. Cowan and Hardy (2021) also describe the encroachment of enforcement through examining the ways in which the Canal River Trust (CRT) govern boaters through the unsettling "continuous cruisers" regime. They describe the difficulties imposed upon boaters, as their nomadism is threatened by sedentarism which is enforced by the CRT. The similarities detected here are perhaps unsurprising when considering the overlap of water and land vehicle dwelling networks: it is common for people to move between boats and land-based vehicles (a finding of my own which is also documented by Bowles).

There are other vehicle dwelling groups that exist beyond the UK and Ireland context. For example, Marsault (2017) uses visual anthropology to outline everyday life in "Wagenburgen" – literally "Wagon Castles" – in Berlin. He explains how people occupied unused land, where they lived in caravans and trucks. Elsewhere, Bey (1998) refers to these kinds of encampments in Germany as a "semi-nomadic version of the squat" which are said to have grown in number during the fall of the Berlin Wall (a significant economic and social shift). There are already known connections between squatting and vehicle dwelling. For example, Vasudevan (2017: 40) notes vehicle dwellers living amongst squatters, and Clark (1997: 129) describes the interconnected nature of networks of squatters and New Travellers in relation to free festivals and convoys during the 80s and 90s. Living in vehicles is also often used as an alternative to squatting, as people move between these different modes of self provided housing (Davis et al, 1993). This is also documented by Steph Grohmann (2022), who documents her own experience of squatting in Bristol which involved her moving into a caravan as an alternative to squatting buildings. Grohmann notes the connection between some vehicle dwellers and other squatting groups, describing her experience living in a caravan outside a squatted building where she gained access to facilities. Moreover, it is also worth noting that many vehicle dwellers are effectively "squatting" empty land with their vehicles in a similar

way to those who squat empty buildings (albeit being subject to different regimes of law and regulation).

In the USA there have also been reports of “RV households” or “RVers” (Hartwigen & Null, 1989; Williams, 1995; Ayers and Counts, 2001; Wakin, 2003; 2005; 2015; McGonagall and Lee, 2020). Interestingly, these studies often focus on older populations, explaining how many RVers have taken to the road as an alternative to ageing “at home” (Hartwigen & Null, 1989; Ayers and Counts, 2001) or as a response to limited income (Williams, 1995). Others frame vehicle dwelling in the USA as a form of homelessness (Wakin 2003; 2005; 2015; Giamarino et al, 2022). There are also distinctions made by academics between “full timers” and “part timers” (Ayers and Counts, 2001), “mobile” and “static” RVers (McGonagall & Lee, 2020), and RVers living in older or newer RVS (Williams, 1995). They explain how those who are full time, static (McGonagall & Lee, 2020) and/or in older vehicles (Williams, 1995) tend to be more marginalised. Therefore, it can be said that significant disparities are also recognised among American vehicle dwellers.

Beyond the realms of academic literature, many vehicle dwellers from all over the world have produced their own accounts of vehicle dwelling, via documenting and sharing their experiences of the lifestyle. While much of this has taken place on various forms of social media, some have gone as far as producing books of their own. This has mostly taken the form of autobiographies (e.g. Ilgunas, 2013; Blue, 2017; Huntington, 2017; Bruder, 2018). Some have formulated instruction manuals advising others how to live this lifestyle, and why they should do so (e.g. Odom, 2011; Wells, 2014; Dorey, 2016). Many of these authors tell tales of their practical struggles living on the road, passing on advice to novices (often in a humorous manner). Many of these vehicle dwellers have used the lifestyle as a way of travelling the world (Dorey, 2016; Huntington, 2017; Blue, 2017) – a kind of nomadism or “hypermobility” that seems to be glamorised in the contemporary world (Cohen & Gössling, 2015). These vehicle dwellers are often labelled as “vanlifers,” who are seen as distinct from the kind of vehicle dwellers involved in this thesis.

Therefore, it appears that vehicle dwelling communities remain diverse and can be said to be continually evolving in relation to changing social, political and economic context and can be found in different parts of the world. Interestingly, all of the contemporary British accounts of vehicle dwellers cited above have shown how

these individuals – like many vehicle dwelling folk in the past – often live the way they do in response to precarious economic conditions. Indeed, 54 of 80 respondents in Glastonbury (Smart Communities, 2020) cited “unaffordable rent” as a key motif behind living in a vehicle. Furthermore, some vehicle dwellers report a sense of relief and greater security in comparison to precarious housing (McAllister, 2018; Smart Communities, 2020). As mentioned in the introduction, much contemporary media reporting surrounding this group (in Bristol and beyond) has highlighted the role of the housing crisis as a “push” factor which has effectively forced many “normal” people into vehicle dwelling, which contrasts with reports of

New Travellers in the past, who were effectively constructed as deviant “folk devils” (Cohen, 1973) at the time. In some respects, this could represent a process of “normalisation” or social legitimisation – as precarity becomes more widespread and familiar to more people (Standing, 2011). It can be said that many vehicle dwellers – like many New Travellers - are directly providing for their own needs through creating new ways of living, as a response to the growth of a neoliberal society that failed to meet those needs (McKay, 1996; Hetherington, 2000; Frediani, 2009, 2017). In this respect, like squatting, vehicle dwelling can be considered “an ethical practice” (Grohmann, 2022) as people create practical solutions to housing crises and challenge neoliberal capitalism.

Reconsidering the Choice and Necessity Debate

Existing literature identifies a variety of “push and pull” factors associated with the New Traveller way of life. A debate was raised regarding *the degree of choice and necessity,* revealing the significance of wider social and economic context which was arguably downplayed by other academics (Martin,1998; 2000). It was argued that broader societal ills *pushed* many people into vehicle dwelling, as various “waves” of people moved into vehicle dwelling at different times. In this respect, he identifies distinct generations of New Travellers, who (as separate groups) share different “concrete historical problems and experiences” (Martin, 1998: 736). In the 1980s, a wave was shaped by the neoliberal regime – as embodied by Margaret Thatcher – led to mass unemployment and an ongoing housing crisis evoked a need for survival (Davis et al, 1994; Martin, 2000; Frediani, 2017). While there is a consensus that an “influx of new people” (Hetherington, 2000) generated significant differences to the composition of those called “New Travellers” at this time, the level of “necessity”

motivating this wave has arguably been downplayed in some accounts (Martin, 2000). Hetherington (2000) is criticised by Martin (2002) for overlooking the extent of wider social problems such as unemployment, deindustrialisation, homelessness or any of the other deficiencies in social policy at the time. Instead, he paints a "rosier" picture whereby New Travellers had chosen their transgressive paths and "assisted" society's transformation by illuminating symbolic boundaries. For Martin, this is problematic and underestimates the extent of economic necessity behind the way of life.

If one is to consider this debate in light of today's vehicle dwellers, there has been significant emphasis in media discourses about the "push" factors involved in people's movement towards dwelling in vehicles. While employment rates have risen significantly in Britain since the 1980s, there have been discussions of an escalating housing crisis in Britain brewing since the turn of the 21st Century (Robertson, 2017) which is thought to have been magnified by the 2008 financial crisis (Whitehead & Williams, 2011). Indeed, like squatters' movements (Martinez-Lopez, 2018), it could be said that the New Traveller "movement" and vehicle dwelling seems to have operated in ebbs and flows – or "protest cycles" (Tarrow, 1993) - as it has morphed in relation to wider social, political and economic conditions and transitions. Martin's (2002) argument is aligned with that of David Graeber (2009: 319), who emphasises the relevance of external forces to the individual when we it comes to making decisions. Graeber's criticism of the concept of "choice" is based on the premise that, while we might make choices within what is offered to us, we often have little or no part in shaping what it is we choose between. Therefore, it could be argued that vehicle dwellers – regardless of their background – really have had little or no choice in shaping the factors that have led them to live in vehicles. However, they are in some respects gaining access to more choice through providing their own housing and reassembling their domestic lives. This will be returned to later. It is also important to note how these varying power dynamics among vehicle dwellers for this can generate different experiences of vehicle dwelling. For example, Jackson's (2012) accounts of young homeless people who are "fixed in mobility" can be considered here. Jackson supports Massey's (1993: 61) contentions about "differentiated mobility" whereby some have more control of flows and movement, while others are "effectively imprisoned by it." Jackson explains how mobility is often used as a *tactic*, and often requires skills or knowledge. Not only will different vehicle

dwellers be equipped with greater resources – both material and experiential – they experience displacement differently. This is explained in further detail in the final findings chapter. Therefore, this emphasis on the differences between vehicle dwellers is crucial.

As aforementioned, media discourses surrounding the “rise of vandwelling” across the UK in recent years have framed the lifestyle as a response to the housing crisis, often being used as an alternative to homelessness or unaffordable housing. In fact, vehicle dwellers and New Travellers are often associated with homelessness. This was observable in the university library, where I found Hetherington’s book about New Travellers amidst the “homeless” section. Beyond the UK, contemporary literature about vehicle dwelling in the USA describes “vehicular homelessness” which is portrayed as a symptom to a wider social ill (e.g. Wakin, 2008; 2014; Flaming et al, 2018; Giamarino, 2022). It is also notable that my own work (Craft, 2020) has been mis-cited in one of these papers (Giamarino, 2022: 81), putting vehicle dwellers in a “non-home” or homeless discourse, despite the article’s main purpose being to illustrate the ways in which vehicle dwellers feel a sense of being at home. In this respect, this contemporary academic discourse appears to have swung in the opposite direction to Hetherington’s writing, constructing vehicle dwellers as disadvantaged people in need of help. Of course, it cannot be denied, some vehicle dwellers certainly are disadvantaged. However, these portrayals must be met with some scepticism, for constructing informal (anti-capitalist) forms of housing as “non homes” can serve as a powerful discursive tool for authorities, as shown with the example of criminalisation of squatting in the UK (Nowicki, 2020). On a more personal level, some vehicle dwellers have expressed concern and a feeling of insult when classified as homeless: it is seen as undermining their lifestyle, and an insult to those who are truly homeless. The Children Society (2010) found that while many New Travellers adopt the lifestyle out of necessity, they often still believe that it is the right lifestyle for them, which has much significance to them. Similarly, McAllister (2018) emphasised that her participants were “houseless” rather than “homeless.”

Interestingly, Grohmann (2022) criticises a similarly polarised “absolutist” debate within squatting literature about choice and necessity. Like Grohmann, this thesis illuminates troubles between stark distinctions between choice and necessity. It is also suggested that there are also other “crises” or calls to action (beyond financial ones) that have led people to live in vehicles. Did the first wave of New Travellers

simply give up “secure jobs and accommodation” (Martin, 2000: 727) to enjoy better lives, or are there perhaps other forms of security under threat? Do these conceptions of “choice” and necessity” reflect the dominance of the economy over (and detachment from) our natural environment, and undermine the source of discontent that triggered by earlier generations of New Travellers? Having already considered various push and pull factors associated with vehicle dwelling and other alternative housing, one can consider the relevance of the mechanics of social movements – or resistance – more generally. For Castells (2012), *discontent* and *anger* are seen to be powerful mobilisers of social change, as people are inspired to act and engage in various forms of resistance and activism. Indeed, it has been claimed that social movements often emerge during times of crisis, responding to shared discontent (e.g. Howard et al, 2011; Castells, 2012; Gerbaudo, 2012; Martinez -Lopez, 2018). It could be said that the role of shared *discontent* and a need for survival motivated the growth of New Travellers, especially during the 1980s: an era of mass unemployment and rising homelessness, and today amidst a climate and cost of living crises.

That is to say that while Martin (2000) was arguably right to be critical of Hetherington’s (2000) conclusion that New Travellers had mostly chosen their way of life, both authors perhaps underestimate the level of hardship – or triggers of discontent - endured by the earlier generations of “more privileged” New Travellers. Although much of this generation was perhaps not forced into vehicle dwelling by access to financial resources to the same extent, they did emerge out of the postwar era, an era marked by fear of nuclear war, collective trauma, heightened awareness of climate change and rapid social change. Indeed, it was during these decades that talks of climate change and the awareness that our damaging relationship with the environment began to grow (despite climate change being identified much earlier). Therefore, there were other forms of security that were under threat, which are arguably just as important, and warrant being acknowledged as a case of “necessity.”

It is important to note here that Hetherington (2000: 109) does briefly acknowledge the influence of threats to the environment and “the growing arms race,” while Martin (2002: 733) notes that he does not wish to “downplay” the role of protest and ecological campaigning that is emphasised more by writers like McKay (1998). Interestingly, many contemporary vehicle dwellers have also found their way into this way of living through protest camps and circuits, such as the Stop HS2 camps.

Therefore, it appears that vehicle dwelling often represents more than a response to troubling economic conditions. In today's context, "climate anxiety" is rife, revealing just how damaging these social structures are, with 45% of young people and children surveyed recently explained how climate anxiety was negatively impacting their daily life and functioning (Hickman et al, 2021). It is worth noting here climate anxiety is also considered to be a practical or constructive form of anxiety, rather than an illness (Pihkala, 2020). Here again we see the relevance of Castell's ideas about "discontent" and social change while bringing into question, again, ideas about the degree of necessity and choice involved.

Hetherington (2000) explains how many New Travellers responded to their discontent with societal structure through *experimenting* with new ways of living. Like the "off gridders" that Vannini and Taggart (2015) spent time with, it could be said that many Travellers and vehicle dwellers could be considered to be "lifestyle migrants" in search of what they perceive to be a "better life" (Hodges & Hendley, 2015). However, if lifestyles can be configured so that they benefit both humans and non-humans via low-impact arrangements of humans and non-humans, there is arguably much to be learned about the potential for social organisation, which *is* a matter of necessity. In a context of climate change, these kinds of initiatives are receiving much attention because they do important work in experimenting with radically different ways of being in the world, which are arguably needed more now than ever (Monticelli, 2022). Therefore, social science is arguably granted a significant opportunity to learn from people involved in these "experiments," which can sometimes act as a remedy for economic hardship, as well as offering practical alternatives that may help us move away from human-perpetuated environmental catastrophe.

Prefigurative Radicals

"It is to change oneself as much as it is to change society." – Carne Ross (2019: 1)

Having considered the relevance of social change and shared discontent, it could be said that many vehicle dwellers may be engaging in a kind of "prefigurative politics" (Breines, 1982) whereby they are creating different social relations through everyday life. Or, in other words, "it is the defiant insistence on acting as if one is already free" (Graeber: 2009: 378). Interestingly, scholars (Crouch, 2004; Bailey et al, 2018) have noted how, having encountered issues with traditional forms of protest and

resistance, many people are now finding alternative ways of “resisting” which are increasingly *prefigurative* in this way. Bailey et al (2018) identify the (increasing) prevalence of “prefigurative radicals” involved in social action across the world today. Interestingly, when speaking of the “Wagenburgen” vehicle dweller camps in Germany, Marsault (2017) emphasises prefigurative action, explaining an experimentation with “new ways of being together.” “New Travellers” have already been cited as an example of prefigurative politics by Greenway (1997); however, there is no detailed articulation of how any New Travellers went about this. In addition to this, Firth (2019) very briefly notes the “New Age” movement as an example of “lifestyle anarchism,” suggesting an acknowledgement of “New Travellers,” some of whom are often associated with the New Age movement; being called “New Age Travellers.” This is unclear. It seems that there has been a general trend of forgetting or overlooking Travellers and vehicle dwelling communities, as there has been little application of these ideas – or any others - to its contemporary manifestations. Of course, not all New Travellers and vehicle dwellers will have carried out such practices, or at least, *intentionally*. However, many do, and I give examples of those who have later in this thesis.

This suggests that, for New Travellers, living in vehicles is, like squatting, perhaps more than just a housing strategy constituting an alternative way of *thinking*, as new forms of social organisation and understanding are practiced (Mayer, 2013). Again, like squatting, vehicle dwelling can be said to be an ethical practice (Grohmann, 2022). Here one can observe other similarities to studies of squatting movements, which have attracted more academic attention in recent years. For example, squatters have been found to practice “degrowth:” an alternative (more environmentally sustainable) to consumer capitalism as people aim to live with less as a marker of success, rather than trying to accumulate as many possessions as possible (e.g. Cattaneo, 2008; Cattaneo and Engel-Di Mauro, 2015; Cattaneo and Gavalda, 2010;). There is also frequent mention of “democratic” and “horizontal” forms of social organisation throughout squatting literature, as the hierarchical nature of capitalist property relations is challenged. In this sense, Traveller sites (Palladino, 2015) - like other squatted spaces (e.g. Lefebvre, 2003; Lafazani, 2013; Dalakoglou & Poulimenakos, 2018) - can be considered to be “heterotopias” (Foucault, 2008): counter-sites that contest and invert wider society’s social and spatial organisation.

Sitrin (2019) explains how this prefigurative approach to activism is not only prevalent today, but it also reflects the growth of the "anarchist spirit."

What is Anarchism?

At this point, it is important to clarify what is meant by "Anarchism" here. In contrast to the "Hobbesian nightmare" (McGeough, 2016) that represents chaos (and even violence), "Anarchism" is used here to refer to a collection of ideas that are largely about accepting (and encouraging) complexity and diversity. It has been argued (Pritchard, 2019) that Anarchism is largely about *freedom*, whereby people are enabled to be the people they wish to be as much as possible. This is said to inherently require a diverse social ecology: there is no desire for people to be the same, "for liberty is infinite variety" (Proudhon, 2009: 136). This is an experimental endeavour, as people try to find common ground and move towards synthesising (or even accepting) their differences in order to coexist and work together (Graeber, 2007; Firth, 2019; Levy & Adams, 2019). In this sense, freedom and an openness to diversity gives space to many opportunities of being and becoming; and therefore, social transformation. As a result, Anarchism is intrinsically experimental, as people search for new ways of being, not only as individuals, but also as a collective (Davis, 2019). It can be said that Anarchism's characteristics feed into each other: its experimental nature generating diversity, and diversity necessitating experimentation.

Pritchard (2019) argues that for many Anarchists, including key theorists such as Murray Bookchin and Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, the freedom of one person is seen as intrinsically connected to the freedom of others. In this sense, freedom is *social*, and he argues that innovative orders and institutions can (and do) arise from this premise. So, what do "Anarchistic" forms of social organisation look like? Having emphasised the diverse and experimental nature of Anarchism, it can be expected that such a society would be comprised of a variety of social organisations. However, an Anarchist order would likely be based on a set of loose principles: freedom, equality, solidarity, mutual aid, and direct action (Fernandez, 2008). While different Anarchists will attach more value to certain principles than others, these principles are prevalent throughout Anarchist ideas and organisations, despite the huge variety of perspectives in this broad area of political thought and practice. Indeed, it is for this reason that Sitrin (2019) speaks of an Anarchist "spirit", much like Kuhn (2010) spoke of an Anarchist "mood" rather than an accomplished state of perfection or rigid

model. Anarchism can also be seen as a process, or in other words, "*the means are the ends*" (Ross, 2019: 1). In this sense, "an ecological society must also be built from within the society in which we find ourselves" (Prichard, 2019: 81). It can be said that Anarchism is more than a way to organise society. It's also a way of learning to be with each other in the world, as people together (Levy & Adams, 2019); but also, within the world, as a part of nature (Barrera-Bassols & Barrera de la Torre, 2017; Price, 2019; Hall, 2011).

However, despite aiming to dismantle domination and hierarchy, Anarchists cannot hope for some kind of "power vacuum," despite earlier writings from key theorist Peter Kropotkin suggesting this (Saytanov, 2017). Dismantling hierarchies is an ongoing practice (Graeber, 2009; Portwood-Stacer, 2013; Sitrin, 2019). In this respect, what is often implied instead is an intention towards the decentralisation of power and away from concentrated power. This arguably represents what is perhaps the essence of all strands of Anarchism: as something "rooted in an ethical choice to live without hierarchy" (Ryley, 2013: 4). It can also be said that social organisations that are based upon anarchist principles function by people relying on *each other* – rather than the state - supporting each other by trading resources, information, care and understanding (Fernandez, 2008). This constitutes the foundations of what Kropotkin (1902) famously termed "mutual aid," which for many anarchists is a key pillar of anarchism. When explaining processes of mutual aid, Kropotkin emphasises how (successful) animals of the *same species* help each other, emphasising the role of collaboration in survival which he argues Charles Darwin – who emphasises competition - overlooked. This concept is referred to and illustrated throughout this thesis through the forms of prefigurative action I have observed on the ground.

Interestingly, the significance of mutual aid has already been found in the New Traveller community. Indeed, Freidani (2009; 2017) explains how this represented a core feature of New Traveller culture in the 1990s, whereby "every aspect of daily life appears to rely on these *obligations* of mutual aid" which effectively become a "source of pride" for many New Travellers (2017: xiv; emphasis added). He shows how often mutual aid can often take place between people who have a great disliking of each other, as people support each other despite their differences. The findings in this thesis support this, as will be shown later. Grohmann (2022) also describes the importance of mutual aid when documenting her experiences of squatting and

vehicle dwelling in Bristol. She argues that the role of mutual aid is constitutive of a moral social order among many squatters.

More broadly, there has been a wave of academic articles about mutual aid in recent years, as multiple academics report the prevalence (and mechanics) of mutual aid groups that emerged during the pandemic (e.g. Preston & Firth, 2020; Sitrin & Sembrar, 2020; Tiratelli & Kaye, 2020; Fernades-Jesus, 2021; Lachowiz & Donaghey, 2021; McLafferty Bell, 2021; Littman et al, 2022). McLafferty Bell (2021), for example, explained how the crisis effectively facilitated opportunities for prefigurative politics whereby mutual aid was practiced as a part of imaging a better world. Additionally, Lachwicz and Donaghey (2021) highlight how these practices stemmed from the inadequacy of neoliberal capitalism to meet people's immediate needs. All of these examples also show the impact that a state of crisis had in triggering these practices, so here again we see the relevance of wider "push" factors. Sitrin and Sembrar (2020) present an international collection of essays from authors documenting Mutual Aid practices across the globe, showing that this crisis response was widespread beyond the UK. This thesis does work in contributing to this growing academic interest, although with less focus on the pandemic and more focus on how people respond to meeting basic needs for shelter to managing experiences of law enforcement.

Beyond practices of mutual aid, prefigurative politics can manifest in various ways today, for example, as people reflect on their everyday practices, such as consumption habits and dietary choices (Portwood-Stacer, 2013). Bookchin (1995) refers to such practices as a form of "lifestyle anarchism," which he contrasts with "social anarchism." However, he portrays the former in a negative manner suggesting that those who engage in this form of Anarchism are merely self-interested, reducing the effectiveness of Anarchist practice which essentially should be social. Sitrin notes that prefigurative social action has often taken the form of housing activism whereby people prefigure new property relations and ways of being together (2019: 661). Following this line of thought, this thesis provides further evidence of "an anarchist spirit" (Sitrin, 2019) amidst social prefigurative action, much like those previously studied by Colin Ward (see Ward, 1976; Ward, 2004; Crouch, 2018). In this respect, the home can be considered to be a "vehicle of resistance" where new social relations are experimented with (Young, 2005). Indeed, much like Squatters in the

UK, (Nowicki, 2020), it can be said that many vehicle dwellers show the “political potency” of the home space.

Reclaiming Control in Self Provided Housing

So far, it has been suggested that the alternative housing adopted by some vehicle dwellers could be looked at as a form of prefigurative politics which involves a reconfiguration of everyday life (to various extents). Colin Ward (another Anarchist scholar) argued that “DIY housing” was the key to reconfiguring social relations and advocated a society where people would be empowered to make their own lives. Ward’s fascination with self-built dwellings implies the importance of this taking place in a *material* way. For him, DIY-housing projects were often existing examples of Anarchism, which empower people to provide for themselves and express themselves.

Other Anarchist housing scholars, such as John Turner (1976), also valued “autonomous” (or self-provided) housing, claiming that it allowed people to be freed from some of the oppressive (and alienating) impacts of “heteronomous” (other provided) housing. Turner explains how when the users of housing are involved in the design, construction and management of their housing, this process (and environment) can stimulate well-being. He argues that contrary to this, when they are excluded from this, their housing can become a barrier to personal fulfilment. Despite very little discussion of New Traveller (or other vehicle dwelling communities) in this area, the reconfiguration of conventional lifestyles suggests the applicability of this contemporary body of literature. Interestingly, Colin Ward himself (2004) identifies New Travellers in his own work when outlining forms of “hidden housing” that experiment with different types of dwellings. He argued that policy must allow these forms of experimental housing to flourish rather than inhibit it as it usually does (as already shown by the policy context).

Before one can continue, it is important to clear up exactly what is meant by “self built” or “self-provided” housing. It appears that we have several definitions to turn to, all of which having nuanced differences. (For an extensive account of various types of contemporary “self-build” and “collaborative housing,” see Field, 2017). Duncan and Rowe (1993) explain how self-build housing is when a household (which can be either an individual or collective) carry out *most* of the building of their own home.

Here we see a similar definition to what Yun (2019: 5) calls “DIY” (Do-It-Yourself) housing – whereby a household is involved in *some* part of the construction process, rather than the majority. Here we encounter some variation, which raises the question: to what extent is housing “self-built” or DIY? Does simply painting the walls and putting up a few shelves constitute self-built housing, or is that not quite enough? Duncan and Rowe (1993) highlight the potential for ambiguity here, for without clarification self-built housing could be absorbed more broadly into “owner-occupied” housing. Therefore, they suggest that we break down the concept of “housing” into three areas: promotion, production and profit. Self-built housing implies the involvement (and *control*) of the household in *all* of these areas, which is what distinguishes it from other kinds of owner-occupied housing. Therefore, “self built” housing is when a household promote, produce and profit from their own dwelling.

Following this logic, it can be said that different levels of involvement or control are both a product and producer of different entanglements, which produce significantly different experiences of housing. Interestingly, the degree of control we have over our housing has already been considered to be an essential part of being at home (Douglas, 2000) and achieving “ontological security” (Giddens, 1984). The former concept mentioned here is often used in housing literature, which suggests that by gaining control over one’s immediate surroundings, wellbeing is facilitated via greater autonomy and a capacity for identity construction. This is thought to give people relief from the outside world. When it comes to the experience of housing – or indeed, *home* - it can be said that: *“*who decides what for whom is the central issue” (Turner, 1976: 3). It has been found in my own work that for many contemporary vehicle dwellers and Travellers that having more control and being “self-sufficient” was a key reason behind their way of life, making them feel more “at home.” This has also been found elsewhere (McAllister-Kemp, 2018; Smart Communities, 2020). This contests the discourses of “non-home” mentioned earlier.

With the case of New Travellers and other vehicle dwellers, alternative housing can involve various levels of involvement in the construction process. Indeed, much diversity has already been observed in the forms of dwellings associated with New Travellers. This has been documented by Hetherington (2000) and Lowe and Shaw (1993). While some New Travellers have built benders (tents), horse-drawn wagons and other “make-shift” moveable dwellings, others have converted vehicles into mobile homes. Others have simply bought (or have sometimes been given) a

caravan and made adjustments. The former examples are quite clearly examples of what Duncan and Rowe (1993) term “self-built” housing, for it implies an involvement of the household in the construction process from the most fundamental level. But as we move from converted vehicles to premade caravans, we generally see the level of involvement in construction decrease. However, caravan owners are generally free to carry out their own maintenance and adaptations, and doing so is seen as a positive feature of the lifestyle among many New Travellers and vehicle dwellers who take pride in the skills and creativity involved in such activity. The significance of skills will be returned to later.

It is also common for the entire concept of “profit” to be irrelevant, as sometimes vehicle dwellers will have passed on their dwellings for free or at a low price to others for the sake of providing housing to others or upgrading or changing their own space rather than to generate profit. (Although, of course, many would also sell on moveable dwellings in order to make a profit, and sometimes a considerable one). While “self-built” housing (which involves a great deal of participation) arguably has the potential to generate a “certain kind of autonomy” (Heslop, 2017: 105) which is enjoyed by some New Travellers and vehicle dwellers, this is perhaps not entirely what we are looking at here. Indeed, it is not necessarily the *construction* process that is shared by all New Travellers and vehicle dwellers (although, many do value this process). In order to capture these other processes, Field (2017; emphasis added) also talks about “self-*provided*” housing – which Duncan and Rowe (1993) use more as an umbrella term that self-built housing falls within. This is when households take direct responsibility for their housing needs – which does not necessarily involve building. So here we see an additional focus, which provides insights for both self-built and self-provided housing: the core issue here being who is *in control* of housing (Turner, 1976). This can include the construction process, but it also involves the design and management of the home.

Interestingly, almost half of participants living in vehicles in Glastonbury cited being “self-sufficient” when being asked what their preferred accommodation would be in Glastonbury (Smart Communities, 2020). This was (marginally) the most common response. In this respect, a lot of vehicle dwellers can be described as what Vannini and Taggart (2014) called “do-it-yourselfers” (DIYers). Vanini and Taggart’s detailed ethnographic work based in Canada is particularly relevant to this thesis, having shown how concerns about pollution and climate crises inspire people to adopt

various alternative, low impact, “off grid” lifestyles that involve a material reconfiguration of daily life. The people involved in this study show similar values of “self-sufficiency” to many vehicle dwellers, often rooted in a dissatisfaction with the workings of the state, consumer capitalism and environmental degradation.

Vannini and Taggart discuss what they call the “Thoreau effect” (2014: 96-102), inspired by the naturalist philosopher – Henry Thoreau (1854) – who advocated self-reliance having moved away from civilisation live in a self-built cabin in the woods searching for the meaning of life. Interestingly, just over 40% of vehicle dwellers in Glastonbury cited a desire to “live outside the system” (Smart Communities, 2020). This “effect” is described as a phenomenon whereby one learns to find contentment in what one already has as an alternative to the “perennial dissatisfaction” (2014: 97) that leaves individuals continuously craving upgrades and enhancements. It also involves a virtue of the ability to “affect the immediate environment through active participation” (2014: 98) and a sensibility whereby self-made accomplishments are valued more so than purchasing items or services. In other words, it’s a system of ideas that values doing things yourself. Interestingly, self-reliance was also a popular narrative in 1960s counterculture discourse (Yun, 2019) when the first wave of New Travellers is said to have emerged.

However, as pointed out by Vanini and Taggart, the concept of doing it “*yourself*” is arguably flawed. This argument is made based on the grounds that much mutual aid and interdependence is observed that makes off grid living possible, as people help each other achieve these reconfigurations of everyday life through sharing resources such as information, labour and materials. Indeed, not only do “DIYers” hold an impressive set of “regenerative life skills” (2014: 141) that allow them to have more control over their life circumstances, they also effectively build strong communal bonds through their building practices. This thesis supports this notion, highlighting the social relationships between people that make some alternative forms of housing possible. This is where observations about processes of mutual aid are shown to be increasingly valid, although Vannini and Taggart do not describe these social relations in this way. In this thesis, the collective nature of the process of these alternative forms of housing are significant, echoing these findings from Vannini and Taggart. As it will be shown, many Travellers and Vehicle Dwellers provide each other with an array of resources, such as: advice, labour, materials, tools and (as mentioned) even entire homes. Therefore, it is agreed here that the term “self” build

is problematic (Heslop, 2017), much like “DIY” (Vannini and Taggart, 2014). Mutual aid (Kropotkin, 1902) is an important part of this process, as people come together to provide housing for others; representing collective forms of prefigurative politics and strengthening communal bonds. It has already been noted how self-provided housing can foster a strong sense of community (Hamiduddin & Gallent, 2016), and how mutual aid can be an effective way of achieving this (Heslop, 2017). Despite this, mutual aid is talked about less in housing studies today.

It is worth noting again here, that many people come to live in vehicles having been provided a caravan by others in the community, who effectively operate a kind of homelessness prevention service that exists beyond the state emerging from the grassroots. Showing a quick, effective response to homelessness, which shows how interventions beyond the state can be more effective, echoing other findings amongst informal support networks of mutual aid for Transgender homeless people (England, 2022). It is also notable that this involves a process of providing a dwelling that dwellers have more control over than most conventional housing, as people are given homes that they are free to modify, personalise or adapt as they wish. In this respect, this represents another way of reclaiming participation and therefore empowerment as an alternative to state-provided housing that is often simultaneously supportive and oppressive (Heslop, 2017).

Again, this fundamental factor – of “*who decides*” – can be said to have a significant impact on the kind of dwelling experience one might have (Turner, 1976; Duncan and Rowe, 1993). That is to say, the constellations of social relations that constitute the process of home-making – or dwelling – can make us feel both alienated, or empowered – in control, or controlled. So, what is of interest here is the ways in which configurations of the social relations that underpin the dwelling process can be (and have been) transformed, and what implications such transformations might have. Additionally, home ownership – which many contemporary vehicle dwellers have reported to have felt excluded from in the conventional housing system (McAllister, 2018; Smart Communities, 2020) – also appears to be significant. It has been found that home-ownership – and its potential for self-expression and feelings of belonging in particular – can counter the experience of an increasingly alienating world (Dupuis and Thorns, 1996). Gurney (1996; 1999) identifies the prevalence of a

“home-ownership” dominant discourse in the UK, which privileges home ownership over renting arrangements. It could be said that my participants views reflect these views, and in some ways, they have perhaps appropriated this discourse: by adopting an alternative (more affordable and adaptable) kind of “home” to own (a point also made by Martin, 2002 when writing about New Travellers).

Much like mutual aid (as shown earlier), self-provided housing is often evoked by a sense of crises. Indeed, inaccessible housing and other economic crises have previously been connected to an increase in self-built and self-provided housing, reaffirming the importance of context and sources of discontent. In fact, these practices are often associated with economic hardship (Heslop, 2017; Mees, 2017; Yun, 2019) and much “DIY” alternative housing has emerged during times where the state has failed to provide for the masses. Colin Ward claims that in the 1970s the increasing desire people had to provide their own housing was a “sign of the times” (1976: 69) and a reaction to the government’s inability to solve the “housing problem.” As aforementioned, talk of a “housing crisis” in Britain which has been connected to the growth of “vandwelling” today, supporting Ward’s idea that this approach to housing grows in response to the lack of adequate state intervention. More recently, Ehwi et al. (2022) have argued that in response to the failure of successive governments meeting housing supply targets, self-built housing can (and already does) represent a significant feature of a necessarily diverse supply of new homes in the UK. They cite an array of social, individual, economic and environmental benefits associated with self-built housing. These scholars identify a dark figure in the understanding of the size of the self-build “market.” While New

Travellers have been mentioned in broader discussions about “DIY Culture” (e.g. Mackay, 1996; Dearling, 1997; Smith, 2017), they seem to be mostly excluded from these discussions about self-built (or self-provided housing). The same can be said for other vehicle dwelling communities, who have usually built and/or provided their own housing (to varying degrees). Despite this, it has been found elsewhere that vehicle dwellers in Bristol were drawn to living in vehicles to have the opportunity to be more involved in the construction of their dwelling (McAllister Kemp, 2018) and many cited other forms of self-built or self-provided housing (such as building “off grid” cabins and living in boats) as their “ideal” form of housing (McAllister Kemp, 2018, Smart Communities, 2020). Therefore, this thesis does important work in illuminating a forgotten area of self-built housing.

Several decades ago, Duncan and Rowe (1993) argue that the majority of self-built households were 30-45 aged parents with nuclear families during the 1980s, with only 2% of those households being unemployed. In fact, one of the arguments they made is that lower-income households – who are perhaps most in need of these forms of housing – were often excluded from these practices. However, if one is to consider converted vans, buses, boats, cabins and tepees – and other examples of the array of housing alternatives that were adopted by New Travellers in the 1990s – we uncover neglected examples of self-provided housing that are accessible to younger people with less access to resources. In fact, as it will be shown, different approaches to resources and building are observed which make this possible. If New Travellers are a multi-class group (Clark, 1997) who were often unemployed in the past (Davis et al, 1994; Hetherington, 2000; Martin, 1998; 2000; Lowe & Shaw, 1993) – much like many roadside vehicle dwellers today (McAllister Kemp, 2018; Smart Communities, 2020) - it appears that Duncan and Rowe's statistics are blind to a group of self-builders, as are Ehwi et al (2022). Of course, it cannot be denied that self-built or self-provided housing *can be* expensive (Duncan & Rowe, 1993; Vannini & Taggart, 2014; Heslop, 2017): with the growing price of materials, vehicles and even caravans today, vehicle dwelling is becoming less accessible which poses a threat to this route into housing.

So far it has been shown how vehicle dwellers have reported feeling empowered by a sense of autonomy achieved via the alternative arrangements of ownership and control they had found themselves within. In this respect, one might agree with Simone Weil (2002) that in this respect, private property is "food for the soul." Some vehicle dwellers have explained how they found their ability to transform and own their own homes offered them some kind of escape from oppressive rental arrangements. So here we begin to see a combination of push and pull factors: a push coming from precarious, alienating housing and other economic factors, and a pull towards what some find to be a more emancipating way of life. Moreover, as mentioned, vehicle dwelling and other forms of self-built or self-provided housing can function as an affordable alternative to much conventional housing. Not only does this enable more control over the dwelling, it can also "free up" more time and resources for people to spend more time doing other things that they wish to, and less time having to carry out what was considered to be dissatisfying (and often

alienating) wage labour. This can include humanitarian work, making art and other hobbies that are conducive of well-being.

Ecological Oikonomia, Degrowth and Green Anarchism

The extensive fieldwork of Cattaneo (2008) - an ecological economist, squatter, and activist - can assist us further here. His work involves a reconsideration of the roots of the meaning of "economy" in relation to alternative forms of housing practiced by squatting communities in Europe (Cattaneo, 2008; Cattaneo and Gavalda, 2010; Cattaneo and Engel-Di Mauro, 2015). Firstly, it can be argued that the formal study of "economics" – born in the 18th century - is arguably "a disembedded science" (Cattaneo & Gavalda, 2009: 582) that is overly quantified, and often largely neglective of human well-being (never mind non-human well-being). This is contrasted with its Latin roots – "*oeconomia*" – which derives from Ancient Greek "*oikonomia*." Both of which refer to "management of the household:" the management of how persons live with one another and material resources. For

Aristotle, oikonomia regarded "the art of living well:" a concept which places wellbeing at its core. In this respect, the output of oikonomic arrangements is *living well (*Aristotle, 1948). Dierksmeier & Pirson (2009) explain how in this respect, well-being can be considered to be "*an organising principle,*" revealing how contemporary understanding and usage of the term "economics" represent a neologism. Leshum identifies a distinction between "ancient" and "contemporary" theories of oikonomia. He explains that the former involved the generation of *surplus* as a way of gaining more leisure time, which could include time spent engaging with philosophy, politics or even demonstrating "the virtue of benevolence" towards friends (2013: 52). The relevance of the ability to practice mutual aid or carry out humanitarian work is notable here. It can be said that we can arrange ourselves in ways that allow us to secure what is needed beyond what we require in order to survive (i.e. food, water, shelter). Moreover, Leshum explains that contemporary conceptions tend to regard the surplus acquired via oikonomia as a source of economic "growth" or "luxurious consumption." With regards to the latter, one sees a stark difference to what Vannini and Taggart called the "Thoreau effect." The contemporary theories outlined by Leshum do not correspond with the use of the concept among degrowth scholars in relation to squatting (Cattaneo and Gavalda, 2010, Cattaneo, 2015). Instead Cattaneo adopts ideas about "*subsistence orientated*" oikonomia, stemming from

ecofeminist thought (Bennholdt-Thomsen and Mies 1999; Salleh, 2009), which he applies to urban squatting in Spain (2015: 346).

Ecofeminist "subsistence-orientated" oikonomia conceptualises both social reproduction (e.g. meeting basic needs such as the need for shelter) and *ecosystems* as the basis of an economy. In this respect, a "view from below" is required, in order to establish what is necessary to build a vision of a "good life" that is enjoyable, abundant and accessible to everyone, rather than a minority at the expense of others as is the conventional pursuit of wealth in the West (Bennholdt Thomsen and Mies 1999; 3). Moreover, a new conception of empowerment is suggested, whereby "poor" women in "developing" countries are recognised for their strengths, needing no more than to be left alone by those who wish to oppress them.

Indeed, revealing an alliance with Anarchist ideas about mutual aid, they argue (ibid: 5):

"Empowerment can only be found within ourselves and in our cooperation with nature within us and around us. This power does not come from dead money. It lies in mutuality and not in competition, in doing things ourselves and not in only passively consuming. It works in generosity and joy of working together and not in individualistic self-interest and jealousy."

Cattaneo (2015) notes the essential recognition of non-human actors in such conceptions of oikonomia: our cooperation with nature is considered here. He highlights the inhibition of social reproduction brought about by the ways in which land and housing are often treated as commodities. He illustrates how his accounts of squatting demonstrate forms of subsistence oikonomia, by effectively resisting such impositions and through developing "eco-social resilience" (2015: 355). In this respect, squatting can act as a proactive and non-violent form of resistance that are prefigurative in the sense that they demonstrate ways of imagining a future that is not only liveable, but also egalitarian. Or, again, to echo Grohmann (2022): squatting can be an ethical practice.

Here we can consider similar notions of "socio-ecological resilience" (Walker and Salt, 2006; Folke et al, 2016; Garmestani et al, 2019) whereby resilience theory and ecological resilience (Holling, 1973) have served as useful tools for understanding the ways in which humans interact with non-humans and their environments, often

being referred to as “socio-ecological systems” (Berkes and Folke, 2000 in Folke et al, 2016). “Social-ecological resilience” refers to the ability of a social-ecological system to transform without completely shifting to an entirely different system (Walker and Salt, 2006). Therefore, this is a case of conserving and preserving exiting relationships and “absorbing” (Folke et al, 2016) change or disturbance. This contrasts to what Cattaneo (2015) describes as damaging processes of urbanisation that have radically altered (and even obliterated) pre-existing societies and ecosystems. This thesis presents further examples of the kind of prefigurative action that moves away from these damaging processes towards “*eco-social resilience*.”

In a similar vein, Frediani (2017: xi) explains how the New Traveller lifestyle effectively served as an alternative to a society of “overabundance,” representing a rejection of materialism. Borrowing ideas from Marxist theorist Heller (1978), Frediani also explains how New Travellers effectively create “autonomous zones” as a remedy in a context where neoliberal capitalist society fails to fulfil our needs: from basic needs (such as food and shelter) to “radical needs” (such as a sense of belonging and fulfilling productive activity). Here one can also consider the accumulation of “surplus” aforementioned and an attempt to achieve Marx’s ideas about self-realisation, as articulated by Elster (1986). Elster speaks about having the *freedom to* develop any of our abilities that we *choose* to develop. He explains that self-realisation is defined as “some further goal or purpose” which is achieved and, as a result, leads to satisfaction. He contrasts this with consumption, which provides a more short-lived satisfaction brought about by “the immediate purpose of the activity” (1968: 100). In this respect, such activities involve “a challenge that can be met.” He gives examples, such as learning to play a musical instrument or building a table. This corresponds with the “Thoreau effect” mentioned earlier. It could perhaps be said that self-built housing could constitute a form of self-realisation, as people take time developing skills to build and maintain a home. For Elster, *choice* is an essential part of self-realisation. Therefore, choice could be considered a necessity in some respects. So here again we see the relevance of ideas about “choice” and “necessity” whereby a sense of belonging and fulfilment can also be considered a need (and therefore necessity); revealing the messy nature of choice and necessity and the underpinning political assumptions associated with such concepts.

Leshum (2013) also explains that ancient oikonomia – in contrast to much contemporary economics – had a different relationship to ethics. While the former is

considered to be inherently concerned with ethics and a concern to achieve "*the good life*" (as it was understood), contemporary economics is arguably "fundamentally distinct from ethics" (Robbins, 1935: 135; cited in Leshum 2013: 226). Of course, he points out, this is not to mean that the Ancient Greeks were in tune with our conceptions of morality today. Indeed, many of their ideas about what was "acceptable" at the time are rejected by most people today. Despite this, oikonomia was "*rooted* in ethical judgements" (2013: 226; emphasis added). Like those presented to us by Cattaneo and Gavalda (2010), the practices presented in the findings of this thesis can be conceptualised as further examples of alternative *oikonomics,* through documenting "degrowth" practices that are also based on ethical judgements.

Degrowth is an increasingly popular body of thought and practice, largely emanating from a concern that material and energy usage associated with "economic growth" is having a detrimental impact on the planet. Many of those that advocate degrowth wish to move away from what is perceived to be damaging historical, pursuit of "growth," which became "hegemonic" after the second world war (Schmelzer, 2016: in Barca et al, 2019: 1). Anarchist scholar Bookchin (1993: 3) also sees economic growth as a key facet of the "grim social pathology" that was giving rise to ecological issues. The practical, local examples of degrowth practice offered by Cattaneo and Gavalda (2010) demonstrate ways in which people at a local level can and do practice economics – or oikonomics – whereby they need less, convert waste into resource and satisfy "real" human needs. From this perspective, *enjoying life* is "the *real* output of the economic process" (Cattaneo & Gavalda, 2010: 581; emphasis added). Indeed, degrowth arguably brings into question the very meaning of "a good life" (Helne & Hirvilammi, 2019). For centuries "economic anthropologists" have sought to understand norms and values associated with economic behaviours though their fieldwork, either to seek affirmation of Western principles, or to seek "alternative" and "more just" formations (Hann & Hart, 2011). Like the squatting network, some of the everyday living practices found amidst New Traveller and other vehicle dwelling networks could also offer ethnographers further examples of "solution focused" possibilities for a more "just and sustainable world" (Lockyer & Veteto, 2013: 1-2).

Gibson-Graham (2013: 19) explains that much economic activity is "below the waterline" and taken for granted as mainstream accounts of economics – such as

large systems of wage labour - dominate common understanding. Not only is this disempowering, but it also draws our attention away from the “small” positive changes that people can (and do) make in their everyday lives. Such a perspective supports an interest in prefigurative politics and reveals the important role that ethnographic research can play in the process of realising and analysing such activity. Moreover, if Sociology is the study of social organisation and the study of social change represents an integral feature of sociological endeavour (Mills, 1959: 6-7) (and a huge part of the experience of being human) then it is clear that such a focus is necessary and productive for Sociologists. What is more, social scientists are increasingly conceptualising society as being constituted not only by people, but also of animals, plants and other non-humans in society, constitutes a growing sociological “paradigm” (Kuhn, 1970). Therefore, the observation of relations between human and non-human actors is increasingly appropriate. This is elaborated later.

The practices and ideas shown in this thesis represent examples of oikonomic arrangements that possess some similarities to those presented by Cattaneo and Gavalda (2010). For example, as aforementioned, vehicle dwelling is often a form of squatting, as communities make use of disused land which is a practice that itself renders waste a resource. Moreover, Cattaneo and Gavalda illustrate how people transform waste into means to directly provide for their own needs, they reduce the need for wage-labour as well as damage to the environment - and other humans and non-humans as a result. Through adopting the terminology of permaculture principles, it is claimed that circles are closed, and symbiotic relationships are effectively made between humans and nonhumans entangled together. They explain how processes of collective self-management and the closing of energy and matter cycles allow people to “live well” within a “low-intensity economy.” “Permaculture” originates from the term: “permanent agriculture” (Mollison and Holmgren, 1978). Here we see further compatibility with ideas about a “subsistence perspective” which also aims to “keep life going” (Bennholdt-Thomsen and Mies, 1999; 3). Moreover, the term “permaculture” is used in different ways: for example, some people may be using it as a set of gardening techniques, while others may consider it to be more of a life philosophy. It largely refers to a way of managing ecosystems, utilising processes of “biomimicry” whereby human problems are dealt with using processes or systems inspired by “nature.” It is worth noting here that we might emphasise the

process of *inspiration* that takes place here, for we do not necessarily "imitate" but rather we enter a dynamic dialogue, whereby such processes are not categorised bluntly as belonging to nature (rather than humans) as such (See Fisch, 2017). This can be considered a useful tool for the pursuit of eco-social resilience in the sense that permaculture involves paying attention to existing processes, harnessing and encouraging existing symbiotic relationships between a variety of species.

So, in a sense, permaculture is a system that very much recognises (and even looks out for) the actions -and interactions - of non-humans. It could also be said that it very much takes into account "*what matters*" to non-humans (Bastian, 2016): potentially offering insights into how we can co-produce knowledge with nonhumans. It has already been shown that permaculture can provide ethnographers with a *methodology* to challenge dominant paradigms (Lockey & Veteto, 2013). Despite this, Permaculture remains relatively untouched in the realms of academic scientific literature, as pointed out previously (Cattaneo and Gavalda, 2010), despite its compatibility with much contemporary sociological endeavour: Aistara (2013) shows compatibilities between permaculture concepts and theoretical ideas from Tim Ingold, Bruno Latour and Anna Tsing. However, more recently, there appears to be a growing permaculture movement (or moment) of some sort occurring within the realms of academia. Laura Centemeri (2019; 2020) shares her work over half a decade studying the history of the permaculture movement, conceptualising it as a form of resistance through everyday practices of care and repair. Cristina Ergas (2021) advocates prefigurative action, documenting permaculture practices in Cuba showing how process of building socioecological communities has allowed Cubans to persevere (and even thrive) in austere conditions. She describes how the Cubans she spent time with can offer lessons in the ways in which people can adapt to ecological crises "by fostering community and reclaiming self-sufficiency" (2021: 4). Haney and Morrow (2022) explored the views of 56 permaculturists in Canada, finding a common belief that permaculture serves as an empowering route towards re-localising economics while building community. As mentioned earlier, existing literature has shown ways in which other vehicle dwelling groups have adapted to survive in difficult conditions through similar means. Badman-King (2021) argues that permaculture can be seen as an attempt to live the Ancient Greek notion of "the good life."

Permaculture has significant connections to many New Travellers. It is notable that the permaculture garden at Glastonbury festival is often considered to be the last remaining relic of authentic New Traveller culture standing at the festival, after many New Travellers were felt to have been casted away from the festival. Many New Travellers do intentionally practice permaculture in their everyday lives: before lockdown altered my plans, I planned to visit multiple New Traveller settlements in Portugal that were permaculture projects. Furthermore, others may engage in practices without necessarily intending to enact permaculture principles; much like some of the squatters documented by Cattaneo (2015). Like those involved in permaculture, many New Travellers engage in a way of living that can be conceptualised as what Laura Centemeri (2019) calls: the "re-grounding of human sustenance."

In this sense, like the permaculture movement, many New Travellers can be said to have reconfigured their everyday activities, and therefore, value systems which have significance beyond the practical achievement of "self-reliance" or "self-sufficiency" (although, as shown earlier, for some New Travellers, these are key goals). Such activities and their underpinning values can facilitate survival on a low income as well as self-reliance. They also reflect a system of ideas that works in favour (again, intentional or not) of the long-term health of humans and nonhumans: which for Centemeri, is a key feature of these constellations of care and repair. Here again we see the significance of *oikonomia*, as *well-being* becomes the chosen output of social organisation, albeit within a context of enduring the consequences of social organisation which have caused a need for repair. Indeed, it appears that permaculture – and the "permasociology" (Gabowitsch, 2021) that Centemeri outlines – is incredibly relevant to contemporary sociological endeavour: for it takes the actions of non-human actors most seriously. However, Centemeri is criticised for failing to supply sufficient detailed accounts of examples of permaculture practices (Bruzzone, 2019: 177).

This is a shortfall that is compensated for (to some degree) here, as it has been already by Badman-King (2021: 104) who supplies the reader with detailed descriptions of his relationship with the living things in his own garden. Through doing this, Badman-King advocates for a perspective whereby we value non humans for their own intrinsic value, moving away from anthropocentric conceptions of humans in relation to nature. This perspective echoes that of Deep Ecologists who

contest “shallow ecology” perspectives whereby nature is to be saved only to serve the interests of people, rather than to be saved as something valuable in itself. It has been argued that degrowth is only possible if we are to adopt instead an “ecocentric view” that departs from this anthropocentricism that underlies economic growth (Dalla Casa, 2012).

Here we can consider the relevance of Green Anarchism, which – having been catalysed by Bookchin’s “social ecology” - extends Anarchist projects to include nonhumans, contesting the domination of non-humans by humans (Price, 2019). It has been argued that the domination of non-humans has generally not been tackled enough among Anarchist thinkers, despite the extent (and gravity) of this form of oppression and exploitation (Cudworth, 2019). Hall (2011) sees this as a logical progression of Anarchism, calling for a “renewed ecological Anarchism” whereby we move away from a sense of human superiority (which is implied by some Anarchist writings) towards the practice of decentralised “ecologically anarchic relationships” (2011: 387). Such relations are considered to be much like a form of kinship, based on care and responsibility and are essential in order to restore and conserve spaces for the “free living” of an array of non-humans.

In this respect, humans are considered to be embedded in social and ethical relationships, engaging with nature in a dialogue, rather than through a process of domination. Indeed, degrowth need not be a “constraining” process, but instead an emancipatory process of liberation whereby we also abandon a conception of a “stingy nature” that cannot provide for endless needs which perpetuates capitalism (Kallis, 2019). This perspective brings into question the nature of needs, revealing their socially constructed nature (and therefore, our power to modify such constructions) (Kallis, 2019). Humans can instead engage with the fact that they are “coproducers of new natures with which we co-evolve” (Kallis, 2019: 270). Hall (2011: 385) points to eco-feminist thought that has been merged with Anarchism (Jones, 2006) as a guide in achieving this: as non-humans are seen as “active anarchist collaborators” that work *with* humans to prevent ecological collapse. For this reason, Jones (2006: 322; emphasis added) argues that it is essential that we reverse the estrangement between humans and non-humans and “recognize and cultivate our relationships with each other, with other animals and with the ecosystems in which we are *enmeshed.’*

Tim Ingold's Theoretical Framework

At this point, it is important to highlight the significance of Tim Ingold's work, which is used as a theoretical framework throughout the rest of the thesis. Firstly, a key concept in this thesis that was developed by Ingold, is his concept of *"*meshwork." This concept is built upon what Ingold – who considers himself to be a "processual realist" (2005) - foundational critique of ontology (the study of being) which he argues should be replaced with the study of *becoming*.

In his iconic publication, Ingold (2000: 19) calls for new ways of understanding our life, particularly by rethinking the relationship "between form and process" and through adopting what he calls a "properly ecological approach." He asks that we pay attention to the ways in which organisms of many varieties – human and nonhuman - shape one another through processes of that are continually unravelling, as various beings (or *becomings*) go along with one another through life. That is to say, that life is made up of entities that are not "mutually exclusive" (2000:19) but are instead, engaged in mutually constitutive relationships – or *correspondences* (Ingold, 2015) – that are continually in a process of becoming. For this reason, Ingold explains that we might see social life as made up of *lines* that are always going somewhere, tangling with other lines. It is this process of "when everything tangles with everything else" (Ingold, 2015: 7) that Ingold refers to as a "meshwork." He contrasts this with common conceptions that social life is made up of what he (2015: 3-8) describes as "blobs:" whereby things are "divided at their surfaces" having "insides and outsides," implying that when two things meld, they form a new exterior.

For Ingold, this is the essence of sociality which has significant implications for the ways in which we might understand the world, and therefore, how we go about doing our research. This includes how we work with materials and other non-humans, the processes of enskillment that ethnographers undergo, and his troubles with "ethnography" itself. This will be elaborated in more detail in the following methodology chapter. At a glance, Tim Ingold's work appears to be very compatible with that of other social theorists that encourage us to dismantle the dichotomies between "nature" and culture," and the mutual shaping processes of different human and non-human social actors (all emphasizing the often-overlooked activeness of the latter). For example, the work of Anna Tsing, Donna Harraway and Bruno Latour are aligned with Ingold in this manner. However, Ingold has a distinctive approach in the

ways in which he conceptualizes these processes of mutual shaping, which highlights a debate in the literature about the use of concepts such as “assemblage” and “network.” Ingold directly tackles these concepts.

Firstly, while Ingold (2000) is explicit that he resonates with the relational understanding that is present through Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987) work, there are significant differences between the idea of an “assemblage” and a correspondence of lines. The “assemblage” implies that various things are “joined” together as *closed* entities, that somewhat lose their own uniqueness through becoming part of a new larger closed entity in the “bloblike” manner that Ingold (2015) is critical of. It has been argued that the assemblage is “overly mechanical” in this respect (Vannini and Vannini, 2023: 148). A meshwork, however, can be distinguished by its *openness* (Ingold, 2010; 2015 in Vannini & Vannini, 2023: 149). That is to say, that there is an emphasis on the ways in which the world is in a state of constant formation as intersecting flows tangle together. So, unlike the static nature that the notion of “an assemblage” implies, a meshwork captures this dynamic process *while preserving the individuality of each thread*. Furthermore, for Ingold (2015: 3), every being (or becoming) - human and non-human - is itself “bundle of lines.” At first, this appears somewhat similar to what Deleuze and Guattari explain, in their opening sentence to their iconic piece (1987:3):

“The two of us wrote Anti-Oedipus together. Since each of us was several, there was already quite a crowd.”

However, they then go on to say that, when becoming entangled and producing this work, which they describe as “an assemblage” (1987: 4): “we are no longer ourselves” (1987: 3) Implying that they have somewhat lost their individuality through this process, explaining that they become “unrecognizable” as a result. For Deleuze and Guattari, who are in this instance explaining how they themselves had become entangled as social theorists, they describe this “bloblike” process whereby they have merged into a new entity and lost their individuality. Ingold, on the other hand, may argue that instead it would make more sense for them to see themselves as lines that had come together and become entangled in a moment, and this book was grown through their correspondence in this moment before they departed and carried on. It could be said that through this momentary correspondence, they also grew one another after having been grown by the many others they had (or were being) grown

by at this time. However, for Ingold, although they were indeed mutually shaping– or as Deleuze and Guattari phrase it “aided” and “inspired” – one another, they still maintain their individuality when they were entangled writing this book together.

While there is further affinity between Tim Ingold’s work and that of Deleuze and Guattari (1987), the points on which they vary bares importance to this thesis. Ingold (2000) refers to their famous notion of the “rhizome:” an analogy of another “relational model” whereby life is “continually ravelling and unravelling.” and able (like a rhizome) to shoot off in different directions, coming together and departing at different points. As a concept, he supports and builds upon this. Interestingly, he notes that some people beyond the academy already understand the world in this way, referring to the “so-called indigenous people” that he has worked with. However, as someone who has much knowledge of the field of biology, he develops Deleuze and Guattari’s work in a different direction: while it is a conception that he aligns himself with, he notes that the “rhizome” analogy does not capture this with botanical accuracy (2000: 140). Furthermore, in his notes (Ingold, 2000: 426), he explains that his conception departs from theirs through the analogy he supplements the rhizome with: instead, he uses fungal mycelium. This is because a rhizome effectively works more like a “network” and a network of similarities whereby if it is attacked, the entire network falls apart. However, as Ingold does (2000: 426), I still refer to “rhizomes” in the following chapter in order to show an affinity with Deleuze and Guattari’s work (1987), while agreeing that Ingold’s analogy is preferable. While Ingold is more sympathetic towards the notion of an assemblage, he has less affinity with the concept of the “network.” Indeed, as explained by Vannini and Vannini (2023: 150), a network implies that the world is divided into nodes whereby “something is either inside or outside the network.” In this respect, such concepts perpetuate an understanding of the world whereby things are dissected from the other things that it is entangled with.

Interestingly, like Anarchism, meshwork can be considered to be more of “an essence” of how we might approach understanding the world, rather than a rigid metaphor or framework (Vannini & Vannini, 2023: 150). Tim Ingold’s work also compliments the work of Green Anarchists, Deep Ecologists, Eco-Feminists and permaculture experts aforementioned. Ingold (2013) calls for a movement beyond the anthropocentric (hierarchical) approach to viewing the world that is underpinned by human exceptionalism: as if humans are the only beings capable of living social

lives and even if non-humans can be social, only intra-species social relations are possible. He explains how animals also undergo processes of negotiation and are actively being non-humans in the way that humans are being humans. Not only are plants and animals animate beings in their own right but they also carry on their lives alongside one another, responding to one another. Here we see an alliance with Donna Harraway's "intersectional ecofeminist perspective" (Timeto, 2020), which calls for the recognition of our "joint kinship" (Haraway, 1991: 154) with non-humans, whom we co-evolve with in a process of "symbiogenesis" (Haraway, 1992; 2008). Her concept of "companion species" (2007) and "compost communities" (2016) illustrate the ways in which different beings come together, composing and decomposing together. In a similar vein, Tsing (2015) explains that different social actors *contaminate* one another instigating new directions and phenomena that go along to entangle with and contaminate others. In this respect, no beings are completely predetermined or self-contained as "becoming is always with" (Harraway, 2008) as different living beings – human and non-human – "carry on" alongside one another (Ingold, 2013b).

In this respect, Ingold, Tsing and Haraway offer an alternative view of the essence of sociality, showing that history and society is not just a human achievement. They all emphasize the ways in which animals and plants are active collaborators in these processes: Haraway illustrates this through the ways in which humans and dogs have co-evolved (2008), while Tsing describes the agency of mushrooms (2015). As stated by Anna Tsing (2012: 144; emphasis in original text): "*human exceptionalism blinds us."* We see this tendency in the work of traditional Anarchist theorist Peter Kropotkin, who emphasized acts of cooperation and symbiosis *among the same species*, which any permaculture expert would contest: for different species are often involved in processes of collaboration, symbiosis, or "kinship," as they "attend to one another" (Ingold, 2015: 154).

More recently, Vannini and Vannini (2023) demonstrate this effectively when describing the reef as a "domain of entanglement" whereby an array of species – animals and plants – are entangled and engaged in processes of symbiosis or, to use Kropotkin's term, *mutual aid*. It could be said that moving beyond human exceptionalism is an essential task for Anarchists wishing to dismantle hierarchy or when seeking evidence of mutual aid. Bookchin's (1993) distinction between "bionic nature" ("nature as a whole") and "human nature" sets out a key epistemological

understanding of the world for Green Anarchism, recognizing the processual, continuous and intertwined nature of humans and non-humans. However,

Bookchin's approach does not portray the openness of the entanglement of humans and non-humans to the same extent as Tim Ingold. Therefore, this thesis does important work in identifying a useful framework to develop Green Anarchism, responding the Price's (2019: 290) expectation that we might see many more insights from Anarchists into the relationship between "nature" and "society." Furthermore, Anna Tsing also recognizes that paying attention to the entangling of humans and non-humans is "the very stuff of collaborative survival" (2015: 20) and an essential pursuit in response to ecological crises. Or in other words, "survival always involves others" (2015: 29). These ideas are developed throughout this thesis, as mutual aid is found to be a key facet of social organization throughout this thesis. Despite Harraway and Tsing emphasizing collaboration and symbiosis in their work to a greater extent, Ingold's theoretical framework is used to explore this and capture the openness of such entanglements more effectively.

Conclusion

In conclusion, here I have revealed a largely marginalised history of vehicle dwelling in the UK and Ireland. It was shown that many different people have come to live in vehicles at different times, as people from an array of walks of life have responded to different social and economic contexts and/or continue cultural traditions. This thesis explores the lives of some people living in vehicles today, therefore contributing to a marginal (yet growing) body of literature regarding contemporary vehicle dwelling communities in the UK.

I aim to contribute to the "choice" and "necessity" debate that emerged in literature relating to New Travellers. Firstly, like Grohmann (2022), such debates are found to fail to capture the messiness of the reality of choice and necessity. I also reveal

"push" and "pull" factors beyond economics the same people in different places), during a period of more limited movement amid the pandemic, I found myself moving in a different way. Instead, I found myself moving through different experiences and shifting my attention to a variety of nonhumans such as animals, plants, natural forces and elements, and materials.

Indeed, it could be said that this project has been a what Wakkary (2020) terms a "*nomadic practice."* Wakkary advocates an epistemology designed to embrace multiplicity and diversity. What is meant by this, is that knowledge is situated, pluralistic and constantly shifting. Such a perspective contends that we must consider the ways in which knowledge is situated, embodied and partial. In this respect, knowledge is *nomadic* in the sense that it is constantly shifting, and we can carry out (and analyse) our research accordingly (Wakkary, 2020). Moreover, "nomadic practices" go where they are led to and are always on the move. As researchers, we are obliged to illustrate the ways in which we traverse the landscape, and what is left behind, I now move on to give details (chronologically) on the research design and process.

Vehicle-Dweller Fication: Undergoing an Education through Ethnography

"…to practice anthropology is to undergo an education, as much as within as beyond the academy...Knowledge is knowledge, wherever it is grown." – Ingold (2014: 392)

Introduction

In this chapter, I illustrate the methods – and epistemological foundations - underlying this thesis. In agreement with Bhambra (2007) and Santos (1992; 2007a; 2007b; 2008; 2014) - as developed by Savransky (2017) – it is shown that we must transcend a "colonial abyss" that exists in social science research; slicing through worlds of understanding, deeming some knowledges superior to others. This calls for a closer engagement between Anthropology and Sociology, challenging the colonisation of knowledge and reality (and our understanding of Sociology) by taking seriously the ways in which those who are not Western academics know the world (Savransky, 2017). This includes an engagement with knowledge from people who may be Western but are not academics. Indeed, that is to say that we must foster an "ecology of knowledges" (Santos, 2007) by opening up an "equality of opportunities" (Santos, 2008: xx) to different kinds of knowledge. It could be said that this approach reflects Anarchist intentions, moving towards diversity and complexity, away from an approach to research that is epistemologically oppressive, rigid, dichotomous, and also hierarchical and monotonous. Santos (2014) calls for a movement towards "existential justice," which is considered to be an essential part of the strive towards all kinds of equality. This approach treats "reality" itself as both a political and ethical problem and requires a (somewhat "risky") return to realism, involving a reconsideration of what sociology might become by dismantling dichotomies and through engaging with an array of knowledges (Savransky, 2017). In alignment with this is the work of Tim Ingold (2005: 127), who identifies himself as "a processual or relational realist," who seeks to dismantle the "nature-culture" dichotomy, while giving us methodological tools that allow us to learn from others beyond the academy.

This chapter is put forward chronologically, revealing the process of three years of data collection, through which I have learned new ways of relating to and understanding the world from people around me who hold a particular kind of expertise that has largely formed outside of the academy. I begin by describing my (evolving) research positionality. This includes a reflection on my existing

connections within the community, as well as my initial approach to the project, which began as a multi-sited set of ethnographic in-situ interviews. I then go on to explain how I adapted my research to the COVID19 pandemic. My evolving positionality reveals a blurring of clear-cut distinctions, such as start and finish, research and everyday life, work and home. I then move on to elaborate the nomadic nature of my work, as a multi-sited ethnography. Later, I reveal how I have come to know a variety of humans and non-humans, and what they have taught me. I also explain additional methods used to build narratives with members of the community:

from unstructured “in situ” discussions, “natural” conversations, and multi-media accounts provided by participants. It is shown how through illuminating ways of living within the world and relations between humans and non-humans I attempt to move towards “existential justice” (Santos, 2014). I also aim to contest negative stereotypes about a largely stigmatised mode of living, highlighting features of forms of social organisation that might be helpful in an era of climate and economic crises.

Research Positionality

I started my data collection period in 2019, a year after I had finished my MSc dissertation and after I had been living in a caravan on an authorised site with a circus collective in Bristol for over a year. However, my experience of vehicle dwelling and vehicle dwellers did not begin when I began my postgraduate studies: I have spent much time with different vehicle dwellers – many of whom identifying as New Travellers - since the age of 15. With my closest friends at the time, I spent much of my free time on sites around the outskirts of the village that I grew up in. Since then, I have continued to have personal ties to an array of families and individuals living in vehicles: some identifying as Travellers, others identifying as Vehicle Dwellers. I also spent time travelling with other friends in their live-in vehicles in Spain for leisure purposes and in Calais to carry out humanitarian work. Indeed, this way of life has, for a while, been somewhat connected to my other walks of life (which there have, of course, been multiple). However, I had never lived in a vehicle myself full time before 2018 which has significant implications for my positionality as a relatively inexperienced vehicle dweller.

Despite already having been somewhat influenced by various vehicle dwelling friends since my teenage years, in recent years these influences have magnified when I began to live in vehicles full time and relied on their expertise and guidance

more than before. It was also through my personal connections to them that this project was made possible, as many vehicle dwellers can be considered “hard-to reach” by researchers lacking personal contacts. Not only can personal contacts, or *friendship*, be a useful way of accessing the field and participants, it can be seen as an effective approach within fieldwork itself as ethnographers “get to know” others in both meaningful and sustained ways (Fine, 1994; Tillmann-Healy, 2003 in in Owton & Allen-Collinson, 2014: 285). This approach can be seen as a way of dismantling hierarchy between researchers and participants (Tillmann-Healy, 2003), complimenting an Anarchist approach to research.

It is important to stress here that we must adopt a kind of “guise” in order to strategically gain access, but instead that we are invested in the worlds that we weave with our participants (Ellis, 2007: in Owton & Allen-Collinson, 2014: 286). Through this approach we are also able to approach our research and those who contribute to it with respect, listening to their stories with both sensitivity and empathy (Tillmann-Healy, 2003). Through my research, I have grown closer to some of my existing friends and made new friends along the way, who continue to be a part of (and therefore an influence on) my everyday life. However, this is not to say that no challenges arose: at times I felt anxious and uncomfortable about crossing these boundaries, as I feared damaging friendships that had much importance to me. It is also important to note that because we are more emotionally involved with participants that are our friends, we may end up engaging in more “emotional labour” than we normally would as people perhaps open up to us more than they would if we were not friends (Owten & Allen-Collinson, 2014). When dealing with more emotive discussions - such as those about experiences of rejection, discrimination, and enforcement – I found that I did become quite heavily emotionally involved at times, and this is something that I would warn other researchers about who have strong personal and emotional ties to their fields of research.

Moreover, as a result of these personal connections, my thesis was in some ways something, as Ingold (2015) might say, that was *given to me* to do by the world around me. In this respect, what we are continually doing is very much shaped by what we are “undergoing,” and vice versa (Ingold, 2015). In other words, our ways of understanding are constantly forming through our involvement within the world. For this reason, reflexive practice is another important part of analysis, for no researcher or research project will ever be identical; as different researchers yield different

results. This can be shaped, for example, by various degrees of “cultural proximity” (Hodkinson, 2005) as some researchers may have a better understanding of certain cultural codes – e.g. slang – than others.

While I had some previous knowledge of cultural codes, there were certain practices and words that I have become more accustom to over the last four years, and now understand in a different way. For example, I came to have a greater understanding of the term (and underlying process) of “tatting down,” which refers to when one secures their belongings before moving. Previously, I had only come across the word “tat” (referring to belongings, particularly ones that are salvaged having been discarded by others). Both of these cultural codes will be explored in more detail later in this thesis. Furthermore, contemporary “insider and outsider” debates reveal that boundaries are often blurred and continually evolving. For example, the “intrinsic ambiguity” of combined insider and outsider statuses has been described (Ghaffari, 2019) and positionalities are dynamic and contextual (Mason-Bish 2018). Indeed, it is common for positionalities to change throughout the research process (Merriam and Tisdell, 2015) as researchers move between insider and outsider status at different points in their research (McFarlane-Morris, 2020). This process is reflected in the forthcoming findings chapters: in some chapters I rely more on accounts from other people. For example, when considering New Traveller and Vehicle Dweller identity in the first chapter I provide a more “outside” perspective, referring to interview transcripts more than personal observations. The same is observed in the final chapter, which shares experiences of eviction, which I have relatively little direct experience of and (before the last 3 months leading up to my submission) I had always occupied the privileged position of having other places to move to (and a working vehicle that can easily be moved there). Of course, as is also shown in these chapters, there is much diversity to account for in the way that people understand themselves or experience everyday life as a person living in a vehicle. This can complicate attempts to identify my positionality in the field, for there are an array of evolving positionalities that we are relating ourselves to. It is also worth noting here that the insider and outsider debate emerges from a Western academic perspective of the world, which does not necessarily correlate with how other people see the world (Mandiyanike, 2009).

It could be said that the influence of those who have guided me has become very much a part of me, shaping the ways in which I would understand and interact with

the world around me. If we are to follow the epistemological foundations set by theorists such as Tim Ingold, as explored in the literature review, it can be said that the people I have been entangled with are constituting who I am becoming as a person. Therefore, while some people were actively involved in my thesis – in ways that will be elaborated later – others have influenced the project in more subtle ways, through the ways in which they have shaped me and my understanding, and as a result, (albeit indirectly) the formation of the findings of this thesis. Moreover, I consider this thesis to be *performative* in the sense that I have delved "deep" as a "full observant participant" (Roach, 2014: 45) becoming a full participant that *performs* what I have become immersed in. Denzin (2001) explains how, by engaging with the performative, collaborative nature of research, we can generate social change in our fields of interest. In this sense, by engaging with the fluidity and multiplicity of truths and identity, we can effectively empower our participants to "rewrite" the social world through collaborating with them to construct new discourses by forming new identities and narratives to express to the world. This argument has been echoed by Gibson-Graham later (2014) who also promote research that harnesses its power to transform discourses. Indeed, it is arguably important that our research is "transactional" in the sense that we give back to our participants in some way (Cunliffe & Alcadipani da Silverira, 2016).

Moreover, much like Steph Grohmann's (2022) fieldwork as a squatter among squatters in Bristol, my work was not driven solely by "research interest", but also by my own personal life circumstances shaped by personal connections. My work also resembles Claudio Cattaneo's (2006) experience squatting in Spain, my time spent with other vehicle dwellers and Travellers was not purely research: it gave me something too. It was a life experience "*for myself"* that served as a "practical learning of a way of living" that – as shown in more depth in my findings – even facilitated a kind of "natural relief" (Cattaneo, 2006: 17) from the busy life that I had lived before in rented accommodation in cities. In this respect, I also found my work to be a "pleasure," as I felt a sense of belonging as a person involved in a social setting, often much more so than as an academic. But of course, I *am* an academic, motivated by an array of institutional influences. For example, a doctoral thesis is a huge milestone in achieving a career within academia. I am also subject to the traditions and cognitive structures of my discipline (Bourdieu, 2003). One cannot deny the presence of these influences either.

It was arguably having such a strong interest – or "desire" (Whitehead, 2009) – that has led to such a deep level of immersion. I have admired my friends (who I met later along other threads of life) who moved into vehicles as adults, allowing them to master musical instruments and circus skills, engage in humanitarian work, festival work, permaculture projects and/or other forms of work that I found interesting and inspiring. I also found it interesting how friends that I met through other walks of life had come to live much like my friends I had known a lot longer from the New Traveller community (albeit with significant differences too). In this respect, it could also be said that I was a kind of "aca-fan" who started out as a someone who admired many aspects of this way of living that had been a part of my life for a while, and then began to think more critically about it (Roach, 2014). While academics are usually interested in their subject matters, the "aca-fan" takes this to another level, whereby public work, private hobbies, professional interests and personal pleasures are "melded." In this respect, this involves a coming together of two worlds. However, this is not always an enjoyable experience: I often felt that I was trying to consolidate inherently oppositional realms, from the personal and the public, to the institution and the anti-institution.

That is to say, like Cattaneo (2008), there was little distinction between my "normal" life and my work. I shared many values and ideas with a lot of the people I have spent time with and learned so much from, which is why I had been drawn to this project in the first place. Ingold may argue that this is not an "ethnography" but more an account of "the educational correspondences of real life" which seeks to move beyond the separation of imagination and real life (2014: 393). It could also be said that this "risks" swaying into autoethnographic territory. However, it does at least put forward "an honesty" in admitting the influence of my personal interests, values and feelings (Roach, 2014). It is also arguable that autoethnographic tools can be useful, particularly when carrying out this process of reflexivity. If we are to consider autoethnography to be a "form of self-narrative that places the self within a social context," it can arguably offer more "verisimilitude" as we unveil illustrations of "being there" through furnishing our projects with self-narrative as additional content (Geertz, 1988:68 in Humphreys, 2005: 855). Moreover, processes of hindsight and reflection – or "epiphanies" (Ellis et al, 2011) - about significant memories or events in our personal lives during this process of education have been useful when identifying themes in my findings chapters, which have then been explored with

participants. It has often been through seeing the huge transformations in myself that I have noticed what is perhaps “significant” about this way of living in world in comparison to the way that I was living before.

Whose “Side” are We On?: Bristol Vehicles for Change

I have begun to reveal the significance of an evolving, embedded research positionality. It could be said that my approach to this project follows a precedent set in wider, relevant research on squatter’s movements, which have also largely come from “insiders” (Martinez Lopez, 2018). While some researchers were already “living it” (Cattaneo, 2008) when they embarked on their projects, others were more like me and were involved or connected, but not quite fully “in it” yet before they began their research (Van de Hor, 2010). For Grohmann (2022), she reports accidentally living it as she found herself homeless, and living in squats and then vehicles became a necessity. Moreover, in this body of literature, activism through research is prevalent, reflecting a broader trend in contemporary social science, as more value-laden, active and reflexive approaches that engage with inevitable subjectivity are embraced. These academics have demonstrated the strength of embedded positionalities, as they are very much a part of – and even and influential upon - the fields in which they carry out their research. Such positionalities facilitate the mediation of discourses that stem directly from the heart of these social movements. Some of these researchers have made powerful impacts in their fields, both through campaign work, their research, and/or through their own personal attributes. For example, “Azozomox” – who writes with Armin Kuhn (2018) - maintains his anonymity when writing as a squatter and radical activist involved in protests, including mobilisations against the G20 summit. Moreover, Feliciantonio (2017) “queered” his research by transforming the field: as a gay man, he was invited by his participants to bring issues of sexuality and power into a political squat in Italy. In this sense, research can and has been used as “an opportunity for transformative politics” (Feliciantonio, 2017: 433) in this area of research.

Since 2018, I have paid close attention to policy developments affecting vehicle dwellers, community consultations, as well as narratives in media and public social media discourse. Like Van de Hor (2010), this gave me an important insight into the ways in which some authorities constructed people as “criminals,” which often feeds a sense of distrust amongst those labelled and treated as such. Indeed, this aspect

of the everyday life of many vehicle dwellers cannot be ignored when exploring the entanglements of everyday life, which inevitably involve law and regulation (or the perceived potential of such) at times. This is illustrated in the final findings chapter. I also attended local meetings in the city of Bristol when a new local policy was being developed in 2019, where I came to listen to the voices of others and contribute my knowledge of existing research evidence in this field. Having seen representatives of affected communities and other stakeholders largely ignored during a consultation about a new local enforcement policy in September 2019 – which the majority of attendees expressed much concern about - I put together a petition to contest the new policy with the assistance and support of other vehicle dwellers and campaigners.

This triggered a small group of vehicle dwellers to propose a community meeting in October 2019, which lead to a small group and myself establishing ourselves as a formal CIC called Bristol Vehicles for Change (VFC) in February 2020. After discovering the utility of the research evidence in decision-making circles, my involvement mainly involved using existing research and my writing skills to assist the formulation of strong arguments when upholding the rights of people living in vehicles in numerous contexts. During the pandemic, we mostly acted like a "firefighting" service: on one occasion we stopped several vehicles (homes) being towed away and disposed of by authorities. I found myself with three other vehicle dwellers in numerous online meetings with council officials, negotiating conflict and defending the rights of vehicle dwellers in the city, channelling the voices of vehicle dwellers who came to us for help during this time.

As a CIC, we also negotiated with the council in order to provide temporary stopping places with water, toilets and showers for those needing them during the pandemic. Interestingly, whilst this fostered trust and appreciation among some vehicle dwellers, others appeared suspicious and thought that we had facilitated "covid concentration camps." As a result, my positionality transformed significantly, with different vehicle dwellers seeing me and my work very differently. Again, like Van der Hor (2010) – who also moved between "official" and "unofficial" realms of social activity when studying the criminalisation of squatting in Rotterdam - I felt as though I was thrown "back and forth" between different worlds. Also, while some people admired the work that I had been a part of, others thought that I was "working for the council" and therefore up to something sinister. Indeed, as explored in the first findings chapter,

there are many divisions and differences of opinion amongst vehicle dwellers. This can make it difficult when trying to decide as a researcher “whose side we are on” (Becker, 1967) if you find that that there is no clear, unified “side” to be on.

Interestingly, this seemed to be (mostly) remedied later in the summer of 2020, when we successfully supported vehicle dwellers in the community to contest various oppressive enforcement measures. My work with VFC will be referred to throughout this project where relevant. While this work was not directly a part of my research, it had a huge impact on my positionality and the “education” process that unravelled during the data collection period. This work gave me a great deal of insight into the political context of vehicle dwelling, continually shaping both my position and understanding within the field. At times, this caused considerable anxiety as a I worried that people did not believe that I was on “their side.” This represents the “dark side” of transformative actions experienced by researchers (Bartels & Friedman, 2022). Due to the inherently diverse nature of people living in vehicles, it was impossible to steer away from criticism and negativity.

Access Through the Rhizome

So far it has been shown that I have conducted this research as an immersed participant observer. I have personal connections to many different (interconnected) networks of vehicle dwellers and New Travellers in various locations and from various generations. Most of the people that came to be involved in this thesis came through my existing contacts. Interestingly, much like Zoe James who carried out her research with New Travellers (2004), an exploration of shared contacts was sometimes a useful way revealing my ‘insider’ status with those I had met more recently. I have found that many vehicle dwellers enjoy exploring their shared contacts when meeting, so this was not a particularly unnatural process.

To some extent, this worked much like what quantitative researchers call “snowball sampling,” as I often met new people through my existing contacts. However, Stehlik (2004) argues that the concept of a “snowball” is inappropriate in that it implies a more linear process that moves forward. Instead, it could be also be said that my project has been more nomadic in the sense that I have come to meet many different people and spend time in various places in a “*rhizomatic*” manner. In this respect, finding participants can take place like a botanical rhizome: “*underground,*” and within “*naturally occurring networks*” (Stehlik, 2004: 39). A rhizome is inherently

dynamic, moving and *living* as it “assumes very diverse forms, from ramified surface extension in all directions” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987: 6-7). Indeed, my research and my participants appeared to take me in many different directions. It could be said my project unravelled through encounters between different social actors and places, rather than a fixed point or location. In this respect, it could be said that my experience of the project was more akin to a “*walk,*” as my movement *through* the field is what constituted the knowledge presented in this thesis.

“In the experience of the walker…the ground is apprehended in the passage from place to place, in histories of movement and changing horizons along the way”(Ingold, 2007: 47).

In other words, the project was more of a process of mapping than tracing (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). While the latter represents an adherence to a more regimented, predictable model which that codes a ready-made configuration with certain routes, “mapping” is inherently experimental with multiple entrances. Not only did I find myself moving through different places, encountering new people (and sometimes the same people in different places), during a period of more limited movement amid the pandemic, I found myself moving in a different way. Instead, I found myself moving through different experiences and shifting my attention to a variety of nonhumans such as animals, plants, natural forces and elements, and materials.

Indeed, it could be said that this project has been a what Wakkary (2020) terms a “*nomadic practice.”* Wakkary advocates an epistemology designed to embrace multiplicity and diversity. What is meant by this, is that knowledge is situated, pluralistic and constantly shifting. Such a perspective contends that we must consider the ways in which knowledge is situated, embodied and partial. In this respect, knowledge is *nomadic* in the sense that it is constantly shifting and we can carry out (and analyse) our research accordingly (Wakkary, 2020). Moreover, “nomadic practices” go where they are lead to, and are always on the move. As researchers, we are obliged to illustrate the ways in which we traverse the landscape, and what is left behind, I now move on to give details (chronologically) on the research design and process.

Ethnographic In-Situ Interviews

“We always create our personal narrative from a situated location.”

– Ellis (1999: 467)

Starting with my personal contacts, I began my data collection before lockdown, between September 2019 and December 2019. I carried out in-situ interviews with 9 people in 5 different locations across England and Wales. Six of these people identified as “New Travellers,” one person identified themself as a “Travelling Showperson,” and two as “vehicle dwellers” (although they did live amongst people identifying as New Travellers). I also carried out 1 in situ interview after lockdown in Mid Wales. I intended to carry out more in Mid Wales, but a sense of “finishing” was essential: I had a lot of data to work with already at this point. Having quickly encountered controversy, I found myself changing my approach to questions about identity. For example, one of the first questions I asked people when starting my in-situ interviews in 2019 was “do you consider yourself to be a New Traveller.” Having already noticed some huge differences in people’s feelings towards self-identification in my Masters dissertation research, as well as my own personal life, it felt more appropriate to ask this to avoid assumptions, while also uncovering people’s feelings about and interpretations of identity categories. This is explained more in the first findings chapter.

Moreover, these interviews were carried out “in-situ” in the sense that they were carried out in the homes of the people being interviewed. This was particularly apt, as we were talking about the alternative housing and way of life that they were living. Bloch (2018) explains the virtues of carrying out interviews “in situ,” using the example of interviewing Graffiti artists. He notes how “place-based elicitation” can result in different results in comparison to interviews in settings whereby the person being interviewed is extracted from the everyday setting and/or activity that they are being interviewed about. Bloch explains how he detected a very different approach to answering the same questions – and alternative narratives as a result - when speaking with participants in settings away from the “activity” that is of interest.

I also chose to carry out in-situ interviews, because it meant that I would always spend at least a few days living with participants in these locations when visiting them to interview them. This gave me a good chance to catch up with old friends allowing us to “warm up” before doing the interviews, some of whom I had not seen

for several years. I would also bring along food and cook for my friends in order to thank them for their hospitality and involvement as an attempt to make the research more “transactional” (Cunliffe & Alcadipani da Silverira, 2016). Spending time with people before interviews also gave me insight into the everyday lives of my friends; providing useful context and inspiring research questions. For example, this once involved a trip to the local well to get water. I used a similar method to Herbert (2018), who carried out research with squatting communities, and used informal discussions “in situ” to make notes and form questions for more formal, recorded interviews later. However, the work I did was different in the sense that some people did not wish to be recorded with a tape recorder. Instead, I recorded four of these interviews by taking notes only, much like Zoe James (2004) who found that many New Travellers she spoke with were uncomfortable with being recorded with a digital recording device, associating them with enforcement. This method also allowed participants to have more direct control over the interpretations of what was being said, and therefore, what was effectively recorded. Some participants were more concerned about this than others.

Responding to the Pandemic

In February 2020, I was in the financial position to buy my own motorised vehicle to convert (which had previously been an obstacle). I had the aim of travelling overseas to carry out ethnographic in-situ interviews in various locations across Portugal, a popular destination for those who have left the UK in search of conditions that facilitate their way of life. However, shortly after I made this purchase and received ethical approval for the project, the world plunged into a state of crisis, and lockdown measures were implemented. As a result, I had to pause the project and reconfigure my plans. As aforementioned, during the first months of social isolation, I stayed engaged with the vehicle dwelling community via other means: between the months of March and June in 2020, I helped vehicle dwellers in the city of Bristol secure temporary access to land with facilities provided by the council. I paid close attention to the ways in which authorities responded to vehicle dwellers in the city during this time. Therefore, while I was physically quite static, I was still able to *shift my attention,* in the way that Lederman (1990) explains, which allowed me to observe the kind of problems that people living in vehicles were experiencing at the time.

Some features of the “natural” conversations I had with vehicle dwellers on the receiving end of state violence during this time are quoted in this thesis and elsewhere (Craft, 2020). My use of “natural” conversations – which have been used where appropriate throughout the entire data collection period - is elaborated later in this chapter.

After being “stuck” in Bristol for several months, lockdown rules loosened in the summer of 2020 and I was invited to Mid Wales – where I had initially planned to convert my truck before travelling to Portugal with my partner. In response to these unforeseen circumstances, I stayed here on private land with my partner, whose family had used the land as a base in between travel and mobile working patterns for decades. I made this place my home for two years. As I worked on building my own home amid lockdown restrictions, I found my attention shifting once again. I began to focus more on the process of building, as my relationship with materials, plants and animals became more noticeable. While this was likely a response to limited human-to-human interaction this was also due to the nature of the way of life I was now living, which involved more engagement with non-humans: something that I had not experienced as much before.

During periods of relaxed lockdown regulation, I used the land in Mid Wales as a base and started to travel in my new home. From September to November in 2020, I moved onto the road with my partner, who is a chainsaw carver, and others who carved with him there. We also went on the road again between June 2021 and September 2021, which was the period in which I wrote Chapter Five, which covers my experiences living on the road in more detail. I also ventured out on my own to visit friends in various park ups in and around the city of Bristol in the summer of 2021, which is when I experienced the heavy-handed eviction documented in the final findings chapter. During the production of this thesis, I have lived among many others who have been living in vehicles. Many of whom had been doing so for some time and some had lived this way their entire life. In Mid Wales, some had moved out of their vehicles and built cabins and other forms of makeshift dwellings having settled on the land more permanently. I was effectively surrounded by a form of *expertise*.

Vehicle Dweller-Fication

While I had spent time living in a caravan of my own previously, I had never converted a vehicle or lived in a motorised vehicle before. I had also never experienced life “off-grid,” as the previous site I had lived on was equipped with access to tap water and mains electricity. Therefore, much of the data referred to in this thesis reflects and comes from a process of *enskillment* (Ingold, 2000), that has taken place through participant observation, or *a life lived with others*. That is to say that the experience of learning how to be a vehicle dweller (and a more efficient, knowledgeable one) has been incredibly informative. As will be shown in more depth in my findings chapters, this process of *becoming* constitutes much of the content of this thesis as I learned more about different materials, resources, and other nonhumans and how vehicle dwelling is effectively *achieved* through ways of relating to a variety of humans and non-humans. Moreover, in forthcoming chapters I share a description of my experience of a kind of induction or apprenticeship (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Ingold, 2000). Much of this has involved *practical* kinds of knowledge that are needed in order to live in a vehicle in a (mostly) “off-grid” setting. For example, this involved learning to organise myself and my belongings so that we were prepared for movement through spaces that do not always have facilities with resources on tap available (see Chapter Five). Therefore, I have effectively learned how to make do with finite resources, as being “off-grid” brings about a new relationship with resources we need to survive: from staying warm in the winter, to having enough water when on the road. I have drawn knowledge from those who have training in various skills and other valuable experiences from their everyday lives beyond the academy, such as carpentry, herbalism and metal work. Thus, revealing one of the many ways we can tap into an “ecology of knowledges” (Santos, 2004).

I have also learned new ways of relating to materials that are both practical, and arguably ethically valuable in a time of climate crises magnified by consumer capitalism. As will be shown later in greater detail, this has largely involved learning how to “make do” with what is around me: from harnessing symbiotic relationships between plants and animals to building with recycled materials. I have learned much from those more accustomed to living in a certain way who have exposed me to various ways of doing (and understanding) things, and helped me become enskilled (Ingold, 2000) through tuning in to the world and material resources in a way that I

had not before. (I return to the details of materiality and working with plants and animals later). My own interpretations and relationships with materials are still unfolding as I carry out this apprenticeship with the people I live with, but also with the materials themselves. The more time that I spend with people who think about materials in various ways, as well as an array of materials, who like people, act and react in various ways too, the more that my interpretations of materials – and building designs - *continue to change.*

In this respect, this project has contributed to the process of becoming "human" that I am continually embarking on (as we all are, in various ways). It is this process of learning that makes up the majority of the content of the findings in this thesis. Indeed, as Ingold explains, we do not ever achieve becoming human as a finished project, we are constantly becoming. He refers to this as "*humanification*" (Ingold, 2015). The same can arguably be said about becoming a vehicle dweller, and a more "savvy" – or "*attuned*" (Ingold, 2000) - one at that. Indeed, there is much to be learned about the logistics of living in a vehicle itself. This can be said to be an ongoing task. The process has involved continuous movement between my imagination as a participant observer and novice, working with new perceptions that are constantly in the process of being made as we "push out into the unknown," never being quite sure about what might happen, building new perceptions as we engage within the social world around us (Ingold, 2015: 139). Therefore, these processes of imagining and perceiving are interwoven and mutually shaping. Through learning to be a vehicle dweller in an off grid set up, what I express in this thesis is a way of becoming human (of which there are multiple), aiming towards what Ingold terms "*a return to anthropology*" (2014: 393).

A Multi-Sited "Ethnography:" Moving Through a Nomadic "Field"

So far it has been shown that it was not a straightforward process whereby I was suddenly "in the field" as a detached observer who began observing. It was also not a case of my personal life merging with my research at a certain point. Instead, it had been unravelling this way for some time. In fact, one might ask: "where is the field?" (Sanjek, 1990: 94). Lederman (1990: 88) explains how "being in the field" often does not involve "any travelling at all" and it can instead involve "a shifting of attention and of sociable connection within one's own habitual milieus."

The project has also been *multi-sited.* This is perhaps unsurprising when learning with people living in moveable dwellings. Many people live in vehicles in order to move, and/or are often moved because they live in vehicles. Therefore, to fail to capture processes of movement would also result in a loss of much of the experience of living in a moveable dwelling. Moreover, it has been argued that a "multi-sited ethnographic sensibility" (Marcus, 1995) presupposes that learning takes places *across* a variety of activity systems, throughout time and space. In this respect, we learn through *movement* (Gutiérrez, 2008) within different realms of social activity.

Firstly, perhaps the most obvious way in which the project was multi-sited was the fact that I moved through 5 different locations when carrying out in-situ interviews, and then moved through over 10 more locations as a participant observer later in my own vehicle during the data collection period (and have spent time in many more since writing up). Furthermore, I have spent time living or visiting people living in various set ups with *v*arious different living arrangements. This has included both long-standing and short-lived roadside locations, roadside locations in cities and in the countryside, bridleways, private authorised sites, council-owned authorised sites, tolerated sites, unauthorised sites, hidden sites, well-known sites, privately owned land with planning permission, and privately owned land without planning permission. On each of these sites there would be significantly different dynamics between people living there. Some people will have been living there a long time, others will be passing through for days at a time. Some people will have been living this way for a long time, others will have recently started living this way. Some groups spent a lot of time together, having regular shared meals and/or meetings. Others would barely speak with each other. I have encountered much diversity in this respect, which is elaborated in Chapter One as a key finding. This also points to the importance of considering the influence of law and regulation on entanglements – and indeed, movement - which is demonstrated in the final findings chapter.

Moreover, I also moved between different forms of housing which constituted significantly different social realms in themselves. This is another instance where tools from autoethnography can partially assist us again, as I reflect on how my own personal life overlapping with my research has contributed to my understandings and interpretations through reflecting on another "epiphany" (Ellis et al, 2011). Interestingly, for 6 months between living in my caravan in Bristol and moving to Wales to convert my own van, I moved through the precarious nature of rented

accommodation in the city of Bristol again. This was a point where I began to feel quite distant from “the field,” and often experienced waves of self-doubt and felt almost ashamed to not be living in a vehicle while being so involved in the thesis and campaign work. However, as I report in this thesis and elsewhere (Craft, 2020), many people I have spoken with have reported experiences of precarity and a lack of control, much like those I was going through at this time. For many people, such experiences were key motivators behind their reasons for moving into a vehicle. This is covered in more detail in findings chapters.

“Headnotes,” “Natural” Conversations, and Trust

“Fieldnotes are ‘of’ the field, if not always written ‘in’ the field.” – Sunjak (1990:95)

it is generally known that most ethnographers compile a collection of “fieldnotes” and “headnotes” (Sunjak, 1990). The former is arguably more fixed, staying in a relatively stable state on the paper or device they are written on. The latter are more nomadic in the sense that they are always changing – in the field and afterwards (if there is a clear sense of “afterwards”). Ottenberg (1990) argues that headnotes are “more important” (whilst the mind making the notes is still alive and working sufficiently). As Sunjak (1990) points out, some papers have been written entirely from “headnotes” alone.

Overall, I have relied on headnotes a great deal more than fieldnotes. I also often took photos – as many people do in their everyday life – to mark significant moments in my life, which would often jog memories when writing up or contemplating my research. This is largely because my life was so intertwined with my project, I would have been constantly writing rather than living my life and experiencing what I have experienced in the depth that I have. In some respects, recording my life in this way felt like an intrusion into my own life and was at times quite uncomfortable. Lederman (1990: 88-89) explains that it is when we make fieldnotes that our “double lives” become more apparent, which can leave us feeling “compromised.” Often, I would find myself writing about memories and experiences that – at the time – I did not think would make it into my thesis at all. However, as time went on, some memories felt too “significant” to leave out. It is worth noting here that visibly “writing notes” does do helpful work in that it makes it more clear to others (and oneself) when the project is “happening.” When the project, like mine, is always simultaneously “happening” and “not happening” I often felt a sense of unease, as I felt like a

“walking recording device” (Okely, 2012). For this reason, I had to make it clear to people what it is that I document in my thesis. As is often the case with ethnographic research, ethics and consent were necessarily dynamic processes throughout the research. Moreover, as Springwood and Kings explain (2001) “getting along,” with those whose world you share is a big part of ethnography, and hence why building trust takes place in a more “incremental” manner which is disrupted by the conventional “legalistic” approach which involves signed consent forms (Boulton & Parker, 2007: 2191). While consent was gained verbally when conducting interviews and inviting people to share accounts, I also sometimes had to gain consent by asking for permission to share memories of shared experiences, or “natural conversations” that I had with people. Due to the lack of clear distinction between my personal life and research project, I would have to make it clear if I wanted to “use” something for my thesis.

I had to manage my ethical commitments when including my memories of shared experiences. For example, I carried out reflective “discussions” with those who were present at an eviction that I experienced. After an informal conversation, some people sent me written accounts, while others recorded voice messages. Other times, I simply refer to everyday experiences broadly in a way that no specific people are present, yet many people will (I hope) relate to what is being shared. When referring to “natural conversations,” sometimes someone would say something “in situ” and I would ask in that moment if I could write it down to use it for my thesis. Other times, people would tell me to record something for my thesis if they felt that it was important to document. Furthermore, while writing or thinking about my thesis, I would sometimes remember something that somebody said and contact them to ask if I could “use it,” while also checking my understanding of it and explain how it was being used. Often people were interested, and this would lead to an informal discussion about the meaning of what was said and its relevance.

Interestingly, I never had anyone object to me using a quote from them. In all cases, pseudonyms were used, and locations were concealed unless participants decided otherwise, and their transparency did not jeopardise the anonymity of others. Indeed, “masking and disclosure need not be an all or non-proposition” (Jerolmack & Murphy, 2019: 818). While some participants may wish to be credited for some of their contributions, sometimes they wanted to contribute something anonymously. Others at times wished to make what they felt were controversial statements about their way

of life that they do not want other people to know came from them. For many people in vehicle dwelling circles, anonymity is always valued and this needed to be respected.

As already mentioned, I would check my understandings of quotes and accounts used where possible. I tried to carry out a “research-collaboration approach” (Mischler, 1986) whereby I share my work with wiling participants, allowing people to see how the work is manifesting and to have a final say on what is put forward in the final thesis. However, I found that most participants did not actually want to read my thesis in practice, and often would state that they trusted me and my interpretations. However, I still wanted this to be an option: it is arguably essential that participants have primary access to findings, before it is distributed to other scholars if we are to decolonise our research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). I would also often informally speak with people about the direction of my thesis, and key themes that were coming up and being explored. This effectively gave others more control over the content of findings, and the analysis process as people shed light on different ways of looking at findings, showed their support, or provided constructive criticism.

While this was more reassuring and empowering for my participants, this made writing up difficult at times when I encountered inevitable differences in opinion. However, it was also incredibly valuable, as sometimes people pointed out to me important instances whereby some themes were better left “unpublished” or “unsaid.” To provide another example, sometimes participants would be critical of seemingly “rose-tinted” perspectives, which allowed me to keep a more balanced voice in my writing. Others would draw attention to other things that I may have missed or failed to go into enough detail on, effectively steering my work in unexpected ways. Sometimes people had very big, radical ideas, which would need to be explored in another thesis (or even several). However, this was not evenly distributed: some people were actively involved than others. Some people I had spent more time with as friends, so I naturally had more conversations with them giving them more opportunities to shape my work. Therefore, the argument that friendship in the field can help dismantle hierarchy (Tillman- Healy, 2005) is perhaps not always true.

Much like my experience when doing previous research with vehicle dwellers, I found that some people were more drawn to get involved with my project than others. While some people showed interest in my research, many people just wanted “to get on

with their lives" and did not respond to invitations to participate. I had to be respectful and aware of this. On the other hand, some were keen to be involved but were prevented by lockdown measures, or we simply just never found a time outside of these measures amidst our (once again) busy lives. However, as mentioned previously, many people who did not participate in this way contributed to the project by inspiring me through the things that they did and the things that they said. That is to say that some individuals had a great deal of influence on my own experiences and interpretations – *and who I am becoming* - without being necessarily "quoted" or actively engaged in the research in the same way. For example, all of the themes I decided to explore and document in more depth were uncovered through living my life and being inspired by what me and others around me were "doing." For example, I was inspired by people around me to work with recycled materials more when I was offered an array of materials that I needed for my conversion, all of which had been gathered and stored by people around me. I then decided to explore this further, which is documented in Chapter Three.

It could be said that in a sense a lot of the data in this thesis can be considered to be "natural." However, it is worth noting that when we record any social interaction, whether it be making fieldnotes or transcribing recorded interviews, this process is inherently *subjective* and *selective* (Jenks, 2018). In this sense, one could argue that the researcher always "contaminates" their research. But must we delve into this "pure empiricism" (Okely, 2012)? Arguments have been made elsewhere that promote the collection of "naturalistic" data – whereby the researcher does not alter the setting with a known presence (see Potter & Shaw, 2018). However, others have expressed concern that this puts us in danger of "endorsing a particular kind of naturalism" (Atkinson & Coffey, 2001: 10) which, like "authenticity," is a perhaps a problematic concept when treated as more than a social construct (Vannini & Williams, 2016). The problems with ideas about "authenticity" in relation to Vehicle Dweller and New Traveller identity will be discussed in depth in Chapter One. It also ignores the amount of interpretation that occurs out during later stages of the research and the level involvement with have with our environments (Ingold, 2000).

Exploring Entanglements of Humans and Non-Humans: Permaculture and Ecological Oikonomia

In the literature review, it was shown how it has been claimed that one of the key features of New Traveller culture is "living more closely to nature" (The Children's Society, 2010). Of course, there is arguably a need for new language here: for being "closer to nature" implies a separation of humans and non-humans, Ingold scrutinises theories based on "cultural representations" that ignore the *involvement* we have with various "human and non-human components" within our environments (Ingold, 2000: 39). He explains how *enmeshed* ideas and physical things are, contesting conceptualisations of separation and categorical distinctions implied by some theorists (Ingold, 2005). It is encouraged that accounts presented in this thesis – particularly in Chapters Three, Four and Five - can be understood as various *entanglements* of humans and non-humans, that reveal continual processes of mutual constitution: adopting "a truly *ecological* perspective" (Ingold, 2000: 27; emphasis in original text).

Following the footsteps of academics working in the realms of squatting literature (Cattaneo and Gavalda, 2010), and as elaborated in the literature review, I have considered the relevance of *permaculture* and *oikonomia* to explore this further*,* considering how such concepts might be aided (and aid) ethnographic research and the "return to anthropology" that Ingold describes. It was also shown that both permaculture and contemporary uses of "oikonomia" refer to relations between various human and non-human actors. In this thesis I offer similar examples of "solution focused" possibilities (Lockyer & Veteto, 2013:1-2) through sharing descriptions of the alternative ways that people I have lived with organise their everyday lives, from the ways in which we power our homes, find materials to build, feed and water ourselves. Therefore, the role of non-humans is seen as very much a part of the achievement of everyday life, and a particular kind of everyday life. However, Ingold (2010) asserts that non-humans do not have "agency" in the sense that they have "internal animating principles" (2010: 7). Instead, non-humans mix and mingle with other non-humans and humans, with various reactions and interactions contributing to a process of formation, which he likens to alchemy or cooking. This is the conceptualisation that this thesis adopts.

Moreover, it has been shown that permaculture can provide anthropologists with a *methodology* to challenge dominant paradigms (Lockey & Veteto, 2013). Permaculture involves observing natural symbiotic relationships between plants and animals, allowing humans to intentionally foster these relationships to maintain and create healthy eco systems. The entanglements described in this thesis often represent a system of ideas that works in favour (intentional or not) of the long-term health of humans and nonhumans: which for Centemeri (2020), is a key feature of permaculture. Therefore, this thesis also contributes to an ongoing project in the social sciences to decentre humans from ideas about social action, through recognising other social actors (Pickering, 2008) that we do not consider to be "human." It can be said that moving away from humanist ideals and assumptions is also another *nomadic* practice (Wakkary, 2020). To do this, I have recorded observations of non-human relations, noting the interactions of a variety of plants, animals and humans. I would often discuss these relationships with people I lived with, who could often tell me about patterns of activity that they had noticed over a longer period of time. This represented yet another area of expertise that I learned from people I lived with, as they showed me various animals and plants that they had their own relationships with. For example, I was shown the living spaces of various animals such as lizards and stray cats and the passing by of otters in the streams. I learned about the seasonal visits of glow worms and where to find (and how to identify) edible forage. So much of what I have learned cannot be accommodated by this thesis alone.

It could also be said that a process of "deterritorialization" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) is needed whereby we dismantle ideas about non-human and human dualisms, in order to recognise the mutual becomings of humans and non-humans (Spannring, 2019). Moreover, this involves manifesting possibilities whereby we *liberate* nonhumans, rather than simply use them and coerce them into an anthropocentric social order. Instead, it is argued, we recognise their intrinsic value. Here we also see compatibility with a Green Anarchist disposition, which gives value to nonhumans and aims to dismantle hierarchy between humans and non-humans. For this reason, when discussing the deconstruction of waste, I note my observations of the impacts of human activity appears to have had on an array of non-humans. Moreover, research that pays attention to non-humans in this way also does work in transcending disciplines, as knowledge is increasingly drawn from the natural

sciences (Maller, 2018). In Chapter Four, I have called upon sources from the natural sciences when relevant having made observations in the field or learned from the local knowledge of others, before looking for scientific backing. For example, this involved me investigating the role of horse grazing on grassland habitats.

Of course, it was not only animals and plants that constituted our everyday life and the ongoing process of education that I attempt to share in this thesis. I also give examples of ways in which we continually respond to a variety of weather conditions, having immediate implications for how we go about our day in the present, or prepare ourselves for the future. We also spent a great deal of time with *materials*. In order to include non-humans – such as material resources - I share my fieldnotes in the findings chapters that illustrate everyday experiences of managing resources, which can at times be scarce and at others abundant. Moreover, I also invited participants to reflect on their relationships with materials too, which I will go on to elaborate now.

Engaging with Materials: "The Generation of Words from Things"

Following Ingold's (2007) criticism of "materiality" in the social sciences, which he argues rarely actually engages with materials and their intricate, changing properties. He asks that we "take materials seriously," moving away from abstract philosophy that has dominated discussions about "materiality," towards directly working with materials, and learning from craftspeople who work directly with materials (and know a great deal about them). In Chapter Two, I share descriptions of the close attention I have paid to the properties of materials that I have engaged with first hand (often with the assistance of others with a better understanding of such materials). I describe the ways in which my growing awareness of the properties of materials shaped my decisions when building and maintaining my home, as well as everyday rhythms of life. Or in other words, the ways in which things "mix and mingle" (Ingold, 2010: 5).

I note the mutability of my home, sharing my observations of "flows of materials" as my home continually changes in response to the "gathering together of different threads of life" (Ingold, 2010: 4). Ingold (2010) also explains that a house is never finished" as it is continually shaped (while simultaneously shaping) the various human and non-human actors that gather together. As a moveable dwelling which is subject to different forces than a relatively static dwelling, I take note of the influence

of mobility on materials, which react in different ways in response to movement. I also document the upkeep and maintenance of my home, paying attention to the various properties of various materials that are continually interacting and reacting: from managing processes of rust and decay, to the expanding and contracting of materials in different temperatures. In this respect, like Ingold (2007, 2010), I conceptualise these non-human actors as *things* rather than objects: the former being a gathering of mutable flows of transformation, rather than exclusionary, finished states that are implied by the latter.

Indeed: “as inhabitants we experience the house not as an object, but as a thing” (Ingold, 2010: 5). In this respect, materials are (like people) considered to be processes, that “cannot always be captured and contained” (Pollard, 2004: 60 in Ingold, 2010: 8) and the properties of materials are both processual and relational, rather than fixed attributes (Ingold, 2007). Therefore, my experience of building was not so much a case of me imposing form onto matter, but a case of bringing together different materials, which then needed to continuously be tended to as these materials interacted with one another and the outside world. It is worth noting, that more recently it has been argued that sometimes we may wish to pay attention to the durability and solidity of things. While everything might be a process and unfixed, sometimes it is worth paying attention to a particular phase of these processes. In which case, this conception may not be suitable for all research projects that are interested in materials (Woodward, 2019: 15). However, this concept of mutable “things” as an alternative to static “objects” is found to be useful when considering processes of “waste” and deconstructing waste. This will be elaborated in Chapter Three, where I share examples of other people’s direct work with materials. In Chapter Five, I describe the intermingling of humans with an array of non-humans as they navigate their way through life on the road.

As previously mentioned, my decision to shift my attention to entanglements in this way came to the project via a process of acknowledging activity in my everyday life, an awareness magnified by the conditions of a global pandemic. While living in Mid Wales during lockdown, I noticed that people around me spent much time building and creating various “things” – from human dwellings to art sculptures – through recycling and assembling an array of things that were available to them. Collecting and storing materials for future projects was a common practice, involving a different approach to discarded “things” that others have discarded having devalued them. It

could be said that I then had somewhat of an “epiphany” (Ellis et al, 2011) and started thinking about how I had observed this approach to building and making among many vehicle dwellers in the past but had never noticed it as a prominent theme. I spoke with others about this informally, and it was agreed that this was an interesting common practice among many different vehicle dwelling and Traveller communities. This became an entire chapter (Chapter Three) exploring processes of “tatting” and “bodging” (recycling and repair practices), as people made do with the resources they had available to them, effectively operating a bottom-up waste management service to society. Moreover, this illuminated a way of relating to and working with materials, which I felt there was a lot for other people in the world to learn from, especially in an era of climate crises and poor waste management.

In accordance with social distancing measures at the time, I sent out an invitation via email or WhatsApp, asking other participants in the community beyond our household to present their own accounts of their creations that were put together using recycled – or salvaged – materials. Therefore, this was a kind of “object elicitation” (Iltanen & Topo, 2015) exercise, but one that involved participants going away and finding a particular kind of object that they had assembled through a particular method or way of creating, which is explored in Chapter Three. Therefore, the *things* that were chosen by participants had been found having been given a broad sense of criteria, which had been formulated through my observations, as well as informal discussions with others about these observations. This may appear to be a rather deductive task, and to some extent it is. However, it was inspired by inductive, lived experience. It could be said that I led those who participated to “develop awareness,” having been led to develop an awareness of such practices myself (Ingold, 2000: 37). This shows how this activity was again, a product of mutually shaping relationships, or correspondence.

I allowed my participants to submit their accounts using a variety of mediums. Four people sent photos via WhatsApp, using their phones to send photos and writing out descriptions or record voice messages to go with the photos. My partner who I lived with showed me his own home in person, talking me through each part of the structure. This particular example operated more like an “embodied experience,” similar to a “sit down” interview and a “go along” interview, as my partner showed me around his home, telling stories about different features about his home and the processes and stories behind them (May & Lewis, 2019: 139). It was also more

dialectical: I was able to ask questions about features of the dwelling in a way that I was not able to for the other elicitations. If we have not been working through a pandemic, I would have offered this in person method to everyone.

It is worth noting here that as a result, there were significant differences between these object elicitations: for photos (and videos and voice messages) are also material culture, with their own characteristics and context that shaped the process of reflection (Woodward, 2020: 49-50). For example, the person who made videos effectively engaged in a process of reflection that was more dynamic, as she walked around her home becoming inspired by more things to document and talk about. She also used voice messages, which meant that her process of reflection involved pressing a button and talking into a device. Another participant took photos of different things (providing a single photo of each object) to describe, and wrote out her reflections; therefore, constituting a different way of reflecting and sharing reflections. This contrasted to another participant who had multiple photos of one object, who effectively went into more detail on different parts of an object, sharing narratives behind different parts of this object. Therefore, everyone engaged with different mediums of sharing and reflection which resulted in different reflections.

As a result, I have documented an array of “things” from 7 people who assembled these “things,” accompanied with details of the use and source of material. Interestingly, the task evoked different narratives and emotions, which varied from person to person. Indeed, object elicitations can effectively “draw out” narratives – or “unexpected talk” (Rose, 2016) - that may not have emerged otherwise (Woodward, 2020). Furthermore, this way of conducting research effectively shifted power relations, giving participants more freedom to direct interviews (Liebenburg, 2009). For example, I found that one participant talked a lot about non-human actors when sharing videos and photos of her projects. She shared a variety of human dwellings that had been adapted for the use of non-humans. She also explained how she managed conflict between certain non-humans, as some were kept in and some were kept out. She also explained how the unwelcome visits of some non-humans had led to dwellings being “downgraded” from human dwelling to non-human dwellings. This led me to begin thinking about the impact of these practices on nonhumans: from lizards hiding under corrugated metal being stored for building practices, to the creatures that benefitted from a cleaner environment as waste was deconstructed. Therefore, this interview inspired me to look further into the

entanglement of non-humans, which had a significant influence on the theoretical framework of my thesis.

Furthermore, the task also evoked various emotional responses. I found that this task evoked enthusiasm among most of those who participated and contributed their own examples. However, others found it difficult, for it was such a “normal” practice for them and explained that they were struggling to know where to start. Interestingly, two of the people who expressed this difficulty did not send accounts.

“Well for me it’s... everything! I’ve just always done (used recycled materials) that.

And none of it’s finished anyway.” - John’s response to being asked to document his recycling practices for this chapter

Indeed, it was certainly a case for some people that they were encountering difficulty when “making the familiar strange” (Mannay, 2010). In this respect, for them it was an incredibly mundane “normal” thing for them to do, which made the task a bit confusing and overwhelming as they felt bombarded with potential examples. Another interesting occurrence was that one person felt that their examples did not “look recycled enough.” That is to say, they had done such a good job of making them look “as good as new,” and did not contribute these examples because they were concerned that they were not suitable. However, I think that they would have engaged a lot more *in person.* Indeed, while some people were comfortable working with a phone or computer to complete this task, others were less confident with writing and talking in this way. Therefore, perhaps some of the people I invited to participate were excluded because it was being done digitally. This was a shame, because I know that these people had some incredibly good examples. In future, I would offer participants the opportunity to carry out this task either in person or digitally to enable more participation. However, it is also important to note, that it is often the case that trying to talk about “things” may be frustrating or difficult, as many of us have inherently non-verbal connections to them and finding the right words can therefore be difficult (Woodward, 2020). Interestingly, as I learned to build myself, I realised how bad I was at describing materials, tools and techniques. While I would understand what these things were, I often struggled to explain to people what I meant and would resort to hand gestures or demonstrating what I meant. Others who were more used to working with and talking about materials would sometimes find this funny, and then tell me the words I could use to say what I was trying to say.

Moreover, despite some words being difficult to find, many emerged from this activity. For example, it appeared that through a reflection on building and the materials used in these processes, participants would sometimes start talking about the restrictive nature of regulation, or the political implications of what they were doing. In this respect, we were not just learning about the materials, we were also using them to learn (Woodward, 2020); in this case, about abstract features of entanglements too. When looking into local processes of building, the nature of wider policy and regulation often has a direct impact, whether that be a case of adhering to MOT standards and other health and safety regulations, or simply how we go about curating the materials we need to build.

"*"I built the frame out of wood that are off cuts from the wood yard, which I got for twenty quid at the time. The "imperfect" bits that weren't straight. Unfortunately, now those bits just get thrown straight into a chipper and sent to a power station where it is burnt for power."* – Jake, object elicitation participant in Mid Wales

"We're not allowed to take things from skips and tips in the same way anymore."

- Nancy, object elicitation participant in Mid Wales

Here we can consider arguments from Hornborg (2018) that emerged in response to Ingold: we arguably must not lose sight of the importance of the influence that the logic of abstract economic and social systems has on such entanglements. Hornborg reminds us that it is Ingold's concern with dominating (seemingly separate) abstract concepts – and what they might be doing - that has inspired much of his work. He contends that, while Ingold does important work in highlighting a concerning lack of engagement with the world that is right in front of us, ideas about grand structures do continue to have a tremendous (largely negative) impact on the world that Ingold wishes to draw our attention to. Indeed, paying attention to the ways in which these structures interact with local processes arguably represents a "call to action," as restrictive (and arguably harmful) policies and procedures inhibit alternative ways of relating to materials. It is important to recognise the ways in which intermingling flows of energy and materials generate particular forms of social organisation (and vice versa).

Furthermore, people often referred to financial incentives when describing their choices in materials for dwellings. Indeed, my partner instinctively broke down the cost of his dwelling in order to demonstrate why he had built his mobile cabin the way

that he had. I found myself doing the same when I first began documenting my experiences of moving into a vehicle. I often notice that people who have built their vehicles out of recycled materials will cite the affordability of their dwelling. Moreover, two people I spoke with showed me how their recycling practices had become forms of employment. For example, Liz made jewellery and other silver items from old cutlery which she sold in a shop in town. Others explained how it was a matter of necessity, as buying new items was not always a possibility. I also noted the ways in which we constitute "things" via our own *ethical intentions* (Alaimo, 2016). In this respect, these entanglements reflected value systems. For example, Jane made art sculptures with recycled materials for various exhibitions and community projects, where her intentions were to share this different way of working with materials which stemmed from her environmentalist values. Moreover, Nancy explained how we "owed it to the planet" when talking about her own projects in one of her video recordings.

Additionally, some participants shared narratives that told stories through their materials, as they reflected on their relationships and engagements with *other people* that were involved in the lives of the materials there were paying close attention to. For example, in Chapter Three, Colin explains how he took on discarded items from people he worked with in the past. In this respect, it can be said that we often see ourselves in things, and things can externalise our relationships with other people (Miller, 1987; Woodward, 2020). I found myself reflecting on my own vehicle conversion in a similar manner. As shown in Chapter Two, I note all of the people who were involved in the making of my home: from getting advice from passersby, to being given washing machine windows by neighbours. People who gifted me materials were also pleased to see how they were used and given a new life that was still somewhat connected to their own, as they would see them when visiting me. Some people advised me on how to use the materials, while others were interested to see the ideas I had come up with through using their materials. Interestingly, through the time that I spend with people who think about materials in various ways, as well as the materials themselves, who like people, act in react in various ways too, the more that my knowledge – and building designs - *continue to change.*

To return to the task that involved participants being asked to gather evidence of a specific set of practices, it can be said that this illustrated the ways in which they were entangled with various non-humans, "abstract" structures (such as a lack of

access to financial resources) and ethical commitments. it could be said that this research method was successful in that it invited participants to weave powerful narratives that contested negative stereotypes; by bringing attention to the innovative practices, they were carrying out on an everyday basis. Indeed, as a largely stigmatised group who – as shown in the literature review – have often portrayed as

"messy" and disorderly, it felt particularly important to demonstrate positive attributes that countered this. Interestingly, one participant explained how this activity had made her realise "how moveable everything was" and considered starting a blog about her projects in future. Other scholars have documented events whereby their participants appear to have "reflected" and effectively changed their perspectives in interviews (Chen, 2011). However, ideas about changing *perspectives* may be problematic, and the process of "reflecting" could also be equally performative. It has also been warned that we must not "overemphasise our potential to change" (Atkinson & Coffey, 2001: 13). Indeed, one would not wish to raise the hopes of their participants in order to disappoint them later, and perhaps even jeopardise future research potential (or, indeed *valuable friendships*). One could also argue that these accounts could represent a less sincere performance of an "ethical" identity. As an ethnographer keen to facilitate the performance of virtuous identities to combat stigmatised identities, this was not a problem. The power of performance of identity as a case of itself shows new, virtuous ways of being in the world that allow wellbeing to flourish. Thus, constituting a practice of prefigurative politics.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have also illustrated how my primary way of working (Ingold, 2014) - "participant observation" - has served as a tool to build a description, or an ethnography, which has followed a life lived with others. That is to say, that I have documented a process of *education* that I have *undergone* (and continue to undergo). It is this process which is shown through – and underlies – what is presented as findings in this thesis. I then moved on to express the multi-sited, *nomadic* nature of this project, which is expressed implicitly through my evolving positionality before having moved on to a more explicit description of the nomadic nature of a multi-sited ethnography which brings into question the nature of "the field" itself. I engaged in nomadic practice through moving beyond boundaries by engaging with an array of non-humans. I engaged in a kind of "apprenticeship," or a

process of learning a way of being in the world with non-humans, and also used object elicitation with participants to generate narratives of other examples of humans intermingling with non-humans.

Finally, as a researcher increasingly interested in permaculture and oikonoimic arrangements, methods that captured the relations between people, non-humans, and abstract structures were apt. In response to my additional interest in prefigurative politics, it was important to note how ethical intentions appeared to be sought to be “fulfilled” in some way, through the ways in which we might consciously entangle ourselves with other humans and non-humans. Furthermore, while contesting harmful stereotypes, we can begin to transcend the “colonial abyss” (Savransky, 2017) by taking seriously forms of education beyond the university, treating others as experts, and by breaking down boundaries between social actors by recognising their entanglement.

New Travellers and Vehicle Dwellers: “Social Groups” or a Meshwork of Lines with an “Anarchist Spirit”?

Introduction

This chapter will serve as a useful introduction in order to establish who it is that I have learned so much from. Here I highlight some notable sources of differentiation between people that I have spent time with. In fact, it will be shown that in some respects it is difficult to group or categorise these individuals. These differences have (at times) been found to be problematic for some campaign groups, as social movements can become hindered by debates over authenticity and group membership. Therefore, it is an arduous but particularly important task.

A review of historical literature implies that people are (or have been) living in vehicles for various cultural and economic reasons, and in different ways in the UK at various points in time. There also appears to have been a continuation of historical trends of different people moving into vehicles in the UK as a way of responding to dissatisfaction with social structures, as a matter for survival and/or simply as a way of living that is considered to those individuals to be a “better life.” Concepts regarding social movements described in the literature will be revisited again, with the idea of prefigurative action being particularly relevant to this thesis. Moreover, despite encountering much diversity, there does appear to be a sense of a shared culture and history among many of those identifying as “New Travellers,” which could potentially signal a case for recognition as an ethnic group, which is need of being developed beyond this thesis.

So, who are New Travellers? What connection do they have to contemporary “Vehicle Dwellers,” “Vanlifers” or “Vandwellers” if they have any at all? Two decades ago, Clark (1997: 128) presented a quote from a New Traveller, who asserted that it is impossible to put all New Travellers “in a box” and that any definition must remain “flexible and broad” if it is to be meaningful at all. In fact, Clark rejects any attempt to offer a fixed definition for this group. Similarly, Hetherington (2000: 95) claims that New Travellers are not (and never were) “a distinct group with a single identity.” Moreover, Martin (1998; 2000; 2002) explains how different social and economic contexts shaped different waves (or generations) of Travellers, which generated diversity through context. More broadly, Lloyd (1993) states that it is impossible to determine the limits of the definition of “Traveller.” In support of this (limited)

scholarship, it is shown here that much diversity, and even disagreement, can be said to exist amongst the people involved (or within the scope of) the interests underlying this study. As a result, it can be said that a typical "scientific impulse" (Kuhn, 2010: 302) to identify a rigid, unified "social group" that can be identified and isolated has been an difficult task, perhaps signalling a kind of "Anarchist Spirit" that is antithetical of any kind of rigid classification. Instead, it is explored how Ingold's concept of "meshwork" might be more helpful for us to understand the nature of the interweaving of people involved in this thesis.

Who are "New Travellers"?

One of the first questions I asked people when starting my in-situ interviews in 2019 was "do you consider yourself to be a New Traveller?" Having already noticed some huge differences in people's feelings towards self-identification in my previous research (Craft, 2018, Smart Communities, 2020), as well as my own personal life, it felt appropriate to ask this to avoid assumptions. I was also encountering trouble identifying the appropriate language to discuss the "social group" of interest. Through doing this, I uncovered some people's feelings and interpretations of identity categories. In the earlier stages of data collection, I found that in response to this controversy surrounding labels, my questioning quickly evolved from asking people if they identified as a New Traveller, to asking what they would define a New Traveller as.

Some participants expressed a distaste towards labels in general, while others were uncomfortable with being called a "New Traveller" or "New Age Traveller" specifically. I found that some people rejected these labels. For example, two interview participants felt that these were "imposed" labels, explaining how the term had emerged as a result of media reporting whereby their identity was forged by journalists (who often discredited them). Media discourses will be considered again later. Other participants claimed that "New" was a useful signifier to distinguish those who had taken to the road and *become* Travellers as adults, rather than being born on the road. Some people emphasised the influence of *choice* here, which they felt was an essential component of "New" Traveller identity.

"With New Travellers … a large part of us have chosen to go on the road, we haven't been born on the road…. Although some of us have now…so I think it's really hard to

define. It's very much a label you either attach to yourself or you don't" - Interview with Derek, Traveller on a tolerated site in the Forest of Dean (2019)

I remember these tinkers one day coming and saying you are "new AGE" travellers then (emphasises, uses tone to sound mysterious). And we were like, well, meaning our parents weren't on the road… so I suppose it is quite a useful category, but does it matter? - Interview with Kelly, Traveller on tolerated park up in West Wales (2019)

Despite this, I found that a lot of people moving into vehicles as adults today felt uncomfortable identifying as "New" Travellers (or "Travellers") at all. It was notable that some people who had begun living in vehicles in recent years were concerned about identifying with an established ethnic or cultural group that they did not feel entitled to self-identify as; often feeling directly excluded from identifying this way and concerned about accusations of cultural appropriation. Interestingly, in the Glastonbury survey (Smart Communities, 2020), when asked about their ethnicity, just over 25% of respondents claimed to identify as a kind of Gypsy or Traveller, while the majority identified themselves as being "White British." This implied that many contemporary vehicle dwellers do not identify themselves as "Travellers" at all.

There has been a significant degree of debate in campaigning circles about who was entitled to claim to be an "authentic" New Traveller (or "Traveller"). I noticed this in contemporary campaigns and have been told by older campaigners that this had been a reoccurring debate for decades. Therefore, it could be said that New Traveller identity is somewhat controversial. Moreover, some people that I spoke with felt that it was necessary to drop the adjective "New," claiming that "we are all Travellers," claiming (to some extent) some affiliation with traditional Gypsies and Travellers, or a continuation of historical nomadism. Two people explained how the term "new" had negative connotations and created unnecessary divides between nomads that undermined people moving into nomadism. This could perhaps be a result of a dogma of tradition, which gives more long-standing traditions and identities a greater status. However, as mentioned by Derek, many people who took to the road as adults have had children who have grown up living this way, and many of these children proudly identify as "New Travellers."

Media Discourses: Changing Subjectivities

Do you consider yourself to be a New Traveller? Researcher

New as in… I just erm… Kelly

You're a bit of an old traveller really aren't you, mum? (laughs) Lucy

I'm a middle-aged traveller! A New Age Traveller… As in, do I identify with the tag "New Age Traveller?" I think it's a bit of a media thing. Kelly

- Interview with Kelly (mother) and Lucy (daughter), Travellers on a tolerated park up in West Wales (2019)

So far it has been shown that the term "New Traveller" can arouse disagreement, being embraced by some and rejected or avoided by others. There has been acknowledgement that many identity categories associated with this group stem from media usage. This includes "New Age Travellers" and other popular labels. For example, Giles told me how "The Peace Convoy" was an "*incorrect name that stuck*" after a group of protesters living in vehicles were labelled as such by the Daily Mail. This contrasts with Martin (1998)'s account, which explains that the "Peace Convoy" and "New Age Traveller" tags were assigned by the group themselves. Regardless of its origin, I know several people who identify others (or have been identified themselves) as belonging to "The Peace Convoy." Therefore, it appears that some identity categories may have been embraced, even if they were originally imposed by media outlets. There seems to be disagreement about the origins (and suitability) of labels assigned to this group. However, while there are many people that still identify as New Travellers today, this label appears to be disappearing from contemporary media discourses and is often referred to as a particular moment in history. Furthermore, the public outrage associated with New Travellers in the past (particularly during the 1980s and 1990s) appears remarkably different to the tales being told about contemporary vehicle dwellers. Indeed, these people, especially those referred to as "vanlifers" in the UK, are often being framed by contemporary media discourses very differently.

For example, during an eruption of news-reporting that commenced around the end of the summer of 2017, identified a vandwelling "problem" growing in Bristol (e.g. Burrows, 2017; Davis, 2017a; 2017b; 2017c; Matthews, 2017). However, the

“problem” being constructed often appears to be the escalating housing crisis in Bristol, rather than the people living in vehicles themselves. While this is less prominent in the news today, we have seen a continuation of this narrative more recently (e.g. Pritchard-Jones, 2022). We have also seen similar cases of reporting in other parts of the UK (e.g. Jones, 2019; Hattenstone & Lavelle, 2021) as well as other parts of the world (e.g. Jagneux, 2016; Howard, 2021; Nguyen et al, 2022). It could be said that contemporary “vandwellers” and “van lifers” are often being constructed as a “symptom” of a problem, rather than a cause or problem themselves. Indeed, “vanlifers” are often portrayed as having “respectable” jobs while living in increasingly unaffordable parts of the world, where they have adopted vehicle dwelling as a “life hack” in order to survive in the rat race rhythm (which a lot of New Travellers and other vehicle dwellers I have spoken to explain that they have sought to escape).

However, some reports have resorted to inflammatory reporting, constructing these people as a problem or an “issue” (Armstrong, 2022), usually referring to toileting habits as a cause for concern (e.g. Cambridge, 2017; Armstrong, 2022). Despite this, overall these discourses contrast greatly with the popular narratives surrounding the “messy” or “dirty” New Travellers in the 1980s and 1990s, who were spoken of as those who brought disorder to the idyllic countryside through their alternative spatial practices (Halfacree, 1996; Hetherington, 2000) while “sponging off” the law-abiding majority (Clark, 1997). Instead, we have largely seen stories about the “normal” people who have been “forced” into this lifestyle in the face of a severe housing crisis. In some ways, these narratives correspond more with the narrative offered by Martin (1998; 2000; 2002): highlighting broader precarious economic forces pushing people into new living arrangements. It could be said that contemporary vehicle dwellers, much like previous waves of vehicle dwelling folk, are often being pushed into their way of life as a result of various social and economic forces whereby vehicle dwelling is a matter of economic necessity. However, in some respects those who do so today are arguably being socially legitimised by the housing crisis, much like squatters’ movements in Spain (Cattaneo, 2008), which differs to the treatment of New Travellers that were pushed onto the road in the past.

Born on the Road: A Case for Ethnic Identity?

It is important to acknowledge that there have now been people being born into this way of life for decades. Many of these people live among people who have moved into the way of life as adults, and some remain living as family units or with friends that they grew up on the road with. Now that multiple generations have been born into this way of life, this could have implications for a *claim to ethnicity*, which would offer these people more legal protection under the Equality Act 2010. This is of growing importance as new laws pose a serious threat to the Traveller way of life, meaning that any protective legislation is now needed more than before. Many New Travellers do appear to have a case if one is to consider the parameters – as defined by Lord Fraser in 1983 - used by Colin Clark (2006: 46-57) when arguing for the ethnic status of Scottish Travellers:

"*For a group to constitute an ethnic group in the sense of the 1976 Act, it must, in my opinion, regard itself, and be regarded by others, as a distinct community by virtue of certain characteristics. Some of these characteristics are essential; others are not essential but one or more of them will commonly be found and will help to distinguish the group from the surrounding community. The conditions which appear to me to be essential are these:*

a long-shared history, of which the group is conscious as distinguishing it from other groups, and the memory of which it keeps alive;

a cultural tradition of its own, including family and social customs and manners, often but not necessarily associated with religious observance."

Indeed, it can be said that many New Travellers that I have met certainly do have a shared history, for some this goes back as far as 60 years when their ancestors joined the first "wave" of New Travellers in the post-war era. Many New Travellers I have met also claim to be related to traditional Gypsies, Travellers and other nomads. While there are significant differences between different Travellers, many share the cultural tradition of nomadism, living in vehicles, and also working and/or gathering at festivals.

Of course, it is worth reasserting that we must not use arguments for ethnicity in order to create a hierarchy of nomadic people creating divisions between nomads that render some nomads more "deserving" of protective rights than others (e.g.

Okely, 1983; Sandland, 1993, Clark & Dearling, 2000). Moreover, it is agreeable that perhaps the pursuit of equality is best achieved by challenging dominant ideas about private and public space (McVeigh, 1997) that appear to render all nomads and Vehicle Dwellers deviant in the eyes of society (Clark and Dearling, 2000: 2). This approach would encompass all of those people who are, to varying degrees, included in this thesis. It is also perhaps more useful to consider the need to protect ethnicity *in combination with* nomadism, representing a more inclusive, wide-ranging approach (Clark and Dearling, 2000). However, this fails to capture those who have effectively ended up living quite sedentary lives in moveable dwellings.

The Relevance of Nomadism: Different Levels of Mobility and "Orbiting"

"I consider myself to be a Traveller because I travel around for work constantly"

Interview with Alex, a Travelling Showman on a tolerated site in Forest of Dean (2019)

"So, to me, even though it's an old word, Travellers, are like people in vehicles who bimbled about in their vehicles."

An interview with John, a Traveller on the roadside in Glastonbury (2020)

This takes us to another point of variation and controversy: the notion of Traveller identity being inherently tied to mobility. Contemporary categories such as "vehicle dweller" and "van dweller" do not appear to have the same connotation of movement that "Traveller" does. Over the years, I have spent time with a lot of different people living in vehicles on the road and on sites. I observed different levels of mobility in all places. Of course, it is worth noting that much of my research took place during a period of isolation which led to a lot of people being more static than usual. However, outside of this period, some people were still more static than others for different reasons.

Interestingly, those who I met while parking on the roadside did not necessarily move more than those that I met living on site. Indeed, some people used sites as a place to rest before moving on again and moved quite frequently. Some people might move between their private land and other reliable locations, using the former as a base for storage, growing food and keeping animals. For example, my partner and I would move between our base in Mid Wales and a reliable roadside location in England to sell carvings (where the local authorities were welcoming and there was a good flow

of customers). As a result, we only spent time moving between these two locations, and rarely went anywhere else. One Traveller I spoke to on a bridleway in the South of England in 2019 spoke of "*orbitals*" who were people who lived in vehicles and "orbited" around a certain locality, rather than using their vehicles to travel. He did not consider "orbitals" to be "real travellers." Others had similar sentiments:

"Loads of people who get classed as travellers have been in the same layby for 20 years". Kelly

"They're not actually travelling are they, they're pretty static (laughs)" Lucy (interrupts) *"lots of people who don't live in a van, but they travel all over the world on planes and stuff…but they're not travellers… so what's it's all about? Some people travel to Paris to get to bloody work."* Kelly

Interview with Kelly (Mother) and Lucy (Daughter), Travellers on a tolerated park up in West Wales (2019)

I have also met people living in vehicles who have stayed parked in the same roadside location for long periods of time. A few vehicle dwellers I have met have managed to stay in the same roadside location for over a year (sometimes several years) and have become a part of the local community who welcome them there. Having reflected on my past experiences, I remember that when first visiting Bristol at the age of 21, I was intrigued to see how some of my friends were living in caravans parked outside houses, with extension cables leaving the windows of houses, into the windows of caravans. The vehicles were treated as extensions of the houses, operating as extra rooms on the roadside. This was very different to the detached life my Traveller friends had on site on the outskirts of the village I grew up in. Interestingly, an older New Traveller also told a story of a more "static" vehicle dweller that he knew in the 1980s who had a similar set up:

"Josie moved into an ambulance which was parked outside my house - she knew Steve well who lived downstairs, in fact she knew all of us pretty well as it was a bit of an anarchist/sab gang. We used to joke that she hadn't so much gone on the road as gone on the pavement as the ambulance never moved from that pavement outside our kitchen. Mark and I gradually got some furniture fitted into the truck and I started to get away and live in it"

- A written account from James, a New Traveller reflecting on his life on the road (2021)

Other people that I have met are very transient, and I was relatively mobile when able to move around after lockdown. Some people will move very frequently, sometimes every few days, rarely staying much more than a week. Interestingly, when being mobile, I found that my paths crossed with other more mobile people multiple times on various sites and roadside locations. Therefore, people do get to know each other without being fixed in one place. It is also a common practice to explore shared connections between yourself and others that you encounter when being more mobile, which can give a sense of ease and home (or security) among new people in new places. Additionally, moving around has its advantages as a way of avoiding enforcement action or hostility from members of the public (the latter often being a catalyst for the former). It is also worth noting here that, for some people, sometimes mobility would occur less, and only when a notice to leave would arrive. In this respect, mobility was often forced mobility which, even though it is often expected, is not consensual and can be stressful. (Chapter 6 delves into more detail of the impact of enforcement and forced mobility, and Chapter 5 describes the everyday experience of living on the road).

Some people go through periods of increased mobility, and then have periods of time being more static. For a lot of people, this means moving around for work in the warm, dry months (often on the festival circuit) and settling down on sites or travelling out of the UK for the winter. Sometimes people would have to stay still to work in an area, for health reasons or to allow children to attend school. Others eventually wish to stop travelling and “settle” in one place, while preserving their way of life living in vehicles or in other homes that “aren’t houses;” having made a base after spending much time on the road and/or on an array of sites across the country (and beyond). While some of these people may stay in vehicles that they had travelled with, others build cabins, benders and other forms of self-provided housing. Echoing findings from McAllister (2018), I have also found that finding land and building a cabin or similar dwelling is a popular aspiration among vehicle dwellers. One person who lived on the land I spent much time on in Mid Wales referred to the land (partly in jest) as a “retirement home” for Travellers. Some vehicle dwellers have grown up in these spaces where their parents have settled (or temporarily settled) and choose to

continue living this way in moveable dwellings on the land or have moved onto the road. Others have left vehicle dwelling behind and moved into bricks and mortar.

Protest Cycles, Networks of Resistance, and "Prefigurative Radicals"

It is important not to politicise the act of living in a vehicle or other kinds of self provided housing: people might be attracted to live this way simply due to their personal connections to friends and/or family they already have living this way. Others have mobile working patterns, for example those working at a variety of festivals, performing at events, fruit picking, or tree planting in different locations. For some people, it is the affordability of the lifestyle that allows them to carry out work that is often less reliable or profitable, such as musicians and circus performers. Or, echoing the words of a young Traveller that once explained to me, some people are perhaps "*just trying to live."* Indeed, there are many apolitical reasons expressed for people's reasons behind living in vehicles. However, it can be said that for many people there is a significant degree of politics and ethical judgements involved. Many of these reasons can involve varying, changeable degrees of choice and necessity.

Do you think that there was a kind of social movement that happened? Researcher *Well that was more combining a bit of the traveller circuit with a bit of the protest circuit. When thatcher did…oh no it was john major did the criminal justice bill, that was in 1994…* John

Uhuh Researcher

Then lots of people…it's a bit like Priti Patel…she was… you know…they were just trying to squeeze everybody and it was the beginning of the acid scene and all that so lots of people went away to like Spain and Italy and did free parties for like 20 years, which is great. Some people stayed and got involved in the protest

movement, and some people stayed and kept their heads down on sites. John

Interview with John, a Traveller on the roadside in Glastonbury (2020)

Today there are still overlaps between various activist groups and vehicle dwelling groups: some contemporary vehicle dwellers I have met came to live this way through participating in protest camps, much like some New Travellers had done in the past. Others live the way they do in order to live more affordably in order to facilitate activism, community work or in order to move between various humanitarian projects across the UK and beyond. Indeed, I have known many vehicle dwellers to

use their vehicles - and/or funds and other resources (such as *time*) accumulated through their affordable lifestyle to do charitable work that had much meaning and importance to them. Many vehicle dwellers are carrying out critical work that can be seen as a kind of “social repair” as this kind of activity could be considered a part of continual upkeep, care and maintenance of society (Hall and Smith, 2015).

Moreover, having already considered various push and pull factors associated with vehicle dwelling and other alternative housing, one can consider the relevance of various scholars writing on the mechanics of social movements. For example, Castells (2012) *discontent* and *anger* are seen to be powerful mobilisers of social change, as people are inspired to act and engage in various forms of resistance and activism. When talking about New Travellers in the 1990s, McKay (1996) describes a “utopian” thirst for difference, which was motivated by discontent and dissatisfaction with “conventional” ways of living. The accounts offered by Clark (1997) and Martin (1998; 2000; 2002) also signal the role of discontent, and a need for survival that motivated the growth of New Travellers, especially during the 1980s in an era of mass unemployment and rising homelessness. I have detected similar discourses amongst New Travellers that I have spoken to, who also identified a surge of people taking to the lifestyle as a matter of survival. This is reflected in what John quoted above refers to when he mentions how “they” (the government) try “*to squeeze everybody*.” Moreover, many people I have spoken with – from various backgrounds and generations – have described a pursuit for equality and a better world as a key motivation behind the way they lived, often in combination with a need to house themselves or live more affordably.

“My dad was into animal rights and hunt saboteuring and I think he had some friends who went on the road, and he joined them. Then my mum met him doing hunt sabbing around 1987 as a teenager in Devon. I think they were drawn to Travelling by meeting other Travellers and seeing their way of life as an escape from normality. Also, the political landscape at the time meant there weren't many opportunities…”

A written account from Janis, a second-generation New Traveller reflecting on life growing up on the road (2021)

Other scholars (Crouch, 2004; Bailey et al, 2018) have noted how, having encountered issues with traditional forms of protest and resistance, people are now

finding alternative ways of “resisting” which they argue are increasingly *prefigurative*. Bailey et al. (2018) identify the prevalence of “prefigurative radicals” who are actively trying to create new, different social relations through everyday life. It could be said that, in addition to freeing up more time for certain kinds of work, many vehicle dwellers are engaging in a form of prefigurative politics through reassembling domestic spaces in different ways. This can take place through claiming more control over their dwellings or using “low impact” building methods or materials (this is explored further later). It is also notable that for some people, anti-consumer capitalist or anti-materialist values might underly the decision to live in a vehicle. Of course, for some people, wanting to be rid of material possessions can be entirely practical: as pointed out by Sahlin (1972 in Ingold, 2000: 65), the accumulation of “stuff” can impede nomadic life. This is especially the case for those with smaller vehicles, or those considerate of weight restrictions.

However, for many people, living in tune with their ethics is considered a necessity for reasons beyond the parameters of dominant ideas about economics. In this respect, ideas about “subsistence-oriented oikonomia” are relevant, whereby social organisation is shaped to ensure that all actors have access to what they need (Cattaneo and Engel-Di Mauro 2015). appears to be relevant. Indeed, some people may wish to spend more time repairing, making and/or maintaining various items they need as a way of spending less money and making material possessions last longer and function better. However, it is worth noting some contradiction here: for a lot of people will still accumulate a lot of materials in order to carry out repairs, or to upcycle various items. In this respect, accumulating material objects can also be quite common as people begin to see the value in discarded materials. This will be elaborated later.

Additionally, some vehicle dwellers that I have known move between various “prefigurative” projects, where they are living in various off grid set ups and permaculture projects. Many contemporary vehicle dwellers have found themselves on the “New Traveller Circuits” engaging in similar projects, or projects being ran by older generations of New Travellers. So, in a sense, it could be said that much continuation can be observed, albeit with significant innovation as the experience of elders meets the new ideas of younger generations. Moreover, as already mentioned, it could then be agreed to some extent that what unites many (but not all) New Travellers and vehicle dwellers is a desire for alternative ways of living. These

alternative modes of living – or social organisation – can be found to take many forms. Hetherington (2000) explains how people were dissatisfied with “mainstream society” and wanted to *experiment* with new ways of living; therefore, it seems almost by default that much diversity would arise from these sentiments. Here again we see the relevance of Castell’s ideas about “discontent” as well as ideas about prefigurative politics. It also brings into question, again, ideas about the degree of necessity and choice involved: for some people are dissatisfied having experienced harsh levels of social exclusion and poverty, while others come from more privileged backgrounds but recognise the value in social change. Of course, it is important to note here (much like Martin, 1998) that this certainly does not mean that all people living in vehicles or self-provided housing are living a kind of utopian existence, whereby they are immune to power imbalances and other problematic tendencies. It is more a case of pointing to a (broadly) shared incentive to seek difference: either as a political pursuit, a means for survival or a mixture of both to varying extents.

The Choice and Necessity Debate

The literature review revealed that discourse about New Traveller identity and the motivations behind their way of life has often involved debates regarding the degree of choice and necessity. For example, Clark (1997), Hetherington (2000) and Martin (1998; 2000; 2002) detect significant class differences within the group, suggesting that those that came from more stable economic backgrounds were driven more by choice, rather than necessity. If one is to reflect on findings on the literature, it is noted that there were various “waves” of people coming onto the road. This notion was supported by several of my participants, who also describe different generations of Travellers moving onto the road who were influenced by different social and economic contexts. For example, there appears to be somewhat of a consensus among many people that I have spoken to that there was an influx of new people during the Thatcher period in the 1980s. This is often spoken of as a response to the rise of mass unemployment as well as the loss of council housing. Clark (1997) and Martin (1998; 2000) describe economic precarity influencing this generation. Martin (2002) emphasises the importance of wider social, political and economic context: he highlights a study (Davis et al, 1994), which showed that the majority of New Travellers they interviewed in the 1990s claimed that they had chosen the lifestyle as an alternative to homelessness. I have found that many people living in vehicles today do so as an alternative to physical homelessness. In Glastonbury, 15% of

respondents noted that they were living in vehicles as an alternative to rough sleeping, sofa surfing, or living in a tent (Smart Communities, 2020).

Moreover, Clark (1997: 129) explains how those labelled as “New Age” Travellers were a “sub-group” of middle-class, well-educated travellers that were more associated with the “eco-spiritual enlightenment” and moved onto the road out of “choice.” Similarly, Martin (1998) describes an earlier generation of “privileged” Travellers coming onto the road who were involved in political campaigns and developed “a New Age-type spirituality” (1998: 736). I found that the term “New Age” Traveller was controversial when mentioned, but also used much less. This could be due to the connotation to a particular belief system, that some would identify with more than others. Interestingly, Hetherington (2000) emphasises the influence of “New Age” and Pagan belief systems and practices among the “mostly middle class” New Travellers that he describes.

It is important to note here that the term “New Age” itself is particularly obscure, and scholars have encountered difficulty outlining its defining parameters (Hanegraaff, 1998). It has been suggested that this is arguably down to its lack of formal organisation as a religious movement, and its variability in that it has different meanings for different people. However, it has been understood broadly as a form of culture criticism, involving understandings of the world that contest dualism and reductionism. For example, between humans and nature (with the former dominating the latter) (Hanegraaff, 1998.). I have observed other beliefs and practices that could be considered to be “New Age” or “Neopagan” among those I have spent time with. However, I have not encountered as many people explicitly identifying with the label “New Age Traveller.” I have also experienced some people being quite oppositional to this term. For some people, class differences appeared to be a reason behind this.

For example, one couple I spoke with considered this to be a more “middle class hippy” term, while they identified as “working class punks.” However, I have also met several adults who had grown up on the road and embraced their cultural identity as a “New Age Traveller,” and it’s worth noting that not all of them could be considered to be “middle class,” some having being brought up on the road as what they described to be an alternative to a council house. Therefore, “New Age” Travellers are not necessarily of a higher social class.

The extent of class differences - sometimes being a source of *conflict* - has been notable throughout my research. Some people expressed a kind of snobbery towards those living in vehicles as a way of managing poverty, being concerned about them attracting negative attention or bringing “problems” to their park ups. Others criticise “bougie” middle class vehicle dwellers or “vanlifers,” who were considered less authentic due to the lack of economic necessity underlying their lifestyle. Interestingly, those who label themselves “vanlifers” often distinguish themselves from Travellers and other Vehicle Dwellers. I have observed some interesting debates on social media, where “vanlifers” disassociate from Travellers and some even express prejudice towards them. Similarly, I have observed prejudice held by Travellers towards those they consider to be “vanlifers” who are actively excluded from networks of Traveller and vehicle dweller solidarity. “Vanlifers” are often referred to negatively or as a distinct “other” group of vehicle dwellers, often considered to be “privileged,” living more “conventional” lifestyles and having greater access to resources.

As mentioned earlier, media representations of “vanlifers” are generally quite positive (and arguably even quite glamorised); representing a big contrast with the social construction of “Travellers” or “New Travellers” (and even, in some cases, other contemporary vehicle dwellers). It is worth noting here that none of the people involved in this study would identify as “vanlifers,” and some of them would be quite offended to be called as such. For many, the glamorised “vanlifer” is often considered to be partly responsible – in addition to the rising popularity of campervanning holidays - for the commercialisation of vehicle dwelling and the subsequent rise in expenses associated with vehicle dwelling. Indeed, it has been notable how much the price of vehicles suitable for converting rose during pandemic when van conversions became increasingly popular, further rendering a previously affordable lifestyle more of a privilege. However, that is not to say that all vehicle dwellers with more financially stable backgrounds are “vanlifers:” indeed, some vehicle dwellers and Travellers that I have spent time with are from very (financially) wealthy backgrounds but have rejected this and deliberately built new lives away from this.

I have found that there are arguably many forces of push and pull at play operating at different magnitudes at different points in time and space for those living in vehicles. While some (for example) may adopt this way of life purely out of desperation while wishing to live in conventional housing, others may be choosing a way of life that is

easier to *tolerate* as they claim time for their own interests and/or political and ethical pursuits. This might be because they want to live in tune with their values by living a life that is “lower impact” in a smaller dwelling powered by solar power and built with reclaimed materials. Some people living in vehicles might wish to engage in unpaid work campaigning or volunteering for various causes that they believe in, which is unaffordable in other forms of housing. Others may see their way of life as a form of protest and refuse to engage in what they feel is an oppressive housing system. Many people have strong feelings about the ethics underlying their way of life:

“[Talking about buying a house via mortgages] Well it is your whole life isn’t it… you’re selling your whole life away. Putting yourself in debt for the rest of your life…you know…that’s the other reason why I would consider myself an itinerant…is because I’m not prepared to do that!... Even if I had the choice to do that, I don’t think I would… I mean I have never been in the position to do that. Even if I was in the position to do that…I don’t know if it’s ethical…actually. I don’t believe that you can own land. And I think it’s a total…it’s totally out of order to even say that you can.”

An interview with Kelly, a Traveller on a tolerated park up in West Wales (2019)

On the other hand, others just want “to get by,” and enable themselves to save up for their own property house, and vehicle dwelling is cheaper than renting a house while being full time workers. Here ideas about a dominant “home ownership discourse” (Gurney 1999) seem particularly relevant, as people express a desire for their own private property. Some wish to own their own property, but in a less “conventional” way: McAllister (2018) found that some vehicle dwellers in Bristol expressed an end goal of buying land to live off-grid and build other eco-friendly structures to live in. Similarly, the Glastonbury survey (Smart communities, 2020) found that the most popular “ideal living situation” for roadside vehicle dwellers was “to live off grid and be self-sufficient.” My own findings echo this, as those I have spent time with on authorised sites often have effective “off-grid” living set ups, which others without access to such spaces often aspire to have.

Additionally, others may wish to spend more time doing activities other than wage labour with their lives, and living more affordably can facilitate this. This could involve developing skills, such as playing musical instruments. I have known multiple people to have become professional musicians having had the time to practice and develop

their skills enough through living in a vehicle or squatting. Many may wish to live in a moveable dwelling in order to facilitate various mobile forms of trade: from travelling circus performers moving between gigs, to chainsaw carvers moving between laybys where they sell their sculptures. In this respect, they live in a vehicle in order to work which is both a choice and economic necessity, as they have chosen a specific kind of work to meet their needs. For others, they may wish to reduce their labour time. In this respect, living in a vehicle can serve as a way of escaping what they consider to be an oppressive employment system. This echoes Martin (1998:742)'s observation that older generations of New Travellers who emerged in a period of relative economic security were motivated by a desire to contest "the meaningless and drudgery of their working lives." For Martin, this resembled what Sahlins (1972) described as the "original affluent society" when debunking notions of inferiority with regards to native Australians, who he explains actually worked less and spent more time sleeping and engaging in leisure time than a lot of people in modern western societies.

I resent having to work nine 'til five, five days a week and tie myself down like that … I just feel that with my freedom I have so much space to be creative and, even though I have less money, I'm able to express my life better.

A voice message from Lucy, a van dweller who is always moving (2020)

Martin (1998; 2000; 2002) argues that middle-class New Travellers were driven more by political ideas and *choice* than others. He explains how these people were in the fortunate position to give up "relatively secure" lives to seek a better quality of life. However, while Martin (2002) was very critical of Hetherington's (2000) lack of emphasis of the push into the later generations of New Travellers way of life, he also perhaps overlooks other forms of hardship endured by the earlier generations of "more privileged" New Travellers. Although this generation was perhaps not forced by conventional economics to the same extent, they did emerge out of the post-war era – an era marked by collective trauma, heightened awareness of climate change and rapid social change. It is worth mentioning again here that Hetherington (2000: 109) does briefly acknowledge the influence of threats to the environment and "the growing arms race," while Martin (2002: 733) notes that he does not wish to "downplay" the role of protest and ecological campaigning that is emphasised more by writers like McKay (1996).

However, there is little elaboration of the significance this may have had for a lot of people. It was during these decades that talks of climate change and the awareness that our damaging relationship with the environment began to grow (despite climate change being identified much earlier). Therefore, I argue, this needs further consideration. Did this generation simply give up “secure jobs and accommodation” (Martin, 2000) to enjoy better lives, or were there perhaps other forms of security that were under threat? These conceptions of “choice” and necessity” seem to mostly be used to denote economic positions. Therefore, is it that they reflect the dominance of stereotypical ideas about “the economy” and its detachment from our natural environment, thus undermining the source of discontent that triggered the first generation of New Travellers and today’s “more privileged” vehicle dwellers?

If one is to follow the arguments of contemporary sociologists such as Tim Ingold (2000), it is perhaps precisely the ignorance of our place within the environment that is leading the planet and many species to extinction. If many New Travellers and Vehicle Dwellers (from various generations and backgrounds) have been motivated by a desire to reconfigure relations with other humans and non-humans, this can be said to also represent a form of discontent that inspired people to live within the world differently (the details of which are shared in the coming chapters). Therefore, I argue here that this desire for change – or as Clark (1997: 127) puts it, “a way out of the darkness” - is perhaps in need of defence. It is important that we reconsider what constitutes “choice” and “necessity” here in relation to a desire for social change and through recognising the necessity involved in responding to human-propelled ecological collapse.

A Meshwork of Human Relations

I don’t really like the word Traveller…so across that spectrum of what we should really be called like… independent living or low impact dwelling, or sometimes people with drug and alcohol problems and then people who are homeless. So, all of those people…there are vast (emphasises) differences between them.

An interview with John, a Traveller on the roadside in Glastonbury (2020)

In agreement with previous scholars, I have found New Traveller’s and other Vehicle Dwellers to be incredibly diverse, and a suitable framework of understanding is required to move forward. In the quote above, John describes a variety of people from different walks of life who could be considered to be “Travellers” while, like

others, feeling uncomfortable with that terminology and an attempt to impose labels. In this sense, it appears that it is perhaps more of an overlapping of groups (or indeed*, individuals)* than a rigid, unified and unchanging social group of interest here. This compliments the work of Hetherington (2000: 95) who argues that New Travellers are not a distinct group. Instead, he suggests that New Travellers are a "hybrid phenomenon" (Hetherington, 2000: 4) consisting of individuals with their own varying constellations of "*selected* identities." He explained how a lot of these people had "shedded" previous identities and *assembled* new "*collages*" of identity, the sources of which stemming from an array of nomadic identities - from travelling circus to Romani-gypsies - and subcultural identities, such as the hippy and punk movements. Indeed, among those that I have spent time with, I have spent time with people influenced by an array of subcultural and other cultural influences. It is perhaps true that many Vehicle Dwellers, like New Travellers, are defined by difference (Mackay ,1996) and are united broadly by their alternative ways of living.

It could also be said that we have seen yet another "influx of new people" (Hetherington, 2000) moving onto the road for various reasons. Here one might consider what Anna Tsing calls "contamination": as different people come into contact, "new directions emerge" through transformations that take place via encounters (2015 :28) or "happenings."

The evolution of our "selves" is already polluted by histories of encounter; we are mixed up with others before we even begin any new collaboration. – Tsing (2015: 29)

In this respect, diversity causes contamination and vice versa. This has significant implications for the use of group categories, which for Tsing "gain a momentary hold" (2015: 29). Like Tsing, here we might be tempted to use Deleuze and Guattari's (1975) notion of an *assemblage* (Deleuze & Guattari, 1975). That is to say, that what is of interest here is a social configuration of different people coming together, that are continuously changing. For Deleuze (1997), assemblages are temporary moments of unification, without an overarching or underlying unity. An assemblage is not an external given, but "a result of assembling, arranging or combining" (Conway, 2021: 233). In this respect, both individuals and social groups are relational "bodies" that are comprised of other relational bodies and have consistencies that come to be through repetition. It is these repetitions that may be considered to be a source of collective identity (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987).

On the other hand, as argued in the literature review, it is arguably more suitable to conceive of this as a meshwork, whereby we move beyond the “overly mechanical” (Vannini & Vannini, 2023: 48) or “static” (Ingold, 2015) metaphor of the assemblage towards understanding what we often call “groups” as something more dynamic. The same can be said for Hetherington’s notion of a “collage” that is “assembled” when referring to individuals’ identity, which again portrays a more static – or “bloblike” (Ingold, 2015) – image of individuals. When discussing the formation of social groups, Ingold (2015: 6-7) rejects the term “assemblage” which is used to describe a new entity that is formed, shaped by “emergent properties” or a certain “espirit de corps.” This effectively treats a “group” as a static phenomenon as if the people involved have “turned to stone” and lost much of their individuality. That is to say that people are not components, but *lines*. As mentioned in the literature review, for Ingold (2015:3), every person (or human being) is “a bundle of lines:” they are not simply “blobs” with insides and outsides, “divided at their surfaces.” Instead, we may think of human relations as knots:

“lines come together…. go separate ways…only to tie themselves with lines extending from other knots, thus spreading the mesh of kinship far and wide.” - Ingold (2015: 20).

For example, here we might think about the ways in which people moved onto the road in the 1980s and became entangled with people who had been living on the road for some time. This could have been Romani Gypsies and Irish Traveller who were living on the road, or the previous “wave” of New Travellers that Martin (1998; 2000, 2002) describes, some of whom would have also lived on the road their entire lives. Several of my participants have mentioned spending time with other Traveller groups and learning from them. Similarly, one can consider John’s words about the ways in which a “domain of entanglement” (Vannini & Vannini, 2023: 151) such as “the protest scene” crossed over with a domain he calls “the free party scene.” By conceptualising these moments whereby different people have come together – or been “joined with” each other (Ingold, 2015: 23) – we can conceptualise these social relations as dynamic and momentary, rather than fixed or static. In such a conceptualisation, the sense of individuality and difference between individual people is not lost.

I have also found myself while travelling through life as a vehicle dweller, that I have encountered people who have at other points in their life found themselves entangled with other people that I have also encountered before. This is perhaps why sharing personal contacts is so common among people living in vehicles, as it is felt to be common that people have crossed paths at points in various domains of entanglement: from living together on encampments, to working at festivals, attending political events or coming together in other ways. Furthermore, people are shaped by the presence and actions of others that they are entangled with: “they grow one another” (Ingold, 2015: 120). Indeed, the process of enskillment I went through that is documented in the following chapters reveals a close view on how I was “grown” by those around me. Those around me were also shaped by others that they encountered in knots they had been (or still were) entangled in. And, of course, they shaped them in return much like I have shaped those around me. Therefore, this “essence” of a meshwork enables us to think of the world as more fluid, whereby things (and indeed, people) do not live independently of others, as individuals tread their own paths flowing together in an “ever-evolving weave” (Ingold, 2015: 151).

Of course, following this conception of social life, diversity exists within all groups in society and all individuals possess multiple identities: every person is “a bundle of lines” coming together with other bundles of lines forming knots that continuously extend into other knots creating a meshwork of social relations. While a desire for difference is prevalent and could be a consistency that unites some people I have spent time with, it could not be said to be the most consistent unifying factor I have found in my work. Instead, it is that these people *are living in vehicles*, or have done at some point for a significant part of their lives. It is this shared experience of living in a vehicle which is the most encompassing “consistency” “binds” people or makes them “stick” and resonate with one another (Ingold, 2015). The experience of living in a vehicle itself has been found to be significant, as it renders people subject to certain patterns of regulation, as well as having practical implications for everyday life. This is shown in detail in the coming chapters.

Conclusion: An Anarchist Spirit?

“I don’t like labels…But I do consider myself to be a Traveller”

- An interview with Kelly, a Traveller on a tolerated site in West Wales (2019)

This chapter has shown that among those living in vehicles, it could be said that there are many individuals representing various political dispositions, social, economic and cultural backgrounds who have, at times, come together - albeit often momentarily in various times and places. Others have not come together, as significant differences segregate different vehicle dwellers as debates about “real” or “authentic” Travellers create divides, while other people simply do not cross paths. In a similar manner to Grohmann (2022), I argue that instead of implying a dichotomised or “clear cut” understanding of choice and necessity, that we recognise that amongst the huge variety of people who might be labelled as Travellers, New Travellers, New Age Travellers, Vehicle Dwellers, Van Dwellers and even Vanlifers, and that there are many forces of push and pull at play operating at different magnitudes at different points in time and space. Indeed, as Grohmann notes in relation to squatting, the reality is far “messier” and greyer” than other scholars have suggested.

Having outlined the complexity and controversy associated with “New Traveller” and vehicle dweller identity (and other labels adopted or imposed), it is worth considering what is termed “the spirit” of Anarchism (Sitrin, 2019). The nature of Anarchism is arguably averse to the “scientific impulse” to generate fixed definitions and classifications (Kuhn, 2010: 302). It can be argued that it is antithetical for an Anarchist academic to offer a homogenising definition of Anarchism, for that would detract from the spirit of Anarchism. It has also been argued that it is wrong for academics to label social movements and political subjectivities as “Anarchist.” Juris (2009: 222) argues that we must avoid applying any fixed “ideological cast” (Juris, 2009: 222) which may mask the incredible diversity characteristic of the array of political subjectivities present all over the world today. I have certainly observed a huge variation of subjectivities through this research and my everyday life which intertwines with it. Therefore, we should take caution when labelling such practices as “Anarchist” too and avoid any rigid processes of labelling at all to avoid a kind of “over-coding” effect that may detract from a complex, heterogenic reality (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). In this respect, one might say, “difference is behind everything, but behind difference there is nothing” (Deleuze, 2020: 36). Ingold’s concept of the meshwork enables us to achieve this, facilitating a dynamic account of overlapping subjectivities that maintain their individuality.

We must take the same precaution when tempted to “over-code” an array of people with different backgrounds and ideas as “New Travellers.” Therefore, it is not a tight “ideological cast” being referred to when referring to “Anarchism” – or “New Travellers” or “Vehicle Dwellers” - in this thesis. Instead, it is a looser Anarchist “mood” (Kuhn, 2010) or “spirit” (Sitrin, 2019) being detected, and much diversity is outlined within what is an *inherently experimental* body of practices. It is acknowledged that each of us approaches anarchism “in our own way” (Levy, 2019: ix), and the same can be said for vehicle dwelling. However, the practice of living in a vehicle will later be shown to involve some shared experiences, whether it be of the practicalities of moving around and managing everyday life shared later in this thesis. For this reason, I choose to proceed with the more inclusive category that is “vehicle dwellers:” people who are living (or have lived for a considerable amount of time) in vehicles. I also argue that Ingold’ concept of the meshwork is a suitable framework to use to describe the ways in which different people’s lives have at times overlapped, as an alternative to describing rigid social groups.

Reclaiming Control: Self-built Housing and Becoming at Home

Introduction

This chapter will outline an account of *"self-built*" housing, revealing the entanglements of social relations involved in this process. I begin by considering my changing economic (or oikonomic) conditions, relating my previous experience of rented accommodation to the alternative "self-provided" accommodation I was delving into. This was what first struck me as a dramatic change to my everyday life and resonated with many accounts provided by other vehicle dwellers. Therefore, this chapter provides a close-up account of what appears to be similar to some accounts given by other vehicle dwellers showcased previously, emphasising the *emancipatory* nature of these entanglements. Afterwards, I delve deeper into the process of making myself at home through converting a vehicle into a dwelling

(largely *with help from others*); showing a close-up account of "enskillment" (Ingold, 2000) and practices of mutual aid.

Following Benson and Hamiduddin (2017), this chapter considers the significance of processes of empowerment - and ontological security - that take place through these "self-built" or "self-provided" housing practices; revealing the inherently social nature of housing. Here we might consider how "home" (which is differentiated from "house" and "household") is both a "spatial and social unit of interaction" where social relations are produced and reproduced (Giddens, 1984: 82). Soaita and McKee (2019: 148) – who echo Delanda (2016) – conceive the home as an assemblage of "this unique dwelling" within a broader housing context, and "this unique individual" within this dwelling as well as a social network. However, as already discussed, the notion of assemblage is more mechanical and static and does not capture the dynamic, openness that the concept of the meshwork can capture. Through these new entanglements of humans and non-humans, new forms of life (Ingold, 2000), or indeed, *home* (which are continuously generated) differ quite considerably to what is produced and reproduced through the experience of private rented accommodation, which echoed other tales of "generation rent" (Soaita and McKee, 2019). This involves new social relations: between humans as well as humans and non-humans. In this respect, following Hornborg (2018), attention is also paid here to the wider "abstract" economic and social systems, which have an inevitable impact the entanglements of interest here. As already shown in the previous chapters, vehicle

dwellers often explain the ways in which they have adopted their way of life in response to inequalities and dissatisfaction with other housing and/or wider economic conditions.

A Means of Accumulation of Time and Resources

As already mentioned in the previous chapter, multiple participants explained the different activities they were now enabled to do through reconfiguring their housing situation via vehicle dwelling. This sometimes signalled ethical judgements about the ways in which we might wish to (or feel we have to) spend our time: for example, some may spend time engaging in volunteer work. Others used their time to learn new skills, such as musical instruments, which then gave them access to new forms of work that they enjoyed. As a full time academic, processes of providing my own housing (and therefore building and maintaining my own home) did not always free up as much additional time to do all of the things that I wanted to do. I was not working a seasonal job or part time during the majority of this process, unlike a lot of people who choose to live in vehicles. In fact, I sometimes found the additional labour required to build my home made me quite exhausted and did not allow me to enjoy the work/life balance that I saw that others had achieved through similar housing arrangement. I later switched my study to part time, so that I was effectively able to spend more time caring for family members and taking on other voluntary work that I cared about during the pandemic. I did this for about a year. Despite earning significantly less money than previously, I was financially secure while being able to do things that were important to me, which had a significant impact on my everyday life.

Here one might consider the relevance of a campaign about the “4-day working week:” a contemporary campaign that builds on a history of calls for a reduction in hours spent carrying out wage labour (Veal, 2023). Research connected to the campaign reveals concerning levels of “burn out” among employees increasing in recent years (Haar and O’Kane, 2022). Despite this, there has been somewhat of a decline in interest among scholars regarding “the work-leisure nexus” (Roberts, 2018). Arguments from feminist scholars Gibson-Graham (2013) are applicable here: much labour is often taken for granted or not recognised in the same way as wage labour. For example, much household work – which was traditionally allocated to women – is often taken for granted as a form of labour. Much like childcare and

cleaning, household repair and maintenance (as an example) can also be considered a form of work that one pays another person to do with the money from their wage labour if they are not to do it themselves. It could be said that many vehicle dwellers (but certainly not all) may choose to carry out these tasks themselves as an alternative to hiring others to help. Therefore, time can effectively be reallocated in a way so that less time might be spent on accumulating money via wage labour, to carrying out other forms of work that essentially need doing and would require a financial investment to carry out if one was not to do it themselves. As mentioned, when attempting to do this myself as a busy academic, this did not give me more time. The difference in expectations or ideas about how one “should” spend their time represented a source of conflict in my own mind, having seen different perspectives through this project. However, while living this way did not always free up more time, it did free up other resources which I could channel elsewhere which enabled more choice or opportunities available to me in other ways.

While I did not initially gain much time as a resource, I did experience a significant reduction in living costs: I reduced my housing costs by approximately 48%. This afforded me the ability to accumulate significant resources while reducing the necessity for me to take on additional work to meet costs. When switching to part time work, this also afforded me more time to engage in other money-saving practices (beyond housing costs) such as growing and foraging my own food, as well as repairing and maintaining items. These practices effectively reduced other living costs. For example, when living in Bristol, I would spend £12 a week on a vegetable box. While living on private land where we were able to grow food and keep chickens, I spend very little money on food: with the garden and foraging providing most vegetation for about 9 months of the year, and chickens providing eggs for protein. I also had more time to bake bread, which was made from organic flour bought in bulk collectively by myself, my partner and his family. This cost approximately £1 a loaf (about a quarter of the price of fresh organic bread that I would previously buy in the city). Of course, I would spend much more time producing my own food as a result, but this was something that I enjoyed doing. The oven also provided additional heating in the winter months, which led to savings on wood used on those evenings.

However, it is worth noting here, if one is to value their time, for example, by the amount of money they earn an hour (for me, it was about £16.90 an hour when

working as a research assistant), this could be considered to be a disadvantage. Indeed, for many people, they may prefer to spend time doing a job they enjoy earning money to meet their needs in different ways. This is by no means a campaign piece insisting that all people must live this way. However, if we are to revisit ideas about the kind of oikonomic “surplus” (Leshum, 2016) that we might generate through different forms of social organisation, if one *enjoys* or *values* spending ones time producing food then it could be said that monetary value is perhaps less significant in many cases. Furthermore, it is important that these activities are recognised as alternative forms of labour, which is important when tackling stereotypes about people living in vehicles who have often been considered to be “jobless.” Moreover, it could be said that much of the “self-sufficiency” valued among many vehicle dwellers that I have spent time with was very much *facilitated* by this rearrangement of living costs and labour time.

An Affordable Home?

Much like my food production practices, the construction of my home had a (relatively) low financial cost, while involving a significant amount of labour. A snapshot of an estimated cost of the conversion was £4389.75 in April 2021, a significant sum to have to hand. However, it was very affordable in relation to the last experience I had of renting a room in Bristol which had been over £600 a month (having doubled in price over 5 years). Having used mostly upcycled materials, most costs were for the electrical system, the structural integrity of the vehicle, and of course, the initial cost of the vehicle itself which was almost half of the total cost quoted here. The majority of the work was done using my own hands, with some of the work being done with the hands and experience of others (who generously volunteered to help). I mainly used basic tools: a manual saw, sandpaper, a drill and a jigsaw (the latter provided by a friend). All power tools were powered by solar power.

The majority of this conversion was done within a 7-day week. At the time of recording this in April 2021, I had also spent an additional 10 days (roughly 6 hours a day) servicing and repairing and adapting my dwelling since I carried out the main body of work. Therefore, it could be said that so far two and a half weeks (approximately) have been spent building and maintaining my home by this point in time. As someone with an average income of £1250 a month, it could be said that

this “cost” an additional £708 (17 x £41.66 a day) in time that could have been spent on earning money via wage labour. Therefore, the total financial snapshot of a cost of my dwelling so far had been: £5097.75.

It is important to note here that this required the privilege of having access to the money to invest in the project in the first place. This for me was enabled by a generous family member, who does not charge interest for this loan. Therefore, this reflects my own privileged position: for I was in a position to borrow money with no interest, and also had regular reliable income in order to pay this. Many people would not be able to do this. For this reason, a lot of people may live in caravans that are premade, and cheaper or sometimes handed down to them as a charitable gesture. Not only are caravans premade and often cheaper, they do not require the maintenance of an engine in addition to the maintenance of the structure. They also do not require MOTS, insurance or road tax in the same way. While some people may live in vehicles that they cannot legally drive (requiring the help of others if wanting to move it), most vehicle dwellers acquire a license in order to be mobile, which represents another privilege as driving lessons become increasingly expensive. On the other hand, others may spend significantly more money on their vehicles than I have and live in converted vehicles worth over £10,000 (or even collectible caravans worth similar amounts). Indeed, the affordability of vehicle homes is hugely variable, as is the perception of what is “affordable” as people come from different economic positions with different experiences and expectations. As aforementioned in the previous chapter, this has caused tensions between different vehicle dwellers: as relatively affluent “vanlifers” and campervan holiday goers are believed to effectively be pricing out other vehicle dwellers from what was once very affordable housing.

There are also significant financial risks involved in investing in a home like this (or any home, for that matter). For example, I experienced fewer financial savings in the first year of owning my moveable home than in following years due to the conversion costs. It is hoped that every year that the dwelling remains relatively intact and that there are no large, unexpected costs to come. It is worth noting here the element of uncertainty: for vehicles can take dramatic turns as various non-humans (or even humans) interfere with their structural integrity. As is the case for any homeowner, when one is “in control of” (and therefore, has *responsibility for*) the physical condition of their dwelling, there remains an element of *risk* which any homeowner

endures. It will now be shown, we are never really “in control,” as though we might successfully dominate and dictate the world we live within. Instead, we are continually having to make do and adapt in relation to many other social actors involved in the domain of entanglement that we call home.

Being “In Control”: The “Anarchic Proclivities” of Materials

As mentioned in the methods section, Tim Ingold (2007, 2010) advocates an approach to understanding materials in the social sciences through engaging with the variable, changeable properties and tendencies of materials. When doing so, it could be said that live-in vehicles have many different risks associated with them in comparison to bricks and mortar, *largely due to the materials involved*. For example, when one has a roof made of steel, one has to be aware of rust which can soon get out of control if not kept on top of. Alternatively, one may have a vehicle body made from aluminium, which does not rust but is subject to greater metal fatigue. My own roof is made of steel, and I was unpleased in the colder, wetter month of November in 2021 when I saw water leaking through my roof through my recently painted plywood ceiling. This was a consequence of the seals of my roof rusting and creating gaps, allowing water to run through. This effectively made the wooden lining of the inside of my home subject to the invasion of unwanted fungi (mould), which needed to be addressed immediately.

Fortunately, it was pointed out to me by a friend I was living on the roadside with at the time that this repair was (fairly) easy and accessible to me. The repair process required: a drill, a wire brush attachment (worth about £5), and some epoxy resin (gifted by a friend). It also required the knowledge and previous experience of my friend who let me borrow a ladder and took the time to explain to me what to do. The sharing knowledge, materials and tools was crucial for me when maintaining and repairing my home. Moreover, as instructed, I used the wire brush to remove the rust, before applying the resin to seal the cracks and the exposed steel. The dry heat from my wood burner inside the dwelling aided this process, although the cold temperature and regular rainfall outside meant that I had to heat up the epoxy resin (which could only be used above a certain temperature and needed to stay dry while setting). Many difficulties are encountered when doing important repair and maintenance while exposed to the elements while living on the road during winter

months in the UK. (Unless one is lucky enough to have access to a workshop with a large enough entrance and/or high enough ceilings to complete the work indoors).

It is also worth noting here that steel is very conductive of the heat, as well as the cold. This means that significant expanding and contracting can take place, which can contribute to the wearing of window frames (as an example), as well as the creation of holes in a roof. Of course, such processes also take place in homes made of bricks and mortar. However, stone expands and contracts significantly less than steel. This point reveals the significance of the local climate. Indeed, if I had carried out half of my study in Portugal as originally intended, I may have been less concerned about rust, and more concerned about having more ventilation and the sun damage induced oxidation causing paint to peel. When considering the influence of the local climate, there is also the element of *mobility* (or potential mobility) to tend to. A moveable dwelling may move through various climates (and they often will). It is well known that a common travelling pattern of Vehicle Dwellers is to live in the UK during the drier, warmer months working on the festival circuit, and then to migrate to drier, warmer pastures during winter months. These travelling patterns can effectively slow down processes of rust, which are magnified by exposure to air and water, which the expanding and contracting contributes to. On the other hand, travelling through wind and rain can lead to further wear and rusting, as small stones bounce up from the road, chipping away at paint exposing steel to more air and water.

Moreover, for those with motorised vehicles, moving the vehicle itself is beneficial to the engine, contributing to its maintenance in the sense that they are *designed to move*. One must make sure that moving parts are adequately lubricated, and that engines are able to cool themselves sufficiently. However, moving also contributes to further wear, as tyres and brakes wear down over time and engine components expand and contract in response to dramatic temperature changes. Therefore, there are constantly processes of wearing (and therefore requirements for maintaining) happening, regardless of where we are and what we are doing. Mobility can also have other perks. For example, if a person living in bricks and mortar is to have an “invasive” tree outside their home, they may have to invest significant resources in order to safely remove the tree as its roots begin to compromise the structural integrity of the foundations of their house. A person in a moveable dwelling would not be affected by a tree in this way, for their dwelling is not rooted to the ground in the same way. However, if one were to park underneath a tree, one’s access to solar

power would be inhibited, posing a different kind of difficultly (but one much easier to resolve in this case). Therefore, it can be said that - in relation to bricks and mortar - the control or power (and therefore *responsibility*) brought about by home ownership can be similar in ways for people living in vehicles.

However, many differences emerge as a result of physical (or material) differences which have different impacts on the ways in which we live our everyday life. The nomadic person has to improvise, responding to different conditions which they are able to move around and position themselves differently in relation to. On the other hand, the sedentary dweller must improvise in a different way, by adapting the surroundings (i.e. by cutting down a tree) or by adapting their dwellings in other ways. In this case, one may consider Ingold's description of the hunter/gatherer perspective of (and interaction with) a landscape, which is contrasted to that of sedentary people. He explains how the former "do not seek to transform the world; they seek revelation" (2000: 57). Moreover, Ingold's "dwelling perspective" asserts that there is no distinction between the "built" and "non-built" environment. In this respect, all dwellers (whether they be in vehicles or bricks and mortar) practically engage with their surroundings and are constituent parts of their surroundings too. This is an ongoing process.

The constant upkeep (and positionings) of our homes reveals that our dwellings are never in a static or "finished" state as such. Indeed, this represents another example of the ways in which life is *"a movement of opening, not closure*" (Ingold, 2011: 4). The physical structures - and the practices (or even sentiments) that they trigger - are constantly changing (often against our will), shaping the course of our everyday lives. It appears that building and maintaining one's home is similar to how Ingold describes weaving a basket, with its form unfolding and evolving "in a kind of force field" whereby we engage in a reciprocal dialogue with materials (Ingold, 2000: 342). In this respect, we work *within* the world, as our homes *grow* from "the mutual involvement of people and materials in an environment" (Ingold, 2000: 347).

Mutual Aid and Making Do with What is There: A Different Way of Building/Dwelling

"There is no script for social and cultural life. People have to work it out as they go along. In a word, they have to improvise." - Ingold and Hallam (2007: emphasis added)

I have continued to spend much time adapting my home to suit my spatial practices during my time living this way. While I would, of course, often rearrange furniture in rented accommodation, I was enabled to change the nature of my dwelling to a greater extent. As it will be shown, this involved much improvisation, mutual aid and upcycling. Through this process, I found myself at home in multiple ways. Firstly, I have argued that I had found myself at home in the sense that I was living in a dwelling that I had more understanding of and *control* over (or *responsibility* for) than I had done previously. For some social theorists, this is an essential part of being "at home." For example, Giddens (1984) explains how dwellers having more control over their homes facilitated greater "ontological security," while Mary Douglas (1991) claims that the definition of a home is a place that is taken under control by the homemaker. For Anarchist scholar John Turner (1976), housing provided by "others" (rather than the users of such housing) would often fail to meet the unique needs and desires of users. As a result, housing is often homogenised and fails to accommodate diversity in society, rendering homes spaces of alienation and oppression, rather than empowerment and security. Self-built housing, on the other hand, can reflect a user and their own unique needs and values. Having been able to build my own home, the space was very much my own and inherently ended up being different to those built by others who used their spaces differently and had different needs and priorities.

I also found myself at home in the sense that, as a novice builder, I was overwhelmed by the support (and materials) offered to me by those around me. This often included being given materials and tools which, like *ideas*, had been collected and stored by others, who were happy to share and see their inventories of materials (and ideas) put to use. I also stored many materials that I found and collected too, which I used for my own conversion or gave to others to use for their own building and repair practices. In this respect, the process of building very much involved working with what I had around me, or *improvising*. As I accumulated my own collection of salvaged materials, I also shared materials in return. In this sense, this "Doing It With" (Vanini & Taggart, 2013) process was, for me, an important part of feeling a part of the community. For Colin Ward (1982), collective processes of building were important, and arguably the concept of individual "self-built" housing is more socially divisive than empowering. Therefore, while this term is used here, it is recognised that it does not entirely capture what is going on here, because the

degree of support from those around me was significant in achieving this. The mutual aid that was involved in the development of my home also represents an alternative economic relationship, whereby people gift their time, labour, and resources for the sake of the home and social bonds, rather than as part of an exchange (Forde, 2017). I will now outline this process.

I began my conversion in the spring of 2021, when the weather allowed me to begin work outdoors. The vehicle was well insulated already, which I was very thankful for: the material used here for insulation is particularly irritating to the skin and unpleasant to be exposed to. I would also not want to purchase this insulation first hand in future, due to its hazardous nature and the ethical complications (it was made by the same company who insulated the Grenfell Tower). These materials did not reflect my values and evoked unpleasant bodily reactions. A mixture of plywood and white cotton had already been used to cover the insulation, forming the walls. I did not want to keep much of the cotton, for there were many stains and mould had already begun to grow in some places (and appeared to be thriving on this particular material). Therefore, I began by stripping back the pieces of cotton that I did not want to keep. I decided that what was left would make an ideal canvas for some artwork. I asked a good friend of mine who was an artist to paint one of the remaining cotton covered walls of my vehicle. This was certainly not something I had been free to do in any rented accommodation and allowed me to personalise my home in a way I had not been able to in the past. He did the work for free as a gift. I gave him the left-over paints, which he used for another project and was grateful to receive them as he was experiencing some financial hardship at the time. I kept the cotton that I had stripped off, which was kept for future art projects for the children in the community or dirty mechanical jobs (depending on its condition).

The next step was the flooring. I was given this flooring (worth several hundred pounds) by a friend who had accidentally ordered too much when refurbishing his kitchen. He would have had to pay for a skip or waste collection from the council, so this was a mutually beneficial arrangement. I was shown by another friend that I lived with how to fit the flooring, and then proceeded to do the rest myself after a useful demonstration. This involved using a chop saw (which I borrowed), measuring tape, a hammer and a flat piece of wood found in a firewood pile to stop the wood becoming dented when hammering the pieces of flooring together. Off cuts and remaining pieces were stored for future flooring projects, both my own and anyone

else that needed them. My partner later used some of it when refurbishing his own caravan.

The next stage was the windows, which I had salvaged from unwanted washing machines. I got the idea having seen a washing machine window in someone else's collection of scrap materials. I had noticed the window a few times before deciding to use it, having passed it when walking along a track that leads to the land on which I was residing. I asked the owner if I could use it, and she was delighted to have it put to use. Firstly, I thought that this was aesthetically pleasing: I like the nautical look that porthole style windows give a panel van. Secondly, I felt it would be practical, due to the fact that this window was designed to stop a considerable amount of water - effectively being thrown around by a barrel - from coming through. This was especially important to me after a laptop of mine just about survived a leaking window a month or two before. It was also a considerably thick type of glass used, meaning that it had good insulation properties, as well as allowing a good level of security.

First, I cut a hole in order to install the window, with the help of my partner who is very good at using a "Jig Saw" tool, which is a powered blade that can slice through metal. Following the advice of a neighbour in the community – who was one of several passers-by interested in this process – I sealed the hole using an old inner tube from a bicycle which I had acquired having just replaced mine the previous week. I had not thought about sealing the window this way, (and I don't think that it would have functioned so well without this advice).

Having dismantled the window, I put the glass through the hole, which was held in place between the original window frame and the sealed hole we had made. I panicked slightly, as the inner tube – due to its circular shape and smooth surface – did not want to stick to the edges of the steel at first. I ran off to look through my supplies, while my partner held it in place. Thankfully, I

found some parcel tape to hold the inner tube in place while the glue dried.

This was something that I had not thought about needing to do in advance. My inexperience and lack of understanding of these materials and how they would interact with each other led to what perhaps could be considered a “bodge job” in the sense that it was not as good as it could have been. Next time I think I will have something to hold the materials – such as clothing pegs - at the ready and would not start fitting windows so close to the evening time. The darkness and impending rain were starting to give me a sense of urgency, for glue does not work well with water. I then drilled holes in the frame, and used the holes to bolt the window to the door while everything was held in place with some G Clamps. The G clamps and second-hand bolts were provided by my partner, who had an abundance of the latter. I then attached the rest of the original washing window frame before cutting the insulation and ply board to shape. At this point, another neighbour came along with a compass tool to help me cut the circle into the ply board having realised that I was struggling, having forgotten to measure this before the window had been fitted into the metal door. I then screwed the ply board back on over the insulation, using the existing holes and screws.

The two different washing windows that I used had different, designs which meant that I had to fit the windows differently, meaning that they were not uniform. Ingold and Hallam (2007: 3) explain how builders *always* improvise, even when bringing to life the abstract designs of architects. Indeed, building work involves long processes of “cajoling” materials - which have their own properties - to fit the design given to them. This can be an arduous task, which as already mentioned, is often *ongoing*. Some of my participants reported spending many hours rendering recycled materials into a state so that they suit the job. In this respect, I adopted flexible designs that form around the given properties of the materials used instead; embracing the wonkiness of “a fickle and inconstant world” (Ingold and Hallam, 2007: 4)

This example demonstrates an example of materials that quite conveniently were well suited to the job. However, I was perhaps not so well suited to being the designer of the arrangement of these materials, for my lack of awareness of how various materials and elements would interact very nearly caused problems. There were several moments where it was only with a little improvisation and the help from my partner and neighbours that it was able to come together. By the “end” two pieces

of “waste” had been assembled with other materials in a way that they became a functioning window. Admittedly, the use of parcel tape was quite wasteful. However, *with better knowledge* of materials in future, I can *prevent waste* by using my materials (and time) more efficiently. Much was learned through doing about materials: I would not underestimate the stubborn nature of inner tubes being stuck to steel again. Therefore, a process of enskillment is being embarked on here as I grow a better understanding as I engage with the world in a new way.

Next, I needed to address the internal window frames. I put out a post on my personal social media profile in search for leather offcuts (a method which often appeared to be fruitful for finding unwanted items for my conversion). I found a friend with an array of offcuts, which he gave me to line my windows and effectively make window frames. Leather seemed to be a good option because not only does it naturally have insulating properties, but it is also flexible and easy to apply to a circular shape. This involved making a template using paper, and cutting out petal shapes which I could then glue onto the ply and glass (using gorilla glue). I was later advised to use suncream to prevent the leather from getting sun damaged and shrivelling up, which would compromise the window frames in the long run if not prevented.

After painting the rest of the walls using left over paint and wood paint donated by several friends and family members, I began to furnish the inside of the vehicle. I began this process after much thought and having gradually accumulated various discarded materials from various sources. I completed this relatively quickly because I had chosen to salvage existing furniture and other household items, which I could

simply adapt for my own uses. Therefore, this approach to sourcing materials reduced a significant amount of human energy.

For example, this included repurposing the frame of a chest of drawers that had been given to my father, who passed the structure on to me to adapt into a kitchen unit. I then assembled an old campervan stove (found on Facebook marketplace for £25) onto this frame. I attached an old baking tray which had been left out on the street to be taken by an unknown person in Bristol. This was fixed underneath the cooker, acting as a safety mechanism to prevent fires caused by the heat of the cooker. My partner gave me an old grilling tray he no longer needed to use the grill too. More wood offcuts from my carpenter friend were used to make the shelves and to stop items sliding out. An old cupboard wall (which conveniently fitted this structure very precisely) was put on runners to make a slide out surface, enabling me to have more space when cooking when I needed it. I also made shelves from wood offcuts passed on to me by my partner, who had bulk bought a large number of offcuts several years ago.

I sometimes improvised in other ways by experimenting with strong branches that I found underneath trees on the land, using them to make shelves. After building a base frame using off cuts, I assembled a fold down bed. The frame comes from a bed that came with a static caravan, which was going to be thrown out by a friend who had heard that I was looking for materials and thought of me before throwing it out. In order to make it the right size, my partner angle-grinded the 1/3 of the width off, and I trimmed down the bed slats accordingly. Fold out legs were made using the wood left over from the collection of discarded wood that I used to make a desk, and some door hinges. The wheel arches worked well to provide extra strength and support to the structure. The bed is held up using bungee straps which are attached to a metal handle that used to be attached near the back door.

When the colder months began to grow closer, I decided that it was time to fit my burner. This would allow me to heat my home, using wood salvaged in woodlands, or what was left over from my partners' chainsaw carving projects or occasionally we would have to buy it in supermarkets. This was a task that I needed extra guidance and help with, for fitting a burner badly can be dangerous. I also wanted some help cutting the hole in my roof for the flue (as mentioned earlier, holes in roofs can be particularly problematic). I swapped this burner with a friend, who was happy to take

my larger (much heavier) burner for her relatively static caravan in exchange for her smaller and lighter burner, which was better suited to a moving van with a more limited weight capacity. This meant that I had to rearrange the position of my kitchen unit, moving it closer to the wall. I used a piece of chequer plate (found in a friend's scrap pile) and a sheet of stainless steel salvaged from an old caravan from another friend in the area to make heat barriers. The flue is made of stainless steel, which I ordered online having failed to find anything suitable second-hand at the time. I used an old baking tray that my partner found as a tray beneath the burner to collect falling ash, as well as a barrier to stop the wood from getting too hot underneath (although it generally does not get very hot here, as heat rises). I decided to use an old yak wool glove to use the handle of the door of the burner when hot, having lost the other one.

After living in the van for about a year I discovered a necessity to build more storage compartments. I created a storage space above my cab using more waste wood and offcuts salvaged from a friend I visited who was a carpenter and had lots of off cuts that he needed to throw away. I also built a storage unit that I adapted from an old CD cabinet, which was salvaged from the roadside in Bristol having been fly-tipped. This was achieved with the help of a friend living on site with me near Bristol at the time, who gave me some brackets (and had the idea to use them in the first place). He held the cupboard in place for me while I attached it to the wall with the brackets. He also gifted me the netting from his own collection of rescued items, after I asked if he had anything of that sort. The netting provided a useful way of securing items when moving, representing another cause for consideration when converting and adapting a moveable home. For example, I made a chair for my desk which is attached to the floor on runners normally used for a drawer, keeping it secure when moving while still facilitating movement to put it under the desk. I also made a storage cupboard using some scrap planks of wood donated by a friend on site in Mid Wales, a caravan cupboard door and the useful catches from the caravan cupboard as this would stop the cupboard from opening when moving. I used hinges from an old cupboard door given to me by another friend who lived in the area, who was throwing it out. A bored teenager living on the site who wanted to earn some money sanded the wood down for me, which saved me time and meant that he could buy some fuel for his motorbike.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter has shown how self-provided housing can be a part of a process of reconfiguring social relations, or *oikonomic arrangements,* which can operate as a powerful alternative in relation to wider (or other) economic structures. This can be done through giving the users of housing more control over their dwellings and the rest of their lives effectively, as more time and resources can be accumulated through affordable housing. In this respect, an "anarchist" spirit (Sitrin, 2019) continues to be present, as self-provided housing can enable people to dismantle hierarchies or inequalities experienced in other forms of accommodation. This chapter has also begun to delve into the role of non-humans, having revealed the process of working directly with material, both when building and maintaining a home. Here it has also been shown that the non-humans that we assemble to make our dwellings shape our experience of "being in control," as we are subject to the laws of physics and an array of variable natural processes. My choice of materials allowed me to do this more affordably, while also living in tune with my values by reducing waste. In this respect, this process reveals ethical judgements involved in these alternative entanglements.

Despite these advantages, vehicle dwellers are often still subject to some of the same conundrums experienced by other homeowners as they encounter wear and tear. Indeed, while rented accommodation can be frustrating if absent landlords fail to manage material circumstances of a dwelling (Soaita and McKee, 2019), renters are often free of a lot of responsibility that comes with ownership, which can also be cumbersome. Indeed, while "the agency of broken things" can serve as an unpleasant reminder of the lack of control one has over their rented dwelling, it can also, on the contrary, be a reminder of the degree of (sometimes overwhelming) responsibility one has of a dwelling that they own.

One can consider some self-built housing practices to be an act of "prefigurative politics" (Breines, 1982) as people enact the changes they want to see through making homes that give them more freedom and allow them to live in tune with their values. Or, in other words, to live the kind of lives that they want to live. In this respect home can (again) be conceptualised as "a vehicle for resistance" (Young, 2005*).* That is to say that home can be "a place where more humane social relations can be lived and imagined" (Young, 2005: 70). Here Aristotle's concept of

“oikonomia” is fitting once again: as *living well* becomes the key target output of how we arrange ourselves with other humans and nonhumans. Moreover, it can be said that escaping what is experienced as oppressive or alienating housing through alternative housing such as vehicle dwelling can contribute to our understanding of oikonomic arrangements that are underpinned by ethical judgements. It can also be considered how these practices may reflect the enactment of degrowth principles, as people make do with what is available to them in their social network and in their environment as an alternative to buying new resources that lead to creating more waste.

It was shown that mutual aid and recycling can play a significant role in this process. Indeed, mutual aid can both generate and strengthen social bonds and recycling can, albeit in seemingly small ways, contribute to the wellbeing of many humans and nonhumans as we move away from wasteful consumption practices. The process of building through processes of mutual aid also offers examples of how we can arrange ourselves in ways that contribute to a sense of belonging and community, which constitute important features of feeling “at home.” Of course, it is worth noting that there are many different ways in which people “do” and feel home (Gurney, 1996; Ingold, 1995). What is shown here is my own experience – shaped by my encounters with other humans and non-humans – that will be more relatable to some than others. Indeed, it is worth noting that some people may have the opposite experience and receive little or no help, having an ill effect on their experience and sense of belonging in a community.

Alternatively, some vehicle dwellers may purchase faulty vehicles that are expensive to buy and cost a lot of time and money to fix. There certainly are fewer positive accounts of social relations underpinning the experience of vehicle dwelling and converting vehicles. Therefore, it is important to emphasise that this chapter is by no means generalisable: there are many different circumstances that different people will find themselves in, as shown in detail in the first findings chapter. The next chapter will now further explore the use of recycled items, highlighting more processes of mutual aid. Other symbiotic relationships between humans and also nonhumans will be explored throughout the thesis, as well as the role that these processes have in

“subsistence-orientated” oikonomic arrangements that reflect a degrowth ethos. The final chapter of this thesis will consider the changing policy context, and the implications this may have for self-built housing practices like these.

The Social (De)Construction of Waste: Tatting and Making Do with Finite Resources

Introduction

So far, it has been shown that I have observed that one can collect and reuse items discarded by others in creative (and effective) ways when building a home. Having presented a close-up account of my own experience of building, in this chapter I will present examples of other people's work: from art projects to other dwellings being made from reclaimed materials. I will explain the practice of "tatting" – the acquisition of abandoned, discarded objects and materials - which involves a new way of relating to materials which effectively facilitates this approach to building and making. This appears to be a significant unifying feature of various vehicle dwelling cultures (albeit certainly not being a practice entirely exclusive this group either). Many vehicle dwellers that I have known take pride in these practices.

Despite this, a damaging impression is often given that vehicle dwellers (particularly those known as "Travellers") are wasteful or "messy." It is common to see reports of piles of waste allegedly abandoned by Travellers at the expense of the wider public. Such stories often trigger and justify their displacement. These stories often constitute harmful misrepresentations that - on closer inspection - are found to be unfair or untrue. In response to this, I present evidence that alternatively many vehicle dwellers that I have spent time with effectively contribute to a bottom-up waste management service. It is hoped that these findings contest misrepresentations, while showing that waste is perhaps only waste *if we allow it to be*. Indeed, underlying ideas about the use and value of discarded materials and objects can effectively deconstruct the concept of waste: a much-needed lesson during a period of ecological crises.

The Waste Problem: (Mis)Representations of Travellers and Vehicle Dwellers

Existing research has often emphasised the hardship experienced by many Gypsy, Roma and Traveller (GRT) communities relating to waste. Firstly, it has been found that structural barriers often exclude travelling communities from waste collection services, which require a fixed address (Crawley, 2004). Interestingly, the survey (Smart Communities, 2020) carried out in Glastonbury found that 61.25% of respondents – who were categorised as "vehicle dwellers" living on the roadside –

asked for waste collection. I have also found myself that when mobile I certainly become more aware of my waste, as it can quickly accumulate when there is no one coming to take it away for you. This was quite noticeable as I transitioned from living in a house.

Secondly, research has found that GRT communities often reside in in places where members of the public often go to fly tip their waste (Crawley, 2004). It has been found that fly tipping usually takes place on highways, bridleways, and council land (Dept. for Environmental Food & Rural Affairs, 2023), the kind of spaces that vehicle dwelling communities often reside on (including myself when being more mobile). It has been found that the lack of waste collection as well as the treatment of the kind of land GRT communities often live on can amplify discrimination as negative stereotypes are fed into (Crawley, 2004). Local people often resist sites due to these negative perceptions, which can lead to evictions (Crawley, 2004; Niner, 2006; CRE, 2006), generating vicious cycles. I have witnessed the stress this can cause when vehicle dwellers find other people's waste dumped outside their homes.

As I went to leave Dave's truck, he opened the door for me and looked angry.

"Bastards!!"

"What is it?" I said.

He picked up a bin bag that had appeared outside his truck during the couple of hours that we had had a cup of tea and a chat. It was full of empty blister packets.

"For fucks sake, this is the kind of thing that I am going to get blamed for. I'll have to get rid of it."

Fieldnotes, on the roadside in Bristol (2019)

Today we see significant amounts of fly tipping carried out by members of the public: between 2021 and 2022, local authorities in England dealt with over 1 million incidents of fly tipping (Dept. for Environmental Food & Rural Affairs, 2023). This could be a result of problems managing waste due to high council charges, or troubles accessing drop-off facilities. Interestingly, "a small van load" was the most common description for fly-tipped goods. Most members of the general public will be rejected when bringing larger vehicles to tips without a Waste Carrier's License. For many people in various kinds of accommodation this can make waste disposal challenging and frustrating. While the sedentary population may still have the option

to pay for their waste to be collected from their homes and businesses, those with no fixed abode are rarely given this option. Despite this, many vehicle dwellers still manage their waste effectively, and often recover and use much of the waste that accumulates as a result of a malfunctioning wider waste management system.

“Tinkerers” and Itinerant Recycling Practices

Before moving on to the empirical data presented here, it is important to note that various vehicle dwelling communities and individuals have been known to spend time with these materials through various “scavenging” - or indeed, *recycling* – practices. Such activities have often been effective economic resources for those who practice them, and are beneficial to wider society. Moreover, other “wandering folk” have often constituted vital elements of a functioning economic system. For example, Clapp (1994: 192) provides a historical account of how an “intricate network” of informal waste dealers in the 1800s was needed to recover waste from poorer populations, while affluent members were served by formal waste-trade dealers. He notes that itinerant “rag-and-bone” men represented a significant part of this network, who would acquire unwanted items from members of the public.

Another relevant example of bottom-up itinerant waste management practices have also been carried out by members the Irish Traveller community – who are often referred to as “tinkers.” It has been argued that “tinkers” were “the first greens” (Clark and O’hAodha, 2000) This community are well known for their workings with scrap metal, which has been considered to have served as a valuable economic and ecological function. In fact, it was estimated that at one point about half of all scrap metal was being processed by Irish Travellers outside of the formal industry. (Gmelch, 1977: 70)

It is also known that the Roma community also have a history using recycling as an economic resource throughout Europe (e.g. see Ringold et al, 2005; Jean-Pierre Liegeois, 2007). As illustrated in Chapter One, there are sometimes overlaps between different networks of vehicle dwelling folk. I personally have friends in the New Traveller community who operate their own scrap businesses, sometimes working alongside members of other GRT communities. Although these communities are incredibly diverse and changeable, it could perhaps be said that many of these groups and individuals are united by their innovative ways of generating economic resources that can benefit them, as well as wider society. It has been noted how

various GRT communities have demonstrated incredible adaptability by finding "employment niches" in this way (Clark and O'hAodha, 2000).

Moreover, the recycling practices put forward in this chapter can be considered a part of essential, bottom-up component of societal waste management. Building on the work of Thrift (2005), Graham and Thrift (2007), and Hall and Smith (2013), this activity could be considered a form of *repair* that constitute a part of "continual upkeep, care and maintenance" of society. Interestingly, Hall and Smith refer to those engaging in acts of (largely unnoticed) care and repair as "tinkerers." The notions of repair explored in these texts mainly focus on repair in the city, I would like to extend the scope of these activities beyond the city. Indeed, while it is known that the city has always provided a good source for materials gathered by "tinkers" (Clark and O'hAodha, 2000), most of the practices I document here have taken place in the countryside in Wales (largely due to constraints brought about by the COVID19 pandemic). However, it is worth noting, that a lot of materials used in examples presented here were gathered during time spent in the city, where the number of resources of this kind are significantly greater. As displayed in more detail in Chapter Two, the building of my own home has included using many materials gathered in cities. When going into the city for work, I would often be asked to keep my eyes open for certain objects on the side of the road needed for a particular job or project.

Moreover, Hall and Smith explain how the repair of *physical* items can often be interpreted as inherently "selfish:" fixing one's own property is a way of meeting one's own needs, rather than anyone else's. In this sense, items do not wish to be repaired, it is for our benefit that they are. This is contrasted with "social repair" whereby people are helped by others and a process of "repair" begins. However, here I would like to suggest that the practices presented here arguably constitute forms of repair that are both physical and social in the sense that they could be considered beneficial to wider society. This is especially the case if we regard plants, animals and the environment as a part of the social. The maintenance and reuse of various "things" represents a movement away from wasteful practices of consumption, effectively deconstructing waste through a reclamation of its use value. In a similar vein, Laura Centemeri (2021) explains how permaculture is a form of "care-based environmentalism," involving practices of *repairing* social and ecological relations. This often involves reducing the need for energy inputs (both non-

renewable energy and labour energy). Eliminating waste is seen as a key part of this process. This is explored further in the next chapter.

The Social Construction of Waste

Existing research regarding "waste" and its place and society has covered various angles looking at this phenomenon. One of the most prominent being the *social construction* of waste (see Gille, 2012 for a review). It is highlighted that the concept of waste is fluid and variable. Lynch (1981) explains how waste is largely defined by the fact that it is *not used.* Indeed, much time and energy is spent keeping it away from us (Scanlan, 2005). Gille (2012) illustrates the fluidity of material objects, as they move between various states (in a non-linear fashion) of being used, stored for future use, or disused and discarded. It is also considered how different people in different parts of the world interpret (and interact with) waste. "Developed," capitalist societies are considered to see waste as both harmful and useless, which leads to discarding, rather than recycling.

Similarly, Packard (1960) explains how waste is *made* through intentional obsolescence of various things sold to consumers, who are left with no choice but to waste as a result. In this respect, material objects are made in such a way that embodies a wasteful, profit-orientated ethos which has material consequences. This is contrasted with "developing" countries, where waste is considered to be valuable (Packard, 1960; Gregson & Crang, 2015). Connections have also been made to the influence of social class: ethnographic research (Gregson, 2007) has suggested that people with fewer resources are more likely to hold onto things and refurbish things. This is distinguished from wasteful "status"-orientated practices, whereby buying new products is a way of demonstrating that one is "up to date" with trends (Veblen, 1899: in Gilles, 2012: 833).

Interestingly, Veblen's analysis implies that this has a negative impact on people's quality of life, as they find themselves committing to more wage labour in order to fund such practices. He explains how long-term dissatisfaction is endured as people have less time to do other things with their lives. To remedy this, consumers often end up engaging in more consumption to gratify themselves; generating vicious cycles of wasted products, and arguably, *wasted lives.* For Lynch, a "wasted life" – whereby one does not develop into what one may have become – is arguably "the most grievous instance of wasted time" (1981: 150): what is considered wasted life

arguably gives meaning to all other “wastes.” This represents an interesting connection to other themes that I have found through my research, particularly with regards to ways in which people have adopted vehicle dwelling – a more *affordable* kind of housing - as a way of being free to do more of the things that they want to has been a reoccurring theme. For some, to persevere in a form of housing that prevented one from doing what *they* wanted to do, and effectively being the person that *they* wanted to be, constituted a kind of “wasted life.”

Moreover, it is shown here that waste is arguably *only waste if we allow it to be.* The production of waste is an action, as we actively interpret and act towards materials or even manage our time in certain ways. So, what if we were to *use* waste, and transform it from waste to resource? It appears that we must spend some time with these materials, for it is our discarding and refusal to spend time with these materials that seems to have allowed them to become waste at all.

The Concept of “Tat” and Practice of “Bodging”

I will now begin to present my findings by outlining some essential terminology that is commonly used among people I spend time with. The ideas behind the concepts that these words represent reveal the ways that ideas become entangled with materials which can make or unmake “waste.” The first is the word “*tat*.” This word can be used as a noun and a verb. The verb being the process of finding and salvaging unwanted items, and it can also be used as the noun for what is collected through “tatting.” Some people have accumulated impressive collections of tat, although these collections are not always appreciated by those who do not see the value in such items. It could be said that “tatting” is a kind of bottom-up waste collection and management service, whereby people collect, store and recycle various items and materials discarded by others. Another more familiar, related term would be “*to scavenge*,” or, on a more positive sounding note, “*to recycle*.” However, among our networks the word “tat” is used and is a familiar word to others beyond these networks too. For example, during my time living in Bristol, the word was commonly used. “Tatting” is very much facilitated by many Bristolians, who often place unwanted items outside of their houses for others to collect in certain districts. This is very popular in certain areas of the city. Interestingly, in other parts of the UK, this practice is discouraged, and some people have been prosecuted for leaving waste outside their houses.

Another practice that will be explored here is that of "*bodging*." Here we encounter a verb that is perhaps more familiar to most people than that of "tatting." "Bodging" tends to carry with it more negative connotations with its more common usage.

The Oxford Dictionary defines "to bodge" as:

"to make or repair something in a way that is *not as good as it should be*" (emphasis added).

It could be said that this is definition is debatable. Indeed, what many people have called "bodges" that I have witnessed are not necessarily "bad." Many examples seem to have generated or maintained the functionality of what is being "bodged." Of course, one could say that repaired objects often do not look the same as they were initially "intended" to look. However, if one is to consider functionality or resourcefulness as determining factors of what is "good," then this definition does not seem so fitting to many "bodges" I have seen.

Moreover, the dictionary also gives an example of bodging:

"The fence was bodged together from old planks and doors."

It could be said that bodging is often a practice of recycling, which appears to have been somewhat undermined by the definition offered by this source. This chapter will show the ways which bodging can be interpreted differently when recycling and resourcefulness is valued. I must be explicit here in that I am somewhat advocating this interpretation. I have felt much satisfaction when carrying out my own "tatting" and "bodging" practices, and experience feelings of admiration when encountering those of others. It will now be considered how bodging, particularly with regards to using discarded or second-hand materials - or *tat* – can be conceptualised in a more positive manner. That is to say, we might see some beneficial ways of attributing certain meanings to various materials and practices. The following examples of field notes and accounts given by my friends in the community will show that many "bodges" can certainly serve their purpose. Not only do such practices save things from "going to the tip," they represent fascinating processes of *improvisation* that involve different ways of using and interpreting materials as we go.

Making Do with What is There: A Different Way of Building/Dwelling

As shown in Chapter Two, my own experience of converting a vehicle into my home involved much mutual aid and recycling. It was illustrated how through this process of

building and improvisation that I found myself at home both in a dwelling, and within a community. As a novice builder, I was overwhelmed by the support and materials offered to me by others. It was mentioned how I used materials that I found, and this often included being given “tat” which, like *ideas*, are collected by others in the community. Many people in the community were happy to share and see their inventories of materials (and ideas) put to use. In this sense, the “DIW” process was, for me, an important part of feeling a part of the community. I also found myself at home in the sense that I was living in a dwelling that I had much understanding of and *control* over. In this respect, the inherently social nature of housing was revealed, while outlining some of the mechanics of a form of self provided housing. I will now show a selection of other people’s examples, most of which were shared with me digitally during a period of social isolation. While the digital examples unfortunately do not share the depth of description that an in-person ethnographic account would have, they do a good job of revealing the fluidity of entanglements, as materials live many lives serving many different functions for various humans and non-humans.

Colin’s Caravan

To begin with, Colin documents his recycling practices, providing photos and a written account that reveal a great deal of understanding and skill. His home has been assembled through the recycling of structural parts of vehicles over many years. This has involved various processes of dismantling and welding machinery, requiring a considerable amount of understanding of materials and how they might be manipulated for certain uses, revealing an impressive level of enskillment. Interestingly, when documenting his home, the process evokes a variety of memories as he reflects on personal connections and past experiences:

"This vehicle… is constructed from materials gathered from a number of sources. The saloon itself is from a Cheltenham Sable 13'4" caravan manufactured in approx. 1971. The stripe along the side and the trimmings are from a Safari caravan that I scrapped for its materials…The drawbar is from a Leyland Sherpa pick up van that a local agricultural contractor…had finished with. As is the rear extension of the chassis. The axles and wheels were provided by a… cattle container that I purchased from a local farmer… that I did a lot of work for, when he replaced it for a newer one. The container, mounted on an ex-skip trailer purchased from a Roma horse trainer and scrapman…is to this day my workshop…The main chassis of the trailer is constructed from a Commer walkthrough drop frame chassis that was purchased from a traveller…from Ireland. The vehicle was purchased for its engine (Perkins 4203) which was transplanted into another Commer walkthrough that was for many years also used as a living van…Both those vehicles were used as living vans for many years and early in their lives they both took part in the "Convoy" protest park up across the M5 motorway in the UK. This took place over most of a week. It occurred as a protest against the fact that there was nowhere legal to park in the early-mid 70's. and lasted for a couple of days."

To borrow words from Ingold again (1993: 152), it could be said that Colin's home, like a landscape: "tells – or rather *is* – a story." As illustrated by Colin's own writing, the assemblage of his home is not only constituted by various materials, but also by various stories and relationships with people who have also shaped the life and form

of these materials. Indeed, this home tells a tale (albeit partial) of Colin's life through showing the meshwork of human and nonhuman relations in which Colin has been entangled at various points in his life. The process of his reflection on these materials appeared to evoke memories and feelings of a sentimental nature.

He also notes how at various points, materials that were once entangled together have at later points been dismantled and taken away from each other to serve new purposes in other entanglements elsewhere. This is what renders recycled materials them useful rather than allowing them to become "waste." That is, of course, not to say that the materials are in anyway "bothered" by becoming waste: this idea of waste is, like other forms of repair, in some respect *selfish* (Hall and Smith, 2014); as this reflects our own interests. However, as some discarded materials begin to damage other nonhumans, it is clear that waste can certainly be quite *antisocial towards* others that are not human. Such "knots" (Ingold, 2015) that are formed (often by us) through the coming together of various things arguably do not have a place in symbiotic entanglements of "oikonomics" that prioritise well-being for all.

Jake's Cabin on Wheels

The next example is Jake's portable cabin (which was originally intended to be a mobile workshop). Halfway through building this space, Jake required a new place to live, so he quickly adapted the structure responding to his circumstances – or indeed, *improvising*. When describing this process, he wanted to share the breakdown of costs and materials. This reflects a common theme in this research: the adoption of alternative self-provided housing is often in order to achieve affordability within a largely unaffordable housing context.

Jake produced the following annotated list:

Insulation: off cuts/rejects for £30

Cooker: £10

Trailer lights and Chassis: from an old caravan given to me that had rotted away and needed scrapping

Frame wood: £20 for a bundle used ¼ so £5

Burner: £160 (made by a family friend)

Cladding/walls: £140

Frame: "I built the frame out of wood that are off cuts from the wood yard, which I got for £20... The imperfect bits that weren't straight. Unfortunately, now those bits just get thrown straight into a chipper and sent to a power station where it is burnt for power."

Roof: £40 "cheap tin that was damaged which I straightened out"

Window: From an old vintage caravan (free, gifted by neighbour)

Other lighting: £10

Runners for desk: £10

Battery: £10 bought from neighbour. currently being reconditioned to maintain usage.

Door: taken from an old bender, which was also made out recycled materials

Gutter: an offcut

Drawers: handed down from relative

Makeshift drawers made from carboard boxes from supermarkets and bungee cables to hold in place when travelling

Strip lights (resoldered) and low wattage plug sockets recycled from an old caravan

Cushions for seat taken from the same caravan that provided lights and chassis

All surfaces/worktops, ceiling and framework has been made using rejected wood from a wood yard.

Cupboard doors taken from caravan that provided the chassis.

Total cost: Approx. £415

Jake's list shows not only the affordability of his home, but also the different kinds of skills and social relationships involved in the building of his home. For example, several items were gifted by family members, friends and neighbours revealing similar processes of mutual aid and shared resources that were illustrated in the previous chapter. He also explains processes of "cajoling" materials, such as straightening out tin, reconditioning old batteries, and resoldering lighting devices. All of which reveal a diverse set of skills and practical knowledge that enabled him to

breathe life into various materials and things that would most likely have ended up being thrown away or rejected in a different context by someone else. Jake and others often speak about “rescuing” items from being thrown away, as they reinstate the value of various things through reclaiming them. However, while Jake explains how he saved a lot of money, he spent a lot of time altering materials to make them work in the way that he wanted them to as a result. It is worth noting here that Lynch (1981: 150) explains how waste of energy, space or time is “relative” in that we usually end up having alternative uses for these resources, and it depends on how we feel about those alternative uses. For Jake, he *enjoyed* learning and using his own time and energy to develop and apply these practical skills and knowledges.

Jake also explained how his approach to building was very much shaped by what was available to him: “we find whatever is the closest that’s free or a good deal and *build around it*” (emphasise added). Not only does this show the non-linear nature of design and how we move through the world engaging with an array of human and non-human actors, but it also reveals a useful approach to building that can effectively deconstruct waste.

Beccy’s Truck

The final example displayed here is a dwelling made almost entirely from recycled materials is Beccy’s truck. For Beccy, converting her truck this way was a way of her living in tune with her environmentalist values (although she did often refer to the unaffordable nature of renting and the lack of control she had in rented accommodation). In this respect, Beccy was consciously prefiguring the kind of changes she wanted to see in the world and considered herself to be an environmental activist. She and her partner had designed and built every inch of the dwelling together as a couple, and she enjoyed talking me through features of her home. Like Colin, she spoke much of the stories behind the materials used. She laughed as she talked me through her choice of low-impact materials and construction methods, some of which she felt she would not repeat having learned that they were perhaps less resourceful than she had initially expected.

For example, Beccy decided to use old pallets instead of plywood for the walls. She explained how although the pallets were free (and were aesthetically pleasing when finished), it was incredibly time-consuming cajoling them (breaking and sanding them). Therefore, when taking a holistic approach which includes the consideration of time and human energy, this was perhaps wasteful. This reveals the importance of recognising the entanglement of materials, as what may appear to be less wasteful in isolation (using an old pallet) may in fact be more wasteful in relation to other elements of the process. This also reveals the importance of sharing knowledge and experience: mutual aid can prevent future mistakes and effectively reduce waste in this respect. I will now present a couple more of Beccy's annotated photographs.

"Inside of cupboards made from old school desks which were on their way to the tip"

“Mish mash cupboards from disused doors plus a random drawer found and me Granny’s old suitcase as a drawer. All handles were rescued from a disused warehouse.”

Rendering Waste into an Economic Resource: Jane and Lily’s Artwork

As mentioned earlier, it has already been noted how other nomadic, vehicle dwelling groups have often done well to find employment niches through being creative and resourceful. This often involves working with what is available, from scrap metal to unwanted wood. Two participants sent me examples of artwork that they were making out of recycled materials. This represented another way in which this approach to making can be used as a valuable economic (or oikonomic) resource, which is beneficial to various social actors. Jane and Lily were passionate artists who also cared about the environment, and this approach to making allowed them to both make money and spend time doing what they loved while living in tune with their environmentalist values.

Firstly, Jane shared her art projects which were simultaneously demonstrations of her environmentalist, anti-capitalist and feminist principles, as well as her creative abilities. She explains how her work with waste is her way of directly responding to wider economics and politics that trouble her, revealing an awareness of more abstract features of entanglements:

“I take the problem of capitalist consumption and turn it into something beautiful... I explore repetitive processes as a reflection of the domestic and what is traditionally seen as women’s work. Contextualising my own position and status as a woman in

Western society cannot be separated from my concerns as a human and the destructive exploitation of our shared home and its finite resources."

Jane shared a YouTube video with me showing two teenage brothers building toys from waste in Haiti. She explained how she gained a lot of inspiration from people in other parts of the world that were working with waste. She also explained how a lot of her work was experimental, as she encountered various materials.

"I experiment with different waste materials and see how they behave and how I can utilise them. I'm also inspired by materials, so I'll see something and want to make stuff with it."

Here we see again an approach whereby one directly engages with materials and the ways in which their properties react and interact. For Jane, this involved a wide range of materials: from "everyday" domestic waste products like plastic bottles and milk cartons, to old tents and mechanical waste. However, of course, in order to detect and notice the value of these things requires a certain way of looking at them. This different approach to looking at materials is what Jane tries to teach the people she works with on various projects. For this reason, Jane explains how she values the presentation of her work as much as the work itself:

"The relationship between materials and space and the way work is presented to the viewer is as important as the making."

Jane has applied her work in many ways, engaging in various forms of social repair with her artwork. For example, she has made musical instruments with adults with learning disabilities from recycled materials, which were then gifted to another project for children to play with (see image below). She has also done work with people suffering from dementia, providing low-cost therapeutic art activities.

Another example I will share is Lily's silversmithing work, which began as a hobby and later became a source of income, as she started selling her creations in local shops and online. Lily hunts for cheap silverware in charity shops and car boot sales, which are often used by people as a place to shed their unwanted belongings, which can be passed on to others for a cheap price. After collecting these affordable materials, Lily using her silversmithing tools to manipulate the metal into new shapes for new functions. This includes the use of various tools and materials, such as saws, hammers, blowtorches, soldering blocks, and "pickle liquors" (chemical solutions that halt oxidisation processes).

Not only does this process require imagination, it also requires knowledge of the ways in which the shape of silver can be manipulated through cutting, welting and exposing it to heat and chemical reactions, allowing the silversmith to reshape the metal and effectively redirect its material flows as it takes on a new life. In order to do this, Lily has an understanding of the ways in which the different properties of different materials

interact. For example, in order to join two pieces of silver, she must use a very thin piece of silver which is inserted between the two edges that are to be joined. She then has to heat it to a very high temperature, over 900 degrees Celsius. (Silver is considered to be a relatively heat resistant material, which is why it is commonly used in electrical appliances). The thin piece of silver will melt before the thicker pieces, effectively melding the pieces together.

Another example of this, would be the use of charcoal as a soldering block as this material reflects the heat back onto the metal being soldered, which speeds up the heating process. There are many more examples, for silversmithing essentially involves harnessing material flows and counterflows, requiring knowledge of material properties and how they interact. This requires the use of a flame, and the right kind of flame. Indeed, different gases burn at different temperatures, and different torches will work differently: with some producing more intense flames or being more adaptable than others. While a more intense flame may be desirable, one also has to consider the workspace in which the flame is going to be produced. So, there are a variety of factors to be considered here, which specifically looks at the ways in which different material properties intermingle, as a matter of practicality and safety.

Nancy's Makeshift Homes for Non-humans in the Community

Another participant, Nancy, decided to show me dwellings that she had assembled for others that she lived with. She showed ways in which vehicles that were no longer able to serve their purpose as roadworthy transportation devices can be used to assemble homes for animals. It is a common practice for vehicles and caravans to passed on to other humans. Nancy showed that when they are no longer fit for purpose for humans, they can be passed on to animals in the community.

Interestingly, many of the properties of these vehicles are well suited to the purposes they are currently serving, although this was most likely not the intention of the designer.

"The Quail house is a broken vehicle. It's rat proof, so good for the winter." – Nancy

Firstly, vehicles are useful in that they are moveable, allowing animals to be easily transported across the land if need be. In addition to this, their metal shells and soft interiors make ideal homes for birds in the winter. Indeed, rats will struggle to burrow through steel, making this is a safe space for quails. The soft cushions make comfortable living spaces for the birds to sleep and keep warm. The windows allow natural light in and warm the dwelling in the day creating a kind of greenhouse effect. Here we see how the materials brought together here can interact with elements – in this case, the sun/light – in a way that generates heat through harnessing the power of the sun. No electricity is needed.

She also explained how she had to quickly adapt and make new dwellings for her birds as they developed from chicks to adult birds as their needs changed. Interestingly, Nancy explained how documenting these dwellings has made her "realise how *moveable* everything is." Indeed, it can be said that all homes are always being adapted to "fit in with manifold and ever-shifting purposes" (Ingold and Hallam, 2007: 3). This has already been demonstrated to some extent in Chapter Two which documents my experience of building my home, and was also shown through Colin, Jake and Beccy's examples.

Further evidence of this is revealed again here where, albeit at a slower rate in some circumstances, the transition of human homes into animal homes takes place, as children grow older and move into new dwellings. Nancy explained how the caravan that was used by a succession of teenagers had now been reappropriated as a chicken shed. In this respect, materials in the home are very much intertwined with our habits, routines, and life events (Gibson, 2007). The transition of this dwelling moving from a home for humans to a home for chickens was largely shaped by the departure of humans followed by the invasion of less welcome nonhumans. Fungi began to thrive in the damp that grows as everyday practices of care and maintenance began to diminish, and the movement (followed by a lack of movement) of water began to invited these unwanted guests. The homes for her developing quails appeared to have a higher magnitude of fluidity, as their bodies changed rapidly her processes of improvisation moved on to meet the changing needs of her fast-growing animals. Due to the nature of quails – as beings having significantly shorter lifespans than humans - these processes moved quickly. They were certainly keeping Nancy busy.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have begun to demonstrate ways in which vehicle dwellers I have spent time with contribute to wider society in ways that are often unnoticed, constituting an attempt of a kind of repair of stigmatised identities. What is more, much can be learned from the ways in which people improvise with what is around them, offering alternative ways in which we look at material “things” that are often discarded and considered invaluable (and even burdensome). It could be said that in some respects, by recognising “things” as gatherings of material flows, one can effectively deconstruct “waste” through “redirecting their flow” (Ingold, 2010: 9), effectively creating new things that live on along different lines. Indeed, Nancy noted how she had realised how “moveable everything was” when carrying out this

exercise. While many people may not knowingly understand materials in this way, many people I have spent time with certainly know much about the properties and tendencies of materials, and how they react and interact when brought together in a meshwork of various flows. Sometimes this can involve quite complex knowledge of materials, for example, when working with the properties and tendencies of metals through welding or silversmithing. In this respect, deconstructing waste can be much like a process of alchemy, as different materials and forces are deliberately mixed or melded together with the aim of reaching desired effects. This involves a considerable level of skill, which the people in this chapter have learned as they move through life, looking, listening and feeling as they improvise their way through. Here one can consider Ingold's (2000) ideas about the ways in which we learn through processes of attention, as we actively engage with the world.

Through recycling materials, we learn much about those materials, which shapes our interactions with other materials as we move along through life. Sometimes recycling involves a process whereby we dismantle a "knot" of connected things, and these things are casted off, going their separate ways to become entangled with other things that they correspond to, becoming a part of new knots (Ingold, 2017). Through making knots that are more symbiotic, we can deconstruct waste and aim towards forms of social organisation that are geared to sustain well-being. Indeed, while repair and reuse can be selfish, as we interact with such materials to fulfil our own desires (Hall and Smith, 2015), these processes of deconstructing waste can be sociable in other ways. We can effectively save things from landfills where they may decompose – or "leak" (Ingold, 2010) – "badly," causing problems for other humans and non-humans. We can also stop various things from becoming obstructions, as they become useless and burdensome laying abandoned on the side of the road where materials start to deteriorate, and their opportunity for recycling slowly diminishes as materials are claimed by other forces that prevent us from being able to manipulate them as easily. Such practices may appear small, but they arguably represent practices that contribute to the well-being of many humans and nonhumans.

It was also interesting to see how different participants presented their creations. Jake mentioned the financial incentives behind his decisions to deconstruct waste, which appeared to be important to him and highlighted how his practices somewhat related to an aim to living a life that was more affordable. He valued using his time to

develop and utilise his practical skills involved in the building of his home. Others cited more political or ethical reasons behind their practices, embracing a “low impact” “anti-capitalist” approach to building and making, the latter signalling a reaction to broader economic and social structures. This supports Hornborg’s (2018) argument that we must not lose sight of the relevance of these more abstract features of entanglements. Moreover, for Jane and Lily, their recycling practices were also sources of income. It could be said that for some people, these practices were motivated by a mixture of economic necessity, combined with environmentalist values (and to varying degrees). This again contests the dichotomous nature of choice and necessity debates aforementioned. Therefore, this chapter offers some insight into the details behind common accounts of vehicle dwellers, who claim to have been motivated by financial factors when housing themselves this way (however, this is not to say that the findings here are generalisable as such).

Interestingly, Jake, Colin and Beccy all mentioned the input of materials provided by people that they knew, highlighting the social bonds underlying their home building. Such accounts represent forms of mutual aid, as builders allow their friends and relatives to offload unwanted items, while directly benefiting from this themselves. Moreover, as mentioned in the literature review, these alternative ways of relating to non-humans can constitute alternative oikonomic arrangements, which possess some similarities to those presented by Cattaneo and Gavalda (2009). By observing the ways in which people transform waste into means to directly provide for their own needs, they reduce the need for wage-labour, while reducing damage to the environment - and other humans and non-humans as a result. Therefore, this can also contribute to our understanding of degrowth principles in action and how other “oikonomic” arrangements may be enacted on the ground through alternative modes of domestic life. I now move on to examine this further in relation to other nonhumans, such as plants and animals.

“Living Closely to Nature:” Exploring Processes of Sustenance and Symbiosis Between Humans and Non-Humans

“Well, once you’ve developed it, it’s quite a secure life. We kinda developed that kind of thinking and attitude...it was a deliberate way of developing my life to be able to use what the landscape provided as much as you could…because in actual fact to keep yourself warm and well fed only takes about 2 days a week…as long as you do away with your flash motors and all the rest of it [referring to material possessions]… if you take all that away you can live really comfortably in just two days a week…then you come to the projects and things…things that you’re doing for the pleasure of it.”

– An Interview with Giles, a Traveller in Mid Wales (2021)

Introduction

Throughout the time I have spent vehicle dwelling amongst various Vehicle Dwellers, and when exploring relevant literature, cultural artefacts and online content, I noticed that language is often used referring to a value of a “connection” with (and *care for*) “nature” or “land.” For some people, this is said to be a key incentive behind their way of life. Indeed, 35 of 80 survey participants in Glastonbury cited a desire to have “access to outside space” as a “reason for current lifestyle” (Smart Communities, 2020: 16). For others, it was something “discovered” through adopting the way of life out of choice and/or necessity. Similarly, Hetherington (2000) described how New Travellers experimented with different ways of living, which often involved different ideas about their relationship with the land. However, there is a need for more detailed accounts that illustrate how this happens, despite the emphasis of a general desire among New Travellers to want to “tread lightly on the land” and to “live close to nature” and using finite resources “sparingly” (The Children’s Society, 2010). It has even been found that sometimes New Travellers would measure their status through measuring how “close to nature” their lifestyle was (Martin, 2000). Clark (1997) also notes the prevalence of “eco-spiritual” beliefs and values among some (often middle class) groups of New Travellers. So far it has already been shown how environmentalist values can underpin the design and build of dwellings that allow people to live in tune with “green” values through the construction of “low impact dwellings.” Additionally, some of my friends have made sources of income through recycling practices, finding “eco-friendly” employment niches.

Before delving further into this, it is important to highlight a need for new language here: for being “closer to nature” implies a separation of humans and non-humans (with some humans being more or less distanced from it than others) which has been shown to be problematic. This Cartesian dualism of “society” and “nature” arguably represents a harmful, anthropocentric feature of both sociological practice and wider society (Aldeia & Alves, 2019). Tim Ingold (2000) expresses concern about this. I also do not think that a lot of Vehicle Dwellers that I know would consider themselves to be “separate” from nature. Instead, I think that a lot of Vehicle Dwellers see themselves as being *intertwined* with nature. Especially those who practice permaculture or appear to engage with similar ideas and practices.

This chapter will now show how relations between humans and non-humans are influential within alternative social ecologies. This chapter will show how enabling more freedom in our lives can be *facilitated* by relationships with various nonhumans that we work with to achieve the lives we want to live. Through an engagement with empirical data, I will demonstrate the ways in which non-humans are *interwoven* with our everyday lives, revealing processes of collaborating with non-humans. In this respect, much like the previous chapter, this involves practices of “making do” or *working with what is available.* It will be shown how people have reconfigured their lives in order to spend time doing what they wish: which for some people, actually involves spending more time with animals and plants and can be part of a rejection of materialism and consumerism. I consider the concept of “mutual aid” to emphasise the collaborative, symbiotic nature of our relations with other humans and non-humans. In this sense, non-humans can be included in processes of mutual aid, or to use permaculture terminology, *symbiosis*. Or additionally, we might also consider what Donna Haraway (2008) terms *sympoiesi*s, which implies an

“unending meeting of beings” whereby living beings compose and decompose together as “companion species.”

Why Do People Practice Permaculture?

For a lot of people involved in the permaculture movement, the everyday ideas and practices that they engage with are conceptualised as a form of activism *(*Centemeri, 2019): a non-confrontational form of resistance that utilises everyday practices of repair and care of the environment as a force of social change. As already shown, the repair and reuse of – and effective deconstruction of - “waste” offers a significant

contribution to the “repair” of the environment. It also involves a different way of looking at and relating to materials (albeit, not always intentionally in this way). Of course, it is worth emphasising again how, for many vehicle dwellers, there are varying levels of motivation in relation to environmentalist values, financial incentives (and even survival). The varying (changeable) degrees of choice and necessity remain a consistent theme and shaping force.

We may also consider notions of *freedom*: as people adopt new ways of living – and indeed, value practices - that allow them to live the lives that they wish to live. Badman-King (2021: 3) takes a similar approach to permaculture, through reflection on ideas about the Ancient Greek concept of “εὐδαιμονία” or, as Nussbaum (1994: 15; cited in Badman-King, 2021: 3) suggests: the “*completeness of life,”* which is grounded in Aristotle’s ethics. As mentioned in the literature review, Aristotle’s notion of well-being involves ethical commitments and other “surplus” beyond fulfilling “basic needs” and/or survival (such as love, friendship, knowledge and philosophy).

“It’s about a simpler life…a life closer to nature where you can hear the rain on the roof, where you don’t need as much money so you can be with your children more.”

A written account of a New Traveller speaking to The Guardian (Grant, 2021)

I now wish to highlight Proudhon’s conception of the freedom: whereby the freedom of one is relational to the freedom of others (See Pritchard, 2019). Pritchard explains how this requires a *diverse ecology*. Interestingly, one of permaculture’s “key” design principles is diversity and, much like Tim Ingold (2000) suggests, diversity is conceptualised as *dynamic* and *relational* (Aistara, 2013). Moreover, following developments in “Green Anarchism” (Price, 2019) when referring to the freedom of “others” here, we can also include the freedom and flourishing of non-humans, such as animals and plants. At this point we may reconsider the ecofeminist notion of “subsistence-orientated” oikonomia ((Bennholdt-Thomsen and Mies 1999; Salleh 2009), whereby ecosystems are foundations of an economy, and a notion of the “good life” is built “from below” taking into account the good life of others in relation to the individual. The well-being of non-humans is considered in these notions of oikonomia.

At this point, one may also consider the work of Donna Haraway, as developed by

Timeto (2020). Indeed, by "being aware of the heterogeneous configuration of the world, we can take charge of its continuous heterogenesis" (Timeto, 2020: 326). In this respect, echoing teachings associated with permaculture (albeit, without overtly recognising this connection), Timeto advocates an approach to repairing ecological damage that requires an active engagement with (and deliberate continuation of) diversity. To use Ingold's (2010) words, this involves the *alchemy* of various humans and non-humans evolving through mutually constitutive relationships. In this respect, humans can act as responsible ecosystem managers, and engage in processes of repair (Centemeri, 2019). Interestingly, Buser and Boyer (2021) have already noted the vital role that the collaborations of human and non-humans (such as rocks and bacteria) play in the maintenance of urban water infrastructures in Bristol. They conceptualise these collaborations in the context of essential (yet largely unnoticed) constellations of care and repair practices. In this respect, through exploring processes of cooperation – or to use Kropotkin's language, "*mutual aid*" – we might find modes of organisation that allow well-being to flourish. This chapter begins to scratch the surface of this more-than-human pursuit, noting the ways in which humans have arranged themselves within the world that is also inhabited by an array of humans and non-humans, who can and do often work together. Through doing so, it is shown how some of the people I have learned so much from do not so live "closely" to nature as such, but live *with* nature and effectively achieve efficient forms of social organisation through engaging with these processes of collaboration and mutual shaping.

Symbiotic Relationships Between Animals and Plants

"As soon as we study animals…we at once perceive that though there is an immense amount of warfare and extermination going on…there is, at the same time, as much, or perhaps even more, of mutual support, mutual aid, and mutual defence…"

– Kropotkin (1914)

When explaining processes of mutual aid, Kropotkin emphasises how animals of the *same species* help each other. Interestingly, despite the concept of "symbiosis" being coined by a botanist in the late 1800s in response to observations of mutualistic relations in lichens, Kropotkin does not use this term at all. He does not highlight collaborations between humans and non-humans: a trend that is also notable in contemporary literature regarding mutual aid. By studying the ways in which different

human and non-human actors work together, we shed light on “ongoing and mutually constitutive engagement between people and their environments” (Ingold, 2000: 27) which can also be seen as “mutually beneficial” from the perspective of sustenance. In this respect, it can be said that Ingold’s theoretical framework can assist us in finding evidence of what Anarchists call mutual aid, while departing from an anthropocentric approach to Anarchism, as called for by Green Anarchist, Murray Bookchin (1993).

Permaculture is largely about harnessing natural relationships to *close cycles.* Badman-King (2021: 109) provides an excellent example: he describes a home he has built for a colony of worms, with a tap to extract the leachate to feed his tomatoes. He can then eat the tomatoes himself, providing himself with valuable nutrition that he needs to thrive too. Here the notion of “companion plants” is relevant, whereby permaculture practitioners observe and note what appear to be complementary relationships between different species of plant that appear to flourish when positioned closely to one another. I have observed similar patterns of symbiosis which provide sustenance, while also contributing to the management (or deconstruction) of waste. These processes show that we do not necessarily *bend* nature to work as we wish it to as such: instead, we “submit to a productive dynamic that is immanent in the natural world itself” (Ingold, 2000: 81). This echoes permaculture principles of biological mimicry. Also, many of these dynamics could arguably be interpreted as processes of mutual aid, as different species help one another in order to ensure the survival of themselves as well as a greater number of species.

One example would be our relationship with our Chickens. Firstly, chickens are efficient waste management systems: they will happily eat much food waste that is given to them, and process it quicker than your average compost heap, converting it into manure which can later be applied to compost heaps for garden. This provides sustenance to the soil and effectively the many other inhabitants that are currently residing within the environment. Chickens will also eat cooked foods that are unsuitable for a compost heap. They then produce nutritious eggs in return, providing humans (and occasionally dogs) with a good source of protein which arguably makes the process more efficient, as we get the very most out of our nutritional resources. For this reason, the chickens did not stay at home when we went out onto the road to sell carvings, they came with us. Managing our food waste (in addition to providing

eggs) was particularly essential in this case, because we often do not have access to waste collection. On one occasion, my partner and I took them to a site on the outskirts of Bristol for a week. They ended up being quite popular, as they started helping other people living there by eating a some of their waste food too. The dogs on the site were well trained, and were more concerned about foxes on the land, becoming guardians for our chickens. This worked out well for us and our chickens.

Chickens also make good gardeners: when confined to the parameters of the vegetable patch they can effectively work the soil, eating any remaining vegetation and bugs in preparation for the next round of crops. It could be said that the chickens are also good at improvising, eating what they find in front of them. They then excrete onto the soil, which provides food for worms who further break it down into the soil providing, essential nutrients. Due to the amount of available animal and plant “waste” in this set up, there is no need to buy fertilisers. One disadvantage of keeping chickens, however, is that they can attract rats who are known to have a more difficult relationship with human beings through sharing harmful bacteria and diseases. This is where the role of domesticated predators come in, such as cats and dogs, who are often kept and bred by humans for ratting purposes. These animals often kill rodents, and it has also been found that rodents foraging activity can be reduced with the presence of predators as cats and dogs that effectively create “a landscape of fear” (Mahlaba et al, 2017).

Therefore, our harmonious relations with non-humans can often rely on the relations between predators and their prey. Or in other words, processes of death and fear. It seems to be that some non-humans have alliances, and their supportive roles towards each other (and us) can involve death or decomposing. That is to say, that sometimes by being kind to one species (or set of species), one must control the population and/or behaviour of another. Furthermore, while some species may live in harmony with some living beings, they may actively destroy another: indeed, like fungi, species are often “ambivalent in their benevolence, depending on your point of view” (Tsing, 2012: 143). In this respect, it can be said that some of our arrangements cause or involve as much death as they do life.

Back on the land in Wales, there are other animals that aid our waste management processes while providing nutritional resources. When it comes to garden waste – such as the woody stems of my kohlrabi leaves that had not been harvested soon

enough while I way away on the road – we can give this matter to the goats, who will devour this kind of garden waste a lot more effectively than chickens. Interestingly, goats are known to be useful for vegetation management as they improve the cycling of plant nutrients, allowing grassy species to thrive as they work through dominating brushes and weeds (Hart, 2001). They can also provide milk which can be consumed as milk, or converted into cheese; representing another significant source of protein

We can also consider the role of the horses, who are also valued members of the community, especially among those living in the community with a horse drawn background. For horse-drawn Travellers, horses are a definitive part of their everyday life and culture. They provide their owners with an alternative to fossil fuel consumption, allowing one to further detach oneself from what are felt to be oppressive economic systems. Interestingly, other research has found that the presence of horses can render Traveller identity more “socially acceptable” (Howarth, 2011), revealing the various dimensions of support they may give us. Unfortunately I am yet to spend time much time on the road with horses, with the exception of one who stayed with us on the roadside for a few days one autumn. However, I have spent time living with several horse drawn travellers who have settled, whose horses now play a practical role in the care of the land and gardens. For example, they continually help numerous people by keeping the grass of their fields tamed as they graze. Horse owners are aided by their friends who allow them to essentially feed their horses on their land, and the horses pay their way in various ways. Firstly, when the plants eaten by horses are converted by the horses’ digestive system into manure, this nutrient-packed manure can be used to enrich the soil of our gardens and, therefore, the edible plants we grow in them. Indeed, those who used horse manure on their gardens recently had impressively large vegetables (see below).

Moreover, through this process of eating plants, horses also have symbiotic relations with other non-humans. It has been found (Garrido et al, 2019) that grazing horses support greater plant diversity, as they remove plants that dominate the space. (Again, showing the role that death can have in such arrangements). As plant species are enrichened, essential pollinators - such as butterflies and bees - have been found to thrive better in these grazed areas. Not only are greater numbers of these insects found in grazed areas, but essential pollinators have also been found to rest and feed more in these spaces. Thriving bee and butterfly populations reciprocate this nourishment through pollinating other non-humans, allowing plants to thrive.

Let's Talk About Toilets: The Value of the Devalued

I have already briefly noted the benefits of both chicken and horse manure, which are generally accepted and treated as commodities by many food growers. In this respect, while it may still be seen as waste by many people, it is generally used a lot more than human waste, which is normally condemned to our sewage system, where natural processes of decay are not only altered, but taken far away from us. This is a huge contrast with the use of compost toilets which, for those of us with access to bases, can stay with us for multiple years as it gradually breaks down until it is safe to feed the plants in our gardens (and effectively food for us) much later. In recent years, sewage systems have begun to receive more negative attention in public

debates as concerns are raised about the leaking of sewage systems into rivers; prompting an ideal time to reflect on the role of excrement in the home.

Moreover, human excretion (like other processes of excretion, death and decay) can be considered to be a "moment of exchange between living beings" (Reno, 2014: 22). In this respect, by considering how our own excretion works as a kind "fundamental currency" that is exchanged between different species (Higgin, 2016: 80) we may perhaps shed light on the ways in which we engage in further symbiotic relationships with the many non-humans we live with. While Higgins does not use the anarchist terminology of mutual aid, nor permaculture's "symbiosis," this arguably represents an allied mode of understanding ecological relations. Indeed, for Higgins, this taboo area of everyday life can reveal what kind of (as Donna Harraway puts it) "*companion species*" we might be (2008: 81; emphasis added). Moreover, Higgin also highlights the work of Ingold, noting the relevance of an ecological perspective that recognises the intertwined, mutually shaping nature of a social world comprised of various humans and non-humans. Therefore, it could be said that our compost toilets (albeit taboo) may be one of the best examples in this thesis of the ways in which humans can rearrange their domestic spaces and contribute to the well-being of other species, which effectively benefits them in return.

"The Landscape Provides:" Harnessing the Power of Fire and Water

Revealing similar observations to Vanini and Taggart (2015), in addition to plants and animals, various *technologies* allow us to harness the power of various natural elements while living on the land (or on the road). Firstly, wood burners supply an excellent source of heating while also providing a way of drying clothes and cooking. This technology facilitates mobility, as the resources we need to get by can be found almost anywhere while on the move. As one Traveller pointed out to me once: when you keep moving, there is often more wood available to you. This highlights a kind of *awareness* of the availability of resources that one develops when gathering their own fuel. Indeed, one does not simply push a button or turn on a tap which generally will allow us to use as much as we like and send us a bill later. As one Traveller pointed out to me, when you have stayed in the same place for a while, you may sometimes start to run low on wood and need to walk further to gather more.

This resonates with the words of Tim Ingold (2000), who notes the ways in which those who settle in a more sedentary manner often end up moving more, while

nomads will move less each time they settle. Moreover, when establishing a more permanent base, more planning is required when it comes to resources. For example, in Mid Wales, trees can be grown to serve as firewood in the future or to replace older trees that are destined to become fuel sooner. Firewood is ideally gathered in the drier months and stored for the winter. In contrast to this, storage space can be more limited on the road, and it is not essential to have a wood store: wood can generally be found or bought in most places. Thankfully, as someone who often travels with chainsaw carpenters, off-cuts of wood are abundant and work well as dry firewood. Other technologies can also be useful. While hot water bottles are relatively high impact for those who boil kettles using electric, if one is to heat the water on the burner, one can effectively save wood through the night by heating the bed with a hot water bottle. With good insulation in a small space, we can also heat our homes quickly by making tea, cooking meals, or even having a friend over. For those on the move, one can use the heat from the engine to warm their spaces as they drive to their next destination. Some people also note the role that their dogs can have in adding additional body heat in their homes.

Furthermore, the use of solar panels is particularly popular, and appears to have become almost standardised among vehicle dwelling groups. Before solar panels became more accessible, in the past a lot more generators were needing to be used. Generators use fuel that (generally) needs collecting from a fuel station, which requires a flow of money and does not facilitate the kind of “off-grid” living that is often desired by some people. Indeed, I used to be very familiar with the sound of a gentle hum of generator while approaching sites between 2008 and 2011 when I first started to spend time with New Travellers. However, today solar panels are both affordable and efficient representing a technological shift that appears to have had much impact on the ability of vehicle dwelling groups to “live off of the landscape.” I am also aware of wind turbine generators being more accessible and now being marketed for use on moveable dwellings. However, I am yet to have noticed them being used in many of the settings I have moved through so far, with the exception of one turbine being used by one person in Mid Wales. Such technologies have effectively enabled access to free energy once they have been invested in (and of course, maintained), which makes use of *what is there* without needing to go to a fuel station. Interestingly, it has been recognised that such technologies can effectively constrain the reproduction of capital, making solar power, offering a good

contribution towards the practical manifestation of a movement away from capitalist relations (Schwartzman, 1996). Of course, we do have to consider our own positionality (Ingold, 2000) in relation to the sun. Indeed, during the winter months solar power is more limited: one must seek alternatives or simply *make do* with less power. One must also consider the positioning of one's solar panel: I am currently writing this while parked under a tree, which is restricting my access to solar power. Sometimes we may have to challenge some of our expectations about our access to energy.

Suddenly the lights go out and the music stops. We've run out of power. One of the kids moans.

Judy (mother) replies: "This is life! It's not on tap!"

Fieldnotes from Mid Wales (2020)

These technologies mentioned so far – which work with natural forces of fire, solar and water - can facilitate our mobility, or indeed, our ability to live "off-grid" as much as we can. However, most of them do require some work. Indeed, I have spent many hours moving large leisure batteries around when my partner and I were sharing a "solar bank" which we could move around to catch the sun or move with us when on the road. Eventually we "had enough" of moving batteries around (which was using a significant amount of human energy), and it was time to make more of an "automated" system, through wiring in our solar panels in a fixed place, combined with a split charger (which allows you to charge batteries using the engine while moving). It is worth noting here that one must be careful not to romanticise providing for one's own basic needs, for it does require work, and sometimes you can encounter dramatic weather changes that can disrupt your system. For example, when one finds that the rainwater they have collected has frozen, or they have to go out hunting for sticks in the snow. Indeed, the landscape is not always so kind in what it provides, especially in the hills of Mid Wales. For this reason, some may move to warmer places in Europe during the winter months.

"This morning, I woke up feeling a very cold breeze on my face: it appears that one of the seals on my door has started to deteriorate, and it's letting through small streams of cold wind. I looked over at my wood pile…it was running critically low. I was going to have to go outside and fetch some smaller sticks. I put the kettle on to

make a cup of tea. The warmth from the gas begins to take the edge off the cold. I then step outside: snow. I can see my breath as a sigh. I then proceed to collect sticks to serve as kindling, the tips of my fingers are feeling very cold now. I find a nice pile of dry sticks under Dom's van. Perfect! I then move back into my van (which actually doesn't seem so cold now) and light the fire. The small space heats up quickly. I'm now ready to sit at my desk and start writing."

Fieldnotes from a layby in Oxfordshire (2020)

In addition to collecting wood and solar power, we also collect rainwater, when on the road and when at our base. We use this for washing dishes, showers, watering gardens, and other kinds of cleaning. As pointed out by my partner, through collecting rainwater, we can effectively reduce flood risks and therefore *costs* associated with flooding (this is supported by academic research: see Jamali et al, 2020). To return briefly to the issue of sewage, water companies are currently allowed to discharge untreated sewage into rivers, lakes and seas at times of exceptional rainfall, causing harm to many non-humans. So, collecting rainwater from roofs can reduce harm to waterways that are caused by flooding, while more water is stored as back up for times of drought.

However, for more mobile people, this is often less practical: collecting water adds additional weight to our vehicles, which has to be monitored for legal and health and safety reasons. This reveals the interaction of more abstract elements of the assemblages we find ourselves entangled in. Also, large amounts of rainwater can quickly accumulate sometimes and be awkward to get rid of when you want to leave in a hurry (for example, if being given an enforcement notice). Indeed, such practices can be more challenging for those who experience frequent displacement as they move from one unauthorised site to another; thus, illustrating how frequent displacement can disrupt alternatives to wage labour, as well as access to wage labour itself (Webstar and Millar, 2001).

Furthermore, when it comes to drinking water, we may fill up our water butts on the road at fuel stations, graveyards, or other publicly accessible water supplies (which appear to be somewhat lacking in the UK). If we are fortunate enough to be close to a spring or boar hole (which we are at our base in Wales), we can use this water for drinking. When doing interviews in the Forest of Dean back in 2019, I accompanied a Traveller to help him stock up on water at a nearby well. I have learned to keep track

of springs and wells on my travels, keeping a good supply of drinking water with me at all times. Many people living on the road will do this. However, only 5 people surveyed in Glastonbury explained that they collected their water from the nearby Chalice Well while 50 said that they wanted access to water (Smart Communities, 2020). This could indicate that not all vehicle dwellers are necessarily committed to "living off the landscape" in the same way. However, it is worth noting, that only 32 of 80 respondents in this survey had lived on the road or on sites previously, meaning that many were new to living this way and almost a quarter of respondents had cited having "no alternative option." Perhaps some of these people had not yet gone through some of the same processes of "enskillment" (Ingold, 2000) that other Travellers have, which involve tuning into the landscape in new ways to identify sources of resources. Alternatively (or additionally) they may lack the resources needed to enable greater "self-sufficiency." For example, driving licenses, fuel money, axes for wood, solar panels and even wood burners can be unaffordable for some people. Others may simply have different aims and values.

Conclusion

In conclusion, while desires to be "living closer to nature," "self-sufficient" and "outside the system" were popular explanations behind the New Traveller way of life, there is little detail or illustration of how this happens on an everyday level in existing literature. This chapter has shown how *collaborations* between humans and a variety of non-humans can assist us in making alternative modes of dwelling possible. It also shows how the actions and characteristics of non-humans can contribute towards oikonomic arrangements that have the potential to generate collective wellbeing. Indeed, various technologies can allow us to, as Giles explains, "live off the landscape" through harnessing natural processes: from gathering solar power, finding sources of water, to working with natural biological processes to grow food efficiently. Animals can gift us with more than companionship: they can provide nourishment for our soils while operating as effective waste management systems that they also benefit from. These symbiotic relations with animals could be conceptualised as forms of mutual aid, whereby animals and humans work together to meet their needs. Effectively, humans can engage in this form of work as a way of achieving the sustenance they need on a daily basis through working with what is available to them, reducing the need for external inputs.

In other words, these relations between various humans, animals, plants and technologies can effectively close cycles, facilitating more circular *oikonomies* - or "*pericapitalist economies"* (Centemeri, 2020) which work in the favour of a greater number of social actors. By "closing cycles" we can contest the kind of systems that consumer capitalism thrives on, which to some extent relies on waste in order to make way for the consumption of new products or services. Cattaneo and Gavalda (2010) have made similar observations among squatters in Spain. Moreover, the more time that we spent more time with non-humans paying attention to natural processes of symbiosis, we may encounter new ideas and ways of making use of collaborations between various social actors, which can allow us to live in tune with certain value systems. It has been argued that such encounters allow us to discover "what is important" and as a result, *live well (*Badman-King, 2021). In this respect, learning to listen to the landscape represents another form of enskillment to undergo.

"I think that we have been given the most intelligent and beautiful blueprint or framework or schematics for how we can live and it's all around us in the way that all other life forms live…all the different forms of intelligence…this world is in abundance of diversity of intelligence and creativity and I think we would do well to realise that we are a part of that."

A written account from Moss, a New Traveller (2022)

Tuning in, Patching Up Appearances and Helping One Another: The Achievement and Maintenance of Everyday Life on the Road

Introduction

This chapter will delve into experiences of vehicle dwelling whilst living on the road. Originally, the project was designed to be largely mobile capturing this element of vehicle dwelling in more detail. However, as elaborated in the methods section, the pandemic restricted the possibilities of my research and resulted in a more "static" ethnographic study for the most part. However, despite strict restrictions being in place for much of my fieldwork, there were periods that were more mobile. This included me spending time moving around myself, visiting various friends living in vehicles in different parts of the UK in various set ups. It also involved me spending a total of 3 months with some of the people I lived with in Mid Wales – including my own partner - who make and sell chainsaw carvings on the road. The land in Mid Wales operated as a base, which we travelled to and from (although often not knowing exactly when we would be back, or when we might next be leaving).

Before and after lockdown, I spent time on various squatted sites in Glastonbury, Andover, and Bristol. Before lockdown, this involved staying with friends while carrying out in-situ interviews and survey interviews. After lockdown, I spent time living in my own vehicle at multiple roadside locations and several squatted sites that were mainly located in and around the city of Bristol when I went to the city to do volunteer work and visit friends. I also spent a week parked up on a Bridleway in Oxfordshire with an old friend. This was a bridleway that I spent much time visiting when I was younger, long before this project had begun. So, it was a setting I was already quite familiar with, although there were significantly less people living here now.

Furthermore, Ingold recognises that more work needs to be done to understand the different between a nomadic life and a sedentary one.: "what it means to move" has rarely been considered and that the ways in which people make home along a path or a trail needs further attention (Ingold, 2013a). In this chapter I share and explore some of the different everyday processes of living on the road: from getting ready to move, to arriving in new places; showing the ways in which our movement is shaped by various forces. These forces can be material forces, social forces or even legal forces. It will also show the way in which everyday life is *achieved,* through tuning

into the environment but also through the informal relationships between people and things. Mutual aid is shown to be, at times, a matter of survival and necessity, as information, objects, tools, and even physical strength are shared in order to keep everyday life going. This chapter will also illustrate the impact that enforcement – or in this case, *potential enforcement*- has on our everyday lives. It will be considered how different these experiences are to my everyday experiences in Mid-Wales, where we were insulated from many of these experiences (although many of the people who live there have certainly had their fair share of such experiences). Indeed, it is when living on the road or on unauthorized encampments that we are more exposed to the watchful gaze of wider society and local authorities that may or may not be mobilised against us at any moment. This prepares us well for the final chapter of this thesis which will outline direct experiences of enforcement action, displacement and a changing contemporary legal context.

It's Time to Go: The Process of "Tatting Down"

It's getting late, it's 11pm and the entire day has been spent preparing vehicles. This is a task whereby objects are secured to avoid unwanted movement during movement. Cupboards are rammed full and padded out with soft items before bungee cables are pulled tight over cupboard doors. Solar panels are brought inside and kept safely on their side with a duvet to pad them in between. Water butts are filled to the top and stacked firmly between items of furniture, with no wriggle room.

Once the living space is packed down, it's time to move on to the work vehicle, which is full of logs of different sizes, chainsaws, petrol cans, gazebos, and all sorts of valuable equipment. Tyre pressures are checked. Trailer lights are tested. In this case, the lights are quickly repaired by tapping them gently, encouraging gentle vibrations on slightly corroded cables (they've been sat still in the cold for a few months). Towing bar is secured. A final check over is carried out before leaving, is everything secure? Have we got all the tools we need if we break down? We're good to go. And finally, in go the chickens in their hutch like the final piece of a game of Tetris. The vans and trailers are jammed full, allowing little room for movement, so there won't be any destructive movements when we get going.

Fieldnotes, Mid Wales 2021

Before embarking on a journey in a moveable dwelling, we must go through a process of "*tatting down*." Firstly, this wording may require some clarification for

those unfamiliar to it. As the reader may recall, the word “tat” is often used to describe discarded items that are salvaged or to refer to personal belongings (which, as shown in Chapter Three, are often items acquired in this way). So “tat” is often used a like “stuff.” “To tat” is also spoken of as a process of salvaging unwanted material objects. In this case, “to tat down” is to render our possessions safe when moving – some of which may have been “tatted”/salvaged, but some may not have. Therefore, the concept of “tatting down” refers to the process of securing all of one’s belongings in a manner so that they do not break or cause disruption when driving. Indeed, one does not simply “just move.”

As mentioned in Chapter Two, when designing moveable dwellings, we must take into account the practice of moving our home. It is less labour intensive in the long run to build storage compartments fit for moving in order to avoid the need for lengthy tatting down practices. Therefore, the time that is put into “tatting down” can depend on how well your home has been adapted for moving (or how tidy or messy you are). In this sense, the time this takes, and amount of labour involved will vary from person to person. Generally, one wants to avoid spending too much time doing this and wants their possessions to be secure and safe. Therefore, this process is very much connected to design, and processes of improvising and adapting the design as we go. Once again one can see how we can arrange our home spaces in ways that allow us to spend time doing the things we wish to do.

With the case of our preparation for the layby above, we had been in Wales for a few months now, and it was time to go out to work again. Unlike others who move more frequently and in different ways, this is usually a case of moving far, but only moving once to get there, and once again to come back. So, moving everything safely (and not forgetting anything) is essential. This takes much time and careful consideration. We will often be staying on the layby for several months, so it was a case of setting up a new base where the carvers can work and live every day until they are too tired to carry on (this being the nature of their seasonal work). Indeed, what we have in this case, is a mobile workplace, as well as multiple mobile homes.

Moreover, regardless of where you’re going and how frequently you’re moving, “tatting down” is the kind of job that you want to do properly, for failing to do so can have some negative consequences. In this sense, tatting down also arguably represents another example of a process of *enskillment* (Ingold, 2000) that one

undergoes when taking on a moveable dwelling. I have found that I have become increasingly aware of the (changing) interactions between different interior and exterior elements. By interior and exterior, I mean in relation to my dwelling. In this respect, I had to come to know the materials in my home in a new way, as well as the nature of roads and traffic and how that might impact what is inside my home as I move through various spaces. It is largely a case of imagining the different forces that may impact your vehicle and your possessions inside. This can include sudden jolts forward, as well as sideways. Unfortunately, this has sometimes meant that I have learned “the hard way” as I turn a sharp corner and hear something fall onto the floor and roll into the footwell.

We pay close attention to the nature of the materials in our home. Round things are likely to roll, sharp things are able to break other things, and soft things (such as pillows) can be great for padding out sharper or more delicate things. As we get to know our vehicles, and the array of possibilities while driving, we come up with more tactics for “tatting down.” Therefore, it could be said that to tat down successfully requires a significant level of *understanding* of the things contained within the home, their unique properties, how our belongings may or may not move in a variety of circumstances and how they may interact with other belongings. A more experienced vehicle dweller may have such knowledge built into the design of a van conversion to avoid lengthy tatting down processes. For example, when building and stocking shelves, one may want to consider the height of shelf walls in relation to the objects being stored in that shelf. I have made various sizes of shelf to fit various sized objects, which are necessarily crammed into the shelf to keep them all in place. I often use softer objects – like hair ties, and toilet roll – to pad out the shelves and ensure a snug fit.

I also became wary of how items may *sound* when moving. I have personally found it quite uncomfortable being able to hear my folding bed hitting against the wall, which can be pulled up out of the way to allow space for bikes and other items that we may wish to transport. If it’s not been pulled up tight enough with the bungee cables, it moves a lot and makes a sound which can be quite irritating. Such movements can also create additional wear and tear over time, which is unfavourable. Therefore, avoiding any distracting, destructive movements in this way is essential. Indeed, when one is operating 3.5 tonnes (or more) that is mostly metal, it is crucial that no sounds are distracting.

Moreover, while sometimes tatting down is a case of improvising at the time and arranging objects in certain ways, we also have to adapt some items for mobility in other ways. For example, as mentioned earlier, this can involve using tools such as bungee cables, straps and other flexible materials to hold cupboards and shelf items in place. Sometimes this requires improvising with random objects with the right characteristics for the job. For example, I have used a dressing gown belt when I ran out of bungee cables. This is a good way of (temporarily) adjusting features of our homes so that they will not move so that we can move safely. Occasionally this may require pulling over to amend and fasten something, having heard it roll or knocking. I have seen my partner pull over and temporarily drill a cupboard shut because the bungee cable was not doing its job well enough. Alternatively, we might build items of furniture that are ready to be moved at all times. For example, I made a shelving unit that uses netting which stops my clothes from falling out.

Another example is the cupboard I made, using salvaged parts of a caravan cupboard. Caravan cupboards have mechanisms that fasten them shut, requiring a significant amount of force to pull the handles to open them, making them resistant to opening during movement. It is common that people salvage old caravan cupboards – or even just the closing mechanism – from old caravans being broken for parts when converting vehicles. Not only does this constitute another form of recycling, but it also saves time and labour designing and building furniture fit for mobility. Therefore, provisions for tatting down can be tactically dealt with during the design and build practice or we can improvise as we go. When improvising as we go, this can be difficult in instances whereby we have to move quickly. For this reason, it is helpful to develop effective (and fast) routines and design our interior spaces with mobility in mind. Indeed, when facing enforcement action (or moving to avoid it) one often has to be ready to move.

“I would suggest that we all tat down tonight, guys. If we get evicted tomorrow, trust me, the last thing you want is to be tatting down with a bailiff breathing down your neck.”

Fieldnotes documenting advice from older Traveller during site meeting, shortly after court papers issued, Bristol 2021

For this reason, it could be suggested that authorities should take this process into consideration when deciding to move on vehicle dwelling communities, or the worst-

case scenario, towing their homes away without warning. Bristol Vehicles for Change reported an incident whereby a mother took her child to school, leaving her horsebox home on a road where vehicle dwelling had recently been banned via an injunction. She was unaware of this and returned to find that her home had been towed away. When retrieving her vehicle, many of her personal items were broken as she had not been given the time to tat down her belongings and move safely.

Arriving: Levelling Up and Tuning In

When tatting down is complete, and we find ourselves arriving in a new destination, one must tune into the new material environment, and how our vehicles may interact with the features of this new environment. This can include observations about the weather, which has certainly been enhanced in contemporary society thanks to mobile weather apps. For example, I have made the mistake of parking my sliding door over a dip in the ground which soon became a big puddle. (It was quite time consuming having to tat down again to move a couple of metres forward). In this respect, one has to consider how one will be moving in and around the vehicle when choosing a park up. This means parking with your door opening onto a pavement (not a road), or perhaps positioning a window so that it catches the rising sun in the morning. Alternatively, perhaps a nearby tree will provide valuable shade in the hot summer months as your metal home attracts more heat.

One must also choose a place to park which is *comfortable* in other ways. Indeed, parking on a hill is hardly a desirable option when the blood starts to rush to your feet as you lay in bed. I have personally found that I have begun to notice even quite minute differences when my home is not level as I get more and more tuned into my home and how it should look and feel. In order to “level up” – a process we tend to embark on as soon as we arrive in a space where this is necessary – we often use a variety of tools. Some people have special ramps and “jacks” that can be adjusted in order to level the vehicle. It is also possible to improvise with scavenged materials around us, using logs or other strong items – such as bricks - that fit “just right” for the terrain and desired positioning of a vehicle. You can also employ a spirit level to make sure that one is parked “just right.” Others just use their own judgement (which can be for better or worse, depending on the person). I have found that, on some occasions, I have gone to bed with a seemingly level van and woken up lent against the wall as the wheels on one side of the vehicle have begun to sink slightly into the

wet ground. Therefore, our positioning can sometimes change quite dramatically and quite quickly.

Indeed, an important factor to consider when parking up – particularly during periods of rainfall, which is very common in the UK - is the difference between hard standing and grass. While grassy park ups are more aesthetically pleasing a lot of the time, we must be careful not to jeopardise our opportunity to leave again. This is particularly important if you travel alone or in small numbers, as being pushed (or pulled) out of the mud is not always an option. Savvy vehicle dwellers and Travellers will carry planks or logs of wood, not just for their wood burners, but to place on the floor before parking up. Others may carry a winch or a ratchet strap, to reel vehicles out of the mud if need be. Some might even be privileged enough to have access to a 4x4: an ideal vehicle for rescuing caravans and vans from the mud.

Again, living in a vehicle this way requires further level of enskillment as one becomes more “savvy.” We must maintain a close eye on the weather. If the ground is dry, such provisions become less necessary. We must also know how to use a variety of tools and devices. Otherwise, there is often the risk of getting stuck, which poses a great threat to our mobility. This can be very unsettling if enforcement is on the horizon, or if you simply need to go to work in your vehicle the next day.

We looked up to the sky. The sky was grey, and some menacing rain clouds opened up and poured down heavy rain on us. Our sink bowl was full after just an hour of rain. The sunny spell was over, and the ground we were stood on was about to become less stable and very, very muddy. All morning, we had been wondering when we should leave. This moment had confirmed that it was time to tat down, and quickly. The ground was not prepared for us to move if we stayed much longer.

However, tatting down two vehicles and a trailer (with chickens) was not going to be quick…especially with expensive carvings – including one worth over £1000 - in the mix. Everything needed to be packed perfectly, to avoid any breakages or accidents. While we were tatting down two PCSOs arrived on the site. Everyone knew what this meant: the papers were likely to be on their way by now. This safe haven we had enjoyed over the last week was already reaching the end of its short life (10 days after being established).

…After we had finished tatting down and the chickens were safely mounted into the trailer, it was time to go. The track to the exit was already looking pretty wet, and there was a hump to get over too. We were going to have to go for it, no hesitating.

Kasp went first with his trailer and didn't quite make it over the hump. The wheels started spinning, as mud sprayed, and the wheels sunk deeper. I felt anxious. This was not a good place to get stuck: we needed to get back to base, and we were now blocking the exit and entrance to anyone else wanting to leave or arrive. Others on the site looked over and came to help. They knew the drill: we were going to have to push the trailer out of the mud. Without a 4x4 handy, this meant that people power was our only option…

…Once the trailer had made it out of the mud and over the hump, it was just me and my van left to get out. With the track now being well worn and extra muddy, it felt like a real challenge. I had to go for it: no hesitating. I took a deep breathe and went for it. My van went straight over. What a relief…

As we pulled out of the site and set off on the road, a huge feeling of relief came. We were driving back to base as the heavy rain continued to fall. I wondered how the others were feeling. Some of them had just moved into vehicle dwelling in response to several squats In Bristol being shut down that summer. They were already exhausted.

Fieldnotes, unauthorised site on disused land outside Bristol, July 2021

In this respect, we are constantly evaluating and adjusting our homes and our position within the environment, paying close attention to the weather and its impact on the terrain. As we move around transitioning through different entanglements, we get to know our homes in new ways and become more "savvy" or "attuned" (or indeed, *enskilled*) as we go. We can be attuned in the sense that we find our way through various material circumstances. This requires both planning and improvisation, as we make our way in and out of various places. Our ability to plan and improvise appears to improve as we go. This highlights the value of more experienced vehicle dwellers who may offer help and guidance to novices, who may well get stuck – quite literally sometimes - without it.

It is worth noting here that we also have to become enskilled in other ways when choosing where to park. For example, we may learn social cues that may trigger

negative (or positive) attention from house dwellers. This involves scoping out local amenities, and the relation of your vehicles to local houses and those amenities. While this can mean working out where you will meet your own practical needs – for example, where you might go for groceries or water – it also involves scoping out the movements and perceptions of local people. This can involve making sure that one is parked in a place that is “socially acceptable.”

Sometimes, this is fairly straightforward, and no different to any other driver as we take clear messages from clearly marked double yellows, or “no entry” signs. In other cases, less obvious features of the entanglements we find ourselves within are in need of attention and understanding: how might people interpret our presence? Are we visible to people living in houses? (If you can see their window, chances are they can and will see you). Am I blocking out that person’s light in their living room? Indeed, where we park in relation to the everyday activities of other members of the public is crucial. For example, if one is to park in a place too close to a school – for example – one can often expect a swarm of complaints which may result in the local authorities paying a visit. It can also be uncomfortable waking up in the middle of the school run, as concerned parents shield their children as they walk past. (I learned this when parking along a busy residential road to visit a friend where many parents took their children to school).

In Bristol, local policies have been formulated that involve a system whereby you are evaluated using ideas about “anti-social” behaviour outlining what kind of vehicle dweller is accepted and where (see Bristol City Council (BCC), 2019). The (usefully vague) “factors” outlined by BCC included: “the nature, suitability or obtrusiveness of the encampment,” “the level of any nuisance including noise and smoke,” “the number, validity and seriousness of any complaints,” “the level of damage caused…”,”proximity to residential properties…schools…children’s play areas and other public amenities.” While some of these factors may seem entirely reasonable at face value, it is often difficult to completely avoid all of them. It is can also be a challenge to find areas without parking restrictions that are away from houses and other amenities. In addition to this, wood burners are what keeps many vehicle dwellers warm in the winter. Therefore, completely avoiding smoke is particularly difficult for most people in the winter. While a lot of vehicle dwellers may be unaware of this, I had studied this policy intently and my knowledge of the processes

underpinning it certainly shaped my movement. Although, for a lot of vehicle dwellers, it was common sense to avoid certain places and situations.

One way of avoiding such issues is to carry on moving before locals have time to disrupt you (another incentive to have your home easy to “tat down”). It can be tiring when having to keep tatting down to move around the city to avoid drawing too much negative attention. Indeed, we are often aware of how we may be interpreted by other people when in the public eye. Controlling such interpretations can effectively be a way of controlling the likelihood of being moved on, as complaints can trigger enforcement action. Other times, more “vigilante” experiences can occur when locals express distaste directly to people living in vehicles in their area. This can range from tyres being slashed, to polite verbal requests.

There is also a sense that one must also make an effort to inform others to be wary of the way their actions may be interpreted by others. This is often a case of more savvy, long term vehicle dwellers and Travellers pointing out behaviours or aesthetics that may increase the chance of being moved. Interestingly, a survey carried out by Bristol Vehicles for Change found that 100% of 54 respondents agreed (over 80% of which strongly agreed) expressed a commitment to encourage and help others living in vehicles to manage their waste, parking and relations with the wider community well.

“Ah I just moved from there [referring to a popular roadside park up]. Someone in a caravan there has left their tat spilling out all over the pavement. I had a word, cos you know how that’s going to go down. I just moved in the end because I don’t wanna be associated with that.”

Natural conversation with Josh, vehicle dweller now based in Wales visiting

family and friends in his truck in Bristol 2019

Sometimes we may consider who we are parking near to when choosing our park ups. Supporting other research in this field, including my own Masters dissertation, there is often a sense of vehicle dwellers being “tarnished with the same brush.” Consequently, the patching up of (a largely stigmatised) collective identity serves as a further incentive to engage in helping others.

This can occur on a national level. Indeed, I have observed a collective of New Travellers call upon Bristol Vehicles for Change to help repair this collective identity

on one occasion. It had reached the news (as anticipated by many) that a site located at a main entrance to the city of Bristol had been evicted and appeared to have left a lot of waste behind. With new legislation going through the House of Lords at this time, bad press was unwanted at what was considered to be a crucial moment in history for people living this way. What was left there was the possessions of those who had previously parked there, made worse by additional fly tipped junk from the general public (as mentioned earlier, fly tipping often takes place in the marginal spaces where vehicle dwellers park). A local newspaper headline read: *"land beneath M32 in Eastville pictured in shocking state piled with abandoned waste"* (Buckler, 2021). In comparison to a lot of media headlines of this nature, it seemed relatively mild. However, the journalist did not hesitate to mention that vehicle dwellers had previously been living there. This caused an uproar on social media, as vehicle dwellers and Travellers all over the country looked on with concern about the impact this may have on their collective identity. In response to this, various groups of vehicle dwellers and Travellers in Bristol came together to orchestrate a clear up. They met on several occasions to sort through the mess left behind before the rest was taken away by Bristol Waste. There was a strong sense of a need to clear up the space, and effectively, the collective identity.

When living in the public eye, we appear to be put under increased surveillance in a way that shapes our behaviour and movement in ways that people living in bricks and mortar are not. For a lot of people, this was precisely why living roadside was undesirable, even when in groups. Therefore, another way to avoid such problems, was not to live roadside at all, but to live *on site*.

"I've never understood why you younger lot in Bristol live on the roadside and in the city anyway. We've [older generation New Travellers] have always lived on sites, and often outside of the city."

Natural conversation with Lesley, New Traveller, been on the road for three decades (2019)

Living On Site

"So, are you going to pull onto site or what then?" Said Rob, a Traveller who had been on the road 20 years, who seemed puzzled that I was parked on the roadside when I had a close friend living on a site nearby.

I had been invited onto a site while visiting a friend there, and it was a real relief. I was starting to find the roadside tiring, constantly feeling aware of passers-by. I was on the verge of returning to Wales at this point. Even just the idea of being able to have my mountain bike lent against my van, rather than chained to a lamp post, gave me a great sense of security that I had to take up. There were over 30 vehicles on the site already, but there was plenty of space. It was incredible (and arguably quite disgraceful) that this huge piece of land had been left empty in the city for decades with such a fast-growing demand for housing. However, it had certainly worked in our favour in this instance.

I drove up to the gate, and two people came to the gate with keys to unlock a padlock holding the gate together with a large chain. Each person took one of the two doors of the gate and pulled them open for me to drive on before closing them again immediately after I pulled on. I had arrived at a new safe haven. Here our everyday lives were able to spill out of our relatively small homes, much like they did on the land in Wales. Some people were sat around in chairs in circles talking, drinking tea or beer. Some were working on their vehicles. Others were playing with circus equipment or musical instruments.

I felt a sense of relief, as my medium wheel-based vehicle was starting to feel really small after being roadside in the city for a week. I also felt really safe here. I knew that the gate was being watched 24 hours by different members of the site, who were taking in turns. I found the tall walls around the site so comforting: I felt that I had finally escaped the gaze of the general public here.

Fieldnotes, unauthorised site in Bristol, July 2021

When on the road, it is common to feel the need to hide that we vehicle dwellers. This is because sometimes being visible as a vehicle dweller can lead to unpleasant experiences. For example, on the layby in Oxfordshire we have had an unknown person drive past shouting "*pikeys*!" Another time in Bristol I was woken up by teenagers in the night by knocking on my windows. These experiences can be intimidating. This is why many vehicle dwellers choose to stay in groups or use sophisticated security cameras. Others choose to live in large, secure trucks, or adopt more "stealth" designs, using blacked out windows, and less visible diesel heaters instead of wood burners that reveal themselves externally.

This contrasted with my experience staying on sites. Sites which were often located on disused pieces of land in industrial areas, concealed by trees or tall walls allowing us to feel concealed from the judgement of the general public. However, of course, site politics remained a reality. Just because a group is somewhat bonded through shared stigma, it does not mean that there are not significant differences and disputes in these spaces.

Tales of Mutual Aid and Interdependence

Despite inevitable differences and occasional disputes, it appears to be quite common that people help each other when living on the roadside or on site. Indeed, mutual aid is a huge part of the informal order that exists while living on the road. As mentioned earlier, sometimes this can be a case of patching up and protecting a collective identity (and therefore protecting oneself). For many, support networks are essential parts of everyday life allowing them to survive and to live well. In chapter one, some spoke of a kind of a process of "social repair" (Hall and Smith, 2015) whereby they responded to trauma and difficulties by transforming their lives and being helped by others living this way.

"For me, Rhi, this is really hard. I've lived like this pretty much my whole adult life. I'm used to having the community to look after me. Having to go to a formal support service is really weird, because I've never needed these kinds of people before..."

Natural conversation with Sandra, a Traveller on the road since the 1980s now having to move into housing after becoming ill (2021)

For Sandra, losing this sense of support had been detrimental, and seemed to have triggered a process of breakage. Interestingly, in Glastonbury, almost 1/3 of vehicle dwellers and Travellers surveyed cited "community support" as a vital source of support while living roadside: the second most popular answer after "friends and family" (Smart Communities, 2020). I have also witnessed this first hand. For example, when spending an evening drinking tea with some friends in Glastonbury, older generation New Travellers were alerted by the arrival of a young teenage couple. The couple had been kicked out of their houses and taken to caravan dwelling recently as an emergency.

“Right, we need to get those two a burner. It’s going to get really cold soon, they won’t survive the winter. And someone needs to help them fit it, we don’t want it leaking either.”

Natural conversation with Greg, New Traveller, living on road since the 1970s

(2020)

This could be described as a kind of bottom-up homelessness prevention service on the road. It is common to see or hear about people helping others by retrieving abandoned caravans left in a dilapidated state and refurbishing them to home people quickly. I noticed this happening a lot during the summer 2021 in Bristol, after several squats were evicted with force after lockdown. The mutual aid observed here – as in other chapters - shows how strangers can come together and support each other, despite their differences. Indeed, for Kropotkin (1903), this was a sign of our compassion as human beings and the logical nature this compassion.

Of course, one cannot rose tint everyday life. There is still much hostility and misanthropy dealt with on the road. The very reality that people need such fast responses from others in the community is itself a concern, and as demonstrated by Sandra, people can be let down and lose support too. There are many power relations that come into play when it comes to the distribution of mutual aid. Sometimes that might be down to sexism, as women receive too much help, and men receive too little. Other times other prejudice may come into play. Whether it be homophobia or transphobia or other forms of discrimination. Indeed, a friend of mine currently undergoing gender reassignment was rejected from a site and lost her entire support network when she was discovered wearing a dress.

People also help each other in other ways that can sometimes be embarrassing for the person getting help. For example, more experienced vehicle dwellers and Travellers may educate a novice they notice making “classic” mistakes. Quite often this has something to do with toileting as people leave their plumbed-in houses for the great outdoors for the first time. Also, not everyone has toilet facilities on board. Interestingly, there is much lively debate on social media regarding whether or not one should have onboard toileting facilities or not. It could also be said that moving regularly is essential when toilet areas are made outside (often by digging a large communal hole which operates as a compost toilet, or smaller individual holes). Okely (1983: 140-141) notes how other Traveller groups will often move when toilet

areas can no longer be used. In this respect, it is arguably only with a more mobile lifestyle that this system can work.

Other times, novices may need advice with fire safety. For example, some people may enforce a “6 metre rule” on site whereby vehicles are to be kept with a safe distance between them, to avoid potential fires getting out of hand. I’ve noticed that some people get particularly concerned and emotional about potential fires, having witnessed or experienced them before. Indeed, I have heard several stories about dramatic fires that result in the loss of homes, pets and even people. Moreover, there are other forms of mutual aid and interdependence observed on the road in relation to safety. Firstly, people often park together in order to feel safe. For example, if an area feels unsafe, this might shape a person’s movements: they want to move but feel a responsibility for someone else that they do not want to leave behind.

“I cannot leave this park up right now. There are some real nasty kids that come through here, and there is no way I’m gonna leave this guy on his own here. That’s the kind of people we are, Rhi. We don’t just leave people behind.”

Natural conversation with Sandra, Traveller, on the road since the 1980s

*“This is why the new law is so f**cked up [referring to the new Police, Crime, Courts and Sentencing Act 2022]. We have to park in groups for our safety, yano, as a woman on her own it can be quite intimidating. I mean I’ve had people rob me when*

I’ve been parked on my own before several times…the law reduces the number of us allowed to park together from six to two.”

Natural conversation with Janet, Traveller (on the road 8 years) (2020)

In some respects, although some vehicle dwellers are incredibly independent and do not stay in groups for long – sometimes citing “site politics” as a deterrent - many vehicle dwellers very much rely on each other in order to survive while living on the road or on site. It does appear that sometimes the kindness of others is what we need in order to survive and holds everything together. It also seemed to be extremely effective when it worked, as people are found homes rapidly after becoming in urgent need of them or were given crucial advice, help and/or resources in a time of need. I have spent time on the road or on sites where the majority of people, do not have all of the facilities that they need as individuals. However, as a collective of interdependent individuals, they do. This means that people might come

together to share meals or solar power with others they live with. One person might have an oven for potatoes, while another person without an oven might make the salad. One person may have gas, while their neighbour has enough solar power to charge their phone in exchange for a cup of tea.

This was quite a big contrast to my life in Wales, where everyone I lived with was relatively self-sufficient, and only needed to share more privileged items such as power tools, materials and knowledge. Of course, all of those things are also often shared on other sites and roadside locations. However, I have witnessed more of a sense of sharing as a matter of survival among many vehicle dwellers and Travellers when spending time on the road and on unauthorised sites. Indeed, I came to realise that our authorised space in Mid Wales was an incredibly privileged space overall. When considering some of the stories shared in Chapter One whereby some participants have experienced economic hardship and a lack of support previously, one can see the vital support that is often found among vehicle dwelling communities. For some, this direct support is an effective support mechanism that has, on occasions, perhaps even kept them alive when the state or other support mechanisms have failed to do so.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter has revealed some of the everyday processes of living on the road. It was shown that there are significant differences between the experience of different places on which we park, depending on the material and social context. It is essential that we *tune in* so that we can park in a way that is more comfortable, and less contentious. This includes becoming more *enskilled* as we learn to read social cues, get to know our vehicles and learn about different entanglements of forces of nature, materials and wider society. More experienced folk that we encounter may help us with this process of tuning in, as they offer advice, tools or a push out of the mud. These moments of mutual aid can be a vital support system, especially for those who will not and/or cannot rely on the state or other institutions to meet their needs.

What is also demonstrated here is that there are notable differences between living on the roadside and living on sites. There are also significant differences between living in authorised or tolerated spaces in comparison to unauthorised spaces. It could be said that, as someone lucky to have an authorised base that I can always

return to, I will never truly understand how it is to leave always wondering where one might go next, or how long you might be able to stay somewhere. Indeed, for those of us with access to authorised spaces, there is always somewhere to return to and get some relief if things get difficult. However, for those who are more experienced, savvy and/or equipped to move, simply carrying on moving is a desirable essential feature of a nomadic way of life, as well as an effective way to manage or avoid tensions and “overstaying.”

Trying to Stay Still: Encountering Law and Regulation

"Those who confront the prevailing order, be it in small ways, those who demonstrate alternative possibilities in economic spheres, in ways of being and thinking, those who appear as powerful symbols, must, it seems, be contained and controlled"

– Okely, (1983:2)

Introduction

This final chapter will now highlight some of the more challenging aspects of life experienced by vehicle dwellers. Having spent time on both authorised sites and unauthorised sites, I have recorded experiences of precarity which are familiar to many people living in vehicles who do not have access to authorised spaces to park their homes. I end the chapter considering how authorised sites can serve as a refuge from such experiences. However, maintaining and developing authorised sites is not an easy task when having to encounter planning committees and hostile neighbours. The chapter ends with a critique of enforcement, signalling a concerning trajectory on the horizon as the Police, Crime, Courts and Sentencing Act (PCCSA) unravels.

While spending time on unauthorised sites, I have experienced the process of eviction directly first hand. This chapter documents a particularly heavy-handed eviction, which involved direct contact with a private bailiff company. During the eviction, I was parked on the roadside outside the site. While I did not experience the eviction from inside of the site, I witnessed the build-up and saw an incredibly heavy approach to enforcement. This was a particularly large-scale eviction which became a political event in the centre of Bristol when some of the people living there decided to protest the eviction. This received much media attention. Therefore, it is more "dramatic" than a lot of evictions that take place. Accounts from various people who were living on the site at the time of the eviction are shared here.

The protest element of the eviction became a demonstration largely in response to the incoming Police, Crime, Courts and Sentencing Act, which came into force a year after this eviction in 2022, which will be explained in further detail towards the end of the chapter. Here I will outline the changes to the law, how it has been received among directly affected communities and other supporters of those affected. I have

attended 4 demonstrations relating to the PCCSA (3 in Bristol, 1 in London). I have also attended several online events.

Differentiated Mobility

"The experience of eviction varies for different people…from my personal perspective it hinders your everyday life…I lost a job before because I had to quit my job and rush back to site to defend my property…my friends daughter missed school one morning because they were unable to get off the site during an eviction…as for the emotional side of things… you've always got a dark cloud hanging over your head… it's never a nice feeling especially when there aren't any alternatives available"

Voice message from Mike, Traveller currently based in Bristol, on the road for 20 years (2021)

For many vehicle dwellers, everyday life is often hindered by the threat of eviction, and sometimes the process of eviction itself. It has been found elsewhere that, due to "police pragmatism" (Reiner, 2000), it is common for police to attempt to move vehicle dwellers on before having to carry out formal eviction action by directing them away from the land (Morris & Clements, 2002; James, 2004). This is often interpreted as a threat, as vehicle dwellers risk having their homes and other belongings seized under Section 61 of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 (CJPOA) (James, 2004). During my time spent on unauthorised sites, I have observed that receiving these directions can be stressful. For some people, the stress of being forced to move can arise at an incredibly unstable time in their life. For example, on two occasions, I have witnessed people in their early 20s finally have a caravan provided on site for them just before an eviction notice arrived. One person had been living in a hammock, and the other had just been made homeless having lost his job and was enduring what he described as "*a breakdown."* Therefore, for some people, life is already hard enough and the unsettling nature of experiencing (or expecting) enforcement can be detrimental to one's wellbeing. As Mike points out above, due to the diversity of the vehicle dwelling population, it is important to note that the experience of enforcement is by no means universal.

"For me it was just another difficult experience in what a very difficult year was…last year my life just kind of went up in smoke. I lost my savings, my job and ended up

drinking a lot and just having a breakdown…I basically spent 6 months in a state of mania…"

Voice message from Sam, temporary vehicle dweller having been made homeless, reflecting on eviction experience. Sam had only just got his caravan and had only been on site for two days when the eviction notice was served. (2021)

Alternatively, sometimes vehicle dwellers struggle due to more practical reasons. Considering the amount of preparation that can be needed in order to move (as illustrated in depth in Chapter Five), working full time or managing other responsibilities on top of managing displacement can be challenging. For example, they may have stopped recently to carry out crucial mechanical work on site, to fix leaking roofs or to do other essential repair and maintenance work to get vehicles back on the road. Others may still be in the process of converting vehicles to live in. There can be much panic as vehicles need to be quickly rendered roadworthy enough to move, having broken down recently or been dismantled to carry out essential repairs or maintenance: indeed, getting an eviction notice when an engine is in pieces can be particularly stressful. Other times, it may be necessary to call upon a friend with a tow to get a broken vehicle moved. The consequences of having to drive a vehicle that is not roadworthy can result in a person losing their license: a particularly concerning event for a person living in a vehicle needing to move regularly. Other times, simply leaving the site can be hard work, especially during wet periods, as vehicles entering and leaving can further disrupt muddy ground making it harder for vehicles to continue moving across it.

On the other hand, others argue that being moved on is simply *a part of the way of life.* In this respect, for some vehicle dwellers, frequent movement has become largely normalised from their point of view. Some people move around very regularly out of choice and/or as a tactic to avoid the experience of enforcement (or even the direction to leave the land in the first place). Indeed, many people live in vehicles to live a mobile, nomadic way of life. One participant that I interviewed back in 2019 went as far as to say that "eviction is *healthy*" explaining how it effectively prevented vehicle dwellers from becoming "*stagnant*" and effectively losing their nomadic tendencies. Similarly, another Traveller later explained to me in a natural conversation that being moved on was a part of the life that she had chosen and was largely why she was drawn to it. Interestingly, both of these participants valued

movement as a part of their identity and chosen way of life. However, as shown in more detail in Chapter One, not all vehicle dwellers that I have spent time with necessarily wish to be moving all the time. Some have moved into the way of life as a response to homelessness, or to seek alternative forms of affordable housing amid escalating housing crises. It is also worth noting that even for those who value movement, having a "base" (like I have done during most of my time living this way) can provide a level of security that is important to some people, while also operating as a place to store belongings that cannot be carried around so easily when moving.

However, it is also worth noting that nomadism is easier to achieve for some than it is for others. For example, those with motorised vehicles in good condition that are up and running and relatively easy to move are less likely to struggle when an eviction notice arrives. The same can be said for those with their own towing vehicles to move caravans, who are not in the situation where they must rely on others to move. Therefore, some individuals are *better prepared* for movement. Of course, sometimes even the individuals who are usually well-prepared for movement can get temporarily "stuck" as they stop to do essential maintenance, repairs or are subject to the forces of nature and simply get stuck in the mud. When considering the different power dynamics involved in mobility, similarities to Jackson's (2012) accounts of young homeless people who are "fixed in mobility" can be observed here. Jackson supports Massey's (1993: 61) contentions about "differentiated mobility" whereby some have more control of flows and movement, while others are "effectively imprisoned by it." Jackson explains how mobility is often used as a *tactic*, and often requires skills or knowledge.

With regards to vehicle dwellers, this can involve knowing an array of suitable park ups in the area. For example, if living on the roadside, this might involve finding a suitable park up situated in a place where other vehicle dwellers are likely to be parked offering significant level of "safety in numbers." It may also be in a place close to sympathetic or friendly house dwellers, who may even offer access to their own water or waste collection. There are also other practical considerations when establishing a network of suitable park ups to move between. Are they close to publicly accessible taps?[1] (For example, in a cemetery). Are they situated on (reasonably) level ground or, especially in the winter, hard standing? (Chapter Five

[1] It's worth noting here that the UK generally does not have many public water points. In this respect, troubles encountered by vehicle dwellers accessing water highlights a broader social inequality in the UK.

already shed light on the kind of knowledge utilised when finding a suitable park up). Therefore, when moving (regardless of whether it is motivated by choice or force), there is also the additional task (and skill) of scoping out a suitable new location to move to. This knowledge is not distributed equally among vehicle dwellers. Indeed, some have more of a wealth of experience to tap into, and some novices may receive more help than others. Therefore, when faced with forced mobility, again, there are differences in how this is experienced which vary between individuals.

Resisting Eviction: "Playing Chess" with Bailiffs

While the *potential* for eviction itself can cause much alarm, distress and displacement, some have encountered the law head on during evictions. While many people will move on to avoid an eviction, one group I spent time with decided to *resist* an eviction, rendering the event into a kind of political demonstration.

"…resisting eviction is a way of resisting the incoming bill [PCCSA]… that was part of the reason why collectively we decided to resist the eviction…it was born out of the necessity to keep our home and stay together as a collective and not be forced onto the road, onto smaller sites or out of the city where we work and have families… we collectively decided it was worth the risk to campaign for an authorised space in a reasonable location in Bristol."

Voice message from Dav, Traveller, on the road 20 years, reflecting on experience of resisting eviction (2021)

In order to do this, numerous tactics were employed by "more experienced" people on the site. While it is not appropriate to disclose all of these tactics for obvious reasons, a couple of key informants wanted to share some of these tactics for the purpose of this thesis. Firstly, it appeared that those wanting to resist the eviction were very aware of the *diversity* of people living on the site, and they were aware that not everyone would want to resist or be a big part of that process. Several meetings were held on site before the eviction, to clarify the different roles that people were willing to adopt.

"…some people are up for the fight, and some people aren't…some of us identify as Travellers…some of us identify as van dwellers…it's good to get past the disparities…if you got a load of people who wanna do things by the books and others who wanna fight and get their hands dirty then… you gotta find out who is capable of

doing what…who is vulnerable…who wants to be here…who can't be here…who is arrestable…you gotta get everything clear before…and work together…it's also good to have people on standby, make sure there are tows there ready…making sure the capabilities are in place, not only to get off the site but to get everyone moving after…"

Voice message from Sam, Traveller, on the road 20 years, reflecting on experience of resisting eviction (2021)

Indeed, there was a mixture of attitudes and capabilities among those affected by the threat of eviction. Several people left the site before the eviction having decided that they did not want to risk missing work or "*put their home on the line."* Some had no choice but to stay due to work commitments and/or the practicalities of moving their vehicles off in time (some had even planned to get towed off that day, but the bailiffs beat them to it). One person decided to park outside the gate to the site on the roadside next to me, allowing him to support family members and friends on the site without being evicted himself. Some stayed but decided to situate themselves away from the "front line." A few people chose to take on the role of filming, in order to hold bailiffs and police accountable. Others wished to situate themselves on the gates, either by "locking on" to the gates or by occupying a "tripod." Indeed, some fairly sophisticated "direct action" tactics (which required significant skills and knowledge) were employed, and the diversity of the people and their intentions on the site appeared to work well.

"*We barricaded the gates to make it more hard work for the private company to evict us…we built a tripod with one leg through the gate… we also welded lock on tubes to the gate and set them in concrete to the ground which took a while…"*

Voice message from Dav, Traveller, on the road 20 years, reflecting on experience of resisting eviction (2021)

Another important part of the preparation appeared to be a case of trying to *predict* the actions of bailiffs. There were debates on site over when the bailiffs would turn up, with different people on the site making different estimates based on their previous experience. It appeared that bailiffs tactically used confusion and uncertainty as a tactic of their own. Not only did this induce anxiety, but it also meant that a lot of work had to be put in to manage the gate. Every night different people

would stay awake to watch the gate, ready to alert the others if and when the bailiffs arrived.

“you don’t know when they’re going to turn up, 9 times out of 10 they don’t come the day they’re supposed to…they rarely come early but they do come late…so you can choose to play the long game…but yeah…you got a sense of looming doom…you could get woken up at any fucking time and you don’t know how they’re going to react…sometimes they break in…sometimes they stand outside and give you a notice…”

Voice message from Sam, Traveller, on the road 20 years, reflecting on experience of resisting eviction (2021)

There was also another particularly concerning tactic used by police and bailiffs during this eviction. One participant explained how this was probably in response to a previous eviction that they had resisted: he explained how there had been a great deal of support from local people and other activists had been (which took place in the daytime) during the last eviction. However, this time, the Bailiffs chose to come during the very early hours of the morning (about 5.30am) when the majority of local people would not be on the streets to witness the eviction. I witnessed the efforts that the authorities appeared to be making to close roads and block access to the area, as well as the *view* of the area:

I woke up on the roadside outside the site at about 5.30am to the sound of a megaphone and an alarm being sounded by the gate watchers on the other side of the road.

“We’re being evicted!”

This was a shock… having attempted to negotiate with the council, police and landowner, people were hopeful that they may have some more time and may be close to reaching a solution. I looked out of my window (still half asleep) to see someone leaning over the wall with a mirror, allowing them to see around the corner where a wave of enforcement was emerging. The police had already closed the road, and a crowd of bailiffs, dogs and police flooded the streets outside my vehicle. My heart started to race. I eventually left my vehicle and was forced to leave the premises without my coat, mobile phone, or even a bottle of water. I was not allowed to re-enter to gain possessions from my vehicle, and the eviction appeared to have

been “paused” while they moved me and another roadside vehicle dweller out of view of what was happening. When I was forced to stand outside, I fortunately bumped into a friend from a mutual aid group in the city who quickly arranged for warm clothes and a sandwich to be brought to me. We then tried to observe what was happening from afar, which was difficult as the police had parked a riot van across the road blocking the view from where we were. Various members of the public were running around trying to get access to view the eviction, expressing concern after a previous eviction in this area had involved excessive force from bailiffs. I was told that police were blocking access to various viewpoints. Others were angry that the authorities were blocking the road, making them late for work and obstructing elderly people from getting to the shops. Many passers by expressed alliance with the protestors.

Fieldnotes, Bristol, May 2021

A Case of Excessive Force

Once everyone had been escorted away from the view of the site, the enforcement process began. Therefore, from this point onwards, I rely entirely on the accounts of the event given by others. Significant concern was raised about the lack of accountability of bailiffs, who had begun to use “excessive force” while the police who were there to “keep the peace” appeared to “turn a blind eye.”

[Image from Bristol Post: Cork, 2021]

Multiple informants reported feeling over policed and under protected: a common sentiment found among Traveller groups (James, 2011). Informants explained to me how they felt that the police had failed to “keep the peace” and instead operated as

facilitators of violence by blocking public view (and therefore *accountability*). From where I was stood, it was made impossible (by police) to see what was happening on the site. I could however see the huge numbers of both police and private bailiffs with an extensive armoury of vehicles and dogs.

"There was police support there, but it didn't seem that they were there to support us…even when members of our group were becoming injured by bailiffs…for example one of our guys who is disabled…was getting manhandled…they were crushing his arm in the gate… we tried to get police support… like even to just witness it… but they didn't seem to give a shit…they did nothing and even denied that they had seen it."

Voice message from Moose, vehicle dweller new to vehicle dwelling, explaining experience of eviction at Glenfrome Road (2021)

"a wheelchair bound elderly squatter was left with bruises after being roughly handled whilst locked to a gate…a bailiff chucked a boiling cup of tea on him, and the police stood by and did nothing. The police camera crew recorded us but refused to record bailiff aggression when we asked them to…the private use of police by these companies is worrying beyond belief."

Voice message from Daisy, Traveller on the road for 8 years explaining experience of eviction at Glenfrome Road (2021)

Several informants explained the sheer level of force as being excessive, as well as unaccountable. This involved intimidating numbers of bailiffs, police and dogs as well as violence.

[Image from Bristol Post: Dav being removed from the tripod, Cork, 2021]

"I chose to sit on top of the tripod so I had a pretty good view of everyone…the bailiffs were pretty rough pulling people locked on around…rather than doing the usual tactic of cutting them out of the lock ons… they just kind of pulled their arms over and over again. That's pretty scary…"

Voice message from Dav, Traveller, on the road 20 years, reflecting on experience of resisting eviction (2021)

For some people on the site, these kinds of experiences were not new and fed into growing concerns and distrust of authorities. An older Traveller explained how this particular eviction had provoked existing PTSD, as it brought back memories of riot police coming towards her during the Dale Farm Eviction in 2011, another high-profile eviction that became a political demonstration. She shared this experience at 3 of the political demonstrations I attended, in order to illustrate the level of trauma involved in experiencing a heavy-handed eviction.

"…I had some work in the city, so I parked my home there...in the morning of the eviction the alarm was raised at 5.30am…as I woke up I got dressed and I looked out the window to see a sea of yellow vested bailiffs and police. Instantly I had a flashback of the morning at Dale Farm…it was unexpected, but I work with trauma victims and I knew and understood that this was PTSD…I believe that eviction is a calculated weapon of the state designed to cause trauma…confiscating people's homes making them homeless causes trauma…this is a human rights issue."

Extract from a speech from Lou, a Traveller since 1980s (2020)

The Cost of Enforcement

Moreover, in addition to the trauma and cost to individuals involved in enforcement action, significant economic costs have been reported with regards to “managing” unauthorised encampments. For example, Morris and Clements (2002) found that £6 million was spent on “dealing with” Unauthorised Encampments (UEs); which was considered to be a huge underestimation at the time due to huge dark figures. This figure appears to be remarkably low when considering the likelihood of costs incurred at the eviction that I witnessed in May 2021. Unfortunately, a Freedom of Information request was made to find out the cost of this eviction, but the police claimed that: “*as the attendance was part of standard policing duties there is no separate costing recorded”* (Wilcox, 2021).

One of the people evicted from the sites claim that the bailiffs they spoke to during the eviction quoted a ballpark figure of £600,000 as an estimate of private funds spent on the day of eviction (which excludes any costs incurred via legal advice, previous surveillance, or any of the live-in security that arrived after the eviction). This was a particularly high-profile eviction which had escalated into a protest, so it certainly does not represent a common figure. However, this case does illustrate the extent to which costly enforcement can be chosen over relatively cheap negotiation and accommodation. It also displays the extent of dark figures involved in our understanding of policies impacting vehicle dwelling communities.

A particularly expensive array of servicemen and equipment appeared to have been called on by the enforcement during this eviction. For example, a crane was hired to remove Dav from the tripod and numerous drones were spotted leading up to the eviction in addition to the “*sea of bailiffs with dogs”* that I woke up to on the roadside that morning. Bailiff companies have provided estimated figures of the costs (measured in British pounds) for “managing” squatters provided by a property guardianship company (Blue Door Property Guardians, 2020). These figures include the cost of preventing squatters, as well as the cost of eviction and clear up costs. When estimated the cost of an eviction, they quoted approximately £1000 spent on repairs, almost £4000 spent on bailiffs, about £5000 on legal fees, and around £9000 spent on rubbish removal. With regards to the prevention of squatting, they quote annual figures. This includes about £125,000 spent on security guards, over £50,000

spend on alarm systems, just under £50,000 spent on boarding up properties and about £30,000 spent on mobile patrols.

Interestingly, the costs above show a huge cost incurred via waste removal. It has been found elsewhere that the lack of waste collection facilities offered to vehicle dwelling groups can often induce more clear up costs after eviction (Morris & Clements, 2002; Crawley, 2004), especially when vehicle dwellers are given little time to prepare before being moved on. While some local authorities may offer waste collection services to aid this process, they often do not. Despite this, the group that I saw get evicted that day had successfully removed their waste before the eviction, and even took photos of this to share on social media. Furthermore, in Chapter 3, it was shown that vehicle dwellers are often good at managing their waste (and even other peoples). However, when preparing for eviction, collections of discarded materials can cause difficulty and stress as well as take up a lot of resources (both time and money) as they have to be moved or disposed of quickly.

Indeed, when I have observed people preparing for eviction, this has involved managing a build-up of everyday waste (which often does not get collected by local authorities) and/or “tat” that is accumulated for various reasons and projects. It is worth noting here that public recycling bins are limited in their number, making it particularly difficult for those excluded from waste collection services. Moreover, without a waste carrier license, one cannot take a van to a recycling centre unless it is a registered campervan (a form of certification that is considerably difficult to obtain for self-built campervans). For those without access to a license or car, managing these articles can require assistance from friends with cars to lend their time and vehicles to go to a recycling centre. As mentioned in Chapter One, many vehicle dwellers are not able to afford a driving license and/or the other expenses associated with owning a motorised vehicle and often live in caravans instead. While some vehicle dwellers will have their own cars, or access to other peoples, this can still cause significant levels of stress; especially if they are having to manage this on top of full-time work and/or other responsibilities. What is more, vehicle dwellers are often aware of the damage that any waste – or what might be perceived as “waste” - left behind will do to their collective identity.

Today everyone has started to gather and manage their “tat” and any waste on the site in preparation for the immanent eviction. The group are very aware of the impact

any waste on the site will have on the image of the site, and wanted to make sure that the site was in a very tidy state before any cameras arrived at the scene.

- Fieldnotes, two days before eviction, Bristol 2021

The "Management" of Roadside Encampments

During my time spent in various roadside locations, I noted different forms of control used by authorities in Bristol. As managers of the highway, this was primarily a job for local authorities, in comparison to the largely privatised approach to squatters on private land aforementioned. This appears to involve a mixed approach from various authorities in the city. However, the police appeared to have little involvement in the policing of vehicle dwellers in Bristol unless they are called upon to carry out or "supervise" evictions. Everyday surveillance appears to be generally carried out by members of the public and occasionally the "Neighbourhood Enforcement Team."

This appears is comparable to the "guerrilla tactics" described by Zoe James (2005) who described the use of less accountable tactics used by various authorities to disrupt and destabilise New Travellers. For example, Traffic Regulation Orders (TRO) (i.e. the introduction of double yellow lines) have been trialled as ways of controlling roadside encampments. Interestingly, these actions seemed to have evoked tactics from affected communities that were more "*by the books*" (as Sam put it) in comparison to the kind of direct action observed at the eviction aforementioned. On one occasion, savvy vehicle dwellers in the city became aware of an application for a TRO on a highway often used by vehicle dwellers. In response to this, the affected group tactically campaigned against the introduction of this TRO through consultation channels, effectively preserving their space. Later, the same area was threatened with a Section 77 eviction order under the CJPOA. Bristol Vehicles for Change put forward a judicial review which led to the eviction order expiring after the council did not respond in time. This current location remains under continual dispute and is home to up to 50 vehicle dwellers at a time sometimes.

In addition to this, controls implemented by local authorities in Bristol also includes roadside patrols from a "Neighbourhood Enforcement Team" (NET) - worryingly given the title of a "street *cleaning* team" - who effectively put vehicle dwellers on the roadside under surveillance. In accordance with Bristol City Council's (2019) local enforcement policy, NET draws on a usefully vague concept of anti-social behaviour by monitoring factors such as the level of waste and the concentration of vehicles to

determine an encampment's status as ‘high impact’. The policy included no plans for providing waste collection facilities, sites, or any other remedies that could arguably improve the everyday lives of vehicle dwellers and prevent ‘high impact’ cases from occurring, making the policy particularly weighted towards enforcement which arguably only amplifies issues and displacement. Despite receiving much criticism from the public, affected communities and other experts and stakeholders, this controversial policy remains in place. The policy also involves the use of controversial “person’s unknown injunctions,” which raised significant concern.

Injunctions have been applied for in various areas across the UK to effectively ban any person from residing in a vehicle in the area that it is applied to. Fines and even prison sentences can be issued if people are to knowingly breach these orders. This has significant human rights implications, as it affectively criminalises people with protected characteristics and treats people as guilty before being trialled due to the way that they live. It is also clearly a disproportionate measure, even if anti-social behaviour has ever taken place. When Bristol City Council applied to apply an injunction like this in a relatively large area of the city, various vehicle dwellers and concerned members of the local housed community came together and arrived in court to contest the order. It was clear that this measure would disproportionately have a negative impact on a huge variety of people. From vehicle dwellers living in the area, to house dwellers with friends or relatives wanting to park outside their houses in live-in vehicles for the evening when visiting. After a lengthy court case, the defence obtained an agreement from the council to work on “alternative solutions.” Soon after, having been contested in various places in the UK where they have been sought, the Supreme Court ruled out the capability for local authorities to use “persons unknown” injunctions. This represented a significant success among campaigners, lawyers and affected community members. However, this was later appealed meaning that there is still a significant risk of such measures being used again. Moreover, with new legislation in force, the policy context appears to be particularly eerie, putting vehicle dwelling communities at further risk.

The “Criminalisation of Trespass”: The Police, Crime, Courts and Sentencing Act (2022)

“It looks like they're trying to change the law again … She [Priti Patel, UK Home Sec] is basically trying to make it illegal to be a Traveller … It's very similar to what

happened back in the early 1990s where first Travellers were told to get their own land and then they were told they can't have planning permission … Now they're going to make it even more illegal, which forces them even more into criminality … Instead of letting you exist, they just make you illegal. There is no other choice: you are either illegal, which then makes it really easy to brand you a criminal and ship you away, or you move into a house which a lot of people don't want to do."

An interview with John, Vehicle Dweller on a tolerated site in the Forest of Dean (2019)

Previously, Bancroft (2000) claimed that the CJPOA 1994 represented a significant means of regulating space and placing nomadic people within a discourse of discipline and punishment. Indeed, the CJPOA represented a significant part of a series of post-war legislative developments that enforced the new industrial order at the time via the enclosure of space and enforcement of boundaries (James, 2006). Today we see a dramatic movement further in this direction as we propel towards the criminalisation of trespass via Part 4 of the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act (2022). The act brings about significant changes for people "*residing*" or *"intending to reside"* on land that they do not own or have permission to be on. This includes highways, private land and common land.

The defining parameters of those affected by the law as those residing/intending to reside clearly marks out those *living* in their vehicles, in contrast to those on holiday in campervans. Therefore, the legislation is clearly aimed at a particular group (or set of groups) of people who are effectively rendered as criminals. Despite this, some legal professionals suspect that this may impact anyone who appears to be residing in a vehicle, regardless of whether or not they intend it to be a permanent mode of residence or not. In addition to this, the law is also to be applied to "anyone who has – or intends to have – a vehicle with them" and "those who cause or are *likely to cause* significant damage, disruption or distress." These features of the language used in this act are particularly concerning. Firstly, the ambiguity requires judgements to be made about individuals without substantive evidence. Indeed, it is questionable how plausible it is to legitimately establish the intentions of a person in this context. As mentioned by one of my participants, it can also simply be interpreted as "*if you are likely to be a Traveller,"* which causes significant concern considering the general

context of prolific discrimination towards nomadic people and others living in vehicles.

Therefore, the act outlines incredibly ambiguous (and arguably quite dangerous) criteria. As a result, those living in vehicles – or those who appear that they might be intending to do so - are subject to as a process of examination and rendered criminals, regardless of the availability of authorised spaces for them to go to instead. The consequences for those “guilty” who do not move when asked are particularly heavy. While police are given the discretion to consider what might be a “reasonable excuse,” this appears quite limited according to police guidance, which states that broken down vehicles and attending events and appointments is not acceptable unless there is a medical reason considered reasonable in court (see NPCC, 2022: 6-7). Those deemed guilty can be subject to a fine of up to £2500, the confiscation of vehicles/homes for up to three months, and up to three months imprisonment. Once ordered away from land, the affected individual/s cannot return to the land for 12 months (a 4-fold increase on the terms set out by the CJPOA 1994).

Another concerning feature of the bill, is that the application of this law can be administered by landowners, or any of their other private representatives, who can call upon the police to enforce their directions to leave. Therefore, one does not have to have any legal knowledge, or perhaps more importantly, be subject to any accountable processes of monitoring equal treatment or use of “reasonable force.” Of course, the same can be said for existing means of enforcement via Common Law, which one participant pointed out was already being used a lot more in recent years by private bailiff companies (as was the case with the eviction described earlier). However, Common Law governs civil offences, which the police can only supervise the enforcement of, rather than carry out the enforcement themselves. Therefore, it could be said that this feature of Common Law has now been reinforced in statute, sending out a strong political message that arguably both reflects and perpetuates negative perceptions and the ill-treatment of those living in vehicles. This could lead to increased police involvement, despite a significant number of police rejecting these proposed powers and expressing a need for site provision instead (Friends, Families and Travellers, 2021).

In the face of resistance erupting on city streets, among academics, politicians and other stakeholders, Part 4 of the Act (which outlines the criminalisation of trespass)

remained intact, as all suggested amendments failed to get a majority when being debated in the House of Lords.[2] While the situation in England appears to be particularly gloomy, the act was partially contested (although arguably insufficiently so) by the Welsh Senedd, who refused to consent to enforce the Bill within Welsh Jurisdiction. This followed a campaigning effort led by Friends, Families and Travellers whereby supporters were asked to display photos of themselves showing the words "Wales does not consent." This was considered to be a great success among campaigners and has reinforced a sense that Wales is perhaps becoming more of a refuge for nomads as planning permission was eased via the One Planet Development policy in 2011 and since site provision became a legal obligation again via The Housing Act (Wales) 2014. Despite this, planning permission remains difficult to obtain in Wales. Friends Families and Travellers note that it is still very difficult to obtain planning permission, particularly permanent planning permission, in the UK. Multiple participants echoed this: with some people reporting decades of struggling with planning committees before being given permission to live on their own land. The planning context makes the enforcement context more unsettling, as vehicle dwellers are denied access to both land, they do not own via the CJPOA and PCSCA, as well as land that they do own via planning mechanisms (if they are lucky enough to have those resources).

Many nomads from Britain have continued a process of migrating to more tolerant spaces beyond the UK, and England in particular. This process appears to have been continuing since it started in the 1990s in response to the CJPOA 1994 (Dearling, 1998). Indeed, it is well known that other countries – particularly Portugal – offer much more accommodating options, with easier planning routes and more affordable land prices. Indeed, some participants mentioned places in Europe being a lot more tolerant of nomads:

"I've been spending a lot of time in Europe recently… most squats and Traveller sites in Germany… if they are derelict and not marked for development then owners usually offer occupiers a chance to rent the space…I did it really interesting…yes they have more land…but they are a lot more forgiving and open than the UK."

[2] Amendment suggestions included: the repeal of entire criminalisation of trespass (71 in favour, 171 against), and the necessity for authorised spaces to be available in order to apply the criminality of trespass (171 in favour, 171 against).

Voice message from Dav, Traveller, on the road 20 years (2021)

“I just don't feel at home in the UK anymore. Every time you build a safe and creative community, the sites are evicted, or the street park-ups are cleared with injunction…I avoid staying here too long now and choose to travel Europe instead … where we're not vilified for our existence and way of life.”

Voice message from Daisy, Traveller on the road for 8 years (2020)

Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter has shown the ways in which enforcement and regulation encroach on the everyday lives of vehicle dwellers who do not have an authorised place to park their homes. However, experiences of forced mobility are by no means universal, as different people work within different capacities. It was revealed that an array of tactics is compiled on both sides, as vehicle dwelling communities battle with various authorities. Both sides appear to make considerable effort to learn from past experiences and predict the actions of their opposition, which informs the moves that they make. In a sense, it could be said that many vehicle dwellers live in a state of surveillance and precarity, as their homes are put at risk by various authorities and regulation bodies. With new legislation unravelling, a gloomy picture looms on the horizon as damaging historical patterns appear to persist and evolve. These accounts contrast greatly with those that reveal the everyday practices of vehicle dwellers on authorised land that make up the majority of material underlying this thesis. Therefore, this final chapter represents a call for action. Without greater tolerance or the sufficient provision of authorised spaces for vehicle dwellers, it is likely that – for many vehicle dwellers - the quest for home will continue to be accompanied by further trauma, displacement and warfare. However, what remains hopeful, is that there is also much benevolence, mutual aid, care and support that exists on the ground that facilitates survival amidst a hostile context of law and regulation.

Conclusion

This thesis has provided details of an education and a process of *enskillment* overgone over 3 years through an ethnography. It was found that there is much knowledge and skills involved in the practical achievement of living in a converted vehicle: from learning how to build, to moving our homes and facing enforcement and regulation. This education did not begin during the data collection period, and nor has it ended. Instead, what is documented here, is a snapshot of an education that I have been undergoing for some time as a friend of many vehicle dwellers and will continue to undergo as a vehicle dweller. The findings of this thesis, as a result, reflect the ways in which I have learned from a variety of social actors around me: from my friends who helped me build my home and live on the road, to the animals and plants that have lived with me along the way and helped me in more subtle ways.

Of course, we not simply absorb information from others: we are *shown* the social world, and ultimately make our own way which continues to unravel as we move through (Ingold, 2000). For this reason, this thesis is not geared to be "generalisable" or "representative." As shown in the literature review, and later in more detail in Chapter One, among those living in vehicles in the UK there are many individuals representing various political dispositions, social, economic and cultural backgrounds. Showing similarities to Grohmann's (2020) arguments about squatting, I have steered away from dichotomised or "clear cut" understanding of choice and necessity. It was found that a huge variety of people might be labelled as Travellers, New Travellers, New Age Travellers, Vehicle Dwellers, Van Dwellers and even Vanlifers, as different forces push and pull. Some are continuing a life they have always lived, having grown up in vehicles as children. Others have taken to the road as adults to carry out mobile occupations, to opt out of oppressive housing systems, or even to survive in the face of homelessness. There are many other reasons for living in a vehicle, and they often overlap. It can be said that, supporting previous literature (e.g. Okely, 1983; Hetherington, 2000; Martin, 2000) throughout history, people have often moved into vehicles in response to wider economic and social conditions and this has continued. In this respect, vehicle dwelling is far from new, and it is likely that we will continue to see people move onto the road in future.

Unfortunately, debates about “real” or “authentic” Travellers and vehicle dwellers have been divisive among campaigning circles during the build up to the introduction of the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act in 2022. Despite this, the act impacts all people living in vehicles. Through engaging with the complexity and diversity of those living in vehicles and focusing on details of an education undergone, I hope to have shared what might be recognisable to many of the different people living in vehicles in the UK today. Through doing so, I hope to create some sense of solidarity and shared experience, while preserving the individuality of those persons that share these experiences. Through engaging with Tim Ingold’s conceptual frameworks, I resisted the scientific impulse to generate a fixed definition or classification of a social group, effectively maintaining what Sitrin (2019) calls an “Anarchist spirit” in this work. I have avoided “over-coding” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987) and labelling vehicle dwellers as an Anarchist group, and instead have embraced the diversity and mutability that I have observed. Indeed, in agreement with the Traveller who spoke with Colin Clark (1997) in the 1990s, you cannot put New Travellers “in a box,” and the same can be said for Vehicle Dwellers more broadly today.

This thesis ends with a call to action. As the need for alternative social organisation becomes clearer amid human-made climate and economic crises, it is arguably essential that we protect and learn from those already demonstrating alternatives in economic spheres. It is important to emphasise here that this is not a case of painting a rose-tinted picture that portrays vehicle dwellers as superior as such. However, it is important to acknowledge and learn from the different ways of interacting with and understanding the worlds that were found in this thesis. Among those along the corresponding lines that I moved through, there was a trend to look at and relate to resources and the distribution of time and labour differently. It was shown throughout the thesis that practices of mutual aid were a crucial part of this, as people lend their labour, time, materials, tools and ideas to one another. This was notable in processes of building, as well as practical tasks such as moving vehicles and working together to manage the risk of enforcement. This demonstrates what Vannini and Taggart (2015) called “Doing it With:” although New Travellers have often been associated with “DIY” culture, on closer inspection this is far more social than it is individualistic.

In Chapters Two and Three, this included new ways of interacting with and understanding materials: supporting Ingold's (2007) ideas about ways in which we might "redirect flows" of materials, which can come together in various forms. While some of the people that have contributed to this project may not knowingly understand their relationship with materials this way, they knew much about materials, and how they interacted with each other, effectively engaging in forms of alchemy to channel unwanted materials into new entanglements. While for some people this was a case of achieving practical tasks, such as building and maintaining homes, for others this opened up new employment opportunities as people used discarded materials to create forms of artwork that they could sell or use in community projects. Not only did this approach free up resources for various forms of labour, it also effectively constitutes a bottom-up waste management service as waste is effectively deconstructed and rendered resource.

In this respect, the data presented here resonates with Kevin Lynch's (1981) work, which demonstrates that waste is fluid and variable, or in other words, *a social construct* that emanates from particular configurations of social organisation and the way that we understand and relate to resources. This data contrasts hugely with media narratives about "messy" Travellers and Vehicle Dwellers. It is worth noting here that this could not be said to be representative of all Vehicle Dwellers: some of whom will have spent a great deal of money on buying brand new materials for their homes. However, this was popular among many of those who I have lived with, who often took pride in their approach to salvaging and reusing discarded materials. Currently, the Welsh Government (2021) is taking on new endeavours to move towards waste management systems "beyond recycling" that consider repair and reuse a top priority. This reflects a wider tendency in both Wales and Scotland to move towards more circular economics, which is sadly not being echoed in the English context to the same extent. To inform these commendable steps from the Welsh Government, much can be learned from those individuals already practicing effective alternatives on the ground. It is recommended that these forms of knowledge are considered in order to implement this effectively.

This reveals the value of the knowledge of people who work directly with materials, as recognised by Ingold (2011). Such knowledge is valuable in pursuits of understanding processes of degrowth and subsistence orientated oikonomia. I have found that, among many of the vehicle dwellers I have spent time with, is a "view

from below" that can inform new visions of "a good life" that keeps life going (Bennholdt-Thomsen and Mies 1999; 3); aiding humanity in the pursuit of greater "eco-social resilience" (Cattaneo, 2015: 355). Ways in which we might "close cycles" and move away from oppressive models of housing were shown, granting us more "surplus" to spend our time and energy doing what is important to us: from spending time with family and friends, to developing skills and engaging with philosophy, politics and forms of benevolence that contribute to a sense of community or kinship. Engaging with materials, humans and other non-humans in this way facilitated a way of living in tune with values for some people as well as survival. In this respect, we might "grow" in new ways, away from GDP. This brings into question the terminology used for "degrowth", for much can be *gained* through closing cycles and building mutually supportive social systems. This is arguably obscured by the choice of terminology here, which does not reflect the abundance that can be achieved through processes of what is currently called "degrowth." Through engaging with these forms of social organisation, we might achieve a greater sense of *freedom* that is social and relational (Pritchard, 2019), allowing all life and collective wellbeing to flourish as much as it can with what we have.

This was shown further in Chapter Four, where symbiotic relationships between humans, animals, plants and new technologies allowed humans to "live off the landscape" in ways that also provide sustenance and liveable environments for an array of non-humans. Indeed, I will always remember the impressive morning chorus and the large variety of species I encountered on the land in Mid Wales. The findings presented in this thesis have supported and developed Kropotkin's ideas about mutual aid, which are gaining traction in academia in the post-pandemic context. It was found that mutual aid was an essential pillar that made many features of everyday life possible: from building a home, to getting out of difficult situations on the road (which was shown in more detail in Chapter Five). Mutual aid (or *symbiosis*) was shown to exist (and function) between a variety of species. The tools of permaculture could present an ideal route to take these ideas forward with in future. This could offer an interesting direction for the resurgence of Anarchist theory and practice in a contemporary academic context, with growing interest of degrowth and circular economics.

As a body of thought and practice that has already been developed mostly on the ground outside of the academy, where much wisdom lies, engaging with

permaculture offers new opportunities for collaborative knowledge production that harnesses “an ecology of knowledges” (Santos, 2007). Moreover, the practice of permaculture is arguably allied with calls from Tim Ingold (2000) to see ourselves as a part of our environments, continuously engaged and immersed in mutually constitutive relations, involving a variety of biological and material forms. Like Ingold, permaculture practitioners show us how we can work with what is already out there, and instead of trying to *bend* nature, we might instead submit to its “productive dynamic” (2000: 27).

Tim Ingold and permaculture practitioners can also offer Green Anarchists a promising way forward in response to Bookchin’s call for the development of suitable theoretical frameworks for this largely forgotten area of Anarchist thought. This is in need of further development. It is also recommended that participatory methodologies are adopted in order to adhere to the Anarchist pursuit to dismantle hierarchy, recognising the value of the expertise of those beyond the academy. Having now spent over 5 years doing data collection in this area – with the majority of the thesis data collection period being inhibited by pandemic restrictions – I recognise that this is essential to move forward with research in this area. With much creativity existing among vehicle dwellers, there is much potential to explore this further using creative means of participatory knowledge production and dissemination. There is also further potential to explore material methods, as there are many impressive craftspeople among these overlapping lines of life. If I were to replicate the study, I would have spent more time in person with participants to show me their projects in order to avoid the impact of the digital devices and their own material implications (Woodward, 2020). However, it was found that through using tools from autoethnography and digital devices, much can still be learned in a context of crisis that does not allow much conventional research to go ahead.

Finally, in Chapter Five, and more so in Chapter Six, the importance of Hornburg’s (2018) critique of Ingold’s work is demonstrated. We must pay attention to the abstract features of entanglements and the wider social structures that feed into everyday life, and vice versa. Previous literature has highlighted a historically oppressive context for vehicle dwellers in the UK, and unfortunately this thesis has uncovered findings that continue this trend. In fact, during the last three months leading up to the submission of thesis, I was displaced from the land I lived on for two years by the planning committee, who had previously tolerated the encampment

for 6 years. As historical conditions continue to worsen, many vehicle dwellers have continued to seek more hospitable pastures abroad. Now that the UK has officially left the EU, those who have not secured their space beyond the UK face tighter restrictions, making their movement into Europe – especially with their animals – particularly difficult. Furthermore, the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022 is now in force, which poses a significant threat to all vehicle dwellers in the UK who can now be subject to prison sentences and large fines if they do not comply with enforcement notices. Interestingly, as it currently stands, lawyers working in this area are finding that the new law is rarely being used and authorities are continuing to use enforcement procedures that they are more familiar with. It is suspected that vehicle dwellers may be forced to move before enforcement can take place, to avoid the magnified consequences of non-compliance. When considering the work involved in moving and managing processes of enforcement, this will likely have a significant impact on the everyday lives of the many vehicle dwellers without authorised spaces to live. This also requires further investigation. Despite this, the data presented in this thesis demonstrates remarkable resilience, as humans (and non-humans) help one another through life. Indeed:

“Many who harbour prejudice and hate will hope the Policing Bill marks the end of nomadic life in Britain. However, the resilience shown by Gypsy, Traveller and nomadic communities throughout the decades, and especially over the past couple of years, should give us all hope.”

– Friends Families & Travellers, April 26, 2022

To conclude, this thesis has met its aims by revealing the diversity and complexity of the social world through the experiences of a vehicle dweller among vehicle dwellers. It has been shown how eco-social resilience can be achieved in the face of a hostile context of discriminatory policy frameworks and historical oppression. The resilience shown by the people involved in this thesis shows different ways in which people can relate to one another, as well as a variety non-human actors. An engagement with Tim Ingold, Green Anarchists, degrowth scholars, and permaculture practitioners revealed a suitable theoretical framework to explore this phenomenon, while signalling new directions in which these areas of thought and practice can be developed and explored beyond this thesis. Indeed, Green Anarchism and Permaculture remain relatively untouched in the realms of academia and could serve

wider sociological aims to conceptualise the social world as being comprised of both human and non-humans. Furthermore, the details of this education serve to inform a wider (much-needed) education of how we might organise ourselves in the face of growing economic, social and environmental crises.

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