

absence of motion

stillness in cars

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abstract

Absence of Motion is a critique of the conceptual space of the automobile in our culture and the actual space that it occupies physically. The project is an investigation into the contradiction embedded in our relationship to automobility, motion vs. stillness. By abstracting the automobile physically and removing the context of motion, we are able to question the beliefs that underlie car culture. The video installation proposes an alternative point of view from which to view cars in our society. That leads to an opportunity to significantly redirect the public's vision of what cars are and therefore allow people to see and feel other possibilities.

The rationale behind *Absence of Motion* emerges from an exploration into our relationship with the automobile that moves beyond issues of pollution and oil use to expose the creation and consumption of both the physical and cultural space that the car occupies. The work provides a very real sense of what that space means. This is achieved through an understanding of our history with the car, the methods used in advertisements that help to foster the idolatry of the car, and artists' work that reveals various alternative views of the car in society.

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Project Description - Absence of Motion

This project emerged from a larger investigation into the future of personal transportation. To consider a large and complex problem, like that of cars, requires a new methodology. The approach would use art (specifically media installation) to propose an alternative vision of automobiles in our society.

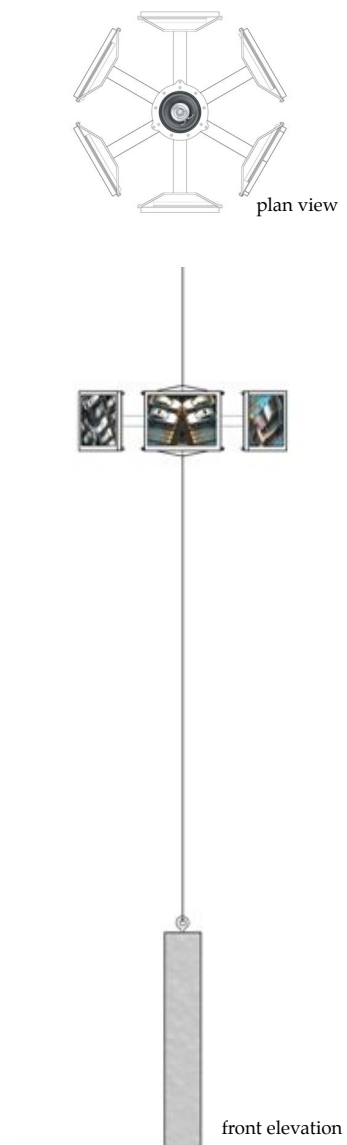
The installation was imagined as an enclosed space where the videos would be presented. The space would seat one person at a time. There would be five independent pieces showcasing particular examples of cars in moments of stillness. An example would be, cars sitting at stoplights or a road trip expressed only through those moments when the car is still. The objective of the installation was to provide a meditative space in which to consider stillness. Through research and design it became apparent that a different solution would more effectively present the absence of motion.

I spent considerable time sketching various ideas of ways to display the videos. As the installation became an object rather than a space, the number of videos was reduced to four. I visited both large and small scale video installations within the city. These included Gary Hill's work - *In As Much As It Is Always Already Taking Place* - that is installed at MOMA. In the piece Hill uses 16 channels and a wide variety of monitor sizes. It is an extremely successful use of multiple channels to convey both detailed information and larger patterns. The seamless nature of the videos, without a beginning or end, is also very successful.

In Hill's work the placement of the monitors is particularly important because of the way it engages the viewer. The monitors reside in an inset in the wall that is 42 inches from the ground. That requires the viewer, when close to the piece, to lean down to engage the work and allows one to focus upon the individual images. It changes the relationship of the screens to the viewer and is significantly different compared to standing back from the work to view the entire piece.

The design for my installation evolved into a radial layout with six screens fed by three DVD sources. This form engages people very differently than an enclosed space would have. To fully experience the piece the viewer must walk around it. Moving around the piece changes your relationship to the videos and calls attention to the stillness of the cars in contrast to your own motion. This experience creates a fresh look at our cultures relationship to automobility. It shows a reality of cars that we experience every day, automobiles as still objects, that is counter to the vision of cars as they are presented in the media.

The installation is called *Absence of Motion*. Two major components make up the work. A main unit holds the monitors and speakers and a concrete column provides a base for the work (see Appendix). The main unit is built of stainless steel elements that are laser cut and welded together. The six monitors attached with nylon screws to the main unit are 6.8" raw LCD panels from Marshall Electronics. The design and finish of the stainless steel component reflects that of car wheels. Aircraft cable is used to hang the main unit so that the center of the screens is 60" above the ground. A second cable connects the main unit to the concrete base below. The source feeds, for the LCD screens and the audio feed to the speakers, travel down the hanging



wire and enter the center hub of the main unit and are then distributed to the individual screens.

The design allows the viewer to engage each monitor individually to study the single image presented before them. At the same time the screens are arranged so a viewer can reflect upon the relationship between two or three of the images concurrently. The three source feeds are split between six monitors so the images repeat on opposite sides of the main unit. The viewer never sees the same



Absence of Motion - Screen 1 - 1 min 26 sec



Absence of Motion - Screen 2 - 1 min 26 sec



Absence of Motion - Screen 3 - 1 min 26 sec

source side by side. This also means that the pattern of source feeds changes as you move around the piece. The first pattern you might see would be sources 1,2,3. As you continue around the installation the pattern 2,3,1 and 3,1,2 would become apparent. This is a sliding triad. The changes are important because it keeps the experience fresh as you interact with the piece. The patterns change through the directionality of a particular image relative to the others. A viewer could also experience just two images which creates yet another varied relationship between the images.



Absence of Motion - Screen 1 - 26 sec



Absence of Motion - Screen 2 - 26 sec



Absence of Motion - Screen 3 - 26 sec

I shot five hours of video over the course of four months. The video shoots were in Los Angeles, Phoenix, and New York during a number of trips. I had a series of images in mind that were used as a starting off point. These included: images of a driver from inside the car while sitting in traffic and at a stop light, shots of parking structures with an emphasis upon the entrances and signage, images of

parking lots with parked cars, automobiles arriving at and leaving from stop lights and vehicles parked by the side of the road.

After logging all of the video, I was able to step back and understand which images were successful in portraying the absence of motion in cars. Many of the shots were interesting but would lead in alternate directions away from the core issues of the installation. For this project three types of shots worked; Images of a parking lot from an 8th floor window looking down at an angle, Shots of parked



Absence of Motion - Screen 1 - 44 sec



Absence of Motion - Screen 2 - 44 sec



Absence of Motion - Screen 3 - 44 sec

vehicles viewed from axle height looking perpendicular to the side of the car, Images shot from the passenger seat looking beyond the steering wheel out the windshield and drivers side window at clouds passing overhead.



Absence of Motion - Screen 1 - 1 min 07 sec



Absence of Motion - Screen 2 - 1 min 07 sec



Absence of Motion - Screen 3 - 1 min 07 sec

These images were expanded upon or re-shot where necessary to provide enough material for the final piece. During editing and critical discussions I found that the pictures could be manipulated in simple ways (flipping or mirroring the images) to eliminate the context of motion that normally occupies the automobile. The cars that are pointing at one another are in stasis. They cannot move independently. The vehicles represented in the parking lot are raised above ground on lifts. They are in a state of arrested motion. In some cases the image has been inverted to force the viewer to reconsider

what the form of the car means. The motion of the solitary cars that are upside down by the sidewalk has been stolen. They no longer exist within a recognized context for automobility. The goal was to strip the motion from the cars and contrast their stillness against the motion of the clouds overhead. The speed of the clouds was manipulated to focus upon the contrast with the motionless cars. The stillness that we perceive in clouds each day is replaced by an awareness of the absence of motion in cars.

“Most people treasure the enrichment that personal mobility brings to their lives . . . most are increasingly concerned about the problems caused by everyone else’s car ownership.” (Foresight)

Introduction - Where am I coming from?

Mobility is an essential part of human culture in this moment. We define and organize ourselves through the movements we make, the means by which they occur and the importance we place upon personal mobility. Automobiles occupy a unique place in our culture. They represent in a physical object the independence and freedom of a nation. They are symbols of openness and motion.

Today there is a contradiction between the advertised image of the car, represented as the ability to always go somewhere else and be someone else and the reality of the vehicle as a simple mode of transportation, one that has not fundamentally changed since its inception. It is important to understand the cultural implications of the automobile in our society and, equally, the physical impact of the automobile to our cities and country. The car is at once defined by freedom and individuality, yet increasingly, it carries a message of overcrowding, pollution, and frustration. That duality has begun to transform our understanding of what the car represents.

To solve the transportation problems that we face in this century we must separate the emotional attachment we have to cars from the utilitarian act of motion that they provide us day to day. By achieving this separation we can approach issues of urban and suburban transportation from a new perspective. Our car culture is now witnessing a transformation. Where once the car was a means to freedom, more and more it is the opposite. Freedom is discovered when one does not have to rely on the car and the burdens that it places upon the user.

In this project I have had the opportunity to look into America's relationship with the automobile. How did this bond come to be and why after so many years is it still strong? Rich Ceppos describes the unusual experience of driving a Bentley. "It unearths a queasy emotional mix of middle-class guilt, greed and questions about what's truly important in life. . . About being the object of envy and resentment. About feeling utterly preposterous pulling into a discount store parking lot . . . And all the while enjoying the experience of looking down on the rest of the world. Who would have thought that this gorgeous locomotive of a car would serve up all that?" (Ceppos 12) This leads to an understanding of the myths that surround the car and how they help us define a vision of ourselves. The ideas that characterize the automobile are a curious mix of historic ideals and hope within the populous and fabricated beliefs delivered to the culture through media.

This paper includes a number of car advertisements analyzed semiotically, in an effort to understand how they are constructed and why the same arguments consistently come up when discussing cars. They are ever present in the media's representation of automobility and include the themes of openness, freedom and individuality. The ads represent what we are up against when it comes to changing the image of automobiles and their place in our culture.

Work from a number of artists is considered as a counterpoint to the prevailing wisdom regarding cars. These are concepts that represent a thread of inquiry that grows outside the defined boundaries of transportation study. By abstracting the automobile physically and removing the context of motion, the artists are able to question the automobile as a vision for a country trying to define itself in an open landscape.

To understand the difference between what a car means and what a car is, we must look at the lack of motion that defines its existence. We live in a culture of movement, but our routines are often static. One need only track personal movements to understand just how limited our range is day to day. Perhaps it is a culture of perceived motion. This project uses the stillness of cars to explore the absence of motion

dichotomy between what vehicles are physically (stationary objects) and their psychological representation as motion objects in advertising.

This project proposes a different understanding of how the automobile fits into our culture. A video installation explores the car as a motionless object. The images used express the psychological difference between stillness and motion through the examination of various moments when the car is stationary in contrast with the movement of natural elements. The videos are an alternative to the way that cars are sold and imagined within society, as agents of freedom and independence.

My Relationship With Cars

“By trial and error, I found that the ideal speed in a Murcielago is not 100 mph, it’s 0 mph. Sitting at stoplights, I found myself thrust into a world of power, wealth and celebrity. There is no way to exaggerate the reaction. Pedestrians gave me the high-five, the okay sign and the two thumbs up. Workers unloading trucks stopped to stare, then called over their buddies. . .” (Grimes G6).

Grimes describes driving a Lamborghini through Manhattan. It sums up the reaction to the myths of the automobile. This vehicle represents something wonderful to the people who encountered it that day. I grew up dreaming of cars like these. My relationship with them was founded upon a love of machines of which the automobile is a marvelous example. These machines encompass a myriad of ideas brought together to express motion. In doing so they transcend their physical capabilities and become a container for dreams and fantasy. “Two-hundred-mile-an-hour super cars are manifestly useless and, yes, “illegal in all states.” But they may serve as a talisman of optimism even when parked, shiny and silent – inert symbols of an ardor for freedom more important to the national psyche than to real-world transportation” (Yates D10).

We have fabricated a national identity in the United States around the individual and free will. The car is the most visible symbol of that idea. Our economy is strongly influenced by them. Our lives both in and outside of cities is determined by their available use and the construction of their supporting structures. As a result we have radically altered our landscape to support them. The focus upon and subsidizing of cars has led to the oversimplification of city development. When the use of the city in one area is directed with this singular concept it tends to simplify the use of adjoining areas. This leads to a kind of unbuilding. A running down process is set in motion. Jane Jacobs believed that parking lots were “instruments of city destruction” that could “disembowel” a city. She states, “City character is blurred until every place becomes more like every other place, all adding up to No-place” (Jakle and Sculle 12). A space full of everything else contains a hollowness. The disconnection felt in these places without unique characteristics results in what Deleuze would call “any-space-whatevers” (Deleuze 15).

In *Cinema 2* Deleuze refers to the spaces in Ozu’s films as achieving this through “the false continuity of gaze, of direction and even of the position of objects” which are constant and systematic (Deleuze 16). The featureless cities that developed along the interstates throughout the U.S. share these same traits. The experience is always the same. A sign announces which restaurants are available at the current exit. The competing brands are close enough to each other to be in competition but separate enough to distinguish their brand logo and colors. The similarity from exit to exit leads to a continuity throughout the country. The sameness provides a safety net of familiarity at the cost of variation and surprise. It matters little where you begin and end because the experience is always the same.

It might be argued that if community exists at all in America, it exists through values and things very widely shared and viewed as being fundamental to life. In this regard, nothing is as rooted in the Americana psyche as the penchant for automobile ownership and use. Is there anything in Amer-

ica more widely shared than the experience of motoring? Motoring has tied Americans together as, perhaps, nothing else in history. If this is true, then we may have done very well, indeed, in our reconfiguring of the built environment around parking needs. For every person a car! For every car a parking space! (Jakle and Sculle 243).

In *I am a Bullet: Scenes from an Accelerating Culture*, Dean Kuipers and Doug Aitken suggest that acceleration is now fully embedded into our culture. It may be no longer the means to an end but instead be the end in and of itself. Acceleration does not bring us to a destination but just gets us going faster than before. Speed and what it represents becomes a way of life. This concept has influence beyond the realm of motion and into the media we consume and the beliefs which structure our lives. The acceleration culture is heavily influenced by our relationship with the car. There are however alternatives that have begun to show themselves. The slow food movement is built upon an understanding of slowing down life to experience and appreciate it. The movement spawned slow cities that are an attempt to use the concept of slowing our acceleration culture to create and utilize our built environment differently.

In Arizona there are open roads that express perfectly the ideology of openness and freedom. In the desert the horizon is limitless and in a car on the road you can be whomever you like and go wherever you want. With roads like these we created our relationship to this vast landscape. There is freedom of movement through the space but an equal lack of foresight as to what the future impacts upon the landscape will be. I grew up in Phoenix and watched it develop over the years in the image of Los Angeles. Each time I flew home from college I would witness the growth out beyond Fountain Hills. The development spreading like a disease over the landscape. The desert consumed piece by piece and the land covered by man-made structures. This type of development is a result of the car and its movement and marks Phoenix as now the 5th largest city in the country.

The built environment throughout our cities suffers an overemphasis of machine space. As it stands the kind of urban environment produced was (and is) of the most degraded and demeaning kind. It is ugly. It is environmentally unsound. It is discouraging to most kinds of human interaction save the mundane act of car parking (Jakle and Sculle 246). This focus dampens and precludes other types of land use that might produce a better balance in our living environments. We must create a transportation and land use system that considers much more than merely the automobile. Proposals must be based on real understandings of how things got to be the way they are.

A new understanding of the automobile is necessary to envision what must be done to change for the future. I first realized this in 1999. This headline appeared on the cover of The New York Times, “Researchers Slow Speed of Light To the Pace of a Sunday Driver” (Browne A1). The article described how Dr. Lene Vestergaard Hau and her team had slowed the speed of light to 38 mph. This struck me as odd considering that the speed of light is accepted as a constant at 186,000 miles per second. Reading this changed the way I thought about transportation and the possibilities for approaching it from a new direction.

The Car Has Not Changed

In nearly 120 years the car has not changed. The technologies that move it and guide the various systems inside it have evolved over the years but the core concept has stayed the same. The basic structure is still the same; 5 wheels, four to ride on and one to steer with. It is a very successful concept but it does not address our future needs nor our current problems.

When considering the future of automobiles there are few new ideas. The range of serious vision is astonishingly narrow. Some people look for a world without cars. The major automakers design

vehicles more or less like our current hardware only without the gas. True believers tackle the task of liberating cars from the ground enabling flight.

“What is most striking about . . . almost all the other automotive-future visions is that none is even remotely new. . . But maybe more significantly, we ended the last century with automobiles schematically identical to those with which we began it: wheeled boxes of various sizes and styles, powered mainly by electricity or petroleum products.” It is easy to say that the differences between a modern automobile and a Ford Model T far outweigh the similarities. “But they’d be differences, I’d argue, of degree and not of kind, at least when you view them through the lenses necessary to see the big picture” (Thompson 12).

We will solve issues of pollution and perhaps even accidents on the road through technology. However the fundamental problem with cars is the amount of space that they take up. From the beginning of life till its end, the automobile’s demands upon the physical space that surrounds it are enormous. Cars and their needs require more than 70% of the available space in many large cities. Is it any wonder that the dominant feature of the modern city is asphalt? The use of automobiles requires us to pave over an unduly large amount of land that would be better used in other ways. Blacktop, concrete and black tarred roofs have the added effect of considerably raising the ambient temperature of cities.

Throughout cities parking is still an essential part of the commerce equation. In particular the ubiquitous parking lot built for and used by patrons of the business. More parking means more commerce but less space for the commerce to occur. There is a give and take regarding this issue. More parking can also lead to time lost seeking the ideal parking space; witness passengers getting out of the car to hold an empty spot while the driver slowly maneuvers into position.

Parking can be a form of territoriality when made personal. On Long Island in New York it is an accepted practice to save “your” space on the street by putting your trash can in place of your car when the car is being used. Bearing in mind that the space each person has taken is often in addition to a garage attached to the house as well as off street parking behind the dwelling. Parking becomes another part of life to collect. Even when not personal we treat it as such. One study found that, “The average driver spent 32 seconds leaving his or her spot when no one else was jockeying for it, but an additional 7 seconds maintaining possession when another car appeared eager to enter” (Jakle and Sculle 109).

Within the urban landscape, parking areas are a pervasive form that functions cyclically day to day and week to week over a set duration of time. Be they closed or open, independent or attached to another building, parking structures are deliberately engineered and designed to facilitate narrow ranges of activity and repeated ongoing human behavior. The development of the *drive thru* and *drive in* are places where the car and architecture mesh directly. The *drive in* is focused entirely upon those who are already parked. In this case the commerce is brought to you. We see this most often in the movie theater and 50’s diner. The concept was not expanded into the arena of the mall, although I don’t see why not. There is no reason we could not have a building completely submerged beneath a parking lot and the objects for sale would be brought up to you at street level.

The *drive thru* became a hit in fast food stores and the outdoor bank teller window. In this case the commerce cannot occur without the moving car arriving and leaving after the transaction. This concept eliminates the need for parking but it usually implemented only as a single window solution. Why have there not been more buildings designed to service multiple cars at the same time in a *drive thru* fashion? The best examples of this type come in the form of toll booths at the entrances to bridges, tunnels and toll roads. These represent a building designed for the express purpose of conducting commerce with as many drivers as possible at once.

The culture of the car is deeply rooted in the fiber of this country but it is changing. Where once the car was a means to freedom, the reality of traffic and the inability of cities to create other options, means that the utilitarian purpose for which the car was designed, must be served by a different means.

The Price is Right - A new car!!!

That is what we wait to hear. The car has always been an exciting prize or gift to receive. We see this through the prize introduction in the game show *The Price is Right* when, wait for it, A new car!!!! is produced from behind sliding doors, generally accompanied by a young woman. The camera cuts to the hands-on-cheeks reaction of the contestant as they take in the wondrous view that they are now in.

Each November as the holiday season approaches we are presented with car commercials that show the gift of the automobile as the ultimate expression of love. A wife is led outside into the snow with her eyes closed and at the signal, the lights are turned on and to her surprise her kids are giggling around a new SUV with a giant bow on the top. What a wonderful family she has! Each vehicle is presented either through keys in a box and the subsequent realization of what the actual gift is or through the surprise unveiling outside that includes the giant red bow to drive home the point that this is a gift and it is a real car.

On the Oprah Winfrey show we see an extension of this concept. 11 people are brought up on stage at the opening of the show (the premiere for her 19th season). Each is given a new car. She then suggests that a person from her studio audience will receive the 12th car. In anticipation everyone in the audience (hoping to be the lucky winner) waits with a small gift box in hand until the order is

given on television to open the boxes. This is the game show and the gift in one. Upon opening the boxes it is revealed in the shrieks of delight that everyone has keys in their box to a new car. Oprah points at the various participants stating, "You get a car! You get a car! Everybody gets a car! Is that



Oprah Winfrey Show

the wildest? Isn't it stunning? And, guess what? Your cars are waiting outside!" (Wildest Dreams).

The camera excitedly pans the faces in the audience with their tear filled eyes.



Oprah Winfrey Show

They are reacting to the prospect of a new car, the 2005 Pontiac G6. A car that had not been selling well now has 276 new owners and incalculable press from the stunt, including the march out to the parking lot to see the cars, each with a giant red bow on top. All this expression of emotion and out-pouring of happiness and smiles under the shining sun over a product. All for the sum of 7 million dollars in donated vehicles that would not sell at cost through the dealer network. People hugging cars are bound to bring in the buyers.

The Developing World

Everyone is talking about China. It heralds the future by virtue of its millions of new consumers and a countryside about to be remade by cars. We hear talk of auto manufacturers from around the world entering into partnerships with Chinese companies just to gain a foothold into what is generally considered to be the next great hope to maintain the status quo of auto manufacturing and its importance in the economies of the world. Throughout other industries, the China effect is being felt. Concrete and steel prices have risen considerably as a result of the construction going on in China. The auto manufacturers do not want to miss this opportunity as the saturation of the U.S. market makes it less appealing when compared to the rising middle class of China. Brands thought of as old and boring in the U.S. are being remade through sales in China.

China represents the next great opportunity for automakers. Writing in *Autoweek* about a test of a Chinese made BMW, Jeremy Hart states, "By 2010, China's demand for cars will be 10 million" (Hart 8). Buying on credit enabled more families in the US to purchase a car and aspire to a middle class lifestyle at the dawn of the modern motor age. Now in countries like China that same transformation is occurring. Credit is a new phenomenon and is allowing car ownership to be made affordable. In China as elsewhere no matter what the wheels you have access to, the allure is freedom, personal freedom. Wang Zong describes the car in these terms, "You can still ride a bike, but surely a car will wheel you to a more exciting life" (Hart 8).

The authors of *The Developing World's Motorization Challenge* explore this type of personal mobility. Mobility is central to the transformation that communities go through as they industrialize. Motorized travel brings with it positive aspects including access to goods, services and education. Using a number of studies they also show the costs associated with this explosion in personal mobility.

These patterns are explored both within the immediate community and globally where the effects are

pronounced. Successful examples of sustainable motorization using a coordinated approach, appropriate to the environment, within developing countries leads to the acknowledgment of the power that the United States wields in this area through both economic and moral factors.

Mobility is an integral part of our current human condition but the automobile has become a dominating force throughout communities that perhaps do not have the resources to explore other options. *Improving Policy Making in Public Transportation* presents the larger contexts for human mobility and the means through which we achieve it. On a global scale, the effect of transportation policy with a continued reliance upon the car will have serious impacts particularly in those countries where the automobile has yet to take hold.

Even in China where the excitement of owning a car is still in its early stages the reality of this path is already known. Some nights, when they're tired, Wang Jian Shuo and his wife get in the car and drive out to the new airport just to experience speeding down the empty highway. But even that road is filling up. It makes Wang happy he bought a car as soon as he did. "When a car becomes something everyone can afford, forget it," he says. "You won't be able to drive" (Margonelli).

How do we begin?

There is little space left not devoted to the car in motion and the car at rest. Roads and parking lots are the dominant feature in most urban centers. The effect is so great that there is little space left for vibrant street life. The result is cities quiet even when most populated during the work day and devoid of people any other time. One of the most effective ways to prevent the chronic diseases of the 21st century is exercise, "the best form of which is walking. But we discourage walking by building the American landscape in a way that keeps people in cars and strands those who don't drive" (Jack-

son 72). Downtown business centers are designed so that workers do not have to leave the office campus. Food and leisure are provided within the building. With few people living downtown the street is quiet during the day and there is no incentive for businesses to open in the urban environment.

A paradox exists in many urban centers. What is missing is movement, not only pedestrian motion but also the movement of people in cars. City development around the car does not take this into account. The slightly overwhelming cacophony of sounds and sights in a moving city keep it vibrant and so a balance must be reached to sustain many forms of city life. The rhythms and cycles that carry a city throughout the day wherein periods of quiet are in tension with the vibrancy of motion are lost when hyper-planning disconnects movement from the city.

Much of the visual interest found in the American city, for better or for worse, is generated by the colors, shapes, and textures associated with automobiles moving and parked. To prohibit cars from city streets, including parked cars, is to reduce visual interest. There are however opportunities to replace the visual interest of the car as we know it with other possibilities. Innovative and experimental architecture can play an important role in activating the city street. We are beginning to see this with media, both light and video, integrated into the building structures themselves. We may also see kinetic architecture take a more prominent role in city design, structures that respond more directly to the environment changing to capture light, wind and water more effectively.

The old ways of traffic engineering – build it bigger, wider, faster – aren't going to disappear overnight but an evolution is under way. West Palm Beach went ahead with a plan to convert several wide thoroughfares into narrow two-way streets. Traffic in this city of 82,000 slowed so much that people felt it was safe to walk again. The increase in pedestrian traffic attracted new shops and apartment building. Property values along Clematis Street, one of the town's main drags, have more than doubled since it was reconfigured. "In West Palm, people were just fed up with the way things
absence of motion

were, and sometimes, that's what it takes, "says Lockwood, the town's former transportation manager. "What we really need is a complete paradigm shift in traffic engineering and city planning to break away from the conventional ideas that have got us in this mess. There's still this notion that we should build big roads everywhere because the car represents personal freedom. Well, that's bullshit. The truth is that most people are prisoners of their cars" (McNichol 110).

There are alternatives to cars in some cities and new possibilities are being considered. *Smart Bikes* (DeMaio) and other shared modes of transit hope to provide various types of transportation only when you need it. Scientific studies to increase efficiency within existing public transit networks hold promise for changing the ways we think about mass and shared transit. The love affair with the car, however, is not going away. In *Ecological Sustainability and Personal Behavior* Reinhold Priewasser explores psychological and social theories relating to the individual decisions that humans make in considering transportation. Patterns of behavior within the rider-ship and the subjective qualities of the public / private choice for transportation illuminate the unique relationship people have with their cars.

In many cases, car use instead of transportation alternatives cannot be justified by objective functional requirements such as transportation of goods or deficiency of alternative transport supply. Empirical studies show us, that very often only subjective motivations are decisive for using a car such as: less information about alternatives (time of departure, tariffs, routes); negative attitude towards alternative transportation means in general; or negative assumptions concerning specific attributes of the alternatives such as speed, comfort or costs.

Moreover, a considerable number of car users cannot give any reasons - objective or subjective - why they do not use an alternative traffic mode. In those cases, selection of a transportation mean is a kind of habitual act, without rational consideration of alternatives available (Priewasser 168).

For the first time the typical American family has more vehicles in the garage than licensed drivers in the home according to the Transportation Department's latest survey. Since 1969, the vehicle population of the United States has grown six times faster than the human population. Currently this equals 204 million vehicles and 191 million drivers. As the market has become saturated, the auto manufacturers have taken to creating ever more confusing niches for consumers to base their lifestyle upon. SUVs, XUVs, and all manner of cross over vehicles display an industry desperately trying to differentiate products. These vehicles are sold as being more specialized than the average car. As a result families increasingly have work day cars, weekend cars and vehicles for holiday.

The Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) announced the Grand Challenge for Autonomous Ground Vehicles to spark new technology that could be used in the military. The types of technology used to make a vehicle autonomous will translate to consumer vehicles that can read the road up ahead and provide collision warning and avoidance. The potential for automobile manufacturers is huge as it leads to the realization of one long standing futurist idea, the fully autonomous vehicle – an automobile that takes you where you want to go at the touch of a button. Sciautronics (a team competing in the Grand Challenge) team leader Reinhold Behringer describes the possibilities this way, "We dream of a day when kids get a car on their first day of kindergarten and it drives them to school, ballet, and soccer practice, so Mom and Dad don't have to" (Stevenson 43).

That idea, while an amazing engineering feat, will not address the problems that are inherent in the concept of the car. We will solve the issues of fuel sources and pollution. These changes will lead to new fuel delivery systems and manufacturing possibilities that support transportation. However, each time changes happen around the car, the car stays fundamentally the same - a two ton vehicle with four wheels carrying a 150 pound human. Instead we must go back to the beginning and let these changes manifest themselves into new forms of transportation that answer the important questions raised about the current system. It did not have to turn out as it did. Automobility might have

been reserved for recreation and movement beyond areas that railroads and trolleys served. In *Understanding Media*, McLuhan suggests that this may ultimately become the reality for cars, "The car as vehicle, in that sense, will go the way of the horse. The horse has lost its role in transportation but has made a strong comeback in entertainment. So with the motorcar. Its future does not belong in the area of transportation" (McLuhan 219).

History - How did we get here?

Automobiles have played an essential role in the development of U.S. culture throughout the last century. They represent better than any other consumer product the overwhelming power of the industrialization processes that were refined at the turn of the nineteenth century – so much so that the last one hundred years could be rightly called the century of the car. The impact of their production techniques and the business models of those that made them cannot be overstated. The car reached into all aspects of our lives. However it is the cultural impact of the car that has the greatest role in society.

The space that they occupy in the American psyche leads to the love affair with cars that we have maintained over the last 70 years. It acts as a mask when we want to ask difficult questions about the role of automobility in the future. Our emotional attachment to the car hides the inherent problems that they bring to the table. Car trouble has serious implications beyond the everyday frustrations one experiences in traffic. Yet the methodology of the car remains the same. Commercials espouse freedom, openness, and motion. These past ideals dominate the discussion of cars in the public sphere of the United States and throughout the rest of the world. The following examples will suggest how we've arrived at this point where the emotional attachment to the automobile is still so strong.

The Automobile

The first self propelled vehicles were powered by steam engines. These were devised in the late 18th century and most were large complex affairs. Nicolas-Joseph Cugnot successfully demonstrated such a vehicle as early as 1769 but saw little application in his native France. The center of innovation passed to Britain, where Richard Trevithick was running a steam-carriage in 1801. Some vehicles were commercially successful providing mass transit. As a result of interest in this new type of transportation, innovations developed such as steering, multi-speed transmissions, improved speed and hand brakes.

By the 1860s resistance had grown to these vehicle driven by those with a vested interest in seeing them fail. The English Parliament passed the so-called Red Flag Law in 1865. The law required that self-propelled vehicles on public highways be limited to a maximum speed of 4 miles per hour and be preceded by a man carrying a red flag. It remained on the books for 31 years, sapping consumer interest in cars and irreparably stifling English automotive innovation for most of the rest of the 19th century, as inventors and engineers shifted their efforts to improvements in railway locomotives.

The first automobiles with gasoline powered internal combustion engines were completed almost simultaneously by German inventors working independently: Carl Benz on 3 July 1886 in Mannheim, Gottlieb Daimler and Wilhelm Maybach in Stuttgart (also inventors of the first motor bike). In 1888 a major breakthrough came when Berta Benz, Carl's wife, invented the road trip in a gasoline powered vehicle. She traveled with her two sons from Mannheim to Pforzheim, a distance of 106 km. Here was proof of the cars ability to take one places in a reasonable fashion. Previous trips with this vehicle technology had been over short distances. Benz's first car did not sell well but set the stage for his first four wheel vehicle.

Steam, electric, and gasoline powered autos would compete through the early 1900s with gasoline internal combustion engines achieving dominance in the 1910s. During this period from 1900 to the mid 1920s, the development of automotive technology was rapid. This was due in part to a huge number of small manufacturers all competing. Key developments included electric ignition and the electric self-starter, independent suspension, and four-wheel brakes.

By the early 1900's the assembly line as a manufacturing concept had been fully developed and Henry Ford was able to apply it in his mass production of cars. We would begin to see large scale fabrication of cars for every-man and his family. Ford himself believed in this concept to the extent that workers at his plant should be able to buy the products that they were building. With this development came modern roads and revealed the true extent of the U.S. cultures need for space. Cars and roads allow one to dominate space. That is to take over space by moving through it. Roads extended throughout the country to places previously accessible only by train. Americans drove ninety percent of all automobiles in the world, nearly nine million by 1921 on 369,000 miles of roads (Lewis 20).

By 1927 when Robert S. Lynd and Helen Merrell Lynd went to Muncie, Indiana to conduct what would become their classic sociological study Middletown, a resident asked, "Why on earth do you need to study what's changing in this country? I can tell you in just four letters A-U-T-O." Throughout the U.S. the car had become, "an accepted essential of normal living" (Lewis 34). Clearly something had changed. Just 20 years earlier, Woodrow Wilson had declared, "Automobilists are a picture of arrogance and wealth, with all its independence and carelessness. . . . Nothing has spread socialist feeling in this country more than the automobile" (Lewis 31).

By this time Thomas Harris MacDonald had become chief of the Federal Bureau of Public Roads. Under his direction billions of federal dollars would be spent to build "good roads" throughout the nation. In 1926 the National Road constructed during Thomas Jefferson's presidency became part of U.S. Route 40 that ran from Atlantic City, New Jersey all the way to downtown San Francisco, Cali-

fornia. These changes represent the true transformation of the nation complete with it's web of transportation routes. In MacDonald's mind the economic well-being and therefore the success of democracy and freedom depended on federal construction of roads . . . Anyone who suggested regulations or tolls threatened, MacDonald said, " freedom of the road" (Lewis 20).

The idea that the road might bring you somewhere new is not a recent concept. The unknown possibilities that exist around a corner do not need roads but only something that you cannot see. The speed with which one could explore what was around the corner was new. There is a wonder to roads in that you cannot see the end. You do not know precisely what is around the next bend. Cars also withdraw the boundary of a timeline imposed by other forms of travel. These being primarily trains although the argument extends to any collective form of travel. The ability to travel on your own time and at your own pace was an exciting concept. You are in control when you are the driver. There is no one to wait for. This lack of constraints when compared to other forms of transit equates to freedom. This is the independence built into the mythos of the car and springs forth whenever the automobile is disparaged for any of its problems.

Futurama

"All eyes to the future," proclaimed the voice. The connection had been made: roads were not merely concrete, but "highways to new horizons of a country's welfare and happiness." Highways--especially those filled with General Motors cars and trucks on them--held the key to the nation's future (Lewis 44).

Here is Futurama. The exhibit was part of the New York World's Fair in 1939. The official theme of the fair was "Building the World of Tomorrow" (Lewis 39). No exposition in history had been

planned so thoroughly for the automobile. Most people who drove to the fair parked at the 215-acre Roosevelt Field, the largest parking lot in history. It could accommodate 43,000 cars. Throughout the fair, the automobile pointed the way to the future. Albert Kahn, the creator of the Ford pavilion anchored one corner of his building with a graceful half mile, two lane, helical ramp that spiraled skyward. It was called the "Road to Tomorrow". The exhibits inside included the "Ford Cycle of Production", which recreated the processes of Ford's River Rouge plant in Dearborn, Michigan, where iron ore went in one end and new Fords came out the other. However, it was at the intersection of the Street of Wheels with the Avenue of Transportation that General Motors proposed a new vision of life to America.

GM was the sponsor of Futurama, which predicted life twenty years into the future – the year 1960. The theme "highways and horizons" expressed the prevailing view that the road into the horizon will always lead somewhere better than here. That concept has been used to great effect throughout the history of automobile advertising. In the Futurama exhibit, a huge map of the United States displayed the highways existing in 1939. Glowing lights represented the traffic congestion that was to come by 1960. The solution to this future problem lay in the "Magic Motorways" shown in lights of a different color. Modern roads would solve the issues of congestion and danger as they led the way to the future. Futurama is a prime example of the cultural shift: from the acceptance of cars as an integral part of our lifestyle to their full role as vessels for freedom. It represented the democratization of products from those for an exclusive few to those available for everyone, ultimately becoming an object that one cannot live without.

An American city presented as a giant diorama allowed viewers to gaze down from moving love seats with audio describing the future unfolding before them. The American landscape included all the modern conveniences; a hydroelectric dam and climate controlled apple orchard. The Corbusier like city was tied together with the rest of the civilization by Magic Motorways, enormous modern

roads that flew through the landscape. Norman Bel Geddes vision for this modern affair included high towers with technicians to monitor the traffic flow so that cars moved at high speed with no impediments. High speed divided highways with sleek interchanges would bring Americans out to Nature in a new and exciting way.

From the text of the script for the sound chair tour,

“Looming ahead is a 1960 Motorway intersection. . . . By means of ramped loops, cars may make right and left turns at rates of speed up to fifty miles per hour. The turning-off lanes are elevated and depressed. There is no interference from the straight ahead traffic in the higher speed lanes. . . .

Now we are traveling high above the mountains and valleys below – a bird’s-eye view of a paradise for vacationers. With the fast highways of 1960, the slogan “See America First” has taken on new meaning and importance. . . .

Contrast the straight, unobstructed path of the Motorway at the right with that of the twisting, winding, ordinary road to the left of the quiet and peaceful monastery. One marvels at the complete accord of this manmade highway with the breath-taking scenic beauty of its route. . . .

Visitors left the exhibit with a pin that boldly claimed, “I have seen the Future” (Lewis 43).

The vision of this great shining city and its motorways was very tempting for those visiting from cramped apartments in large cities. Expansive roadways, suburbs and planned communities like Levittown would become the solution for congestion in cities. Little thought was given to the enormous sprawl that would accompany these changes. Bigger roads, bigger cars, bigger country. There is a lot to see out there and the car can bring it all to you.

Futurama had its vision of roads leading to the future. The interstate highways that were to come after WW2 and the massive transformation of cities through road building rested upon a belief that engineering would solve urban congestion and blight. The roads however would be used to displace blighted neighborhoods rather than fix them. Those that were built in this case would literally take you somewhere better by passing through and driving over formerly vibrant neighborhoods.

Car manufacturers continually tout the latest revolutionary technology. At the 2005 Detroit auto show in January G.M. showed off the Sequel so called because it is “a sequel to the first hundred years of automotive transportation” (Hakim C1). The claim is that the technology contained in the vehicle can reinvent the automobile. GM says it will theoretically be able to mass-produce fuel cell vehicles affordably by 2010. Many competitors though, who are also working on the technology, believe it will be decades before such vehicles are viable.

A decade earlier at the Detroit auto show, Jack Smith, then G.M.’s chairman, told reporters that battery-powered cars would be profitable in less than 10 years. Two years later, before another battery car demonstration at the Detroit auto show, he said that “regulation can divert an automaker’s resources and attention from fully exploring the range of technologies like those we are showing today” (Hakim C1). G.M. subsequently abandoned its electric vehicle program to the disappointment of those who still believed the technology viable.

Futurama is the forbearer of the modern car show with its whiz bang concept cars announcing a future that has already passed or will never arrive. These shows capitalize on the aura of futurism that surrounds cars. However, in truth, cars are essentially a utilitarian appliance. Sigurd Grava, an urban studies professor at Columbia states, “The car is an appliance. I would not accept someone having their refrigerator on the street. . . I have no sympathy for people whose car interferes with my well being. I think the streets should be cleaned and twice a week is good.” (Parking)

Essentially the car is a device designed to move a person or persons from point a to b. This reality does not change the fact that cars are instilled with magic by those who create / market them and those that consume them. The magic comes from the history of the car (the classics), the shape of the car (flying machine, or big wheels) and the possibility that the vehicle can take you places that you've never been before.

The Interstate Highway System

The automobile is a figurehead that rests atop a mountain of industry and history. The belief in the magic of the car translates to other industries affiliated with the car. Roads became paths to the future, winding ribbons expressing the country's hopes and desires. Opening a road meant newer and better things were close at hand. Manufacturing discussed "building a better tomorrow" as if somehow construction when connected to perceived progress would solve the ills plaguing us today. I would argue that we've never moved beyond this concept. In TV commercials and print ads, faster, bigger and better numbers are touted as a cure-all even for being stuck in the very traffic that you create. Current ads for the Acura MDX and Jeep Liberty show the vehicles stuck in highway traffic with contrasting images of natural environments. The message in both is that even when you're stuck in traffic you can feel connected to nature through the car.

The roads envisioned at the New York World's Fair in 1939, though never expressed in precisely the manner shown in Futurama, would extend coast to coast in a vast web called the Interstate Highway System. First proposed by Franklin Roosevelt as six red lines drawn on a map of the U.S., the arguments to construct it continued through Truman's tenure in office. In 1956 the Federal-Aid Highway Act was signed by then President Eisenhower. With this act the largest public works project ever in the U.S. was made real. The system of roads stretching across the country would physically

express man's need to dominate and tame nature through motion. The effect of this idea would be masked by engineering hubris for years. Contrast that with the sense of time and space of native Americans. For them the land was theirs to inhabit, not to own, and never to conquer (Lewis xii).

"More than 55 percent of America's public-works investment in transportation goes to the six-lane highway, an unfunctional simplification that has reduced our choices and taken complexity from our surroundings" (Norquist 18).

The unknown price that Americans would pay for their mobility is expressed by Lewis Mumford in *Highway and the City*. "When the American people, through their Congress, voted a little while ago . . . for a twenty-six billion dollar highway program, the most charitable thing to assume about the action is that they hadn't the faintest notion of what they were doing. Within the next fifteen years they will doubtless find out; by that time it will be too late to correct all the damage to our cities and our countryside, not least to the efficient organization of industry and transportation, that this ill conceived and preposterously unbalanced program will have wrought" (Mumford 234).

The impact of the Interstates has been felt by everyone from the inauguration of the Interstate Highway System as man's triumph over nature, to its completion in 1991. The roads afforded some the ability to live in the relative quiet, safety, and cleanliness of the suburban countryside, while for others roads destroyed the very neighborhoods and downtown centers that made cities vibrant. The highway system had the power to divide rather than unite us, and though it enabled us to speed across the land, it also distanced us from the very land we crossed. Yet for many this concrete structure still holds the promise of connection and new beginnings.

The Interstate Highway System expresses a vision of ourselves. The promise of coming mobility with modern automobiles and roads proposed in the 1939 Worlds Fair would create a wonderful future. During the fifties we thought there were endless possibilities. Engineering would bring progress

and change our world for the better. The fins on our cars grew larger and more flamboyant each year, expressing an optimism towards the dawn of the space age. Questions arose during the sixties about what the roads were doing to our society, especially the ways in which they could divide our neighborhoods and destroy vital parts of our older cities. The seventies brought gasoline shortages, and we wondered what damage we were causing to our environment. People wondered if we were still in control of the roads and cars or if they now drove us. In the eighties, we were angry about the ways our lives had changed as a result of the Interstates.

Ultimately, the Interstates are the physical manifestation of the uniquely American trait that pushes us to resolve our destiny in this vast landscape. Gertrude Stein wrote that, “it is something strictly American to conceive a space that is filled with moving, a space of time that is filled always filled with moving” (Stein 161). The Interstate Highway System allows us to, or at least gives us the illusion that we can, control our own destiny. Today we must debate the place of the automobile and the highway in our future as we formulate just what the vision of ourselves should be.

Parking

Parking is part of the infrastructure of auto movement. Victor Gruen dubbed this the “transportationscape,” a fabric comprised of “millions of square miles covered with the tinny surfaces of automobile, the concrete bands of highways, freeways, expressways, parking lots, cloverleaves and their spaghetti-like convulsions, all tastefully trimmed with traffic signs, billboards and dangling wires of power and communication lines” (Gruen 43).

Throughout the automobile’s development, parking has been intimately connected with the creation of roads and cities. Long before cars and the designation of a particular piece of asphalt as a

parking space, there were hitching posts. Any moveable object requires a place to stop and rest. Hitching posts provide a space for horses to be parked. Constructed in front of businesses as a convenience to travelers, they were a form of on-street parking just as parking spaces with meters are today. As the cycle of parking construction and reworking of cities continued during the last century, parking garages and empty parking lots would come to symbolize the flight from urban centers to those places where the car reigned from the beginning – the suburbs.

The Detroit City Plan Commission's published report in 1972 summarized the impact of the car and its needs upon space. "The automobile has an insatiable appetite for space. It needs about 300 square feet when stored in its home quarters; 300 square feet when stored at its place of destination; and 600 square feet on its way. It further needs about 200 square feet for those places where it is sold, repaired and serviced. Thus an automobile needs 1400 square feet of living space" (Urban Transportation 16). This equates to the size of a small house. Roadways and parking facilities consume over 30% of the developed land in most U.S. cities. In a major city like Detroit it is normal for 74% or more of the city's downtown to be devoted to the automobile.

This represents the rise of machine space. It occurred throughout cities during the 20th century. The primary feature of this space is the car. In the years prior to World War I, automobile congestion reached critical levels in the largest cities within the U.S. As more and more families owned and used cars every day, curbside parking proved inadequate. Some cities imposed street-side parking bans. Opportunities were created for off-street parking; they took the form of the parking lot and garage. "The clearing away of buildings for car storage became, after 1920, the single-most important "urban renewal" activity in America's central cities" (Jakle and Sculle 48). Many kinds of economic activity shifted to outlying business locations as traffic congestion made downtown centers inconvenient. There was a prevailing belief that parking would alleviate the congestion and return commerce to urban centers. Therefore, parking made good business sense. It also turned out to be a good invest-

ment in those early years. Parking structures were low cost and there was not much in the way of maintenance required. The number of parking lots grew considerably as did the physical connection between parking and business.

Following World War II outlying business districts grew in importance and retail activity in downtown areas began to decline severely. Property values dropped in cities like Baltimore and Boston. Many people blamed traffic congestion and parking. In Downtown Detroit the lack of parking (an estimated shortage of 2000 spaces in 1944) was given as one reason why business had departed for the periphery. The loss of business further hurt property values. The urban fabric is engineered, based on an innate belief that progress is always right. Figures for efficiency are used alone without qualitative concerns being addressed. With parking, the result was the construction of many off-street parking structures. Paradoxically this only intensified the decline of downtown property values and the fall of city revenue as high tax assessments on land drove developers to tear down undesirable buildings and construct parking. This traditional belief in the importance of a central location for business only encouraged more rapid change. With revenue down cities were less able to manage the transportation issues confronting them in the face of increased automobile ownership.

Parking, roads and the car in general are developed without thought to long term consequences. The presumption that parking would be a temporary solution to bring commerce back downtown was false. Parking lots had a depressing effect upon surrounding property values. Blight induced by the construction and negative effects of parking structures spread street by street. The streets were emptied and the downtowns fragmented without a coordinated plan to solve their fundamental problems. These are the results that we are digging out of even now. The construction of parking in downtown centers and the removal of pedestrian traffic are both culprits in the decline of urban environments. The rise in parking availability that was supposed to bring commerce back had the opposite effect as fewer people entered the downtown district.

Throughout the 20th century, the encouragement of auto use has led to a scale of “hyperplanning” regarding the redevelopment of urban centers. The belief, it would seem, was that it was necessary to tear down the city in order to save it. In Detroit a new civic center was to be built anchored by a mammoth convention center, Cobo Hall. This would, it was argued, attract private capital for downtown redevelopment. One widely circulated illustration, not unlike visions proposed in Futurama 35 years before, projected a utopian space of “a technologically sophisticated future 1975. Sky-scraper towers would loom overhead . . . Helicopters would hover overhead. And although the plaza was to be dominated by cars . . . mass transit would be included in the form of a futuristic monorail” (Jakle and Sculle 173).

Planners and engineers directing progress at all levels have swept aside the public and the serenity that formerly effected landscape transformation. The happenstance that creates the very street life we seek is engineered out of the urban experience. The vibrancy of living spaces mixed with parking and business is what drives successful cities. Humans on the ground bring the energy, not just humans moving through in a car.

It did not have to turn out as it did. Automobility might have been reserved for recreation and movement beyond areas that mass transit served. Instead, downtown centers became a void while development on the periphery created the phenomenon of “placelessness” experienced upon entering the suburbs of a city with no defining characteristics. As an influx of residents begin to enter downtown centers once again they are seeking a vibrant street life and density. Cities are beginning to respond by encouraging development to promote mixed use construction that includes people, cars, transit and business. This density can sustain small shops once common to downtown streets and brings with it a customer base for other types of commerce.

The solution proposed for urban renewal and ease of congestion has always been more lanes and more parking. Yet this very idea is discounted by the fact that more capacity will always be filled with absence of motion

more cars leading to further congestion. The city must also be experienced from outside the frame of the windshield. That frame colors our world and defines what and where we choose to go. The installation project that this paper supports proposes a new frame through which to see our relationship to cars and how they define our environment. (see Appendix and DVD)

Advertising - Guiding Insights

“What really made me think things had changed, though, were the ads. If they don’t show some monster SUV barreling down a dirt road you could negotiate in a low-rider, it’s a family sedan going sideways across a dry lake bed at what looks like 150 mph. “Professional driver on closed course,” it says. “Do not attempt” (Farley 10).

The car industry spends enormous amounts of money through advertising to sell their vision of the automobile and how it fits into the consumer's life. The same themes are consistently used to reinforce a very old-fashioned vision of the car. At its most basic their vision of automobility includes the themes of openness, freedom and individuality. These ideas are the result of the transformation of the United States over the last century as cars helped to reshape our cities and landscape. The ads we see on TV and in print feed into the myths that came out of that transformation.

Automobile ads act as guiding insights that can be analyzed to help understand what we are up against when proposing alternative visions of the car in our culture. My research led me to four types of ads that clearly express the overarching themes that surround the discussion of cars and the pervasive methods used to create the myth of the car. These four categories; the god complex, man over nature, nostalgia and childhood dreams promote a belief in the transformative power of the car. In each case the automobile achieves a status beyond that of merely a machine. The car becomes a symbol to believe in and a vessel that holds your dreams.

The God Complex - Pontiac G6 / Nissan 350Z

These ads open with classic symbols that connect to the meaning of the car. Wide open space, roads that continue out beyond our view and no one else is around. These three elements; open space, open roads, and the individual express a prevailing emotional relationship with the car. A vision that expresses the freedom embedded in car culture.

In these three examples however, the automobile as a harbinger of freedom is connected to something greater. The car is led by the light from above. Light as a symbol of godliness and righteousness is expressed through the architecture of medieval churches. Designed to bring the sacred light from above into inner spaces. They serve as an uplifting yet humbling space. "I think that cars today are almost the exact equivalent of the great Gothic cathedrals: I mean the supreme creation of an era, conceived in passion by unknown artists, and consumed in image if not usage by a whole population which appropriates them as a purely magical object" (Barthes 88). The car can be seen as a different altar to give yourself to. The automobile replaces the physical size and magnitude of the cathedral with speed and the movement that is undertaken through the natural environment. The car is not a humbling space but is instead meant to empower the individual.

The Pontiac commercial presents roiling storm clouds overhead. An opening appears and light streams through to cast its glow upon a small patch of road. The light illuminates the road ahead and the driver responds to this act by zooming towards the light. The sun roof of the car opens as it reaches the lighted area of the road and powers through it. The light moves with the car tracking it like a spotlight. In an alternative version of this commercial the light is shown out in front of the car further down the road when the camera pulls back to survey the scene. The car cruises down the road through the darkness and foreboding forest. Now with a light from above illuminating the path, the

music which starts slowly and builds to woos! and yea! expresses an optimism and excitement of being on the open road.

The light from above illuminates the road to freedom and in doing so suggests a path to achieve godliness. The sunroof opens to invite the light to make contact with the driver. The connection to a higher power is made through the medium of the car. The signs are very straight forward in the Pon-



Pontiac G6 "Sunlight" - 26 sec

tiac commercial. The story is clear; this car leads to open roads that connect to open space that is illuminated with the light from above. The car connects the driver to the spiritual and with that suggests that a higher power, insight and safety are now contained in this vehicle.

Two Nissan commercials for the 350z roadster use still photos to focus the viewers gaze upon the action of the vehicle and its relationship to the natural environment it is moving through. In the first piece a series of aggressive still shots in black and white show the car attacking the road. The powerful stance of the car is shown through close ups and images of the car frozen in motion rounding a curve. The words "goes like hell" appear against black. The music has a deep bass line that continues as more stills are shown contrasting the automobile against its environment. The music changes to a soothing score and the words "feels like heaven" appear against black. The black fades to a color still image of the landscape with light streaming down from above over the next hill with the car on a winding road in the foreground driving towards the light.



Nissan 350Z "Hell and Heaven" - 20 sec

The second commercial for the 350z roadster opens with black and white still images. The horizon is filled with dark foreboding clouds. These are snapshots of the car racing over the road. The images are tentative and unsure. The automobile appears to be running from something. The words "a little slice of heaven" appear against black and then fade into a color still image of the vast landscape with a road cutting through it and the light from above streaming through the clouds and lighting the way.



Nissan 350Z "Slice of Heaven" - 22 sec

The word heaven is important to note in these pieces as it represents an explicit connection to the light from above that is then displayed in each piece. The link is also made to the car as a transport to bring you closer to that light. In these commercials, the world outside the car is imposing and to be

feared. The car becomes a vessel for salvation. The car and its occupant are saved by the end of the pieces as they touch the light.

In each case the car represented is a single occupant vehicle far away from man made cities and other aspects of the created world that might contaminate the ideal. However, to get to the place they depict one must engage the machine world both through the roads and the automobile itself. This is also important as it calls attention to the separation that is attempted here. We are led to believe that the rest of the machine world is something to escape and be away from but the car and its associates, roads, will bring you closer to enlightenment. This is enlightenment expressed through power, speed and singularity, a single person moving through space to dominate it.

Connection with Nature - Acura MDX / Jeep Liberty

The Acura and Jeep commercials strive to connect the car with nature and by association the driver of the vehicle as well. These ads use natural images as a symbol of freedom and independence. However the goal is to show that the cars themselves have nature in their genes. The statement being that this vehicle will always connect you to nature. When you travel with us you move with nature. Both commercials express a belief that the mere act of driving a car will bring you closer to nature. Regardless of the fact that in both pieces the car is stuck in traffic which is indicative of automobiles contributing to the covering over of nature and as an extension of man the exertion of control over nature.

In this commercial the automobile does not appear until the very end. It begins in a harsh desert environment. A dust trail is moving through the space, an area most people would never dare to go. We are seeing indications of a vehicle driving through natural environments. The voice-over de-

scribes the capabilities of the car we are not seeing, “Electronic 4 wheel drive. Vehicle stability assist with traction control and an available navigation system with off-road tracking.” Tire treads can be seen in the dirt, leaves are stirred up into the air and a fox jumps back while the camera pans through the forest. An invisible presence splashes through the water at a crossing.



Acura MDX “Right Place” - 01 sec



Acura MDX “Right Place” - 19 sec



Acura MDX “Right Place” - 26 sec

An overhead shot suggests the footprint of a car is moving through the water. This leads to migratory birds flying overhead. The noise of the birds transitions into car horns honking as the reflection of birds in the windshield of a car brings us back from nature to the present. The traffic is not moving. We are now greeted with the image of the vehicle that is capable of the action we have just witnessed. “The 265 horsepower Acura MDX.” Unfortunately the car and by extension you are stuck in traffic. The voice-over ends, “It’s heart’s in the right place . . . even if you’re not.”

The Jeep Liberty commercial is less aggressive than the Acura piece. Nature is displayed like a pristine film to be watched from the confines of a car. The serenity of the natural environment is something that is outside. The windshield is the lens to view the natural environment around you.



Jeep Liberty “Middle of Nowhere” - 03 sec



Jeep Liberty “Middle of Nowhere” - 17 sec



Jeep Liberty “Middle of Nowhere” - 20 sec

The music is soft as a voice gently describes the benefits of the automobile, “With a smooth ride, available navigation system and luxuriously quiet interior . . .” Various images of the interior highlight the features that allow you to experience nature without getting your feet wet. The only person

in the car is the driver. The voice-over continues with images of nature still outside, "The new Jeep Liberty limited edition makes you feel like you're in the middle of nowhere . . ." As the camera pulls away now outside of the car we see the traffic jam including the truck next to our Jeep with an image of the mountains on the side of it. The voice ends, "even when you're not." Honking erupts from the traffic surrounding the Jeep.

The world inside this car is wondrous and natural. Outside it is loud and obnoxious. The Jeep Liberty and Acura MDX are needed to feel serene, to connect with nature. All of this despite the fact that one of the greatest contributors to traffic and delays is the single occupant vehicle. The drivers of these cars are creating the very conditions that the ads propose they escape by getting in the car. The camera when inside the Jeep portrays the excellent accommodations and silent travel you will experience. This is in direct contrast with the reality that you are helping to create which the camera communicates upon exiting the car. This includes noise, stopped traffic and the frustration of the urban environment.

In the Acura ad the birds suggest that perhaps you should migrate to a place better than the traffic you're stuck in. When we see the birds overhead and free we long to connect with nature and here in this vehicle we know that possibility exists, to move out into nature even though the reality is our SUV will never leave the road for fear of dirt and the unknown. This paradox runs fluidly throughout the history of our relationship with automobiles and undoubtedly in the advertisements of the car manufacturers.

The statement remains that cars are a sign of freedom and therefore extend out into nature. Cars expand on this notion of dominating the natural environment by moving through it. In the automobile you are not forced to confront the rawness of the natural environment. It is experienced through the lens of a windshield. We can see nature as something that exists outside of and in contrast to humans. The images that are streaming through a windshield amount to an image track for your life. It

is a way of taking from nature without engaging it. That is what these commercials propose you do. This is what these vehicles are for; to drive on top of the natural environment, to be apart from and not within the natural environment.

Nostalgia - Porsche Carrera

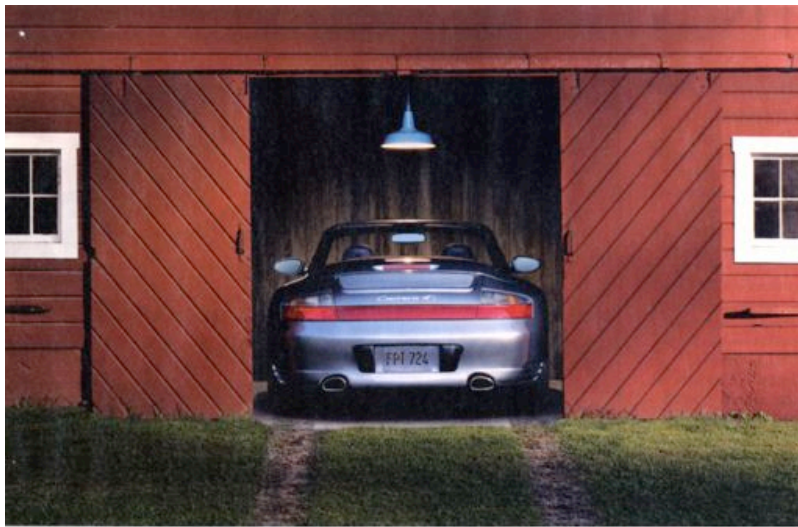
The open doors of a red building present the parked sports car. A light hanging overhead illuminates the car and acts as a focal point for the print ad. Two white windows, one on either side of the doors, anchor the image. They extend beyond the frame of image.

The barn represents nostalgia for things past or lost, not for anything specific. It is a general nostalgia. A sense of longing for a time when things were better. It is in contrast to this frame that the car is presented. The open doors of the barn beckon you to focus upon the vehicle. The action of the slats in the doors and the light from the lamp hanging overhead is to focus the gaze of the viewer down upon the car. They bring a direct focus to the car and enhance the squat appearance that this vehicle has as it would hug the road.

The icons in this image; green grass, red barn, white windows, and the light above, construct a sense of barnness. Nostalgia becomes a literal and figurative frame for the vehicle. The Porsche is modern and technological but with a solid connection to the past. This vehicle design has been around for forty years, longer if traced to the 356 from 1948. This most modern of technology springs forth from nostalgia. As much as it contrasts with the barn, this space also speaks directly to the history of the car and marque.

Delicate white windows in this image are an analogy to suburban life. The connection is reinforced between the nice green grass and overhead light (a kitchen light) to suburban homes. The tire absence of motion

tracks through the lawn show that this car does not stay sitting in its parking space. Those elements that bind us together within the suburban fabric, green lawns always the pride of their owners, are taken over by the call to motion. The tracks in the grass attest to its other life away from stillness and make the argument that stillness should be avoided.



**The hours a Porsche spends parked.
You don't get those back.**

Every nanosecond it sits idle is an opportunity missed. A road not driven. A corner not taken. A 320-hp exhaust note not heard. Time to log some miles in the all-wheel drive 911 Carrera 4S Cabriolet. And acquaint yourself with what's important in life. Porsche. There is no substitute.

The new 911 Carrera 4S Cabriolet

The overhead light illuminates the car and floats above it like an idea that just turned on. An idea or realization of what the ad copy is stating, that you should acquaint yourself with what's important in life. The light above the car is like an awakening or enlightenment, to have discovered what is important in life - this vehicle in motion. From the right side of the ad the sunlight rising is an extension of the light going on in your head. The approaching morning signals the importance of this realization that you have come to. This change will transform your life.

This barn becomes an icon for something being lost and found. You can rediscover your history in this space and reclaim your youth. There is a history of wonderful sports and racing cars, forgotten

over the years, being found serendipitously in someone's barn. Now you are finding the vehicle. Instead of the car sitting idle it wants to go. This vehicle is engineered to go fast. That is its purpose in life. The worn grass suggests this use.

The ad is not aggressive. Instead it relies on the emotional suggestion and subtle metaphor to the garage in your suburban life. The back of the car is presented in a passive manner. It is waiting for you to mount it. This is very different than if the vehicle was looking out from inside the barn. It would be very aggressive waiting to pounce. Here the car still has a personality but it is not complete without the driver who it is waiting for. It proposes a relationship between the vehicle and the driver. A kind of symbiosis where the car needs the driver to move and the driver needs the automobile to be in motion and therefore alive. This fits the more subdued image of Porsche cars. There are no garish wings or stripes on this vehicle. Instead it is more subtle, preferring to offer itself to the driver.

The facts describing the car in the copy are tied to emotions. The horsepower rating is linked to an exhaust note not being heard. The exhaust note is the voice of the car. This auditory connection does not increase performance so much as serve the driver's exhilaration that comes with revving the engine and the power that is suggested by that action. The fact of all wheel drive is linked to the passing of miles over open roads. The convertible top only enhances the idea of freedom and love of life the ad is selling. Top down motoring is care free and open minded with your hair blowing in the wind.

The construct of the visual and the accompanying text supports the idea that this is not merely another form of transportation, "The hours a Porsche spends parked. You don't get those back." A Porsche should not be made to sit still. Not just your Porsche but any Porsche. It is for the benefit of everyone that they be driven.

The copy wraps the negative into a positive. The statements describe opportunities missed whenever the car is still. Somewhere out there is a road not yet conquered, senses not yet stimulated, an exhaust note not heard, a corner not taken. This negative reinforcement drives home the message. The act of being in motion is paramount. The destination is not important. You should just get out and log some miles. Being in motion is what's important in life. Everything in the ad suggests that stillness is negative. Being still is to not be alive.

"Every nanosecond it sits idle is an opportunity missed." One billionth of a one second is too long to be to be out of motion. If you are still you are missing something very important. You are missing out on life, because life is motion and Porsche is motion.

"There is no substitute." For what? For the act of being in motion. For the act of being in motion in a Porsche. For the act of being in motion in your Porsche. "Reacquaint yourself with what's important in life. Porsche."

Motion is magic. Time without motion is useless. Being idle is being useless. Here, the time when the car is stationary is time lost. To be in motion is to be in life. The mere act of movement to no particular place, for no particular reason is enough to discover life. This is achieved through the car.

Childhood Dreams - Chevrolet Corvette

As the ad opens we are presented with a classic urban environment. Brick apartment buildings surround the playground and a high fence keeps the kids safe from the dangers of the city. The children stare in amazement from their blacktop basketball courts and swing sets. Their gaze looks skyward unsure of what is coming. They seem to be looking out from moments of childhood reduced to mere snapshots of the mundane school day. A boy in the middle of dribbling a basketball, game off on the playground as everyone stops to look up, mystified by what could be entering their world. Rising high above this scene comes another. Delivered from the clouds like a dream, a shadow moves over their frozen expression.



Chevrolet Corvette "A Boy's Dream" - 04 sec



Chevrolet Corvette "A Boy's Dream" - 07 sec

This text appears beneath the image, "This is a dream. Do not drive without a license. Obey all traffic laws." It serves as a reminder not only to the viewer but also to the kids in the image as if to reassure them, that what they are seeing is not real nor could it be. The car enters the shot seen from below like a ship flying overhead. It appears briefly from below giving itself up as the object to which the gaze of the children is linked. The slow movement enhances the weight and importance of this moment.

Inside the classroom even the teacher is transfixed upon what occurs just outside the window. The kids in the room all turned towards the window, wonder how it is possible that what they are seeing is really happening. The action is halted in class to connect to the possibilities of the world be-

yond this room. A car flying by a classroom window is not an everyday occurrence least of all the window of an upper floor. The children look blankly out the window as kids are apt to do on a sunny day during class, though this dream view contains a car in slow motion. The driver of this flying vehicle happens to know the kids inside. A wave is offered as a small gesture and acknowledgment of how splendid the view is from the outside. This boy is in control and he has chosen to fly. His counterpart in the class looks on in befuddled wonderment unsure of how to respond to the display.



Chevrolet Corvette "A Boy's Dream" - 10 sec



Chevrolet Corvette "A Boy's Dream" - 11 sec

The point made, the driver takes the wheel with both hands, his right arm banded with the tell-tale, "too cool" wrist band just to drive home the point. A quick shift into fourth and real time is regained. The car literally flies out of the clouds and the dream to connect to hard pavement at speed. The dream becomes reality at this moment. This theme permeates the commercial. This car has arrived out of your dreams and now it can be your reality.



Chevrolet Corvette "A Boy's Dream" - 14 sec

The notes in the background coalesce into the song Jumpin Jack Flash as the vehicle is revealed. The song connects to the great heyday of the Corvette in the 60s. This is nostalgia for a time of strong American iron and by extension strong American culture. This was an era of revolution and change like that being practiced by the kid driving. He is taking control and stepping out of school, doing absence of motion

what he should not. It is stoked by the energy and sex in the music. It is interesting that they chose a British band for the all American sports car. The music is no longer associated with a place or specific time. It is only connected to a belief and memory of a time when this type of rock and roll conveyed an openness and revolution in the country.

The ad is pressing for a link between the Corvette and a time of freedom and change in America. The 60's were a time when the freedom of the open road was still a practiced myth. The theory that out on the road somewhere was the future. This connection is important for the target market of the Corvette. The history of great American cars stops at the end of the 60s as the cars of the 70s and into the 80s were quite a bad experience. This is nostalgia for a better time. The message however is coming from a giant corporation (GM) that could not have been the counter culture at the time and still cannot today. Capturing this belief is integral to shifting public perception away from the reality of the company and the product it sells and refocusing the consumer upon the myth of what the car provides. In reality, GM's lagging sales and large cash incentives to draw customers, reveal a different story about our changing relationship with cars.



Chevrolet Corvette "A Boy's Dream" - 17 sec

Clouds of white smoke emerge from the car as it is put into a slide. A smell of burning rubber is left behind from tires spinning under enormous torque. The burnout, a symbol of muscle cars is an expression of power. This car is an expression of power. It imprints the new Corvette with a definitive heritage, that of the classic American sports car. The car as it is represented in the commercial must be instantly recognizable as an expression of the Corvette heritage through new sheet metal.

The color red embodies the essential characteristics of the classic sports car. On an automobile the color connotes danger and speed. It is a well known “fact” among dreaming kids that the cops are more likely to go after a red car. It calls attention to itself and announces a level of rebellion through a bold color. This is precisely what the Corvette wants. The driving technique on display in the commercial represents a knowledge of this showmanship. Red on a sports car is sex. It is linked to sexy Italian sports cars. Red was the livery of Italian racing cars (Green for the British, etc.) during a wonderful time of sports car racing post World War II. The link between color and country persists today with Ferrari forever associated with the color red. The voluptuous lines of Italian designs in red are a benchmark for the physical and emotional statement that a car can make. The Corvette strives to achieve that same plane and is thus represented in red.



Chevrolet Corvette “A Boy’s Dream” - 17 sec

The boy gives a look to the camera, an understanding that he is in control and therefore you can be in control. It is an acknowledgment that he knows how cool this is. He expresses the freedom that comes packaged with the car. This is a freedom expressed through control of the machine. You decide where and when you want to go. No one, not even the teacher can tell the boy what to do as he exerts control through the vehicle.



Chevrolet Corvette “A Boy’s Dream” - 32 sec

The control of the vehicle in the commercial is focused upon the steering wheel and manual shifter. The car enters a new phase of experience with each shift. The car emerges from the clouds at the first shift, out of a dream sequence in slow motion and into reality in real time. The second shift brings the city into focus as a destination. Crossing a bridge the third shift introduces the specifics of



Chevrolet Corvette "A Boy's Dream" - 32 sec



Chevrolet Corvette "A Boy's Dream" - 40 sec

the city. At the fourth shift we enter back into the dream sequence and travel through monumental concrete pipes sitting dormant as if waiting for this experience. Before exiting the pipes the Corvette succeeds in driving upside down and emerges back into the city proper only to launch through the air once again and cross paths with the girl. She winks to acknowledge the coolness of the boy driving.



Chevrolet Corvette "A Boy's Dream" - 43 sec

The car is control manifest through technology that allows you to go where ever and whenever you want. When he is in control anything is possible. The car is a symbol representing everything that can change. If I could attain this vehicle look at all that would be different in my life. Your direct physical control enables the car to take you places that you would never otherwise experience. These signs of control linked to freedom express the guiding insights of car culture.

The visual of a child driving the car of your dreams connects the adult viewer to being a kid again and specifically to that moment when you first saw and heard a Corvette. Standing at the street corner as the V8 rumbles by or being on the family trip passed by this beast of a sports car. The commercial is meant to take you right back to that moment. This is realized in the final image of the ad. The voice-over proclaims, "The all new Corvette. The official car of your dreams." The boy who was driving is now shown standing on the street corner staring at a parked car. The child is a stand-in for the viewer. His dream shared by the viewer.



Chevrolet Corvette "A Boy's Dream" - 54 sec



Chevrolet Corvette "A Boy's Dream" - 55 sec

The focus upon a clearly underage driver was protested by seven auto safety groups. In a letter to GM chairman Rick Wagoner, the authors state, "Promoting illegal and risky behavior in ads viewed by millions of families – especially young males – watching the Olympics is egregious corporate behavior. It is doubtful that General Motors would condone the beer industry showing a 'dream sequence' of 10-year old children having an after school 'kegger'" (GM pulls Corvette ad). GM pulled the ad after only a few screenings during the 2004 summer Olympics.

The use of children is important to consider as it connects to adults but also aims at younger viewers. It displays a child's response to a fast car with all that that entails and the adults search for youth, reclaimed through any means necessary. The ad puts the boy in control at an age when he has no control. Kids may recognize aspects of themselves in the images presented. The boy gets the cute girl by being cool. There is also the connection between the outcast image of the skater and the Chevrolet tag line, "An American Revolution."

Revolution can be defined as a drastic and far-reaching change in ways of thinking and behaving. What is the revolution that GM refers to in this commercial? How is this car a revolution if it is the same as it has always been? New sheet metal and a new engine is certainly not a revolution. The commercial reflects a stasis in regard to automotive thinking. The car is full of speed but the ideas are static.

The ad proposes that this vehicle can grant you a wish. It will transform not only your personal sense of self but literally the world around you. The car can do things that you simply cannot. In fact it is the idea of these possibilities that is so intriguing. You will never reach even 6/10s of the car's potential but knowing that it is available reinforces the transformative idea. It shows you the essence of the car. The car as a magic carpet.

Artists - Counter Indications

In advertising and popular culture automobiles are most often portrayed as vessels for freedom and independence. This message saturates the culture. The car becomes a magical object capable of transporting the user to a better place. The images have come to define the culture's vision of what a car is.

Against this backdrop artists provide a counter point to consider alternate realities regarding car culture. By abstracting the automobile physically and removing the context of motion, the artists are able to question the automobile as a vision for a country trying to define itself in an open landscape. These ideas represent a thread of inquiry that exists outside the defined boundaries of transportation study.

In analyzing their work we find indications of other vantage points to approach the problems of transportation. In two works created by SITE stillness is paramount. It is used to comment on the position of cars in society and focus upon the unconsidered reality of cars out of motion. The collective Ant Farm presents cars as a memorial to both society and a past culture. In their piece *Media Burn* the car is used to express dissatisfaction with the status quo regarding consumer culture. John Chamberlain's work deals with the trauma that is the result of our powerful relationship with cars. Through his work the trauma of car ownership that we experience in our subconscious is represented physically.

Site - Ghost Parking Lot

The *Ghost Parking Lot* is comprised of a series of cars located near the entrance to a little used parking lot. The lot is part of a shopping center adjacent to the main thoroughfare in the town of Hamden. Twenty full size vehicles of the time (late 70s) are located in parking spaces and have been covered with a skin of asphalt. Some of the automobiles are partially sunken into the ground. Others rest at an expected height. The existing physical and psychological factors in the location provide both the medium and the content for the work. There is nothing unusual in the components that make up the *Ghost Parking Lot*. The commentary arises from the way the pieces are put together.

“The *Ghost Parking Lot* was dramatically public from the moment construction began. People in the community flocked to see the burial process . . . One woman who lived nearby was so moved by the project that she asked for a special parking place to be reserved for her son’s beloved Karmann Ghia, which she had kept in her backyard since his death in Vietnam. In a tearful ceremony the car was laid to rest” (Wines 110).



Site - Ghost Parking Lot

This idea captures a moment in car culture. The 70’s were a particularly bad time for American car companies. The Japanese manufacturers had entered the market a decade earlier and their cars by this time were a real alternative to iron from Detroit. They were much smaller and compact vehicles

with high efficiency engines. This coincided with the onset of an oil crisis from the OPEC nations. Gas prices soared and supply dwindled in the US, the world's largest car market. U.S. auto manufacturer's products at that time were visually holdovers from better days but now saddled with anemic engines to respond to the environmental crisis and fuel shortage and poor build quality. Poor design led to inferior quality and further reduced the value of American made cars at that time. What was good for GM was no longer good for the rest of America.

30 years later, Japanese car manufacturers continue to produce consistently more efficient and better designed cars than their American counterparts. U.S. companies have never really recovered although some bright spots over the last two decades stand out. Cars from the lost generation of the 70s and early 80s can be seen both as a graveyard for manufacturing in the US and as the lack of mobility that would come to define the reality of automobility. The major cities would become ever more separated through sprawl and more congested on their roads.

The public artwork that SITE created reflects upon this legacy of a moving America, replete with cars fetishized through consumer culture. A "blurred vision of motion" (Wines 110) emerges from these automobiles that can no longer move. They appear now as ghosts, as only a sign of past movement. Consider the definition of parking. The act of moving a vehicle into a location where it can be left temporarily. The vehicles in the *Ghost Parking Lot* have been laid to rest permanently.

Parking implies arrival at the end of a trip. However, it has come to mean many things besides just stopping the car and stepping out. In colloquial terms to park is taken as a term meaning a coming together of two people in intimacy while in a car. The term park extends out beyond the car to gather other ideas. Parking spaces offer a place for assemblage before, during and after an event. The entirety of the film *Heavy Metal Parking Lot* takes place in a parking lot. In this case the event, a Judas Priest concert, is of secondary interest to the film makers. The parking lot provides spaces for the concert goers to come together in celebration and allows the film to capture them in their raw state.

The parking space is a container for the car. The car as an object of mobility cannot exist without containers. The parking garage in its various forms is a box full of containers. What would the car do without explicit containers? Would people stop in the middle of the road at random angles when there is no structure? The parked car would create its own structure and a new grid. Perhaps others would follow it spontaneously or they would find their own appropriate space and shape. Perhaps the car would drop you off and stay in perpetual motion around the block until you called for it. This is close to the experience of picking someone up at the airport where you cannot stop but instead must circle till your passenger emerges from the baggage claim. It might generate a new business of people who are paid to circle in your car. When you beep them they could bring the car back to your original position and pass it off to you.

Consider the possibilities for using a vehicle (that you do not own) to get to the store and instead of parking you could trade spots with someone who is waiting for the use of a car. They might be lined up as if waiting for taxis, only this is a taxi that the user drives as they see fit. Perhaps there would be an agreed upon sign to hold up if you were done with the vehicle or needed to use one. One day you might require a small car and the next a truck to haul equipment. The car would be kept in constant motion through the city center, the opposite of current personal vehicles. The parking space then becomes designated as a temporary area to drop off cars and walk away, allowing others to use them.

The *Ghost Parking Lot* offers to represent an end of cars. A reversal of their direction, pointing instead towards the absence of mobility. Devoid of motion they call attention to themselves through only form and the context of parking. The ghost car is a sign of itself as it once was - a parked car waiting to move. The parking space becomes a tomb. Perhaps SITE was just ahead its time. Recently cars have become part of the roads that we drive on. They are permanently still, stuck in the road as their tires are recycled and used in modern highways to provide a softer ride.

Site - Highway 86

Highway 86 was the winning entry to design an environment that celebrated transportation technology at Vancouver's 1986 World Exposition. The project is an undulating four lane steel and concrete roadway that rises out of the sea and runs the length of the central processional of the Expo. Referred to as a super highway on the information panel, the roadway surface displayed the various types of land, sea and air transportation available at the time. All of the transportation objects (over two hundred) were painted gray to match the concrete roadway. The visitors bring color to the monochrome public work.

The structure is completely transformed by people moving through it. *Highway 86* inhabits an indeterminate ground between apocalypse and utopia. It was designed as a temporary exhibit and was torn down at the end of Expo '86. For the sense of permanence it radiates it cannot overcome its own predetermined life span. The comment is made and for a brief moment its impact is felt only to be lost while the march of technology continues.



Site - Highway 86



Site - Highway 86

Highway 86 expresses an ambivalence about what all this progress is leading to. The progress is represented through the white forms of modern transportation. This variety of vehicles is an appropriate display of the moving front of technology and the changing culture. They represent a physical expression of humanity in motion. Automobiles and other forms of transportation have always been associated with an idea of the perpetual movement of culture. It is essential for the message offered
absence of motion

by auto manufacturers, these objects are transformative. In *Highway 86* however, all of the transportation objects are stopped in space. They appear as a frozen moment of movement down a path with an unknown ending. Their motion has been stolen. All that is known is the direction which is forward for no particular reason.

The road rises from False Creek Harbor and moves through a garden and dips into a reflecting pool. These spaces provide for unexpected relationships like trucks submerged in water and a submarine embedded in the ground. The vehicles continue north where the roadway soars upward to rise above the Georgia Street viaduct, a major traffic artery into the city. The broken road ends in mid-air. A single car with its nose pointing to the sky seems to lead the way for the other forms of transportation.



Site - Highway 86



Site - Highway 86

The technology is moving forward by itself to a destination that is unknown. Contrary to conventional wisdom the road does not continue but instead ends in space. There is nothing greener on the other side. We don't know what is on the other side. Perhaps the future is open so the road might end and transform into something else. There are no humans driving these vehicles. They are moving by themselves as the motion of technology is autonomous.

Modern culture has a love / hate relationship with technology and the changes it has wrought during our time. People approach it with enthusiasm and resentment. We are at once curious about the possibilities and fearful of the consequences. This relationship is born of our experiences

throughout the twentieth century. “To unquestioningly applaud technology without acknowledging these feelings of distrust would produce a false and irrelevant representation of transportation in our time” (Wines 111). *Highway 86* is narrative architecture that is also strangely abstract. Throughout the course of day it would take on a variety of roles. At once quirky and joyous it became apocalyptic in the evening. The work “expressed the ambivalence of the times, becoming playground and cemetery” (Wines 111).

SITE’s work engages the public in a dialogue about this relationship and presents a platform to consider our feelings from a different view point. Visitors are confronted with the generic shapes of vehicles that are instantly recognizable. Their details gone, the most normal vehicles are rediscovered as signs of technology in our culture and the direction we are moving.

The public work becomes something other than an untouchable work of art. Instead it invites the visitor to enter into a conversation by touching and moving through. The vehicles are meant to be handled by the visitor. Our relationship with these objects is altered. They are no longer held apart from but instead become just a part of the landscape. This sculpture treats cars, roads, all objects of transportation as just an everyday object in a much larger context of humanity and in doing so brings focus upon the very real problems and questions about transportation in the future.

Ant Farm - Media Burn

Media Burn was staged on independence day, July 4th, 1975. It was a happening, an event to participate in. The work's main attraction is the destruction of a wall, constructed out of 42 television sets, by the *Phantom Dream Car*, a Cadillac modified to express the futuristic vision of dream cars from the 1950s and 60s. It was staged in an empty parking lot. The art collective *Ant Farm* christened it the ultimate media event. It is a response to the media saturation present in our culture.



Ant Farm - Media Burn - 19 min 28 sec

Consider the name *Media Burn*. It was not called TV destruction. What is it to burn media? The physical act of burning the wall of TVs. To burn media is to deconstruct it from within. To co-opt the news media into covering an event that mocks and questions both its place in the media and the media's representation of it. Ant Farm is creating an image to be consumed through the media saturation throughout the culture. They state that the image will never be forgotten.

The parking lot is a gathering and performance space for this work. An announcer over the PA system reminds people to pick up their *Media Burn* memorabilia from the souvenir desk. They can purchase posters, t-shirts and other goods. Pretty girls are a requirement for any media event on TV. At *Media Burn* they occupy the souvenir desk.

Two artist dummies who will drive the *Phantom Dream Car* are questioned about their chances of survival. The first responds, "I'm more worried about America's chances for survival than my own

personal chances for survival.” The interviewer says, “That’s a very heroic statement” (Ant Farm Video). The second dummy when asked about the tension in the culture offers his solution, “First the TV’s go, then the freeways, then the factories . . . and the McDonalds, all of them. This is just the beginning . . . If everyone in America would burn just one TV set” (Ant Farm Video) The statements reflect the much larger intent of the event - to help people question the media that permeates their



Ant Farm - Media Burn - 1 min 56 sec



Ant Farm - Media Burn - 6 min 00 sec



Ant Farm - Media Burn - 14 min 30 sec

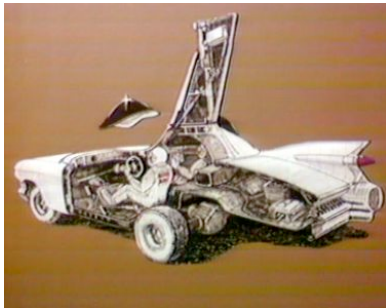
lives. The use of dummies to bring that message to the public was a prescient event as it predated the crash test dummies Vince and Larry by 10 years. Vince and Larry were known to the public from 1985 to 1999 through public service announcements by the Advertising Council used to encourage auto safety.

Media Burn coincides with the celebration of the 4th of July. The events mediated commercial approach fits within a history of cultural events that are intertwined with commercial interests. The holiday becomes a container for the occasion. Being independence day people are drawn out into public to witness events. The fire and demolition at this happening are close to the fireworks shot off on the Fourth each year. The crash itself becomes a firework and occupies the same space of importance as the end note of this holiday phenomenon.

A futuristic vehicle is a central character on this day. *Media Burn* uses the car as an attractor and is in large part centered around the vehicle as a touchstone. It is first seen with red, white and blue bunting (appropriate for independence day) wrapped around it, hiding the details. At the appropriate time there is the reveal and the *Phantom Dream Car* makes its full presence known.

“The Phantom Dream Car has the giant tailfin of the Dream Car era. It is a Cadillac and still conveys all the power and prestige that that implies. it contains the myth of 350 horsepower and uses it to demolish forty-two TV sets. It embodies the lure of the demolition derby, the calculated planning of a lunar launch, the freedom of the open road, and the reality of cars that crash and burn. It is the myth that the automobile created and the myth destroyed, in the same car” (Wines 169).

The artist dummies drive via a closed circuit TV in the car. A camera is mounted in the oversized tail fin. Their window bubbles are replaced by reinforced opaque fiberglass shells. They are blind without the assistance of the the TV and camera. The car represents the physical fusion of media and automobility. It is designed to have maximum impact even while not moving. In some ways it is more successful as a still object. The wing while functional is primarily a statement about the foolish-



Ant Farm - *Media Burn* - 7 min 22 sec



Ant Farm - *Media Burn* - 6 min 36 sec



Ant Farm - *Media Burn* - 7 min 47 sec

ness of the cars from an earlier generation and the public response to those vehicles. A belief that cars could carry us forward into a brighter future. The show cars that would predict the future of the culture. The *Phantom Dream Car* concerns a vision for the culture that is held within automobiles.

The *Phantom Dream Car* is a direct descendant of Futurama - the car as a sign of the future. The artists lay claim to this world of futuristic show cars and the techniques they used to create a buzz about each succeeding year's new models. The reveal is a sign of anticipation and chance. The show vehicles that American car manufacturers designed in the 50s and 60s looked like airplanes and spaceships. They reflected the cultural shifts by responding with designs festooned with wings whose

only function is to evoke flight and speed. The physical car suggests the culture moving forward in great leaps and bounds. It is no longer a terrestrial vehicle but can move beyond the ground.

After the reveal of the *Phantom Dream Car* the arrival of the artist president is announced over the PA system. He pulls up in a long black Cadillac convertible surrounded by secret service agents. It is JFK, here to deliver a speech as an introduction to the event. He exits the vehicle waving at the crowd and makes his way up the steps to the podium. Two agents with dark glasses flank him on stage. The stage is wrapped in red, white and blue bunting for the holiday. The artist president stands in front of a TV to deliver his message.



Ant Farm - *Media Burn* - 8 min 38 sec



Ant Farm - *Media Burn* - 8 min 40 sec



Ant Farm - *Media Burn* - 8 min 55 sec

He states that the American spirit is uncertain in these times. The country has been through an unworthy war, political scandal and now economic turmoil. He speaks about a pervasive doubt of the ability for the country to correct itself. "What has gone wrong with America is not a random visitation of fate. It is the result of forces which have assumed control of the American system . . . Television because of its technology and the way it must be used can only produce autocratic political forms, hierarchies and hopeless alienation" Many people, "are frustrated by this addiction. Now I ask you my Fellow Americans. Haven't you ever wanted to put your foot through your television screen" (Ant Farm Video).

He describes the artists from Ant Farm as pioneers, about to go forth into the unknown. "They do this not from self interest but intuitively and as an act of patriotism . . . That the greatest statements about this great country of ours are heartfelt by individuals and never prearranged by a committee."

He ends by saying, “The world may never understand what was done here today, but the image created here shall never be forgotten” (Ant Farm Video).



Ant Farm - Media Burn - 13 min 16 sec



Ant Farm - Media Burn - 11 min 45 sec



Ant Farm - Media Burn - 10 min 30 sec

This politician’s speech is stirring because of the symbolism inherent in the JFK recreation. From the arrival of the former president, complete with secret service agents and appropriate speed stepping up the platform and while leaving the event to his handsome face and Eastern speech. JFK is an appropriate choice because here was the first president who fully leveraged television as a medium to send out a message. To use TV as an effective means to move the country. His speech is a message from beyond to connect the event to something greater. The speech provides a ground for the art happening. In it the seriousness of the event is made real.

The two artist dummies arrive on scene, waving to the crowd and take their place standing atop the *Phantom Dream Car*. They stand, hand over heart, while the national anthem is played and then enter the vehicle to prepare for launch. A camera records the action inside the car (much like today’s



Ant Farm - Media Burn - 14 min 38 sec



Ant Farm - Media Burn - 16 min 54 sec



Ant Farm - Media Burn - 19 min 13 sec

race car broadcasts). A media control center keeps the artist dummies in touch with the outside and the countdown is displayed on their monitor. The protective shells in place the TV wall is set on fire with 32 seconds till launch. They drive at 55 mph (highway speed limit at the time) down a white

guideline between two rows of cones. The car blasts through the wall of TVs at 0 time. The action is recorded from multiple angles. A camera shooting super slow motion presents the impact as an official government test crash. A rescue truck speeds out to check on the condition of the drivers. The artist dummies are driven back by the stands to a heroes welcome.



Ant Farm - Media Burn - 19 min 13 sec



Ant Farm - Media Burn - 20 min 07 sec



Ant Farm - Media Burn - 21 min 08 sec

The automobile is an image that people respond emotionally to. Ant Farm uses the powerful symbol of forward motion and thinking, the show car, to focus the event. A show car creates its own reality distortion field through its futuristic image. In this case a strange mix of Cadillac power with spaceship bubbles and a wing that stands five feet above the waistline of the car. It does not matter what wild claims it might make about itself, the past or the future, the field that surrounds it blurs everything just enough to allow the claims to be compelling and possible. In *Media Burn* this allows the artists to put forth a grand comment upon the state of America, to question the culture's infatuation with television.

They use this image and the public's need for a media event to gain coverage through local news broadcasts. Ant Farm takes the most effective elements of a media event and crams them all into a single moment. They include: a politician's speech, a holiday, a car crash, fire, media interviews, commercial sales, pretty girls, the police, and a reveal. *Media Burn* compresses the previous 25 years of television imagery into a single one hour media event.

Ant Farm - Cadillac Ranch

Throughout the 1950's Cadillac cars were sold as *The Standard of the World*. They represented world class engineering and safety. They became a status symbol, something a person would aspire to own. Cadillacs grew tail fins that each year increased in size. The Cadillac was a symbol of a big powerful, growing America.

Cadillac Ranch was installed in 1974 in a wheat field six miles west of Amarillo, Texas. A wealthy Texas businessman funded the project and it was installed on his land. It is comprised of 10 Cadillac cars ranging in year from 1949 to 1963. They cover the heyday of the finned Cadillac. Each car is buried, at an angle, nose first into an eight foot deep hole. They are placed in a line pointing West. Over the years the cars have been stripped of any element that could be taken. The original paint lies under



Ant Farm - Cadillac Ranch

many coats of spray paint left by visitors. In 1997 the work was moved two miles to escape the expanding city limits of Amarillo. The horizon line had been lost to buildings. In its new home the original image of these iconic forms against the horizon is reclaimed. *Cadillac Ranch* is public work of art that memorializes the American Dream on Highway 66 pointed to the West.

"We didn't anticipate vandalism when we constructed the *Cadillac Ranch* . . . Yet in the four years since its completion, the piece has been "touched" by thousands of passing motorists, many of them

leaving their initials or a statement, to prove they were there . . . People have left their marks in homage to the piece, as compliments, as involvement” (Wines 169).

People have left their mark in recognition of the monument to an era that has passed. It can be considered a grave for a time in America when people dreamed of hitting the road in all these preposterous American cars. It is the end of motion. There is nowhere for them to go. They are no longer pointing to the future. The concept refuses to answer the question why. No context is given other than what the visitor brings. As a graveyard it reflects all the problems associated with car culture. These cars are just left to decay.



Ant Farm - Cadillac Ranch



Ant Farm - Cadillac Ranch



Ant Farm - Cadillac Ranch

However it is also a memorial. A memorial to Cadillac, these wonderful machines captured in time. The cars inserted into the ground memorialize an idea. The idea of Cadillacness. Big, bold, lovely and outdated American iron. This is a memorial to a vision of America. It is appropriately placed in big open country. The car more than anything else represents the American ideal of itself, free, open and in control. The automobiles here propose a changing vision of our relationship with automobility.

The possible motion of the cars is not as important as what they represent. They can therefore be displayed without the road and without movement. The image is simple but represents a complex set of signs employed through only a few objects and their relation to much larger ideas. Cars have an inherent personality. This is the result of our culture’s infatuation with automobility. Old cars are in-

fused with their owners failures and triumphs. People come to this memorial and add their own emotions. The cars take on these characteristics. Many individuals together complete the statement.

“And in an age in which art generally precludes anything but intellectual involvement, we have created, unconsciously, a work that encourages touching and contact and allows it to happen, unexpected, in a wheat field, alongside an interstate highway in the heartland of America” (Wines 169)

John Chamberlain - Crushed Car Sculptures

The automobile carries with it much more than merely the concept of transportation. A car can be seen as freedom and independence. The reality of a car as a 4000 pound piece of metal traveling down the road at 50 miles per hour can create a very different vision of the car. “All the rhinos and hippos and elephants in the world, if gathered in one city, could not begin to create the menace and explosive intensity of the hourly and daily experience of the internal-combustion engine. Are people really expected to internalize—live with—this power and explosive violence . . .” (McLuhan 219). Even when moving slowly in heavy traffic the pattern of the mass of cars carries with it a magnifying force upon not only the drivers but the environment that they are moving through.

The three Chamberlain pieces I explored during the research for this project express the trauma of cars. Beyond just the crash, they embody the trauma of the automobiles energy every day on the roads, in the cities and in the culture. “Rush hour can spawn more than frayed nerves, according to a German study that found that exposure to traffic can triple the short-term risk of having a heart attack (Tomsho 3). The incredible energy with a vehicle is often associated with the power of the individual and the vision of a culture expressing itself throughout an open landscape. In Chamberlain’s

work we see another side to that energy, the explosive and uncontrollable force that is also contained in that vision.

His work captures the motion of the car in a still material. The forms express an energy that the automobile has. As if the material itself contains that energy. He allows us to see the force that the car has inside itself. There is a dangerous force that comes from the nature of the material and how it is used. His work shows a coming together of components to manifest a greater force than if these elements were apart. In that way these pieces are an expression like an automobile, that the sum is greater than the parts. The parts do not show a singularity of force. However, each element, color and form can be taken on its own merit and explored.

Daddy in the Dark represents the energy turning in on itself as if the force was so strong that the empty space of the car could not hold it any longer and so wrapped itself up. In doing so it retains the force of that waiting to happen. It brings speed and acceleration to an inner space to contain it. The



John Chamberlain - *Daddy in the Dark*



John Chamberlain - *Daddy in the Dark*



John Chamberlain - *Daddy in the Dark*

energy is compacted but only to the point of containment, not beyond. In Matthew Barney's *Cremaster 3* we witness the force of vehicles and their occupants transformed into an ultra compact form of force and energy. One that cannot be smaller. This is clearly not the case in Chamberlain's work. As he does not wind up with a ball of energy but instead lets the material express its force as it

chooses, as in an automobile. The piece expresses itself in a similar fashion as that of a car. Namely the materiality of the work connects to larger patterns of the culture of the car and in doing so proposes the emotions of the car; speed, energy, force.

King King Minor appears as a single object that has been shorn into pieces by outside forces acting upon it. As if the sheet metal has been peeled away and folded from the action upon it. The force that it represents is very aggressive. This piece expresses a form like that of vehicles that we have seen in accidents. These are events where the force of the crash creates objects that are physically foreign to us but nonetheless recognizable at some level as once having been a car.



John Chamberlain - *King King Minor*



John Chamberlain - *King King Minor*



John Chamberlain - *King King Minor*

The image is disturbing as if we could not imagine how the energy could act the way it has upon this structure. It is unknowable how an automobile, an everyday appliance, exists now in this form, in this vertical position. The recognizable details of a car hood (multiple small vents side by side) lead one to wonder what the other parts we are seeing used to be. Which elements of an automobile are we seeing now after this trauma was visited upon the object?

Luftschloss is the largest of the three pieces standing roughly 11 feet tall. It is an explicit expression of crash. Unlike *King King Minor* and *Daddy in the Dark* this piece is the result of the forces multiple vehicles brought to bear upon each other. The resultant form directly indicates the forces we are seeing in the absence of motion

ing at work. The verticality is the consequence of the energy transmitted between the various vehicles involved. Pieces of metal have been torn apart and bent in compression from the trauma of crash. This work is forceful and exposes trauma. The reaction is that of a driver passing the scene on the road, "I wouldn't want to have been in that crash."



John Chamberlain - *Luftschloss*



John Chamberlain - *Luftschloss*



John Chamberlain - *Luftschloss*

The names John and Erin are scratched into one of the metal panels. They appear as a sort of makeshift memorial to those involved and who may not have survived. It is not unlike the small crosses that dot the highways throughout America calling attention to an action that occurred at a specific place without explaining what happened. The explanation is not required where cars and roads come together because we have all seen the results of crash. In *Luftschloss* multiple vehicles become one through the trauma of the crash. We are not sure where one begins and the other ends.

In Chamberlain's work as through the other artists we are reminded that there are important qualities to automobility that are not considered in the general discussion regarding cars in our culture. To see beyond an antiquated vision of transportation we must be willing to consider alternative points of view that artists present in their work. We find in their visions mobility issues that the car does not solve and must be addressed in the future of human mobility.

Project Summary

To solve the transportation problems that we face in this century we must separate the emotional attachment we have to cars from the utilitarian purpose they are designed for. Our car culture is now witnessing a transformation.

“On the fun meter, it’s a blowout. Driving is never a chore for me, but driving that route 250 times a year can be tedious. On the bike, every day is different. It’s hot, it’s cold, you smell the lilacs or run through a cloud of gnats that go up your nose and give you sneezing fits. . . I get to work awake and energized; I get home with the frustrations of the day forgotten” (Farley 14).

The absence of motion defines the modern car in our culture. Far from being a liberating object of openness and freedom, cars play an increasingly stationary role in life. This contradiction is seen in the advertised image of the car and the reality of the vehicle as a simple mode of transportation. An understanding of this difference is important to be able to revisit the meaning of personal transportation and how it affects our lives.

Absence of Motion is an exploration of this contrast within our relationship to automobility. By abstracting the automobile physically and removing the context of motion, we are able to question the beliefs that underlie car culture. My work proposes an alternative point of view from which to view cars in our society. This leads to an opportunity to significantly redirect peoples vision of what cars are and therefore allow people to see and feel other possibilities.

I hope to foster these early ideas into a new process with which to solve the increasing problems in personal transportation. Within this project are the beginnings of a new methodology for my future design work. My undergraduate degree is in Industrial Design. I have been practicing in the field for six years. Industrial Design (ID) is the formal name given to a field that grew primarily out of the Industrial Revolution. Mass production required practical and innovative solutions to bring to market the incredible changes of the time. In practical terms it encompasses all designed things except for architecture. It is as broad as possible, crossing into and out of ideas regardless of their history. This is its greatest strength, as a possibility to create relationships where none existed before, to link ideas and people in solving problems.

However the process of design as taught and manifested in the business world has lost for me a sense of possibility. The reality of money and client and time too often skews the process away from exploration and into a mode of creation where in, the reasoning and freedom to begin is lost. It is replaced by the need to build before being able to ask the question why. There are many roles to play in design but for it to have the ability to change ideas and represent culture we must be able to ask fundamental questions.

In an I.D. magazine interview designer Bruce Mau describes possibilities of a new relationship with design, "Based on this insight, we made two decisions. First, to abandon the classical boundaries of the design trade . . . instead of automotive design, we researched the economy of movement. . . Secondly, we chose to abandon form. The traditional considerations of design aesthetics . . . were rejected in favor of capacity, of what design facilitates. What we discovered is a strange and beautiful new image of design, an aesthetics of capacity" (Bruinsma 30).

In Semiotics I have been exposed to a systematic approach to problem solving but one that is open enough to approach all kinds of ideas. The phenomenological base of Charles Peirce's theory of Semiotics has provided an organizational tool for me to approach the larger questions of personal transportation. This requires going back to the beginning. Instead of reshaping an existing form to create another new car, we must instead ask: Why do we move? What does transport mean? Where are we going? How do we move?

Working from these questions, I believe Peirce's ten sign system will allow me to construct a framework and methodology to design within. This will address the problems I have encountered in Industrial Design and provide a platform to consider the future of transportation.

"The message sent to us by all our past futures is simple: Always expect the unexpected. Today, to be auto-mobile is to use an automobile. Most of us can imagine it no other way. But then, who in 1901 could accurately imagine Los Angeles traffic a century later?" (Thompson 12)

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Appendix - Technical Drawings

