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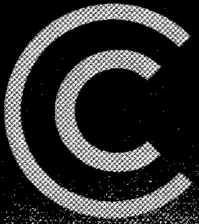

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VIOLENT SUBMISSION

GENDERED AUTOMOBILITY

Cars in the fullness of their materiality and semiotics offer a critical opportunity to analyze the dynamic of social submission. In the human and nonhuman choreography of the road, some people will be passengers, some will die in crashes, some will live with the most unthinkable injuries, and some will tuck in behind another vehicle after the merge sign while another plows ahead. Cars require submission both by consent and by design. Not only the steel itself but pollution, noise, and concrete inevitably push aside would-be users of would-be public spaces.[1]

It would be a mistake, however, to leave these observations to policy makers, since submission implies a working out of power relationships. In American culture, submission, with all of its sexual connotations, seems to be understood as "bad." In looking more closely at the popular culture of automobility, we see this at the level of advertising, where we witness a new level of individuated violence. "As a matter of fact, I do own the road," reads the tagline of a recent sport utility vehicle ad, or a recent Lexus ad illustrates a suburban neighborhood with tanks lined up in the driveways.[2] These offer just two examples of new entitlements to and takings of the semi-public-corporate street spaces as they are made evident in both rhetoric about driving and in actual vehicle designs. Of course, we all cannot "own the road" and so negotiations take place—from the small driver who purchases a compensatory high-riding truck, to the luxury car driver who peels out of the intersection, to the Mini Cooper driver who decides to buy a new brand of communal "motoring."

In the essay that follows, I aim to better understand how the need for submission has been worked out in American automobility.

I do this through a reading of a recent Internet advertising film for BMW. Briefly, the ad is presented as a six-minute film, "Star," directed by Guy Ritchie, and available only—but freely—on the bmwfilms.com Web site.[3] This film, according to the write-up on the Web site, pits Madonna against the driver of the BMW (Clive Owen) in a battle of wills. It is the way in which these "wills" are set against each other, however, that is of interest here—for another perspective on the film would hold that the driver merely uses the physics of the car to beat his passenger by driving fast and literally tossing her around the backseat.[4]

"Star" is one of a collection of BMW advertising features. Yet, given the supposedly high creative latitude afforded the directors, it is somewhat surprising that the films themselves follow remarkably stodgy and predictable scripts. The dull storylines may tell us more than we want to know about both the monopoly of a certain type of consumer (wealthy males between ages 35 and 45) on what will count as popular culture as well as this demographic's increasing ability to take as their own a higher percentage of national wealth than ever before. But for this very reason, they provide a concentrated analysis point, for "Star" taps into powerful mythographies. If in one way the film represents a seemingly timeless masculinist, misogynist fantasy stereotype, in capturing that stereotype so unabashedly, a close reading can tell us a great deal about car culture, gender, and technology. The discursive field on which this film depends for its sensibility is framed through many sources: popular films, engineering studies, popular reporting of engineering studies, corporate lobbying, computer games, car chases, and institutions such as law courts. These sources are recursive: just as Ritchie's film relies on them, they rely on the sorts of fantasies purveyed by his film.[5]

Thus, both the film's legibility and its ironic reversals make it an ideal site for better understanding the car as a highly ambiguous gendered space. Its implied simplicity (two people make a journey) belies a deeply gendered heteronormative narrative that underpins American understandings of technology and consumption, safety and security—and influences the ways that these relations play out in everyday life and practices of representation. Specifically, I examine the tenets of these normative narratives to better understand how the violence of the film makes sense in the context of its ironies.

I argue that automotive technology, engineering studies, and cultural notions of masculinity carry notions of gendered violence that have remained both central to the structuring of the kinds of violence played out by automobility and have naturalized to the point of invisibility both policy itself and mainstream social histories of the automobile. The car, not only an object or container moving through a city but a particular kind of composite, has been at least as much about defining social relations as it has been about transporting people and goods. "Star" presents the interaction between two individuals, but its legibility rests on the gendered and classed spaces of the auto itself.

Most crucially here, I analyze the way in which the various spaces at play in automobility have been articulated and understood through the varied layers of representation that make meaning of cars and, specifically, how these have both enforced and constituted gender. To get at these questions I borrow Eve Sedgwick's notion of "triangulation" to examine, in relation to a series of popular films, the way in which the technology of the car and the skill of driving has organized heterosexuality in the twentieth century. These social relations of homo- and heteronormative social relations lead us not only toward a richer understanding of the social role of automobiles but they also demonstrate the physicality of social reproduction. If, as Judith Butler argues, "recognition becomes a site of power by which the human is differentially produced" (Butler, 2), car culture reminds of the relentless physicality of that production. Although safety movements have typically been understood as humanist moves toward economies with fewer human costs, safety-engineering studies of the second collision that were taking place in the 1950s and '60s show these to be deeply gendered projects. These have been reiterated not only through the gendered car-death statistics but also through the ways the popular-culture narratives about crash deaths have reiterated stories of masculine heroism. Finally, I situate this set of critiques within the ironies that the film sets out: that Madonna is in some ways the most powerful actor in the film; that the film enters her varied genre of production, one that includes so many aspects of popular culture; and that the fact that she is beaten by no means renders her impotent or powerless but rather demand us to ask if and how this film challenges cultural feminist thought.

For this reading I begin with two observations, which I believe are critical to the advertising effect of this film. The first is the mounting separation of the car from its environment; that is to say, automobiles are being designed increasingly as interiors completely independent of, and to be lived separately from, the spaces they traverse. This has perhaps been one branch of the dream of automobility from the get-go realized now by advancing technology and the increased resources being put into automobiles, which now include DVD players, high quality stereos, and so on.[6] But furthermore, it is in this way that the film can make sense as an *individuated* journey—as one that can be made as separate from the environment that enables it.[7] Thus the filmic medium and the speed-enabled automobile mirror each other, as Karen Beckman notes in her reading of the film *Crash*. She writes, "The 'rules' of this road (or film) are marked by gutters, bollards, and white lines, all of which perforate the unbroken 'strip' of the road's surface like sprocket holes, holes that seem complicit with the singular, mechanical, and unidirectional motion of the road" (Beckman, 107).[8] The materialities of cars, marketing, and political values of individuated liberty nest within one another.

The second observation is this: the American city has developed as a highly political, exclusive place habitable only barely through automobile ownership—but only really rendered habitable at all through the fantasies of infraction held within the city form itself. The spaces shown in "Star" reiterate this point: the parkade, the underpass, the overpass, the gray noisy roads—these are only interesting, and even then only just barely, through the windshield of the representation of a speeding BMW and its interior spaces. This raises a paradox that has been debated since the beginnings of automobility: car safety is dependent on everyone driving cautiously and attending to the sociality of the road, whereas car advertising has highlighted the individuality and the potential for infraction offered by the automobile.

The film runs 6 minutes and 56 seconds and is rated PG. We begin with a close-up of Owen sitting at the wheel and shown from the hood, a view only available through the camera's eye, and one that makes available a full-framing of the portrait in the car's black luxury interior. A lush black leather interior surrounds Owen and a seatbelt indicates his connection with—literally, attachment to—the

car. Owen has the first and last word, and he begins the narrative in a not-unfamiliar deconstruction of "the star" (Madonna is not named in either the notes or the film, but she is clearly playing a version of "herself"). "The first thing you notice physically about this lady," he notes, is her eyes. As the camera cuts to her sunglasses, he notes that "it is rare to actually see those eyes, 'cause they're usually covered up—but when you do," (a pause and an appreciative nod), "it is worth it." Then a cut to her hands as he tells of her "strong, powerful, yet feminine" hands, and then of her voice. The voice is the ambivalent point: with it she has reached "giddy heights" and is "unrivalled in her world"—it is also the medium of her unpleasantness. As he recites this paean, the camera follows her descending in an elevator to a basement garage. She is flanked by

Figure 1. Film stills from "Star."

two large bodyguards, who look to be of Southeast Asian descent, dressed in matching black suits and white shirts. Arriving at the parkade, she walks toward a camera set below with men dressed in black, cars, and white concrete pillars: a familiar scene from any shopping mall, university, airport parkade, or, equally, a scary scene in many American films. She wears very dark glasses, a thick gold neck chain and earrings, a black tee-shirt, black gloves, short leather jacket with *superstar* bejeweled on the back, and bright red trousers. Surely she is packing something in the crotch fold of the pants: an area that will become a theme of the film. As the viewer gets a first peek, Owen completes his dismemberment of her: "she is a complete cunt."

Clipping the last letter of "cunt," the film cuts back to her. This is where we are introduced to her manager, Glen, who is described by Owen as having no "backbone," and who we see being mouthed off to by the Star: "you are such an idiot," she says, her notoriously bad acting on high, "this is not what I pay you for." "We'll work it out, sweetheart," he says. Madonna opens the back door to her limo and fairly screams, "coffee, I want my coffee." The only other woman of the film, a brunette dressed in tight black, hands her an unbranded cup. Then, claiming to be so sick of black, she walks over to the silver BMW with Owen sitting inside. A bodyguard leans in the window to tell them the performance is at the Palace, and the Star warns him not to get into the car but to "take the bus." He jumps into a large black (buslike?) SUV to tail Owen. She is eager to lose the trailing car, and as they leave the garage, fans pile onto the SUV.

As she nags Owen to drive faster, Owen says, in his understated *Gosford Park* butler tone, "well, marm, I wouldn't like to put you in any danger." She says, "don't ma'am me"—and just then the phone rings. It is Glen: "is she doing okay?" "Yeah, she is fine, I'll take care of her." "No rush, show her the sights, give her everything I pay you for, breakfast, lunch, and dinner." Straight-faced Owen: "she'll be there on time," and glances in the rear-view. As he puts down the phone from this paternalistic wink and nudge conversation, Madonna harangues, "if you keep your eyes on the road instead of me, we might be getting somewhere."

"Let me see what I can do," he responds. And after a critical pause, "Sir."

The camera flicks back to her applying lipstick in the back seat, and the adventure begins as they peal out of the intersection. Rock music begins, Blur sings "Song 2," with lyrics that include many repetitions of "woohoo." The soundtrack also features screeching brakes, the screaming woman, and the foregrounded sound of the engine in a typical NASCAR trope. Owen says, "you just hold on tight, sir," as she, airborne in the backseat, tries to grab him and is flung backward as he accelerates. Again, her crotch is featured prominently as she is pitched from side to side. (We see her empty cup flying around but no coffee.) In an underpass area (which again, like the parkade, offers a total-car space), Owen pulls into an enclave and the soundtrack pauses as they wait for the tail car to pass by. Just as Madonna puts a black-gloved hand on the dashboard, Owen squeals out and catches up to the SUV, winking at the driver. The music changes to Wagner's "The Ride of the Valkyries" as the car (actually two cars, since one was destroyed in the filming) flies up over an overpass and through urban space that could be Anytown, USA.[9]

After more quick cuts, we reach the climax of the film and height of Owen's skill. As Owen calls, "well, we got you here, and in good time, too," he simultaneously skids into a 180-degree turn that lands the car expertly at the curb and the red carpet and, in an impossibly acrobatic move, reaches back to open the Star's door. Pulled by the centrifugal force of the spin, Madonna flies out of the car to land on her butt onto the red carpet. A crowd of photographers awaits her and stare in shocked silence. Here is where we see the Star's eyes for the first time, although her grimace makes it clear that it may not be "worth it." The post-ejaculatory hush is relieved by a collective gasp from the crowd of truly ugly men, and we see Madonna's face, with a rather grotesque expression, looking down at her crotch, and then, as we are shown her coffee-stained trousers, the music begins again and the cast of male photographers begins to shoot.

After the significant line-up of credits, a very brief message from BMW fades on and off the screen: "BMW recommends that you always wear your seatbelt."

The film conveys a high level of artifice. The stuntwoman looks nothing like Madonna; the road spaces are noncontiguous; there are various continuity or editing mistakes, such as no coffee appearing on her crotch until the last shot; and the font choice of the title shot "star" echoes *Star Trek*. Even the casting of Madonna in this role emphasizes the fictional. The Star, the stunt woman, and Madonna all overlap in the representations here: the stunt woman is bruised up, but our presumed pleasure is based on Madonna herself being both "in on it" and "getting it." Despite the semi-slapstick approach and Madonna's obvious approval of the storyline, make no mistake: a star is being beaten in this film. The scenes were shot with a stunt woman who had to dye her hair, since they could find no way to make a wig stay on. Guy Ritchie testifies in his director's dub that this professional stuntwoman was "pretty bruised up," after the shooting. Six cars were ruined in the shooting of the film—and traces of the chase are left all over the road in skid marks and scattered vehicles. Much of the film time is taken with the Star getting a good thrashing.[10]

The film plays on a series of stereotypical car-film tropes. First, the trope of the chase can be read only as a pretext for speed since there is actually no real impetus for pursuit. Second, the trope of the video game is clear in what looks like digitized imagery of up-close tires and the joystick/gear shift of the car, as well as the setting of various urban nether spaces. These combine with the characterization of the diffident European chauffeur (although Owen is actually from New Zealand), which echoes both James Bond and Owen's own butler role in *Gosford Park*. Film reviewer Elvis Mitchell describes Owen's character, with his "exquisite concave facial structure that . . . could have been engineered by exacting Bavarian designers, [is] the driver, one of those laconic action samurai who are chauffeur, shrink, bodyguard, and some kind of master mechanic. . . . His elongated and cruel jaw line, suggests . . . a thug Bond."[11] Owen's confident Commonwealth-bred masculinity contrasts markedly with the Star's hysterical bitchiness. It is, in fact, hard to describe her behavior without resorting to gendered words: nag, bitch, hysterical. By the men in the film, the self proclaimed "superstar" is referred to as "this lady," "cunt," "sweetheart," "the bomb," and "marm." Yet when she finally registers her complaint against the latter, the designation of, "sir," along with the changing color of the traffic light begins the sadistic fantasy of her beating.

An audience will also be familiar—if not critically so—with the

woman who seems powerful, and yet ultimately is portrayed as both pawn and victim. The film is utterly politically incorrect and stereotypically so. The plot summary given on the Web page that offers the download, and that is repeated in many of the on-line and newspaper reviews, is this: "The driver faces perhaps his most perplexing challenge: Coming face-to-face with a hugely talented and successful rock star. But beneath her beauty lies a problem she always gets what she wants [sic]. Guy Ritchie directs Clive Owen and a surprise guest star in a battle of power against power."

If BMW's ad department was suddenly taken over by feminist-standpoint theorists, the write-up might look more like this: "Highly successful and rich woman brings on the jealous ire of her male inferiors. In order to get revenge for her success—which they take personally—they hire a driver to give her, in her own manager's words 'everything I pay you for, breakfast, lunch, and dinner.' The driver takes that as permission to assault her, through the vessel of the car, and ultimately to humiliate her in front of her fans. These fans/paparazzi are all too ready to consume her humiliation in their own ways. The potential BMW consumer ostensibly identifies with the driver, or the car itself, and desires the automobile." This second reading would recognize that the classic effect of rape is to curb women's physical, economic, and social mobility. These "commodity rapes," like in this film and also in the Glad bag commercial (see note 4), cannot be just neutral representations of violence; they join specific histories of violence against women.

But hewing closely to car culture and its gendered history will offer the reward of specifying how the car has been a powerful technology in the making of gender. In what follows of this paper, then, I trace my argument by offering an analysis of the film and how it grapples with the ambivalence of the car in social regimes—offering a reading that recognizes both Madonna's iconic status and a potential reconfiguration of ingrained gendered car relations and the overwhelming coding of the car and its goods as masculine.

What if Owen, right there in the parkade, had beaten up Madonna and then poured hot coffee on her crotch? Certainly that would not have presented the BMW brand in quite the right way, and one suspects it would have been neither funny nor interesting. So what is fun about the film? In part the fun is in traversing space—or what that traversal allows us to do in filmic time: watch some quick cuts that build some sense of excitement, watch a great car and driver in action, enjoy the music, and see how the spaces, objects, and bodies act and react at speed. But the fun in this film is in the irony—the play of the beating of a star with, outside the constraints of the film itself, her obvious consent; the spilled coffee in an era where hot coffee spilled in a car can only reiterate Stella Leibeck's maligned lawsuit victory over McDonald's over burns she suffered on her groin;[12] and the citation of the unbelted Princess Diana's crash death in a car driven by her chauffeur.

Traversing space itself has been found to be gendered,[13] and early twentieth-century automobiles gave the gendering of space particular valance in the ways it allied both the internal space of the car and the space-takings required by the automobile to the technological and commodity object of the car. Automobiles asserted themselves rather aggressively into the social order of the early twentieth century, and the implications of this were seen in both nuclear sexual relations (the ways that men and women could identify) as well as in the wider politics of urban sociality, the latter of which I will discuss further later in the paper.

Historically, the car was picked up nearly immediately as a tool to renew a masculinity challenged by industrialization's needs for assembly-line and white-collar work. This assertion of masculinity through technology followed two ambivalent tracks. On the one hand, the driver's seat reasserted the male as the family head in control of its destiny. The car became a symbol of paternity—daddy driving the family around on Sunday. On the other hand, the car provided the male with the means of escape from the family and domesticity—it was the private place that gentlemen could drink, swear, and court.[14] Obviously women were not unaware of the power of the automobile and, even early on, many of those who could, drove expensive cars. But as the early banning of women from auto racing and auto clubs demonstrates (Joan Cuneo became one of the top racers of the early century and apparently for this reason women were banned from racing altogether), this provenance of masculinity was viciously guarded. As Virginia Scharff outlines in her history of automobility, this guarding took place after the First World War, in which American women had worked as volunteer ambulance drivers in Europe,

mainly by questioning their sexuality and implicating independent woman as lesbians.

That the car offered a definitively new kind of social space is obvious from the ways that anxieties about the car were expressed in the early media. Not only did concerns arise about the ways that automobility was reconstituting urban spaces through the way it tended to take over previously vibrant street space, but the car offered a place that could not be fully understood or accounted for. Thus, it became the locus of new versions of courting and, for good and ill, parents lost control of who and how their daughters dated (see Bailey). In 1925, with the highly publicized murder of Bobby Franks in a car in a wealthy area of Chicago, the car became a space, untethered to possible witnessing communities, in which unspeakable horrors could take place. The industry responded to these anxieties with commercial short films such as "The Safest Place," which in 1936 compared the car favorably to the multiple household dangers of stepladders and soap ready to be slipped on.[15]

This domestication of the automobile gains momentum through the 1940s and '50s. With the rise of suburbanization and the garage as the façade onto the street, the car became a sort of second living room, featuring fabrics and upholstery that followed trends in home design. As Ford claimed as early as 1949 in one of its brochures, "The '49 Ford is a living room on wheels: . . . There's room to spare for three people on each of these 'sofa seats,' trimly upholstered in new, modern, fabrics. And there's 'picture window' visibility. . . . Yes, it's a living room on wheels, this '49 Ford!" (quoted in Eastman 1984, 129). Indeed, even as this suburbanization marked the beginning of the woman as domestic chauffeur, the car was perhaps the only domestic space that men, as proper men, could care for, clean, and caress.[16]

Thus, the driver's seat, with its disciplined, seated immobility, occupies a space in an oscillating order of living room and cockpit, or patriarchal domestic and masculine technological.[17] But the brutal protection of this male physical and symbolic space also belies a queer triangulation to the social, historical, and cultural integration of the car in gendered social relations. Elements of car culture, from enthusiast magazines to auto shows and Saturday-afternoon washes, manifests a performative hypermasculinity verging on overcompensation.

Women have been for decades ubiquitously draped over hoods and sprawled in passenger seats in car ads and shows. What kinds of displacements and identifications take place here? Could this use of women's bodies be some sort of ruse? Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick has used the analytic of the erotic triangle to examine male homosocial desire within "the structural context of the triangular, heterosexual desire" (Sedgwick, 16), where the typical form of the triangle is man-man-woman. Sedgwick's argument ranges over Freud's Oedipal triangle, in which the young child is situated "with respect to the powerful father and beloved mother," to Lévi-Strauss's traffic in women, in which the "normative man uses a woman as a 'conduit of a relationship' in which the true *partner* is a man" (26), and Gayle Rubin's reworking of this in which she analyzes how women are used to "cement the bonds between men" (26). Sedgwick writes that, "the status of women, and the whole question of arrangements between genders, is deeply and inescapably inscribed in the structure even of relationships that seem to exclude women" (25).

Alfonso Cuarón's road film *Y tu mamá también* makes this point explicitly. The film depicts a car trip that traverses Mexico against a backdrop of brilliantly narrated car crashes and government violence. These death traces and lined-up peasants are inconsequential to the two teenage boys on the trip, who are more interested in who will sleep with the woman they have brought along. As it turns out, this woman will become the means by which the close male friends initiate a homosexual encounter. What had been expressed through their repartee as an extremely heterosexualized misogyny between these two boys is resolved by this event, which starts as a threesome and ends with the men kissing each other. In *Y tu mamá también* the old station wagon was backgrounded as simply the means for the journey. In the less audacious American vernacular of the road flick, cars have taken on a more defined role in these triangulated relationships; they tend to become either a means for the homosocial transmission of power vis-à-vis their role as a male prosthetic to get the girl to impress the guys, or the means for expressing the practice of driving as a masculine skill that also allows for the heroic acts of "saving" ladies in need (and thus tiresomely construct women as in need of such rescue) (see Brown). One example of the former figuration of the erotic triangle is collected and purveyed in *American Graffiti*—and of course what makes *American Graffiti* such a classic

is its illustration of the many ways that coming-of-age men and women identified with the car and its associated masculinities of the 1950s and '60s. Such masculinities can be illustrated by the recent film *2 Fast 2 Furious*, in which the one woman in the film provides the necessary façade of heterosexuality and purpose for masculine heroism as two male buddies race around Miami to save her from the bad guys (and purge their own criminal records in the process).

In the film *Grease*, recall how John Travolta uses the scene of a group of male mechanics making fun of a rusty old car to pop into a homosocial celebration of male bodies while singing and dancing to "Greased Lightening." Kenneth Anger's "Kustom Kar Kommandos" dispenses with women entirely as the camera's eye caresses a male (and particularly his ass) as he dusts his hot rod with a pink powder puff before roaring off to the tune of "Dream Lover." Perhaps one of the most obvious examples of this homoeroticism was in an early Chevy campaign, which advertised its trucks to a male demographic. Bob Seger sang "Like a rock, straight as an arrow" in some of the ads in the campaign.[18] BMW itself was forced to recognize the effect of this masculinist space when they had to issue a product recall on cars that had female voices on the navigation systems: male drivers would not take instruction from a computer voice they identified as female.

These exclusions of women from the representations of car culture are reflected in other areas, namely in their exclusion from whole professions that range from automobile and safety engineering, design, sales, repair, policy making, and commentary to taxi driving, industry executive positions, racing, road construction, and, until recently, urban planning (see Gregory). In short, women are virtually excluded from a range of careers that together account for one-sixth of the U.S. economy. According to Carol Sanger's analysis, women are defined as women through their purported preceding relationships to cars. The infrastructures of automobility, while excluding women from the economies of automobility, have required them to do unremunerated car labor such as chauffeuring children. These exclusions work within the stereotypes of women's supposed mechanical inabilities and overcautious driving to sustain and enhance "traditional understandings about women's abilities and roles in areas both public and private" (Sanger, 707).

That women have so often been the subterfuge for the sexual forays of men and cars, or men and men, however, does not make the car immaterial. Indeed, it is the very materiality of it that makes it such an important site of analysis. As the *New York Times* quoted one woman car owner as saying, "It's dangerous to get too good a car, you will only end up wishing men would look at you with the same admiration and lust in their eyes" (Stanley, D11). The female owner of this car is caught between desiring the gaze of the male and owning the means of his homosocial identification. Her rather banal, even naively heterosexual comment illustrates the extent to which misogyny and the car underpins gendered American economic and political structures. What would it take to have a female director for one of the BMW films? How would the Ritchie film have meaning if Madonna and Owen switched roles?

Owen, the driver in "Star," carries the burden of these and other ambivalences. As the chauffeur, he is uniquely positioned between the labor of driving as paid work (hired by the manager, as the film narrative makes clear) and the control of the machine, the journey, and the body of the passenger. The film represents, then, Owen's multiple transgressions: of his work (unless one takes the "give her everything I pay you for, breakfast, lunch, and dinner" conversation between Owen and the manager, Glen, as permission to beat her), of his gender (graciousness), and of the social and legal regulations of the city. These transgressions become the source of entertainment for both him and the spectator. As Elvis Mitchell writes, "his eyes have a bedeviled twinkle, as if he were on the verge of a nervous breakdown while whipping his four-wheeled co-star, the mighty-mighty M5, through the streets of Los Angeles as if it were the agitator in a washing machine."[19] His enjoyment is manifest in a strangely incongruous finger snapping and seated dancing. If she has money and beauty, he has breeding (at least in the national sense), gender, and technology on his side.

In this transgression, the film presents the feminist viewer with an immediate quandary in its political incorrectness: the film shows us a rape scene. Every woman knows not to get into a strange car with a man she does not know. Indeed, Sanger has described in detail how American law has consistently taken the position that the act of entering a car, even in certain instances when the car in question

was a taxi, amounts to consent to sexual relations. Kathleen McHugh has also done detailed readings of the history of filmic representations of women and cars. She analyses how automobility literalizes the "threat of women's economic and sexual autonomy" and how films have balanced the "rhetorical and semiotic conflict between, on the one hand, women's positioning as spectacle and their domestic and narrative roles and, on the other, automobility."[20]

These social consolidations of gender through the automobile are further stabilized by how the physics of movement have been read through them. Much as the upholstered backseat reminds one of the domestic living room, the everyday coffee spill—reiterated too in the film's punch line—reminds one of the qualitative differences between the car and the space it traverses. Spills and crashes act as constant reminders of the threat of the disintegration of these isolated spaces.

Already in the 1930s it was becoming obvious that injuries in car crashes were suffered not in the initial car crash but in a second collision, the collision between car and passenger. Nevertheless, in the absence of rigorous and publicly available safety testing of automobiles, misinformation and speculation ran high. In 1933, for example, *Popular Mechanics* stopped just short of calling for auto-design changes with the moot claim that the passenger seat was significantly more dangerous than the driver seat because it did not have a steering wheel to hold the passenger in place. In fact the passenger seat *was* considerably more dangerous, though not for lack of a steering wheel. In 1948 a study found that three times as many passengers as drivers were injured in accidents. These injuries took the form of decapitation by the windshield, deflection from the windshield to the dash, or smashing straight into the dash—just as J. C. Furnas, in his widely reprinted, graphic, and groundbreaking *Readers Digest* article, had observed over a decade earlier. The 1948 article comment took the following form: "Sadly enough, from the point of view of beauty, about seven out of ten of [the] victims of these face marring crashes are women."[21]

Around this time, Dr. Hugh De Haven, who ultimately served as the National Highway Transportation Safety Association's first director, developed a theory of "packaging"—that humans needed to be

packaged in much the same way as a delicate parcel might be, to prevent damage during shipping.[22] Experimental crash testing was also being undertaken at UCLA in the early 1950s, and the two projects turned up results that would greatly influence the thinking about car design and human injury for the next two decades. Mainly they found that bodies could sustain enormous decelerative force—up to 40 times body weight—if properly packaged. Adequate packaging required the structural integrity of the car, energy-absorbing materials on the interior or the car, and occupant restraint.[23] This observation of the second collision and its associated idea that car design is integral to injury patterns brings us through the 1960s and the founding of NHTSA, the state-by-state mandates of seatbelt use, the introduction of a series of passive restraints culminating in the controversial adoption of airbags, and the switch in law and policy toward a recognition that car makers can expect that their products (although not intended to do so) will crash—and that they will therefore be responsible for providing occupants with some measure of protection. Thus, in standard histories about car safety, the car was until the mid-1960s understood to be a material object that was merely a medium of human expression. Thus, when an accident occurred, it was purely and simply a matter of human negligence or error. After the mid-1960s, the car itself was understood to be an actor in the injury drama—thus, better crashworthiness became a policy and social ideal. This is the narrative told by policy, injury law, and automobile histories.[24]

Though efficacious in installing policy that has had some effect on lowering crash deaths, this standard reading of automobile safety is unsatisfactory in ways that that a close reading of "Star" renders visible. Primarily, it vastly simplifies the role that the car plays, as a complex agent, in cultural narratives about safety. Normative automobile history misses the powerfully gendered representational stakes that play out through American roads and the deep implications these have had in American understandings of auto deaths and masculinity. The numbers themselves are extraordinary: in 2000, 41,057 drivers in fatal crashes were male, compared to 14,545 female drivers.[25] In 1975, when the difference in the number of drivers by gender was more significant, the rate of involvement in fatal crashes per

100,000 licensed drivers was 64 for men, four times the rate (15.8) for women. This astonishing correlation of gender and fatality is both rendered normal and incessantly remade by the various myth-making machinations of media and celebrity, as ideals of masculinity are endlessly articulated through the fantasies of prestige, liberation, and heroism that are persistently used to invest car-crash deaths with significance.

Jackson Pollock can provide one of many such examples. The many and contradictory stories of Pollack's death (he actually died ingloriously as a result of hitting an oak tree head first after flying from the car), as Steven Jay Schneider has examined, demonstrate how his crash has become a key element in the interpretation and glorification of both his life and his art. Schneider writes, "It's almost impossible for us to confront the harsh truth that Pollock's untimely death—like the untimely deaths of so many other celebrities—was the least glorious part of his life" (Schneider, 268). Though it is impossible to know the circumstances of the crash (the survivor, Ruth Kligman, has written a highly suspect and contradictory narrative of the event), the car crash is most often read as the culmination of his art. Ivan Karp, for example, wrote six weeks after the crash in the *Village Voice*: "We can only speculate whether the pain in him had come to the point where, driving at terrific speed, he had conceived a permanent release from the unrelenting pressure of his art." Or another commentator, nearly a decade later, wrote, "After his death . . . Pollock's keen sense of destruction . . . was now seen to include a final assault upon himself" (Schneider, 274). Perhaps most disturbing about this kind of account is not that it invests the crash itself with a similar rhetorical significance as if it were itself a work of art (and thus raises suspicions about the genre of commentary) but how easily it elides the fact that Pollack killed, with himself, an acquaintance, Edith Metzger, whom he had known for only a couple of days. This fact is not even mentioned in Pollock stories, such as the otherwise quite fascinating BBC documentary *Jackson Pollock: Love and Death on Long Island*.[26]

Strikingly, the crash became a rich rhetorical moment to stabilize Pollock as an American hero and a lens to reflect on and retell the events and personalities that preceded it. These tales of heroism, though, consistently place under erasure the deaths of female friends,

lovers, and colleagues as if they were mere instruments to be absorbed into the primary story of the male life as a work of art.[27] The band the Red Crayola put the issue succinctly in their song, "A Portrait of V. I. Lenin in the Style of Jackson Pollock, Part I":

> They say it's art killed Pollock—
> As if that could be.
> In fact he missed a bend
> And drove his Ford into a tree.[28]

James Dean surely vies for fame and heroism among car deaths and their making of masculine heroism. We might compare the Star (or would it be Owen?) to Donald Turnupseed, the college student whose left turn onto a rural California highway at once launched James Dean out of his Porsche and into the world scene. Turnupseed's moment of inattention killed the twenty-four-year-old actor, and, as the character Vaughan in David Cronenberg's film *Crash* comments, "it was a moment that would create a Hollywood legend."[29]

If the physics of the crash that killed Dean might be traced from Turnupseed to his Ford through Dean's Porsche and Dean's body's flight over the hood of the car, there is in fact no basis for the "second" collision repeatedly suffered by Madonna's stuntwoman. Rather, the second collision is offered as a ruse for the particular form of violence enacted on the passenger. This is a filmic trick not unfamiliar to Ritchie. He employed it in *Lock, Stock, and Two Smoking Barrels* to allow a driver, through quick braking action, to literally toss his backseat, would-be aggressor through the windshield.[30] In his film *Snatch*, a car is backed into the rear doors of a van and left there, with the result that a key player is basically held prisoner in the back of the van. Ritchie has well understood the acting capabilities of cars and so he was an obvious choice to bring the BMW product to stardom.

This turning of the second-collision rhetoric on its head in "Star" allows the combination of car and driver to give the Star "everything I pay you for." Rather than the interior surfaces of the car becoming the agents of injury through its odd protuberances and badly engineered ergonomics (and thus the locus of a legal and engineering revolution), the agency in "Star" remains, at least in this sense,

with the driver, who has used his understanding of acceleration, deceleration, and centrifugal force to cause movement, collision, and injury. So, while depending on the sort of selective memory and judicious life valuation that Pollock's crash represents, "Star" offers a unique way to read the violence that I am arguing is constitutive of automobility. In both cases the masculine hero is consolidated through the cultural myths elucidated above, although they have one crucial difference. Through the rhetorical remaking of the Pollock crash, he emerges (as a representation at least) unscathed: in fact he is commodified through celebrity and his art is recursively recommodified. Metzger may just as well not have existed. Owen, on the other hand, *uses* the physics of the second collision to dexterously beat, eject, and humiliate the Star, emerging not only unscathed but as the victor after his heroic use of the car as tool of psychic and physical force.[31] The Star plays a crucial role. In the set of effects that has created the film, Owen's skill, vis-à-vis his ability to apotheosize driving as a practice, reminds the viewer that driving itself, and particularly the kind of driving enabled by BMW, is the real

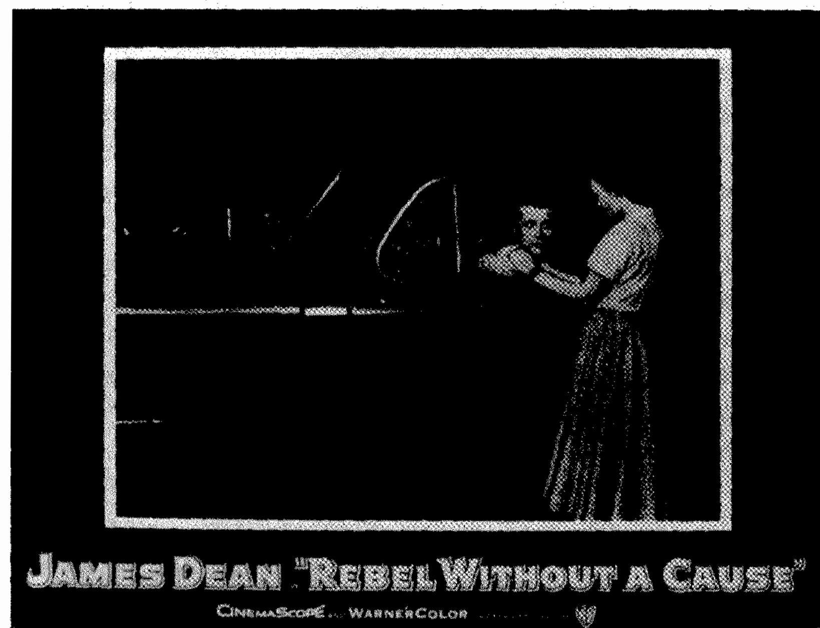

Figure 2. Advertising card, courtesy of Everett Collection.

star. The second collision enables, through the express heterosexuality of the beaten woman, the glorification of the prime homosocial event—driving itself.[32]

If Clive Owen, a minor celebrity compared to Madonna, emerges on one level as one of the luminaries in "Star," Henri Paul (Princess Diana's chauffeur) displayed rather less skill in transporting Princess Diana to her destination. An unbelted Diana was beaten and killed by her chauffeur's infractions, and who is to say whether she was asking him to speed up or slow down before the crash? Diana was of course understood by the British public to be the naive innocent, thrust at once into the limelight and Prince Charles's callous arms at the tender age of sixteen. Who would have guessed that the spectacular procession through London in 1981 marking the royal wedding would have been mirrored in 1997 by the funerary procession that sandwiched her spectral death in a high-speed crash in a civilian Mercedes? Diana and Madonna contended for first place on the paparazzi most-wanted list, and the fact that Diana was ultimately hunted to her death by them surely plays in "Star's" central moments.

As indicated in Madonna's various caricatures as well as in the economic terms of the film (as by far the highest-paid member of the cast), a spectator remains sure that Madonna maintains control over her own spectacularization. She is undoubtedly the most powerful player in this film and this fact is pivotal. Madonna, who the *New Yorker* claimed in 2000 had replaced Diana as "Fleet Street's favorite mother" (quoted in Guilbert)[33] and who the British press has dubbed "Madge," has rather more manifestly built her superstardom on pushing the boundaries of her body as itself a source of endless manipulated spectacle. If Madonna has "an image," it would surely be sex—and, indeed, in 2002 at the age of 44 she was voted the world's sexiest person by VH1. This background is pivotal to the specificity of the film.

A reading of Madonna as über-Frau might suggest that, as in *Sex: The Book,* Madonna in "Star" maintains the phallus through her self-caricatured humiliation. Madonna offers in this film a parody of the tired car-chase scenario. She portrays herself as a star who has orgiastically enjoyed the caricature of this power play, and, having ejaculated all over herself, caricatures a grimace as a group of fat, ugly photographers grimly photograph this star of untouchable

dimensions.[34] As Georges-Claude Guilbert writes in his book on Madonna, it would be naive to say that the one who does the tying up and torturing is the one who retains the power—naive also to disapprove of it "in the name of some generic condemnation of violence" (79). He argues, for example, that the play represented in *Sex: The Book* is a continual iteration of the irony inherent in her work—one we see in the bowler hat she wore at the wedding to Sean Penn, in her many images, and in her performance of "Like a Virgin," in which she changed the "rich" to "experience has made me a bitch" (57).

This vein of analysis attends to the intervention in normative power relations offered by Madonna in "Star." In this vein, "Star" does not reverse or overtly challenge gender roles (as does, arguably, *Thelma and Louise*), but they are played upon and deeply challenged through that play. Through these readings what might be read from feminist-standpoint theory as Madonna's loss of control of her image and her body can be reclaimed as an offer of a spoiled image. The brown coffee stain on bright red trousers offers not an embarrassing childhood accident but a mightily sexualized orgasm, experienced with such force that she shot herself right out of the car.

This film begs to be read as a power play between Madonna and cultural narratives of masculinity and technology: this film could not have "worked" with any other actress. Madonna is the most powerful woman in the film and is perhaps making fun of the men in various and semi-complicated ways: as the highest-paid actor in the film and as by far the most famous member of the cast. She retains the phallus even through the beating and the mock humiliation in which the coffee resolves the tension of the violence.[35]

Unlike crashes such as Pollock's, where women's deaths are virtually erased from narratives about these events, the violence of the second collision in "Star" emerges as the point of this film. This violence is rendered acceptable by three means. First, it relies on the incessant naturalization of masculinity and technology tempered through car culture. Second, it is in part resolved, in equal portions, by the parting pleasure of her humiliation (she still is a bitch after all) and through the ambivalence of Madonna's feign (she is "in on it" too). Third, it rewrites the relentless iterations of Princess Diana's crash and death. In a crash fantasy reminiscent of Diana but relived

through the new pop princess, the blond heroine suffers the mock humiliation of a child's "accident" rather than death in a smashed Mercedes. This bitchy, sexy woman offers an image for a crowd of photographers, not a spectacular crash tragedy that also kills the male chauffeur but rather a spoiled image that fizzles into a caricatured grimace. Unlike Diana, named for the hunter goddess and in the end hunted to her death, Madonna's image—mercurial, tough—still prevails through her American, coffee-drinking, mocking, most-sexy-woman-in-Europe, spectral immortality.

The film works in part because it is aimed toward white men who have more or less bought into corporate logics of luxury, entitlement, and fine cars, and because the extremity of Madonna's success in some sense allows the unadulterated pleasure of taking down the bitch on top—one that can finally surface after too many years of politically correct inhibition. The Madonna genre of ironic femininity *enables* the BMW film.[36] The film also depends on some rather serious disavowals and blind spots. The film depends on some of these, such as the second-collision literature, the queer erotic triangulation, and the submission of the bodies of typically female passengers, in much the same way as the purportedly rational space of the road (and its public) does. The invisibility of the violence in "Star" results from its adept work within logics of gender, heteronormativity, luxury, value, and celebrity: logics that also tend to be accepted by institutional actors in law, urban planning, and advertising.

This film represents a recursive relationship among luxury, stardom, and transgression that works its way out in automobile culture more generally. Margaret Morse has described the freeway, along with the mall and the living room, as a nonspace in which "practices and skills . . . can be performed semiautomatically in a distracted state—driving, shopping, or television watching—are the barely acknowledged ground of everyday experience" (196). "Star"—and more specifically the BMW brand—offers a way out of that distraction. Ritchie has turned the street into a place for excitement, even as a mere background to the action inside the car, and has turned driving into an active and masculine skill that physically demands the respect of other street publics as well as other car occupants. Through these violences, Ritchie represents driving as a misogynist homosocial

event, in which driver and car work together to create the conditions of violence.

This highly masculinized action and possibility (how else could the rather mundane *Thelma and Louise* be read as "man-hating" in virtually all the press reviews?) is reinscribed through luxury and the highly engineered cars of BMW. The violence of this identification thus hides itself through the naturalization and disciplining of the associated subjects. In one instance the point is as obvious as Owen's crucial appellation "Sir" as he steps on the gas, or Madonna's preceding back seat driving, a technological violation second only, perhaps, to the woman driver. In addition, the players in this film—Owen, Madonna, the BMW—are all "stars"; the invitation is to share their class privilege (the privilege of stardom indeed bestowed and made meaningful by the same mass of spectators that Madonna needs to duck as she leaves the garage) through luxury consumption. This loop of celebrity, luxury, and urban transgression underpins the ideals of and possibilities for American consumption.

Feminist and queer theorists have intricately studied the power dynamics of submission. This film offers one way of analyzing how everyday technologies are also instruments, instruments that are designed and fantasized about, and by both design and fantasy play integrally into power relations. Thus, as much as this film is about gender relations, it is about automobiles and streets as violent places that are coded through gender. "Star" fashions a journey, in some sense fantastical, and in another simply reiterative of an everyday car trip. Therefore, it is worth our attention to look critically at this journey's components: a star being beaten, an apotheosis of speed and luxury, the derision of spilled coffee. These events and objects circulate and provide the possibilities for each other. Although these may seem trivial issues, it is my hunch that they have a lot to say about how the politics of consumption creates material worlds. In these worlds, a liberal notion of choice that adheres to some "base" material human body, or its correlate that infers social action or protection clearly coded into automobile design, presents the least effective way of understanding how commodities and citizens intermingle and co-constitute. In fact, as I have tried to outline here, violent submission is intricately tied in with consumer promises and the gendered-commodity regime that comes along with the product, a regime that includes both the institutional and material frameworks that distribute goods such as physical and economic mobility.

Notes

A million thanks to Deborah Cohler and Derek Simons, who invited me to present the work in its early stages to audiences at San Francisco State University and Emily Carr Institute of Art and Design. I have also presented parts of this work at several conferences: the T2M in Eindhoven, organized by Gijs Mom and Clay McShane, the "Alternative Mobility Futures" conference in Lancaster, organized by Mimi Sheller and John Urry, and "Approaching the City" at the University of Surrey, organized by Nina Wakeford. Thanks also a number of friends who have read drafts of the piece with amazing engagement and audacity, including Deb Cohler, Carla Freccero, Samara Marion, Derek Simons, Jake Kosek, Kris Cohen, and Miriam Ticktin. Without these brilliant readers the piece would not have been nearly as fun to write. Thanks also to Linda Campani, Caren Kaplan, and other friends, students, and colleagues who watched these bizarre films with me and shared in discussion.

1. See Sarah Jain, "'Dangerous Instrumentality': The Bystander as Subject in Automobility," *Cultural Anthropology* 19, no. 1 (February 2004): 61–94.

2. This unalloyed aggression presents what I interpret as a new version of advertising rhetoric. It is quite unlike the familiar claims about what products can do for consumers (All-Bran prevents cancer), how to use products (no ice in Budweiser, Coca-Cola for special guests), or how much fun you can have (driving a Swept-Wing '57 Dodge). And so, what are we to make of this marketing of violence and use of commodities as a means to express violence and aggression?

3. www.bmwfilms.com. This is a safe enough distribution strategy, as the technology is at a stage where downloading is fast and easy, and a high percentage of the BMW demographic is connected (males aged 35–45; incidentally the same as for the Hummer). These films have been introduced in two series: the first, of which "Star" is a member, in 1998, and the second in 2003. The first series included five films (the series is called "The Hire"), each by a different male director and each featuring a different model of BMW car. The second series of films includes three films, all featuring the Z-4 Roadster. Each director was given about six minutes, a several-million-dollar budget and six cars to create a short film. For "Star," Ritchie was reportedly paid $280,000; his wife, Madonna, raked in a cool $2.8 million and her choice of a new BMW for her role.

4. A contemporary ad for Glad garbage bags mirrored a similar logic, and also led me to these research questions. The Glad bag ad seems to mirror this commodity and gender logic in depicting a couple driving along a country road in a mobile home. The wife, who is "housekeeping" in the back, asks the husband to pull over so that she can put out the trash. He pulls off the road, and the monstrous vehicle rolls down a cliff face. Everything in the vehicle, including

her, crashes around the interior of the vehicle until it lands on its wheels. As it settles, she—visibly tousled but uninjured—cheerily exits the tattered mobile home and puts the garbage bag in the waiting trash can.

5. "Star" rests on a well-developed cultural narrative of a sexualized automobility for its sensibility, but so does a whole gendered history of how car-accident injuries have been understood by the press, by engineers, and in the making of heroic masculinity. This analysis thus bolsters feminist inroads to questions prevalent in science and technology studies and material-culture investigations into how objects have meaning, how they "act," and how they construct communities.

6. For a full development of this theme, see Margaret Morse, "An Ontology of Everyday Distraction: The Freeway, the Mall, and Television." The counterdream has been to connect utterly with the environment through the "road feel" of the vehicle.

7. The issues presented by representing, in narrative filmic form, an object moving at high speed through space offer in many ways a technical and administrative problem. The director is faced with the problems of how to mount cameras on the automobile, other automobiles, and in the city; how to edit cars dented and destroyed in the process of moving at speed; how to remove bystanders and other quotidian users of space. These are some of the issues addressed by directors in their commentaries. In an another essay based on the space of the city and automobility, I argue that the excesses of the BMW are not only in the latest curves of its side paneling, its leather seats, and bulletproof glass but in its engineering and capabilities of speed. There is a very physical component to this luxury item, one that enables the BMW driver to transgress urban American spaces that have become congested, tedious, and ironically banal, but precisely *because* they were built for automobility. See Sarah Jain, "Urban Violence: Luxury in Made Space," in *Mobile Technologies of the Future*, ed. Mimi Sheller and John Urry (London: Taylor and Francis, forthcoming).

8. As she notes, filmmakers like Jean-Luc Godard have conversely used driving as way of exploring the camera's possibility of motion—to investigate the vantage points offered by automobility and how movement is structured. Pier Paolo Pasolini, on the other hand, did not use cars in his films because they were too capitalist (Linda Campani, personal communication, September 2003).

9. Interesting aside: The 1936 film *Master Hands* represents all aspects of car manufacturing in a style that Rick Prelinger describes as "Capitalist Realism" (as a play on Socialist Realism). The soundtrack is Wagner.

10. Astonishingly, the gender violence is utterly invisible to many audiences I have shown this film to. When I asked more than one hundred students in my Car Culture class at Stanford to fill out a short questionnaire on the film, violence or similar concepts were mentioned only twice. Students typically found the film funny, entertaining, or occasionally boring. The two possible reasons for this are, first, that the styling and caricature hides the violence as violence or, second, that they simply do not see it; they are immune.

11. Elvis Mitchell, "Honk If You've Seen These Online Films: BMW Hopes That Its Mini-Movies Will Sell Cars," *New York Times*, June 26, 2002, E1. Also available at *Critic's Notebook* Web site, http://www.murphsplace.com/owen/articles/critics.html.

12. For an outline of the details and politics of the case, see Michael McCann, William Halton, and Anne Bloom, "Java Jive: Genealogy of a Juridical Icon," *Miami Law Review* 56 (2001/2002): 113–78.

13. Henry Jenkins cites that a 1979 study of suburban American girls and boys showed that, in an afternoon, a typical boy would travel 2,452 yards, while a girl would travel 959 yards. See Henry Jenkins, "'Complete Freedom of Movement': Video Games as Gendered Play Spaces," in *From Barbie to Mortal Kombat: Gender and Computer Games*, ed. Justine Cassell and Henry Jenkins, 262–97 (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998).

14. This claim is based on my archival research into early debates on automobile dangers. For a review of these debates, see Clay McShane, *Down the Asphalt Path: The Automobile and the American City* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994). For an analysis of the ways that technology became masculinized at the turn of the century, see Ruth Oldenziel, *Making Technology Masculine: Men, Women, and Modern Machines in America, 1870–1945* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1999).

15. The "Safest Place" is available at www.prelinger.com. It is not incidental that Leopold and Loeb, Franks's murderers, were rumored to be having an affair, while the "Safest Place" makes much out of the heteronormative space of the automobile.

16. For more analysis on film and violent domestic spaces, see Mary Ann Doane, "The 'Women's Film': Possession and Address" in *Home Is Where the Heart Is*, ed. Christine Gledhill, 282–98 (London: British Film Institute Publishing, 1987). The ambivalence of the domestic spaces of the car can be seen in the 1950s TV commercial for a Ford station wagon in which the woman claims, while looking from the sink to the driveway, that she is "no longer a prisoner in my own home."

17. The décor of the upscale BMW 5 Series is perhaps reminiscent of the understated elegance of an upscale lawyers' office or Chelsea apartment—at once home and office.

18. Barbara Thompson, librarian, Detroit Public Library-NAH, e-mail communication, February 17, 2004.

19. Mitchell, "BMW Hopes That Its Mini-Movies Will Sell Cars."

20. Kathleen McHugh, "Stopping Traffic: Women, Cars, and the Cinema," http://www.cmp.ucr.edu/photography/mirror/exhibition.html#essays. See also Kathleen McHugh, "Women in Traffic: L.A. Autobiography," *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 97, no. 2 (1998): 391–412.

21. Research reported in George Mann, "Let's Insist on Safer Cars," *Science Digest* 24 (October 1948): 78–82. Ultimately the author, perhaps realizing his impotence in pleading for redesigned and padded dashboards, advised readers to

make some padding to hang from their own dashboards, as he had, in a pathetic gesture at self-sufficiency. This self-reliance went to what now seems ridiculous extremes. In 1953 *Science News Letter* reported on a paper given at the American Medical Association conference that outlined what would become known as whiplash. Although the surgeons exhorted drivers avoid accidents by leaving enough space in front of the car and making use of hand signals, "if collision is unavoidable, [drivers should] cover and support head and neck with arms." See "Brain Bumps Skull in Auto Crashes," *Science News Letter*, June 20, 1953, 381.

22. During World War II, De Haven began to study aircraft accidents at Cornell University Medical College and began the first nationwide data-collection system to analyze in detail the causes of injuries suffered in car crashes. See Hugh De Haven, "Mechanical Analysis of Survival in Falls from Heights of Fifty to One Hundred and Fifty Feet," *War Medicine*, July 2, 1942, 586–96.

23. It may seem bizarre that these fairly obvious observations were made using actual fatal car crashes nearly fifty years after cars regularly reached speeds of well over 50 mph and when Sweden had already reached nearly 80 percent of people using seatbelts (the U.S. number was less than 3 percent).

24. See William Haddon Jr., Edward A. Suchman, and David Klein, *Accident Research: Methods and Approaches* (New York: Harper and Row, 1964); Joel W. Eastman, *Styling vs. Safety: The American Automobile Industry and the Development of Automotive Safety, 1900–1966* (Lanham, NY: University Press of America, 1984).

25. U.S. Department of Transportation, National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, "Traffic Safety Facts 2000: A Compilation of Motor Vehicle Crash Data from the Fatality Analysis Reporting System and the General Estimates System" (National Center for Statistics and Analysis, Washington, DC 20590), Table 5 from page 19.

26. Another illustration of this incessant refashioning and absorption of events into the same stories is found in the Ted Kennedy "involvement" with the death of Mary Jo Kopechne. In *The Last Brother*, Kennedy biographer Joe McGinnis writes: "The girl was dead, which was sad. But there were many other girls. And only one Teddy, only one last male Kennedy of the glory generation. It was his reputation, however hollow and even rotten the man himself may be, that would have to be salvaged if the legend was to be preserved at all, if the myth was to retain even a fraction of its power" (quoted in Simpson, 128). Kurt Moser has studied the "way the car fitted into an aggressive mainstream before 1914" (Moser, 240), focusing specifically on the interplay of danger, aggression, and civilian preparation for war. He argues that automobilism "seems to have combined archaic heroic ideals of knighthood and courage with specifically modern qualities, especially a personal relationship with technology" (243). For more on these cultural links, particularly with reference to the artistic Italian movement of Futurism, see Jeffrey T. Schnapp, "Crash (Speed as Engine of Individuation)," *Modernism/Modernity* 6, no. 3 (1999): 1–49.

27. Mary Louise Pratt has discussed, in the context of exploration, how the "non-events" of discovery gain rhetorical meaning. Two of the key means of creating a semiotics of discovery include presenting material (as if it were) densely meaningful and "rich in material and semantic substance," and instituting a relation of mastery, in which certain people have the power to interpret these events. This is exactly what happens here with the event of the crash.

28. The Red Crayola with Art and Language, on album "Kangaroo?" LP/cassette (Rough Trade, 1981); CD (Dexter's Cigar, 1995). Thanks to Kris Cohen for this citation.

29. Later Vaughan comments, "Was that glib? James Dean died of a broken neck and became immortal. I couldn't resist."

30. A few years ago, while I was on a business trip in Portland, Oregon, a taxi driver told me that this was a stock trick for drivers under threat—particularly as drunks tended not to wear seatbelts.

31. Although BMW's Web site sets up this confrontation between Owen and the Star as a battle of wills, when looked at it from this light, it would be more like an ancient duel where one of the interlocutors takes his sword and lops off the other's head while the other was still debating, or as if in the Wild West Buffalo Bill took out his pistol and shot his interlocutor while he was blowing his nose.

32. His driving is what rapes her.

33. Georges-Claude Guilbert writes that the most "expensive paparazzi efforts were shots of the Monaco Grimaldi family, Michael Jackson, Princess Diana, and Madonna" in 1996 (Guilbert, 50).

34. Madonna is caricaturing both Leibeck and Diana.

35. The film "Star" offers a different set of agencies than the more obvious narratives of masculinist heroism and female victimhood followed in some of the other BMW films. For example, in John Woo's "Hostage," Clive Owen must crack a code to find a CEO (Kathryn Morris) who has been trapped inside the trunk of a car and left in a large urban inlet. He, of course, finds and saves her just as she is about to drown. Women in the back seat, women in the trunk, women about to be killed by disgruntled, drunk, or jealous men: there is nothing of interest here. The "twist" in the film comes, apparently, when she appears to expect to have an affair with Owen, and as she turns to him, he leaves (in his BMW), completely disengaged and disinterested. "Hostage" does not leave open an alternative power narrative. Other films, such as "Beat the Devil," dispense with women, both on screen and in production, altogether.

36. For more on how women professionally deploy their femininity, class resentment, and physical disgust and injury, see Laura Kipnis, "(Male) Desire and (Female) Disgust: Reading *Hustler*," in *Cultural Studies*, ed. Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson, and Paula A. Treichler, 373–91 (New York: Routledge, 1992).

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