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Sociality in motion: exploring logics of tribal consumption among cruisers

Douglas Brownlie, Paul Hewer and Steven Treanor

Introduction

This chapter discusses consumption as cultural formation and the part played by exemplary artefacts in performing identity work within complex webs of social relations. Accounts of the dynamics of distinction-making are situated through acts of spectacular consumption and bricolage. We discuss how fluid patterns of collective association and 'sociality' are nurtured through particular forms of materiality and interaction with specific objects of desire – in this case, cars. We also explore the value of understanding car cruising as a collective or distributed strategy for spreading the burden of representation through the generation of symbolic resources and the management of self-constructed forms of identity. In doing so, we consider the value of adopting a cultural approach to understanding consumption as unstable patterns or flows of

affiliation and identity which characterize the 'sociality' of 'differentiated cultural citizens' (Willis, 1990).

Considerable influence is attributed to the work of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (hereafter CCCS: cf. Clarke, Hall, Jefferson, and Roberts, 1993; Hall and Jefferson, 1993; Hebdige, 1991, 1993). However, after Bennett (1999) we call for a reworking of the concept of subculture in the light of recent Maffesolian insights (1996a,b) regarding the elusive determinacy of shifting patterns of commitment and ways of life organized around creative interaction with commodity aesthetics and their conspicuous consumption. On the topic of car culture, the study draws on a small, but insightful extant literature base (Miller, 2001; Moorhouse, 1991; O'Dell, 2001). It also draws on data generated through interviews and participant observation among car cruisers to explore how they distinctiveness is produced through the performativity of the cruise, while at the same time maintaining a shared identity. The cruise becomes a site where collective understandings and group allegiances are sustained and reworked through practices such as creative debranding practices.

Tribes in motion

The language of tribes is everywhere. Switch on your HDTV or DAB radio and any numbers of social groupings will be labelled as 'tribes'. Tribes are also big business, especially in the economies of culture and sport. In other words, 'tribes' is the latest in a long line of buzzwords appropriated by the media to bracket the complexity of contemporary social reality and make it malleable. In this chapter, we explore one particular tribal group – that of a cruiser community for whom the modified car is an iconic object in which it sees reflected its values and collective self-image. We will show that during the performance of the cruise, modified vehicles occupy centre-stage in an unfolding drama of aesthetic contest and creative reworking through which particular consumption practices distribute a sense of authenticity and subcultural capital.

The cruise is a fluid grouping of car enthusiasts who, on the first Thursday of every month, drive in 'convoy' to the site in central Scotland, marketed by Visit Scotland as 'The Falkirk Wheel'. On such evenings the car park of this very imposing and innovative canal lock becomes, not merely another tourist attraction, but the site for a gathering known as the 'Falkirk Cruise'. Similar gatherings can be witnessed in cities and towns throughout the UK, where cars sporting thousands of pounds worth of modifications are temporarily brought together for the display, spectacle and ritual performance of what is termed *the cruise*. Despite the significance of such spectacles to those involved and the context-specific practices they engage in, little is known about them beyond the charged tone of the media coverage which seeks to 'other' them through portraying them as troublesome, secretive gatherings of 'joy riders' and 'boy racers' intent on inflicting their deviant practices on an unsuspecting and

innocent general public (Campbell, 1993; Evening Times, 2002a–c, 2003; Mulford, 2000). The effect of such interested media representations, as previously noted by Thornton (1997), is not merely to stigmatize cruising as anti-social, but to construct participants as committed members of a menacing collective expression of the unacceptable face of the 'reality' of youthful resistance, irresponsibility and subversion.

For two important and related reasons it strikes the authors that beyond the froth of such manipulated media accounts there lurks a topic in need of closer inspection. First, there is the issue of understanding the cultural significance of the car in contemporary society. And second, there is the issue of how young people interact with cars and how their lives are organized and made meaningful through those interactions. For it seems that until we are able to offer a better understanding of both those issues, we will not be in a position to frame the broader issue of car consumption.

Others have similarly argued that the study of the culture of the car has received limited attention (Miller, 2001; Moorhouse, 1991; Urry, 2000). With only a few particular exceptions (Banik, 1992; Solomon, 1992; Stern and Solomon, 1992), the same could be said of consumer research which has failed to get beyond the understanding of cars as simply extensions of the self (Belk, 1988). We argue that consumer research needs to better understand how cars and sociality interact to understand the material cultures of consumption produced through such interactions.

Indeed as Miller (2001) discovered, the car has become so central and 'second nature' that its significance has been overlooked to the detriment of an accurate understanding of the extensive role it plays in people's lives. He argues that the car has been viewed as the 'taken for granted mundane that hides the extraordinary found in this material expression of cultural life' (ibid., p. 2). Bull suggests that we think of the car as an extension to the home in which individuals, 'physically cocooned' (Jacobsen 2000 cited ibid.), inhabit a 'free dwelling' in motion on the road (2001, p. 185). As he explains, the car has become a metaphor for dominant western values of individualism through which people adhere to the rule of an individualized society, namely, 'to each his own bubble' (Baudrillard, 1993 cited in Bull, 1999, p. 185). For us this individualized approach is insufficient since it fails to address what Riggins (1994) refers to as the 'socialness' of such material objects. In writing about the social value of cars, Dant (1996) sets out to avoid the fetishism of the object through understanding the car as an inherently social object, a point of connection or 'vector of communion' (Maffesoli, 1996b) through which people are able to share their enthusiasms and passions to produce what Maffesoli might refer to as ephemeral, local emotional communities (Maffesoli, 1996a).

A (sub)cultural approach to consumption

Studies of bikers (Schouten and McAlexander, 1995) to those on goths (Goulding, Saren, and Follett, 2004; Miklas and Arnold, 1999), rave cultures

(Goulding, Shankar, and Elliott, 2002), gay men (Kates, 2002), mountain men (Belk and Costa, 1998), trekkies (Kozinets, 2001) and X-Philers (Kozinets, 1997), have all sought to understand the situated nature of consumption practices. In doing so, they have highlighted the value of what Arnould and Thompson (2005) refer to as a cultural approach to the study of consumer complexity that involves 'study[ing] *in* consumption contexts to generate new constructs and theoretical insights and to extend existing theoretical formulations' (ibid., p. 869).

Our pathway into the cultural studies literature has revealed the deep influence of structuralist ideas in the early work of the CCCS (cf. Gelder and Thornton, 1997; Hall and Jefferson, 1993; Hebdige, 1991; Hodkinson, 2002, 2004; Malbon, 1998; Skelton and Valentine, 1998; Willis, 1978). It offers a useful approach to cultural analysis framed through the lens of subculture. The study of so-called subcultural groups such as Mods, Rockers, Teddy Boys, Goths and Punks depicts such groupings as tight, coherent cultural formations organized around forms of interaction and ways of life that are distinct, and typically in opposition to other, usually dominant, structures of oppression (Bennett, 1999; Gelder and Thornton, 1997; Goulding et al., 2002; Hall and Jefferson, 1993; Hebdige, 1991).

In the case of studying the subculture of skinheads, Clarke writes that 'Skinhead style represent(ed) an attempt to recreate, through the "mob", the traditional working class community as a substitution for the real decline of the latter' (1993, p. 99). He argues that groups of similar minded youths were able to resist the 'people on our backs' within their 'community', with solidarity expressed through the symbolic construction of taste and style (1993, p. 99). In this way, the subculture is manifested through a collective response to changes taking place in wider social conditions, organized around style-based allegiances, especially to fashion and music. Early debate around the value of the CCCS notion of subculture centred on the idea of taste and style as articulations of symbolic capital and as the basis for strategies of resistance enacted through the conspicuous consumption of style-inscribed commodities. In one study Clarke et al. (1993) asserts that 'despite visibility, things simply appropriated and worn (or listened to) do not make a style. What makes a style is the activity of stylization – the active organization of objects with activities and outlook, which produce an organized group-identity in the form and shape of a coherent and distinctive way of "being in the world" ' (1993, p. 54).

Through solidarity and conformity to argot, appearance and taste, the CCCS (Clarke et al., 1993; Hall and Jefferson, 1993; Hebdige, 1991, 1993) theorized that individuals were brought together in a stylized ensemble to form a 'tight', coherent social group (Clarke et al., 1993; Hebdige, 1991). Yet, as Bennett (1999, p. 605) explains, the idea of 'subcultures [as] subsets of society, or, cultures within cultures . . . imposes lines of divisions and social categories which are very difficult to verify in empirical terms . . . [and] there is little evidence to suggest that even the most committed groups of youth stylists are in any way as coherent or fixed as the term subculture implies'. So studies of youth culture which are located within a theory of subculture have attracted

criticism based on the assumed stability of the categories defining the collectives and the limited role of consumer creativity and autonomy in constructing identities.

In consumer research, the work of Schouten and McAlexander (1995) imports a subcultural framework into their research among a community of bikers, albeit with little reference to prior ethnographic studies of bikers (Willis 1978), or the work of the CCCS (e.g., Clarke et al., 1993; Hall and Jefferson, 1993). In producing an ethnographic account of the new biker community, they also introduced the term 'subculture of consumption' as a means of characterizing individual and group organizing structures, such as clearly defined hierarchical fields, systems of formal and informal membership, a unique ethos or shared set of beliefs, rituals, jargon and modes of symbolic expression.

Although these characteristics, in particular shared rituals and modes of symbolic expression, seem extremely similar to those which mark neo-tribes (Cova, 2002), there are fundamental differences. For instance, a 'subculture of consumption' recognizes that subcultural groupings are defined by clear hierarchical social structures that may identify the status of individual members. Expanding on the work of Fox (1987), Schouten and McAlexander (1995) explain how subcultural groupings can be characterized by a concentric social structure and related consumption practices, signifying three levels of involvement based on commitment to the ideology of the group. 'Hard core' members exhibit a 'commitment and ideology that is full time and enduring' (ibid., p. 48). This group acts as opinion leaders to the 'soft core' members, who demonstrate less commitment and willingness to submit to the ritualized practices of the group, especially where discomfort or hardship is involved. In turn their role is subordinate to and dictated by the 'hard core'. Finally, 'Pretenders' show great interest in the subculture but only 'delve superficially' into the ethos serving as an audience and material support to the hard core and soft core members (ibid.).

Tribal membership practices

Another crucial distinction between neo-tribes and subcultures as ways of framing cultural collectives relates to formal and informal membership practices. Maffesoli (1996a) argues that neo-tribes are distinctive on the basis of their ephemerality: that is, they do not have any permanent membership other than through the duration of rituals. It also appears possible to belong to more than one neo-tribe through switching allegiances, where one mask is dropped and another is worn (Malbon, 1998). Within a subcultural framing then, identity is theorized as being unified and fixed: membership is seen to be static, one mask being permanently worn, in that distinct dress codes and a specific stable way of life permeates everyday activities. As Schouten and McAlexander (1995) discovered, the biker culture could be represented as a rigidly defined and stable way of life. Or as Miklas and Arnold (1999, p. 568)

observed, Goth culture inscribes a 'sort of religion', apparently underlining the stability and intensity of commitment and belonging.

On the other hand, membership framed through the concept of neo-tribes is represented as being temporary, unstable and shifting, making possible simultaneous membership of several sites, so that the individual can live out a temporary role or identity in one site, before relocating to another to assume a different role or identity. And those roles or identities are not simply class-based. As Maffesoli argues, '. . . it is less a question of belonging to a gang, a family or a community than of switching from one group to another' (1996a, p. 76). Recent research into 'rave cultures' (Bennett, 1999; Goulding et al., 2002; Malbon, 1998) has been critical of the relevance of subcultural theory to our understanding of contemporary tribal groupings on the basis of its static focus on structures at the expense of agency. Bennett maps out some of the key objections, namely that it may be inappropriate to utilize 'structuralist accounts to explain what are, in effect, examples of consumer autonomy and creativity' (1999, p. 599).

Drawing on the work of Goulding et al. (2002), we suggest that subcultural activities may be better understood as moving expressions of self-identity and creative solidarity, rather than resistance against domineering forces in what is becoming a progressively classless society. As a raver in this research stated 'Going to a rave is like going to a massive party where everyone is in the same wavelength. Dancing kind of draws people together, not in any kind of sexual way, it's just like you're sharing something exhilarating, dancing till you nearly drop' (ibid., p. 273). Bennett (1999) employs the neologism of 'neo-tribe', arguing that membership of such groupings is based not on conformity nor exclusivity, but an ambience, a state of mind that binds fellow individuals, even strangers, together into one tribal moment (Bennett, 1999; Goulding et al., 2002; Malbon, 1998). In his research on music-making, Stahl (2004) opts for the analytical concept of 'scene' to account for the loose affiliations and 'webs of connectivity' that may define participants' everyday practices in moments of communal activity.

Car practices

Turning to studies of car consumption we find that most have tended to adopt the subcultural approach rather than that of the tribal framework. For example, Moorhouse (1983, 1991) investigated the 'hot-rod' enthusiasm of post-war America and was able to identify a specific subculture with its own values, interests, vocabulary, magazines and rituals. He argued that the most important practice, entailed customizing modifications as a means of creative self-expression, varying from 'simply bolting a few shop-bought accessories onto your car, to creating, through one's own labour over many years, a streamlined special' (1991, p. 17).

In describing the enthusiasm that bound the group, Moorhouse (1991) writes that 'through action and activity "commodities" like the car become the

basis for various fields of interests, even identities for individuals and, relatedly, become the basis of various enthusiasms . . . I believe that a large amount of personal consumption and, especially, the explanations, ethics, and ideologies which surround consumption, are regulated through involvement in such enthusiasms' (1991, p. 18). In a similar fashion, O'Dell (2001) documents how the car served to bring individuals together forming the *Raggare*, a subcultural grouping in Sweden where the car became both 'a forum for self-expression' (ibid., p. 114) and 'a mobile family room or kitchen – a semi public sphere in which friends congregate and socialize' (ibid., p. 125). Through acts of bricolage the cars of the *Raggare* were customized and decorated outlandishly with two-tone paint and as much chrome as possible, becoming 'something of a vulgarity' to the general public (ibid., p. 114). Lipsitz (1997) notes how the result of customizing bricolage in LA is to modify cars in such a way as to flaunt their impracticality or otherness, for instance where widely understood fast cars are modified to go slowly, even decorated with chandeliers instead of overhead lights.

We argue that the value of such studies lies not in their adoption of the language of tribes, but in the attention they draw to the practices of customization and the consumer empowerment that flows from them. By this reckoning we employ the lens of practice (Warde, 2005) as a device to help frame social relations circulating around the cultural form of the 'car', as particular manifestations of consumer culture in the making. We interrogate questions of identity making and the affiliative work of objects, in this case cars, through employing the language of tribes and also of subcultures. This helps unravel the complex processes by means of which consumer culture is instantiated in the particular milieu of the car as bricolage, a site where cruisers improvize collective responses to their environment. Logics of appropriation can then be seen to be the means by which tribes seek to capitalize on difference and pursue strategies of authenticity through creative reworking of available resources. We suggest that this approach also avoids the trap of developing a static focus on the structures of social organization at the expense of the contingent flows of processes of identity formation and transition. In this way we identify pathways into the rich literature and various intellectual traditions available to consumer culture theorists (cf. Arnould and Thompson, 2005).

Methodology

Having mapped out the conceptual traditions that lay behind the chapter, it is useful to articulate the methodological underpinning for the research conducted. Cova and Cova (2001) emphasize that to study neo-tribes the marketer is 'well advised to cast aside the more traditional mono-disciplinary, systematic approaches and to favour practices based on detecting signs, foraging for faint hints and sighting glimmers of shadow' (2001, p. 71). In following this advice, data generation was organized around three key processes: first, to build an understanding of the jargon, rituals and aesthetic

ambience shared by the group, a review of popular discourse was undertaken, involving websites, Internet discussions and newspaper coverage. The dedicated fanzines *Max Power* magazine and *Fast and Modified* provided accounts of 'key [cruise] events memorialized in words' (Fetterman, 1998, p. 92). Such textual resources were supplemented by recourse to 'consumer voices' (Stern, 1998, cited in Cova and Salle, 2003, p. 10) to generate accounts of the lived experiences and everyday practices of cruisers. As Elliott and Jankel-Elliott (2003) advise, interviews took the form of impromptu discussions between researcher and informants. This material was then coupled with a phase of participant observation, which involved an episodic 'deep hanging out' (Wolcott, 1999, cited in Elliott and Jankel-Elliott, 2003, p. 215) with tribal members over a six month period at a number of specific cruise events.

The cruise: as a way of being together

Car enthusiasts have existed in society for as long as cars have existed. As car manufacturing has evolved over the years, passion and interest in cars has increased exponentially. 'Cruisers' are not a new phenomenon but represent a contemporary form for an enthusiasm centred around the car. In this way, we can make links to previous groups such as American hod rod enthusiasts (Moorhouse, 1991). Our research reveals that central to their enthusiasm is the spectacle of the cruise itself, whereby cars meet periodically at a pre-arranged meeting place, usually a sizeable public car park, details having previously been circulated by internet, phone and email. The convoy exists as a form of being-togetherness which enables participants to express their solidarity by travelling in tandem along public roads. Or as Maffesoli might suggest: 'I will try to show that the object does not isolate, but that it is, on the contrary, a vector of communion. Like the totem for primitive tribes, it serves as a pole of attraction for postmodern tribes' (1996b, p. xv).

Comparisons here can be made to Hebdige's accounts of the Mods and their symbolic scooter charge on Buckingham Palace (1991, 1993). That is to say, the convoy and cruise represent the imaginative marking out of territory, a symbolic attempt to 'win contested space' (Clarke et al., 1993, orig. 1975). Moreover, they exist as ephemeral performances delivered on the public and commercial stage of the car park, what Cova (2002) refers to as 'anchoring sites', where upon the tribe marks its own 'unique' existence through rituals of display and performance. In terms of interpreting such cultural events we argue that such spectacles are not defined simply by their public visibility, but also as Kahn Harris (2004) and Butler (1997) prefer it is essential to view the cruise as a space for performance and ritual, through which the cruisers become visible to each other. Taking this line of argument further, we might suggest that the performance of the cruise functions to energize and vitalize the group, providing it not only with legitimacy, but also with a material presence to produce an ephemeral community where emergent socialities are

produced. Namely through what Maffesoli might refer to as their 'undirected being together' (1996b, p. 86).

While we found it difficult to estimate the numbers involved, we concur with Cova and Cova's (2001) evaluation of the in-line skater tribe that hundreds of individuals may share in the vogue surrounding modified cars and cruising. Outward manifestations of this include the movie *Fast and Furious* and its sequel, as well as a variety of Internet sites and chat forums, what we might term neo-tribal spaces, where regular exchanges of information on modifications are facilitated but also where the identity of each regional cruise is marked out and a counter-discourse to the dominant media representations is produced. As the following response posted on one of the cruise forum conveys:

> Well the BBC certainly got one over us, what a fucking embarrassment to those that are genuine cruisers . . . This 'Inverness posse' bunch of twats climbing out car roofs and in through windows while on the move, smart! Good show for the camera's and exactly what the folk in Crail need to see when they get Crail shut down . . . . It was basically a bunch of neds selected to show us up, well done.
>
> (Edinburgh Cruise Forum, Tuesday March 23, 2004)

The Internet is in this way not simply giving rise to new forms of community, but operates as a cultural resource enhancing group solidarity through the affirmation of a 'them' and 'us' mentality mediated specifically in terms of local affiliations and differences.

Stylization and customization

The spectacle of the cruise is central to the collective display of the sensibilities of taste and style that mark out the imaginative territory of the cruise. In addition to this there is of course the 'look' of the car itself and the associated modifications made to this cultural object (see Figures 8.1 and 8.2).

We argue that it is not just the spectacle that cements and animates the group, but through the prior acts of modification and the codes which regulate and place value upon particular forms and styles of modification. Table 8.1 provides a synopsis of the main modifications of car cruisers gleaned from observation, revealing that designs of alloy wheels are the apparent 'calling card' for cruisers, where they, like the Mods before them (Hebdige, 1991, 1993) are not merely passive consumers of culture, but actively construct it. Bricolage involves a 'hyper-stylization' of the car, achieved for instance through the deliberate lowering of the suspension, or the addition of elements to attract the gaze of spectators such as bonnet vents or unique paint effects, debadging (Figure 8.1), neon lights, body kits and spoilers (Figure 8.2), smoothing, or I.C.E (see Table 8.1), illustrating that some commodities are constantly in flux and occupy shifting positions for consumers.

Figure 8.1 Debadged car.

Figure 8.2 Body kit, spoiler and neon lights.

By means of reworking their vehicles, removing original features and building-in or appropriating others, the vehicle is imaginatively removed from its original context. Through transcending the style boundaries imposed by the manufacturer's production design, the cruisers strive to express their

Table 8.1 A list of common tribal modifications

Mod	Description
Debadging	'Debadging' involves removing all the badges of the car manufacturer as to reveals a blank shell on which cruisers imprint their own brand creations.
Smoothing	Removing or inverting locks from car doors and boot as it is perceived that the smoother the car is, the better it looks.
Spoiler	Usually used for preventing lift on the car and increasing the downward force on the car. However, spoilers have largely been adopted as a style feature on their cars. These can vary in size and proportion. Prices range from £50 to £300.
Body kit	Body kits are moulded panels applied to the original shell of the car which makes the car, at times, unrecognizable according to shape and manufacturer. Prices range from £200 to £1,000.
Neon lights	Neon lights are fitted under the car to light up the underside of the car. Usually neon blue in colour these lights are perceived to add style.
Exhausts	Wider bore exhausts are purchased to replace standard exhausts. As well as for style and performance purposes, exhausts result in the car sounding louder and as a result is noticed more. Prices range from £100 to £700.
Paint effects and transfers	Paint effects can vary from smaller stencilled graphics to full bodywork coverings. The most popular style is multi-lustered 'flip' paint but more recently glitter paint effects have become widespread.
Tints	Tinting involves darkening the windows of the car so that it is difficult to see inside the car. Recent legislation has made some tinting illegal, depending on how dark the windows have been made. As a result many cruisers who previously modified windows have now discovered their windows are breaking the law.
Alloys	One of the first purchased modifications a cruiser is likely to make. Purely for style purposes. Ranging from £120 to £1,000s for a set of four, they can form a considerable expense. Sizes range from 10″ to 22″ and are available in a number of colours (white, black, powder coated, gun metal grey and most common, chrome). It is generally perceived that the larger the alloys, the more fashionable they are.
ICE (in car entertainment)	Given the time cruisers spend in their cars many have extensive in car entertainment. ICE varies in extent and variety. The most common ICE is a stereo system to listen to music. Frequently cruisers dedicate the whole boot to install their sound systems and 'sub whoofer' speakers that increase bass power and volume. Other examples observed in the field included flat screen DVD players in the passenger seat of cars and even Playstation consoles.
Custom lights and clear indicators	All lights on the car can be modified to suit individual tastes and styles. An example of custom lights are 'angel eyes' which are LED-powered light rings, forming a halo effect, that replace standard lights. Clear direction indicators involve replacing the conventional yellow indicator and making it clear.

(Continued)

Table 8.1 (Continued)

Mod	Description
Lowered suspension	Usually prioritizing style over practicality, lowering involves sinking the suspension. It is generally perceived that the lower the car is the better it looks. However, extremely low cars prevent anyone from sitting in the rear seats. Moreover driving over speed bumps is likely to damage the underside of the car, especially the exhaust usually lowered by 30 mm to as much as 150 mm.
Body vents	Used in rally cars to increase the flow of air and provide greater stability. However, cruisers use them for styling purposes.
Engine modifications	Used primarily for performance enhancement engine modifications take many forms. Examples include the following: conventional engine 'swaps' where one engine, is replaced by another; turbo charges and dump valves are installed to give more power. Such modifications not only increase performance of the car, but also serve to increase the subcultural capital ascribed to its owner. The intense sound of a highly tuned engine gives great pleasure to cruisers. More style-based engine modifications include colour coding the engine with different coloured leads and hosing, and installation of push button starters whereby the engine can be started at the push of a button.
Miscellaneous engine modifications	Given the amount of time cruisers spend in their cars it is unsurprising that the interior of the car tends to be stylized to the same extent as the exterior. A small selection of interior modifications include: stylized seats including bucket, leather, recliners, racing, etc.; replacing standard dials with custom images or coloured varieties; additional dials added to show extra elements of the car not provided by original manufacturer; replacement of floormats, steering wheels, handbrakes, pedals (available with neon lights) and gear shift sticks, with versions to suit personalized comfort and style ambitions.

individual creativity and autonomy and their affiliation with other cruisers. So, we understand the practice of customization, even where it involves removing the accoutrements of brand recognition (debadging) that many other consumers seem keen to cherish and display, as the formation of tribal capital, 'confer[ing] status on its owner in the eyes of the relevant beholder' (Thornton 1997, p. 11).

Individualism and affiliation

Central to understanding the relationship between cruisers and their cars is the problem of individualism (Maffesoli, 1996a, p. 9). At a superficial level it may seem adequate to define cruisers behaviour as a form of individualism as a number of individualistic elements did characterize the group. In this manner some of the respondents explained their passion for modifying cars

in terms of the desire to be 'unique', to possess what they termed a 'one-off', but also '. . . to be as different as possible from anyone else'. However, this assertion is also framed in terms of what the CCCS (Hall and Jefferson, 1993) might define as the values of the parent culture. As some of the participants suggested:

> In a world where everyone had a grey coloured car, wore grey suits, had grey wallpaper and carpets would there be much to live for?

By this reckoning the name of the game is not simply a spectacle of escape and freedom (Goulding et al., 2002), but also appears geared to expressing resistance through symbolic means to broader cultural imperatives:

> The reason is to be different from standard. Standard is boring and you can see standard cars at any time of the week. It's all about individuality and standing out from the crowd.

It is as if in a drab humdrum world such groups are searching for the glamour of the spectacle, the glamour of display to express their identities and re-enchant themselves through communion with others. This being-as-a-group, or as they prefer 'standing out from the crowd', can be reaffirmed in their resistance or antipathy the logic of the market, what Willis refers to as the 'shit of capitalist production' (1978, p. 178), and their desire to inflect their own meanings from such commodities. Debadging being one such act of resistance or symbolic attempt to escape the market and it's characteristic brand-dominated culture. We must also understand; however, the extent to which the practice of debadging serves as an affiliative act enacted to produce a sense of belonging and community.

Debadging is also an aesthetic act, and the importance of the appearance of their cars cannot be underestimated (Hewer and Brownlie, 2007). Although no such codes existed around the 'look' of members, as no particular cruiser 'uniforms' appeared to exist as was the case with the CCCS work on mods, rockers and punks. Although one significant way in which membership was affirmed and reproduced was through the development of a unique argot. In this way, cruisers would use a lexicon of terms to not only endorse their own individual membership but also exclude non-members or outsiders. The language of 'Scooby', 'Evo', 'Cossie', 'Chinq', 'Feestie', 'fourteens', 'convoy', 'mods', 'peeps' and 'cruises' (see Table 8.2) may appear incomprehensible to non-members but they appeared to serve a unique function of mapping out the shared identity of the tribe.

Aloofness and fluid hierarchies

Although Cova and Cova (2001) do not describe any specific differentiating practices within neo-tribes, it was clear that a fluid form of style hierarchy

Table 8.2 The argot of Scottish car cruisers

Tribal term	Definitions
Mods	Modifications
Peeps	Endearing term for friends/other members
Fourteens/sixteens/ eighteens, etc.	14/16/18″ alloys
Scooby-doo	Subaru
Evo	Mitsubishi evolution
Cossie	Ford sierra Cosworth
Feestie	Ford Fiesta
Chinq	Fiat cinquecento
Slammed	Lowered cars
Dubs	20″ alloys
Beemer	BMW
Zorts	Exhaust
Rims	Alloys
Dusties	Fancy dustcaps
Tunes (choons)	In car entertainment (music)
Rims	Wheels
Smoked	To have been overtaken
Honnie	Handbrake turn
Donut	Drive rear-wheel drive car in a continuous circle

does operate within the cruiser community. Understood through the concept of tribal capital, it is based upon the possession of cars deemed to be outstandingly creative and stylish (see Figure 8.3).

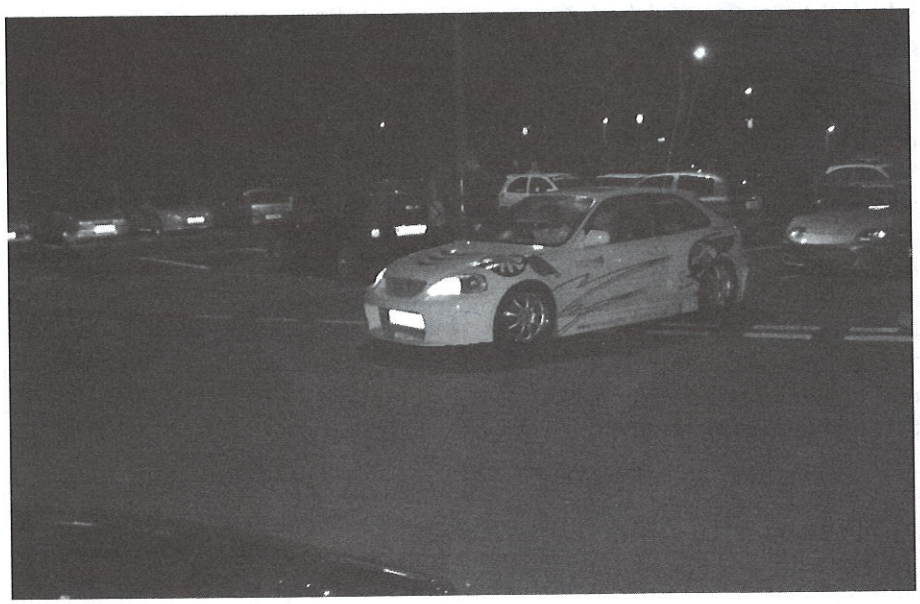

Figure 8.3 Parading the work of art.

The question for the present study then becomes whether the tribal perspective seems better suited to explaining shifting patterns of sociality within elective groupings, than stable structures based on ongoing conformity to the practices and ideology of the group, as explained by Schouten and McAlexander (1995). Within the studied community of cruisers, interaction did appear unstable and fluid, more resolutely neo-tribal in character than a rigidly defined subcultural community. However, a tacit form of distinction-making was present, noted by a shifting two-tier social structure of 'cruiser chiefs', who possess what Simmel describes as 'works of art' (cited Nedelmann, 1991), and the rest. The position of these informal chiefs, like the group to which they belong, does appear to be constantly under threat and in flux. As Simmel argues 'works of art are destroyed in their uniqueness the moment they are reproduced . . . . [and] cannot exist in great numbers without losing their essential nature' (cited Nedelmann, 1991, p. 182). Indeed, according to informants there were several cruisers who attracted fame and notoriety due to their extraordinarily 'unique' cars. And the flux between the extraordinary creations and the ordinary creations of others did appear to animate consumption activities and aspirations within the group. Discussions revealed that several style chiefs seemed successful in their efforts to acquire the distinction of 'coolness'. And one way in which this was managed and maintained was in their deliberate efforts to remain outside the socializing practices of the group, that is to say they would avoid speaking to or befriending others or otherwise participating in face-to-face networking activities to maintain a sense of aloofness (Maffesoli, 1996a).

becoming a fan (can themselves)
aloofness is needed

Discussion

> In giving to the word culture its strongest meaning, that of the soil in which soil life takes root, one could speak of an aesthetic culture. This means a moment when aesthetic values contaminate the whole of social life, the moment when nothing escapes their influence . . . [when] Style become an encompassing ethic that slowly shapes the manner of being and different forms of representation.
>
> (Maffesoli, 1996b, p. 37)

This chapter has sought to explore the value of adopting what we term a cultural approach to the understanding of car cruisers. This cultural approach relies heavily upon insights gleaned from the early work of the CCCS (Clarke et al., 1993), namely in the focus upon notions of stylization, creativity, 'winning space' and language. We have sought to rework their contribution through a turn to the work of Maffesoli (1996a, b) which anticipates the demise of the distinction between structure and agency with the retreat of the classic institutions of family, state and class. We argue that the turn to Maffesoli helps frame the cruiser community in a way that captures the 'outsourcing' of identity work through moments of movement, transition and

disorganization. It also draws our attention to the social value of cars as culture in the making and the constitutive practices and platforms in play around this. Pivotal among these ideas is that of the reflexive nature of consumption practices which mediate social relations within the cruise community. Here tribal cars serve as a 'vector of communion', a nexus through which the group can cohere around like-mindedness while at the same time capitalizing on difference. The car in this sense not only operates as a 'pole of attraction' (Maffesoli, 1996b, p. xv), but also as a visual iconography, a totemic space in which emergent forms of sociality are negotiated.

The contribution to tribal marketing thus becomes clear, or as Cova (1997) makes explicit ' . . . postmodern persons are not only looking for products and services which enable them to be freer, but also products and services (employees + physical surroundings) which can link them to others, to a community, to a tribe' (1997, p. 311). For cruisers there appears a restlessness and impatience with the car in its mass-produced form. The cruise vividly dramatizes this in the variety of material forms that modifications take, capitalizing on the discursive marginality of the tribe while at the same time celebrating 'otherness'. We argue that it is through the refashioning of this social object the car, through practices of customization and the generation of symbolic social meaning, that a feeling of community and a sense of distinction is produced. This approach to marketing where 'the link is more important than the thing' (Cova, 1997, p. 311) sees consumers as important co-producers of value (Vargo and Lusch, 2004), coupling this with an appreciation of the social influence brand communities can exert upon individuals (Aglesheimer et al., 2005). This new logic places aesthetics, stylization and customization in centre stage, not only when trying to untangle social life, but also when seeking to understand tribal socialization and the desire to be with similar-minded people (Maffesoli, 1996b). What we are witnessing when we study the rituals, practices and performances of such cruisers is 'the emergence of a shared and tribal happiness' (ibid., p. 42) whereby they experience the pleasure and 'warmth' of a form of being-together. This eclipses the individual and transcends negative and manipulative media representations. It also reenchants daily life to produce a sense of belonging, a kind of sociality and a form of community within a fragmented, contingent and ever-changing consumer culture.

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