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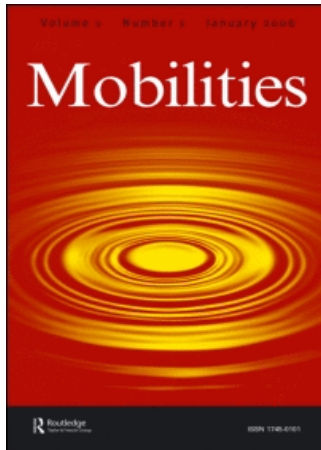
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Articulations of the Car: The Dominant Articulations of Racing and Rally Driving

SARAH REDSHAW

Transforming Drivers Project, Centre for Cultural Research, University of Western Sydney, Australia

ABSTRACT *Drawing on a number of sources, including social and cultural accounts of mobility, such as those of Sheller and Urry and by Zygmunt Bauman, car advertising, and focus group discussions with young drivers, the violence of the car and its shaping influence in contemporary life are considered through an application of the idea of articulation from Grossberg. Highlighting articulations of the car, particularly the dominant articulations of racing and rally driving evident in particular types of advertising, allows an examination of the destructive potential of particular driving cultures and also illustrates the meanings inscribed into the car, thus challenging its apparent neutrality. The racing articulations are connected to aggressive, competitive styles of driving, extending into competitive social relations and implicating an emphasis on aggressive individualism. There has been some dialogue in the road safety community about what counts as aggressive behaviour but these discussions often do not take into account the innate violence of the car itself and tend to consider only extreme behaviours as aggressive. The forms of self-control that arise in relation to the dominant articulations and the desires appealed to in advertising are sketched. Focus group responses to two car advertisements emphasising social competition and extreme thrill-seeking are discussed.*

KEY WORDS: cars, mobility, driving, aggression, racing

This paper emerges out of the analysis of focus group discussions of car and safety television advertisements. The research project Transforming Drivers: driving as social, cultural and gendered practice – an Australian Research Council Linkage project in partnership with motoring organisation NRMA Motoring and Services – involved a series of focus groups in which participants were shown a selection of television advertisements and then discussed them (Sofoulis *et al.*, 2005). The paper is confined to the question related to the driving styles evident in particular advertising, discussed in the focus groups in relation to each advertisement shown.

Car dependence, environmental impact and fatality and injury rates are significant issues in considering mobility worldwide. Even more than this, the car expresses and facilitates aspects of western culture based on individualism and getting ahead as an

Correspondence Address: Dr Sarah Redshaw, PO Box 203, Lawson NSW 2738, Australia. Tel.: +61 247589817. Email: s.redshaw@drivingcultures.com.au

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aggressive means of achieving at the expense of others. Particular articulations of the car are more expressive of aggressive competition and individualism.

The extent to which the car has shaped social action and interaction has become the focus of commentary on cars, particularly in sociology (Wright & Curtis, 2005; Dant, 2004; Sheller & Urry, 2000). The car has a real physical resistance that has shaped and is shaped by human action and is given meaning in a variety of forms related to complex features of the cultures it is embedded within. The kinds of social relations generated in and through cars will be explored here through the idea of articulation. Driving cultures have emerged that can be related to particular dominant articulations of the car. The paper will concentrate on the appropriation of cars into dominant meaning systems; in particular, that of aggressive individualism as exemplified in car racing and rally driving.

In this paper driving cultures will be considered as articulations of the car in the sense that Lawrence Grossberg (1992) used the concept in his book on rock music culture. Grossberg was aiming to provide an alternative to cultural studies that equated culture with communication, in order to 'describe the complexity of effects and relations circulating through and around culture' (1992, p.45). He was concerned with 'particular configurations of practices, how they produce effects and how such effects are organized and deployed' (Grossberg, 1992, p.45).

Articulation is a continuous struggle to reposition practices within a shifting field of forces, to redefine the possibilities of life by redefining the field of relations – the context – within which a practice is located. (Grossberg, 1992, p.54)

By applying the idea of articulation to driving cultures, the intention is to encompass, not only discourses relating to cars and driving, but also the implications of the car itself, and the associations and attachments to cars expressed in discourse. The affective appeal of the car, in addition to its function in facilitating mobility, has enabled the car to become a means of social and individual expression (Anable & Gatersleben, 2005). Particular articulations of cars have dominated the social and individual meanings inscribed in them. The meaningful associations that have shaped car use include aspects of the context that are taken for granted, such as the connection between the development of racing car technology and road vehicles, which has brought with it implications for the ways in which cars are driven, including an emphasis on speed and power. Racing associations have shaped and articulated the context of car use and, in particular, emphasised the aggressive assertion of cars at the expense of other forms of mobility, and at the same time downplayed the destructiveness of the car.

According to Grossberg, in examining aspects of culture the context requires not just description but consideration of the way it is taken up, in order to help identify investments in particular practices (1992, p.56). It is thus, for him, not only a matter of describing experiences or reconstructing historical contexts in search of underlying codes. Experiences become facts among other facts for Grossberg (1992, pp.62–63), informing the broader context of the articulation. It is not just the car as material object – as it is investigated in Wright and Curtis (2005), for example – that requires

change. It is also the dominant and dominating articulations of the car, particularly those associated with car racing and rally driving, which need to be reshaped.

In *The Individualized Society*, Zygmunt Bauman (2001) picked up the point that articulation worked best in research-theory battles with its focus on forging connections between practices and effects, while also taking into account the different unpredicted effects that may follow. Bauman also pointed out that in the examination and articulation of life stories and experiences, the ability to look at the bigger picture became problematic. He states:

All articulations open up certain possibilities and close down some others. The distinctive feature of the stories told in our times is that they articulate individual lives in a way that excludes or suppresses (prevents from articulation) the possibility of tracking down the links connecting individual fate to the ways and means by which a society as a whole operates ... (Baumann, 2001, p.9)

Articulation of life stories remains important as 'the activity through which meaning and purpose are inserted into life' (Bauman, 2001, p.13) but it is just as important to expand the boundaries of articulation 'by bringing back into view the areas banished to the background and left out by the life stories' (Bauman, 2001, p.13). The experiences of individuals in their use of cars need to be looked at in the context of the promotion and dominant discourses of cars.

Within driving cultures there are a range of expressions exemplified in people's experience of cars and driving. The complex and varied ways in which different people live with cars needs some exploration. The different experiences of car enthusiasts seeking to know and push the limits of the car, commuters facing daily traffic, and tourists' use of cars as a means to enter and explore, for example, must be acknowledged. These various experiences merge somewhat in the flow of traffic where the central issue becomes moving ahead, but they also indicate a range of ways in which the car is meaningful and variously articulated.

Driving flash cars is associated with thrill, excitement and speed. Enjoyment in these circumstances is allied with the idea of free-flowing movement, unobstructed by traffic, where speed is open. Responses to the restriction of speed and the impediments of traffic can be aggressive, and fast, powerful cars and speed are often expressive of aggression in the sense of demanding space on the roads and blowing everything else out of the way. The fantasy that has accompanied the car collides with the reality and limits of mass car use.

Mimi Sheller and John Urry (2000) have pointed out that sociology has tended to regard cars as neutral technology. They argue that the consequences of the car and its logic have been enormous through the reconfiguring of civil society and people themselves. The car has had many unintended consequences, including pollution and overcrowding problems and planning implications – women isolated in suburbia, the increased distances of commuting, the budget for road building and maintenance. The frustrations and demands on the individual of the convenience of cars were not envisaged in the early days. Not only were the limitations not imagined in the promises of enhanced freedom, but the car as machine was considered neutral in its effects.

The limitations of the logic of the car and car systems include the reduction of choice, the physical separation of home and workplace, and a shortage of time. The car becomes necessary to the extent that alternatives such as walking, cycling, bus and rail appear inflexible and inconvenient (Sheller & Urry, 2000). The systems of organisation, rationality and logic presupposed by the car in turn produce resistance, according to Sheller and Urry. They cite local protests over the expansion of major highways, and objections to expanding road networks by environmentalists. We could also note the infringement of rules by drivers, as a resistance to the logic of the system where both car and driver become the irrational resisters, evading the inevitable logic of the system. The car, furthermore, represents or symbolises hierarchical mobility. This is an aspect of mobility that is explored by Zygmunt Bauman. Individuality is often expressed through competition and domination in western cultures, and the car is central to this expression. Bauman emphasises the role of increasing speed in making it possible to be ahead of the rest. He states, referring particularly to global mobility: 'Speed of movement, and particularly speed of escape before birds have time to come home to roost, is today the most popular technique of power' (Bauman, 2001, p.12). Domination and escape from responsibility seem to be the main aims of increased speed of movement, and the destructive implications of some forms of mobility are certainly left out of the equation. The theme of domination is evident in many forms of car promotion and advertising and discourses of driving. The car offers the means of escape through aggressively getting ahead of the rest.

Alternatively, enjoyment is associated with the movement itself and the progress of the journey even with its inevitable traffic obstructions. This other sense of mobility is less aggressive and associated with the commuter and the tourist, rather than the serious enthusiast or competitor. The commuter is often seen as having no real connection with the car or any authentic sense of driving. Speed is seen as cool and 'macho' whereas slow driving is 'feminine' or 'old-fogey', and skilful, fast driving is the means to get ahead and to relieve stress and frustration (Silcock *et al.*, 2000). The domination involved in car mobility is not far below the surface of some representations of cars. The commuter can come to feel they are being left out or left behind in the traffic as others seem to get ahead in the flow of traffic, pushing their way aggressively forward. The car dominates the environment, aggressively carving its way through all social and cultural contexts. The car in itself is dominating by its sheer weight and force.

Domination in Car Advertising

The serious enthusiast in everyone is often appealed to in car advertising related to performance. The enthusiast is usually male and is prepared to take the risks involved in serious driving, which is not merely controlled, but rather attempting to control the environment through domination. The car as an emblem of aggressive masculinity, progressive identity, individuality and freedom has been noted in Hirschman (2003), who explored the associations between 'rugged individualism' and men, dogs, guns and cars, in advertising in hunting magazines. Ferguson *et al.* (2003) analysed the content of 850 car advertisements from the United States, Europe and Asia, and listed the primary themes according to frequency of

appearance. Performance and sales incentive were found to be the dominant themes in 1998 and the previous decade and a half.

Bristow (2001) found in her UK study that the most important themes were quality, and drive and handling (performance and power). Performance relates to the speed, power and handling of the car, and is expressed in advertising in a range of creative ways, many of which emphasise an aggressive competitiveness. Bristow notes that advertising, in selling more than a mode of transport, emphasises image, appeals to aspirations for the best, and boasts improved quality of life and jealousy of others. The wording in some advertisements was noted for its suggestion of speed and power as exciting. A Toyota Celica advertisement in *What Car?* Magazine (May 2000), for example, states: 'Beneath its predatory shell lurks the VVTi engine ... the only thing that can hinder its responses are yours'. Not only is this statement indicative of the play between control and loss of control, but employing the concept of 'predation' also implicates aggressiveness.

Articulations of cars, then, are connected to actual experiences of cars and the pleasures they afford, but also to a broader context of powerful interests. Manufacturers vie for position in the market place by appealing to the fantasy and pleasures of the car, and in the process are largely involved in framing articulations of cars. Car advertising frames the practice of driving in particular ways, playing a part in the shaping of expectations about cars and the experiences they are able to induce. Framing here has a special sense connected with mass media:

... in a society of almost universal television consumption, and largely shared patterns of programme availability, the simple fact that television is 'by definition ... common to all' itself grounds its function as a frame for the social. (Couldry, 2000, p.14)

It is argued here that car advertising is an unquestioned part of the background of daily life that is not necessarily reflected upon, but which nevertheless leaves an impression.

A media culture has emerged in which images, sounds and spectacles help produce the fabric of everyday life, dominating leisure time, shaping political views and social behavior, and providing the materials out of which people forge their very identities. (Kellner, 1995, p.1)

The media, Kellner argues, provide models of 'what it means to be male or female, successful or a failure, powerful or powerless'.

In a mass mediated culture, it is representations that help constitute an individual's view of the world, sense of personal identity and gender, playing out of style and lifestyle, and socio-political thought and action. (Kellner, 1995, p.60)

The 'immersion' theory of media at least allows for some acknowledgement that advertising has a part to play in the meanings that are applied to cars and the practice of driving. The relationship between advertising and behaviour is not one-way

(Morphett & Sofoulis, 2005) as advertising draws on and reinforces already existing articulations of cars, such as those drawing on racing and rally driving themes. However, connections can be shown between dominant themes of advertising, such as the forms of masculinity, individualism and competition that they draw on, and the interpretations of those themes, as well as what is considered suitable behaviour on the roads.

Racing Associations

The individualism associated with cars is a competitive individualism fuelled by the constant promotion of new and better, faster cars. Many performance advertisements invoke the image of the racetrack to show a particular car as 'ahead of the rest' in performance, power and speed. A recent advertisement for the Ford Falcon in Australia shows the car on the track with the latest race version, indicated by the slogans painted all over it. The road version is shown as even better than the racing version due to the level of comfort it allegedly has built into it, while at the same time exhibiting all the features of the powerful race car. Holden have a Commodore advert where only the engine is required to emphasise power and performance, illustrated in the sounds of the revving engine on the factory floor. The engine itself is shown as the emblem of aggressive masculinity. The sounds are transferred to the next advert in the same campaign, in which a young man is shown driving the car with a small boy in the back, who is giggling at the impressive noise and the fun of the ride. The advertisement illustrates an assumed 'natural' affinity between aggressive masculinity and the thrill of the ride.

The race car and the race driver are often considered the model of good cars and good driving. Racing is highly competitive and aggressive but a point that is not emphasised in the association of road cars and racing is that racing is conducted in a highly controlled environment. It is the play on control and potential loss of control that advertisers are most interested in appealing to. The racetrack is the emblem of free expression – drivers can go as fast as their skills and vehicle will allow – while it is also controlled to minimise death and injury of drivers and spectators. The only constraints to freedom acknowledged on the track are the car, and the driver's ability. The racetrack is upheld as the venue of real freedom. Winning and going fast enough to beat others is thus allied with the expression of freedom – the demonstration of skill, and the right to be better, to defeat and overcome. This expression of freedom is one of the dominant ideals of the car and the condition under which cars are expected to operate on the roads.

The controlled conditions of the racetrack limit the damage that the cars and drivers are able to inflict on bystanders, officials, spectators, and each other. There is always the risk for the driver, however, of being killed or injured, or there is no real challenge to make it a race. The best the technology has to offer, the skill of the driver, and speed, are the ingredients. This is the embodiment of real car appreciation and enthusiasm. Skill and handling allowing the driver to take corners at high speed, manoeuvre the vehicle at high speed from among other vehicles, accelerate and decelerate at the right pace, control slides and drifts, and push car and driver to the absolute limit of their capabilities, are included in the abilities established for driving from a racing and rally driving perspective.

In his review of *The Bughatti Queen: In Search of a Motor Racing Legend* by Miranda Seymour, Turner (2004) expresses the horrifying cost of early road racing:

The Paris–Madrid road race of 1903 was a wonderfully disgraceful affair. Three hundred cars set out, conferring death and dismemberment along the dust-choked roads south. Six of the drivers were killed outright and nearly twice as many gravely injured. The hospitals were stuffed with mangled sightseers. By the time the surviving drivers reached Bordeaux the race was called off, and in Madrid the garlanded welcome arches were quietly dismantled. (Turner, 2002, p.25)

The historical account of early road racing shows the lack of foresight and preparedness to acknowledge the destructiveness of the car. Car racing was pursued with enormous enthusiasm and despite the carnage it created, it became the model of excellence in cars and driving. Circuit racing became increasingly controlled to reduce the carnage, and rally driving, also increasingly controlled, particularly to protect spectators, developed as the road version of car racing. Rally driving has equally been appreciated and upheld as ‘real’ driving. The race and rally driver are considered models of good, skilled driving, and lack of such skill has long been regarded as the problem with the average driver and the reason for road carnage.

While car-handling skill is heralded as the solution, however, this kind of skill is not what is needed on the road. Research has shown that most drivers have adequate skill for everyday demands and acquire it fairly quickly (Catchpole & Di Pietro, 2003). The problem, rather, is the emphasis on the skill of controlling the car with less emphasis placed on the self-control also required in driving a car. Maintaining rally and race driving as an appropriate model of road driving and responding to public roads as anything like a racetrack, or through the controlled recklessness of the rally, promotes aggressive competitiveness. The dominance of aggressive racing articulations excludes other ways of thinking about and articulating the car, and thus downplays other less destructive driving cultures.

Car manufacturers have appealed to the technology and excitement of car racing and rally driving and sought to show and exploit their racing and rally achievements as relevant to their road vehicles.

The magazine advertisement for Toyota’s Sportivo (*Wheels Magazine*, August 2003, inside front cover) shows the rally car and the road car as two sides of the same vehicle (Figure 1). The drivers, dressed in the full rally suit, add to the racy appeal. The accompanying text states that it is a ‘true driver’s car’, and uses terms such as ‘awesome’ and ‘thoroughbred’ to relate it to both rally driving and circuit racing:

The rally-inspired Toyota Corolla Sportivo. With an awesome 1.8 litre WTL-I engine, six-speed gearbox, 16 inch alloy wheels, leather seat trim and fully colour-coded body work, it’s a true driver’s car. And the next generation in a long line of thoroughbred Toyota racing cars.

Another advertisement for the Sportivo emphasises the ‘thrill’, unbelievable power and racy technology and looks (*Wheels*, August 2003, pp.46–47).



Figure 1. Toyota Sportiva Rally advertisement

The performance and power of many cars are emphasised as ‘rally bred’ or as ‘race bred’, with car companies scurrying for the upper hand in technology on many levels, from the engine capacity and handling on corners, to the inside comfort and safety. Now that the fashion for low petrol consumption has subsided, the emphasis is even more on the power of the V8, which is being produced again by Ford and Holden and also by makers such as Saab and now Toyota. Honda flashes a race car across the screen at the end of many of its commercials. Mitsubishi shows both its Lancer and Magna on the rally circuit in television and magazine advertisements. Somehow the violence of the race and the rally, and their inappropriateness as a model of driving, is overlooked.

Cars are the 10th leading cause of all deaths worldwide and the leading cause of death by injury worldwide, with 1,170,694 lives lost in 1998 (Australian Transport Safety Bureau, 2004a). The serious injuries are even higher in number. In New South Wales alone in 2001, there were 22,682 injury accidents with 29,913 people injured (NSW Roads and Traffic Authority, 2003). The Australian Transport Safety Bureau (2004b) statistics report for serious injury states that on average 22,000 people are seriously injured on Australian roads each year. Injury rates are not mentioned as often as fatalities in the media and in safety campaigns, even though the report of the Australian Government commemorating World Health Day (Australian Transport Safety Bureau, 2004a) notes that according to the United Nations there is a lack of information on the extent of the problem of road traffic injuries (Australian Transport Safety Bureau, 2004a, p.10).

The ways in which the car is articulated allow and tolerate the violence that is incurred in order to maintain automobility in its current expressions – as competitive, dominating and aggressive. The dilemma is the increasing need for traffic control to manage the spiralling force and presence of cars. The car is promoted as the means and emblem of individual expression through aggression, and performance, power and speed are standard features of many cars. More power, better performance, faster acceleration are constantly being generated and promoted to make the car and its driver stand out. Sports packs on cars are increasingly popular, making them look more like race cars. The race car has moved further and further away from the road car and yet the alliances are being emphasised as much as they ever were. Formula One cars are a breed of their own, but they are related to the road car through technological claims.

Similarly, the V8 Supercars raced on the circuit and the Ford Falcons and Holden Commodores driven on public roads are so strongly associated that they are seen as the same, even though the specifications of the race car are rare on the road – the kind of suspension, engine modifications and tyres, and so on, needed for the racetrack are not likely to be found in the road car. It is largely the look that is sustained, the aggressive, competitive racy styling, including alloy wheels and body trim.

Aggressive Implications

For Bauman, violence is a contested concept and the contest is centred around legitimacy. ‘Violence is illegitimate coercion; more precisely, coercion which has been denied legitimacy’ (Bauman, 2001, p.208). The struggle is for the right to articulate and define what is legitimate. This struggle is apparent in discourses of driving where it is not a matter of eliminating violence but of legitimising ‘useful and necessary’ coercion (Bauman, 2001, p.211).

The car itself is often the legitimiser of coercion in that it can be driven to emphasise and express dominance. Behaviours such as tailgating, flashing lights, overtaking dangerously and speeding are increasingly regarded as aggressive (Jonah *et al.*, 2001). These behaviours have had a history moulded by and moulding expectations. The view that ‘slower’ drivers should move out of the way of faster drivers has enjoyed prominence for some years.

Although it is impossible to say whether there is more aggression today than there was in the past, road users consider aggressive driving to be one of the most significant problems of driving today (Shinar & Compton, 2004), and road traffic and its effects have been viewed by people from all social sectors as the most widespread urban problem (Appleyard, 1981). Engineering and road safety experts have resisted admitting the real violence of the car. Elias (1995) has produced an argument indicating that there has been a continual decline in aggression because the civilising process that has accompanied the car has brought about a concomitant self-control and this has made drivers more measured in their judgements. Elias also acknowledges, however, that there are still too many deaths and injuries from cars. The continued carnage could be related to the forms of self-control and the ways in which it is popularly articulated through cars. While the civilising process produces forms of self-control that limit violence, the complementary decivilising process noted by Elias produces articulations that emphasise and glorify being out of

control. The play between control and lack of control, often evident in car advertising and discourse related to cars, is evidence of the struggle between ideas of freedom as lack of restriction and the freedoms the car allows.

The struggle over what can be considered illegitimate and legitimate coercion has been evident in arguments in the road safety literature over what constitutes aggressive driving. Shinar and Compton (2004) define aggressive driving for their purposes as ‘any behaviour that interferes with the movement of other drivers or pedestrians’ (2004, p.429) – a definition that is not dissimilar to the utilitarian definition of freedom as freedom from interference. In this definition, any driver who is looking for a parking spot, uncertain as to where they want to take a turn or driving slower than others desire, can be considered aggressive in interfering with those who are simply travelling through and know where they are going and want to travel faster.

Dula and Geller (2003) regard such a definition as too broad, and they seek to restrict aggressive driving to behaviours where the intent is to harm others, without challenging the real implications of Shinar and Compton’s definition for social relations on the road. They maintain that under a category of dangerous driving there are three major classes: intentional acts that can physically or psychologically harm others; negative emotions felt by drivers; and risk-taking without intent to harm (Dula and Geller, 2004, p.564). The exclusion of intent to harm for risk-taking and negative emotions harks back to the argument that these are somehow beyond conscious control and more ‘innocent’ because they do not involve deliberate intent to harm. Bullying, which includes tailgating and flashing lights with the implication that the driver being targeted should move out of the way, would be classified under dangerous driving. While there is no explicit intention to harm or kill, there is an explicit intention to influence the behaviour of another driver through aggressive means. It offers the threat of possible harm through intimidation. Such behaviours should be treated as aggressive. Using the term aggressive exclusively for the more extreme forms of behaviour allows behaviours that are aggressive in intent to be regarded in a softer way. Clearly bullying can eventually lead to road rage, although a progression is denied in the categorisation under classes. Cars are often used in aggressive and threatening ways, and this is masked by confining aggression to extreme violence, where the car is deliberately used as a weapon.

The car, and the aggressive uses of the car, its effects on others and the social environment are underplayed in discourses on cars, such as those evident in some forms of advertising. The priority given to cars over many other aspects of the social environment is demonstrated in the aggressive pushing-through that is implicated in much current car advertising. The advertisements to be discussed in the following serve to illustrate one of the problematic themes of driving discourse – the unquestioned priority of the car and the lack of recognition of its destructive potential.

Driving demands a high level of control that is often related to the glorified ability to control the car and less often to self-control (Redshaw, 2005). The struggle to articulate and define legitimate use of cars and the legitimacy of coercion on the roads has been related to the ability of the car and driver, and the potential for loss of control central to car racing, rather than the caution required to counter the destructive consequences of the car. The ability of the car to go faster appears to

override the cost and appropriateness of faster speed, for example. While the self-control required in driving is significant, and this has no doubt developed with the increasing proliferation of cars, the antithesis of self-control is often appealed to and promoted in advertising related to performance where priority is given to the potential for loss of control glorified in car racing.

Extreme Advertising

In the following, discussion will centre on the responses of participants in focus groups to two car advertisements that appeal to the play between control and loss of control, by drawing on racing and rally driving themes. Both of the advertisements were shown on Australian television in 2003/04. One of the cars advertised was a small four-wheel drive vehicle, the Nissan XTrail. Rally driving themes are often used in advertisements for four-wheel drive vehicles, and in the advert to be discussed they are particularly evident, with handling and performance in extreme circumstances tied in with fun, ease and excitement. The other advertisement discussed is for the Holden Monaro, which uses an explicit race theme shown in a video or computer game format.

Both of the adverts draw on fantasy and ‘unreality’ but this is nevertheless related to the context of driving on the road for many of the focus group participants. Advertisers claim to show fantasy and that most people can tell the difference between fantasy and reality. However, the distinction between fantasy and reality is not the issue since it is desire that is appealed to and which consumers respond to. It is also desire that arguably governs how we drive and which requires shaping through self-control. Of interest in the focus group responses to the adverts is the acknowledgement of the racing and rally driving themes and how they are seen as related to ordinary driving contexts, and thus helping to ‘frame’ the meaning of the car and how it is driven. For many participants, the themes of recklessness and competition, which largely glorify and heighten car-handling ability, indicated the extent to which the car itself could absorb and compensate for rough treatment and errors of judgement on the part of the driver. The participant responses show the pervasiveness of racing as a model of driving that is rarely criticised, and the focus on car-handling skill with little involvement or articulation of self-control.

Monaro Game

The Holden Monaro advert, shown in seven focus groups, is unapologetically competitive, showing the Monaro in a computer game format, racing traditional high-performance sports cars, through city streets and along dramatic cliff tops. The game format is represented at the beginning of the advert, when it appears that the viewer gets to choose the colour and other features of the car.

For the Bankstown female group this competitiveness was immediately related to driving on the roads and to aggressive social competitiveness, which they were happy to parody:

F3: Like, someone who’d drive in the right lane. Sort of, ‘I’m overtaking everyone because I’m ...’

- F2: 'In the faster lane ...'
F3: 'And I'm powerful and ...'
F2: 'Move out of my way,' sort of ...
F4: It's kind of like the next door – you've always got to have better things to the people next door! A better car, better house ...
F2: And there's that comparison as they go past the other cars ...

The connection between the competitiveness of racing and what they considered were the implications for driving on the road, of competitiveness with other drivers, as well as the neighbour, were apparent to these young women, and they were quite critical of the blatantly competitive theme. Some viewers in the Redfern group saw the advert as quite obviously promoting speed and power as well as social competitiveness:

- F1: It's sort of like if you buy this car, you have a licence to speed. Everyone will just go, 'Wow'. You know? They'll admire your car. You can do what you like. You own the road! [laughs]

Having a licence to speed and owning the road are suggestions of aggression that aim at domination that are openly criticised by some. The text of the advert could be clearly read as indicating the potential for domination through aggressive means.

In rural Bathurst, home of the Mount Panorama racing circuit, the first group identified more of the meanings of the racing theme, which they were comfortable with, even admired, and did not consider dangerous. They saw the drivers as being capable and would be more concerned about what they considered erratic driving – they cited driving into oncoming traffic as an example. They noted the presence of the Holden sign and the Valvoline sign, as signifying 'the whole thing [as] racing'. The interest was in the idea that 'those cars that overtake are real track cars that you could drive to a race track and do a race day in, and then drive home again'. The car was seen as having all the attributes of a race car that belonged on the road.

The participants did not see anything wrong with the idea of race driving as it applied to driving on the road:

- F2: I think a lot of these ads, too, like the ones that promote racing-type driving, I don't see any of them as being dangerous. Like, as far as the type of driving goes that they're showing, I think that's quite fine and quite acceptable, because I suppose I can see that they're in a racing, or supposedly in some kind of racing environment, and I trust that the drivers they've got are capable. Like, I don't think I'd ever go and try it myself.

Others backed up this idea, saying that it was not showing street racing, and they were not 'overtaking on the wrong side of the road into oncoming traffic and running red lights and stuff'. Really dangerous or risky driving was erratic driving: 'Like, if they were all over the road and I couldn't tell what they were going to do next. Every one of these things seems to be done in such an environment that it's predictable, you know what they're doing, and you trust them.' The predictability of

the race track became an attribute that invoked trust in the driver. The implication of this for driving on the road was only acknowledged in the comment that this young woman would not try to do these things herself.

One male reiterated the idea of 'the car that you take to the race track on the weekend', and this idea prompted the same young woman to note that some young males could take the advert as demonstrating the way to drive. She noted that she was older and so it would not affect her in that way:

F2: Yeah. I mean, they're still getting across this racing-type thing, and if you have some young kid who's just got his licence and thinks that's how he's got to drive, then that's probably not the right thing, but I don't like, I don't know. I've probably been driving for four or five years now and I don't want to emulate that! [laughs]

For another female, the game and racing presentation of the advertisement only went so far – ultimately for her the message was about driving on the roads:

F1: Well, the beginning's like a game, you're clicking through all the options, but then when it goes over the bridge and stuff you think everyone's in a rush in Sydney, and this just gets you there faster!

This young woman clearly implicates a real driving context in the supposed fantasy of the advert, relating the rush of the race to the rush of traffic and being able to get there faster in the right kind of car. The fantasy of the race is linked in with the desires of the road – being able to beat the traffic and get ahead of everyone else.

The Monaro Game advert was clearly selling an image for males of fast, racy driving, which females in the second Bathurst group could also relate to, stating that they would 'go fast' if they had a Monaro. A male noted that it had 'that "need for speed" feel about it'. The 'driving and speeding around the place' seemed to the young women to be 'smooth', 'fast but measured', having to do with the ability of the driver as well as the car. The males noted the driver's ability 'to drive it like it should be driven', which they said they would try if they had a chance. One male from the Mudgee group was emphatic about the articulation of the car:

You don't buy a Monaro to drive around at 60 ks an hour in town. You buy it to drive fast. It's a fast car. It's powerful, it's ... if you want a normal family car you'd buy a normal Commodore. But Monaros are supposed to be driven fast. That's what they're designed to do.

A male in the second Redfern group similarly said that he did not think it was 'showing off speed' and that it was not 'saying that just 'cos you've got this car you're allowed to drive fast'. He saw it as just a game, not 'real life' and 'not supposed to be taken literally'. A young woman then said that 'it depends on the person watching', some could read it as suggesting that one should drive fast with this sort of car as it relies on being 'sensible enough to realise that you're not really going to race your car on the main road, but not everybody does!' This was a rare reference to self-control as distinct from the control of the car.

The men in the Fairfield all-male group could identify with the car and the idea that it was a powerful car that required skill to handle it and make the most of it, but they became incensed about the implications of the Monaro advert:

- M2: They're making more powerful cars, they're making the speed limits lower and the fines bigger and everything's worse. And you go, 'Right, I've got a performance car. Going to buy the car! Put an exhaust on this car.' F@!, you've got a shop there, an exhaust shop, why the f@!, if he can put it on my car and he takes my money, and this and that, it's a spin-out! Like, they're performance cars, you know what I mean? I don't know.
- M3: I don't know why an ad like that should be allowed. Because it's showing, alright, I'm sitting there in a car, why can't I go and do that on the motorway?
- M4: You did do that on the motorway, though!
- M3: Yeah, but the cops won't let you do it.
- M4: It's illegal to do it so why should they promote it with an ad like that?

These young men have come up against the contradiction between what the car can do, how it can be promoted and what is allowed on the roads, and this frustrates them. They do not want to say that high-performance cars should not be allowed, but they are incredulous that the advert could show the car in situations that are forbidden. They go on to point out what it is about the Monaro image that is important, relating to it as a necessity for maleness:

- M1: Well, that's the whole point of having a Monaro in the first place. It's a V8.
- M2: It's a guy thing, you need it, you know what I mean? It's for show.

They argue that the car must be made for a reason, 'it's a testosterone thing', and that it must be possible 'to show it off one way or another'. Even though they consider that 'there's no other way they can show it off', it does not make sense that it is legal to 'make an ad like that' when the activity being shown is illegal. One young man says that just because they can make the advert 'doesn't mean you can do it', to which another replies:

- M4: What matters is, the law should change! [laughs] If people can't keep up with the driving, get off the road!

It is the laws restricting performance vehicles that should change and not the laws related to advertising for these young men. For them, to 'keep up with the driving' is to drive in the racing style where speed dominates, and the roads should prioritise speed to suit the power and speed of the car and the skill of the driver. There is very little awareness of the impact of speed on the social environment. The advert met perfectly with their desires and they expressed the difficulty of controlling the desires illustrated in the advert. While they expressed annoyance that such an advert could be made, they were ultimately more annoyed that the speed limits did not change to suit the car and their ability to drive it 'as it should be driven'.

In the Mudgee group, one female reflected on the message of the advert as promoting safe speed and driving as a fun, sporty sort of thing, but ultimately she saw the suggestions of speed and the association with car racing as more problematic than they first appeared:

F2: I think it's trying to say how safe it is even if you go so fast and it's shown like a race car, it's pretty safe, but it is promoting driving as a game, driving is just fun and it's a sport sort of thing, when sometimes it shouldn't be looked on like that, because that's how accidents happen.

Racing provides the background of what is safe; however, the consequences of regarding driving as a game were evident to her, as was the framing of the car as safe for maintaining 'fun' – whereas for a young man in the group, the message was that the car was able to outperform more expensive cars:

M3: Yeah. A performance car is very expensive, very fast, whereas a Monaro, it's not so expensive, but it can still outperform.

The focus for the young man remained the ability to outperform others even though the women point out the strongly competitive suggestion of the advert. In general, the males tended to be less concerned about the suggestions of racing, pushy, competitive, dominating driving and saw the advertisements as showing normal male activity. The desires of the young men could be seen to link in with the desires appealed to in the advert. Some of the participants saw the desires related to the car as out of place in the context of driving on the roads, but most identified with the desires expressed. While some were sure that they would not have to drive the car the way it was shown, others were equally sure that it had to be driven according to the desires expressed.

Xtrail Xtreme

In the Nissan Xtrail 'extreme' advertisement, fun was expressed through aggressive styles of driving, as well as social competition. The advertisement showed various 'daggy' examples of sport such as ping-pong and badminton, all conducted by people with unattractive hair cuts, shown at unflattering angles, and accompanied by slow music. The music then became faster and up-tempo with images of snow boarding, dirt-bike riding and white-water kayaking, clearly identifying the car as fast, colourful and exciting. The male driver of the vehicle and a male passenger are visible at times, and the way the vehicle is being driven is clearly coded as masculine in its emphasis on extremes and the aggressiveness of the car being pounded through creeks and over rocky terrain and dirt roads, throwing up dust and water in its wake. Speed is indicated in the fast-moving backgrounds and the potential for losing control shown in the sliding of the back of the vehicle as it turns, spraying dirt and sand. The driving style is sufficiently reckless to relate to the extreme sports illustrated and to demonstrate the potential for loss of control that is central to extreme sports (Lyng, 1990).

The advert draws on the tradition of rally driving associations although the vehicle has no rally driving record to draw on. The emphasis is thus on extreme thrill and excitement attractive to young males who are likely to try out manoeuvres such as slides to hone their car-handling skills. The advert involved the implication that the rally style of driving demonstrated in the advert in off-road, 'fun' situations could be transferred to the context of on-road driving. The vehicle was intended to be seen as a fun vehicle that could take the roughest play, and the driver by implication as a fun kind of person, prepared to take risks and push the vehicle and their driving to extremes.

Focus group discussions of the advertisement were varied in the ways they recognised the aggressive implications involved in it. Four focus groups viewed the advertisement and in each group a different kind of response was evident, with some offended by the implications and the aggressive implications of the advert not being seen as particularly problematic.

Some of the women in the Bankstown all-female group regarded the style of driving in this advertisement as not really reckless, but as 'extreme' – 'off-road, sand dunes, that sort of stuff' — and not as implying anything dangerous, since it was not shown 'in the city doing naughty stuff'. It was 'pushing boundaries', 'where it's supposed to be done', which made it seem reasonable.

F1: It's not like you would attempt that in the city. Even if you did have that car, you'd go, 'Oh, it'd be funner to do that in the dirt.'

The extreme sport theme of pushing boundaries was recognised but it was considered harmless. When asked to say what sort of on-road driving it suggested, some in the group referred to an aggressive, 'pushy' style of driving:

F4: There's a type of person that comes right at the back of you and is really aggressive. Is in a hurry and, like, all this energy and can't wait at the petrol station for you to hurry up and fill up, or someone sort of aggressive, energetic, doesn't want to wait, instead of, you know, 'I'll go around instead of waiting for the person to turn right.' You know? Someone like that sort of, I don't like 4WD's, people who drive them.

F2: They're pushy.

The off-road extreme style was not a problem for them, but when the theme of 'pushing boundaries' was transferred to on-road driving, some were a bit more inclined to see the 'pushy' style as aggressive. While the advertisement itself suggested that extreme sports were innocent fun, and the women in the group accepted this to a point, on examination it did appear to them to condone behaving in threatening and daring ways in cars.

The extreme theme of the advert is a play not only on the name of the vehicle, 'Xtrail', but it is also an appeal to pushing the boundaries and to being the kind of person who likes to push things to the extreme, a desire for fun that is 'out there'. While the women in the Bankstown group at first thought the extreme idea was relatively harmless, expressing the innocent desire to have fun, the first response of the Mountains group was to relate the extreme idea to being crazy and classing people as nerds or extremists:

- F1: It's showing that you have to be doing, you have to be on the extreme, you have to be going that fast that, you know, being crazy like that, because otherwise you're in this class with the people who are playing ...
- M1: Ping-pong! [laughter]
- F1: Yeah! You're a nerd!
- M1: If you drive like that, you're cool. If you don't, you're a nerd.
- M2: It's sort of like, if you're a nerd, you can't have that car, as well, because you're not extreme.
- F2: You're out playing croquet.

These young people were offended by the representation of the desire to be ahead of the rest and more cool than everyone else. The implication for on-road driving was seen as extreme, involving fast and crazy driving to be cool. One of the males went on to consider the implications of the extreme sport idea as dangerous. He highlighted the appeal to risk-taking evident in the identification with extreme sport and one of the women agreed with him:

- M2: I know that's promoting like it's 'push it to the limit', but wouldn't that, in a way, promote unsafe, like: 'If you have this car, you could kill yourself?' in other words? That's kind of the interpretation I get with the guy stacking it on the bike. He's driving the car, he's pushing it to the limit, so you push it to the limit in a car, there's a greater chance of you smashing.
- F2: But the ad is more appealing to people who are like that, so they'd be like, 'Yeah, you get hurt.'

The male identification with the risk of crashing as exciting was being highlighted here. Those who really are prepared to go to extremes are prepared to put themselves in a life and death situation. The young woman picked up on this and drew attention to a type of person who regarded getting hurt as part of the fun. In the association with extreme sport, the potential for being out of control and for getting hurt (Lyng, 1990) is emphasised and identified by these young people.

There was some discussion in the Redfern group about four-wheel drives, how ineffective they were in the city and their impact on pedestrians. The males then moved on to discuss the advantages and the technicalities of handling in four-wheel drives as they saw them, relating the rally driving emphasis of the advertisement to cornering:

- M2: No, I'm off the pedestrian idea now. I'm off the, you know, driving that car, your centre of balance is a lot higher which means that your handling will be shifted.
- M1: It's not that, it's the handling of the 4WD's and sometimes with rear wheel drive, when I say 'handling' I mean, like, doing corners and stuff. Whereas a rear wheel drive, you have very poor handling.
- M2: I'm a big fan of front wheel drives and four wheel drive cars.
- M1: Yeah, most 4WD's, you get a lot of handling. The sports cars, like Integras, they have front wheel drive because they're good handling. They can take corners really well.

Taking corners better means faster, and the terminology of handling among these young males was similar to the rally driving talk the advert draws on. The participants were not discussing the use of the vehicle in off-road situations but as a street vehicle, however. The transfer of the rally driving implications of the advertisement to on-road driving were clear to these young males, for whom the technical possibilities were the important consideration. They were not critical of the aggressiveness of faster cornering in the traffic environment of the road but saw this as an aspect of the fun and challenge of cars.

Most of the men in the Fairfield all-male group thought the advertisement was not extreme enough, in that they identified four-wheel driving with older people who had kids or had retired. Even though one male disagreed and said it was meant to be appealing to guys like them, for most of the young men it was not an activity that interested them. For them extreme driving meant driving on the road in a challenging way with characteristic vehicles that were beyond the ordinary street vehicle in their style and power, as well as their uniqueness. The extreme sports appeal did not speak to them at all as for these young males this did not represent extreme activity.

The group went out to the car park at the end of the focus group and looked at each others' cars and car stereos. They were more outside the consumer culture than other groups, in that they did not buy standard car packages, but made up their own through modifications of older vehicles. They related less to the rally driving style than to drag racing and demonstrating powerful modifications of their vehicles through a smart, aggressive, street-driving style. The aggression in the advertisement was not an issue to them and they were almost offended by the implication of the advertisement that if they were not into the kinds of extreme sports illustrated, they were not cool. Their sense of being cool was derived from their modified street cars that required being driven in aggressive ways more like the racing style of the Monaro advert.

Responses to this advertisement showed an evident transfer of the driving style of extreme off-road, rally-type driving to driving on the street or the road. Although the responses were varied they showed a similarity in their recognition of the style of driving as technically challenging and fun. The innocent but extreme fun of extreme sports was transferred unproblematically to driving cars for some, while for others the social competitiveness and the implications in the advertisement for driving on the road of fast, crazy or reckless driving were apparent. The technicalities and consequences of four-wheel drives in the city were the main point of discussion in one group, and in another most did not relate as young males to the extreme sport theme as it was presented in the advertisement.

The advertisement draws on the rally driving theme of pushing both the vehicle and driving skill to their limits, and connects it to extreme sports where there is a clear life-threatening potential, and the difference between life and death relies on skill (Lyng, 1990). There is an aggressive potency to the association of extreme sports with the car driven largely on public roads and this was recognised in various ways by the focus group participants. The advert relies on an implicit reference to the danger of the car while at the same time masking this danger in the emphasis on fun and excitement as relatively harmless expressions of maleness. This led to the idea that the car was relatively 'safe' in that it could take the treatment meted out while

everyone continued to have fun. Considering the car itself as 'safe' relieved some of the responsibility on the part of the driver to be more careful, and allowed for the potential for speeding and other expressions of aggression.

Re-articulating the Car

I have referred elsewhere to the expectation that the speed of car travel will continue to increase into the future (Redshaw, 2006). Desires fuel the experience of drivers, egged on by car companies and their bigger, better, faster promotions, of easier, faster mobility as well as the added associations of unlimited freedom and aggressive expression. The reality of the limitations of cars is a direct result of their increasing presence and performance, as well as the dangers of the internal combustion powered vehicle.

Self-control involves shaping who we are in relation to the car and the desires connected to it, but it also involves shaping ourselves in relation to the limits and dangers of the car. Dominant articulations of the car such as those of racing and rally driving have been influential forces in shaping the forms of self-control expressed with the car, particularly in relation to masculinity. The dangers and attractions of the car have both helped to form the self-control required in car use; however, the articulations that have been the focus of this paper have maintained and masked the dangers of the car in order to fuel control that is outward oriented – to control of the car itself and the environment – giving too much emphasis to the car as a shaping force in itself.

Re-articulation of car use requires remodelling desires, expectations and associations of the car. Some of the associations of the car that have been discussed in this paper are 'obvious' – the lethal effects of cars and the racing alliances – but their influence in articulating the car has not been sufficiently considered. These adverts clearly connect desires for excitement and fun to a machine that is able to cause significant carnage. Aggression appears to be inherent in the use of the car, especially when considering dominant articulations of performance such as these. The theme of dominance and aggression is one articulation among others that emphasises, at the same time as it masks, the danger and destructive ability of the car.

Other articulations of cars that do not predominantly express aggression and that demonstrate other ways of relating to cars and forms of self-control in relation to cars have been considered in Daniel Miller's (2001) *Car Cultures*. Placing the car in the social, cultural and political contexts through which it is articulated requires looking at the implications of the relations that support and sustain the car in its present forms. Maxwell (2001) describes some of these: convenience foremost, individuality and space, for women particularly, and the caring facilitated by the car in taking friends, family, the aged, to appointments and places of interest. Other articulations and associations of the car need to be emphasised and promoted at the same time as the car needs to be understood as forceful and damaging. Its effects on the environment in terms of fuel emissions are only one aspect of the problem of the internal combustion engine-powered vehicle. The effects on the social environment of the car being used to carve a path into and through every aspect of social and

cultural life, as well as a way of dominating the environment, are clearly extremely costly.

Articulations of the car that emphasise the cooperation necessary to traffic flow, evident in the success of most driving negotiations, could create a more conducive atmosphere. The emphasis on speed and aggressive competition promoting car use needs to be counter-balanced by a recognition of the limits of the current form of the car, such as its destructiveness, optimum speeds for motor vehicles and the social costs of an emphasis on speed, as well as representing the many cooperative ventures facilitated by the car.

While not all enthusiasts are mad speed freaks who drive on the road as if they were on a race track, there is a strong association of the internal combustion engine with speed and power, and this is part of what is enjoyed and desired about the car. The desires fuelled by the continual association of road cars with racing, even though the two are conducted in quite different circumstances, help to encourage and maintain the aggressivity of the car and its dominant place in contemporary life.

The paper has sought to consider particular articulations of the car including the way in which aggression is promoted through the association with both rally and circuit racing. Advertising examples illustrate the emotional themes that pervade the driving experience, with expectations of faster and more immediate mobility fuelling experiences of boredom and impatience. The need to further consider the broader articulations of cars and driving must include a range of ways in which cars are used and experienced in people's lives. The accompanying forms of self-control related to different uses of the car could also be further outlined.

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