



## Sharing the Road

### *The Post-Internet Hitchhiker*

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*Practice-led-Research exploring hitchhiker's relationship with the digital platforms: BlaBlaCar ([www.blablacar.com](http://www.blablacar.com)), Hitchwiki ([www.hitchwiki.org](http://www.hitchwiki.org)), Couch Surfing ([www.couchsurfing.com](http://www.couchsurfing.com)), TrustRoots ([www.trustroots.org](http://www.trustroots.org)) and HitchGathering (<http://hitchgathering.org>).*

#### 1 Introduction

Anthropological research on hitchhiking has a rather mild repertoire of previous studies<sup>1</sup>, however as Purkis (2012) identifies with a characteristic reflexivity, the anthropologist is a hitchhiker of sorts. "Hitchhiking provides an ideal theoretical touchstone (for anarchists) since it foregrounds informal (and frequently marginal) sets of social relations based on mutual aid, cooperation and trust, the qualities of which have often existed in the 'primitive' societies' studied by anthropologists" (Purkis 2012: 147). Whereby this research can be characterized as its own *Ethnographic Hitch*.

Informed by economic anthropology's *Formal Substantive Model*<sup>2</sup> (Cligget & Wilk 2007: 7), the hitchhiker's means of 'exchange' was explored identifying unique characteristics within the significant digital platforms identified by the participants, as well as overarching trends of self-interest, social and moral motivators.<sup>3</sup> 'Indirect Reciprocity' is often referred as a 'gift economy'<sup>4</sup> (Cheal 1998: 1-19, Botsman & Rogers 2010: 133), and yet this adoption of terminology is bypassed with the complexions of understanding hitchhiking as a unique example of a *share economy*, or as argued, a *share community*.

Employing the definitions of Botsman & Rogers (2010), this research explores the nature of the collaborative / share economy with hitchhiking. In an age defined by 'Neo-Liberalism'<sup>5</sup> and the ideals of 'self-sufficiency'<sup>6</sup> and excess – our 'supermodern'<sup>7</sup> (Augé: 1995: 29), it is the nature of the hitchhiker that defines an alternate model of exchange, negating the characteristics of the commonly termed collaborative / share economy (e.g. *Reputation Capital*).<sup>8</sup> By its nature of comparison, multiple interconnected virtual field sites were explored, following the prompts of participants. Applying Boellstorff's (2005) principles of Digital Anthropology, the actual world informed the virtual world engagement, thus distinguishing the focus of here on hitchhikers' 'culture in virtual worlds'<sup>9</sup> (Boellstorff 2005: 66).

## 2 Methodology

Imagine yourself set down surrounded by all your gear, alone on a forgotten road close to a gas station while the launch of the car, which has brought you, drives away out of sight. Imagine further that you are a beginner without previous experience. With a *wiki* of over 170 thousand edits<sup>10</sup> to guide you and eleven thousand, eight hundred and eighty eight *members* to help you. This exactly describes my first initiation into fieldwork on the *Hitchhiking Community of this Digital Age* (Boellstorff 2008: 3, Malinowski 1922: 3). Despite being rather inexperienced in the Anthropological quest of research, the multiple platforms of focus harnessed a level of engagement and support from participants.

A promising methodological framework for this research was, as dubbed by George Marcus (1986), “multi-locale ethnography”<sup>11</sup> ultimately encompassing the exploration of multiple interconnected field sites assessed on their own terms. Based on the participant’s engagement with multiple platforms, this study looked to understand the nature of the larger systems affecting the hitchhiker, “What is holism once the line between the *local* worlds of subjects and the global world of systems becomes radically blurred?” (Marcus: 1986: 171) As well as the understanding of personal opinions and behaviors with the hitchhiking-platforms, seeing “the ‘field’ as a habitus rather than as a place, a cluster of *embodied* dispositions and practices” (Clifford: 1997: 199). The means of how a site was adopted by users equated multiple methods and practices according to each site explored. The non-geographic specific aspect of the virtual world equated for participants to be situated in multiple locations. For the purposes of consolidating the data, this research focuses on the actual world experience of hitchhiking in Germany.

This was conducted through a series of interviews with ten participants, an anonymous survey with fifty participants and participant observation on each of the key platforms / field sites. The research was conducted over a period of 2 months fieldwork. Though initially the vision of fieldwork was going to be with bag in hand and out on the roads of Central Europe, this ethnographer was rooted to his seat, pitter-pattering at the keyboard, whereby employing the notion of *the virtual on its own terms*. The very ease of the digital fieldwork to instigate a process of returning to observe and leaving to reflect, allowed the employment of Constructivist grounded theory<sup>12</sup> methods. The participants were engaged with in reflections and feedback, to instigate a process of dialogue and following up on arising details observed. The research was on its own hitch, morphing by the moment, and with each new detail learnt was a new driver to carry me to my next gas station – a path full of turns and the unexpected. “A grounded theory is durable because it accounts for variation; it is flexible because researchers can modify their emerging or establishing analyses as conditions change or further data are gathered” (Charmaz 2000: 510).

This variation and enabled flexibility of this method saw the nature of the focus progress from a more ‘comparative’ analysis of hitchhiking with the collaborative / share economy platforms, to noticing the inherent nature of trends of ‘sharing’ and noting its intrinsic relationship with hitchhiking. Thus throughout the process of fieldwork, there was a ‘sharing’ of the research for critical response and discussion with the participants. These are the participant’s lives – and their beliefs and actions whether deliberate or not, are scattered with details with consequences – whether ramifications eventuate as hypotheticals or not, their lives were theirs, not purely to be seen as a *subject*.<sup>13</sup> “But without empirical facts as a check and reference, the political or cultural discourse goes nowhere and remains just rhetoric. There is no way to have meaningful anthropology – or any other social science – free of politics” (Cligget & Wilk 2007: 3)

### 3 Hitching Time and Non Places

The idea that human choices and decisions do shape the future and that people are not just culturally programmed robots is now *fundamentally accepted* by most anthropologists and sociologists. (Cligget & Wilk 2007: 14, *emphasis added*.)

When Cligget & Wilk (2007) detail a *fundamental* precedent within which the discipline(s) *accept* the notion of ‘agency’ (as oppose to ‘system’) as the key measure of understanding the research participants, they deny several contextual aspects I note to consider. Specifically in the case of this research, it is pivotal to recognize the dominance of economic paradigms within which participants find themselves. This contextualization is not to answer whether a research participant is *programmed* or otherwise, for outside this naïve binary sits the questions of responding to the dominance. And though this research does not explore the notions of empowerment and the limits to which *choices and decisions* are able to be made by markers of privilege, it is important to note hitchhiking in the context as being its own re-imagining of time, place and of values. And specifically, these aspects are seen in a context as a response. In this research the nature of the choices and decisions for the participants played a central role – whereby much of the research looked to explore how participants saw the world and established their position in response to dominant notions of economic structures. Questions of motivations, and taking note of what the participants repeated or got excited about.

The hitchhiker would not know what to expect along the trip, referencing the potential meeting with a driver, who may evolve to be a ‘host’ and to stay with them. These dimensions of spontaneity were subject to the Short / Long distance dimension. Short distances (often within the subject’s ‘familiar’ environment), was established with a sense of confidence in ‘being quick’. In comparison, the Long distance is often accompanied with a multitude of other variables, such as non-common language, unique legal and social structures of ‘the road’ and the basic notion of unfamiliarity with the space. As such, the aspect of ‘time’ was significant with this distinction of distances, to acknowledge the ‘unknown’ context of foreign environments and the inability to

know what exactly may happen. Purkis (2012) elaborates on this notion with the term *hitching time*, acknowledging the distinctions where the "...driver and hitcher deliberately chose to socially invest in moments outside the everyday flow of *clock time*" (Purkis 2012: 158-9, Griffiths 1999: 11-15).

With the significance of the *hitching time*, participants expressed their relationship with experience and social relations taking precedent outside of 'non-monitory' nature of hitchhiking as a motivation, "when sharing you need to acquire less, so that a person's focus may indeed shift from "the pursuit of income growth" to the "quality of social relations with others" (Marchand et al. 2010: 1438, Shiel 2015: 63). And for the participants whilst hitchhiking and across all of the platforms they engaged with, the sense of the social relations is a central motivation.

The time aspect also figured into a parallel with age of the participants. The majority of hitchhikers were young, and not working a normalized model of a forty-hour working week. For several participants that were currently working at the time of the research, no longer were they able to hitchhike – 'you can't hitch when you don't have the time'. Though the age group of hitchhikers is filled with exceptions, majority were between twenty to thirty five.<sup>14</sup>

The relationship between the collaborative / share economy and hitchhiking is explored by Weymouth (2015) with the specific examples of ride-sharing platforms, such as *BlaBlaCar* (BBC). He states, that for BBC, "along with many other websites and apps now proliferating across every continent, it's being called *digital hitchhiking*" (Weymouth: 2015). However all participants made the very clear point to say there's no real comparison. Though one participant said she noticed the change in driver's mentality since BBC came about. BBC was referred to in comparison with public transport, not hitchhiking. It wasn't just the monetised aspect of BBC that made it different for the participants<sup>15</sup>, but more so the nature of the scheduled pre-planned nature of the trip. To hitch is to be free. Unsure of where you might end up. Never sure where you'll stay at night. Such a 'freedom' that the participants spoke of asks the question – if there were a hitchhiking-specific-ride-share-platform would it be used? Though most participants dismissed such a question, *CarmaHop* (Bradley: 2014) is an app that is currently being developed for just that. Though the nature of ride-sharing platforms are not employed by hitchhikers, they engage with other platforms for other reasons when they hitch. The act of waiting for the next ride is indeed the very act of hitchhiking itself, and participants would not try to change this stage in the journey. Waiting in the Non-Place.<sup>16</sup>

Within this study rooted within the virtual worlds, the field site is confined to scope of a URLs capacity, however in for the hitchhiker in the actual world, the borders of field site are less tangible. These non-places are Augé's (1995) conceptions of the traveller's space –

...spaces in which solitude is experienced as an overburdening or emptying of individuality, in which only the movement of the fleeting images enables the observer to hypothesize the existence of a past and glimpse the possibility of a future. (Augé 1995: 87)

The 'road' took an interesting aspect here within the research, and as the participants identified the high level of engagement between hitchhikers and drivers that 'spend more time on the road', due to their professions. One participant characterized truck drivers and travelling businessmen as those that 'Live on the Road'. Though this was not noted as the most regular demographic of driver that pick up the hitchhiker, as one participant noted, by the very nature that those who work on / 'Live on the Road', there's greater likelihood of picking up hitchhikers. These very interactions between the hitchhiker and those that 'Live on the Road' identifies a unique ecosystem in it's own right – 'the road' as a 'space' with its own set of exchanges. For the hitchhiker, the digital platforms do not serve to identify a 'reputation' of the hitchhiker that will determine the success of their future interactions, thus marking a split between the collaborative / share economy principles as characterized by Botsman and Rogers (2010), on the commodification of peer-to-peer rating systems, termed the Reputation Economy - "Users know their behavior today will affect their ability to transact in the future" (Botsman & Rogers 2010: 140, 217-220). Hitchhiking does not have the same framework of systematic commodification of non-monitory exchange.

Hitchhiking of course is rooted in the gift economy and largely bypasses formal monetary transactions or administration, with cross-generational reciprocity evidenced by the hitchers of one era becoming the lift givers of the next (the World War II hitchhikers later helped the 'baby boomers', etc.) (Purkis 2012: 158).

Within the rational of Purkis, the assumption is that drivers themselves are ex-hitchhikers, however when explored, the testimonies of participants beg to differ, and equate the ex-hitchhiker as a smaller demographic than inferred by the generational reciprocity noted.<sup>17</sup> "I worry for hitch-hiking's future. If we don't hitch then the next generation of hitchers will have no one looking to return the favour" (Weymouth: 2015). Weymouth too expressed a sentiment of the notion of 'passing the baton', whereby both Purkis and Weymouth adopt a language of generosity between hitchhikers, at various stages, presenting a sphere of exchange exclusively between ex-hitchhikers (as drivers) and hitchhikers. Though participants reflected on the moments whereby the glimmers of nostalgia of the driver's experience act as the catalyst to such interactions, this was not typical. Rather the emergence was a sentiment that the interaction was a sharing of it's own kind. Where stories and experiences are the possessions of exchange. Additionally, isolating a relationship that is built on sharing stories, experiences and time, and not built on a structure of sympathy or gift giving. The benefits were mutual within the moment.

#### 4 Live, Learn and Pass it on

You get in the car, and you share your whole life stories and everything. And then you leave. And it's like you read the chapter and then you go to the next one. (DurianandCamelSocks - Participant Skype Interview)

All participants repeatedly clarified that there is no ‘one type’ of hitchhiking. There are no right or wrongs. But the majority of participants sighted that *Hitchwiki* (HW) was the central site for hitchhikers. One participant referred to HW as the ‘Bible of Hitchhiking’, or perhaps we may call this Purkis’s (2012) long awaited “global atlas of hitchhiking.”<sup>18</sup> HW is built on the same principles as its namesake Wikipedia. Working on the principle of user-generated information, blurred lines between being a ‘reader’ and a ‘writer’, inviting contributions, indeed being built on them. At the time of the research the level of engagement as noted on the site itself specified: ‘*Hitchwiki is made by people like you. 172,008 edits. 3242 pages. 23 recent contributors.*’<sup>19</sup>

In the interview process the majority of participants noted that they used HW in research about a location ‘particularly when hitchhiking in a new place’ (‘Long’ distance). However based on the nature of being a user-generated site, this level of ‘updating’ the information varied across the participants. This ‘Bible of Hitchhiking’ does isolate the relationship between hitchhikers themselves, in the process of enabling a practice of ‘live, learn and pass it on.’ Open source ‘knowledge gathering sites’ provide an empowerment of experiential knowledge that is decentralized and is rooted in the relationship of community aspects of investment of sharing your knowledge, rather than just acquiring it. “A deep ‘mutualization of knowledge through open source practices and [...] shared innovation commons’ has paved the way for access infrastructures, away from isolated and maximized consumption towards individual scarcity in favor of use communities” (Bauwens et al. 2012: 149, Shiel 2015: 29).

There is however a distinction of ‘contributing’ versus ‘rating’ a hitchhiking spot. One of the key features of HW is a global map that identifies and tracks the nature of position to be picked up by drivers, detailing roads and structured with a ‘rating’ system, expressing the practicalities of ‘how easy it is to get a ride’ (cultural context, single or multi-direction road etc.). Each position on the HW map is built with a ‘rating’ as well as a place for ‘comments’. On ‘clicking’ on a site, the interface specifies the previous experience of hitchhikers, whilst offering the place to contribute. In the context of Germany alone there is an acknowledged 2,659 ‘pickup spots’ that are sited on the HW map, with a large portion including multiple contributions and ratings. ‘The Bible of Hitchhiking’ is not structured to mediate the experience of actual world hitchhiking, but rather to give a helping hand with tips, and foster a relationship of users to share their experiences with others.

“Social serendipity is too important an activity to be left to the advertising slogans of sharing-economy start-ups in the hope that they will make it happen as a side benefit” (Zuckerman: 2015). When one is a *hospitable person* and often invites new friends to stay, they are now referred to as a ‘Couch Surfer’. However if one is a hitchhiker and looks for a ride, they remain referred to as a hitchhiker. And one of the reasons being that the act of looking for a ride with an unknown driver (which is the root in what we refer to as the exchange / gift / share) is still maintained in an uncompromised or unmediated way, whilst being informed or fostered by digital platforms (termed as

collaborative / share economies). In sharp comparison we see the many examples of the collaborative / share economy digital platforms actually *play* the role of mediator, rather than supporter, and in doing so the actual world interaction skips a beat – that is known as the initiation. And it is this moment that defines the relationship of the hitchhiker with the digital platforms that inform and connect the individual, without replacing the moment to stare into the eyes of the unknown.

In understanding the rich web of interaction of the participants across multiple platforms – the multi-locale field sites, *Couch Surfing* (CS) and *TrustRoots* (TR) were explored on their own terms as peripheral spaces. With multiple examples, participants valued the exchanges that came with CS and TR with the development of friendships fostered. Though TR was specifically created for hitchhikers<sup>20</sup>, both platforms allowed for the connection of the hitchhiker with others (often not hitchhikers themselves). And though not always conducive to use these platforms on a journey –needing to ‘pre-arrange’ a stay with a host, without being able to commit to the time (*hitching time*) – the majority of participants equated an intrinsic relationship with such sites. Though a thumb on the road invites a blur of the public / private divide by pairing strangers, the nature of staying with a stranger was enabled through these sites as the mediator.

Whether CS received accolades or not, all participants made a distinction of what it was versus ‘what it became’, reflecting on the transition into ‘for-profit’.<sup>21</sup> The wider lens of understanding the proliferation of collaborative / share economies exposes the transitions into the ‘for-profit’<sup>22</sup>, that often bypass the regulations of workers’ rights<sup>23</sup> and tax accountability. “The sharing economy has been criticized for not following legal rules” (Chang 2014, Zvolska 2015: 30). This level of criticism marked a point of mistrust with the platforms that posed as collaborative / share economies in the name of making profit, understanding hitchhiking as an example, that “you can’t get more real than that” (Ling – Participant Skype Interview).

Despite the status of whether a platform is grass roots or ‘for-profit’, the very model of collaborative / share platforms rely on the growth and spreading of participation. “Every single person who joins or uses Collaborative Consumption creates value for another person, even if this was not the intention” (Botsman & Rogers 2010: 91) This does however open a question about community development. For the hitchhiker, who generally hitches alone, the question of establishing community of other ‘like minded’<sup>24</sup> individuals is the next layer of multi-locale understanding. Whereby we understand the sharing of knowledge and experience via HW, the connection fostered with travellers via CS and TR, a negated interaction with BBC, and a defined sharing of between the driver and the hitchhiker. However it is perhaps the development of *HitchGathering* that serves as the most fundamental aspect of community building, an aspect that has only developed because of the development of the Internet and rise of social-media(s).

5 ‘All the Roads Meet Somewhere’<sup>25</sup>

*HitchGathering* (HG) is an actual world meeting of hitchhikers. It runs as an annual event whereby in August each year, individuals meet for a period of three weeks, in a new location each year, within Europe and its periphery. This 'meet up' was established by the creators of HW and for the previous four years saw upwards of three hundred individuals to hitchhiking from 'all over'. And as noted by the participants that had attended one of the 'actual world' events, it was not just a 'camp' out, but also an opportunity to run workshops around HH. By its nature of the structure of the 'actual' world event, the *HG Facebook group* (HGFB) has a particular focus of planning and discussing the 'meet up'. As one participant noted, "Planning occurred for a few months before the event, whilst the rest of the time it was more 'chit chat' of those who attended."

Despite its actual world intentions, the virtual world was a frenzy of new 'members' constantly 'joining' and 'posting' on the HGFB page.<sup>26</sup> HG manifested as a field site of both the virtual and the actual, "...'virtual' connotes approaching the actual without arriving there. This gap between virtual and actual is critical: were it to be filled in, there would be no virtual worlds, and in a sense no actual world either" (Boellstorff 2008: 19). However this gap between worlds is paramount in the case of HG for the HG (website) and HGFB were sites of over 10,000 members before the research commenced. And during this period there were over 200 new members.<sup>27</sup> This is compared with the 300 attendees of the actual world event.

In this way, the site enabled a dialogue between fellow hitchhikers with questions specific to upcoming trips, general questions about hitchhiking, and reflections and experiences people have had. One example from a user was a post asking for advice about an upcoming trip.<sup>28</sup> Overwhelmingly, this structure of dialogue of 'question' and 'answer' dominated the nature of interaction on the HGFB page. And the trend that emerged was often resulting in the presentation of the 'core'. On assessing the posts over the period of research, 'members' who joined quite recently generally posed questions, with the responses coming from 'members' who were had a higher frequency of 'response'. This notion of the 'core' was first referenced by a participant<sup>29</sup> in an interview, equating the 'core' users as the 'community'.

Other than the acknowledgement of 'non-commercial' posts, the HGFB allowed the inclusion of all dialogue,<sup>30</sup> though one trend was the significance of the 'personal'. When a user shares an intimate detail or vulnerable aspect, the level of response was greatly increased.<sup>31</sup> This was unparalleled across the other platforms explored within this research. Terms of affection, and a sense of genuine feelings fostered the level of community interaction between the users. These included users sharing their latest hitchhiking experience, often accompanied with a level of 'replies' congratulating the hitchhiker.<sup>32</sup> For in assessing the nature of interaction across the spectrum of 'posts' and 'replies', the unifying aspect was that of sharing with and 'supporting' each other. The HG/FB fostered the communal aspects of hitchhiking (particularly in Europe) and exploded the conceptions of the hitchhiker as a sharer,

outside of the dominant points of comparison with the collaborative / sharing economy platforms. Whereby the very virtues of sharing progress our understanding, into what one participant termed the *Sharing Community*.

The dichotomy of understanding the hitchhiker as an individual or community was expressed with the nature of blogs. Often posted on HGFB were users blogs, websites and various forms of documented hitchhiking experiences. The nature of the blog exposes a point of reflection for the hitchhiker and society at large,<sup>33</sup> and debatably exposed the most unique pattern of understanding the post-internet hitchhiker. For it is the manifestation of our 'Bible of Hitchhiking' (HW) and the self-claimed 'group that constantly unites the family of hitchhikers' (HG/FB), that centralize the process of sharing experiences, that is paralleled by the continued creation of the blog.

A lot of people ask for my blog, and I give it to them... if they can get some kind of knowledge from my writing, my opinion and my experiences, if that can help them out – then I am happy, that's the main thing. (Erth Walker – Participant Skype Interview)

These blogs and self-created expressions of hitchhiking, often were a point of advocacy to wider audiences, however also were often for 'loved ones' at 'home' to know what they were doing.<sup>34</sup> Indeed for several of the participants the first moment of hitchhiking themselves often was based on being inspired from reading other blogs, or being exposed to the depictions of hitchhiking within the media. The modes of representations of hitchhiking were in this way seen as a tool with a greater point of significance and acknowledged as an extremely powerful tool- both in how they began their journeys as hitchhikers, as well as the context within which what they share has a potential impact on others. The politicized nature of hitchhiking equates an often-demonized archetype reflecting the economic and political nature of the age, whereby "these tales appear to fulfill a collective psychological function of determining social and geographical boundaries, yet probably assisted in the development of anti-vagrancy legislation in many countries"<sup>35</sup> (Purkis 2012: 156). Within the context of understanding the role of exposure to stories as an initiator for the hitchhiker, these self-created expressions of hitchhiking transcend the individual and immediate community, into a complex web of the public sphere. For someone who can characterize an experience in their life with such fondness, only to be met with a social precedent of criticism (often the dangers, or the 'bloodsucker' principles of exchange outside the dominant monetary model), the Internet heightens the level of dispelling myths and posing a point of inspiration for those who have not hitchhiked. It starts with a story. It's followed by a hitch. And once embedded as a reflection of lifestyle, it ends with inspiring the next to join the journey. A sustainable economy of sorts. Perhaps we are all awaiting an invitation...

## 6 Conclusion

*As a society we are wary of the old C's associated with sharing: cooperative, collectives, and communal structures. The words themselves are loaded with*

*stigmas and unfortunate associations. Perhaps we fear they jeopardize our cherished personal freedoms of individuality, privacy, and autonomy.* (Botsman & Rogers 2010: 67)

Botsman and Rogers advocate for the collaborative / share economy, highlighting the hesitation associated by fears of normalcy in approaching *sharing*. And yet these *personal freedoms* that are referenced so casually hinge at the very factors that define the hitchhiker: the demise of individuality – meeting and engagement with the other, demise of privacy – denied divide of public and private space, and the demise of autonomy – the hitchhiker waiting on the side of the road, arm stretched out awaiting a moment (that may not come) where a car will fly out of nowhere to take them. After waiting. Vulnerable. The hitchhiker is the antithesis of such values, and enacts the *old C's* every time they look for a ride.

The noted behavior and motivations for the aspects of the platforms like CS / TR, all expressed the aspect of having more 'genuine' connections with individuals. HW was about sharing 'tips' and advice for fellow hitchhikers. HGFB was a chance for individuals to share advice in a personalized fashion, as well as support each other and engage in hitchhiking related discussions. The blogs allowed more in depth representation of experience as a means of inspiring others. All participants discussed the nature of engaging with people in the actual world also, with a dialogue of connecting with 'like-minded people' and sharing their stories. The relationship between the driver and the hitchhiker was a sharing of their life stories.

Throughout the process of this research there has been an enthusiasm of involvement from participants with a willingness to help as well as welcoming me into various networks and communities. The frequency of such support, gave a first hand example of the abstract notion of the *Share Community*. The nature of such a research should be critically interpreted, and though an aspect of trends emerged within the participant group, a highly dominant aspect of the results was the notion that hitchhikers are individuals with unique experiences accounted by multiple variables. For an identity that is forged out of a 'placelessness' (non-place), it is the digital place that holds a new point of significance of identity. The relationship of re-appropriating a personalized identity of the 'non-place' subverts the aspects that dominate 'super modernity' at large. Hitchhiking remains an actual world behaviour, however the varying digital platforms engaged represent a relationship that moves beyond the 'placelessness' of the actual world.

The redefined *Share Community* that hitchhiking is built upon, isolates a point of critique that lay with the peer-to-peer exchange platforms, termed the collaborative / share economy. These digital platforms replace the actual world experience of sharing with a mediated transaction, and yet distinguish their point of reintegrating communal principles amongst materialistic structures of Capitalism.<sup>36</sup> The hitchhiker's virtual world enables the process of sharing through multiple new realms. Though it is pivotal not to romanticize the notion of hitching, by applying a 'utopian' lens of individuals' motivation and behaviour, this aspect of hitchhiking in a digital age certainly does

display tangible data, not only for the nature of an ever-increasing presence of hitchhiking, but also through the adoption of digital platforms, the development of a hitchhiking community, built on sharing. *The Share Community*.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Packer (*Mobility without Mayhem*) being one of the few to acknowledge the significance of lift-seeking in anthropology, “noting that it is / was unique in terms of creating new forms of community and fostering a cultural idea of freedom not easily framed within the language of liberal ‘rights’.” (Purkis: 2012: 157, Packer: 2009).

<sup>2</sup> Polanyi defined ‘economic’ with a dual meaning: ‘*formal*, meaning the study of rational decision-making; and *substantive*, meaning the material acts of making a living.” (Cligget & Wilk: 2007: 7, Polanyi: 1957: pp.243-270)

<sup>3</sup> Within Economic Anthropology, these aspects of behavior are divided between three distinct motivators. This study employed *The Combined Model - Self Interest / Social / Moral human being*. (Cligget & Wilk: 2007: 42-45)

<sup>4</sup> “So, rather than there being a necessary movement from ‘barter’ (largely non-existent in fact) to mature capitalist market places, Mauss emphasized the centrality and endurance of the role of the ‘gift’, in the social life of many cultures.” (Purkis: 2012: 149, Mauss: 1967)

<sup>5</sup> “The global economy began to change rapidly in the last decades of the twentieth century as the World Bank and other important international agencies pursued a strategy of getting countries to open up their economies to competition. Governments were pushed to sell off state owned utilities and enterprises, to fire large numbers of government employees, and to eliminate many social programs and food subsidies for the poor. At the same time, countries had to open up their financial markets, allowing multinational companies to buy up many local industries, and cut down on import duties. The whole package was called ‘structural adjustment,’ and the philosophy which guided it is called ‘neoliberalism’.” (Cligget & Wilk: 2007: 23)

<sup>6</sup> “Self-sufficiency was part of the myth of the self-made man with his private estate, so community property, carpools, or sharing of any kind became anathema to the suburban aesthetic.” (Rushkoff: 2009: 51)

<sup>7</sup> “This need to give meaning to the present, if not the past, is the price we pay for the over abundance of events, corresponding to a situation we could call ‘supermodern’. To express its essential quality: excess.” (Augé: 1995: 29)

<sup>8</sup> “Today reputation serves not only as a psychological reward or currency, but also as an actual currency – called reputation capital.” (Botsman & Rogers: 2010: 218)

<sup>9</sup> Employing Boellstorff’s distinction, based on the co-relationship between the ‘actual’ and ‘virtual’ worlds, this study reflects the “virtual culture” rather than “culture in virtual worlds” (Boellstorff: 2005: 66) of the Hitchhiker.

<sup>10</sup> Hitchwiki Message: ‘Hitchwiki is made by people like you. 172,008 edits. 3242 pages. 23 recent contributors.’ [http://hitchwiki.org/en/Main\\_Page](http://hitchwiki.org/en/Main_Page)

<sup>11</sup> “A multi-locale ethnography would, according to Marcus, ‘try to represent multiple, blindly interdependent locales, each explored ethnographically and mutually linked by the intended and unintended consequences of activities within them. If the intent were merely to demonstrate random interdependencies by which everyone is unexpectedly connected to everyone else in the modern world, if only you looked hard enough, this would be an absurd and pointless project... Rather, the point... would be to start with some prior view of a system and to provide an ethnographic account of it, by showing the forms of local life that the system encompasses, and then leading to novel or revised views of the nature of the system itself, translating its abstract qualities into more fully human terms’.” (Marcus: 1986: 171, Chene: 1997: 72-73)

<sup>12</sup> “Constructivism assumes the relativism of multiple social realities, recognizes the mutual creation of knowledge by the viewer and the viewed, and aims towards interpretative understanding of subjects’ meanings.” (Charmaz: 2000: 510)

<sup>13</sup> The process of dealing with representation, whether academic in nature or otherwise, is inherently lined with a power dynamic. And whether this is comprehended in a political or social dimension, the nature of participants having their own lives, needs to be established with a precedent of research that is grounded in respect. There is no

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excuse for an Anthropological practice that is not grounded in an active engagement with the participant. For this reason terms such as 'participatory mode' are noted as redundant, by their binary nature in forging a distinction between the research process that actively engaged the subject / participant. The very nature of determining a 'mode' that employs involvement, establishes a precursor whereby it is warranted that there are some modes of research that are validated without this structure of methodology. It is my recommendation for all further Anthropological and Ethnographic research that such a distinction not be made – replaced by the precedent of standardizing the replacement of the 'subject' with the 'participant' in all Anthropological pursuits.

<sup>14</sup> Notably, as the research was wholly conducted on the digital platforms, this notion of demographic reflects the hitchhikers engaged with the online platforms, not that of hitchhiking in general.

<sup>15</sup> "A million journeys are made every month, from which BlaBlaCar pockets €2 per ride. It's not possible to offer a journey for free." (Weymouth: 2015)

<sup>16</sup> "Despite the dearth of sociological or anthropological research, hitchhiking does creep into the cultural studies literature of 'non-places'; those ordinary transitory spaces not thought of as 'interstices' – isolated tracts of land around motorway service stanchions, or beneath overpasses – which are used by communities who want to exist outside the usual perimeters of society." (Purkis: 2012: 159, Edenson: 2003: 161-68, Moran: 2009: 139-41).

<sup>17</sup> On exploring this inter-generational reciprocity, one participant who had hitched over one hundred and thirty thousand kilometers (and experienced HH before the spread of the internet), was very quick to dismiss the relationship of the driver as the ex-hitchhiker. Rather he explained his conception of the exchange between hitchhikers with those that 'Live on the Road' – equating an equivalent as a *host* service: "Some people say, stupid hitchhikers – they just want to save money. They're like bloodsuckers. But in the end, I am giving them (the drivers) something in return. If you just think, if I travel every day alone as a business man, and I want to have company I have to order a *hostess* service for this. How much am I paying for someone sitting four hours in my car and giving me company?" Floh – Participant Skype Interview. This relationship holds within it a unique set of principles of exchange, and characterize the non-place economy in a unique way. However on reflecting, several of the other participants did not agree with this description. But rather highlighted the multiple variables of interaction and exchange. Indeed the whole premise of not having the mode of interaction as a clearly definable system allowed for the infinite possibilities of the unknown that attracted all participants to the hitch.

<sup>18</sup> "The social history of hitchhiking, even in the age of the internet, seems in danger of vanishing too, yet should someone choose to publish a global 'atlas' of hitchhiking, it would provide a visual representation of many of the concerns of anarchist anthropologists and sociologists. For instance, we would learn much of treatment of migratory people through details of how various states have provided for hitchhikers as contrasted with those that have anti-hitchhiking legislation or are notoriously racist, sexist or homophobic." (Purkis: 2012: 161).

<sup>19</sup> [http://hitchwiki.org/en/Main\\_Page](http://hitchwiki.org/en/Main_Page)

<sup>20</sup> "Folks behind Hitchwiki are building a new hospitality exchange community for hitchhikers and other travellers: Trustroots.org. Join us and spread the word!" Opening message (with hyperlink) on HW - [http://hitchwiki.org/en/Main\\_Page](http://hitchwiki.org/en/Main_Page). The sites themselves connected.

<sup>21</sup> "Couch Surfing is a bit like shopping online. It used to be more grassroots, for a niche target group, if you will. And now it has expanded to touch more people." Ling – Participant Observation. The expansion transitioning into 'for-profit'.

<sup>22</sup> "People, when they talk about the 'Sharing Community' they always talk about Non-Profit – but that's bullshit, that's something we never had! What we had was websites run by volunteers... then the websites got so big, that it was impossible to maintain it anymore in a professional way, without having certain funds... they directed the step into the 'For-Profit', like AirBnB, like Couch Surfing. They're 'For Profit'. There to gain money. What we never had, and what I think would have been a good solution to the whole 'Share Community' would have been the actual 'Non-Profit' thing... We still have the 'Sharing Community' like BeWelcome and TrustRoots, which in my eyes never really took off, and then we have the ones that went into 'For-Profit' who completely fucked up the spirit! And we have nothing in between."

Flo – Participant Skype Interview.

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<sup>23</sup> The critique of collaborative / share platforms includes multiple examples. One participant reflecting on BBC: *“When I see people driving from Vienna to Munich, twice a day with a nine seater (car)... Putting as many people in as possible, driving as much as possible, to make their own living of that... without any Worker’s Rights or any institution that takes care of them, without any control over how long they drive and what they do to themselves... Without an institution that supports them in any way, it becomes this tool of Capitalism. Where they want to earn more, and more, and more money, so they use this wannabe sharing site, and try to make profit of it.”* Noah – Participant Skype Interview.

<sup>24</sup> ‘Like minded’ the term repeatedly used by the majority of participants when asked about the nature of describing the hitchhiking community – virtual or actual.

<sup>25</sup> ‘HitchGathering’ slogan attached to online material – ‘All the roads meet somewhere’. <http://hitchgathering.org/>

<sup>26</sup> Throughout the research a number of other FB groups related to HH were investigated, however for the point of consolidating the focus of the research they are not explored within these results. However each of these FB groups held their own characteristic, though reinforced behaviour patterns as observed in the HGFB page. These pages included – ‘Hitchhiking Europe’, ‘Hitchhiking Partners Worldwide’, ‘Tribe of Hitchhikers’ and ‘Digital Nomads Around the World’.

<sup>27</sup> 30<sup>th</sup> March 2016 – Display of Members on the HGFB page: 11,922 members (134 new members). People were joining the group every day.

<sup>28</sup> Example post from participant on HGFB: *‘Is there anyone who didn’t have a bad experience HH in Italy ☹ (waiting time, men with bad intentions ecc.)?’* Twenty hours after this post was made, over twenty-five ‘replies’ were left. This included general responses of the Italian context (‘it’s not illegal in Italy’), mixed with also the personal accounts of individual’s own experience.

<sup>29</sup> This participant is acknowledged as an ‘Admin’ on the HGFB page, whereby he has the tools to be able to edit / remove posts on the page, as well as make ‘official posts’ on behalf of the HGFB page itself, rather than his ‘personal’ account. As he noted the majority of his involvement was actually to remove SPAM. SPAM was noted in this case as any post that was ‘commercial’.

<sup>30</sup> *“A Facebook group to constantly reunite the family of hitchhikers. Tie valuable contacts, keep in touch with old friends, inform others of hitchhiking-related news, find travel partners, organize events and contribute to a creation of a better world. ... Please note: In this group discriminatory or disrespectful behaviour will not be tolerated. Comments of this kind will be removed and can lead to exclusion from this group. Be kind and aim for understanding when dealing with others in the hitchhikers’ family, as you would if it was face-to-face conversation. Commercial posts will be deleted and can lead to banishment.”* HitchGathering Facebook ‘Closed Group’ Description.

<sup>31</sup> *“Dear Friends, it’s something I’ve been thinking a lot about since beginning hitching through Brazil some months ago: the idea of possessions and further: death, and it’s immediate possibility... But today was a foolish day: I was robbed for the first time in x years of almost constant travel and movement. Not even hitchhiking... Everyone told me it would happen. And it was ridiculous. A guy threw hot dog sauce all over my bag. Came and started to clean me, saying someone else had done it. I would like to know: How does one keep a good heart? How eyes can be deterred from becoming cynical and mistrusting? For trust and hitching...this kind of wandering... go hand in hand... Hugs, you all. Jass.”* Jass – Participant of HitchGathering FB Page. In response to the ‘Post’ there were twenty-one replies. Each reply often started it’s own chain of replies between Jass and the other member in a dialogue.

<sup>32</sup> However I would not dare declare that these ‘emotional’ interactions could be isolated as ‘more meaningful’ or significant posts when compared to the relationship of the ‘tips’ and ‘actual’ world ‘advice’ that dominates the site.

<sup>33</sup> *“In the same way that individuals reflect on and report their daily activities and thoughts on Twitter or Facebook (and personal blogs) – and in turn, have those contributions reflected on, mimicked, edited and disseminated- society is undergoing a constant process of reflexivity and adaptation.”* (Botsman & Rogers: 2010: 212-213)

<sup>34</sup> *“I’m travelling (alone) and I would like to have my friends with me, my family with me. And in this way, somehow they are with you because they see kind of the things that you do... and it’s always better to see something together than alone.”*

Gabor – Participant Skype Interview – on the structure of having a blog.

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<sup>35</sup> On reflecting on Richard Grant's cultural history of North American nomads, *Ghost Riders*: "For Grant, the fact that nomadic existence is chosen contributes to a different vision of American history, belying the official mythology of America as a 'fixed' acquisitive society. It is only when an educated person 'inexplicably' 'drops out' and ends up becoming a cult figure such as hitchhiking wanderer Chris McCandless (Krackauer: 1998, Penn: 2007) did after his death in the Alaskan wilderness in 1992, that mainstream society begins asking questions which have been in culture for a long time." (Purkis: 2012: 156, Grant: 2003)

<sup>36</sup> "The appetite of our present materialism depends upon stirring up our wants – but not satisfying them." (Lane: 2000). Indeed the very principles of non-monitory exchange pose its own subversion in an age dominated by the centralized presence of producer-consumer. This notion of 'wants' versus 'need' pivots a disposable culture of excess. And despite the nature of re-appropriating collaborative / share economy terminology with the adoption of the *Share Community*, both examples mark an alternate engagement of consumption, and reflect a value shift.

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