

**The Automobile in American Society:**

**Visions of Freedom and Control**

**By**

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## Introduction

In attempting to outline the role of the automobile in American society, a researcher will undoubtedly encounter a broad scope of material. However, this body of literature does have some large, implicit themes, all of which are based upon the assumption that automobile is undoubtedly much more than just another mode of transportation. From what does the car derive its intrinsic appeal? As Arthur Neal would argue, the car is a "master symbol" within our society, and it is the location at which so many of an individual's most basic desires can be realized.<sup>1</sup> Investigation bears this out, and it becomes apparent that the automobile's popularity is largely due to the mode's ability to cater to our cravings for individualism, freedom, power, and our need to establish power and control over the environment in which we live. In this light, one understands why our young nation has embraced this individualistic mode of transportation so enthusiastically. In doing so, we have allowed it to reshape the society in which we live, as and as a result it has altered the very nature of human relationships, while simultaneously changing the way we conceptualize the physical and social world around us. Most importantly, the car has transcended its early role as a purely utilitarian form of transportation to become a "vehicle" of self expression.

## Visions of "Freedom"

The universality of the "auto experience" is in part because the car has become the backbone of our consumer society, and yet it also indicates that the automobile is able to satisfy needs that transcend simple functional imperatives. This begins to explain why,

despite the wide array of options available to an individual interested in getting from point A to point B, the car is far and away the number one choice. As the driver envisions it, the direction of a car is primarily self-determined, and fundamentally responsive to his/her needs alone. On this level the motorized vehicle seems to be the embodiment of "freedom" as we conceptualize it in or industrialized mass culture. As a "flee machine" it offers the option of independent and spontaneous escape, and in this sense, one seems able to exercise their freedom of will. However, such automotive "freedom" is an anomaly; after all, it can only exist within a complicated set of societally-imposed pre-requisites(i.e. license, registration, skill, \$, congestion, etc ... )

Despite these somewhat hidden compromises, many chose not to recognize the superficiality of the "freedom" that the automobile provides. The laws, regulations, procedures and circumstances that facilitate such widespread individual mobility create a situation in which one must establish "a complex conformity within" to retain a license or even stay alive for that matter.<sup>2</sup> Although the auto's promise of freedom was real in the earliest stages, it quickly melted away as each person clamored for this new privilege.

**According to a growing number of sociologist and social historians, major factor in destroying personal freedom and the promise of the open road has been, ironically the widespread success of the automobile.<sup>3</sup>**

By acknowledging the emptiness of this promise, one begins to understand that it is not "freedom" that the car facilitates but rather it is escapism. Steinhart, in a piece called, "Our Off Road Fantasy" recognizes how advertisements play up to this quest for escapism, especially one considers how often cars are seen in the midst of "chopping up the back

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<sup>1</sup> Arthur Neal, "Animism and Totemism in Popular Culture," *Journal of Popular Culture*, V 19. Fall 85. p. 20.

<sup>2</sup> Kenneth Schneider, *Autokind vs. Mankind*, (New York: Norton, 1971) p. 175.

<sup>3</sup> Cynthia Dettelbach, *In the Driver's' Seat: A Study of the Automobile in American Literature and Popular Culture*, (Greenwood Press, 1976), p 43.

country."<sup>4</sup> In many advertisements, cars are often placed in surrealistic landscapes, and trucks are always found in the midst of some African safari; certainly neither reflects the drudgery of the daily commute.

There are however, certain ways in which an individual's (or a group of individuals) freedom can be maintained within this larger framework that predicates conformity. Consider the existence of state to state traffic laws; these demonstrate a "refusal to establish for all a single set of mores," and thus they partially acknowledge the diversity inherent within our society.<sup>5</sup> Some drive in a manner which pays no heed to these restrictions, and this too is a form of freedom only to be found behind the wheel of an automobile. Speeding is a behavior that makes the myth of automotive "freedom" visible on the simplest of terms. One has the freedom to speed, if they decide to accept the consequences; yet the term "speeding" exists only because the automobile is not capable of fulfilling all of its hyperbolic promises of freedom. Thus, things like racing and speeding can be interpreted as forms of frustrated protest (ed. And then "road rage") rather than being seen as merely devious behavior.

Many argue that this initial thirst for liberation has developed into an unbreakable dependence in which, ultimately, the car becomes master and the owner, servant.<sup>6</sup>

**If the automobile first appeared as a convenience that permitted more frequent, faster and more flexible movement, metropolitanism gradually made that movement an inescapable feature of urban living.<sup>7</sup>**

Now that society has made the choice, all of its members must submit, willingly or not to the collective will. Ah sweet freedom.

## Notions of "Individualism"

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<sup>4</sup> Peter Steinhart, "Our off Road Fantasy," in Lewis, D. ed. *The Automobile in American Culture*, (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1980), p. 67.

<sup>5</sup> Donald Hook D., "American and German Driving Habits," *Journal of Popular Culture* V 19 (Summer 85): 93.

<sup>6</sup> Dettelbach, p 90.

<sup>7</sup> Joseph Interrante, "The Road to Autopia," in Lewis, D. ed. *The Automobile in American Culture*, (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1980), p. 94.

As a consequence of the automobile's high visibility, it has become the most conspicuous, and perhaps the most accessible, expression of a person's individualism. Whether it deserves this status is the main question, and it is the question this section aspires to answer. On the most basic level, the car confers a degree of individuality that public transportation simply cannot, and hence we begin to understand why there are 2.25 cars for every human being in the United States.<sup>8</sup> Off the assembly line the automobile offers a basic, prepackaged "sanctuary of individualism" simply because of its physical nature. Provided that the driver rolls up the windows, the car is capable of creating a space that offers womb-like security and cozy seclusion.<sup>9</sup>

Regardless of one's choice of make, model and year, it is in some way or another a readable sign and thus capable of indicating, directly or indirectly, the uniqueness of the person inside.

**The driver of the rusty beetle, and the one in a gleaming turbo-charged Porsche both make equally powerful statements about themselves. They define themselves to be particular kinds of people and so define themselves socially.<sup>10</sup>**

However, if the automobile is to be truly communicative, one must be extremely cognizant of the means by which automotive signals are sent, received, and interpreted. As members of a car culture we all possess some degree of an automotive "literacy." Consequently, within the car culture, making a statement with what one drives is unavoidable, despite the absence of intention. This situation is the product of America's status as the quintessential car culture, which produces

**A cluster of beliefs, attitudes, symbols, values, behaviors and institutions which have grown up around the manufacture and use of automobiles.<sup>11</sup>**

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<sup>8</sup> Julian Pettifer, and Nigel Turner, *Automania* (Boston:1984) p. 34.

<sup>9</sup> Peter Marsh, & Peter Collett, *Driving Passion: The Psychology of the Car*, (Boston: Faber and Faber, 1986) p. 10.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, p. 4.

<sup>11</sup> Charles Sanford, "Women's Place in American Car Culture," in Lewis, D. ed. *The Automobile in American Culture*, (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1980), p. 137.

Accepting this premise, one can see the car culture as a vast collectivity in which everyone, like it or not, is included. Therefore, each individual has the task of staking out his/her identity. Some people ignore, so they think, this task completely; while others are rigorous in establishing their individualism." It is important to remember that one's choices are only comprehensible, and relevant within the context of the larger collectivity.

A majority of the car buying populace is composed of individuals who simply select from the market's latest options. For many this is purely a convention at work, they chose, as many others do, from the apparent myriad. Convenience, lack of interest, functional necessity or satisfaction with what the market has to offer, are all potential reasons for choosing a specific car. But even such disinterested rationality does not release one from making a choice that is in some way or another, the "identity" of the buyer.

Advertising is a strong, somewhat mysterious force in this process. Vance Packard argues all of us possess an "inner eye" which helps us, as consumers, to sort through the choices at hand. Ultimately, this "eye" allows an individual to make decisions based on how well a product approximates the image of self that an individual has. On the average, the consumer is content with the pre-assembled identities found in the showroom, and therefore one may conclude that the selection of automobiles available is sufficiently well marketed and advertised so that everyone can find a socially, and thus psychologically comfortable seat.

**Advertising is a multiplier of symbols. Like a prism it can represent many different facets of the car's character so that many very different people can see it as their car.<sup>12</sup>**

For this reason, many advertisements avoid associating a specific individual to the car in question, and more often than not, this type of advertising completely avoids any reference to the human anatomy. After all, these ads want you to believe that the car in question is made with you, specifically, in mind.

However, Packard's case may be a bit overstated for automobiles, because for most, they are typically the second dearest purchase on a consumer's list, and hence they warrant a great deal more consideration by the average buyer. Although people may invest more of their earnings in their home, "they invest more of themselves in their cars."<sup>13</sup> The whole idea of declaring one's automotive identity within a larger car culture becomes a null hypothesis if one can be so mindlessly lulled into a purchase. The eclecticism found within the automobile market is in part, a desire on the manufacturers side to accommodate and appeal to the diversity of the car buying populace.

As the automobile spread across the American societal landscape, it became apparent that the few models available, although very functional, were incapable of bestowing any sense of personal identity. The demise of the model T was at the hands of this shortcoming: Henry Ford failed to realize that black was not the only color that people wanted. In the 19 years of the "Tin Lizzy's" production over 5,000 accessories were created, and because many of these were designed as "personalizations," it is easy to see the direction in which the automobile market would orient itself.<sup>14</sup> Alfred Sloan, General Motors mastermind of the thirties, would identify this trend, and subsequently tailor the way cars were manufactured and sold to match this longing for more an atypical vehicle.

Suddenly, cars began to defy the notions of homogeneity that mass production implied. In 1965 for instance, the number of different option combinations that a Chevrolet customer could conceivably order was calculated by a physicist to be "greater than the number

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<sup>12</sup> Vance Packard, *The Hidden Persuaders*, (New York: David Mackay Co., 1957.) p. 103.

<sup>13</sup> Marsh, Collett, p. 73

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*, p. 34.

of atoms in the universe."<sup>15</sup> In reality however, this was a blatant ploy by the manufacturers to appeal to the consumer's desires for a unique automotive identity.

**The consumer view down the mile long option list, is one of diversity; yet the manufacturing aim is the antithesis, a frantic scramble toward just the kind of "rationalization" that is implied in the name "mass" production.<sup>16</sup>**

It is an interesting paradox, and one that has haunted both consumer and manufacturer. For a while, the buyer's need for "aloneness" was placated by such superficial projections; and manufacturers were always testing the malleability of the automotive form in search of yet another stylistic triumph that would be marginally different from all others. As a result, the car had become, quite ignominiously, just another transient fashion statement, and in the process it displayed a blatant disregard for the task it was originally designed to perform. A consumer's search for that "one of a kind" combined with the economic boom of the times effectively triggered the "exportation of the very concept of an automobile whose supremacy lay in its efficiency rather than in size."<sup>17</sup> Here, the auto reflected not only the desires of the buyer, but also, and perhaps more importantly, stood as a metaphor for the wealth of American society at that point in time.

However, the oil crisis of 1974 was to bring a new sobriety to both buyers and sellers within the automotive world. Suddenly, efficiency was to enter more heavily into the equation that resulted in the purchase of a car. Today, the consumer has, through the process of natural selection, created market options that reflect a more responsible balance between the automobile as a mode of self-expression, and a transportation device. Newer expressions of automotive identity are not any less forceful; they just reflect different economic and environmental realities.

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<sup>15</sup> John Jerome, *The Death of the Automobile: The Fatal Effect of the Golden Era 1955-1970* (New York: Norton, 1972.) p. 66.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 67.

<sup>17</sup> Gerald Silk, *Automobile and Culture*, (New York: H.N. Abrams Inc., 1984) p. 284.

Obviously individuals are as mindful as ever about their automobile's ability to establish their identity. One of the primary reasons for General Motors recent sales slide was a consumer dissatisfaction with the increasingly apparent similarity between models that are quite far apart on the socio-economic scale, yet spawned by the same chassis. GM's economies of scale had produced a situation in which some fundamentally different automotive identities risked the chance of being confused with each other. For instance, a Cadillac Cimarron owner's statement of identity is devalued and threatened if his car's similarity to a Chevrolet Cavalier is pointed out at the country club. Although they share the same body and floorpan, they are marketed to, and purchased by, individuals with very different bank balances.

This situation also highlights the economic component of identity that the automobile is capable of projecting. Although some chose to live above or below their means, most chose a car that roughly correlates with their income. Harley Earl, a cantankerous GM designer of the thirties, captured the essence of the automobile's economic message when he called it a "visual receipt."<sup>18</sup> Because we are a materialistic, and migrant society the motor car has become the "ideal status symbol."<sup>19</sup> Consequently, Thorsten Veblen's analysis of conspicuous consumption proposes some interesting studies, especially when examining vulgar materialism that was spawned the disposable car of the fifties and sixties; this time period demonstrated to many social historians that any "clinging Calvinist sensibilities" Americans possessed had indeed been junked, along with an embarrassing number of automobiles.<sup>20</sup> Alfred Sloan's doctrine of "dynamic obsolescence" in which cars were restyled every two years, was created with an eye towards making Americans feel ashamed of a car that

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<sup>18</sup> Marsh, Collett p. 39.

<sup>19</sup> Pettifer, Turner, p. 25.

<sup>20</sup> Jerome, p. 26.

was more than a year out of date. In this respect, one begins to understand how the car could become "the ordinary American's form of potlatch."<sup>21</sup>

Conversely, there are those individuals who are dissatisfied with a "stock" (off the assembly line) car, because regardless of how well the car is chosen, it still remains a impersonal mass produced object; that is, for them, fundamentally incapable of communicating their identity within the car culture. Customizers are members of this subgroup. Much like a tailor alters a suit, so does the customizer chop/lower/paint his car, and in doing he (an almost exclusively male subculture!) creates a stylized expression of self that is completely unique. He does not buy the identity being sold, but rather he creates an identity from an "empty" shell.<sup>22</sup>

We all to some degree or another "customize" our cars in an attempt to reclaim them from their mass-produced heritage. Take for instance the vanity plate, for in its form is "the potential to make an even more explicit statement about the driver than the car does."<sup>23</sup> Even the unaltered license plate reveals something about the identity of the owner; it may tell us that he/she is a senator from a Illinois, or even a doctor from California. Bumper stickers are another example of the kind of automotive billboardism that is practiced by those more extroverted members of the car culture; suddenly, everything from one's political views, to their dog type, is information willingly made available to the public. One's options for this kind of behavior are virtually infinite(iconic mudflaps to fuzzy dice), but the underlying desire beneath all of theses items, is a need to make own's identity within the car culture more explicit through the personalization of his/her automobile.

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<sup>21</sup> Marsh, Collett, p. 40.

<sup>22</sup> H.F. Moorhouse, "Racing for a Sign: Defining the Hot Rod" *Journal of Popular Culture* V 45-6, p. 84.

<sup>23</sup> Marsh, Collett, p. 79.

Automobiles offer a number of direct and indirect modes of self expression, yet ultimately these modes are compromises made within the bounds of this manufactured object. Regardless of the means, there is a basic tendency to somehow delimit one person's car from another. From the factory, the car is admittedly a rather raw statement about the purchaser, but slowly, it becomes a rich text capable of revealing a great deal about the individual contained within.

### **Automobile as Part of the Societal Landscape**

"The automobile is European by birth, American by adoption," is an often cited statement made by John B Rae, a notable automotive historian. One of the focal points of cultural studies is how the individual's identification within society is altered by new cultural forms, which more often than not, are a result of new technology. One of the strongest trends we have witnessed over the past two centuries is the homogenization and centralization of a general cultural identity; technology has had a unifying effect upon large diverse populations, by slowly eroding the community-based identity of the individual in favor of a more pluralistic sense of self.

**With the emergence of mass society and the weakening of family status as the dominant indicator of social location, the relationship between self and collectivity becomes more problematic for the individual.<sup>24</sup>**

Mass society, bureaucratization, mass production and nationalism are strains that make an individual's place within the society insecure. Because the automobile is the most recognizable and identifiable artifacts shared by most Americans, Dannefer would argue that

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<sup>24</sup> Dale Dannefer, "Rationality and Passion in Private Experience," *Social Problems* V 27. no. 4 p 411.

it is capable of "organizing identity and making sense of existence," even though, in reality, it is partially the cause for an individual's alienation.<sup>25</sup>

One the most fundamental level, this organization manifests itself in a kind of "automotive time line" in which the motorcar stands as a memorable and consistent feature of one's life.<sup>26</sup> For this reason, the car may become an important point of reference, which enables one to tap certain memories or contextualize a specific event: "Oh yup, I remember... 1927 or so, that's when we had that ol' Hudson ... hunk of junk never started very well!" Thus the car, simply by its very presence, often serves as a touchstone for organizing social experiences - both past and present.

This symbiotic relationship between the automobile and society was not the result of just any haphazard process, as William Ogburn points out. Man's current environment, he argues, is technology, but nonetheless, the process of adaptation continues.

**The first adaptations are those coming from direct uses. But to these changed customs and institutions coming directly from their use, secondary, indirect or derivative adjustment are in turn made.**<sup>27</sup>

Institutions undergoing change are both physical and social. The family home underwent major physical change in response to the "accelerated tempo of living," so too, did the family that lived within it.<sup>28</sup> Family ties were loosened and sexual mores underwent major changes as the auto became a new locale for amorous trysts.

Although the fundamental rites of passage (birth, death, marriage) are universal in nature, their content and form are determined by the culture in which they occur, and therefore, they are certainly not immune to changing technology. America's car culture has

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid, p. 410.

<sup>26</sup> Dettelbach, p. 90.

<sup>27</sup> Ogburn, p. 83.

<sup>28</sup> Folke Kihlstedt, "the Automobile and the Transformation of the American House," in Lewis, D. ed. *The Automobile in American Culture*, (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1980), p. 84.

not only infected traditional rites of passage, but also has created some of it's own. Receiving one's driver's licence, as well as procuring one's first automobile, are both important rites of passage that signify an individual's new status as a bona fide member of the car culture.

Even wrecking one's car and surviving the crash, is a considered a rite.<sup>29</sup> Consider also the existence of "exemplary" cars that are used in the more traditional rites; the black hearse is used for death, and the white limousine for departure from the wedding ceremony.<sup>30</sup> The car used to drive home a newborn child is also particularly symbolic.

As a consequence of the automobile's omnipotence, members of society have become reliant upon the information it can provide about others and indeed this is what sending and receiving automotive signals is all about.

**Associated with any car there will inevitably be a picture of the typical driver (his or her lifestyle, personality, affluence) and a range of emotional qualities levels of aggression, sex, thrill, ambition, etc.<sup>31</sup>**

The very same thought processes that produces generalizations and stereotypes about people to simplify the social world, are quite logically extended to automobiles; for motorcars, as we know, are very legible texts if one possesses a even a minimal degree of automotive literacy. With such literacy, accurate automotive stereotyping becomes possible and often unervingly correct. As members of a "car culture" we all posses some degree of auto literacy; we must, for it is what allows us to pick the proper car, so that we can project the desired image.<sup>19</sup>

Socialization into this form of literacy begins early, and slowly through observation (i.e. magazines, television) and interaction(i.e with extended family, neighbors, friends) we begin to develop visions of archetypal drivers for certain kinds of cars. Ultimately, this information is considered, at least circumstantially before one purchases an automobile.

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<sup>29</sup> Lydia Simmons, "Not From the Back Seat," in Lewis, D. ed. *The Automobile in American Culture*, (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1980), p. 155.

<sup>30</sup> Sanford, P. 138.

<sup>31</sup> Marsh, Collett, p. 51.

**When the impression we have made about the typical driver of a car matches the one we have of ourselves, or how we would like to be, then we want to buy the car.<sup>32</sup>**

The problem here is that it is difficult to assess the degree to which we are actually conscious of this process. Many, when asked if they like a certain car, reply in the negative, but are unable to provide any substantiating reasons that explain why. Is this evidence that perhaps this process is more pervasive than imagined? On the other hand, there are those who make no apologies for their fluency in this somewhat difficult language. Dannefer describes a car buff.

**A more or less constant focus upon cars, having them at the foreground rather than the background of consciousness, differentiates the enthusiast from the non-enthusiast.<sup>33</sup>**

If anyone, these are the individuals most likely to over interpret, if this is possible, the automobile signals that are always passing by.

Not surprisingly, our preconceptions about the driver of certain automobile are likely to shape our behavior towards that person. Observations set forth in an article written by H. Solomn, "Status Symbols and Pro-Social Behaviors: The effect of the victims car on helping," seem to indicate that this is indeed true. The findings were revealing: a) low status parked cars had it neglected headlights turned off more often than a high status one, b) low status cars a more likely to be honked at sooner at a green traffic light c) stranded high status cars received significantly more help.<sup>34</sup> These findings hint at how cars may predispose our roadside etiquette in the subtlest of ways. It would be interesting to undertake a similar study with a wider scope and more clearly defined parameters, for it appears to have merely scratched at the surface of a much bigger phenomenon.

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid, p. 44.

<sup>33</sup> Dannefer, p. 395.

<sup>34</sup> Henry Solomn, "Status Symbols and Pro-Social Behaviors: The Effect of the Victims Car on Helping," *Journal of Psychology* V 97, pp. 271-273.

Ever since the automobile was introduced, it has been leaving its imprint upon every societal institution it comes in contact with. In the theatre of life, the car is a multifaceted player; it is both prop and costume but more importantly a key protagonist. Modern American society and the auto are now perhaps inseparable and therefore it seems implicit that it has come to influence virtually every facet of society in ways which we have yet to fully understand.

### The Car as a Means of Control

Power and control: these objectives are central pursuits of the human race. Their desirability is, no doubt, a function of their elusiveness. Technology once again, played the role of the saviour, and provided humanity with an admirable surrogate for that, which for so long, had been unattainable.

**The car has afforded the average man control over his environment to a degree not equaled anywhere else in his daily routine.<sup>35</sup>**

Even if it is an illusion of control, the consumer has consistently demonstrated that he/she will pay most dearly for it. Not only did the car expand the horizon's of an individuals environment, but it also provided a tool that allowed his mastery of it.<sup>36</sup> Dettelbach asserts that dreams of attaining an automobile reflects age old, and rather sordid, desires of possession and mastery. For all, it was the proverbial dream come true. This was especially true for women, as traditionally "powerless" members of society, it gave them great satisfaction to feel that finally, they had power under their control.<sup>37</sup>

There are also less literal interpretations of the kind of control that the automobile was able to provide. Daniel Guillory applies the idea of "logos" (a self contained system of

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<sup>35</sup> Neal, p. 20.

<sup>36</sup> Dettelbach, p. 113.

<sup>37</sup> Pettifer, Turner, p. 188.

cause and effects) to the motor vehicle; the straightforward rationality and order that the auto utilizes, provides, a model that man could not only take comfort in, but also own, perfect and master indefinitely. Here, mastery indicates control of speed, and something greater than oneself, and therefore offers up another channel which an individual man can manipulate his/her environment and continue to do so if the machinery is kept in order; the logos makes this conceivable.

Although we may couch automobiles in terms of cool Emersonian logic, we typically treat them like temperamental Latin lovers, perhaps cooing them in the morning so that they may start more easily. Such duality, is typical, argues Arthur Neal in his article "Animism and Totemism in Popular Culture." Man in attempting to organize his world organicizes it, a concept that links indirectly to wo/man's quintessential search for control. Thus, one begins embellishing utilitarian objects with artistic and symbolic qualities that are inevitably outside appropriate mechanical idioms.<sup>38</sup> It is not difficult to see; consider the naming of automobiles: Falcon, Cougar, Cobra, Firebird, Phoenix, Barracuda or the tradition of naming the family car. Although personification of the automobile is completely irrational, it is incredibly widespread and reveals our materialistic tendency to seek security from things. One need only to reflect upon the fact that, almost all European manufacturers use numbers to designate the different automobiles they produce. Apparently, automobile names are a somewhat unique feature of our car culture.

For many, true power and control is only realized in automotive terms, and certainly this partly explains of why the automobile is such an object of within our society. In this sense, those who infringe upon our automotive space (i.e. tailgating, red light racing) are guilty

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<sup>38</sup> Neal, p. 20.

other, invisible and certainly more serious crimes.<sup>39</sup> Because the automobile supplies the individual with so many things that are desirable to him/her, it only seems natural that the car will receive conscientious care and protection. This is the key to understanding the quasi religious nature of the automobile.

## Conclusion

**Although driving is in theory a privilege granted by the state, the necessity of being able to drive in our automobile culture has in practice made driving another inalienable right.<sup>40</sup>**

Perhaps James Flink was referring only to physical realities, but his words seem to speak on a much more insightful level. In the American mind, the automobile has carved itself a niche next to the other more basic human essentials. The sovereignty of the automobile, is for the most part, because motoring has a hedonistic appeal rooted in the most basic human drives. Within the concept of individual, motorized mobility, Americans discovered a entity which finally catered to the their long standing desires of power, control, freedom and identity. Undoubtedly, automobile manufacturers realized early on that they were selling much more than a method of travel; and thus they began to manufacture and sell their products in a manner which implicitly acknowledged the variety of reasons, both functional and emotional, that leads an individual to purchase an automobile. The American consumer's willingness to purchase the automobile, and its somewhat imperfect projections of basic human desires, has led to the motorcar's entrenchment within our societal vernacular and in doing so it has also given birth to the concept of a car culture.

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<sup>39</sup> Marsh, Colleft, p. 176.

<sup>40</sup> Flink p. 172.

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