**A Submission to the
Inquiry into National Road Safety 2003
House of Representatives Standing Committee
Transport and Regional Services**

DRIVING CULTURES:
Driving Messages:
Meanings and Counter-meanings

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Prologue

Background & Acknowledgments

This submission to the Standing Committee on Transport and Regional Services is closely related to another submission to the Inquiry from Dr Sarah Redshaw, 'Driving Cultures: Driving with a Difference' Both submissions are related to various research projects and consultancies that have been conducted or are currently underway as part of the 'Driving Cultures' research program at the Centre for Cultural Research This work was initiated and has been mainly carried out by Dr Sarah Redshaw, building on her experience in innovative learning, training, and philosophy for children. Dr Zoë Sofoulis, the author of the submission below, is an academic with an established international reputation in the fields of cultural studies of gender, media, technology and digital arts, and has joined Dr Redshaw in some of this work, along with Dr Greg Noble, a researcher whose interests include youth and ethnicity in Western Sydney, and Glen Fuller, a postgraduate student who is researching modified car cultures, and is also a research assistant.

After an initial pilot of the media study component, *Driving Messages: Meanings and Counter Meanings* (funded by UWS), the team was successful in receiving an ARC Linkage Grant for 2003-2005 for *Transforming Drivers: Driving as Social, Cultural and Gendered Practice*, in partnership with the NRMA (Motoring and Services), with Dr Redshaw as the Postdoctoral Fellow and Principal Researcher, Dr Sofoulis as First Chief Investigator, Dr Noble as Co-Chief Investigator, and Ms Anne Morphett and Mr Alan Finlay from the NRMA (Motoring and Services) as Partner Investigators. This project aims at contributing to innovative policy initiatives and safety awareness programs in the field of mobility safety by conducting research into the cultural and social dimensions affecting young driver behaviour and attitudes.

Dr Redshaw has provided considerable input into ongoing development of the Driving Cultures program, and her research, talks and writings form a significant background to the submission below, respectfully acknowledged by the author. Readers are referred to her submission to the Inquiry (Redshaw 2003c). The author would also like to thank Glen Fuller for his assistance with the bibliographical references.

Some of the research that has formed the basis of this submission has been undertaken as part of the *Transforming Drivers* project, and the support from the ARC, the NRMA (Motoring and Services) and UWS is gratefully acknowledged. However, the views expressed herein are those of the author and do not necessarily represent those of the entire project team, nor are they representative of the NRMA (Motoring and Services), or any other organization.

Dr Zoë Sofoulis

Part 1: Introduction: The Cultural Approach

Conventional approaches to road safety and young driver education in Australia have focussed on rules, compliance, and punishments, and on individual knowledge, driving skill, and hazard perception. By contrast, the Driving Cultures research aims to develop new approaches to mobility safety policy and to young driver training and safety awareness by starting with the idea that driving is a form of cultural practice and traffic an arena of social interaction. This cultural (or more awkwardly, 'sociocultural') approach has implications for how we understand drivers and driving, cars, traffic, and their cultural contexts, as well as implications for driver training. This latter issue is canvassed here but explored more fully in Dr Sarah Redshaw's submission to this Inquiry (Redshaw, 2003c). The present submission concentrates on one particular aspect of the Driving Cultures research conducted in the pilot study *Driving Messages*: how young people respond to—and resist—car and road safety messages.

Drivers, Driving (and Training)

As a cultural practice, driving is an expressive activity with significance and purpose in people's everyday lives. As such, it is not just associated with the official values and norms of some general 'Society' of good driving citizens, but can take on different styles and forms to express different cultural identities and subcultural affiliations, including public expressions of certain styles of adolescent masculinity associated with risky and illegal behaviours (Holtz 1975; Young 1990; Moorhouse 1991; Leigh 1995; Walker 1999; Donnelly 2000; Walker, Butland et al. 2000; Garvey 2001). Cars and driving have different meanings for different kinds of people (Maxwell 2001). For the middle aged, cars may be status symbols, but for young suburban or exurban dwellers, status is less of an issue than access to personal mobility that allows them to get away from home and reach friends, entertainment, work and study (Carrabine and Longhurst 2002). Some drivers are car enthusiasts, but not all of the same kind, and the same person may adopt different kinds of enthusiasms as they grow up (Fuller 2003). Because of their different cultural positions and allegiances, people do not all receive the same messages (e.g. in car commercials or road safety campaigns) in the same way: some adopt a 'resistant' position and may completely reject messages simply because they come from authority figures.

This perspective has implications for driver training which are explored in Dr Redshaw's submission (Redshaw 2003c). Whereas most programs for young driver education involve authority figures lecturing to young people (Redshaw 2001; Vick 2003), the cultural approach piloted in *Driving with a Difference* workshops (Redshaw, 2001b, 2001c) acknowledges the knowledge and experience of young drivers and guides them in exploring some of the values and implications of the driving practices they use or see others using. Becoming more reflexive, verbal and self-aware about the informal codes of driving, the meanings of cars and driving in one's own life and social group, and being able to analyse where one's own impulses and actions are coming from, are all understood as forms of enfranchisement that form a basis of life-long learning. This process can allow the individual to understand some of the cultural forces that are shaping them, and so to be in a position to make better choices about their conduct on the road, and positively contribute to creating safer driving cultures.

Cars

Cars are well established in cultural mythology as vehicles of individualism, escape, freedom as celebrated in 'road movie' genre (Eyerman and Lofgren 1995), and are also presented as a kind of a technological womb like the space ship (Sofoulis, 2001).

Drivers, cars, roads, and traffic can be seen as participants in a material culture that comprises sociotechnical networks of human, non-human and inhuman actors, and capacities and powers that can be redistributed between humans and machines. From this angle, it could be argued that the appropriate unit of analysis is not the individual driver but what Mike Michael calls the 'cason' (car + person), the sociotechnical hybrid of car and driver (Michael 1998; Lupton 1999; Michael 2001: 73-77). "The medium is the message," as Marshall McLuhan famously proclaimed, and cars and roads are media that come with built-in biases and meanings that include power, mobility, speed, access. These meanings are part of the historical evolution of car use (Rothe 1994: 133-146) and are not surprisingly prominent in car advertising.

Traffic

Because the cultural approach understands driving as a form of cultural expression and social interaction, it promotes a broadening of the focus of driver training and safety programs from the individual's knowledge, skills and perceptions, to a concern with driving as a way of behaving within the social context of traffic. Traffic is a sociocultural phenomenon (Lynch 1993; Jonasson 1999; Toiskallio 2002) that has been defined as "a system or network of actions creating meaning and values produced at a place where humans meet as traffic participants" (Jonasson 1999: 49).

Behaviour in traffic poses ethical questions about how to acknowledge and interact with others in the shared public space of the road. Like society in general, traffic is multicultural: different types of vehicles and drivers exhibit different capacities, behaviours, purposes, and we need to cultivate more awareness and tolerance of the different purposes, uses and capacities of others vehicles (or 'casons') on the roads. And like the utterances of speech, in which people who know correct grammar may nevertheless speak ungrammatically or colloquially, driving performances in traffic do not always obey official road rules but follow informal codes of behaviour, some of which are common but illegal (e.g. a whole line of traffic all going 10kph over the limit). These informal driving codes are not taught in formal training, leaving novice drivers unprepared for the 'normal' rule-breaking they encounter in traffic. This is why, as Redshaw (2001b, 2001c, 2003c) has found, safety awareness programs for young drivers who already have some experience of traffic behaviour can be a valuable intervention by providing an arena to discuss these informal codes.

Culture at large

Urbanisation and suburbanisation, and increasing separations of home and work in sprawling post WW2 cities, have not simply been developments necessitating car use: car use has shaped and reshaped the social, natural and built environments. In the cultural approach, drivers, cars and traffic are situated within larger cultural and historical preoccupations which have structured our current way of urban life. These themes include progress and the theme of modernity itself, as well as an ongoing fascination with the power of the machine, where the locomotive was the car's predecessor as a symbol of power, speed, access (Urry 2000: 56-57, and the

spaceship an ultimate embodiment of principles of futurity, speed, and escape from Earth's gravity (Sofia, 1987, 1996, 1998).

Some of the key concepts which have emerged from sociological and cultural studies of driving cultures, and which inform our approach, are:

- **Automobility** — This concept was first critically explored by James Flink (1975), and later developed by John Urry (2000) to encapsulate the ways the car is "immensely flexible *and* wholly coercive. Automobility is a source of freedom, the 'freedom of the road' [...] Much social life could not be undertaken without the flexibilities of the car. But at the same time such a flexibility is coerced, [...] because the moving car forces people to orchestrate in complex and heterogeneous ways their mobilities and socialities across very significant distances" (Urry 2000, 59).

- **Mobile privatisation** — cultural theorist Raymond Williams developed this notion to name a cultural trend in which "at most active social levels people are increasingly living as private small family units, or, disrupting even that, as private and deliberately self-enclosed individuals, while at the same time there is a quite unprecedented mobility of such restricted privacies" (1983: 188). The 'mobile privatisation' of the car refers to the state of the driver "strapped into a comfortable armchair and surround by micro-electronic informational sources, controls and sources of pleasure" (Urry 2000: 63; Pinkney 1991: 55).

- **Dromology** — this term is derived from the Greek *dromos* (race) and defined by Paul Virilio as the "science of speed" (1986); where speed is identified as the social, political and military logic of systematic movement accelerated to a vanishing point at which territory, as traditionally conceived, is replaced by "a government of nothing but time." Speed as a key theme in modernity and in war, (Virilio 1986), connected with 'universalism' (Connolly 2000), globalisation, and economics (Armitage and Graham 2001) has increasingly taken over daily life, with increased emphasis on instant transport, communications, money, food, entertainment, quick getaways, and twenty-four hour access (Urry 2000: see Ch5 for a sustained exploration of these themes).

In what follows, some implications of the cultural approach are considered in relation to car advertising and public concerns with the effects of their representations of speed on viewer/drivers. The assumptions behind the calls for stronger advertising regulations are refuted (Table 1) and it is argued that since speed and other themes in car ads have deep cultural roots, it is preferable to concentrate on changing cultural attitudes to speed, driving and traffic. Televised road safety campaign messages—which are a potentially effective counter to car advertisements—are then critically examined. Material from focus group discussions is used to identify the many ways young driver/viewers resist televised safety messages. It is suggested that 'aversion therapy' shock tactics and authoritarian addresses to generic 'citizens' are likely to be less effective than television campaigns more like ads in targeting young drivers as media literate viewers who inhabit meaningful sensory and social worlds in the car and on as well as off the road. The main arguments, implications and suggested actions are then presented in a summary form (Table 2), which also includes points covered in Sarah Redshaw's submission (Redshaw 2003c).

Part 2: Limiting Speed in Car Advertising: Can the tail wag the dog?

'Strong effects' versus cultural approach to media influence

On 25th September 2003, the NSW Minister for Roads, Carl Scully put out a media release calling for "the scrapping of the voluntary code introduced in 2002 and its replacement with a mandatory code that clearly bans unsafe driving behaviour from motor vehicle advertising." He referred to research by Prof. Simon Chapman of the School of Public Health at the University of Sydney that showed young drivers found that speed was 'very obvious' in 15 recent car advertisements, and quoted Prof. Chapman's views that 'weasel clauses' in the code "allow grotesque abuses of the presumed spirit and intent of the code," which was a "farcical means of controlling speed themes in advertising;' he too called for strengthened Federal powers to "prevent these reckless and irresponsible ads going to air".

In the *Driving Messages: Meanings and Counter-meanings* project, the Driving Cultures team has conducted pilot research (involving questionnaire and focus groups, as well as content and semiotic analyses of ads) on themes in car and road safety advertising and young drivers' responses. We draw on a more complex view of the role of media in influencing driver behaviour, including the possibility that young drivers will not interpret ads in the ways they are intended to. We share with Minister Scully and Prof. Chapman a concern with issues of speed, safety, young drivers, and the possible contributions of car advertising to cultures (and especially youth subcultures) of driving in Australia, but we do not share the model of media and effects implicit in their identification of the problem, and therefore would take a different approach to its solution.

Their model is what is known in media and cultural studies as the "strong effects" theory, developed in the 1940s and early 1950s and linked to the "hypodermic" S→M→R (Sender-Message-Receiver) model of communication as a top-down flow of information whose effects are as predictable and intended as those of an injection directly into the receivers, who are considered as powerless and unwitting "cultural dupes".(Tudor, 1995)

By contrast, the perspective we take has been informed by developments (from the late 1950s into the 1980s) in textual analysis and critical cultural analysis of dominant forms of culture and ideology, as well as by more recent advances in theories of how powers and discourses work to structure everyday life and the subjects (socialised people) who live them, not only through top-down processes of restraining and repressing, but also by producing and enabling certain forms of interaction, social order, and cultural life (Foucault 1991; Foucault 1995; Giddens, 1984, Giddens 1986). This approach implies a different understanding of consciousness from that entailed in the behaviourist psychology of the 'strong effects' model (and much market research) whose interest in reportable attitudes and intentions covers only the first of the three kinds of consciousness social theorist Anthony Giddens identifies as operative in the social field:

- **Discursive consciousness**— the capacity of social actors to report on intentions, attitudes, feelings, etc.
- **Practical consciousness** — shared, routinised, tacit and not necessarily verbalised knowledge "about how to 'go on' in the contexts of social life."

Clearly, driving in traffic is an example of a social behaviour that relies not only on the formal rules articulated by law and discourse, but is very much reliant on shared practical consciousness of driving norms and behaviours as they have actually evolved.

- **The unconscious** — those repressions, motives and wants unarticulated by —indeed usually not directly available to — social actors themselves. These motives and wants are not purely personal but are also socially shaped through the structures, myths, values and histories of a certain collective way of life.

Distinctive to the cultural approach is a concern with how all three levels of consciousness are involved in driving culture, a concern we believe driver and safety training should also adopt. This means dealing with not only formal explicit information and attitudes of young people about driving, but also getting them to talk about some of the informal, shared —and sometimes law-breaking—codes of driving practice and familiar traffic behaviour, as well as how these line up with other sociocultural codes and performances of gendered, ethnic and generational identities. (Redshaw, 2001a, 2001c, 2003c). The researchers consider these practices in relation to broader and deeper theoretical concerns about the history and future of automobility and related structuring forces in local and global culture and the environment (Gorz 1980; Freund and Martin 1993). It is against this background that we can identify such influential popular cultural themes as the road as race track and the car as escape vehicle (Garvey 2001; Vaareanen and Wieloch 2002). We are interested in social and political questions about moral panics and the regulation of youth, modified cars, roads and public space (Fuller, 2003a) and critically examine contestations over speed and its regulation (Redshaw, 2000, 2003a). Questions about the interface of humans and cars, and issues of control are also relevant (Redshaw (2001b, 2002), and will be themes in the next phase of the *Transforming Drivers* project. These questions all relate to the unconscious dimensions of driving culture—the roads and vehicles not taken; the repressed or unacknowledged alternatives— that shape driving practice in ways not usually noticeable or discussed by individuals.

So let us see how these approaches line up on the question of regulating depictions of speed and unsafe driving in car commercials. The following chart (Table 1) specifies the assumptions and arguments of the 'strong effects' model, and presents counter-arguments and alternatives to these assumptions from the perspective of the cultural approach. The chart also anticipates points covered in the discussions which follow of car and road safety ads.

TABLE 1: 'Strong effects' vs 'culture and discourse'

| Strong Effects model ARGUMENT / ASSUMPTION	Culture & Discourse model COUNTERARGUMENT	Culture & Discourse model ELABORATION/ ALTERNATIVES
Strong, predictable, one-way effects of media depictions: Sender→Message→Receiver	Meanings of messages vary with contexts of reception and media effects are diffuse, not predictable, and difficult to measure.	• Influence of advertising difficult to demonstrate: exactly where is its influence exerted ? (e.g. shaping aspiration, prompting purchase). • Ads sell lifestyles perhaps more than particular products – tend to a utopian social realism that seeks to establish an horizon of desire or expectation which not all viewers will attain.
Audiences are dupes of the media and cannot resist their messages.	Contemporary audiences — especially the young— are highly media literate across a variety of media channels, modes and sources.	• Young audiences are very good at inventing, creating, producing, disseminating, analysing, parodying, and debunking messages in a bewildering variety of forms.
The meaning of an ad is determined by what senders intentionally put into it, and all power is on the side of the message makers.	Meaning is construed (or misconstrued) through negotiations between the message, the receivers, and the contexts of reception.	• People have own uses, purposes, pleasures, positions and contexts from which to negotiate and make meanings, which are often deliberately ambiguous anyway • Audience has power to make own meanings
To alter the effects or meanings of a message, you work on controlling the message	Conditions of reception and interpretation of media messages are impossible to control. Messages include unintended or unpredicted meanings and can be misread. The meaning of messages changes with the channels and codes of transmission, including its media form, its genre or style, its modality (realistic, fictional, simulated); its mode of address (formal, authoritative, intimate), etc.	• Alternatively, you can change media effects by changing: • **Audiences** —build up critical media literacy (as in new high school English curricula); road safety discourses and young driver education strategies need to address the social and cultural dimensions of driving and car culture in terms and media meaningful to young drivers; • **Producers/Senders** —get more young people working on counter-messages like road safety campaigns; involve people from other sectors (e.g. health) in youth campaigns; • **Contexts**of message reception — including discussions of media and cultural fantasies and norms as part of school driver training; placing safety campaign ads and advertorials in popular car magazines; • **Medium** —develop and disseminate alternative or counter-messages through different media channels, forms and modes.

(continued)

Strong Effects model ARGUMENT	Culture & Discourse model COUNTERARGUMENT	Culture & Discourse model ALTERNATIVES
Meanings and signs can be regulated.	Meanings are easier to mutate than to regulate. 'Preferred readings' might be built into messages, but there is no guarantee readers/ viewers will go along with them.	• A focus on regulating overt, obvious **denotative** meanings ignores ambiguous, multiple, deeply culturally embedded and not always verbalised **connotations** of images, scenes, figures. • These connotations tied to different fields of cultural practice and whole ways of life: just how far can depictions of the culture of automobility be regulated
Advertisements 'weasel' their way around regulations and pervert the code, and so need even stronger regulations.	Language and imagery are inherently 'weasely': flexible, expressive, and unruly; and conventions are established only to be flaunted.	• Attempts to regulate denotative meanings—practiced in many countries with high levels of censorship—simply result in farcial lip-service to official rules, and inspire even more inventive poetics and plays on connotative meanings. • Connotations are potentially subversive of any code, since they work by playing with, on, underneath, and between different media conventions and cultural domains.
Speed is the main and obvious problem in ads.	The obvious denotative meaning is not always the problem: strong meanings can be conveyed by connotations which are less obvious or controllable.	• Regulating denotations won't stop connotations. e.g. speed and the road as a race track can be invoked without movement simply by linking road vehicles and Formula 1 models. • Open road imagers is also an issue for driving behaviour, since it imagery insidiously sets up background expectations allied to the race track that ignore the social reality of traffic and the existence of other road users.
The speed theme is like a virus that passes out from advertising to infect culture at large.	Advertising generally reflects and parasitises existing cultural norms and aspirations, and only rarely extends what is already established in people's values, aspirations and practices, or familiar from other cultural forms (e.g. movies, sport, racing of all kinds).	• Speed is a major theme in modern western cultures, characterised initially by the fetish for **progress** and the very idea of **modernity** itself and more recently by increased demand for **instantaneousness** many domains of service and social activity. • The need for forms of **personal mobility** is related to the way suburban and exurban areas have developed. • **Speed is a capacity built into the technologies themselves,** but it is politically far easier to attempt to regulate advertising than to regulate or limit vehicle design, or to introduce limits on passengers and vehicle power for novice drivers (like those for motor cyclists).

Vehicle advertisements should be strongly regulated in depictions of unsafe and speeding driving behaviour.	Stronger regulation will likely force the speed theme to be expressed in even more poetic ways, and will not stop it being expressed in other media channels and cultural arenas (e.g. televised car racing).	- Poetic and ambiguous representations can be more resistant to specification, critique or and counter-argument. - Efforts to regulate cars ads would be better spent **developing more effective counter-messages,** for example through the road safety and/or health campaign genres, and exploring a range of other media forms for delivering them. - Rather than censoring ads, we could **articulate positive goals about driving culture** and encourage socially responsible and traffic-wise advertising.
Televised car ads strongly influence young drivers to speed.	Ads on broadcast media are just one small part of a complex mediascape that includes widely viewed films and popular car magazines, the internet, etc.	- Preliminary research is underway —and more is needed— to find out about **what media mix** young drivers source for messages about cars, traffic and driving. Films, racing simulations, and car magazines may be stronger influences than TV ads. - We suspect **immediate social and sensory contexts** are likely more important than media fantasies in influencing speeding behaviour, and these could be targeted in safety campaigns to encourage lower-risk behaviours in youth driving cultures. - It is not only young people who speed, behave badly, and take risks on the road: they see their elders doing it.
Regulating speed in ads will change driver behaviour.	Yes, and the tail might wag the dog: ads are an easy scapegoat for a whole culture of driving that needs critical questioning.	- Better to work on deeper questioning of speed in culture, and on **changing driving cultures,** addressing driving as a practice with personal, gendered, social and cultural meanings, and dealing with these dimensions in driver training programs and road safety campaigns. *(See Table 2: Summary of findings)*

Speed representations in car ads

In a driving culture where many participants seem to regard official speed limits as minima rather than maxima, speeding is a normal illegal driving practice, while speed and its regulation are topics of widespread public debate and contestation, with a popular consensus favouring ever faster roads and vehicles (Redshaw, 2000, 2003a). Our advertising studies so far have confirmed that speed is indeed a dominant theme in car advertisements, represented in both literal and obvious forms (denotation) as well as through metaphor and allusion (connotation) (Redshaw, 2003a, Sofoulis, 2003a). Even a quick survey of speed in car ads shows that whereas as from the point of view of physics and road laws, speed is simply distance

over time (kms/hr), in its cultural and media contexts, speed is not a single thing, but is complexly bundled up with other meanings central to the culture of individual mobility, such as the ideas of 'getting ahead', freedom, agency, control, high-tech performance, pleasure, risk, excitement, escape. Moreover, as project team member Dr Greg Noble has pointed out, whereas the discourse of road safety presents speed and safety as opposites, car ads frequently bundle them together, promoting cars that can comfortably pick up the kids from school, but transform into fantastic macho sports machines on the open road: we are promised comfort with grunt, safety with speed.
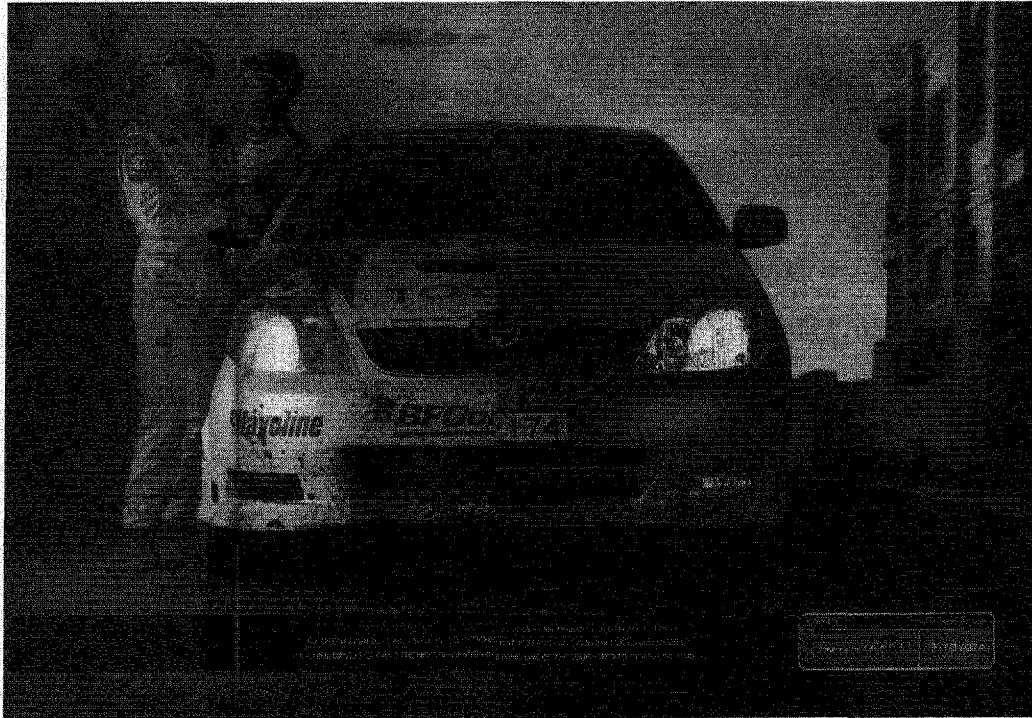
Car as embodiment of speed. Even at rest, the Toyota Sportivo embodies the thrill of the race through this montage which hybridises the urban model with the rally car.

Representations of speed can be roughly categorised in terms of their different emphasis on movement through the environment (road, landscape); the car itself; the physical and sensory effects of speed, and extraterrestrial references.

Speed through an environment:
- long shots of cars travelling rapidly across open roads and landscapes, or speedily negotiating tough corners (this latter about control as well as speed);
- a race track or a racing simulation (e.g. 'Monaro is back... Game over' ad), one of the few driving scenarios showing more than one vehicle;

- car appears still or slow moving while the background is a blurred streak —a visual convention that implicitly situates the camera/viewer as moving at similar speed to the featured vehicle.

Car as embodiment of speed:
- Direct verbal references to the power of the motor or other performance features associated with speed (e.g. Saab ad of vehicle pulling along a para-glider, and the tag line "The new Saab 9.5 Aero. 0–100kph in 6.9 seconds.")
- Cars at rest can embody speed by being linked with professional car racing and high-performance prototypes (Tranter and Keefe 2001; Tranter 2003), as in a Honda ad where a racing vehicle morphs into a family sedan, with the tag line "...the dreams of our formula one engineers find their way into every car that we make," In the magazine ad for a Toyota reproduced here, a simple montage of the driver's side of a rally car and red urban sedan attributes the qualities of the former to the latter (and its drivers).

Physical and sensory effects of speed:
- Physical effects of vehicular acceleration, sometimes with humour and special effects, as in ads where an animated toy dog hung by an elastic string from the rear view mirror ends up squashed against the back window; or where a racing car driver's face is so distorted by his speed around the empty racetrack that his speech about a car sale needs subtitles (though his final manic laugh needs no translation).
- Sensory and physiological effects of speed felt even without driving, including ads for Integra where a young man is hospitalised with a syndrome where hundreds of identical microscopic red Integra cars are racing through his veins (tag line: 'It's in the blood.'); or one showing female quadruplets in different locations sharing the orgasmic thrill of the sister who's fanging her new Alfa Romeo down an open road.
- Risk-taking behaviour and sensation-dominated ego states are invoked by references to extreme sports like snowboarding or BMX biking, where cars carry people and gear to the venues, or are represented as equivalents of extreme sports equipment.

Extraterrestrial and space age references:
- Found across above categories of speed representations, with cultural associations to light speed as fastest velocity attainable;
- Words and imagery of science fiction and the space age link driving with the most open space imaginable and the fastest possible speed for escaping into it, as in Ford ads with tag line "We have ignition," or Sirion ads where the car is hijacked and taken at light speed into outer space by an extraterrestrial with deadly green laser eyes;
- Light speed as sensory excess, as in Ford ad including a scene reminiscent of the 'Star Gate' sequence of *2001: A Space Odyssey* where a man stands still amidst fast-moving streaks of light and the song proclaims "I can't get enough of this".

Recent road safety research on young drivers has suggested that factors like "sensation seeking, egocentric thinking and risk taking" as well as deliberately deviant traffic behaviour, and worries and emotions in traffic, were stronger predictors of crash risk in young drivers than factors like driving skill (where optimistic overconfident self-estimation is more of a problem) (Willams, 1999) see also Ulleberg and Rundmo 2003, Rundmo and Iversen 2003). In this context, it would seem that of the various kinds of speed representations in advertising, the ones emphasising the sensational effects are potentially the most appealing to, and

dangerously encouraging of, the subtype of young drivers who actively seek such sensations through driving. But regulation of such images would not diminish the built-in capacity of cars to provide these sensations to speeding drivers.

Grunt and Conquest

Rather than celebrating the sensation of speed, and the vehicle as a means to attain it, many ads for 4WD work and leisure vehicles celebrate the vehicle as a powerful, autonomous and intelligent physical agent—rather like an animal (Colt, Jaguar, Panther, Barracuda) or a reliable mate, who is in touch with and can command natural forces, as in a controversial ad where a ute magically stirs up cyclonic rain by doing wheelies in the dry country.

- **Not a race but an odyssey or conquest:** the narratives celebrating the manly vehicle's heroic struggle to find its it way into the wild country, the grunt it possesses to forge its own off-road paths through terrain, the toughness with which it survives battles with elemental forces, and the intelligence and resilience that let it cope where humans fail, as in a number of humorous Toyota ads including the 'Bugger' commercial where the apprentice forgets the handbrake, the vehicle slips away, and manages through a series of accidents and off-road meanderings to collect all the building materials sought by the boss before coming to rest (still unscathed) against a tree.
- **Getting wet and dirty:** Other generic 'grunt' scenes show the vehicle throwing up a spray of red dust, or creating a big splash while crossing creeks or floods; negotiating rough rock-strewn mountain tracks to perch on rocky cliff edges; plus the obligatory excremental moments when it gets covered in mud or dirt.
- **Rugged individualism:** These ads draw on established images of the Australian bush and outback and share many features with ads for hunting rifles, spotlights, fishing gear, etc., in what analyst Elizabeth Hirschman (2003) has identified in North American culture as 'the semiotics of rugged individualism', where a masochistic willingness to endure and survive damage is part of manly toughness (see also Sofia, 1998, 43-49).

Containment, comfort and 'mobile sociability'

Despite the sociability of traffic (denied in ads anyway), the car is designed, promoted and experienced as an insulated 'cocoon' (Lupton 1999; see also Morse, 1998); cars are examples of 'container technologies' (Sofia, 2000) and technological 'smart spaces' (Sofia, 2001) that not only transport us with power and speed, but also provide a seemingly self-contained, controllable and adaptive environment that promises comfort, entertainment, sociality, safety and security.

- **"Driving your world"** is the tag line of a Mitsubishi ad popular with young female driver/viewers, showing a range of cruising or stationary Mitsubishi cars in various settings, with a focus on the interiors and occupants, who are all moving enjoyably or miming the words of a song about "the dreamer's disease" Despite showing no other traffic, this ad was found "very realistic" by some young women in our pilot focus groups, who identified with using the car as a party zone, piling into it, turning up the music and car-dancing and singing their way are around the city.
- **Mobile sociability:**This ad speaks to the young driver/viewers for whom, as Carrabine and Longhurst (2002) found in their study of Manchester youth, the car was not so much an agent of lamentable "mobile privatisation," but a site of social interaction, meaningful as a means of "mobile sociability" to which

the young and car-less aspire as a way of avoiding social exclusion, getting out of the family home and maintaining and expanding social networks, as well as enjoying routine convenience of getting to study or work.

- The significance of cars as social spaces for youth, and how to manage the social and sensory environment within the cabin, are factors that could be better addressed in road safety policy, training and campaigns for young drivers.

Narratives and scenarios of driving

Although speed is a predominant theme in car advertising, and "allegiances to the racetrack" (Redshaw 2003a) many and varied, the race is not the only kind of driving scenario or narrative. A variety of driving scenarios can be distinguished in terms of the emphases they put on different aspects of an archetypal journey (Sofoulis, 2003b).

- **Escape** scenarios (including extraterrestrial trips) emphasise the moment of leaving the mundane world and escaping to another one;
- **Race** scenarios (including computer/video games) express the thrusting, phallic aggressive/competitive impulse to gain a leading edge, win a trophy or make a record of your name and score;
- **Epics or odysseys** focus on the destinations and what you can discover or experience there;
- **Conquest** scenarios celebrate the phallic-excremental 'grunt' power needed to penetrate and discover the body of nature and its resources;
- **Errand** scenarios, common in life, are rare in advertising ('Bugger' being a humorous and unusual hybrid of conquest and errand); they represent a routinisation of the epic or conquest (e.g. the drive and the quest for a parking spot in order to shop; Morse 1998);
- **Cruise** scenarios concentrate on the sheer pleasure of movement within the comfortable womb-like technological cocoon of the vehicle itself (rather than the destination);
- **Joy rides** emphasise the thrills of speed and/or of stealing the vehicle as a forbidden and otherwise unattainable pleasure;
- **Crash** scenarios put an abrupt and sometimes fatal end to the journeys of the protagonist and whatever unfortunate entity gets in their way; they are mainly confined to road safety campaigns and some insurance advertising.

In the above list it is apparent that the scenarios of driving in car ads are not created by ads or even cars alone, but are variants of well established traditions in popular 20th century culture (the escape by car and the car chase being film staples since *The Keystone Cops*). Some have antecedents in the age of equine or locomotive transport, while others relate to heroic narratives of nationalistic masculinity and colonial discovery, or the hero archetype in western culture (and its ironic and anti-heroic austral variants, like the *Mad Max/Road Warrior* cycle).

The open road

The ubiquitous image of the open road is even more common, though perhaps less obvious, than references to speed across all kinds of car advertising (Sofoulis, 2002). With only rare exceptions, cars move in a world without other vehicles, stop signs, or red lights and travel in splendid isolation on open roads, whether urban, rural, coastal or outback through scenery ranging from the idyllic to the sublime. Open road images are related to popular fantasies around cars in the cultural of private mobility: fantasies of individuality, freedom and escape. They also relate to the mystique of the

race track and the thrill of being out there alone at the head of the pack. Even though idealisation of some recognisably realistic scenario is a characteristic device of television advertising, whose short durations permit no "dull footage" (Marchand, 1985), the open road imagery in car ads represents an extreme denial of the everyday social reality of driving as an interactive practice within traffic.

Advertising does not often deliver a lot of product information, but typically aims to generate a familiar feeling in viewers about the kind of world and social/familial networks in which the product is embedded, or alternatively, a too-familiar world from which it promises release. Ads thereby establish an horizon of expectation about the desirable state of the viewer's own world and the people and things in it, such that, as one media researcher puts it, "Synthetic experience does not substitute real experience but interacts with it, providing frames of interpretation" (Giaccardi 1995, 127). The horizon of expectation set up by open road imagery is that one can drive as if the road was one's own. This background expectation of an unimpeded journey along an open road makes us more likely to get frustrated with the very existence of other drivers and vehicles, unless racing them. As Sarah Redshaw amongst others has found (Redshaw 2001a), many drivers behave as though other road users don't or shouldn't exist; we resent speed limits as impediments to what we believe should be an uninterrupted and rapid journey; many do not drive with a defensive awareness of the hazards and unpredictability posed by other drivers or off-road entities, but rather with the view that these are occasional hazards and obstructions in our path. With speed and associated sensations such an obvious feature of many ads, together with the ubiquitous anti-social fantasy of the traffic-free road, encouragement is tacitly given to exactly that kind of narcissistic and sensation-dominated attitude to driving which proves most fatal to the young and inexperienced.

Regulating Advertising or changing culture?

We have to acknowledge that advertising has some effects in shaping our expectations and ways of interpreting and the world. But how much could regulating car advertising influence the preoccupations with speed and the open road? Car ads are a too-easy scapegoat for deep-rooted problems in how we think about driving, traffic and what influences driving behaviours .

The open road fantasy is not an invention of car advertising, but implicit in the general culture of automobility, where motorised private transport has been pursued at the expense of more collective forms. The culture of automobility needs to keep alive the open road fantasy, because it expresses the utopian dream of unimpeded private mobility for which it has been—and continues to be—willing to sacrifice so much, including too many of its youth. Can we fairly penalise car ads for open road imagery that ignores the social reality of traffic when even one of the largest traffic regulatory bodies in Australia, the Roads and Traffic Authority in New South Wales, has as its logo an image of an empty road passing through blue above and green below, without a single vehicle in sight? (Sofoulis, 2002). And what effect would censoring the connotations of the race track in ads have when, as Redshaw has critically noted (2003a), the RTA sends out similar messages, such as in the flyer promoting the celebratory walk-through opening of the M5 tunnel with imagery of speed racing (checkered flags, suited-up drivers, racing cars, etc)?

Because driver training and traffic regulation have historically been male-dominated fields, and conventionally approached as primarily regulatory and technical concerns in which human factors are understood in terms of behaviourist and perceptual

psychology (Redshaw, 2000), very few inroads have been made into officially acknowledging, let alone trying to change, irrational factors in driving like emotions and fantasies, both cultural and unconscious (Grumet, 1989), as well as sociocultural affiliations, expectations and purposes that give meaning to driving behaviour. These factors interfere with but are unexplainable within what has traditionally been understood as a form of procedural and technical rationality[1]. If driving is viewed instead as a form of socio-cultural practice, we can recognise it as subject to all the vagaries of human emotional and social idiosyncrasies: performances of social, gendered, ethnic and subcultural identities; traffic is seen as an arena for enacting egoism, rage, vengeance, pride, macho fantasies, territoriality, but also occasionally generosity, tolerance, forebearance and congeniality—emotions unspeakable where driving is thought of as a purely technical matter.

Our current driving cultures do not provide any adequate and accessible vocabulary for dealing with issues of how to negotiate between our highly individualised desires for personal mobility, and the inevitability of us trying to satisfy those desires amidst hordes of others on their own journeys. (Think of the holiday traffic congestion when lots of people try to 'get away from it all' at the same time; see Redshaw 2003b). In a culture that so highly values individualism, speed and private mobility, the very idea that some form of comfort and security might ensue from being an obedient little subunit within the moving flotilla of traffic is barely even expressible. What training do we get on how to safely express, acknowledge or moderate the strong and primitive emotions aroused by feelings of controlling a powerful prosthetic body whose space can be threatened by others on the road? What advice do young people receive on how to get out of potentially risky and emotionally or socially challenging situations involving combinations of driving, music, sex, drugs or alcohol? What techniques of anger management might be developed for road bullies, passive aggressive drivers, and their victims? These are some of the many issues relating to cultures of and behaviour in cars and traffic that could potentially be addressed in driver training programs as well as in safety campaigns that did not leave it solely up to the advertisements to recognise the non-technical and emotional dimensions of driving.

What is the point of regulating car ads when—other than the goals of reducing death and injury or improving enforcement— we do not even have any road maps about the kind of driving cultures we want to steer towards? Efforts spend developing regulatory guidelines for advertising might be better spent articulating in a positive way the desirable directions of driving cultures. Instead of imposing censorship, national bodies might consider offering rewards to vehicle manufacturers and advertisers who developed less anti-social and more safe and traffic-wise ways to promote their products. Perhaps the best outcome from the moral panic about speed in car ads is that the community discussion it generates might prompt us to articulate more clearly what kind of driving culture we want to strive for, and from there plan to bring about cultural change.

PART 3: Resisting Road Safety Messages

Because of the points outlined in Table 1, which highlight the complexity and indeterminacy of media effects and the role of audiences construing meanings, it is rare to find scholars of media, communications and popular culture endorsing calls

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[1] Similar arguments can be made about the irrational dimensions of gendered and dominant cultural attitudes to computers and other high technologies; see Sofia 1993, Sofoulis 1993, Sofia 1998.

for media censorship. Rather than trying to control the message, we are more likely promote other forms of response that change the contexts of message reception, including building critical media literacy and developing counter-messages which could be in a variety of media of different breadth of circulation. Televised road safety campaign messages are an already existing media genre expressing counter-messages to the utopian fantasies of car advertisements. They represent a site for making interventions in driving culture that can prove effective, especially when backed up by other regional and local measures in a variety of media. There is a comprehensive literature evaluating the effects of different kinds of safety awareness campaigns, which is not reviewed here, where the focus is not on the effectiveness of overall safety campaigns, but on an analysis of the narrative strategies of typical safety messages and details of how some young viewer/drivers manage to find different ways of resisting them.

Authoritarian mode of Address: the 'juridical voice'

As counter-messages to car ads, road safety television commercials (TVCs) are in many cases limited in their effectiveness as modes of communication to youth audiences by their mode of address, that is, the tone of voice and position of power and/or intimacy they adopt towards viewers.

Car ads seductively address viewers as socially situated and media literate beings, familiar with many media forms, cultural styles and codes, and full of desire and the potential to realise their dreams of owning a car that will secure their belonging in an ideal social world, or maybe take them away on some exciting trip. Different ads are designed to create different audiences, thus fostering people's feelings that they are not generic 'consumers' but members of particular subgroups. Semi-realistic social scenarios offer a range of characters and positions with which viewers might identify. In strong contrast, many road safety and enforcement ads take up an authoritarian, paternalistic and juridical stance (the 'juridical voice') by addressing their audience as generic citizens and potential law-breakers in need of reminders and moral appeals to obey the rules. This authority also administers 'aversion therapy' through scenes of the bad consequences of disobedience, whether fatal, injurious, costly, restrictive, or inconvenient. These threats are usually articulated by a deep, stern masculine voice, or bold, black and white sans serif lettering, threatening harm or prohibition should legal injunctions be disobeyed.

The authoritative warning ("You will get caught!")

Announcements about surveillance, enforcement and warnings of extra penalties comprise a common subgenre of safety messages, as in an RTA ad where the typical stern deep male voiceover announces extra penalties for not wearing seatbelts over Easter, while the visuals show someone's driver's licence being inserted into the seatbelt lock and getting shredded. Here the viewer/driver is pictured in quite abstract and formal terms as a citizen, his legal identity represented by the driving licence bearing his image and signature—an identity the road authority threatens to capture and chew up.

In response to an a similar ad from WA about the increased use of speed cameras with the tag line 'You will get caught', young drivers negated the message in the following segment of discussion:

> Barbara: It's a lie
> Boys: Yeah!
> Alan: You'd be lucky to see two radars a week. Apart from the speed cameras.

> Barbara: I've driven past police officers doing 120, and , like, I'm on my Ps. ...
> Alan: Most of them are really crap drivers as well. They disobey the rules.
>   [Example of being overtaken by speeding cop car.]
> Michael: I'd say, if you saw a policeman speeding, you'd go "Oh, I might as
>   well speed as well!" [Then gives example of a policeman who thought
>   he was unseen, smoking the police car wheels in a take-off staged for
>   his cheering friend.]

The participants counteract the message firstly with their 'optimism bias', the belief they are unlikely to get caught speeding on cameras, and secondly by disparaging the driving styles and hoonish behaviour of particular policemen. They recognise what the official ads could never acknowledge: that police on the roads in their powerful cars share some of the traits (and enviable pleasures) of the hoons and speeding young drivers they are supposed to be policing.

Further problems with these types of messages are identified below.

Crash scenarios

Crashes are another common variety of safety message, showing not only the crash but also the terrible physical, social and emotional consequences not only for victims and survivors but also their friends and families. One youth-targeted NSW example (referred to below as 'the brothers' ad) shows two brothers on a quest for food after school, doing 72k in a 60k zone and crashing into a lamppost when trying to avoid a car that emerged from between parked vehicles. Somewhat of an advance on the didactic warning to generic citizens, these ads at least acknowledge their audiences as people who are in close social or familial relationships, even if they still rely on guilt and shock tactics intended to jolt the audience into avoiding the consequences of being a crash victim or perpetrator.

However, an inherent problem with the typical crash scenario is that it reinforces the very conventions of open road imagery that it attempts to disrupt. That is, the drive is shown as the 'ideal' of a traffic-free journey, with perhaps just some parked cars around. Suddenly, some other vehicle or driver appears unexpectedly and the crash occurs, usually with fatal results. Open road imagery in car ads ignores the society of traffic and promotes narcissistic, and sensation-oriented ego states in which driving is understood as basically an uninterrupted journey with the occasional hazard to negotiate, a minor challenge to the (optimistically overestimated) vehicle handling skills of the driver. Despite the traumatic ending of the fantasy in crash scenarios on the open road, by having represented other road users not as expected traffic, but as unexpected and occasional hazards to deal with (or fail to), the typical crash scenario can let this basic egocentric attitude to driving go unchallenged. It builds in a way for the optimistic young viewer/driver to resist the message by reaffirming that in such a scenario, their superior skills would ensure the crash would not happen to them. This is one reason why more attention needs to be given to issues of behaviour in traffic scenarios, rather than only open roads.

In a TVC of a single-car crash scenario (referred to as the 'rewind crash') that takes place on an open road, a male driver has rolled the car and cries in horror on realising his woman passenger is dead; the crash scene is played in reverse, shot from the point of view of inside the cabin, and the alternate ending presented of a policeman giving him a speeding ticket, while he blames his car for wanting to go "whoosh [gesture]". Respondents in an all-female group thought the shock tactics of the 'rewind crash' ad were effective for them, but likely less so for young men they knew, who can resist the influence of such warnings, as one participant noted, by asserting "Nah! I can drive good."

This ad makes effective use of the media form in the rewind segment, allowing us an alternative 'happy ending' to the crash narrative: getting a speeding fine. But since the crash scenario is averted by the intervention of the police, not the actions of the driver, the narrative reinforces the paternalistic message that all moral responsibility rests with the police who are going to save you from yourself and your car. While the discussants got the intended message that even on an empty road, high speed is enough to kill, they also got this moral message. In response to the researcher's question "What do you think is the police message there?" they replied:

Alan: You'd rather be caught than dead.
Barbara: Yeah. "We're doing it for your own good" kind of thing.
Sally: Yeah. That also affects the way the driver would look at being pulled over. Yeah. You're more likely to have a kind of — like you won't yell at the police officer as much! (Laughter) Like, you know, if it's for your own good.
Barbara: If they're looking out for you, you're not going to abuse them for pulling you over.

From the way they spoke, the message wasn't about not speeding, but the etiquette of getting caught.

Most safety ads—whether warnings or crash scenarios —concentrate on the confronting physical and emotional situations or penalties and restrictions that happen in the **aftermath** of an infringement or accident. But if as recent research on young drivers suggests (e.g. Ulleberg and Rundmo 2003, Rundmo and Iversen 2003), emotional factors are a better predictor than cognitive factors of the likelihood of young drivers taking risks and having accidents, then safety campaign ads might be more effectively designed to create emotional connections with drivers experiencing and responsibly managing sensations and emotions in *pre-crash situations*, not just confronting the horror and remorse of the aftermath. It is unfortunate in that what was obviously an expensive television production, the 'rewind crash' TVC missed the opportunity to offer a crash avoidance scenario where the driver took responsibility. For example, on the rewind, he could have voluntarily pulled over, saying he can't help himself speeding, and maybe needs a break anyway, and asked the woman to take over driving. Or, the woman could have asked to drive for a while.

Forms of driver/viewer resistance

Most road safety and enforcement ads seem to rely on the old 'hypodermic' model of communication, with faith that the authoritative sender can effectively control the meaning and effects of the message received. But this model breaks down because it cannot account for the ways receivers of messages can negotiate with the text or construe it from their own resistant point of view. There seem to be almost as many ways of resisting safety messages as there are young viewer/drivers.

- **Resistance to policing as such** —Some of our focus group discussants pointed out that people used broadcast radio, police radar detectors, CB radios and mobile text messaging services to pick up information about the location of police speed traps.

Resistance to messages from authorities —The very fact that a message comes from an authority like the RTA is enough to invoke resistance in some cases, as in previous example of the WA ad about speed cameras.

o **Warnings taken as incitements** — In some driving subcultures, the boundary between safe and un-safe driving practices serves as a marker of identity, where risky driving practices can be understood as a signifier of difference and as a source of collective and personal meaning (Fuller 2003). Disciplinarian warnings that 'you'll get caught' may serve to encourage the already anti-authoritarian drivers to think about experiences and technologies for defying authorities and not getting caught, rather than encouraging them to not speed. Threats of increased surveillance only up the stakes in a game of cat-and-mouse with the police that on occasion may culminate in a deadly high-speed chase.

- **Resistance to juridical mode of address ('citizens')** — Addressing young viewer/drivers as citizens is not likely to be effective. Even for law-abiding young Australian drivers, citizenship is likely to be a relatively weak category of identity compared to other axes of affiliation such as various youth subcultures, being 'a westie', a 'habib' (a Lebanese-Australian 'mate'), driving a Ford or a Holden or a Japanese or Korean import, barracking for the Panthers or Roosters, etc. The juridical mode of address (the driver as citizen) would likely have even less effect (other than incitement) on the most problematic variety of young drivers: those for whom risky and illegal road behaviour is a performance of a masculine social identity that is deliberately constructed as deviant, marginal, and outside the frame inhabited by good, law-abiding 'citizens.'

- **Resistance to the medium** — Another point of potential resistance to crash scenario ads is built into the media form itself, as pinpointed by one young woman who said that for her, real stories on the news about fatal crashes involving young drivers had more impact than ads like the 'rewind crash' because:

> In an ad, it's just fictional. Like, I mean, it [an accident like this] has happened, but people aren't going to process that when they're just watching an advertisement because they're just skimming over it and will hardly take any notice.

This respondent had undertaken some university level media study and she reiterates the worthy point that the conditions of reception of the television medium can undermine the effectiveness of safety messages like this, which are received half-distractedly as yet another televisual fiction in the constant flow of ads, news, and dramas. (On the other hand, as in the British example discussed below, safety ads that more fully embrace fictional televisual and cinematic codes could potentially avoid this problem.)

- **Resistance to the televisual modality** — For the above driver/viewer, the actuality of news was more powerful than realistic but fictional crash scenarios achieved with special visual effects under controlled conditions. This response raises the question of modality. There is need for research into which kind of televisual modalities work well for young viewers: real, realistic, simulated, video game style, fictional, fantasy. Cartoons, for example, are an under-explored genre for televised safety messages, though comics and cartoons have been used widely in health campaigns targeted to specific populations. Because they are capable of both addressing the emotional, sensory and social dimensions of a scenario in a comically exaggerated, self-

reflexive and stylised way; because their 'weak' (non-realistic) modality allows them to get away with more extreme representations than does photorealism; and because young drivers are of a generation who has literally been feed on (or at least during) *The Simpsons* (Zerbes, 2003), cartoons could prove an excellent televisual form for presenting pre-crash, crash or aftermath scenarios in ways which were emotionally engaging without being traumatic.

- **Resistance through crash analysis**— In a focus group discussion of 'the brothers' ad, most participants settled on the interpretation that while the driver couldn't control or predict the car coming out, had he been going slower, he wouldn't have killed his brother, or the accident wouldn't have happened at all. But one participant countered by arguing that had the driver been going faster, the accident wouldn't have happened either. This 'resistant' meaning is counter to the intended one, but is nevertheless is implicit in the accident scenario, waiting perhaps to be noticed by a young viewer /driver with a lead foot, an anti-authoritarian attitude, and an overconfident belief in their judgement and vehicle handling skills.

- **Avoidance and 'hatred' of traumatic images**— A number of respondents mentioned strongly remembering and "hating" particular crash scenario ads, an intensity of emotion apparently associated with the shock and horror of the accident scene. The ad of a combi crashing into a truck was mentioned, and another of a family with the song "Summer holiday" as the sound track. Some even reported switching channels or going away when a hated ad came on. While this form of resistance probably doesn't completely negate the TV message (because the walkout is prompted by the traumatic memory of it), it does remind us that since TV viewing is a voluntary activity, audiences have the capacity to protect themselves from repeated 'aversion therapy' and shock tactics by simply avoiding them. On the other hand, the more people expose themselves to the shocking images, the more used to them they become, and the shock value wears off.

The murky morality of trauma tactics

Aside from the problems of aversion therapy techniques being resistible by viewers who simply switch off, or become inured through overexposure, there are moral weaknesses and ambiguities inherent in the crash scenario sub-genre that undermine its effectiveness. In order to shock viewer/drivers into avoiding physical violence to themselves or their passengers, the road safety or enforcement institution becomes the perpetrator of emotional trauma upon receivers of its messages, in what is less of a 'hypodermic' than a 'cudgel' approach to communication that undermines rather than enhances the moral authority of the senders and receivers alike. Is an authority that only gains respect through threats of violence and punishment truly worth respecting? And can someone who only obeys road rules out of fear and in traumatised acquiescence to authorities—or who alternatively, takes authoritarian warnings as incitements for further defiance—be said to be enfranchised as a 'citizen' who obeys laws in a spirit of civility based on respect for self and others?

The weak and murky moral positioning implicit in shocking crash scenario messages may be one explanation for the failure of these expensive productions to have any significant impact on the NSW road toll, a failure the RTA was "as a loss to explain" but which has prompted it to develop new styles of commercials targeted to "different age and socio-economic groups" (though not, apparently, gender) (Glendinning and

Connolly, 2001),.[2] But even if they have a different class or age of protagonist in the narrative, a crash scenario is still a crash scenario, with the inherent problems discussed above, including a concentration on the horrible aftermath rather than modelling the management of potential pre-crash scenarios.

Less Resistible Alternatives?

One implication of the above criticism of safety ads as too readily resistible by young viewer/drivers is that they could become more like other kinds of advertisements, and address targeted audience segments in more 'seductive' and less resistible ways. Ads employing complex, contradictory meanings and a range of characters in realistic fictional scenarios are harder to resist than threatening and shocking assertions of moral and legal authority which can be easily rejected those who don't even identify strongly as citizens in the first place.

- **Social realism and positive reinforcement** — A recent safety message about drink driving works more like a regular ad by using humour within a realistic and identifiable social scenario. Five anglo-looking Aussie men are drinking in a pub and watching sports TV. The main character is so drunk he accidentally enters the Ladies toilet (timed with the TV sports commentary saying "crucial error"), and makes other blunders but at the end, when the mates all get into a taxi, he is praised by the voiceover:

  > Believe it or not, he's actually very smart. Why? Because he's planning to take a taxi home with his mates. Drink and don't drive? You legend.

  Instead of an earlier threatening message "Drink and drive? You bloody idiot!", this voiceover does not promise punishment for disobedience but encourages a cultural shift in driving behaviour by positively presenting a way of managing a believable pre-crash scenario. Similar socially realistic scenarios might be developed for youth road safety campaigns as they have been for public health and youth campaigns on drugs, alcohol and STDs: indeed these risky behaviours are very effectively approached together. One focus could be working on changing ideas about what counts as "good" or "cool" driving.

- **Magical realism and cross-media literacy** —Interesting examples of road safety ads have recently been obtained from the UK through our Partner Investigator Anne Morphett of the NRMA(Motoring and Services). Far from the authoritative style of safety message, and going beyond the social realism of advertising seen in the Australian 'Legend' ad, these overseas campaigns make use of a range of contemporary visual techniques and ambiguous and complex narrative structures familiar to young cinema-going (or video-watching) audiences.

  In one very engaging and effective production, a young man with a regional accent speaks directly to a hand-held camera that follows him around from his high school, where he points out his mates, to his family home (where everyone looks sad). He looks over a fence and asks the young man working on a motor bike how it is going, but getting no answer, shrugs and moves on

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[2] The author would like to thank Ms Janet Hogge, RSO for the Hawkesbury, for passing on this newspaper article.

to a road. He sees a young woman and man on the other side walking towards a roadside shrine with a lot of flowers. He says "That's Debby. She's meant to be going out with me, but she's with Tariq. Again. Debby!" He calls and runs across the road, where a car is coming and hits him. The shot changes to the point of view of passing through the cabin of the car, which drives on, while the boy looks back, walks on and comments to the camera "That's the second time that's happened to me this week. It hurt a lot more the first time." The shot changes and the camera looks over his shoulder at Debby and Tariq who are sadly contemplating the roadside shrine. The final shot is a close-up of the flowers and fence-posts of the shrine, with the tag line superimposed in somewhat grungy block letters: "Traffic is the single biggest killer of 15-18 year olds."

This ad sustains an intriguing ambiguity until the point of the accident, itself a typical enough scene in road safety ads, but here followed by the apparent intact survival of the stricken pedestrian. The ambiguity created through the earlier part of the ad is one likely to sustain interest over repeated viewings. We call on our knowledge of other popular cultural genres as we realise it is an "I see dead people" sort of story, in the genre of popular films like *The Sixth Sense*: the protagonist is actually already dead and the roadside shrine is for him.

- **Other media and modalities:** Compared to expensively produced broadcast TV safety campaigns, local and regional campaigns make use of a wider diversity of communicative modalities with youth audiences. More research is needed into which modes of address and which modalities work best with young driver/viewers of safety messages: brutal realism? Actual news? Magical realism? Fantasy or dream? As mentioned above, cartoons are potentially valuable for trenchantly addressing emotional and social issues and dealing with gore in a less brutalising way. Their 'low' modality—the very fact that they are not photographic or cinematically realistic—makes them less vulnerable to being resisted through some of the tactics listed above (crash critique, trauma avoidance, dismissed as just another realistic televisual fiction).

Fostering a paradigm shift: a case for national initiatives?

Ads like the British example would not come cheaply, and it is interesting to note it is part of a suite of ads produced in a national safety campaign. In Australia, by contrast, a country with far fewer people, televised road safety messages are mainly produced on a state by state basis, generally through a government road and traffic or road safety organization, and are sometimes shared or adapted after production for broadcast in other states. Compared to many other kinds of Australian commercials (including for cars), or various British road safety examples we have seen, most Australian road safety ads have been lacking in imagination, creativity, irony, humour; they have exhibited little overt awareness of youth perspectives or youth idioms, and do not acknowledge the mediascape in which they are located. The budgets for television commercial production available to each state would probably limit the scope of ad design and production values, and restrict capacity to develop campaigns targeted to different audiences of viewer/drivers, while exerting pressure to develop ads aimed at some hypothetical mainstream audience or generic driver (most often represented as a young white male).

One strategy perhaps worth considering for Australia is the development at a national level of innovative televised road safety messages targeted to certain groups of viewer/drivers, including both city and rural youth. One way to fund such an initiative might to be exercise a levy on broadcast car commercials, or to develop a scheme in which car advertisers could subsidise production of high quality and creative safety ads.

An initial objective of such an initiative could be to help bring about a paradigm shift in the way state agencies approached youth road safety campaigns, and in effect, to create more room for the alternative approaches that already exist in the community to get a national airing. Since safety messages from traffic authorities are potentially so easily dismissed by youth by as ineffective warnings from a morally suspect and punitive source, one platform of an innovative new approach would be to realign youth road safety campaigns with health rather than traffic enforcement in a move which could allow a number of related risk-taking issues to be addressed at once (such self-esteem, substance abuse, sexual vulnerability, etc.)

Such a program of innovation would by no means have to start from scratch, because there are already many people in the road safety field and other areas (especially health) who are already familiar with and using more 'youth friendly' and less authoritarian modes of address to encourage less risky behaviour and other kinds of changes within their communities. In many road safety initiatives undertaken at local and regional levels by Road Safety Officers—the majority of whom are women—authoritarian conventions and shock tactics have been largely abandoned in favour of campaigns that are more specifically targeted, tailored to specific community problems, often developed in consultation with and involvement by local young people, and which use wit, humour, cross-media references and a diversity of youth oriented media forms (stickers, T-shirts, postcards, dances, art competitions, etc). Young people themselves are excellent source for ideas and scenarios around road safety, expressed in social and emotional languages their peers can respond to, as some RSOs have found when they have organised competitions for young people to make their own road safety ads (for example, the Happy Habib Laps commercial produced in Parramatta; TAC in Victoria also has a youth road safety message competition going).

Even without hugely increased budgets for road safety advertising, significant improvements in communications with youth audiences could arguably be achieved by a paradigm shift in the style, content and focus of safety ads. The conventions of threatening and authoritarian addresses to punishable 'citizens' are rooted in the historical and institutional links between traffic management and policing, and the definition of driving as a form of rule-governed technical rationality, rather than a form of collective practice and social interaction subject to irrational influences. Although car ads deny the existence of traffic, they do at least acknowledge that driving is a culturally meaningful activity, a means of personal expression and social inclusion associated with powerful fantasies, aspirations, emotions, and sensations. Safety campaigns for young drivers would be better if they were more like ads to the extent that they addressed the social, emotional and sensory contents and contexts of driving, and drew on a wider range of cultural references and resources in presenting their messages in ways young driver/viewers would find harder to resist.

The conclusion of this submission is presented in the form of a chart (Table 2) which summarises arguments and points from the foregoing discussion, and also includes points summarising the submission 'Driving Cultures: Driving with a Difference' by Dr. Sarah Redshaw (Redshaw 2003c).

TABLE 2:SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, IMPLICATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

GENERAL CULTURE

FINDINGS/ ARGUMENTS	IMPLICATIONS	SUGGESTED ACTIONS
• Traffic is a social phenomenon and form of interaction that involves informal rules, personal, cultural and subcultural meanings, and historical socio-economic and technical choices for a way of life organised around principles of 'automobility'.	• Approaches emphasising laws, penalties, engineering and perceptual and behavioural psychology are limited in their ability to bring further change in driving cultures because they do not deal with the social and cultural factors affecting driver behaviour.	• Overhaul dominant legal and engineering paradigm to place more emphasis on traffic behaviour as not just a matter of knowledge and skills, but of background social norms, particular social contexts, and personal choices involving emotions and—especially for youth—the performance of identities in social space. • Address the social and cultural dimensions of traffic in approaches to driver training and licensing, transport and safety policies (not to mention car design).

CAR ADVERTISING
(See also Table 1)

FINDINGS/ ARGUMENTS	IMPLICATIONS	SUGGESTED ACTIONS
• Despite 40 years of critique and the development of better models of media effects on individuals and cultures, the 'strong effects' model is still employed in moral panics about media and youth.	• Many intellectual and cultural resources available for better understanding of media effects are being ignored by transport policy makers and researchers outside the field of media and cultural studies.	• Transport and road safety stakeholders need to broaden their perspectives on road safety beyond law, engineering and perceptual or behavioural psychology. • Calls for regulation of driving messages in ads need to be treated cautiously and their implications properly evaluated in the light of contemporary theories of media effects and culture. • More research is needed about which kinds of media (including car magazines, computer games, the web, films and videos) young drivers pay most attention to or feel most influence their driving styles.
• Regulation of overt TV message content cannot control connotations or interpretations.	• Rather than censor messages, can counter with other messages in the same or different media; or change meanings by changing audiences, producers, contexts, medium, modes.	• Encourage development of critical media literacy through high schools (already happening) and driver and safety awareness programs for young that explicitly deal with representations of driving culture in a variety of media channels. • Instead of designing a regulatory code, articulate positive goals about driving culture and reward safety- and traffic-wise advertising.

CAR ADVERTISING (continued)

FINDINGS/ ARGUMENTS	IMPLICATIONS	SUGGESTED ACTIONS
• The taken for granted background imagery of the open road is more insidious and perhaps equally worrisome in car advertising (and official logos).	• The absence of other vehicles is a utopian denial of the reality of everyday driving as a necessity undertaken in the social field of traffic. • Open road imagery insidiously encourages the background anti-social expectation of the road as 'my road' on which others shouldn't exist.	• The background expectation of the open road as factor affecting choices of driving behaviour can be productively verbalised, discussed and examined in young driver workshops that focus on traffic and the social and cultural dimensions of driving. • Car ads can provide an excellent starting point for getting young people to air their ideals, and to compare the fantasy world of ads with their real-life experience.

ROAD SAFETY TVCS

• Many Australian televised road safety messages are paternalistic and authoritarian, addressing their viewers as potentially disobedient citizens who need stern warnings and threats to force their compliance with road rules.	• The 'hypodermic' S→M→R (sender, message, receiver) is alive and well in Australian TV road safety campaigns in Australia. • The 'juridical voice' is easily resisted by youth, for whom 'citizenship' is a weak axis of identification. • Messages may be rejected simply *because* they come from authorities, and warnings may be taken an incitements by anti-authoritarian risk-taking young drivers.	• Campaigns need to acknowledge and adapt to the 'mediascapes' in which they are received by members of a highly media literate generation. • More research is needed into the different modalities of message that might work for young audiences (authoritative, realistic, overtly fictional or special effects, cartoon or animated, etc). • Safety messages could be more effective and less resistible through more complex presentations within meaningful social scenarios. • Instead of being addressed as 'citizens', young audiences need specific kinds of targeting and recognition of specific emotional and social preoccupations
• Crash scenarios often share with car ads the imagery of the drive along open road, only with an unexpected interruption and an horrific aftermath.	• Crash scenarios usually focus on speed or road hazards whereas the emotional and sensory distractions within the vehicle may be more salient risk factors for young vehicle occupants.	• Young drivers and passengers need advice and opportunities to discuss ways of managing 'pre-crash' driving scenarios within and outside the car, including in the context of other risky behaviours (drugs, alcohol), and gender expectations about driving.
• Even when they concentrate on the psycho-social aftermath rather than gory details, crash scenarios try to work as aversion therapy.	• The aversion therapy model of causing behaviour change through shock, trauma, fear and guilt is likely ineffective on many optimistic youth, or those who refute, ignore or become desensitised to the ads.	• Instead of threatening and traumatising viewer/drivers, overt expressions of care and concern amongst peers, and positive modelling of alternatives to bad traffic behaviour by young people, might help improve youth self esteem and promote less risky behaviour.

ROAD SAFETY TVCS (continued)

FINDINGS/ ARGUMENTS	IMPLICATIONS	SUGGESTED ACTIONS
• Some crashes are presented as avoidable through obedience of speed limits or police intervention.	• Such scenarios leave moral responsibility on the side of authority rather than drivers or passengers.	• Responsibility for traffic safety has to be shared amongst the diverse community of drivers and vehicles. • Paying more attention to traffic as a social phenomenon and acknowledging the psycho-social, gendered and cultural dimensions of choices of traffic behaviour, could foster better appreciation of the road as a 'multi-user domain' that requires shared rules of civility.
• In contrast to countries like Britain which have national road safety campaign advertising, Australian TV road safety ads are mainly produced on a sate by state rather than national basis (with some post-production sharing)..	• Small state safety advertising budgets plus authoritarian conventions inhibit development of campaigns targeted to specific kinds of viewers, and reduce the creative scope and production values available to communicate with media-literate youth. • Other media besides TV need to be used in safety campaigns for youth.	• An innovative national youth safety television campaign could help shift the paradigm from enforcement to care. • Road Safety Officers and young drivers themselves have many good ideas which could be drawn upon. • Could some funding come from car advertisers? • Youth-targeted safety ads—especially those designed by young people themselves—could be shown in cinemas & other youth venues.

YOUTH SAFETY AWARENESS AND TRAINING
(Points related to *Driving Cultures: Driving with a Difference* submission by Dr Sarah Redshaw)

• Many prevention programs are about rules, compliance, and punishments.	• Compliance emphasis doesn't address the complex interpersonal, social, and cultural factors in driving behaviour, including the low self-esteem for which some young drivers try to compensate by risky behaviour in traffic.
	
	• Positive modelling and rewarding of good behaviour in traffic and management of pre-crash scenarios are alternatives to the emphasis on compliance and punishment.
		• We need a paradigm shift from the authoritarian concern with compliance to something akin to a health-based model of intervention and care, with more express attention to:
		  • the well-being and development of young people;
		  • the enhancement of their self-esteem;
		  • building the capacity of young drivers (and passengers) to make less risky choices on the roads and in their lives.

YOUTH SAFETY AWARENESS AND TRAINING (continued)

FINDINGS/ ARGUMENTS	IMPLICATIONS	SUGGESTED ACTIONS
• Programs emphasising advanced skills training deal with rare events and easily forgotten procedures, and foster dangerous over-confidence in young drivers.	• Such programs reinforce the "allegiances to the race track" and focus on driving as a technical skill instead of a form of social interaction. • These programs ignore the research evidence that it is not skill, but emotional and sensory factors, that are most causative of dangerous behaviour in young drivers.	• Driver and safety training needs to address the choices young people make in traffic, through discussion and reflection upon everyday driving experience. • Need to confront more directly the masculine gender norms which many youth sub-cultures share with aspects of dominant and official culture • Maybe provide some safe off-road arenas for the minority of hard core motor heads?

• Many programs employ a didactic approach to driver training that involves authoritative one-way delivery of information, and the use of shock tactics with equivocal effect.	• These approaches tend to encourage either passivity or anti-authoritarian resistance, while sending a message to young drivers that their opinions and experiences are not worth acknowledging, and that they must comply with the rules of a driving culture they are powerless to change.	• Allowing young drivers to share and reflect on knowledge and experience already gained in traffic is a better way to :
		  • address the psycho-social and cultural factors in driving;
		  • help establish a basis for life-long reflection and learning on and in the social field of traffic;
		  • encourage individual contributions to changing driving cultures.

• Better longer-term improvements in driver behaviour (for young drivers, adults, and offenders) are achieved from programs based on principles of interactive, peer-based group learning than from conventional didactic approaches.	• Peer group discussion is a better way of dealing with performances of identity and 'practical' consciousness in driving and traffic, the irrational and emotional factors in driving, and the background structural biases in driving culture all of which affect driver behaviour. • Whereas formal rules and the consequences of breaking them can be taught and explained, the socio-cultural and behavioural dimensions of driving cultures are inherently diverse and have to be worked through from different perspectives (rather than one authoritative one).	• A paradigm shift is called for in young driver and safety awareness training towards a more youth-centred and peer-based approach that acknowledges diversity and promotes positive changes in driving cultures. • Open-ended, interactive peer learning in a safe environment— as piloted in the *Driving with a Difference*™ workshops— can make gendered and local subcultural driving norms explicit for discussion and critical scrutiny, and can address, verbalise and question less conscious fantasies, assumptions and behavioural choices in driving cultures.
• The most effective safety and prevention campaigns entail a combination of levels of government, a range of institutions, and a variety of state, regional and local initiatives.	• Although there is arguably more room for national level research and policy addressing safety and youth issues, and to encourage innovations at state and local levels, there needs to be a continued diversity of initiatives at other levels and in the community.	• Need combination of national, state, regional and local initiatives to effect general shift in driving cultures and also to acknowledge the experiences and knowledge of young people and the diversity of local practices and driving subcultures.

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