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Automotive Emotions

Feeling the Car

Mimi Sheller

CARS ELICIT a wide range of feelings: the pleasures of driving, the outburst of 'road rage', the thrill of speed, the security engendered by driving a 'safe' car and so on. They also generate intensely emotional politics in which some people passionately mobilize to 'stop the traffic' and 'reclaim the streets', while others vociferously defend their right to cheap petrol. Cars are above all machines that move people, but they do so in many senses of the word. Recent approaches to the phenomenology of car-use have highlighted 'the driving body' as a set of social practices, embodied dispositions, and physical affordances (Sheller and Urry, 2000; Dant and Martin, 2001; Edensor, 2002; Oldrup, 2004; Dant, 2004; Thrift, 2004). More encompassing approaches to the anthropology of material cultures have also resituated the car as a social-technical 'hybrid' (Michael, 2001; Miller, 2001a).[1] This article builds both on this work and on recent approaches in the sociology of emotions (Hochschild, 1983, 1997, 2003; Bendelow and Williams, 1998; Katz, 2000; Goodwin et al., 2001; Ahmed, 2004) to explore the ways in which the 'dominant culture of automobility' (Urry, 2000) is implicated in a deep context of affective and embodied relations between people, machines and spaces of mobility and dwelling, in which emotions and the senses play a key part.

Social commentators have long addressed the problem of car cultures in an explicitly normative manner concerned with the restitution of 'public goods' (the environment, human health, the social fabric of cities, democratic public cultures) that have been eroded by contemporary car and road systems (Jacobs, 1961; Nader, 1965; Sennett, 1990; Kunstler, 1994; Dunn, 1998). At stake in such debates is not simply the future of the car, but the future of the entire 'car culture' (and wider transportation system) in what might be characterized as 'societies of automobility' in which the 'coercive freedom' of driving shapes both public and private spaces of all scales and

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kinds (Sheller and Urry, 2000; Urry, 2004). Yet most practical efforts at promoting more 'ethical' forms of car consumption have been debated and implemented as if the intense feelings, passions and embodied experiences associated with automobility were not relevant.

Car cultures have social, material and above all affective dimensions that are overlooked in current strategies to influence car-driving decisions. The individualistic 'rational choice' model, which is so influential as to be taken for granted in transportation policy debates, distorts our understanding of how people (and their feelings) are embedded in historically sedimented and geographically etched patterns of 'quotidian mobility' (Kaufman, 2000). Paying attention to the emotional constituents of car cultures, however, need not imply resorting to black-box causal explanations such as the popular yet ill-defined notions of 'automobile addiction' or a 'love affair' with the car (Motavalli, 2001). New approaches both to car cultures and to emotional cultures can aid us in shifting attention away from the counter-factual 'rational actor' who supposedly makes carefully reasoned economic choices, and towards the lived experience of dwelling with cars in all of its complexity, ambiguity and contradiction.

Car consumption is never simply about rational economic choices, but is as much about aesthetic, emotional and sensory responses to driving, as well as patterns of kinship, sociability, habitation and work. Insofar as there are 'car cultures' vested in an 'intimate relationship between cars and people' (Miller, 2001b: 17), we can ask how feelings for, of and within cars occur as embodied sensibilities that are socially and culturally embedded in familial and sociable practices of car use, and the circulations and displacements performed by cars, roads and drivers. As Michel Callon and John Law suggest:

> Agency and subjectivity are not just about calculation and interpretation. They may also have to do with emotion. Circulation and displacement are also crucial here. . . . Passion, emotion, to be affected, all have to do with travel, with circulation. The language gives it away. To be moved, to be transported, the trip, these are metaphors for displacement. As, too, is addiction, a word that comes from the Latin *ad-ducere*, to lead away. (2004: 10)

As I shall argue below, an emotional agent is a relational entity that instantiates particular aesthetic orientations and kinaesthetic dispositions towards driving. Movement and being moved together produce the feelings of being in the car, for the car and with the car.

A better understanding of the cultural and emotional constituents of personal, familial, regional, national and transnational patterns of automobility can contribute to future research programmes and policy initiatives that resist the powerful yet ultimately unsatisfying aggregation of social data based on statistical quantification of individual preferences, attitudes and actions. Social psychological studies of driving behaviour have begun to emphasize the complex determinants of transportational choices, such as

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the physical, cognitive and affective 'effort' of different modalities of travel (Stradling et al., 2001; Stradling, 2002). However, we still need further qualitative research models that will take into account how these apparently 'internal' psychological dispositions and preferences are generated by collective cultural patterns and what I shall describe below as emotional geographies, which in turn reiteratively reinforce cultures of automobility. Even the 'new realism' in travel reduction, which posits a shift from economic and technological solutions towards more holistic land use and planning solutions (Bannister, 2003), must engage with the complexities of housing and labour markets, changing patterns of gender and family formation, and the place of transportation in modern urban, national and transnational identities – all of which have a strong emotional component.

An emotional sociology of automobility can contribute to theorizing the connections between the micro-level preferences of individual drivers, the meso-level aggregation of specifically located car cultures, and the macro-level patterns of regional, national and transnational emotional/ cultural/material geographies. Through a close examination of the aesthetic and especially kinaesthetic dimensions of automobility, this article locates car cultures (and their associated feelings) within a broader physical/ material relational setting that includes both human bodies and car bodies, and the relations between them and the spaces through which they move (or fail to move).[2] Cultural styles, feelings and emotions underpin and inform the relationality of things and people in material worlds. Feelings about driving are one way in which emotions are embodied in relationships not only with other humans but also with material things, including the kinaesthetic dimensions of how human bodies interact with the material world. Such 'automotive emotions' – the embodied dispositions of car-users and the visceral and other feelings associated with car-use – are as central to understanding the stubborn persistence of car-based cultures as are more technical and socio-economic factors.

As Arlie Hochschild's work suggests, emotions are not simply 'natural' but have to be worked at through 'emotion management' and in relation to culturally specific 'feeling rules' (Hochschild, 1983, 2003). Her ideas underline the social relationality of emotions showing how affect transcends individual psychology; however, her conceptualization of 'management' and 'rules' still implies a quite instrumental actor, who first feels things and *then* manages and judges those feelings. Through this exploration of automotive emotions I aim to show how emotion itself arises out of particular material relations and sensations, and at the same time organizes material relations and sensations into wider aesthetic and kinaesthetic cultures. Insofar as 'feelings' are embodied and performed in the convergences and collisions between emotion cultures and material cultures, we can speak of both 'affective economies' (Ahmed, 2004) and 'emotional geographies' of automobility in which there are flows, circulations, distributions, intensifications and interferences of emotion between and among people, things and places.

The following sections explore in turn the embodied practices of

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feeling the car, the emotional geography of family cars and caring practices, and the emergence of national feelings about cars, car industries and driving styles. Each section aims to describe the transpersonal emotional and material cultures by which particular styles of automobility and dispositions towards driving come to be naturalized and stabilized. My argument also draws on recent approaches in feminist technoscience and cultural anthropology, which offer a critical theoretical perspective on nature, culture, technology and commodity branding (that has been largely marginalized in the predominantly male-dominated androcentric research, planning and transport policy arenas). By taking seriously how people feel *about* and *in* cars, and how the feel *of* different car cultures elicits specific dispositions and ways of life, we will be in a better position to re-evaluate the ethical dimensions of car consumption and the moral economies of car use (on moral economy see Sayer, 2003). Only then can we consider what will really be necessary to make the transition from today's car cultures (and the automotive emotions that sustain them) to more socially and environmentally 'responsible' transportation cultures.

Feeling the Car

> Whilst I am driving, I am nearly always happy. Driving *towards* virtually anywhere makes me excited, expectant: full of hope. (Pearce, 2000: 163)

Pleasure, fear, frustration, euphoria, pain, envy: emotional responses to cars and feelings about driving are crucial to the personal investments people have in buying, driving and dwelling with cars. Car manufacturers, of course, manipulate brand desire through the emotional resonance of their advertising campaigns; yet the 'thrill' of driving, the 'joy' of the road, the 'passion' of the collector, the nostalgia for retro designs are not simply lexicons of the advertising imagination. The 'feelings' being generated around cars can be powerful indicators of the emotional currents and submerged moral economies of car cultures. This affective relationship with cars is not only about pleasure-seeking, but also feeds into our deepest fears, anxieties and frustrations. The stomach-turning feeling of witnessing a car crash or the terrors and permanent anxiety produced by being in an accident are the dark underside of 'auto-freedom'. The very passions that feed into certain kinds of love for the car or joy in driving may equally elicit opposite feelings of hatred for traffic, rage at other drivers, boredom with the same route or anger at government transport policies (see Michael, 2001 for a discussion of road rage in terms of 'human–non-human hybridity').

An advertising campaign for the Lexus IS200 unsurprisingly proclaims: 'It's the feeling inside'. Emphasizing the leather seats, the automatic climate control and the digital audio system, the text makes clear that this slogan refers both to the 'feel' of the car interior and the feeling it produces inside the body that dwells within the car. The feel of the car, both inside and outside, moving or stationary, sensuously shapes and materially

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projects how motorists feel not only about cars but also about themselves and within themselves. These concerns can be traced back to Roland Barthes' reading of the mythology of the Citroen DS, in which he recognized the materiality of this particular car as marking a shift in the dominant car culture. Writing of the magic and spirituality of its lighter, less aggressive design, he describes a clear cultural shift from 'an alchemy of speed to a *gourmandise* of driving' (Barthes, 1957: 152). People embraced the '*déesse*' in a tactile and amorous encounter:

> Dans les halls d'éxposition, la voiture témoin est visitée avec une application intense, amoureuse; c'est la grande phase tactile de la découverte . . . les tôles, les joints sont touchés, les rembourrages palpés, les sieges essayés, les portes caressées, les coussins pélotés; devant le volant, on mime la conduite avec tout le corps. (Barthes, 1957: 152)
>
> [In the exhibition halls, the car on show is explored with an intense, amorous studiousness: it is the great tactile phase of discovery. . . . The bodywork, the lines of union are touched, the upholstery palpated, the seats tried, the doors caressed, the cushions fondled; before the wheel, one pretends to drive with one's whole body. (Barthes, 1973: 90)]

Touching the metal bodywork, fingering the upholstery, caressing its curves, and miming driving 'with all the body' suggests the conjoining of human and machinic bodies. Of course, viewing cars as prosthetic extensions of drivers' bodies and fantasy worlds (Freund, 1993: 99; Brandon, 2002: 401–2) is the standard fare not only of motor shows and advertising, but also of youth cultures, pin-up calendars, pop lyrics and hip-hop videos. The 'love affair' with the car (Motavalli, 2001; Sachs, 2002), its sexualization as 'wife' or lover (Miller, 1997[1994]: 238), suggests a kind of libidinal economy around the car, in which particular models become objects of desire to be collected and cosseted, washed and worshipped. Whether phallic or feminized, the car materializes personality and takes part in the ego-formation of the owner or driver as competent, powerful, able and sexually desirable.

But the individual psychological investment in the car can be said to arise out of the sensibility of an entire car culture; the invested subject is moved (and thus brought to feel specific forms of agency) in particular ways. In making sense of prevailing commitments to car cultures across the world we can draw on the recent turn in social science towards a sociology of emotions as personally embodied yet relationally generated phenomena (Hochschild, 1983, 1997, 2003; Jasper, 1997; Bendelow and Williams, 1998; Goodwin et al., 2001). Following Nigel Thrift we could conceive of 'non-cognitive thought as a set of embodied dispositions ("instincts" if you like) which have been biologically wired in or culturally sedimented (the exact difference between the two being a fascinating question in itself)' (Thrift, 2001: 36). Emotions are one kind of non-cognitive thought that rides on this ambiguity: seemingly instinctual, yet clearly a cultural achievement.

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Emotions are felt in and through the body, but are constituted by relational settings and affective cultures; they are shared, public and collective cultural conventions and dispositions (Jasper, 1997; Goodwin et al., 2001). As Hochschild argues, 'there are social patterns to feeling *itself*', based on 'feeling rules' that 'define what we imagine we should and shouldn't feel and would like to feel over a range of circumstances; they show how we judge feeling' (Hochschild, 2003: 82, 86). Emotions, in this perspective, are not simply 'felt' and 'expressed', but are rather elicited, invoked, regulated and managed through a variety of expectations, patterns and anticipations.

More specifically, there is a crucial conjunction between motion and emotion, movement and feeling, autos and motives. Tracing the current attention to 'body practices' back to the influences of Mauss, Benjamin, Wittgenstein, Merleau-Ponty and Bourdieu, Thrift suggests that in paying more attention to non-conscious forms of cognition and embodied dispositions the emotions come to the fore:

> . . . such work points to the pivotal importance of emotions as the key means the body has of sorting the non-cognitive realm through a range of different sensory registers, including the interoceptive (including not only the viscera but also the skin), the proprioceptive (based on musculo-skeletal investments) and fine touch which involves the conduct of the whole body and not just the brain. (Thrift, 2001: 37)

Combining the 'feeling' of the world through the senses with the 'feelings' that arise from those encounters, this approach suggests the co-constitution of motion and emotion. Emotions, in this view, are a way of sorting the sensations of the non-cognitive realm, which occur through the conduct and movement of the body. The key question, then, is not whether sensation precedes emotion or the cultural organization of emotion precedes the embodied feeling, but how sensations, cognitions and feelings arise together out of particular orientations toward the material and social world (cf. Ahmed, 2004). Insofar as feelings come to be felt as welling up from within the body, how does the cultural framing of emotion interact with more visceral elements of embodied feeling? And what role might driving or riding in cars play in the naturalization of certain kinds of feeling?

Being (in) the Car

> It felt alive beneath my hands, some metal creature bred for wind and speed. . . . It ran like the wind. I ran like the wind. It was as though I became the car, or the car became me, and which was which didn't matter anymore. (Lesley Hazleton cited in Mosey, 2000: 186)

Macnaghten and Urry argue that there are ambivalent and contested 'affordances' that 'stem from the reciprocity between the environment and the organism, deriving from how people are kinaesthetically active within their

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world' (2000: 169; see also Costall, 1995). Driving can be included among the active corporeal engagements of human bodies with the 'sensed' world. Like other modes of mobility, such as walking, bicycling or riding trains, modes of driving also arise out of 'a specific time and place, and they have often developed in contrast to each other. They tend to have a history of both gendering and class' (Lofgren, 1999: 49). Driving, then, suggests many different kinds of affordances between varied bodies, cars and spaces. How does the motion of the car 'impress' upon specific bodies in different ways, and thus produce differing 'impressions' (Ahmed, 2004), differing affective dispositions toward the moving view, the rushing breeze, the changing smells and sensations as the car shifts speed, makes noise or swings around curves? For some the motion produces feelings of happiness, excitement or anticipation; others become fearful, anxious or sick to the stomach. These feelings are neither located solely within the person nor produced solely by the car as a moving object, but occur as a circulation of affects between (different) persons, (different) cars, and historically situated car cultures and geographies of automobility.

In what sense might we have 'embodied dispositions' towards the feeling of driving? At 6 weeks old my baby already expresses an excited anticipation of car rides. As I place her in the car seat (while still in the house) her countenance brightens and she looks around in expectation. As I fasten the seat into the back of the car she turns her face toward the window and looks expectantly for the show to begin as the car moves. During a ride she watches the window intently for as long as she can, until lulled to sleep. It is clear that many infants take pleasure in the kinaesthetic experience of the car ride, and develop an early orientation towards four-wheeled mobility within a car culture that soon enables them to play with toy cars, ride on child-sized cars, and learn to identify different kinds and brands of motor vehicles by the age of 2 years. At the same time, this seemingly 'instinctual' disposition is tightly coupled with a very particular car culture in which any moving vehicle is an extremely high-risk environment for children, shot through with legal interventions. The parent who places their infant in a car seat is faced with a warning of dire consequences (written in 11 languages in Europe): 'DO NOT place rear facing child seat on front seat with airbag. DEATH OR SERIOUS INJURY can occur.' This warning is an unnerving yet routine reminder of the need to cultivate a precise driving disposition oriented towards defensiveness, safety and security. Installing the child and the seat in the car correctly induces a sense of having taken security measures; it is a self-discipline that makes parents *feel* better about being in the car, as discussed in the following section on family cars and caring practices.[3]

Motion and emotion, we could say, are kinaesthetically intertwined and produced together through a conjunction of bodies, technologies and cultural practices (that are always historically and geographically located). Drawing on the research of Jack Katz on drivers in Los Angeles, Thrift suggests that we should:

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> . . . understand driving (and passengering) as both profoundly embodied and sensuous experiences, though of a particular kind, which 'requires and occasions a metaphysical merger, an intertwining of the identities of the driver and car that generates a distinctive ontology in the form of a person-thing, a humanized car or, alternatively, an automobilized person' (Katz, 2000: 33) in which the identity of person and car kinaesthetically intertwine. (Thrift, 2004: 46–7)

Human bodies physically respond to the thrum of an engine, the gentle glide through a gearbox, or the whoosh of effortless acceleration, and in some cases the driver becomes 'one' with the car (as in the quotation at the start of this section). Different emotional registers are produced through the variations in the embodied driving experience, which also have national variations. Some feel content with a smooth and silent ride (historically aligned with ideas of luxury, privilege and wealth), others prefer an all-wheel drive that shakes the bones and fills the nostrils with diesel and engine oil (historically aligned with ideas of adventure, masculinity and challenge). Although people also have 'embodied dispositions' towards walking, bicycling or riding a horse, it is the ways in which these dispositions become 'culturally sedimented', as Thrift puts it, that matter.[4]

My argument is not that emotional relations between people are simply mediated or expressed through things (as in the Frankfurt School's analyses of emotional 'investments' and 'fetishism' within commodity culture), but that kinaesthetic investments (such as walking, bicycling, riding a train or being in a car) orient us toward the material affordances of the world around us in particular ways and these orientations generate emotional geographies. As Paul Gilroy notes, 'cars are integral to the privatization, individualization and emotionalization of consumer society as a whole', in part due to the 'popular pleasures of auto-freedom – mobility, power, speed'; cars in many ways 'have redefined movement and extended sensory experience' (Gilroy, 2001: 89). In societies of automobility, the car is deeply entrenched in the ways in which we inhabit the physical world. It not only appeals to an apparently 'instinctual' aesthetic and kinaesthetic sense, but it transforms the way we sense the world and the capacities of human bodies to interact with that world through the visual, aural, olfactory, interoceptive and proprioceptive senses. We not only feel the car, but we feel through the car and with the car.

Today a further key change in the embodied feeling of cars is due to developments in digital control of the car and in mobile information technologies, which further transform the very ways in which we 'sense' the world. There is growing emphasis on the integration of information and communication technologies into the car (especially luxury cars), leading to a lacing of technologies of mobility with capacities for conversation, entertainment and information access (Sheller, 2004). Many aspects involved in directing the car as a machine have been computerized, while, simultaneously, car-dwellers have been insulated from the risky and dangerous environments through which they pass, seemingly protected by seatbelts,

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airbags, ‘crumple zones’, ‘roll bars’ and ‘bull bars’. Features such as automatic gearboxes, cruise control, voice-activated entry and ignition, GPS-navigation, digital music systems and hands-free mobile phones all ‘free’ drivers from direct manipulation of the machinery, while embedding them more deeply in its sociality, producing what might be described as a ‘cybercar’ (Sheller and Urry, 2000, 2004; Sheller, 2004).[5] The marketing of so-called ‘smart’ cars emphasizes not only their smaller size but also their enhanced capabilities for information or entertainment in congested urban areas, which will increasingly be designed as ‘intelligent environments’.[6]

Collective cultural shifts in the sensory experience of the car hint at what might be necessary were there to be a wholesale shift toward a new (more ethical) culture of automobility: a new automobile aesthetics and a new kinaesthetics of mobility. The following sections turn to the wider ways in which emotional geographies of automobility also support complex connections and social ties between people, which then come to be normalized and naturalized in formations of gender, family and nation.

Family Cars, Caring and Kinship

> I’ve found there’s a difference having my own car. I mean, we’ve always had a family car which is my husband’s work car, and then I got to the point where I had my own, and I did actually feel different . . . there was this little emotional thing . . . that’s mine. . . . I had this little feeling of actually, that it was a little bit of my territory. (‘Catherine’ quoted in Maxwell, 2001: 219)

Despite strong feelings against cars and the damage they do to the natural environment, the ethics of anti-car protest is often at odds with the needs for mobile sociability and the day-to-day moralities involved in coordinating family life or networks of friendship in automobilized societies (Miller, 2001a; Carrabine and Longhurst, 2002; Stradling, 2002). Popular conflicts in Britain and the United States over the traffic supposedly generated by ‘the school run’, for example, are indicative of conflicts among feelings about children’s safety, about traffic and about the environment. Miller argues that there is ‘a conflict between an ethics which is concerned with aggregate effects of personal action on the world at large and a morality that sees caring in terms of more immediate concerns such as one’s partner and children’ (Miller, 2001b: 28). Thus in many cases the same people can be both enthusiastic car-drivers, as well as being very active protesters against schemes for new roads (see Macnaghten and Urry, 1998: ch. 6, on how cars generate intense ambivalence).

A key overlooked aspect of car cultures is the emotional investments people have in the relationships between the car, the self, family and friends, creating affective contexts that are also deeply materialized in particular types of vehicles, homes, neighbourhoods and cities. A recent advertising campaign for the Toyota Yaris points out that, ‘You could end up loving it too much’; the Yaris is then shown in a variety of absurd yet

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believable social scenarios in which love is taken a bit too far (receiving postcards, being treated to a candle-lit bath, monopolizing a huge empty garage, etc.). Clearly cars have been deeply integrated into the affective networks of familial life and domestic spaces, as well as friendship networks and public sociability. As Simon Maxwell argues, policy discussions have neglected the 'positive social frames of meaning of car use associated with care and love for immediate others, as well as care for others within wider social networks' (Maxwell, 2001: 217–18). He finds that 'there are plural ethics associated with car use in everyday life, and intense negotiations between these ethical stances' (2001: 212). Such frames of meaning and ethics generate some of the feeling rules that govern the emotional cultures of car use, in which needs to manage personal identity, familial relationships, and sociability can easily override any ethical qualms about driving.

For example, driving offers many people a feeling of liberation, empowerment and social inclusion, while inability to drive may lead to feelings of social exclusion and disempowerment in cultures of automobility. A study of young suburban drivers in Britain suggests that 'the car is part of patterns of sociability' and the anticipation of new possibilities for such sociability generates 'an extraordinary and exciting moment of consumption' for young drivers (Carrabine and Longhurst, 2002: 192–3). In a large-scale survey study of the expressive dimensions of car use among English drivers, Stephen Stradling found that feelings of projection, pride, power, self-expression or independence, vary by age, class and gender: 'different kinds of persons obtain different kinds of psychological benefit from car use. Driving a car is particularly attractive to the young and the poor because of the sense of displayed personal identity it conveys' (Stradling et al., 2001; Stradling, 2002: 11). Along similar lines, Gilroy suggests that African-American flamboyant public use of cars makes up for feelings of status injury and material deprivation through 'compensatory prestige' (Gilroy, 2001: 94).

Emotional cultures and their ethics are deeply intertwined with material cultures and technologies. When cars become associated with feelings of protection, security and safety (as emphasized in advertising of the 'family car'), their use may provide parents with a sense of empowerment in the face of a generalized feeling of insecurity. Technologies of protection enable risk (and fear) to be managed by driving 'correctly' rather than by not driving. As already noted, mobile technologies such as the infant car seat also mediate in distinctive ways between the private and the public realms, touching upon changes in the gender order, in domesticity, in women's mobility, and in the relation between home and work. Insofar as the private mobilization of the family within the automobile has partly enabled the increasing participation of mothers of young children in the paid workforce, it becomes more likely that infants and young children need to be moved between different locations as parents and caretakers juggle fragmented time schedules.[7] Automobility enables and constrains the complex orchestration of such schedules, and contributes to the increased

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blurring of boundaries between public and private activities (Sheller and Urry, 2003). Thus the 'family car' is closely integrated into daily or weekly routines and comes to support feelings associated with taking care of loved ones, as well as the sense of liberation afforded to women, as noted by Stradling. Independence via the car can also come at the expense of familial relations, as in the quote at the start of this section where the car becomes one woman's 'territory' set apart from familial demands.

As Sarah Lochlann Jain observes in an ethnographic account of the day-to-day mobility of a suburban mother in the US, the huge popularity of Sport Utility Vehicles (SUVs) among young families builds on gendered practices of mobility and of public and private space:

> . . . the SUV has been marketed as a vehicle that can uniquely fuse the hitherto 'uncool' aspects of family life with the hipness of the outdoor adventure. . . . But this nexus of marketing and consumption also has a history in women's responsibility for the family's safety and men's idealization of the car as a means of escape and a tool for identity. . . . The privatization of this [typical] family project as one reproduced through consumption is also seen in an understanding of 'safety' that relies on chauffeuring children as much as 'winning' in potential car accidents. (Jain, 2002: 398)[8]

The 'masculine' appeal of the SUV has attracted especially professional mothers, as they cultivate a high-achieving public persona in the workplace, while the more familial aspects of the SUV (room for the shopping, the children's friends and equipment, the cup-holders and the video consoles) enable them to maintain a more caring 'feminine' side, both roles being overdetermined by prevalent gender inequalities. From Hochschild's perspective the social embedding of these vehicles allows for management of the plural ethics and feeling rules that structure public and private gender identities in contradictory ways. At the same time use of the SUV intensifies certain kinds of gendered (and we could add 'raced') identities and emotionally cathects them with the material cultures of suburbia.

So-called 'Sport Utility Vehicles' also continue to be embraced as a way of getting closer to nature (safely). Ironically, the very idea of 'nature' that many anti-car campaigners are defending may have been constituted largely through automobility. Gliding through green woods dappled with sunlight, speeding toward the endlessly receding horizon of a vast desert or plain, or shooting along winding hedge-rowed country lanes, driving has long been a way of 'getting out in nature'. Early use of the automobile in many countries was linked to 'Sunday drives' and family holidays which involved driving from city and suburb out to the countryside and to wilderness reserves such as national parks (Wilson, 1992; Bunce, 1994; Lofgren, 1999; Urry, 2000: 60–62; Peters, forthcoming). Thus the car is already implicated in constituting contemporary appreciation for the extensive, relatively untouched and visually pleasing vistas that environmental campaigners seek to preserve (for example by blocking new road building). Underlining such contradictions, the 'environmentally friendly' marketing

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of 'clean, green' superminis like the Citroen C3 plays on feelings towards nature as much as ethical choices about fuel economy. In large green and blue print its advertising imagery invokes 'mountain stream dew glen lungfuls of air rising mists scots pine cloudless sky heather crisp linen lichen'. This stream of consciousness elicits feelings of bodily proximity to nature, recreation and revitalization for the urban dweller able to escape to 'the country' in a 'clean' car without feeling guilty about driving there.

As John Urry argues, following Marilyn Strathern's (1992) thesis that nature is today supported, rescued and assisted by culture, 'All natures we now can identify are elaborately entangled and fundamentally bound up with social practices and their characteristic modes of cultural representation' (Urry, 2000: 202). Feminist analyses of the shifts that are occurring in the 'two-way traffic' between nature and culture can help us to understand some of the ways in which automotive emotions depend on a convergence of the human and the technological, the natural and the cultural, the instinctual realm of feelings and the commodified realm of symbolic systems (Haraway, 1997; Franklin et al., 2000; Strathern, 1992). Sarah Franklin (1998), in a key example, explains the ways in which the metaphor of kinship has travelled from the human genome to the branding of the BMW 3 Series as a form of DNA. Here the kinship amongst humans or animal breeds, passed down through 'genes' and good breeding, is transferred to the car itself, which becomes a naturalized or biologized commodity, and its brand, which becomes a natural if superior 'kind':

> From seed to gestation, from panther to thoroughbred, from adolescent to aristocrat, the representation of these four cars [in the BMW brand lineage] delivers an excess of genetic and genealogical analogies to build a sense of hybrid evolution. The [advertising] text is a series of descriptions borrowing heavily from the language of genetics, referencing inheritance, evolution, breeding, genetic traits, strains of DNA, and genetic selection. The text is strained to hold together its diverse images of animals and machines, the domestic and the wild, the inherited and the learned. (Franklin, 1998: 4–5)

In this complex hybridization of the biological body and the machinic body, new terms of kinship are elaborated, 'linking animate qualities to machines' (1998: 8). When the quasi-biological car as cyborg becomes deeply intertwined with the sensory evolution of the human ('which was which didn't matter anymore'), it not only supports human kinship practices, but it has also become kin – the 'humanised car' meets the 'automobilised person' and discovers they are cousins. As Daniel Miller suggests, 'it is this highly visceral relationship between bodies of people and bodies of cars that forces us to acknowledge the humanity of the car in the first place' (2001b: 24).

When cars become not only devices for escaping families, but also members of families, repositories for treasured offspring and devices for demonstrating love, practising care and performing gender, they bring into

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being non-conscious forms of cognition and embodied dispositions which link human and machine in a deeply emotive bond. When cars further become breeds and kin, they enter even more deeply into an emotional geography of human and physical relations, and an affective economy of circulation of feeling. Through the disciplines, reflexivity and governmentality of 'safe' driving or 'green' driving, car-users become ever more deeply 'cathected' with cars and their material cultural sedimentations, one of which is the brand. For those who have become so deeply attached to their cars and to the physical, cultural and emotional geographies that have become 'natural' within car cultures, how easy will it be to give up this part of the self, the family, friendship and kin networks? And what happens when the meeting of technologized nature and naturalized technology takes national form?

National Feelings about Cars

> And the snarling traffic jams are composed largely of the most macho modern Japanese four-wheel-drive vehicles with darkened windows. . . . Most driving experience seems to have been obtained by watching car chases on TV shows. Vehicles being driven at night without their lights in order that their owners can save battery power can sometimes be a problem; and when you're proceeding gently along a country lane you may find yourself all of a sudden being overtaken by a trio of left-hand-drive smoke-belching articulated heavy rigs hurtling on the wrong side of the road towards a blind bend. (Salewicz, 2000: 42–3)

Beyond familial and caring networks cars are also crucially implicated in the production of national identities, which are both kinaesthetically distinctive and highly affective. How are the emotional sedimentations of our embodied feelings for cars writ large into 'car cultures', be they familial, subcultural, national or global? The feel of the car, as Barthes suggests, materializes a collective ethos of an entire society such as the shift from an obsession with speed to the more subtle feelings of driving in a certain style. The aesthetics of streamlined aerodynamicism became a symbolic expression of Swedish modernity, for example, permeating all aspects of mass consumption in the 1950s, but especially cars (O'Dell, 2001: 107). The customizing of car upholstery and paintwork in Trinidad in the 1980s was a materialization of certain currents within national culture, including ethnically segmented expressions of 'modernity' (Miller, 1997 [1994]). And among Aboriginal people in the Western Desert in South Australia, 'cars mediate, not only, the constant dynamic of social relations but also, crucially, the strong emotional relationship of people with country' (Young, 2001: 52).[9]

Tim Edensor argues that distinctive 'national' styles of motoring encompass a range of different affective dimensions, including: feelings toward national car industries, national 'motorscapes' with different kinds

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of aesthetic and kinaesthetic materialities, auto-centric cultural practices and the sensual affordances of particular types of cars (Edensor, 2002: 120; see also Edensor, 2004). He suggests that the assemblage of distinctive national cultures of automobility 'produces distinctive ways of sensually apprehending cars and car travel for people inhabit, and are institutionally emplaced in, particular webs of affective and sensual experience' (2002: 133). The 'sensuality of motoring' and different 'driving dispositions' are formed within these national cultures, which might on the one hand be oriented towards a comfortable drive, smooth roads and exclusion of external sound, or on the other, as in Edensor's description of the cacophony of Indian road culture, be full of noise, smells and intrusions. Stereotypical 'Western' perceptions of driving in 'Third World' countries, like Salewicz's account of Jamaica cited above, rest partly on a clash between these different national styles, motorscapes and affordances. What image of Cuba is complete without the fading glory of the massive tail-finned cars from the heyday of US imperialism, lumbering zombies from a pre-revolutionary capitalist era? Petrol shortages aside, the Cubans who pile entire families onto a 50 cc motorbike, babies and all, clearly have a different kinaesthetic culture of mobility than do the US Americans who would be terrified by such a practice and who claim they need all the space in their huge, gas-guzzling Chevrolet Suburbans for a two-child family.[10]

The 'soundscapes' of motoring identified by Bull (2001, 2004) also take different national forms which shape the feeling of driving and the collective identities associated with differing car cultures, from the Egyptian pop of North Africa to the blaring Dancehall of Jamaica or Soca of Trinidad. Music can heighten the emotional climate within the car interior, or it can be projected into the 'dead public space' of the surrounding streetscape (Gilroy, 2001: 97). The panoply of *collectivos*, tap-taps or tuk-tuks – painted in bright colours, christened, blessed and charmed – that wend their musical way through most non-Western cities, attest to both an alternative economy of public transportation as well as different sensual, kinaesthetic and musical contexts. Lynne Pearce further describes how listening to hours of contemporary and 'retro' music while driving long distances 'becomes an emotional palimpsest of past and future, in which events and feelings are recovered and, most importantly, rescripted from the present moment in time' (Pearce, 2000: 163). Suspended in the motorway's 'spatio-temporal continuum of "in-between" ', the 'imaginative empowerment' of the 'chronotopes of the road' promote an exploration of 'various fantasies of home', which are at once psychological and material, personal and national (2000: 178).

Cars certainly occupy a rich vein of popular national cultures in all of the nostalgic imaginings that accompany their past incarnations, from road movies and pop songs, to classic car collecting and vintage car rallies. For Pearce, British literature also offers historically evocative representations of 'how motor-travel has transformed our perception of "home" within the British Isles: how it has enabled us to explore, and fantasize, its

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seductions and traumas from the relative "safety" of the open road' (2000: 171; see O'Connell, 1998). While such regional and national images may be drawn on in advertising for 'home' markets, they can also be read (and marketed) across national cultures, as when Audi banks on its 'German design' reputation in England through the *Vorsprung durch Technik* campaign, or the Spanish car-maker Seat plays on its Hispanic *auto-emocione*, or Renault uses a French international footballer who plays for an English team to talk about the Clio's 'va-va-voom' and *je ne sais quoi*. The multinational sites involved in the design, production and marketing of various brands belie any simple correlation of style with national identity, yet producing such identities remains crucial to the emotional geographies of car cultures. Nissan goes further and tries to transcend national motorscapes in its 'Do you speak Micra?' advertisements, set in a futuristic urban utopia where the brand has evolved its very own language, a pan-European techno-patois.

So-called 'hybridization' takes many forms in car cultures: modern with retro ('modtro' in Micra-speak); internal combustion crossed with electric engines; electronic information with physical transportation technologies; and now also one national car culture with another. With echoes of Barthes, a recent Renault advertisement in Britain emphasizes 'design in motion' and the 'sensual velocities' of its new models, the Avantime and Vel Satis:

> To experience a new car is to allow a series of sensual triggers to be pulled. One takes in the body-form; one eyes the exterior details; one touches parts of the trim. . . . The cabin of a car, and the seats in particular, may not seem to be the sexiest element of the getting-to-know-you experience. Actually that's precisely what they are. As soon as you slide into the front seat, the car is yours; and the car's got you . . . just *sitting* in them is a real pleasure.[11]

Here again the car becomes a sexual partner, an object of desire eyed and touched by the consumer, but the particular fusion here of technology and cutting-edge design, 'refinement and emotion', 'functional tool and object of beauty' plays on Anglo-French cultural hybridities. The advertising text references a European 'punk-baroque' design world with a new set of 'rules' grounded in 'jazz', 'chaos' and 'the complexity of mass culture' as interpreted by Barthes, Le Corbusier and Rem Koolhaas. Intersecting with current developments in social theory (Clark, 2001; Urry, 2003a; Law, 2004), this embrace of the baroque and the complex signals a new kind of modernity in which high culture and mass culture, art and marketing, French high theory and Anglo-American know-how are mixed. Form and function are fused, but in a playful postmodern way especially signalled by the 'unusually sculpted rear-end'.[12] In considering these practices of national branding I do not mean to suggest that cultures of automobility will change simply by designing cars in new ways. Nor do I believe that it would be possible for a single nation (or multinational corporation) to lead the way

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in creating a more ethical car culture. Despite incremental change and experimentation in new transportation policies (regulation, taxation, road pricing, congestion charging) there has not been a radical transformation of the car and road system itself, nor of the patterns of habitation and feeling that underlie existing car cultures. However, there are signs of change that suggest that we may be approaching a 'tipping point' in the demise of current configurations of the dominant culture of automobility (Urry, 2003). These include a greater willingness of manufacturers to produce new kinds of cars, of governments to restrict automobility through road pricing and of consumers to try to limit their environmental impact (at least in parts of California and Europe). The 'agency' leading towards such changes is not located in any single actor, but is distributed through the complex affective economies of the social and material worlds described above.

This article has explored how automotive emotions arise from both the kinaesthetic feeling of the car and from its cultural and social affordances, circulation and distribution. Emotional geographies of the car occur at different scales ranging from the feeling of the individual body within the car, to the familial and sociable settings of car use, to the regional and national car cultures that form around particular systems of automobility and generate differing driving dispositions. Cars will not easily be given up just (!) because they are dangerous to health and life, environmentally destructive, based on unsustainable energy consumption, and damaging to public life and civic space. Too many people find them too comfortable, enjoyable, exciting, even enthralling. They are deeply embedded in ways of life, networks of friendship and sociality, and moral commitments to family and care for others. Transformations of the dominant culture of automobility will begin only when local innovations in designing and dwelling with cars are tied to patterns of gender expression, racial and ethnic distinction, family formation, urbanism, national identity and transnational processes. The ethics of car consumption at a global level (i.e. in terms of an abstract concern for the environment and for collective 'others') surely will have to be integrated into the moral economies of personal status (including gender, race and ethnicity), locality, family and nation.

Emotional investments in the car go beyond any economic calculation of costs and benefits, and outweigh any reasoned arguments about the public good or the future of the planet. To create a new ethics of automobility, in sum, will require a deep shift in automotive emotions, including our embodied experiences of mobility, our non-cognitive responses to cars and the affective relations through which we inhabit cars and embed them into personal lives, familial networks and national cultures. The contest over cars and roads can be said to involve wider social practices and human relationships, material cultures and styles of life, landscapes of movement and dwelling, and emotional geographies of power and inequality. Debates about the future of the car and road system will remain superficial – and policies ineffective – insofar as they ignore this 'deep' social, material and above all affective embodied context. Social research on automobility will

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also remain cramped in the 'transport studies' enclave until we recognize the full power of automotive emotions that shape our bodies, homes and nations.

Notes

1. The concept of hybridity has a complex history which ranges from colonial theories of race (Young, 1995) to debates about diasporic identities and multiculturalism (Werbner and Modood, 1997) and the human–nonhuman hybrids of studies of technoscience (Haraway, 1997), actor-network theory (Law and Hassard, 1999) and critical geography (Whatmore, 2002). This is not the place to discuss fully the implications of this theoretical genealogy, but it is worth noting that the discourse of hybridity is a powerful one within techno-cultures of automobility and is itself in need of careful analysis vis-à-vis its effects of denaturalization and renaturalization.

2. Unlike certain cyborgs found in STS, the attention given to embodied emotions here privileges a human subject, while still allowing for a degree of intercommunication between human and non-human, social and material, cultural and corporeal.

3. In other car cultures a blessing or a hidden charm might serve the same function of making the occupants of a vehicle feel they have taken appropriate safety precautions (see Verrips and Meyer, 2001 on protecting cars from witchcraft and ghosts in Ghana). Recent research carried out for the AA Motoring Trust suggests that up to two-thirds of child car seats used in the UK are in any case installed incorrectly thus providing little protection in accidents (http://www.aatrust.com/news/release_view.cfm?id=621).

4. Thus it is argued that electric motor vehicles and cars with fuel cells or hybrid power sources will have to *feel like* conventional cars and to deliver the same pleasures of driving: quick acceleration, speeds over 65 mph, and the capacity to drive at least 350 miles without recharging (Motavalli, 2001). It is for this reason that General Motors' electric EV-1 and Ford's Think are thought to have failed (Apcar, 2002; Duffy, 2002).

5. The Toyota/Sony Pod concept car even promises that it will:

> . . . measure your pulse and perspiration levels to gauge your stress levels. If you are becoming aggressive it will calm you with cool air and soothing music. It will even warn other drivers about your mental state by changing the colour of the strip-lights on the bonnet! (*RAC Magazine*, 2002: 14–15)

6. Such developments were already prefigured in the subcultures of car customization criticized by Paul Gilroy (2001: 98–9), which produced 'road monsters' such as the GM Chevrolet Suburban 'macked out' with TV, video library, temperature controlled cup holders, digital compass and thermometer, invisible speakers in soundproof walls and a satellite-controlled security system.

7. Car journeys also may become important settings for clawing back 'quality time' in busy family schedules, at least until on-board DVD and games consoles become commonplace.

8. The perception that SUVs contribute to familial safety and afford possibilities for adventure and escape is belied not only by the 'traffic jams and nasty roadside

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architecture' that attend their mobility, but also by 'the children themselves, easily "picked off" by the SUV's higher bumpers and poor visibility' (Jain, 2002: 399), not to mention their now-recognized tendency to roll over in accidents allegedly leading to one in four traffic deaths in the US (Bradsher, 2002). Even if Bradsher's claims have been challenged, SUVs are nevertheless more likely to be accessorized with the rigid metal 'bull bars' which also are frequently fatal to child pedestrians in accidents, even at relatively slow speeds.

9. Apart from Miller's edited collection (2001a) there has been relatively little attention paid to car cultures in non-Western settings.

10. The Chevy Suburban is one of the larger domestic vehicles on the US market. Essentially modified from a truck base, the 'three-quarter ton' 4 × 4 holds up to nine occupants and is said to get 13 miles per gallon in urban conditions. The conversion of trucks into family vehicles is thought to have been a result of car manufacturer's tactics to avoid expensive fuel efficiency regulation that was put in place for cars but not trucks in the early 1980s (Bradsher, 2002).

11. 'Design Velocity: The Future Now', Sponsored by Renault, *Independent on Sunday* 26 May 2002.

12. Recent British television advertisements for the Renault Megane likewise mix the French love for African American popular culture with high-end design to ironically appeal to the British market by flaunting the car's rear end to the lyric of Groove Armada's 'I See You Baby (shakin' that ass)'.

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