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Teaching Self-Control. Road Safety and Traffic Education in Postwar Germany

Kai Nowak[*]

Abstract: *»Selbstkontrolle lehren. Verkehrssicherheit und Verkehrserziehung in der frühen Bundesrepublik«.* In the 1950s, the Federal Republic of Germany had to cope with a situation referred to at the time as "*Verkehrskrise*" (traffic crisis). In a relatively short time span, the number of cars on German roads had increased rapidly, as well as the number of accidents and fatalities. Correspondingly, efforts in traffic education were heavily intensified. By examining public campaigns and expert discourse, the article explores how the notion of self-control gained more and more acceptance among road safety experts, and eventually helped to establish a paradigm change in Western German traffic education. In the course of the three decades from the 1950s to the 1970s, the focus shifted from enforcement by appealing to reason and disciplinary endeavors to the internalization of adequate behavior on the road and competence behind the wheel. Traffic education aimed to motivate road users to regulate themselves and to improve their ability to adapt to traffic situations. It tried to establish a specialized "seventh sense" as the core element of vernacular risk practices on the road. The notion of self-control, as implemented in public campaigns and other road safety activities, relied on societal models and certain notions of social and political order. These included, in particular, traditional family and gender roles, Christian religious values, and democratic freedom. Therefore, road traffic can be regarded as a cultural concept with road safety as a discursive arena. In that sense, road safety does not appear as a static state but was in a state of flux just as traffic itself was. Thus it required self-control and routinized yet flexible practices to improve the resilience of each individual road user to the risk of accidents as well as the resilience of the traffic system itself.

Keywords: Road safety, traffic education, traffic policy, motor car, Federal Republic of Germany, public campaigns, expert discourse, self-control, risk, resilience, pedagogy, morality, values, gender roles, infrastructure, technology.

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1. Introduction

In 1954, Werner Schöllgen, a catholic moral theologian at the University of Bonn, wrote an article for the *Zeitschrift für Verkehrssicherheit* (Journal of Road Safety).[1] What we find there is the following observation:

> Our roads, traffic signs, warning signs in front of railroad gates et cetera, as well as the technical features our means of transport are equipped with already meet the demands of safety standards to such a high degree that the actual and in fact biggest problems of road traffic do not concern these aspects anymore. Rather, the problem is the individual road user, because he is an inaccurate, erratic being, prone to failure, simply a living creature (Schöllgen 1954, 105).

Road safety is neither a mere problem of technology that can be solved by improvements in road building, city planning, and vehicle safety, nor is it a legal one that simply takes a thorough amount of state regulation and control. Not alone can engineers and planners, politicians and police be considered road safety experts, but also people like Schöllgen: philosophers, psychologists, and teachers. Road safety was a sociopolitical task, focusing particularly on the road user. From this perspective, road safety experts at large considered traffic accidents to be a "moral problem." As such, they concluded, traffic education was a suitable means of tackling the problem (Meyer and Jacobi 1959).

In the 1950s, the Federal Republic of Germany had to cope with a situation referred to at that time as "*Verkehrskrise*" (traffic crisis). In a relatively short time span the number of motor bikes, cars, and trucks on German roads had increased rapidly and so had the number of accidents. In 1960, Germany had almost four times as many vehicles than ten years before; their number had increased from almost 2,000,000 to 7,600,000. In the same period, the number of fatalities had almost doubled from 7,300 to 14,000, while the number of injuries due to traffic accidents even tripled in a decade. Starting from 150,000 injuries in 1950, the count raised to 430,000 in the year 1960 (Klenke 1993, 353-6; Kuhm 1997, 241). Correspondingly, the government, schools, automobile clubs, as well as mass media heavily intensified their efforts promoting traffic education. Most of these efforts were connected with the *Verkehrswacht*, a non-governmental organization dedicated to road safety that was re-established in 1950 with essential support from the West German federal government, after

[1] The *Zeitschrift für Verkehrssicherheit* was founded in 1952 by prosecutor Konstantin Lehmann, who ran the journal as editor-in-chief for ten years. It had a decidedly interdisciplinary approach and was open to jurists, psychologists, engineers, physicians, through to sociologists and theologians. Thus, the journal aimed at representing the breadth of the field and emphasized that it regarded road safety as a multifaceted task which required diverse expertise. Yet, particularly in its first years, the circle of contributors appears to have been rather eclectic since some of the authors were autodidacts with regard to road safety, who did not always keep up with scientific and methodological standards.

the National Socialists had forced its "voluntary" liquidation in 1937 (Klenke 1993, 83-91; Hochstetter 2005, 395). In the course of the 1950s, traffic education was more closely integrated in school curricula. Exams were offered for pedestrians and cyclists, "traffic rooms" were established in schools and public libraries as well as mobile training grounds in school yards, while the voluntary crossing guard service was expanded, and in 1956 the "*Verkehrskasper*," a soon to be popular puppet show and figure, started its activities next to an increasing number of educational films and public campaigns.

Stemming from this observation of what amounted to an explosion in traffic education activities, this article begins with a few – rather sketchy – remarks on how actual risk and the debate on road safety may relate to each other. A discussion then follows of how the notion of self-control in road traffic is related to this debate by drawing upon the work of Norbert Elias. The subsequent section focuses on the question of how the 'human factor' was addressed in expert discussions and public campaigns, exploring how the debate on self-control evolved and was established as an important if not leading concept in German traffic education in the 1950s and 1960s. In order to do so, the analysis will draw mostly on discussions held within contemporary road safety journals such as the interdisciplinary *Zeitschrift für Verkehrssicherheit* (Journal of Road Safety), *Verkehrswacht*-periodicals, and *ADAC-Motorwelt*, the membership magazine of Germany's largest automobile club.

In the following pages, this article argues that endeavors to promote road safety blended state regulation and expert-based conduct with self-control in order to establish a specific modern form of civilized behavior with regard to road traffic. Self-control relied on certain notions of social and political order and, at the same time, helped to establish them. This process could not be determined by the state, as self-control essentially relied – and still relies – on vernacular risk practices, a risk culture that is, according to Arwen Mohun (2013, 1), made up of a "set of rules, customs, and beliefs," shaped in everyday life and "passed informally from person to person, reinforced through the authority of experience and social status." But traffic education that approached its audience top-down could at least give road users incentives for disciplining themselves, which were closely connected with moral values and ideas of democratic freedom and personal responsibility. Thereby the principle of self-control was constituted and seemingly undermined at the same time, this paradox being a prerequisite for the mechanism to work. The notion of self-control helped to establish a paradigm change in Western German traffic education, which occurred over the course of three decades from the 1950s to the 1970s: The focus shifted from enforcement by appealing to reason and by disciplinary endeavors to the internalization of adequate behavior on the road and competence behind the wheel. It thus changed from a static, technocratic view of road traffic that thought in terms of controllability to a more dynamic understanding that paid tribute to its inherent contingency. Therefore, traffic education was increasingly focused on

improving the resilience of the traffic system by improving road users' resilience in coping with its shortcomings – both systemic as well as personal.

2. Roads and Risk

Using roads may result in undesirable consequences: Road traffic entails hazards for each person's property, physical health, and life. In the early days of automobilism, the motor car was at the center of a hard-fought struggle about priorities and responsibilities on the road. The vehicle was a complete game changer that required a renegotiation process which mainly took place in the contested space of the road itself. At times, the protests against the hazards induced by higher speeds and reckless driving became violent and created new, possibly life-endangering hazards in turn. Some protesters even stretched steel ropes across roads (Fraunholz 2002; Norton 2008). On the other hand, at the beginning of the twentieth century, the hazards of the road acted as a source of pleasure for some (mostly male) drivers, who had cultivated a sporty, even aggressive style of driving. In this context, a traffic accident was considered a "heroic paradigm of modernity" and a source of social prestige similar to war injuries (Möser 1999, 164).

The need to contain these social frictions as well as the increasing death toll was obvious. Generally, there were three approaches to minimizing risk on the road: First, this was filtered through efforts in engineering, e.g. improvements in the construction of roads, the segregation of traffic lanes by setting up designated areas for different means of transport like pavements, bikeways, etc. (Ishaque and Noland 2006), or new developments in vehicle safety (Stieniczka 2006). Second, regulation and enforcement through traffic law, traffic signs, and police control imposed or at least enjoined proper behavior on the road (Meyer and Jacobi 1959, 183-6). Third, traffic education aimed at conditioning road users. The early days of automobilism in Germany saw private driving schools popping up and initial efforts at bringing traffic education to primary schools followed by its institutionalization in the course of the 1920s with the *Verkehrswacht* as the leading actor (Fack 2000a, 2000b). Since then, road traffic has become an increasingly extensive, systematic, and basically risky endeavor that has been securitized and thereby politicized. Road traffic became a subject of safety-related practices, most importantly of safety communication. An expert discourse emerged which produced and distributed safety-related knowledge, thus trying to deal with risk systematically. These practices focused not only on the prevention of accidents or on mitigating the results of accidents as, at the same time, they addressed road traffic as such and its preconditions, requirements, and consequences. As a result, the diversifying activities of traffic education were targeted at establishing trust in the traffic system. They should suggest reliability and create a collective perception of security and safety, because

increasingly one could expect everyone else to have at least a basic knowledge of appropriate behavior. In this way they circulated notions of modern society.

In this respect, risk turns out to be a social construction, since it is all about the perception of contingency and dealing with it – on an individual as well as on a social level. As it is completely uncertain when or whether the possible instances and effects of damage, injury or death will occur and who will be involved, risk perception is more or less like viewing an uncertain future (Mohun 2013, 5). Alternatively, statistics like accident rates help measure the chance of accidents occurring, but in turn are always subject to interpretation. Statistics are used by experts in order to securitize road traffic, thus rendering it a safety issue. Dangers cannot be completely avoided, though. It still remains a fact that, by participating in road traffic, people somehow have to cope with the associated risks if they do not want to avoid traveling by car. However, this is not an option for most in an increasingly mobile world because it proves to be difficult to evade the promises of motorization: participation in the benefits an affluent society offers, as well as the extension of the individual radius of mobility. The debate on road safety continuously had to balance personal demands for self-fulfillment and requirements of public safety and security, respectively, the individual and the common good.

Accordingly, the question at hand, and the one that preoccupied the experts, is: To what degree is the risk inherent to the automobile age manageable for society as a whole, as well as for each individual road user? Consequently, endeavors in road safety to a lesser extent aim at achieving a safe or an as-safe-as-possible state. But what is safe anyway? Of course it should entail enabling road users to travel preferably unharmed. But at the core road safety is more about improving the *acceptance of risk*. Thus, it aims in particular at creating trust in the road traffic system as such and the car as a means of transportation. This was more important at times when traffic planners and politicians to an overwhelming degree tried to promote individual motor traffic, which was the case in Germany at least in the 1950s and 1960s.

However, as Arwen P. Mohun has shown, road safety is not based solely on systematic efforts deployed top-down. These efforts are rather closely linked with vernacular risk practices, which give weight to common knowledge and experience. With regard to road traffic, vernacular risk culture centers around a figure that might be called: the good driver. He (in safety discourse less often: she) is always in full control of the vehicle and is able to assess any risky situation correctly. However, particularly good drivers have a mind of their own: They do not abide by every regulation, if it seems justifiable. That is why systematic endeavors at road safety also try to 'infiltrate' vernacular practices with sanctioned conduct (Mohun 2013, 164-5). This could be achieved, as a growing number of experts in traffic education were convinced, with the help of the concept of self-control.

3. Self-Control

Road traffic is a complex, highly interdependent sociotechnical infrastructure system distinguished by overlapping interests, different travel speeds, a pluricentric structure which impose the highest requirements on the discipline of every single road user. Roads, aside from motorways, induce uncertainties and insecurities because they are public spaces with their usage not clearly predefined. Since the nineteenth century, they have evolved from being a habitat to interconnected spaces of networks and flows, which required the synchronization of a steadily increasing volume of traffic. Therefore road traffic is regarded as virtually paradigmatic for late industrial modernity (van Laak 2016). But how can security and safety be produced under conditions which are characterized less by personal commitment than by reliable procedures and practices?

According to Norbert Elias, people have to adapt their conduct to those of others due to the increasing complexity of modern societies and the process of functional differentiation. Elias holds that, in the "civilizing process," external constraints are transformed into self-constraint. This adaptation cannot simply be determined top-down by state regulation and control, but, of course, it can be accompanied and guided. Self-control is instilled in people during their socialization process and in their daily lives. Socially accepted conduct that is internalized, in this view, is much more effective than external control, because as a phenomenon made up of latency and willfulness at the same time it is not as easily prone to inner resistance as interventions on behalf of a third party (Elias 1997, 327-30). With regard to road safety, all efforts at traffic education aim to motivate road users to regulate themselves. Self-control and the expectation that others will control themselves as well produce stable behavior patterns, and by that, predictability. By such means, the contingency of road traffic is reduced and the perception of road traffic as potentially too hazardous is softened.

While Elias finds self-control primarily located in subconsciousness, the activities of traffic educators in the 1950s, mainly consisting of teaching rules and appealing to an individual's responsibility, were still geared to rational insight. This becomes apparent in campaign slogans like "Open your eyes in traffic" ("*Augen auf im Straßenverkehr*") or "Pay attention to others" ("*Achte auf den Anderen*"). However, at the end of the decade, a controversial discussion about the significance of preconscious conduct for road safety set in, led in (semi-) academic journals by the use of catchwords like "automatisms" or "reflexive driving behavior."

The starting point was the observation made by psychologists that, due to high complexity and speed of traffic flows, there was not enough time, and drivers' cognitive abilities were insufficient, to adequately assess situations on the basis of understanding alone. Instead, when a risky situation occurs, a driver often spontaneously reacts in the "correct" way even if inattentive (Leonhard 1957, 10). This is because subconsciously perceived signals trigger sequences

of action that run automatically. Single elements of these are rarely explicable. One example: The perception of a red light is followed by the act of reducing speed, pushing the clutch, shifting down, braking, etc. until the vehicle finally comes to a stop (Schmitz 1958, 17-8). The advocates of automatism urged traffic educators to give more weight to constant repetition, for instance on training grounds, in order to habitualize appropriate sequences of action (Leonhard 1957, 9-10; Franke 1961, 101-2).

However, the notion of automatisms was quite strongly contested because it appeared too static for requirements imposed by a highly dynamic traffic system. Actually automatisms were accepted as an effective instrument to improve road safety only as far as they were conceptualized with regard to disciplining the body. This means for example the guidance of the driver's eyes through the reading of traffic signs or road markings ("Keep in your lane!") as well as the complex relationship between body and vehicle (Urry 2006). Even though body related techniques were seen as equally essential for governing the road infrastructure system and the implementation of self-control, road safety experts raised serious concerns because the notion of automatisms undermined the topos of freedom on the road:

> The modern man, who was educated in the spirit of freedom and human dignity and is eager to preserve these values, is reluctant to submit himself to automatic and mechanical procedures, like a small cog in a big machine, without the possibility to decide autonomously (Löw 1961).

Eventually, personal freedom and the voluntary decision to comply with traffic regulation was the most important element of self-control, if not the secret of its success.

4. Road Safety and the 'Human Factor' in Postwar Germany

In the 1950s, there was a mostly unchallenged consensus among the German road safety expert community that next to efforts in road building, disciplining road users was the key for improving safety and solving the so-called "traffic crisis" (Altmeier 1957; HH. 1960). In October 1951, the Federal Minister of Transport, Hans-Christoph Seebohm, had already emphasized the importance of self-discipline as a goal of traffic education in a parliamentary speech.[2] But how could self-discipline be achieved?

Road safety activities took place within discursive orders, based on knowledge and corresponding practices as well as technologies of the self.

[2] Parliamentary speech, Federal Minister of Transport, Hans-Christoph Seebohm, 171th plenary session, Oct. 25, 1951, 7045-9.

These constituted the power to discourage or encourage courses of action. Besides the state and state-run institutions, many non-governmental organizations and networks of experts from science to legal professionals were involved in elaborating, rationalizing, and organizing this program and carried it into the last angle of the private sphere. Thus, road safety essentially drew on preexisting power structures in education and family environments in order to establish mechanisms of self-control, which relied on societal models and certain notions of social and political order, and at the same time helped to establish them. These were, in particular, traditional family and gender roles, Christian religious values and democratic freedom – all of which played a major role in traffic education and its campaigns.

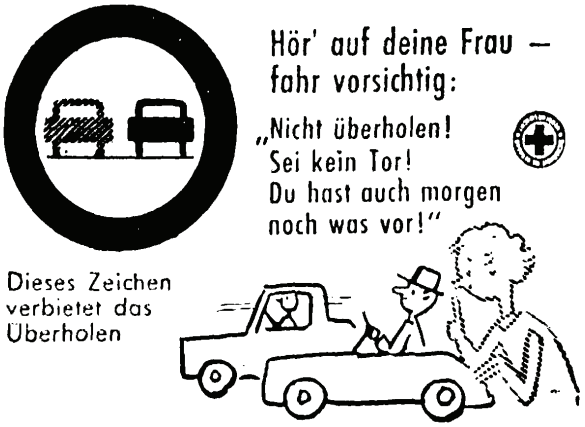
Figure 1: Safety Campaign Targeting Women

Source: Deutsche Verkehrswacht, April 1960.

In the 1950s and 1960s, women were rarely addressed directly by road safety campaigns. Their behavior behind the wheel was not in question as they were already regarded as decent drivers, who are well acquainted with traffic law. Hence several 1950s safety adverts presented women as role models, even though at that time this was mostly as non-motorized road users (Figure 1).[3]

[3] A neither representative nor methodically sound traffic count from 1958/59 revealed that only 5% of car drivers were female, whereas the percentage of female cyclists came to 28% (Linden 1960, 23).

Figure 2: "Listen to your Wife – Drive Carefully"



Source: Deutsche Verkehrswacht, June 1957.

Only occasionally were women portrayed as responsible for creating hazardous situations, for instance due to an allegedly natural lack of self-confidence behind the wheel (Sjövall 1955), or even because they distracted their driving husbands by chatting too much (Leonhard 1957). Instead, men were considered as prone to accidents because they seemingly acted out their masculinity on the road (Denecke 1958). Thus, almost all road safety campaigns were aimed at male drivers. Some of them made use of domestic power structures in order to indirectly exert influence on men. In the 1950s a popular campaign by the *Verkehrswacht* tried to get access to reckless drivers traveling alone, reminding them: "Listen to your wife – drive carefully!" In one picture the specter of a woman with a wagging finger accompanies the man in his car. He has her on his mind while driving. Moral imperatives and societal control at home were meant to be converted into self-control on the road (Figure 2).

In another example from a 1959 campaign, a poster shows a worried child and its mother awaiting the safe return of their father and husband, which – underlined by a sinister light setting at dusk – should remind him of his responsibility for his loved ones. Besides pointing to the social control exerted by family members, this poster implicitly drew upon imaginations of accident and death and the impending social and financial consequences for relatives (Figure 3).

Figure 3: "Get Home Safely!"

Source: Bundesminister für Verkehr (1990, 40).

Women were assigned a "passive role" (Baumgarten 1960) in most of the campaigns of that decade, suggesting that they were only indirectly affected by fatalities. This changed in the course of the 1960s and 1970s. Now there were observers who inverted former interpretations, stating that in the end men and their paternalism were to blame if women were involved in accidents, because they prevented them from becoming safer drivers (Bretz 1968). And in road safety campaigns, women not only gained more importance as an audience, but were even granted the status of being as adept on the road as male drivers. Nevertheless some road safety posters depicting women still targeted men by relying on sexist stereotypes that were well-known in product advertising (Figure 4).

Since the road can be regarded as an arena of morality, it is no surprise that the churches were also active in this field. Since the beginning of traffic education, they had tried to establish a specifically Christian traffic ethos by – among other means – referring to the fifth commandment ("You shall not kill") and preaching – literally – safe driving with regard to others as every Christians' duty. There were dedicated sermons and prayers (Katholische Bundesarbeitsgemeinschaft Verkehr 1964), from time to time road safety was featured in church journals,[4] and small pictures of Saint Christopherus, the patron saint of travelers, were handed out to drivers, who could fill in their blood type on the reverse

[4] Letter from Katholisches Büro Bonn to Kuratorium "Wir und die Straße," Bundesarchiv, B 108/2666, 374-86.

side,[5] while motorway churches, to which hurried travelers could retreat and seek spiritual guidance, indicated a close connection between god and car drivers. Aside from actual church activities, there is a whole host of Christian imagery used in road safety language: A mid-1950s Berlin poster campaign tells drivers to behave like a road angel ("*Sei auch du ein Engel im Verkehrsgedrängel*"), and the roadside assistance service offered by the German automobile club ADAC operates under the name "yellow angels" ("*Gelbe Engel*"). Most notably, a traffic offender in the German language is called a sinner ("*Verkehrssünder*"). This term explicitly refers to confession, for hundreds of years one of the most effective Christian techniques of governing souls. But it still aims at the promise of salvation, which everybody is able to reach by himself, if he tries to fulfill a certain ethos. Since the road was considered an arena of negotiation with regard to moral values, the rather close involvement in road safety activities corresponded to the churches' endeavors in re-Christianizing public life after 12 years of Nazi rule (Kleßmann 1993; Gabriel 1996). However, just as the churches' public authority diminished due to liberalization tendencies in the 1960s and 1970s, traffic education in general saw a decrease in religious references, although churches kept up their own road safety initiatives. The semantics of sin still remained in use, since it had been well established for a long time.

Figure 4: Poster Drawing upon Sexist Stereotypes Recommends to Better Wear a Seatbelt than to Drive Topless (1974)

Source: German Safety Council – Deutscher Verkehrssicherheitsrat (DVR).

[5] Minutes of the advisory board of Kuratorium "Wir und die Straße," April 26, 1960, Bundesarchiv B 108/2665, 132-6.

Secularized values that traffic education referred to included – to name the most prominent – chivalry, courtesy, being a gentleman, showing responsibility and good manners on the road. These appealed to the self-perception of one's character, which was one important way to tackle the problem of self-control: "Don't let your car make a bad person out of you" was the slogan the *Verkehrswacht* used in their priority program in December 1959, which attempted to establish proper manners behind the wheel (Deutsche Verkehrswacht 1959a). The same year, 1.5 million copies of a *Verkehrswacht* flyer were circulated that drew heavily on traditional gender roles and that at the same time tried to change associated behavior. It read: "Decency is pure joy for real men with lots of horse power" (Deutsche Verkehrswacht 1959b). So, traffic education not only aimed at reducing risky driving behavior but also tried to convey notions of desirable forms of communal life. One road safety expert suggested communicating more often with other road users using gestures through the car windows to overcome the social isolation that was induced by the automobile age. Another one seconded this idea, arguing that this could successfully "defrost the Cold War on the roads" (v. F. 1958).

At the same time road users could, in the eyes of experts, express their civic virtues and political convictions by behaving properly. Therefore, traffic education was considered a means of civic education for the newly established democracy in Western Germany. In 1958, a grammar school teacher painted the picture of the road as a suitable training ground for appropriate civil and civilized behavior where Germans could prove their maturity. On the road, they could train themselves in exercising the democratic freedom of their own choice – but, of course, in accordance with common rules and limited by a sense of responsibility for their fellow citizens and the political and social order as such (Seitzer 1958). In 1959, this balance still was missed by a *Verkehrswacht* member, who complained that after the experience of war, the postwar years filled with deprivation and the economic miracle with its dog-eat-dog mentality, competition, and selfishness ruled the road as well. Instead he claimed: "Democracy means […] *deliberate* and wise integration in the community and its necessities" (Lienen 1959).

However, such an expectation had already turned out to be little more than wishful thinking a few years earlier. In 1953, the speed limit inside towns had been abolished in order to facilitate self-responsibility and to practice a democratic attitude. In this regard the bill was directed against the national-socialist traffic policy, which had demanded subordination to the "traffic community." Now the notion of freedom on the road was considered crucial for a democratic Germany, with the motor car as its symbol. The struggle between a collectivist and an individualist approach, thus between the past dictatorial regime with its traditions and continuities and the democratic present, was also fought out through traffic policy (Klenke 1995, 41-4). But at the core, transport minister Seebohm aimed to remove one of the alleged obstacles of motorization. Ironically, the bill had the abatement of accidents in its name, but the number of

fatalities in urban areas rose quickly. The attempt to realize democratic freedom and reeducation by means of road safety proved to have rather deadly consequences. In 1957, the speed limit of 50 km/h was finally restored (Klenke 1995, 17-8; Praxenthaler 1999, 19-21).

Even if it obviously failed in terms of accident prevention, in the long run the notion of freedom was vital for establishing self-control. The successful internalization of an ethos of a democratic traffic system, representing freedom, prosperity, and a desired way of communal living, was a key factor. It seemingly laid the pursuit of happiness in everyone's own hands. Thus, the convergence of individual and community should be deliberately favored by citizens themselves. In that sense, (personal) freedom is a necessary condition in liberal democracies, but it is bounded by a dispositive of security and safety, albeit not in a complementary way. As the concept of self-control shows, in liberal societies, security and safety are actually produced by freedom (Packer 2003).

Despite all the efforts at enforcement and education, appealing to road users' manners and teaching traffic rules was not enough, as a glimpse at the statistics unmistakably revealed. Subsequently, experts tried to reassess current concepts in traffic education. In this context, a changed perspective on road traffic gradually became prevalent. More and more it was regarded as an open, highly dynamic, interconnected infrastructure system with a multitude of autonomous users with a will of their own. In this conception, risk had to be accepted as an inherent element which could neither be denied nor eliminated completely, but should become manageable. Hence, contingency was no longer only considered to be a fundamental problem leading to accidents. Instead contingency should be utilized for traffic education in a productive way (Brunner 1958, 359; Franke 1961, 82-7; Munsch 1961). In this context, the notion of self-control became more and more central. Such a traffic system required "a high degree of elastic adaptation" from its users, as one expert put it (Franke 1961, 90). Others stated that there could be situations where not conforming to compulsory behavior could actually even prevent accidents. Therefore, traffic education should renounce the idea of teaching a predefined code of conduct which pretends to be always totally clear, and stop insisting on compliance at any rate (Munsch 1961). The metaphor of elasticity, however, pointed to a certain fuzziness, a gray area of adaptation, that could not be handled either by fixed patterns of behavior or by disciplining and regulation. In this context, traffic psychologists brought preconscious conduct to the fore again, and thought about which parameters could possibly stimulate the emergence of a "practical, nonreflective intelligence, that intuitively let one do the right thing" (Brunner 1958, 360). Traffic education, they argued, should "shape attitudes, that leave road users a certain latitude and enable them to adapt to the variety of specific traffic situations" (Franke 1961, 91-2; cf. Hebenstreit 1961).

The practitioners in the field of road safety translated these thoughts into the catchword "*Verkehrssinn*" as a means of inserting self-control into subcon-

sciousness (Munsch 1966). They started to reflect upon what they called a "seventh sense." A good driver, they claimed, does not need to think about how to behave properly on the road – he simply does. He always has the contingency of road traffic in the back of his mind and anticipates potentially hazardous situations – thus, hardly knowing any by himself. However, if there is one, he instantly knows how to avoid harm (Lidl 1960). But there is more to it than simply experienced driving. The term suggested a new, specific body sense, a second nature, vital for survival in late industrial societies (Merki 1999, 52-3). Besides anthropological connotations, the notion also relied on social control to enforce self-control: Traffic educators often remarked that drivers who had gained a fairly good seventh sense were surrounded by an aura of safety, which in turn encouraged others to get in his car – and on the contrary, that nobody liked to join drivers who did not have a seventh sense (Lidl 1960).

But how could traffic education successfully stimulate the emergence of a seventh sense? Besides stressing the importance of constant driving training, experts demanded that driving schools and other means of traffic education should concentrate on teaching and practicing anticipatory skills. In particular, drivers should develop a specialized "traffic vision," the ability of visual attentional control located in subconsciousness (Munsch 1962). In this regard, educational films became more important, and the notion of a seventh sense gained huge popularity until it was adopted by the TV show of the same name which was broadcast between 1966 and 2006 (Ebeler 1986; Wind 1990).

The career of self-control and a seventh sense implied two fundamental shifts in perspective that saw resilience put forward as a paradigm of road safety and accident prevention: Whereas in the 1950s, the road safety discourse, and thus traffic education, first and foremost had concentrated on exceptional situations of dysfunction by trying to reduce traffic accidents and mitigate their consequences, the guiding principle of the seventh sense was the smooth operation of the traffic system (Munsch 1961). Moreover, road users, hitherto the object of traffic education, increasingly became its subject. In 1971, the newly established German Road Safety Council launched a long-running campaign that explicitly centered on road users, their interests, self-perceptions, and abilities. One of its core elements was a series of posters which were displayed at autobahns and major roads. Each poster presented an adept user of the road ("*Könner*"), a skillful, responsible, and calm driver who seemed like a personification of the seventh sense. Slogans used were, for instance, "*Könner* keep their distance" or "*Könner* wear a seat belt" (Figure 5).

Figure 5: "*Könner* Keep their Distance"

Source: German Safety Council – Deutscher Verkehrssicherheitsrat (DVR).

Those drivers, the campaign suggested, do not need enforcement as they have internalized adequate behavior as well as good manners through their own free will. They express competence with regard to their own safety and those of others.

5. Conclusion

Traffic education in postwar Germany over the years did not just stick to the goal of reducing the number of accidents. It also focused on normal operations in road traffic and positively offered desirable models of sociopolitical order and communal life. Implementing self-control was an essential goal of those road safety endeavors. Evidently that applied in particular when freedom as a fundamental societal value coincided with an open and pluricentric infrastructure system. In liberal democracies, state regulation is inherently a difficult task, certainly more difficult to achieve than in dictatorial regimes. While also utilizing mechanisms of self-control to some degree, the "Third Reich" decidedly relied much more on inclusion and exclusion. The Nazis transferred the idea of *Volksgemeinschaft* to road traffic. Who dared to put himself outside the German traffic community (*Verkehrsgemeinschaft*)? But to their own confusion, the Nazi-ideologists recurrently had to state that even innumerable good

"*Volksgenossen*" willingly ignored such appeals and refrained from adopting their driving behavior (Hochstetter 2005, 381-5).

Nevertheless, in 1950s traffic education, there were quite a few continuities with the Nazi period, not only regarding people who could still count on their expert status. Some tried to preserve the Nazi idea of community, while others even stuck to the terminology (Mühlhaus 1953). Nor was the notion of self-control completely new, let alone the only paradigm in effect. While it was widely in discussion, other, older ways of addressing still remained in use, for instance paternalism, as a campaign picture from 1957 shows: A traffic signal in the guise of a Berlin policeman looks down on his subject (Figure 6).

But it is not too surprising that the 'human factor,' and correspondingly the notion of self-control, gained increasing attention in the traffic education of democratic postwar Germany. As a non-governmental organization, yet one closely related to the state, the *Verkehrswacht* – originally founded in 1924 – is strongly associated with the republican form of government and with the idea of a civil society (Klenke 1993, 85). By relying on the commitment of thousands of volunteers, the *Verkehrswacht* sent out the message: Everyone could become a road safety expert!

Figure 6: Berlin Dialect and Prussian Paternalism: "Can't you pay attention?"

Source: Deutsche Verkehrswacht, March 1959.

In the 20th century, and even more in the period of mass motorization, road traffic was more than a central economic factor for industrial societies. It was a cultural concept with road safety as a discursive arena. Therefore, safety was no static state that could be predefined; it was in a state of flux just as traffic itself was. Thus it required self-regulation and routinized yet flexible practices in order to improve the resilience of each individual road user to the risk of accidents as well as the resilience of the traffic system itself. Therefore, road

safety in the light of the self-control paradigm, which emerged from the late 1950s on, can be considered part of a specific security dispositive, the regime of risk prevention through immunization (Bröckling 2012, 96-9). The aim of implementing self-control and a corresponding ethos of road traffic heavily relied on vernacular risk practices, which traffic education tried to influence in the sense of overseeing a long-term change from risk affinity to the presence of a specialized seventh sense of safety. Road risk was to appear manageable.

The securitization of road traffic was a constant task, a constant process of negotiation. Not only because increasing traffic with increasing speeds seemingly meant increasing risk, but also because of ever new generations of young people entering the roads and because of shifting degrees of waywardness that could be tolerated. Even more importantly it was because of changes in society itself and its guiding principles. Traffic education had to adapt to these changes if it wanted people to adapt.

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