Automotive Emotions: Feeling the Car

Mimi Sheller

Senior Lecturer, Dept of Sociology, Lancaster University

19 May 2003

Copyright

Why are some people so passionately mobilised to 'stop the traffic' and 'reclaim the streets'? What leads others to defend their right to cheap petrol so vociferously? And how do such emotive politics relate to the more mundane feelings such as the pleasures of driving, the outburst of 'road rage', the thrill of speed, or the security engendered by driving a 'safe' car? What is required to shift an entire 'car culture', with its 'intimate relationship between cars and people' (Miller 2001b: 17)? Social commentators have long addressed the problem of car cultures in an explicitly normative manner concerned with the restitution of 'public goods' (the environment, human health, the social fabric of cities, democratic public cultures) that have been eroded by contemporary car and road systems (Jacobs 1961; Nader 1965; Sennett 1990; Kunstler 1994; Dunn 1998). At stake in such debates is not simply the future of the car, but the future of the entire car culture (and wider transportation system) in

1

what might be characterised as 'societies of automobility' (Sheller and Urry 2000; Urry 2003b). Yet most practical efforts at promoting more 'ethical' forms of car consumption have been debated and implemented without reference to the kinds of feelings, passions, and embodied experiences associated with the 'coercive freedom' of automobility (Sheller and Urry 2000).

In this article I argue that car cultures have social, material, and above all affective dimensions that are overlooked in current strategies to influence car-driving decisions. The individualistic 'rational choice' model that is taken for granted in transportation policy debates distorts our understanding of how people are embedded in historically sedimented and geographically etched patterns of 'quotidian mobility' (Kaufman 2000). Car consumption is never simply about rational economic choices, but is as much about aesthetic, emotional and sensory responses to driving, as well as patterns of kinship, sociability, habitation and work. Nor does attention to the emotional constituents of car cultures imply resorting to illogical black-box causal explanations such as the popular notion of 'automobile addiction' (Motavelli 2001). My key concern is how feelings for, of, and within cars come to be socially and culturally embedded in embodied sensibilities, in familial and sociable practices of car use, and in entire regional and national car cultures that form around particular systems of automobility and generate different aesthetic and kinaesthetic dispositions toward driving.

A better understanding of the cultural and emotional constituents of personal, familial, regional, and national patterns of automobility can contribute to future research programmes and policy initiatives by resisting the apparent 'power' of aggregate data based on statistical quantification of individual preferences, attitudes, and actions. Social psychological studies of driving behaviour have begun to emphasize the complex determinants of transportational choices, such as the physical, cognitive, and affective 'effort' of different modalities of travel (Stradling 2003; Stradling et al. 2001). However, we still need further qualitative research

models that will take into account how these apparently 'internal' psychological dispositions and preferences are generated by collective cultural patterns and what I shall describe below as emotional geographies, which in turn reiteratively reinforce cultures of automobility. Even the 'new realism' in travel reduction, which posits a shift from economic and technological solutions towards more holistic land use and planning solutions (Bannister 2003), must engage with the complexities of housing and labour markets, changing patterns of gender and family formation, and the place of transportation in modern urban and national identities. I suggest that an emotional sociology of automobility can contribute an invaluable theorisation of the connections between the micro-level preferences of individual drivers, the meso-level aggregation of specifically located car cultures, and the macro-level patterns of regional, national, and transnational emotional/cultural/material geographies.

Cars are above all machines that move people, but they do so in many senses of the word. Recent approaches to the phenomenology of car-use have highlighted 'the driving body' as a set of social practices, embodied dispositions, and physical affordances (Dant and Martin 2001; Dant, forthcoming; Edensor 2002; Sheller and Urry 2000; Thrift 2003; Oldrup, forthcoming). This work shifts our attention away from the rational actor making carefully reasoned practical and economic choices and towards the lived experience of dwelling with cars in all of its complexity, ambiguity, and contradiction. More encompassing approaches to car cultures are also found in the anthropology of material culture (Miller 2001a). This article builds both on this work and on recent approaches in the sociology of emotions (Hochschild 1983, 1997, 2003; Bendelow and Williams 1998; Katz 2000; Goodwin et al. 2001) to explore the ways in which the 'dominant culture of automobility' is implicated in a deep context of affective and embodied relations between people, machines and spaces of mobility and dwelling, in which emotions and the senses play a key part (Sheller and Urry 2000; Urry 2000).

3

Through a close examination of the aesthetic and especially kinaesthetic dimensions of automobility I will locate car cultures (and their associated feelings) as part of a broader physical/material relational setting that includes both human bodies and car bodies, and the relations between them and the spaces through which they move (or fail to move).[1] Cultural styles, feelings, and emotions underpin and inform the relationality of things and people in material worlds. As Arlie Hochschild's work suggests, emotions are not simply 'natural' but have to be worked at through 'emotion management' and in relation to culturally specific 'feeling rules' (Hochschild 1983, 2003). Feelings about driving are one way in which emotions are embodied in relationships not only with other humans but also with material things, including the kinaesthetic dimensions of how human bodies interact with the material world. Such 'automotive emotions' -- the embodied dispositions of car-users and the visceral and other feelings associated with car-use -- are as central to understanding the stubborn persistence of car-based cultures as are more technical and socio-economic factors.

Insofar as 'feelings' are embodied, managed, and performed in the convergences and collisions between emotion cultures and material cultures, we can speak of emotional geographies of automobility. In the following sections I will explore in turn the embodied practices of feeling the car, the emotional management of family cars and caring practices, and the emergence of national feelings about cars, car industries, and driving styles. My aim is to better understand the transpersonal emotional and material cultures by which particular styles of automobility and dispositions towards driving come to be naturalised and stabilised. In posing the problem this way I will also crucially draw on recent approaches in feminist technoscience, which offer a critical theoretical perspective on nature, culture, technology, and commodity branding that has been largely marginalized in predominantly masculine and androcentric research, planning, and transport policy arenas. By taking seriously how people feel *about* and *in* cars, and how the feel *of* different car cultures elicits specific dispositions and ways of life, we will be in a better

position to re-evaluate the ethical dimensions of car consumption and the moral economies of car use.[2] Only then can we consider what will really be necessary to make the transition from today's car cultures (and the automotive emotions that sustain them) to more socially and environmentally 'responsible' transportation cultures.

Feeling the Car

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

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

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

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

> Dans les halls d'éxposition, la voiture temoin est visitée avec une application intense, amoureuse; c'est la grande phase tactile de la découverte…les tôles, les joints sont touchés, les rembourrages palpés, les sieges essayés, les portes caressées, les coussins pélotés; devant le volant, on mime la conduite avec tout le corps. (Barthes 1957: 152)

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

But I am not so much interested in the individual psychological investment in the car, as in the sensibility of entire car cultures. In making sense of prevailing

commitments to car cultures across the world I want to draw on the recent turn in social science towards a sociology of emotions as personally embodied yet relationally generated phenomena (Hochschild 1983, 1997, 2003; Bendelow and Williams 1998; Goodwin et al. 2001; Jasper 1997). Following Nigel Thrift we could conceive of 'non-cognitive thought as a set of embodied dispositions ("instincts" if you like) which have been biologically wired in or culturally sedimented (the exact difference between the two being a fascinating question in itself)' (Thrift 2001: 36). Emotions are one kind of non-cognitive thought that rides on this ambiguity: seemingly instinctual, yet clearly a cultural achievement. Emotions are felt in and through the body, but are constituted by relational settings and affective cultures; they are shared, public and collective cultural conventions and dispositions (Goodwin et al. 2001; Jasper 1997). As Hochschild argues, 'there are social patterns to feeling *itself*', based on 'feeling rules' that 'define what we imagine we should and shouldn't feel and would like to feel over a range of circumstances; they show how we judge feeling' (Hochschild 2003: 82, 86). Emotions, in this perspective, are not simply 'felt' and 'expressed', but are rather elicited, invoked, regulated and managed through a variety of expectations, patterns, and anticipations.

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

> such work points to the pivotal importance of emotions as the key means the body has of sorting the non-cognitive realm through a range of different sensory registers, including the interoceptive (including not only the viscera but also the skin), the proprioceptive (based on musculo-skeletal investments)

and fine touch which involves the conduct of the whole body and not just the

brain. (Thrift 2001: 37)

Combining the 'feeling' of the world through the senses with the 'feelings' that arise from those encounters, this approach suggests the co-constitution of motion and emotion. Emotions, in this view, are a way of sorting the sensations of the non-cognitive realm, which occur through the conduct and movement of the body (though it also remains a possibility that the cultural organisation of emotion precedes the embodied feeling). Insofar as feelings come to be felt as welling up from within the body, how does the cultural 'construction' of emotion interact with more visceral elements of embodied feeling? And what role might driving or riding in cars play in the naturalisation of certain kinds of feeling?

Insofar as there are ambivalent and contested 'affordances' that 'stem from the reciprocity between the environment and the organism, deriving from how people are kinaesthetically active within their world' (Macnaghten and Urry 2001: 169; Costall 1995), driving can be included among the active corporeal engagements of human bodies with the 'sensed' world. From the kinaesthetics of walking and the emotive sensation of being in 'nature', Thrift extends this approach to the 'unnatural' kinaesthetics of the car ride. Drawing on the research of Jack Katz on drivers in Los Angeles, he suggests that we should

understand driving (and passengering) as both profoundly embodied and sensuous experiences, though of a particular kind, which "requires and occasions a metaphysical merger, an intertwining of the identities of the driver and car that generates a distinctive ontology in the form of a person-thing, a humanized car or, alternatively, an automobilized person" (Katz, 2000, p33) in which the identity of person and car kinaesthetically intertwine. (Thrift 2003: 7)

Human bodies physically respond to the thrum of an engine, the growl of a gearbox, or the whoosh of effortless acceleration. Some feel content with a smooth and silent ride, others prefer an all-wheel drive that shakes the bones and fills the nostrils with diesel and engine oil. Different emotional registers are produced through the variations in the embodied driving experience, which as I shall discuss below also have national variations. Although people also have 'embodied dispositions' towards walking, bicycling, or riding a horse, it is the ways in which these dispositions become 'culturally sedimented', as Thrift puts it, that matters.

Daniel Miller likewise suggests that 'it is this highly visceral relationship between bodies of people and bodies of cars that forces us to acknowledge the humanity of the car in the first place' (Miller 2001b: 24). In what sense might we have 'embodied dispositions' towards the feeling of driving? At six-weeks-old my baby already expresses an excited anticipation of car rides. As I place her in the car seat (while still in the house) her countenance brightens and she looks around in expectation. As I fasten the seat into the back of the car she turns her face toward the window and looks expectantly for the show to begin as the car moves. During a ride she watches the window intently for as long as she can, until lulled to sleep. It is clear that many infants take pleasure in the kinaesthetic experience of the car ride, and soon play with toy cars, ride on child-sized cars, and learn to identify different kinds and brands of motor vehicles by the age of two years. Of course people also react to the motion of the car in different ways, having different dispositions toward the moving view, the rushing breeze, the changing smells and sensations as the car shifts speed or swings around curves. For some the motion brings a feeling of happiness, excitement, or anticipation, while others may become fearful, anxious or sick to the stomach.

Today a further key change in the embodied feeling of cars is due to developments in digital control of the car and in mobile information technologies. There is growing emphasis on the integration of information and communication

technologies into the car, leading to a hybridisation of technologies of mobility with capacities for conversation, entertainment, and information access. Many aspects involved in directing the car as a machine have been computerised, at the same time that car-dwellers are insulated from the risky and dangerous environments through which they pass, seemingly protected by seatbelts, airbags, 'crumple zones,' 'roll bars' and 'bull bars'. Features such as automatic gearboxes, cruise control, voice-activated car phones, GPS-navigation, and digital music systems 'free' drivers from direct manipulation of the machinery, while embedding them more deeply in its sociality (Sheller and Urry 2000; Thrift 2003).[3] The marketing of new 'smart' cars emphasises not only their smaller size but also their enhanced capabilities for information or entertainment in congested urban areas, which will increasingly be designed as 'intelligent environments'.

Collective cultural shifts in the sensory experience of the car hint at what might be necessary were there to be a wholesale shift toward a new (more ethical) culture of automobility across entire societies. As Paul Gilroy notes, 'cars are integral to the privatization, individualization and emotionalization of consumer society as a whole', in part due to the 'popular pleasures of auto-freedom – mobility, power, speed'; cars in many ways 'have redefined movement and extended sensory experience' (Gilroy 2001: 89).[4] The car is deeply invested in the ways in which we inhabit the physical world. It not only appeals to an apparently 'instinctual' aesthetic and kinaesthetic sense, but it transforms the way we sense the world and the capacities of human bodies to interact with that world through the visual, aural, olfactory, interoceptive and proprioceptive senses. We not only feel the car, but we feel through the car and with the car. In those terms it has contributed to changing how car-users judge feeling, and what feelings people expect to have as they move through the world and sense their own movement. Although this appreciation of the sensibilities of automobility adds some human flesh to the denuded bones of rational choice theory, a further 'sensitising' step is needed to fully countenance the social

embedding and embodiment of car cultures. In the following sections I want to turn to the wider ways in which emotional geographies of automobility also support complex connections and social ties between people, which then come to be normalised and naturalised in formations of gender, family, and nation.

Family Cars, Caring and Kinship

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

Despite strong feelings against cars and the damage they do to the natural environment, the ethics of anti-car protest is often at odds with the needs for mobile sociability and the day-to-day moralities involved in co-ordinating family life or networks of friendship (Miller 2001a; Carrabine and Longhurst 2002; Stradling 2003). Popular conflicts in Britain and the United States over the traffic supposedly generated by 'the school run', for example, are indicative of conflicts amongst feelings about children's safety, about traffic, and about the environment. Miller argues that there is 'a conflict between an ethics which is concerned with aggregate effects of personal action on the world at large and a morality that sees caring in terms of more immediate concerns such as one's partner and children' (Miller 2001b: 28). Thus in many cases the same people can be both enthusiastic car-drivers, as well as being very active protestors against schemes for new roads (see Macnaghten and Urry 1998: chap 6, on how cars generate intense ambivalence).

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

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

For example, driving offers many people a feeling of liberation, empowerment, and social inclusion, while inability to drive may lead to feelings of social exclusion and disempowerment in cultures of automobility. A study of young suburban drivers in Britain suggests that 'the car is part of patterns of sociability' and the anticipation of new possibilities for such sociability generates 'an extraordinary and exciting moment of consumption' for young drivers (Carrabine and Longhurst 2002: 192-3). In a large-scale survey study of the expressive dimensions of car use among English drivers, Stephen Stradling found that such feelings vary by age, class, and gender:

> The young (17 – 20 years) and, amongst the over twenties, the relatively poor were the two groups obtaining the greatest sense of personal identity – projection, pride, power and self-expression – from driving in their car, while older drivers (> 40 years) and, amongst these, female drivers, scored highest on the independence factor (Stradling 2002:11; Stradling et al. 2001)

Thus, he argues, 'different kinds of persons obtain different kinds of psychological benefit from car use. Driving a car is particularly attractive to the young and the poor because of the sense of displayed personal identity it conveys' (Stradling 2002: 11). Along similar lines, Paul Gilroy suggests that in African-American culture car ownership and flamboyant public uses of cars have historically been deeply implicated in making up for feelings of status injury and material deprivation through 'compensatory prestige' (Gilroy 2001: 94). Especially so long as high income-earners and professional elites continue to equate car worth with personal worth, the young and the disempowered will continue to use cars for status compensation.

As I have suggested above, emotional cultures and their ethics are deeply intertwined with material cultures and technologies. One technology that condenses a number of complex conjunctures in the emotional geography of familial driving is the infant car-seat, which exists at a particular moment in the late modern 'risk society' (Beck 1992) when safety and security have become paramount concerns in national cultures in the West. Every time I place my baby in her car seat I am faced with a warning of dire consequences of my actions written in eleven languages: 'DO NOT place rear facing child seat on front seat with airbag. DEATH OR SERIOUS INJURY can occur'. For those disciplined to the correct use of such devices this warning is an unnerving yet routine reminder of the risk we place loved ones in if we fail to properly use the 'safety' technology; yet we know that any moving vehicle is an extremely high-risk environment for children. Installing the child and the seat in the car correctly, then, induces a sense of having taken security measures; it makes parents *feel* better.[5] When cars become associated with feelings of protection, security and safety (as emphasised in advertising of the 'family car'), their use may provide parents with a sense of empowerment in the face of a generalised feeling of insecurity. Technologies of protection enable risk (and fear) to be managed by driving 'correctly' rather than by not driving.

The infant car seat also mediates in distinctive ways between the private and the public realms, touching upon changes in the gender order, in domesticity, in women's mobility, and in the relation between home and work. As families with two working parents or a single working parent with no partner have become more common, it is more likely that infants and young children need to be moved between different locations as parents and caretakers juggle fragmented time schedules. It is automobility that has both enabled and constrained the complex orchestration of such schedules, and contributed to the blurring of boundaries between public and private activities (Sheller and Urry 2003). The private mobilisation of the family within the automobile has partly enabled the increasing participation of mothers of young children in the paid workforce. Thus the car seat is closely integrated into daily or weekly routines and comes to support feelings associated with taking care of one's family, as well as a sense of liberation afforded to women by ease of movement with one or more children outside of the home. Car journeys also may become important settings for clawing back 'quality time' in busy family schedules (at least until on-board DVD and games consoles become commonplace!).

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

> the SUV has been marketed as a vehicle that can uniquely fuse the hitherto "uncool" aspects of family life with the hipness of the outdoor adventure…. But this nexus of marketing and consumption also has a history in women's responsibility for the family's safety and men's idealization of the car as a means of escape and a tool for identity…. The privatization of this [typical] family project as one reproduced through consumption is also seen in an

understanding of 'safety' that relies on chauffeuring children as much as 'winning' in potential car accidents (Jain 2002: 398).

However, as Jain notes, the perception that SUVs contribute to familial safety and afford possibilities for adventure and escape is belied not only by the 'traffic jams and nasty roadside architecture' that attend their mobility, but also by 'the children themselves, easily "picked off" by the SUV's higher bumpers and poor visibility' (ibid: 399), not to mention their now-recognised tendency to roll over in accidents allegedly leading to one in four traffic deaths in the US (Bradsher 2002).[6] Nevertheless, the 'masculine' appeal of the SUV has attracted working mothers in particular, as they cultivate a high-achieving public persona in the workplace, while the more familial aspects of the SUV enable them to maintain a more caring 'feminine' side. Thus it allows for management of the plural ethics and feeling rules that structure public and private gender identities in contradictory ways.

SUVs also continue to be embraced as a way of getting closer to nature (safely), especially for urban and suburban families. Ironically, the very idea of 'nature' that many anti-car campaigners are defending may have been constituted largely through automobility. Gliding through green woods dappled with sunlight, speeding toward the endlessly receding horizon of a vast desert or plain, or shooting along winding hedge-rowed country lanes, driving has long been a way of 'getting out in nature'. Early use of the automobile in many countries was linked to 'Sunday drives' and family holidays which involved driving from city and suburb out to the countryside and to wilderness reserves such as national parks (Urry 2000: 60-62; Bunce 1994; Wilson 1992). Thus the car is already implicated in constituting contemporary appreciation for the extensive, relatively untouched, and visually pleasing vistas that environmental campaigners seek to preserve (for example by blocking new road building). Underlining such contradictions, the 'environmentally friendly' marketing of 'clean, green' superminis like the Citroen C3 plays on feelings

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

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

From seed to gestation, from panther to thoroughbred, from adolescent to aristocrat, the representation of these four cars [in the BMW brand lineage] delivers an excess of genetic and genealogical analogies to build a sense of hybrid evolution. The [advertising] text is a series of descriptions borrowing heavily from the language of genetics, referencing inheritance, evolution, breeding, genetic traits, strains of DNA, and genetic selection. The text is

strained to hold together its diverse images of animals and machines, the domestic and the wild, the inherited and the learned (Franklin 1998: 4-5).

In this complex hybridisation of the biological body and the machinic body, new terms of kinship are elaborated, 'linking animate qualities to machines' (ibid: 8). When the quasi-biological car as cyborg becomes deeply intertwined with the sensory evolution of the human ('which was which didn't matter anymore'), it not only supports human kinship practices, but it has also become kin – the 'humanised car' meets the 'automobilised person' (Katz 2000; Thrift 2003) and discovers they are cousins.

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

National Feelings About Cars

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

heavy rigs hurtling on the wrong side of the road towards a blind bend.'
(Salewicz 2000: 42-3)

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

Tim Edensor argues that distinctive 'national' styles of motoring encompass a range of different affective dimensions, including: feelings toward national car industries, national 'motorscapes' with different kinds of aesthetic and kinaesthetic materialities, auto-centric cultural practices, and the sensual affordances of particular types of cars (Edensor 2002: 120). He suggests that the assemblage of distinctive national cultures of automobility 'produces distinctive ways of sensually apprehending cars and car travel for people inhabit, and are institutionally emplaced in, particular webs of affective and sensual experience' (ibid: 133). The 'sensuality of motoring' and different 'driving dispositions' are formed within these national cultures which might on the one hand be oriented towards a comfort-oriented drive, smooth roads, and exclusion of external sound, or on the other, as in Edensor's description

of the cacophony of Indian road culture, be full of noise, smells, and intrusions. Stereotypical 'Western' perceptions of driving in 'Third World' countries, like the account of Jamaica cited above, rest partly on a clash between these different national styles, scapes, and affordances. What image of Cuba is complete without the fading glory of the massive tail-finned cars from the heyday of U.S. imperialism, lumbering time-capsules of a pre-revolutionary era? Moreover, aside from petrol shortages, the Cubans who pile their families onto a 50cc motorbike, babies and all, clearly have a different kinaesthetic culture of mobility than do the US Americans who would be terrified by such a practice and who claim they need all the space in their huge, gas-guzzling Chevrolet Suburbans for a two-child family.[7]

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

Cars certainly occupy a rich vein of popular national cultures in all of the nostalgic imaginings that accompany their past incarnations, from road movies and

pop songs, to classic car collecting and vintage car rallies. For Pearce, British literature also offers historically evocative representations of 'how motor-travel has transformed our perception of "home" within the British Isles: how it has enabled us to explore, and fantazise, its seductions and traumas from the relative "safety" of the open road' (ibid: 171). While such regional and national images may be drawn on in advertising for 'home' markets, they can also be read (and marketed) across national cultures, as when Audi banks on its 'German design' reputation in England through the 'Vorsprung durch Technik' campaign, or the Spanish car-maker Seat plays on its Hispanic 'auto-emocione', or Renault uses a French international footballer who lays for an English team to talk about the Clio's 'va-va-voom' and 'je ne sais quoi'. The multi-national sites involved in the design, production, and marketing of various brands belies any simple correlation of style with national identity, yet producing such identities remains crucial to the emotional geographies of car cultures. Nissan goes further and tries to transcend national motorscapes in its 'Do you speak Micra?' advertisements, set in a futuristic urban utopia where the brand has evolved its very own language, a pan-European techno-patois.

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

> To experience a new car is to allow a series of sensual triggers to be pulled.
> One takes in the body-form; one eyes the exterior details; one touches parts
> of the trim… The cabin of a car, and the seats in particular, may not seem to
> be the sexiest element of the getting-to-know-you experience. Actually that's

precisely what they are. As soon as you slide into the front seat, the car is yours; and the car's got you…just *sitting* in them is a real pleasure.[8]

Here again the car becomes a sexual partner, an object of desire eyed and touched by the consumer, but the particular fusion here of technology and cutting edge design, 'refinement and emotion', 'functional tool and object of beauty' plays on Anglo-French cultural hybridities. The advertising text references a European 'punk-baroque' design world with a new set of 'rules' grounded in 'jazz', 'chaos' and 'the complexity of mass culture' as interpreted by Barthes, Le Corbusier, and Rem Koolhaas. Intersecting with current developments in social theory (Clark 2001; Law 2002; Urry 2003a), this embrace of the baroque and the complex signals a new kind of modernity in which high culture and mass culture, art and marketing, French high-theory and Anglo-American know-how are mixed. Form and function are fused, but in a playful postmodern way (especially signalled by the 'unusually sculpted rear-end') rather than in modernism's pared-down simplicity.[9]

In considering these practices of national branding I do not mean to suggest that cultures of automobility will change simply by designing cars in new ways. Nor do I believe that it would be possible for a single nation (or multinational corporation) to lead the way in creating a more ethical car culture. Despite incremental change and experimentation in new transportation policies (regulation, taxation, road pricing, congestion charging) there has not been a radical transformation of the car and road system itself, nor of the patterns of habitation and feeling that underlie existing car cultures. At the very least any holistic transformation would have to involve a population adopting new automotive technologies, new kinds of road systems, better integration of public and private transportation, and new patterns of habitation, work, and leisure. Along with these changes, however, there would also have to be a new aesthetic of cars, a new kinaesthetics of mobility, and a strong affective commitment to living with cars in new ways. The ethics of car consumption at a global level (i.e., in

terms of an abstract concern for the environment and for collective 'others') would have to be integrated into the moral economies of personal status (including gender, race and ethnicity), locality, family, and nation.

Whether government policies, shifts in the automobile industry, and the influence of social movements will bring about such a transformation of everyday forms of mobility remains to be seen. But it seems unlikely if debates over car use continue to posit an unmarked, universal, instrumental rational actor and ignore the embodied and affective dimensions of car cultures. In this article I have explored the formation of a variety of automotive emotions arising from both the kinaesthetic feeling of the car and from its cultural and social embedding. Such embeddings occur at different scales ranging from the feeling of the individual body within the car, to the familial and sociable settings of car use, to the regional and national car cultures that form around particular systems of automobility and generate differing driving dispositions. Cars will not be easily given up just (!) because they are dangerous to health and life, environmentally destructive, based on unsustainable energy consumption, and damaging to public life and civic space. Too many people find them too comfortable, enjoyable, exciting, even enthralling. They are deeply embedded in ways of life, networks of friendship and sociality, and moral commitments to family and care for others.

Transformations of the dominant culture of automobility will begin only when local innovations in designing and dwelling with cars are tied to patterns of gender expression, racial and ethnic distinction, family formation, urbanism, national identity and transnational processes. Emotional investments in the car go beyond any economic calculation of costs and benefits, and outweigh any reasoned arguments about the public good or the future of the planet. To create a new ethics of automobility, in sum, will require a deep shift in automotive emotions, including our embodied experiences of mobility, our non-cognitive responses to cars, and the affective relations through which we embed cars into personal lives, familial

networks, and national culture. The contest over cars and roads can be said to involve wider social practices and human relationships, material cultures and styles of life, landscapes of movement and dwelling, and emotional geographies of power and inequality. Debates about the future of the car and road system will remain superficial -- and policies ineffective -- insofar as they ignore this 'deep' social, material, and above all affective embodied context.

Bibliography

Apcar, L. 2002. 'Illuminating High-Voltage Commute', *The New York Times*,

22 September 2002, Section 12, Page 1.

Bannister, D. 2003. 'Reducing the Need to Travel'. Presentation to the ESRC Mobile

Network,

http://www.its.leeds.ac.uk/projects/mobilenetwork/mobilenetwork.html

(accessed 15 May 2003).

Barthes, R. 1957. *Mythologies*. Paris: Editions du Seuil.

Beck. U. 1992. *Risk Society*. London: Sage.

Bendelow, G. and Williams, S. (eds) 1998. *Emotions in Social Life: Critical Themes*

and Contemporary Issues. London: Routledge.

Bradsher, K. 2002. *High and Mighty: SUVs -- the world's most dangerous vehicles*

and how they got that way. New York: Public Affairs.

Brandon, R. 2002. *Auto Mobile: How the Car Changed Life*. Basingstoke and Oxford:

Macmillan.

Bull, M. 2001. 'Soundscapes of the Car: A Critical Ethnography of Automobile

Habitation', in D. Miller (ed.) *Car Cultures*. Oxford: Berg.

Bunce, M. 1994. *The Countryside Ideal*. London: Routledge.

Carrabine, E. and Longhurst, B. 2002. 'Consuming the car: anticipation, use and

meaning in contemporary youth culture', *Sociological Review*, 50: 2 (May

2002): 181-96.

Clark, N. 2001. ' "Botanizing on the Asphalt"? The Complex Life of Cosmopolitan

Bodies', in P. Macnaghten and J. Urry (eds) *Bodies of Nature*, London: Sage.

Costall, A. 1995. 'Socializing Affordances', *Theory and Psychology*, 5: 467-81.

Dant, T. forthcoming. 'The Driver-Car', *Theory, Culture and Society* [?]

Dant, T. and Martin, P. (2001), 'By Car: Carrying Modern Society' in A. Warde and

J. Grunow (eds) *Ordinary Consumption*, London: Harwood.

Duffy, J. 2002. 'Why This Isn't the Car of Tomorrow', 25 September 2002,

http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/2309397.stm, Accessed 9 October 2002.

Dunn, J. 1998. *Driving Forces*. Washington: Brookings Institution Press.

Edensor, T. 2002. 'Material Culture and National Identity', in *National Identities in*

    Popular Culture. Oxford and New York: Berg.

Franklin, S. 1998. 'Kinship Beyond Biology: BMW's DNA', unpublished paper

    presented to the 4S Meeting, Halifax, Nova Scotia, 27-31 October 1998.

Freund, P. 1993. *The ecology of the automobile*. Montreal and New York: Black Rose

    Books.

Gilroy, P. 2001. 'Driving While Black' in D. Miller (ed.) *Car Cultures*. Oxford: Berg.

Goodwin, J., Jasper, J. and Polletta, F. 2001. *Passionate Politics: Emotions and Social*

    Movements. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press.

Haraway, D. 1997. *ModestWitness@SecondMillennium*. New York: Routledge.

Hochschild, A.R. 2003. *The Commercialization of Intimate Life: Notes from Home*

    and Work. Berkeley: University of California Press.

------. 1997. *The Time Bind: When Work Becomes Home and Home Becomes Work*.

    New York: Metropolitan Books.

------. 1983. *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling*. Berkeley:

    University of California Press. Reprint, with new afterword, Berkeley:

    University of California Press, 2003.

Jacobs, J. 1961. *The death and life of great American cities*. New York: Random

    House.

Jain, S.L. 2002. 'Urban Errands: The means of mobility', *Journal of Consumer*

    Culture, Vol. 2 (3): 385-404.

Jasper, J. 1997. *The Art of Moral Protest: Culture, Biography and Creativity in Social*

    Movements. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press.

Katz, J. 2000. *How Emotions Work*. Chicago, University of Chicago Press.

Kaufman, V. 2000. *Mobilité Quotidienne et Dynamiques Urbaines: La question du*

report modal. Lausanne: Presses polytechniques et universitaires romandes.

Kunstler, J. 1994. *The geography of nowhere: the rise and decline of America's man-made landscape*. New York: Touchstone Books.

Macnaghten, P. and Urry, J. 2000. 'Bodies in the Woods' in *Body and Society*, Special Issue on 'Bodies of Nature', eds. P. Macnaghten and J. Urry, Vol. 6 (3-4): 166-182.

------. 1998. *Contested Natures*. London: Sage

Maxwell, S. 2001. 'Negotiations of Car use in Everyday Life', in D. Miller (ed.) *Car Cultures*. Oxford: Berg.

Miller, D. (ed) 2001a. *Car Cultures*. Oxford: Berg.

Miller, D. 2001b. 'Driven Societies' in D. Miller (ed.) *Car Cultures*. Oxford: Berg.

------. 1997 [1994]. *Modernity, An Ethnographic Approach: Dualism and Mass Consumption in Trinidad*. Oxford and New York: Berg.

Mosey, C. 2000. *Car Wars: Battles on the Road to Nowhere*. London: Vision.

Motavelli, J. 2000. *Forward Drive: The Race to Build 'Clean' Cars for the Future*, San Francisco: Sierra Club books.

O'Connell, S. 1998. *The car in British society: class, gender and motoring, 1896-1939*, Manchester: Manchester University Press.

O'Dell, T. 2001. '*Raggare* and the Panic of Mobility: Modernity and Everyday Life in Sweden', in D. Miller (ed.), *Car Cultures*. Oxford: Berg.

Oldrup, H. forthcoming. 'Driving, the Body and Daily Mobility' PhD Thesis, University of

Copenhagen.

Pearce, L. 2000. 'Driving North/Driving South: Reflections upon the Spatial/Temporal Co-ordinates of "Home"' in L. Pearce (ed.) *Devolving Identities: Feminist Readings in Home and Belonging*. Aldershot: Ashgate.

RAC Magazine (2002). 'Future Thinking' (Winter 2002), pp. 14-15.

Sachs, W. (2002) *For Love of the Automobile. Looking Back into the History of Our*

Desires. Berkeley, University of California Press.

Salewicz, C. (2000*) Rude Boy: Once Upon a Time in Jamaica*. London: Victor

      Gollancz.

Sennett, R. 1990. *The conscience of the eye: design and social life in cities*. London:

      Faber and Faber.

Sheller, M. and Urry, J. 2000. 'The city and the car', *International Journal of Urban*

      and Regional Research, 24: 737-57.

Sheller, M. and Urry, J., 2003. 'Mobile Transformations of "Public" and "Private"

      Life', *Theory Culture & Society*, 20(3): 115-133.

Stradling, S. 2002. 'Persuading People Out of Their Cars', Presented to the ESRC
Mobile

      Network,

http://www.its.leeds.ac.uk/projects/mobilenetwork/mobilenetwork.html

      (accessed 15 May 2003).

Stradling, S.G., Meadows, M.L. and Beatty, S. 2001 'Identity and independence: two

      dimensions of driver autonomy', in G.B.Grayson (ed.) *Behavioural Research*

in Road

      Safety X. Crowthorne: Transport Research Laboratory.

Strathern, M. 1992. *After Nature*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Thrift, N. 2003. 'Driving in the City', Paper presented to the ESRC Mobile Network,

      http://www.its.leeds.ac.uk/projects/mobilenetwork/mobilenetwork.html

      (accessed 15 May 2003).

------. 2001. 'Still Life in nearly Present Time: The Object of Nature' in P.

      Macnaghten and J. Urry (eds) *Bodies of Nature*. London: Sage.

Urry, J. 2003a. *Global Complexity*. London: Polity.

------2003b. 'The System of Automobility', Paper presented to the ESRC

Mobile Network,

http://www.its.leeds.ac.uk/projects/mobilenetwork/mobilenetwork.html

(accessed 15 May 2003).

------. 2000. *Sociology Beyond Societies: mobilities for the twenty-first century.*

London and New York: Routledge.

Verrips, J. and Meyer, B. 2001. 'Kwaku's Car: the Struggles and Stories of a

Ghanaian Long-Distance Taxi Driver' in D. Miller (ed), *Car Cultures*. Oxford

and New York: Berg.

Wilson, A. 1992. *Culture of Nature*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Young, D. (2001) 'The Life and Death of Cars: Private Vehicles on the Pitjantjatjara

Lands,

 South Australia' in D. Miller (ed.), *Car Cultures*, Oxford and New York: Berg.

Endnotes

[1] Unlike certain analyses of human-machine cyborgs found in actor-network theory, the attention given to embodied emotions here privileges a human subject, while still allowing for a degree of intercommunication between human and non-human, social and material, cultural and corporeal.

[2] As Andrew Sayer argues, '"Moral economy" can indicate both the ways in which economic actions are influenced by moral sentiments and norms, and a standpoint from which we can <u>evaluate</u> economic arrangements…. Moral considerations highlight the effects of [our] behaviour on others, thereby getting us away from the misleading picture of a society of individuals who become unequal independently of one another' (Sayer 2001, http://www.comp.lancs.ac.uk/sociology/soc059as.html).

[3] The Toyota/Sony Pod concept car even promises that it will 'measure your pulse and perspiration levels to gauge your stress levels. If you are becoming aggressive it will calm you with cool air and soothing music. It will even warn other drivers about your mental state by changing the colour of the strip-lights on the bonnet!' (RAC Magazine 2002: 14-15).

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

[5] In other car cultures a blessing or a hidden charm might serve the same function of making the occupants of a vehicle feel they have taken appropriate safety precautions (see Verrips and Meyer 2001 on protecting cars from witchcraft and ghosts in Ghana).

[6] SUVs are also more likely to be accessorised with the rigid metal 'bull bars' which also are extremely fatal to child pedestrians in accidents even at relatively slow speeds.

[7] The Chevy Suburban is one of the larger domestic vehicles on the US market. Essentially modified from a truck base, the 'three-quarter ton' 4x4 holds up to 9 occupants and is said to get 13 miles per gallon in urban conditions. The conversion of trucks into family vehicles is thought to have been a result of car manufacturer's tactics to avoid expensive fuel efficiency regulation that was put in place for cars but not trucks in the early 1980s (Bradsher 2002).

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

[9] Recent British television advertisements for the Renault Megane likewise mix 'low-culture' popular references with high-end design to ironically appeal to the European market by flaunting the car's rear end to the lyric of Groove Armada's 'I See You Baby (shakin' that ass)'.