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❖ **"V8's 'til '98" The V8 engine, Australian nationalism and automobility**

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Abstract

The 1984 "V8's 'til '98" media-led consumer campaign to 'save' the locally-produced Holden V8 engine, was a direct result of the "economic rationalization" of the Australian automotive industry. The so-called Button Plan to overhaul the automotive industry by way of tariff reduction, forced automotive manufacturers to cull their model lines in order to prepare the Australian automotive industry to be competitive in global markets, and was one of the first policy-based waves of globalization in Australia. Due to cross-platform engine sharing arrangements and costs involved in environmental technology developments, one potential outcome of the market rationalisation could have been the absence of a locally produced vehicle with a V8 engine. For automotive enthusiasts, the V8 engine represented a monument of masculine and class-based automotive identity articulated through automotive performance. A market without a V8 was a dire set of circumstances for enthusiasts within modified-car culture. The "V8's 'til '98" campaign was led by *Street Machine* magazine and the tabloid *Daily Telegraph* newspaper and mobilized over 10,000 enthusiasts in a letter writing campaign to save the V8. During the campaign the V8 engine was articulated in familiar ways in terms of a class-based, masculine identity, but this time with a reactionary nationalist bent as the "Aussie V8". In this article the "V8's 'til '98" event is critically analysed to explore the intersection of technology, identity and enthusiasm at the emergence of a globalised Australia.

Introduction

Articulations of national identity within a globalising social, cultural, technological and economic context disrupt the social totality of a 'globalised' world. One historical example of such an articulation of a complex Australian nationalism is the "V8's 'til '98" media-led consumer campaign of 1984. The campaign mobilised thousands of car enthusiasts to write letters in order to save the locally produced Holden V8 engine after the Australian subsidiary of General Motors, Holden, raised the possibility that it would be axed. The campaign needs to be understood as an expression of the complex cultural negotiations that were part of the globalising "economic rationalist" policy trend of the Hawke/Keating Labor governments. The campaign resembles a moral panic in the way that it was centred on anxieties over Australian automobility, and used a masculine and reactionary Australian nationalist discourse to mobilise an enthusiast population. The possible disappearance of the V8 engine was framed as a challenge along racial, nationalist and gendered lines. By framing the possible disappearance of the V8 as a challenge that could be engaged with and overcome, this event serves as an example of a way in which a given enthusiast population can be mobilised in political ways through popular culture.

This article also introduces the notion of 'performance' as it is circulated within modified car culture and car cultures in general. 'Performance' is a slippery term as it elides distinctions between technology and discourse, while technologies are often represented in discourse in terms of how well they 'perform' according to various tests of effectiveness. This 'effectiveness' is not an essential characteristic of the technology, but is in part an effect of the discourse and of extra-discursive practice through which we make sense of technology. Of interest to the argument here about enthusiast discourse is that the valorising effect of discourses of technological performance indicates an affective dimension. Whether a technology is 'good' or 'bad' only partially relates to tests of effectiveness. Instead, performance technologies are valorised (or not) due to the strong affective relations that we form with them, particularly amongst enthusiasts, and tests are used to reproduce these relations. That is, tests of performance technologies are culturally performative in the way that they can characterise the affective dimension of discourse.

Automotive performance first appeared in the cultural politics of automobility in Australia by examining the 'supercar scare' of the 1970s. This is a useful episode of cultural politics as it frames the way in which automotive performance is framed in popular political discourse, and it sets up the main example of the "V8's 'til '98" media-led consumer campaign. The article

then ends with a discussion of the broader implications of the relation between enthusiasm and nationalism when valorising discourses are deployed in the context of the experience of automobility.

Socio-technological performance and modified-car culture

To situate the events of "V8's 'til '98" it is necessary to define and introduce 'modified-car culture' and 'performance'. Modified-car culture is a generic term that I am using to describe a collection of subcultural formations with their own ritualised practices, events, specialist media and variations of discourse. While some of these subcultural formations are historical such as the 1950s US-based hot-rodding scene, there is also a relatively vibrant contemporary scene of modified-car culture across Australia, the US and elsewhere. The reason for grouping different subcultural formations is that they are all characterised, first by the enthusiasm of participants and, second by the discourses and practices that are produced through the modification of the material and semiotic (or discursive) attributes of a car's mechanical and aesthetic qualities. There are subcultural formations that share many practices and even technologies with modified-car culture, but do not actually work on 'cars' per se such as the four-wheel drive subcultural formations or even different kinds of boating. There are many different practices of modification but a core sense of purpose of the enthusiasm in modified-car culture, evident across all eras from the proto-hot rodding era of pre-War and inter-War US through to the most recent 'import' enthusiasms, has largely been premised on the willful extension of the performance capabilities of automobile technologies (Balsey, 1950; Goldberg, 1969; Moorhouse, 1986, 1991; Witzel and Bash, 1997; Ganahl, 2000; Thomas and Butcher, 2003).

The movement from a 'stock' car to a modified car more often than not changes the performance of the vehicle. 'Performance' is understood here as a capacity to act: that is, to perform ritualised practices within events of 'action' that in part constitute a 'scene', such as 'racing' or 'cruising'. In one of the earliest works on modified-car culture, Theodore Goldberg (1969), examined the ritualised practice of 'cruising'. Writing during the tail end of the first wave of mass-popularisation of modified-car culture in the US, he suggests that cruising is a social gathering complementary to "drag racing" in the same way that the high school dance is a social spin-off of football or basketball games (1969: 165). Furthermore, he argues that "the most striking feature of drag racing" is the massive predominance of cars modified according to "the competition aesthetic, the hot car look":

Wide racing tires, magnesium hubs, radically lifted suspensions, and air scoops are some of the more obviously visible signs of a hot car. For those who really know, they are only the prerequisites to a fullyclothed [sic] competitive car. Subtleties of engine sounds, brand name racing parts, and types of suspension sort out the higher status cars (Goldberg, 1969: 165).

Even though Goldberg's paper is more than 40 years old, he makes some salient points that apply to contemporary modified-car culture. Goldberg discerns the difference between cars that 'look' like race cars and cars of a "higher status" that are actually built to perform in a ritualised technological sense. He assesses the cars according to different (and more-or-less specialised) levels of modification. His distinction between "hot cars" and cars that simply look 'hot' highlights an aesthetics of performativity as opposed to the actual mechanics of socio-technological performance.

Socio-technical performance will be explored more fully below in the example of the 1972 "supercar scare" moral panic around factory-built race cars that were 'homologated' for the regular automobile market. To accomplish this task, it is important to introduce what is meant by 'performance'. Jon McKenzie (2001: 97) defines "technological performance [as] effectiveness in a given task." This definition is complicated by the cultural meanings given to the different conceptions of 'effectiveness'. The discourses of performance that belong to the different variations of modified-car culture and correlate with the different subcultural formations are organised around valorising specific "tests of effectiveness". These are ritualised as motor sport or, in less stratified forms, as specific practices and examples that include drag racing (ritualised motor sport) through to 'burnouts' (a practice, that is also ritualised, but in a less formal manner). Proponents of specific motor sports or practices advocate for their "test of effectiveness" being a 'true' test of the technological capacity of the vehicles. However, the 'test' is a contrivance that enables the production of a "level playing field". There is always a discursive dimension to the 'tests', either through formalised rules or specific subcultural valorisations of a given practice. The 'tests' are also anchored in more or less ritualised social practices that require a degree of habitualised competence to participate. The description of a technology as a 'performance' technology relies on explicit or implicit frames of reference determined by the discursive character of the 'tests' in question.

By focusing on the more or less formalised practices of modified-car culture, I am trying to move away from fetishising the object of enthusiasm in itself for two reasons. First, an analysis that focuses on the technological object of the car fails to account for how enthusiasts are actually mobilised by their enthusiasm. A more useful way to engage with enthusiasm is to recognise that the technological object of the car and the "tests of effectiveness" (and associated practices) are constituent elements of various challenges that mobilise enthusiasts according to their enthusiasm. That is, the enthusiasm is characterised by the challenges presented by the technology and practices, not by the technology itself. If someone forms a bond with a particular car or a fascination with a given practice, this bond or fascination may be very robust and a positive experience, but it is not necessarily enthusiasm.

I am drawing on older philosophical conceptions of 'enthusiasm' that derive from Immanuel Kant's work, where enthusiasm was defined in terms of an impasse in experience as both a failure of imagination and the movement by which the power of imagination was increased to overcome it (Lyotard, 1988: 165-166; Kant, 2000). I don't follow Kant's transcendental philosophy (that would also position this failure as a function of the 'categories'), but the linking of enthusiasm with the power of imagination is very useful to explain critically many of the practices of enthusiasts in modified-car culture and of others

engaged in similar practices of "serious leisure" beyond the banal excitement or pleasure that may be derived from practices (Hoggett & Bishop, 1986; Stebbins, 1992, 2001, 2007; Jackson, 2006, Watson & Shove, 2008). Enthusiasts of all stripes are affectively mobilised to overcome challenges presented by whatever object or practice with which they engage. The production of practice-based socio-technical skill, combined with experience-based knowledge or "know-how" (Certeau, 1984), is an outcome of an enthusiast mobilising satisfactorily to overcome a challenge.

Briefly defining 'enthusiasm' is important in this context to understand the way that I am discussing "enthusiast discourse" compared to other forms of discourse, and other ways of critically engaging with the concept of discourse. Enthusiast discourse has an affective dimension that is not necessarily present in other forms. For example, a key difference is Michel Foucault's use of 'discourse' as a conceptual tool to understand the historical context of "discourse events" where the distribution of 'statements' (enonce) defines the field of what is 'sayable' in the context of authority, rationality and 'truth', and which can be mapped onto compositions (dispositif) of power relations (Foucault, 1972, 1991; Deleuze, 1988). Foucault's (1997) Kantian heritage includes a focus on the limits of rationality, and indicates a central difference in the way that I am discussing "enthusiast discourses" compared to the way that Foucault was concerned with "rationalist discourses". My focus is "enthusiast discourse", which means that the discursive limits of truth are not as important as the ways in which enthusiasts are mobilised in specific ways according to the affective dimension of discourse.

Second, beyond the performance technology as an object, 'performance' is a valorising movement across the technological object, and discourses of performance are enacted in practice, and immanent to the action itself. Robert Post captures a sense of this ambiguity of 'performance' as one of the central themes of his engaging history of drag racing:

All of drag racing is saturated in the language of mechanical technology, naturally, but scarcely more so than with the imagery of the theatre. The race cars come out in pairs, then stage and prepare to perform. The very word performance has a delicious ambiguity, and I have taken that ambiguity as one of my themes. Some conceive of performance in the context of engineering; for others the crucial referent is entertainment (2001: xviii).

An obvious commonality between all the different dimensions of modified-car culture is an investment in a related technological object, but only enthusiasts will have an enduring mobilisation that characterises their participation in the culture as compared to other non-enthusiast participants. A further complication emerges when vehicles are modified for the aesthetic or cultural 'performance' of technology and not necessarily for technological effectiveness. Enthusiasts draw on a discourse of authenticity when describing 'real' enthusiasts who are concerned with specific tests of effectiveness and socio-technological performance, as compared to 'fake' enthusiasts who are only concerned with the aesthetics of performance. Both of these positions may involve challenges that are sufficient to inspire enthusiasm and mobilise enthusiast bodies (the challenge of socio-technical performance versus the challenge of performance 'aesthetics'), and the difference between them is a question of cultural politics that belongs to the subcultures that constitute modified-car culture.

The primary discourses of modified-car culture are premised on an economy of signs that can be 'read' by members of the enthusiast community. The slippage across cultural and technological performance of technologies means that 'performance' cannot be understood only along semiotic or technical lines. For example, within some communities of enthusiasts the modifications carried out to cars are functional or 'effective' only if they successfully communicate and conform to the highly stylised aesthetic forms of what Goldberg (1969) called the "competition aesthetic". Through the modification of the aesthetic form of a car and its use in particular ritualised practices, performance occurs in a cultural or theatrical sense. Therefore these two dimensions – practice and discourse – are necessarily integrated according to the affects of enthusiast valorisations. If an enthusiast does not share an enthusiasm with another participant, no matter what the actual technological performance of a modified vehicle, the technology will not be valorised within enthusiast discourse. That is, the integration of the cultural performance of technology and the aesthetics of technical design are valued according to the character of enthusiasm shared by members of the different communities of interest that constitute modified-car culture. Depending on the level of involvement, the level of 'know-how' and the interests of enthusiasts in a general sense, different socio-technical performances will be valorised in different ways.

Moral panics and the V8 engine in Australia

"V8's 'til '98" campaign is couched in a specific discourse of technological performance that developed through the 1960s and 1970s regarding the V8 engine, which has been and continues to be a key technology in the most popular currents of enthusiasm within modified-car culture in Australia. The ongoing cultural importance of such V8-powered vehicles is evident from the popularity of the ABC's *Wide Open Road* documentary television series on Australian automobility (Clarke, 2011). An enthusiast history of the V8 in mass-produced vehicles is largely derived from trends emerging from the United States and begins with the Ford Flathead V8 released as an option for the 1932 Ford, which is known in enthusiast circles as the "Deuce Coupe". It was used as a key technology in the early practices of modified-car culture, salt lake racing and later drag racing (Balsey, 1950; Moorhouse, 1991). In later years new engine technologies were introduced and embraced by enthusiasts in different ritualised practices. For example, the Dodge 'Hemi' V8 engine has such enduring popularity in drag racing circles that it is possible to purchase and build a 'new' Hemi entirely from custom parts produced by aftermarket suppliers.

Unlike the Ford 'Cleveland' or 'Windsor' V8 engines sold by Ford Australia in locally manufactured vehicles that were basically copies of North American V8 engines, the Holden V8 was designed and built in Australia (albeit largely based on its precursor and contemporary, the GM Chevrolet V8). Introduced to the market in the 1969 model year, car buyers could choose a 253 cubic inch (4.2 litre) or a 308 cubic inch (5.0 litre) version (Antoniou, 2003). For example, as a number of advertisements in the early to mid-1980s issues of *Wheels* and *Street Machine* magazines indicate, the Holden V8 engines were promoted as "race proven V8 power-houses [...] designed like no other Australian engine to take big towing loads, long roads and passing

manoeuvres in their stride" (Holden, 1984: 17). The Holden V8's racing prowess was tested in the mid-1970s in a Holden Torana L34 race car at the annual 'Mecca' of Australian racing culture at the Mount Panorama, Bathurst 'street circuit'. Iconic race car driver, Peter Brock, and his co-driver, Brian Sampson, won the race in 1975. Beyond familiar enthusiast platitudes that invoke a technology's manufacturing or racing 'heritage' however, a genealogy of 'performance' belonging to any enthusiast car culture in Australia must pass through an event of the 1970s known as the 'supercar scare'. It has had a lasting impact on the mythopoeia of enthusiast car cultures because the large V8-powered saloons and "muscle cars" of that era (such as the Holden Torana or Holden Monaro powered by the Holden V8) are romanticised as 'real' cars, and influence the Anglo-Australian, V8-based enthusiasms to this day.

In 1972, the tabloid *Sun Herald* published a seed story that triggered an eight-day long moral panic about 'supercars' manufactured by Australia's three major automotive manufacturers at the time, which were described as "bullets on wheels". The 'supercars' were built to comply with the motor racing regulations of the Hardie Ferodo 500 motor race at Bathurst. The regulations of the "Series Production" motorsport class at the time required a certain number of homologated race-specification vehicles marketed to the public built to the exact same standard as the race vehicles. The model names of these cars – Ford Falcon GTHO, Holden Monaro GTS, and Chrysler E55 Charger – strongly resonate throughout contemporary enthusiast car culture in Australia. An issue of the *Australian Muscle Car* magazine from the early 2000s republished all of the key articles of the moral panic with some limited commentary. What is evident from these documents is that, rather than simply being a story about 'supercars', the moral panic triggered changes to the social and technical safety discourse within the automotive industry. The commentary in *Australian Muscle Car* magazine frames the moral-panic event thus:

To provide a well rounded story, Green had sought the opinion of NSW Transport Minister, Milton Morris, about the new Bathurst 'supercars'. Morris, who was reeling from some pretty horrific road death statistics in NSW, felt he already had enough blood on his hands. Don't forget, in those days wearing seat belts still wasn't compulsory and cross-ply tyres were only just being superseded by radials.

There were no speed cameras, no open road speed limits and drink driving was still considered to be a worthy test of your manhood. Australian Design Rules (ADRs) and local development of active/passive vehicle safety features were also in their infancy, so there were no side-intrusion beams and crumple zones, no ABS, no SRS airbags, no active stability control or electronic traction control which we take for granted today. Morris was not inclined to talk positively about anything that could be seen to promote excessive speed on 'his' roads. Like all politicians, he needed to show the public that he was doing something – anything – to try to curb the carnage and in Evan Green's story, he found it. His 'horrified' response to news of the latest "bullets on wheels" provided plenty of juicy quotes for the *Sun Herald's* editor, on what was otherwise a pretty slow news day (Oastler, 2003: 18-19).

The "supercar scare" moral panic was formative in the history of not only modified-car culture, but Australian car culture in general. It was an event whereby a certain type of automotive technology was discursively posed as socially unacceptable. As in all moral panics (Thompson, 1998; Cohen, 2002; Fuller, 2007) there was a folk devil figure, the factory built high-performance V8-powered saloon that represented broader social anxieties – the appalling state of Australian road safety at the time. The "supercar scare" is an important historical development in enthusiast car culture; it is now used as a discursive resource in contemporary enthusiast discourses that valorise 1970s and 1980s V8-engined high-performance vehicles. The factory-built, race-based vehicles of the era that ended with the "supercar scare" are now highly valued amongst mostly older enthusiasts, with auction prices in the order of hundreds of thousands of dollars. A small, yet dedicated industry has emerged organised around the restoration and maintenance of these prized vehicles. The vehicles are romanticised as representing an era when the automotive market was not constrained by governmental intervention into various aspects of automotive design.

In the context of the "supercar scare" moral panic's media discourse, the complex networks of causality are predictably reduced to a singular causal agent, but what is interesting here is that the agent is a technological object. The factory-built race cars sold to the public were a folk devil figure because they were represented as transgressing the social threshold of automotive performance. That is, the so-called 'supercars' were sold with the expectation that they would be driven on the street and not necessarily on the racetrack, and therefore the "tests of effectiveness" for these road-going race cars would potentially exist in the space of the street with its prevailing fraught safety record. Although at the time the road safety record was atrocious relative to today's standards, there was no evidence that such cars constituted more risk than others.

The "V8's 'till '98" media campaign of 1984 is in some ways similar to the "supercar scare" moral panic event, but directed towards 'positive' outcomes (from the perspective of the enthusiasm) in that it valorised one assemblage of technologies ('Aussie', masculine) over others. It was another moral panic, this time structured around the possible absence of a particular kind of automotive technology and resultant capacity of Australian road users to form particular Australian car-driver hybrid subjects. The 'car-driver' hybrid is a concept that has been developed to account for the ways in which road user subjects appreciate the technical change in their social relations with other road users when in control of a vehicle (Lupton, 1999; Chavoya, 2004; Sheller, 2004). In the example of the 1970s "supercar scare" moral panic, the 'supercars' were presented as unacceptable because they enabled the production of 'car-driver' hybrids that had the potential to transform the space of the street into the space of a racetrack.

Beyond the immediate phenomenological space of the street and the shift in capacities signaled by the assemblage of 'car-driver' hybrid, Mimi Sheller argues that drivers relate to their cars on three emotional and affective 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 (Sheller, 2004: 234).

There is a transversal circulation of affect across these scales so, for example, the 'national' or the 'familial' can be affectively experienced at the level of the individual body while in a car on the road. Referencing the work of Tim Edensor, Sheller suggests that "

the assemblage of distinctive national cultures of automobility 'produces distinctive ways of sensually apprehending cars and car travel [because] people inhabit, and are institutionally emplaced in, particular webs of affective and sensual experience' (2004: 234).

Having established some of the discursive terrain of automotive performance in the specific context I am interested in for this article, I want to locate the context of the anxiety of the "V8s 'til '98" campaign in the national-scale reconfigurations of power relations triggered by the process of globalisation and, more specifically, the anxiety over the possible disappearance of the V8 as an anxiety regarding the shifting character of Australian automobility.

"V8's 'til '98"

The campaign to save the locally-produced Holden V8 engine largely contradicted the dominant globalising 'economic rationalist' trend as it was organised around 'saving' an out-of-date 1960s technology only sold in the very small Australian market and even then in limited quantities. Ford stopped producing the so-called 'Cleveland' V8 at their Wollongong plant in 1982 due to environmental and fuel consumption worries. The Holden V8 was partially under threat because of the phasing out of leaded petrol, which would require the engine to be expensively re-engineered (Scott, 1984). As Geoff Paradise (1984) noted in the pages of *Street Machine* magazine, the logic of keeping the V8 was understood as a "pay-off" for the cancellation of the 'ancient' Holden 'Straight 6' motor (originally developed in the 1950s) and its replacement by a 'modern' Nissan-sourced Japanese-manufactured motor.

As part of the Hawke government's 'economic rationalist' tendencies (comparable to US neoliberalism), Senator John Button, Minister for Industry, Technology and Commerce, introduced a plan, based on that of the previous Liberal Government, to reduce "iron lung" protectionist tariffs on automotive imports. The so-called "Button Plan" was unveiled in 1984 to the public as government policy after a year of discussion with the automotive industry, and it continued in effect for the next decade (Sampson & Woodbridge, 1984; Ravenhill, 1997: 234). In his history of automotive parts manufacturers, Beruldsen notes that the details of the Button Plan aimed to "abolish local content plans and import quotas including penalty duties, and assist the car-making industry by simple tariff with a rate of 57.5 percent from 1992" (1989: 209). Beruldsen further explains that the government hoped that "its objective for the industry to cut down to three car makers and six models or less by 1992 [would] be achieved by natural market forces and voluntary agreements between the five car makers" (1989: 209). It eventually did force the once-protected local industry to 'rationalise' itself and become globally competitive.

Although the Button Plan marks the first wave of contemporary globalisation in Australia, there is also a need to recognise the gradual reduction in tariffs for the automotive industry from the mid-1970s that heralds these much greater shifts in the mid-1980s (Beruldsen, 1989). The earlier tariff-based industry protection was often covered in reports in the popular motoring press. For example, Steve Cropley, editor of the 'Newsbreaks' section of *Wheels* magazine, reported in January 1976:

[The] latest Industries Assistance Commission [IAC] submission to the Australian Government recommends that sales of imported passenger cars be restricted to the present 20 percent of total until the end of 1976 which means the present system of quotas remains. It also recommends that the present 45 percent tariff on imported cars be maintained until the end of 1977, when it foresees a drop to 35 percent. The report says quotas on imported light commercials should be dropped. The only slight piece of encouragement for lovers of imported cars and those alarmed by the speed of car price increases is that the IAC report stresses the very high cost of the present car plan to consumers and says the cost should be maintained only if it leads to a re-structuring of the motor industry to make local products more competitive with imports (Cropley 1976: 4).

It is not only global movements that have an impact on a local level, but also local movements on a global level, including the coverage of General Motors to "[swing] into producing 'world cars' with a vengeance." Cropley's (1976: 4) short news article ends with the provocation: "Imagine - your Holden after next could be a European ...".

The signifier 'European' has a distinct meaning in the popular discourses of the Australian automotive market as a colonial and post-colonial nation. It is one differentiation from the first tier nation-Other distinction of 'overseas' which includes anywhere beyond Australia and New Zealand. 'European', 'Asian' and 'American' capture the three main qualifiers of region when it comes to automotive manufacturing in the mid-1970s through to the mid-1980s. 'European' refers to a certain kind of sophistication that may be expressed in a number of different ways. It is not until much later that permanent further differentiations occur, such as 'Asian' splits into 'Korean' and 'Japanese' (with 'Chinese' currently emerging); however, Europe had already split into 'English', 'German', 'Italian', and 'Swedish'. 'American' has not really changed, although 'South American' has emerged as a separate region on a similar discursive tier to 'Chinese'. These differentiations of region capture not only a region on a geographically stratified map of the world, but particular stratifications in the discursive articulations of national and regional cultures, automotive engineering, and automotive style. For example, 'German' involves sophisticated performance and overall engineering, while 'Swedish' is sophisticated safety engineering, and so on. 'Australian' has almost emerged on the global level as a region with the export of the Holden Monaro as the Pontiac GTO in 2004-2006 (Fuller, 2005).

These industry machinations locate the decision regarding the V8 in the context of the globalising Button Plan automotive industry and there is a distributed causality in effect here that must include other local and global events. As such, the "V8's 'til '98" campaign is one of the first Australian mass anti-globalisation movements and, considering the composition of the interests at stake, is somewhat bizarre. Various media outlets "got behind" the movement, including newspapers, radio and

magazines. Approximately 15,000 people participated in a letter writing campaign to Holden. On the one hand, the event captures how material conditions of the automotive industry were transformed during these initial processes of globalisation, while on the other hand the event captures how a given market can be consolidated around a particular relation of enthusiasm.

The historical link between national identity and a country's automotive industry is also reflected in the era of globalisation in relation to transformations to the Australian automotive market. Australians were exposed to what is called 'badge engineering': the same basic car is sold by two separate manufacturers using different model names (or 'badges'). While this practice had begun much earlier than the Button Plan, it accelerated this tendency. For example, the 1983 Wheels Car of the Year (COTY), commonly regarded as the most prestigious award of its type in Australia, was given to both the Ford Telstar and Mazda 626. The Telstar and 626 were based on the Mazda platform and powered by Ford motors, an agreement that benefited both manufacturers as they could then meet local content rules (Robinson, 1984). By the mid-1990s, manufacturers found that it was cheaper to import fully-built vehicles from overseas, which radically changed the composition of the market again. The Button Plan also triggered some investment into Australia as the site for the production of 'global' vehicles or parts. The automotive industry is still adjusting today, except that now it is feeling the ultimate after-effects of globalisation with the threat of closure of many of the component part manufacturers. All of these industry and national-scale dynamics filtered through to a general anxiety about the everyday experience of automobility – how would the transformations to the Australian automotive industry affect the experience of being in a car on the road for the 'average' Australian driver?

To provide a case study of these kinds of anxieties, I'll draw on the example of the 'Brian Plankman' columns in *Street Machine* magazine. These 'Plankman' columns exhibited a performative reactionary 'Aussie' ethnocentricity regarding 'foreign' built vehicles and were written in a flagrantly racist style. During the process of my research, I've gathered that 'Brian Plankman' was a *nom de plume* (with the author's identity remaining a secret) and his columns were satirical in nature (Paradise, 2006, interview). Like all good satire, however, it only works if it contains an element of truth. Below is a large extract from one of Plankman's columns, where he publishes what is supposedly an open letter to the Managing Director of GMH, Chuck Chapman, during the "V8s 'til '98" campaign. The affective timbre of the 'Aussie' or 'Ocker' (Harris, 1974; Wark, 1999: 166-167) mode of expression is hopefully maintained from the original in the extract that has been edited only to retain those elements relating to the "V8's 'til '98" campaign:

It's come to me attention that youse blokes are gunna kill orf your small block, the 308. Now mate, you've already made one big blue when you dropped the 186, so fer Chrissakes don't make another one with the small block. Now I know a V8 is never-ever gunna be as good as a lumpy 186, but that 308 of yours is not a bad unit. [...] Of course, you mightn't realise it Chuck, but this is all part of a Nip plot. You see the Slopes haven't got a decent motor between 'em, so they've got their sneaky little heads together and come up with a plan to destroy the competition. Ford, the silly buggers, fell for it hook line and sinker - but what more could you expect from a mob that builds Jap cars and calls 'em Australian names [i.e. the Telstar/626 vehicle]? That just leaves you blokes for the Nips to roll. Once they've done that, what's left for the Street Machiners of tomorrow? What sort of motors are gunna power the [Holden] Belmonts of the future that me three boys, Kev, Trev and Brian Jnr., will one day buy and build? [...]

Chuck, take a tip from yer old mate Brian. You blokes owe a debt to society. Don't be conned by this Nip plot. [...] If you'd been at The Nats in Canberra you'd a seen blokes crying at the news of what you're about to do. Anyway, don't give in to the Slopes old mate. Bore it up 'em. [...] Otherwise the kids of tomorrow are going to believe that two-litres is a bloody "Big Block." And if that happens, the Japs would've won, wouldn't they? (Plankman 1984: 16)

The language and use of particular phrases clearly works to capture the affective textuality of iconic (racist) Australianism: 'youse', 'gunna', 'orf', 'fer Chrissakes', 'mob that builds Jap', 'Nips', 'yer old mate', 'You blokes', 'conned by this Nip plot', 'Slopes', 'old mate', and 'Japs would've won'.

The 'Plankman' column was dropped by Paradise but brought back by Phil Scott in the first issue that he took over as editor. In this issue Plankman laments GM Holden dropping the WB utility models (again, the original expression is retained):

I hears a news broadcast on the bloke next door's radio: [...]

"Mr Chapman said rationalisation of company production facilities had prompted the move and that Japanese built Isuzu commercial vehicles would be sourced to fill the gap left by the demise of the WB Series ..."

Readers, I know real blokes don't cry, but your old mate Brian went bloody close. [...]

The blokes at Holden had done it. After all me good advice, they'd been suckerpunched [sic] by the little blokes from Up North into giving away the best vehicle in the world. First the redmotor gets the chop, now the mighty WB Kingy ute.

Readers, if there'd been a sharp knife handy I'd have considered slitting me wrists. [...]

It's all over readers - 34 years of loyal service and a classic collection of great vehicles. What are the Street Machiners of tomorrow going to drive, eh? Nip utes with backfire four motors? Not bloody likely! (Plankman 1985: 16)

It is clear that the Australian affectations in the textual tone of the writing continues, as does the explicitly ethnocentric and racist comments regarding being "suckerpunched [sic] by the little blokes from Up North" and "Nip utes". The affects of nationalism are combined with anxieties regarding automotive technologies and the cultural effect of foreign, mostly 'Asian',

cultural practices articulated through different automotive technologies. These cultural practices are represented as 'sinister', involving a 'plot' that at its most hyperbolic is a conspiratorial extension of World War II. Each affective inflection effects a translation of the language from discursive 'neutrality' of technical discourses of automotive engineering and design to the performative masculine parochialism and nationalism of Plankman's ideal reader.

Throughout the first extract above, the use of 'mate' every time Chuck Chapman is addressed is an attempt to invoke the almost sacred bond of 'mateship' that so perturbed Max Harris in his discussion of the 'Ocker' figure that was popular in 1970s Australian cinema (O'Regan, 1985). Harris attempted to diagnose why the figure of the 'Ocker' had become popular at that time and argued that it was due to the Australian culture of 'mateship':

Mateship is about ignoble a philosophic notion as could be thought up in the mind of half-developed man. It is a social imperative which calls for blind aggressive loyalty to your tribal group, whether they be made up of criminals, thugs, or theologians. If the idea is extended to a larger grouping, it leads to the witless self-deluding nationalism affected by countries of provincial insignificance. [...]

[The] power manipulators do not seek out an efficient infrastructure based on an impartial pursuit of merit and capacity; but rather that power is used on the old courtly, or modern mateship tradition, of casually capricious patronage. It is not necessarily buddy-buddy motivation viewed as preferable to the meritocratic abstract system applied by the impersonal business corporations that put efficiency first (1974: 22, 25).

The 'Plankman' columns work hard to implicate Chapman as one of 'Us', as one of the Australian nationalists concerned about the composition of the automotive market. The anxieties expressed in the 'Plankman' columns regarding changes to the Australian automotive market are congruent with understandings of Australia's white racism as being described as 'defensive' rather than 'aggressive' (Chen, 1998: 34; see also Papastergiadis, 2004). This 'defensive' white racism culminated with the ethnocentric and reactionary Pauline Hanson phenomenon (Stratton, 1998). Although there is a long history of white racism in Australia, the context of the expression of anxieties in this episode needs to be understood in the shifting social and political dynamics of the process of globalisation in Australia.

Meaghan Morris argued that the 1980s-1990s Hawke Labor, and later Keating Labor, governments in Australia framed the economic rationalist policies in terms of an economic project ("The Accord") shared between the populace, business and government as a kind of paternalistic Australian "neocorporatism" articulated as Australia as One Big Union (1992: 66). Morris frames the introduction and implementation of the Labor government's economic rationalist policies as a way of preparing the Australian labour movement for darker days ahead:

Neocorporatism – with its emphasis on bargaining, consensus and a training of constituents (using radio and television) in the meta-discourses legitimating the "hard decisions" which affect them – does differ in crucial respects from neoconservatism. The Accord renegotiated six times with the union movement was an anathema to "true" rationalists, aiming as it did not only to secure stability for the government in the present, but to strengthen the labour movement against the day when "real" neoconservatives came to power (1992: 66).

Harris isolated the beginning of this trend in his analysis of the 'Ocker' where economic efficiencies were secondary, or were at least articulated as part of, the social bonds of 'mateship'. This isn't necessarily about reproducing a masculine and nationalist hegemony within Australia; rather, 'mateship' describes a tactical strategy (with built-in privileges and discriminations) designed to cope with extraneous changes to broader social relations. The satirical use of the 'Ocker' mateship discourse by 'Plankman' is designed to be self-referentially humorous, while at the same time invoking an intimacy between the *Street Machine* magazine reader and those that have the power to determine the material conditions of the readers' collective enthusiasm (Chuck Chapman, or Holden executives in general). The satire of the column serves as an ironic foil that at once distances readers from their enthusiasm (involving V8 engines) and from the implied intimacy of the mateship discourse. In doing so, there is no transgression of masculine cultural values (dispassion, resoluteness in the face of adversity, and so on), while at the same time valorising the Holden V8 as necessary for the future of the enthusiasm.

There is a defence against an imagined 'Asian' 'other' for the purposes of producing a white Australian 'us', but also the social and material reality of Australian automobility, the experience of which is partially determined by the affordances of automotive technologies. The point I am making is a tricky one, as I do not want to come across as somehow supporting this reactionary racism. Similar to the way that technological 'performance' slips across technological and cultural registers, the experience of automobility needs to be understood as the expression of technological and cultural relations. It would be too easy to write off this white racism as 'identity politics' without properly appreciating the experiential basis of the anxiety that fuels the racism. To frame it another way, the 'Plankman' columns expressed an anxiety that the experience of Australian automobility was radically shifting due to globalisation, and the core point to isolate is that the panic around the V8 engine was a defence of a particularly Australian experience of automobility.

Banal nationalism and automobility

There are several ways to think about the relation between the 'national' and automobility. Often the 'national' is described as a function of identity, both collective and individual. At moments of crisis, such as war or civil unrest, the 'national' is articulated in such a way as to produce a functional social cohesiveness. It normally draws on discourses of the 'nation' circulated through an economy of signs and symbols that most members of a nation would instantly recognise. Much attention has been paid to understanding the power relations involved in this process and how the 'imagined community' of the nation is (re)produced. The process of producing the 'national' does not only occur at moments of crisis or in better times during rituals of celebration and purification (such as national days or remembrance days) that sanctify the national imaginary through

particular signs and symbols. Often this happens by excluding other signs and symbols or 'purifying' the representative frame through which the elements that constitute the 'national' are valorised and the 'imaginary' sanctified. The way in which the national is articulated as part of everyday life is, however, not necessarily part of a crisis or celebration. Michael Billig's (1995) concept of "banal nationalism" is useful for understanding how the 'national' is articulated through the practices of everyday life. Billig argues that along with the more spectacular expression of national identity at specific times and places, nationalism is reinforced through a multitude of small and subtle ways that are so commonplace as to be otherwise unremarkable. When introducing the concept, he remarks that "banal nationalism is not a flag which is being consciously waved with fervent passion; it is the flag hanging unnoticed on the public building" (1995: 8).

The "V8's 'til '98" campaign is an expression of anxiety amongst automotive enthusiasts born of the possible withdrawing of the automotive technology of the V8 engine from the consumer market. But why does this anxiety emerge? And why is the anxiety expressed in the 'Plankman' columns in such racist and reactionary ways? As I have shown, anxieties around the possible discontinuation of the V8 were expressed in the enthusiast media in terms of an influx of foreign-designed and foreign-manufactured automotive technologies. 'Asian' automotive technologies were explicitly identified as a threat and their introduction into the Australian market as a conspiracy that belongs to what Morris has called a "phobic narrative":

Widely used today in the media to frame economic and political debates about Australia's future, phobic narrative constitutes space in a stifling alternation of agoraphobia (fear of 'opening up' the nation to an immensely powerful Other, typically 'the global economy') with claustrophobia (fear of being shut away from a wider, more dynamic, typically 'Asian-Pacific' world): pressure accumulates in this way on the figure of the border between forces pushing in and forces pushing out. [...] The driving force of phobic narrative is then a preemptive desire for avoidance: how to avoid invasion at one pole while avoiding isolation at the other; how to avoid stagnation while avoiding revolution and disruption (1998: 222).

In her essay, Morris reads the *Mad Max* film trilogy as an allegorical retelling of the Australian colonial myth, moving "from a loss of family [Mad Max] to a nomad/settler conflict (*Mad Max 2*), and the making of a new society partly based (in *Beyond Thunderdome*) on convict labour, the Max trilogy revised the dreams and nightmares of white settler mythology" (1998: 217). Morris argues that the films mediate back and forth across the two "poles of avoidance" in its phobic narrative of white settler mythology of an Australian landscape defined by a sublime 'nothingness' combined with a diffuse post-apocalyptic catastrophe that is repeated in different ways as it is encountered by the spectator through Max's experiences (1998: 217-220).

Street Machine magazine readers voted Mad Max as their favourite film of all time (Fuller, 2003). To put it bluntly, the popularity of Mad Max amongst enthusiasts is not because of an allegorical relation to Australia's white settler mythology, but because of Max's vehicle, which is described in the movie as 'the last of the V8 Interceptors'. Morris's use of the sublime to capture a sense of the "white panic" experienced in situations described in phobic narratives is also useful for an enthusiast reading of *Mad Max*. The scene where Max is first introduced to the vehicle is an example of the "technological sublime" (Slack and Wise, 2005). Morris describes "white panic" not as a racial category, but as the experience of a panic so intense that it impinges on perception (like a kind of "white out"). Similarly, enthusiasts experience the introduction of the 'last of the V8 Interceptors' with an intensity that non-enthusiasts do not. Actually, being able to appreciate (in positive or negative ways) why the "last of the V8 Interceptors" circulates within enthusiast discourse as sublime is a good indicator of whether or not an enthusiast has sufficiently embodied and habitualised the social practices that characterise enthusiasm in Australian modified-car culture.

As I have already noted, many of the practices in modified-car culture involve the ritualised display of vehicles. An enthusiast 'reads' the car according to its performance attributes in that tricky sense of slipping across cultural and technological registers. In the scene from Mad Max when Max first 'meets' his vehicle, the police mechanic offers a running narrative documenting the technological prowess of the vehicle. Factory-built "police specials" have long been a fascination within modified-car culture. For example, the original 1960s XR GT Falcon (one of the basic models 'banned' due to the "supercar scare") was derived from the "police special" of the same model. Parallel to other films that explore similar existential terrain (for example *Two-Lane Blacktop* (1971) or *Vanishing Point* (1971)), the attraction for enthusiasts is not only Max plus the "last V8 Interceptor" as a car-driver hybrid; it is Max plus the "last V8 Interceptor" plus the automobilised time-space produced by the car-driver hybrid and attendant system of automobility.

John Urry (2000, 2004) has suggested that the automobile is such a pervasive technology that societies have become 'automobilised', and time and space are distributed according to the rhythms of the system of automobility. Members are subjectivised very early in their lives through governmental discourses that attempt to produce 'safe' road user subjects (Packer, 2003). For example, everyone within an automobilised society must learn how to cross the road. This is a particular competence that is designed to enable subjects properly to identify the dangers and associated risks of directly participating in the system of automobility. One consequence of this development (that the road safety industry has never come to terms with) is that the space of the road is therefore 'potentialised' in different ways depending on what Lawrence Grossberg (1992, 1997) calls "mattering maps" of the subjectivised individuals. The aim of governmental discourse is to produce anxiety that functions as self-surveillance for not only being aware of the dangers, but the primary risk of a subject developing a dangerously blasé attitude towards the risks. Different societies produce different systems of automobility (Urry 2000; O'Dell 2001; Urry 2004). The cultural dimension of the system of automobility coupled with its banal everyday intimacy means that, when a subject of one system of automobility is transported into another, they can experience the radical shock of a different way of existing (within the system of automobility).

The "V8's 'til '98" media-led consumer campaign functioned as a moral panic about whether or not automobilised Australian subjects would be able to perform a particular Australian (and masculine) form of processual production of, and engagement with, automobilised time-space. A properly processual conception of the subject is essential for appreciating the capacities for

action afforded by linkages with socio-technical assemblages (Massumi, 2011: 146). At stake was not so much the technology in itself or as a signifier of a particular identity, but the capacity of the technology to function as part of particular Australian socio-technical assemblage within the system of automobility. This socio-technical assemblage is of a particular automobilised subject of the masculine Australian driver combined with a particular automobile technology of a car powered by the "high-performance" large capacity V8 engine that is used to perform upon (or, better, process) the particular space of the Australian road. The anxiety around the V8 was mobilised to defend the way that automobilised Australian subjects could exist within the dynamic system of flows and spaces of the Australian system of automobility. As in the 'Plankman' columns, other automotive technologies were dismissed in the enthusiast media on the grounds that they cannot 'hack' the 'tough' Australian conditions, and thus were obviously not 'Australian'.

Conclusion

One important question hangs over this entire episode regarding the nature of the "V8s 'til '98" campaign, and whether the entire event could merely have been a public relations exercise in manufacturing support for the V8 before the new model Holden Commodore was released. One rumour that supports such a view is that money for the bumper stickers, which played a crucial role in the campaign's public visibility came from a Holden PR department. Plus, it is no secret that the idea was hatched at a car launch by all those who would strongly profit (and, indeed, would suffer otherwise) from a decision by Holden to maintain production of the V8. That is, perhaps it was an attempt to cultivate and exploit an enthusiasm for V8-enabled automobility by capturing the enthusiasm and patriotic sentiment of consumers. Regardless, if Holden had not kept producing the V8 until 1999, Ford would not have been pressured to reintroduce the V8 in the early 1990s and there would be no HSV Commodores and GT Falcons currently on Australian roads and in Australian enthusiast magazines. Part of the mythopoeia of Australia's masculine V8 car culture would have been radically different.

When Phil Scott took over the editorship of *Street Machine* magazine in 1985, turbochargers and other non-masculine, non-Australian/US-based automotive technologies were literally expunged from its pages. The kind of readership imagined by Scott and others at *Street Machine* magazine could be produced by articulating performance in such a way. This early period of *Street Machine* magazine is relevant for understanding the congruence of the affective dimension of automotive technology and cultural meaning in discourse. By selecting and pursuing a line of editorial content across the entire magazine that focused on V8-powered cars, *Street Machine* magazine tapped into an enthusiasm characterised by the challenge of defending an Australian nationalism experienced through the system of automobility. The banal nationalism experienced on the road as part of the system of automobility is not only produced through explicit signifiers of nationhood, but in the way that the experience itself is produced as a processual relation by the socio-technical assemblage of (nominally) car, driver and road. The V8 is not simply a signifier of identity; it is also part of a processual socio-technical assemblage valorised by enthusiasts of Australian modified-car culture. The anxiety over the possible disappearance of the V8 is over whether or not an Australian road user subject will be able to draw on the capacities of the V8 to inhabit the system of automobility in culturally specific ways. To invert the focus of Morris's (1998) analysis of the automobilised drama of *Mad Max* on the masculine violence of 'contact' as a metonymic event of colonisation and the occupation of 'the road' as an existential horizon of national phobia, the event produced is of a kind of mastery of "the road" through the magnification of power afforded by the V8 engine. This event still demands a masculine violence, but one of domination and competition articulated through a mastery of the flows of time and space within the system of automobility.

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