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Title	From phantasmagoria to mundanity: the fetishization of the automobile in 20th-century French representations
Author(s)	Coffey, Edward
Publication Date	2015-01-30
Item record	http://hdl.handle.net/10379/4870

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**From Phantasmagoria to Mundanity: the
Fetishization of the Automobile in 20th-Century
French Representations**

Edward Coffey

Submitted for the Degree of PhD

To the National University of Ireland, Galway

College of Arts, Social Sciences, and Celtic Studies

Research Supervisor: Dr Philip Dine

French

School of Languages, Literatures, & Cultures

2015

From Phantasmagoria to Mundanity: The Fetishization of the Automobile in 20th-Century French Representations

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Abstract

The automobile is an object that has been systematically consumed to become part of the fabric of society, hence its impact and its perception make the car a particularly precise means of studying cultural values. As it grew in popularity, the automobile conditioned the texture of modern life. The particularly car-centred society of modern and contemporary France is thus apt for such an examination. Precisely because the automobile became so ubiquitous, people from all classes interacted with it, making it part of the national cultural fabric. The automobile thus provides us with an accurate prism through which to examine the evolution of French society in the modern and post-modern eras.

This thesis explores how the capacities of the automobile are displaced and consumed to create an object of desire, specifically a desire to acquire and use the automobile in what became systems of automobility. The practices which are scrutinised have often led to the object acquiring a special position. The evolution of the status of the automobile is examined as it became valorised in such a way that it was perceived to be enhancing human capacities. Taking the Second World War as a pivotal period in the development of France, this thesis demonstrates how the automobile was consumed and fetishized in two distinct ways before and after this conflict. More specifically, Marx's concept of the phantasmagoria of the fetishized commodity forms the conceptual basis of the first part of the analysis. The second part examines how the specific phantasmagoria of the fetishized automobile was subsequently modified in French society, and here Baudrillard's examination of the system of objects helps explore the second-stage fetishizing of the car as a symbol of mundanity. This theoretical refinement and this social evolution together allow us to view French culture "through the window" of the automobile as it embodied technology and progress in 20th-Century France.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to everyone who has helped me complete this thesis. You know who you are.

Introduction

This introductory chapter is divided into four main sections. The first section, which explores the important role played by the car in France, sets out a number of themes and concepts that will be developed throughout this thesis. The second section examines the literature that exists in this area and suggests how this thesis may fit into this body of work. The third section focuses on the theoretical framework upon which this thesis is structured; Marx's theory of the commodity fetish is explored as well as more modern readings of it by French theorists, in particular Baudrillard. The fourth section outlines the parameters of the project, describes the material to be analysed, and discusses the methods used in this study.

1. Fetishizing the Automobile

“At first sight, a very trivial thing and easily understood,”¹ the capacity of the motor car to transport someone from A to B is an obvious and inherent one. As a means of transportation, and thus as a utility vehicle, the automobile can seemingly be understood quite easily. One single intrinsic use-value cannot be applied to it, however. While there are a whole range of activities for which the automobile cannot be used, it is also true to say that the number of roles of which it is capable is not fixed. Thus, its capacities can vary according to the society in which it functions and the timeframe within which it is being considered, as well as the demands placed on it by its owner. The use-value of a car is initially apparent; however, its corollary capacities are many and varied, depending on the setting in which it is placed.

Marx wrote of a world in which technology was beginning to gain a foothold during the 19th-Century, but the automobile had yet to be invented. Thus, in applying this theory to the car, we must be cognisant of the fact that it did not enter Marx's thought process when he wrote of the fetish. The automobile, at first sight, may seem to be trivial and simple; however it has never embodied one single role or use-value. A form of transportation, the motor car is consumed as much more than this. As Urry has pointed out, “Most car journeys were never made by public transport.”² The automobile thus does not satisfy a pre-existing need or social role. The car became

¹ Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy* (London: Penguin, 1990 [1867]). 81.

² John Urry, “The ‘System’ of Automobility,” *Theory, Culture & Society* 21, no. 4/5 (2004): 25-39. 28.

the embodiment of progress, a symbol of technology's desire to improve society. The motor car, as the latest in an ever-growing list of technological advances, was the vehicle, in every sense, by which society would be freed. People would find emancipation in the ability of the car to cast off the shackles of the city and provide its user with the freedom to conquer space and time in a way that was hitherto unknown.

De Brosses used the term "fetishism" to refer to the adulation of inanimate objects as gods, as was done in 18th-Century West Africa. It is ironic that the term originated in a practice that was ridiculed in the western world and that, in its attempts to "civilize" these regions, France fetishized its newest symbol of modernity in parading the automobile through its colonies. Marx's access to the word was through de Brosses, and thus it was with religious connotations that Marx used the term, as highlighted by Bayley:

This notion of the fetish worshipper's desire-driven delusion regarding natural objects, his blindness to the unprovidential randomness of physical events was an element in de Brosses's original theorisation of *fétichisme* as the pure condition of un-enlightenment.³

It is within this conceptual framework that this thesis will examine how the automobile has been fetishized in France. In examining the use of this object, the present thesis will also explore how its capacities are displaced and consumed to create an object of desire, specifically a desire to acquire and use the automobile in what became systems of automobility.⁴ The practices which will be scrutinized have often led to the object acquiring a special position. The evolution of the status of the automobile will be examined as it became valorized in such a way that it was perceived to be enhancing human capacities. By supplementing Marx's commodity fetishism with an exploration of use-value, Baudrillard examined the commodity as having a more active role in relation to humans.

Taking the Second World War as a pivotal period in the development of France, I will show how the automobile was consumed and fetishized in two distinct ways before and after this conflict. More specifically, Marx's concept of the phantasmagoria of the fetishized commodity will form the conceptual basis of the first part of my analysis. In the second part, I will study how the specific

³ William Pietz, "The Problem of the Fetish, I," *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics*, no. 9 (1985): 5-17. 136.

⁴ Urry, "The 'System' of Automobility." 25-39.

phantasmagoria of the fetishized automobile was subsequently rejected in French society, and will introduce Baudrillard's examination of the system of objects to explore the second-stage fetishizing of the car as a symbol of mundanity. Baudrillard's rejection of phantasmagoria is not, as we shall see, a wholesale rejection of Marx's theory. Rather, in Baudrillard's view, commodification does not end when the object becomes democratized; instead, the fetish is coveted and consumed in different ways than it was in its phantasmagorical incarnation. This theoretical refinement and this social evolution together allow us to view French culture "through the window" of the automobile as it embodied technology and progress in 20th-Century France.

The automobile after the Second World War became fetishized as an everyday object. It became one of the standard household appliances, along with the fridge, the washing-machine, and the television, to such an extent that it now "slept" in the house in a garage that was specially built for it. It was used to run errands and to commute to work. It thus came to be consumed for its use-value as a domestic vehicle. However, although it was consumed in this way, the car was not seen to be solely fulfilling its use-value. Marx refers to use-value as the ability of a product to fulfil the needs of its owner. But the automobile became ubiquitous across classes in France, and thus was fetishized in a new way. This constitution of the car as a need, an appliance without which a household cannot function, implies a fetishizing process or mechanism symbolic of a society then undergoing the economic expansion of the *Trente Glorieuses*. As the car became inscribed in the domestic sphere, it began to represent a fetishized notion of progress which in this era of growth became attainable. Possession of a car was now considered a statement of a desire to engage with the nation's aim of advancing to a cleaner, more progressive, and more modern state.

As automobiles became ubiquitous, the French infrastructure was unable to keep up and automobility was inevitably compromised. The fetishized capacities of the car, including especially its ability to liberate through freedom of movement at any time, were no longer being realized. Thus, while the car theoretically offered the means to escape, the reality was quite different. The car was consumed as an ideal of liberation rather than as liberation itself. Major cultural commentators, including

notably Barthes⁵ and Baudrillard,⁶ discussed the impact of the car; Barthes more specifically that of the car in France. Both suggest that the car has been mythologized or fetishized in a process through which a mystical aura has been attributed to it. However, we shall see that as the automobile was democratized and domesticated it began to lose this lustre and was consumed in a different manner. The accession of the car to a place in the home led to its becoming a need in the Baudrillardian system of values of *Trente Glorieuses* France. The fetishized nature of the car can be seen to continue to exist, however, as Baudrillard argues that desiring an object because of its everyday use constitutes a form of fetishizing.⁷ Barthes also suggests that a mythology of the car is no longer appropriate; the time has come for a mythology of driving.⁸ The banalization of the car as a commodity has been explored in other contexts which are also significant for this study.

Ross's *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies* (1998) is an examination of the emergence of consumer objects, from cars to detergent, in *Trente Glorieuses* France.⁹ This period of growth coincided with the collapse of the empire, from Dien Bien Phu in 1954 to Algerian independence in 1962. This evolution to a dependence on modern commodities takes place as France's colonial past is forgotten. Ross argues that automobiles and other modern appliances helped the nation place colonialism in the past. In its emergence as a modern nation, it distanced itself from the dirty and uncivilized colonies it had left behind. This was a country which had previously proclaimed Algeria to be a part of France, indeed that "Algeria is France."¹⁰ According to Ross, with the advent of the Algerian War, the French push towards progress highlighted that France was not Algeria and that it was nothing like its former colonies. Following Lefebvre, who calls the car the "leading object" of modernity, Ross calls the car the central commodity of the post-war period.¹¹ It facilitated the creation of a mobile workforce and also that of the *jeune cadre*. The car thus embodied a new, mobile, progressive nation. It showed the world that

⁵ Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (Paris: Seuil, 2003 [1957]); Roland Barthes, *Oeuvres complètes* (Paris: Seuil, 2002).

⁶ Jean Baudrillard, *Le système des objets : la consommation des signes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1968).

⁷ Jean Baudrillard, *Pour une critique de l'économie politique du signe* (Paris: Gallimard, 1972). 151.

⁸ Barthes, *Oeuvres complètes*. 1142.

⁹ Kristin Ross, *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies: Decolonization and the Reordering of French Culture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT, 1998).

¹⁰ *Ibid.* 121.

¹¹ Henri Lefebvre, *Everyday Life in the Modern World* (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1971). 100.

France was everything that its colonies were not. This progression was to be seen in many different forms of popular representation.

2. Literature Review

While the automobile has established and retained a central role in human life and especially mobility since the early 20th-Century, it has been argued that it has not been adequately explored from a sociological or, indeed, from a representational point of view. The automobile, while originally a European product – invented in Germany and subsequently developed and improved in France – became an iconic product in the United States at an earlier date than in Europe. Perhaps as a result, the literature that focuses on the history of the American automobile is more extensive than that tracing the car's evolution in Europe. So, while numerous examinations of the automobile on American highways and its broader impact on American society have appeared,¹² fewer such studies have been undertaken in the European context.¹³

Although the iconic nature of the automobile has led to a voluminous general literature, it quickly becomes evident upon examination that much of this work focuses on an enumeration of cars, a sort of “show and tell” of what exists, with perhaps a short biography of a designer or of the car itself to accompany it. Typically, these volumes are copiously illustrated, and as such are aimed at the general public in an attempt to increase sales by satisfying the interests of an automobile-loving public eager to learn more about the latest models and their availability. Books written by car enthusiasts for car enthusiasts are the main staple. These works seem to constitute the majority of the printed material relating to the automobile although academic engagement with the car and with automobile travel is gradually increasing, the collection on *Automobilities* being one notable example.¹⁴

A number of academics have commented on the relative lack of critical analysis of the automobile in the social sciences and humanities, in contrast to

¹² Leonard Setright, *Drive on! A Social History of the Motor Car* (London: Granta, 2003).; Cotten Seiler, *Republic of Drivers: A Cultural History of Automobility in America* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2009).; David Gartman, *Auto Opium: A Social History of American Automobile Design* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1994).

¹³ Wolfgang Sachs, *For Love of the Automobile: Looking Back into the History of our Desires* (Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1992). T.R. Nicholson, *The Birth of the British Motor Car, Volume 3, The Last Battle 1894-97* (London: Macmillan, 1982).

¹⁴ Mike Featherstone, Nigel Thrift, and John Urry, (eds.), *Automobilities* (London: Sage, 2005).

scholarly engagement with other common objects. Daniel Miller (2001) highlights the proliferation of work on such examples of material culture as food, clothing, and housing, and suggests that it would be “very hard to exaggerate the disparity between the voluminous literature on those three topics and the lack of any comparable consideration of the car.”¹⁵ Charles Forsdick, in his work on *Travel in Twentieth-Century French and Francophone Cultures* (2005), agrees with this position:

As Miller makes clear, literature on the car seems to fall into two principal categories: either abstract histories of automobile production and design, or transport studies that focus on the vehicle’s consequences. To these I would add works particularly common for vehicles (such as the 2CV) that have achieved cult status: amateur histories in which an enthusiasm for often-recycled detail overshadows any rigour of analysis.¹⁶

Forsdick does, however, mention the fact that Miller omits Kristin Ross’ monograph on the role of the car at the time of and even, to some extent, in the process of French decolonization; this is a work which will be referred to on a number of occasions in this study.¹⁷ This lack of critical engagement is also echoed by David Inglis in his article on French intellectuals’ reading of the car in post-war France. This “relative neglect of the motor car as an object of scrutiny and analysis”¹⁸ is reiterated by John Urry (2000), who finds this absence to be a “particularly curious state of affairs, in part because automobile technologies have been profoundly involved throughout the 20th-Century in shaping and reshaping urban and non-urban spaces, ways of thinking and being, and modes of social interaction.”¹⁹

The automobile has its own history in each country, and, in some cases, this has been extensively explored. The impact of Henry Ford and his Model T in the growth of mass motorization in North America has been examined by a number of authors; it is a history that Forsdick claims has yet to be written for France and the 2CV.²⁰ James J. Flink is perhaps the best-known chronicler of the American automobile, and his work *The Car Culture* (1976) provides an in-depth account of the core events and personalities involved in the burgeoning industry.²¹ James

¹⁵ Daniel Miller, *Car Cultures* (Oxford: Berg, 2001). 6.

¹⁶ Charles Forsdick, *Travel in Twentieth-Century French and Francophone Cultures: The Persistence of Diversity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005). 119.

¹⁷ Ross, *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies*.

¹⁸ David Inglis, “Auto Couture: Thinking the Car in Post-War France,” *Theory, Culture & Society* 21, no. 4/5 (2004): 197-219. 197.

¹⁹ Mimi Sheller and John Urry, in *ibid.* 197.

²⁰ Forsdick, *Travel in Twentieth-Century French and Francophone Cultures*. 119.

²¹ James J. Flink, *The Car Culture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT, 1976).

Foreman-Peck has written a similar account dealing with Britain entitled *The British Motor Industry* (1995).²² In France, the car has been explored historically by a number of writers, but Jean-Pierre Bardou in his *La Révolution automobile* (1977) gives the most comprehensive account, which dates from 1890 to 1977, the year of its publication. *La Révolution automobile* was co-written by Bardou, Patrick Fridenson, and Jean-Jacques Chanaron, and was translated into English by James M. Laux; each of these writers has written extensively on the car.²³ Laux in particular is well-known for his work on the car in the United States. Jean-Louis Loubet's *Histoire de l'automobile française* (2001) is another example of a well-researched chronicle of the car in France.²⁴ However, they do not examine how the automobile impacted on French popular culture.

In the early years, a number of periodicals devoted much space to the automobile in an attempt both to attract readers and also to promote the car itself. Initially named *L'Auto-Vélo*, later to be named *L'Auto*, the predecessor to *L'Équipe* was one such example. Other periodicals also emerged at this early period in an effort to embrace and promote the car. *Le Moteur* (1913-1938) was a monthly magazine which was first issued in 1913 and, after a suspension of printing during the First World War, was resumed in 1924 under the name *Le Moteur et le Chauffeur Français*. With the subtitle *La grande revue de la vulgarisation automobile*, it was particularly concerned with making the public aware of the steady technological progress being made and how this could be of benefit to the country. *La Vie Automobile* (1903-1956) contained editorials which commented on the social need for the automobile and very often highlighted an evolving mechanical aspect of the car; it also contained regular articles on maintenance and repair. Further early newspapers included *La France Automobile* (1900-1906), which, as technology advanced, became *La France Automobile et Aérienne* (1907-1911), and then *La Journée Industrielle* (1918-1939). These newspapers all featured abundant advertisements by the various car manufacturers. Their layouts and contents have not been analysed in any coordinated way in an attempt to gain insights into the public attitude towards the car or to obtain an understanding of the perceived needs and

²² James Foreman-Peck, Sue Bowden, and Alan McKinlay, (eds.), *The British Motor Industry* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995).

²³ Jean-Pierre Bardou, Jean-Jacques Chanaron, Patrick Fridenson, and James M. Laux, *La révolution automobile* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1977).

²⁴ Jean-Louis Loubet, *Histoire de l'automobile française* (Paris: Seuil, 2001).

interests of the public. Chroniclers, interested in compiling a history of the car, have certainly used them, but, to date, these newspapers have not been examined as periodicals dedicated to the car's growth and democratization. Chapter 4 in this thesis will begin to explore some later general-market magazines during the period after the Second World War in an attempt to trace the impact of the banalization of the car on the French population.

Extensive accounts have been written of the larger French automobile manufacturers and their associated companies. While, much like the more general histories, some of these works are simply a chronicle of popular manufacturers, these volumes are important as they map out the evolution of the automobile. These often image-filled works provide an interesting tapestry of how each company's products and perceptions evolved over the years. The Michelin firm, notoriously slow to open up its archives, as attested to in Alain Jemain's *Michelin : Un siècle de secrets* (1982), has arguably had least written about its enterprise, although René Miquel's *Dynastie Michelin* (1962) provides a comprehensive genealogy of the Clermont-based manufacturing company.²⁵ Miquel paints a negative picture of this family, using the emblematic character of the Michelin man as a symbol of how the family in reality is nothing like the image portrayed through this jovial character. A biography of the family-run company, written by Annie Moulin-Bourret and entitled *Guerre et industrie* (1997), is a more comprehensive account of the development of the Michelin rubber factory. It traces the venture from modest beginnings through its acquisition of Citroën in 1933, and it explores its efforts to innovate and to be at the forefront of both creativity and marketing.²⁶ This work also takes a much more balanced and even favourable position with regard to the Michelin family. Much analytic work has been carried out on the marketing policies of the marque, as for example in Stephen Harp's *Marketing Michelin: Advertising and Cultural Identity in Twentieth-Century France* (2001), which examines the Michelin enterprise through its visibility in popular culture. His close reading of marketing material, the firm's "lifestyle-oriented images," and the development of Bibendum himself, scrutinizes

²⁵ Alain Jemain and Bernard Hanon, *Michelin : un siècle de secrets* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1982). ; René Miquel, *Dynastie Michelin* (Paris: La Table Ronde, 1962).

²⁶ Annie Moulin Bourret, *Guerre et industrie : Clermont-Ferrand : la victoire du pneu* (Clermont-Ferrand: Institut d'études du Massif Central, 1997).

the impact of the company on the national consciousness.²⁷ The role of the Michelin company and also that of Citroën, including specifically their impact on the growth of the automobile, will be explored in Chapter 2.

André Citroën is perhaps the man to whom most ink has been devoted. This is perhaps not surprising since his company was responsible for the creation of three of the most iconic cars in French automotive history. Citroën, the man, has also attracted special attention, as he was a very public figure during the 1920s and early 1930s. Regularly featured in newspapers, Citroën embraced publicity and was constantly on the lookout for ways to enhance the Citroën brand. He organized publicity stunts, availed of innovative marketing ideas, and was open to acquiring the best practices from abroad, the United States in particular, for application in the manufacture of his vehicles. John Reynolds' biography, *André Citroën: The Henry Ford of France* (1996), is divided into three parts, "The Engineer," "The Explorer," and "The Entrepreneur," each dealing with significant periods in the life of a man who died at the age of 57.²⁸ Pierre Dumont, in *Quai de Javel, quai André Citroën* (1973), dedicates his book "A la mémoire d'André Citroën, le plus grand des constructeurs français" and includes photographs of the various cars to leave the Quai de Javel factory, some of which he examines in closer detail.²⁹ Numerous books have been devoted to the iconic cars to have emerged from the Citroën factories: the Traction Avant, DS and 2CV have each had several volumes dedicated to them.³⁰

Renault and Peugeot are the two least studied of the major manufacturers. The biography devoted by Laurent Dingli to the life and work of Louis Renault focuses much of its research on his actions during the Second World War, as this is the period which caused the most controversy because of his jailing for collaboration and his subsequent death while imprisoned.³¹ Cultural historian Jean-Pierre Rioux's chronicle of Renault's life celebrates the man and the cars he created with abundant

²⁷ Stephen L. Harp, *Marketing Michelin: Advertising and Cultural Identity in Twentieth-Century France* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001).

²⁸ John Reynolds, *André Citroën: the Henry Ford of France* (New York, NY: St. Martin's Press, 1996).

²⁹ Pierre Dumont, *Quai de Javel, quai André Citroën* (Paris: Éditions pratiques automobiles, 1973).

³⁰ Jacques Wolgensinger, *La 2 CV : nous nous sommes tant aimés* (Paris: Gallimard, 1995).; Yves Buffetaut, *La Citroën Traction de mon père* (Boulogne-Billancourt: ETAI, 1997).; Olivier de Serres, *Citroën DS : au panthéon de l'automobile* (Arcueil: Anthèse, 2005).

³¹ Laurent Dingli, *Louis Renault* (Paris: Flammarion, 2000).

illustrations.³² Much has also been written about the working conditions in the Renault factory at Billancourt, where a large Parisian population worked. *La forteresse ouvrière : Renault* (1971) is one such example, as it examines the many strikes organized at the factory and pays particular attention to Jean-Paul Sartre's 1968 speech in favour of the Renault workers.³³

As already mentioned, Inglis has highlighted the relative lack of critical engagement with the automobile. One notable exception to this is the famous essay written by Barthes on the Citroën DS. In his celebrated collection of mythologies, he wrote about "La nouvelle Citroën." This treatise on the DS has become perhaps the most quoted text when referring to the ground-breaking car, launched in 1955. In *Mythologies*, published in book form in 1957, Barthes compares the DS to a gothic cathedral, drawing on the otherworldly appearance of this new vehicle. He underlines how the shape of the DS belies the origins and the utility of this car.³⁴ This portrayal of the Citroën will be contrasted with another essay published in 1963 entitled "la voiture, projection de l'égo", in which Barthes singles out another Citroën, this time the 2CV, and highlights its belonging to everyday French society.³⁵ These two essays, published just six years apart, albeit about two very different cars, are indicative of the evolution of perceptions of the automobile at the peak of the *Trente Glorieuses*. Jean Baudrillard has also examined the automobile in his *Le Système des objets* (1968), where he describes accession to the use of the car as a rite of passage and the acquisition of the driving licence as an act of initiation for young people to prove their worthiness to be considered adults.³⁶ This engagement of leading social theorists with the automobile will be explored later in this study.

The physical appearance of the car and its evolution throughout the 20th-Century is an area which has not been extensively discussed with regard to European vehicles. David Gartman provides a very thorough account of this evolution in the United States in *Auto Opium: A Social History of American Automobile Design* (1994), which charts car design from the ethics and aesthetics of Fordism, linking

³² Jean-Pierre Rioux, *Renault* (Paris: Hazan, 1998).

³³ Jacques Frémontier, *La forteresse ouvrière, Renault* (Paris: Fayard, 1971).

³⁴ Barthes, *Mythologies*. 140-142.

³⁵ Barthes, *Oeuvres complètes*. (This work was first published, as *La voiture, projection de l'égo*, in *Realités*, October 1963). 1136-1142.

³⁶ Baudrillard, *Le système des objets*.

both to mass and class automobile production, through to what Gartman calls the rise and fall of auto individuality.³⁷ He devotes an entire chapter to the tail fins which became prevalent in the 1950s. This is a point which Baudrillard uses in his exploration of the significance of sign values.³⁸ The influence of the American car on the French automobile industry has been examined by Ross in *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies* (1996), a detailed reading of the development of the motor car during the era of decolonization. Her study argues that the development of this industry was used as a means of highlighting the differences between *Trente Glorieuses* France and recently independent Algeria.³⁹

The earlier use of the automobile as colonial tool in the 1920s is a theme to which a significant body of literature is devoted. The first automobile crossing of the Sahara desert in 1922 is chronicled in a work penned by the expedition leaders and prefaced by André Citroën.⁴⁰ A similar work was published after the so-called *Croisière Noire* in 1926; however, it was the filmed account of this later expedition, in a 60-minute feature, which became the most significant work from this era.⁴¹ Competing activity by Renault in North Africa in the 1920s has also been chronicled, the first example being written by Gaston Gradis⁴² and a subsequent journey recorded by the journalist and politician, Henri de Kérillis.⁴³ These accounts form part of the colonial literature of the era. They place the automobile at the forefront of these expeditions. The automobile as the vehicle of modernity symbolizes *La Mère Patrie* on its *mission civilisatrice* as it maintains and promotes a France that is *une et indivisible*. Peter J. Bloom's *French Colonial Documentary: Mythologies of Humanitarianism* (2008) is largely devoted to the Trans-Saharan films; Alison Murray also examines this period in the modernization of the colonies in *Le tourisme Citroën au Sahara (1924-1925)*.⁴⁴ In an article about the *Grand*

³⁷ Gartman, *Auto Opium: A Social History of American Automobile Design*.

³⁸ Jean Baudrillard, *La société de consommation : ses mythes, ses structures* (Paris: Gallimard, 1986 [1970]). 83.

³⁹ Ross, *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies*.

⁴⁰ Georges-Marie Haardt and Louis Audouin-Dubreuil, *La première traversée du Sahara en automobile : de Touggourt à Tombouctou par l'Atlantide* (Paris: Plon, 1923).

⁴¹ Fabien Sabatès, *La croisière noire Citroën* (Paris: E. Baschet, 1980). ;

⁴² Gaston Gradis, *À la recherche du grand-axe : Contribution aux études transsahariennes* (Paris: Plon, 1924).

⁴³ Henri de Kerillis, *De l'Algérie au Dahomey en automobile : voyage effectué par la seconde mission Gradis* (Paris: Plon, 1925).

⁴⁴ Peter J. Bloom, *French Colonial Documentary: Mythologies of Humanitarianism* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2008).; Alison Murray, "Le tourisme Citroën au Sahara (1924-1925)," *Vingtième siècle. Revue d'histoire*, no. 68 (2000): 95-107.

Rallye from Algeria to Dahomey in 1930 to celebrate the centenary of the French presence in North Africa, Philip Dine has also shown the impact of the automobile in demonstrating to the colonies the technical superiority which the *mère colonisatrice* possessed.⁴⁵ The abundant capacity of cars to symbolize colonial modernity is highlighted here.

Motor racing in France dates back to the birth of the internal combustion engine and consequently has an abundant literature. As with general histories of the automobile, the rise of motor racing is often recounted in epic tones, but, numerous volumes with plentiful images notwithstanding, the social significance of these races is rarely examined. *Le Sang bleu* (1978) by Serge Bellu is one such work.⁴⁶ This is a chronicle of turn-of-the-century races compiled by a former racing driver. *La belle époque à 30 à l'heure* (1984) by Claude Pasteur is another example.⁴⁷ Meticulously researched, these two accounts provide details of the races and, when these are inserted within the societal context which existed at the time, as suggested by periodicals, it is possible to identify the social role of the automobile and motor racing at the time. Early newspapers are particularly useful in providing a setting for these events. As the original motor trials and races were launched to boost press sales, this underlines the importance of consulting these periodicals. The significance of these early races in the growth of the automobile lies in their providing a platform upon which the French public could discover the capacities embodied in the car. This will be examined in chapter 1.

The car's role in the democratization of tourism cannot be overstated. Initially, this linkage evolved slowly; however, with the establishment of paid holidays in 1936, followed by the economic boom of the *Trente Glorieuses*, a veritable tourism explosion took place which was, to a certain extent, linked with growing car-ownership. In *La Roue et le stylo* (1999), Catherine Bertho-Lavenir traces the evolution of holidaymaking in France through the 20th-Century, placing strong emphasis on the growing democratization of the automobile.⁴⁸ This theme is

⁴⁵ Philip Dine, "Dresser la carte sportive de l'Algérie « française » : vitesse technologique et appropriation de l'espace," in *L'empire des sports*, eds. Pierre Singaravélou and Julien Sorez (Paris: Belin, 2010).

⁴⁶ Serge Bellu, *Le sang bleu : 70 ans d'histoire des voitures françaises de grands prix* (Paris: EPA, 1978).

⁴⁷ Victor Breyer, *La belle époque à 30 à l'heure* (Paris: France-Empire, 1984).

⁴⁸ Catherine Bertho-Lavenir, *La roue et le stylo : comment nous sommes devenus touristes* (Paris: Odile Jacob, 1999).

also taken up by André Rauch in *Vacances en France de 1830 à nos jours* (1996) in which he refers to the direct effect the car had on the growth of holidaying on the French Riviera in the 1950s and 1960s.⁴⁹ Rioux and Sirinelli also make this point in *La France d'un siècle à l'autre* (1999). They present the fuel crisis of 1973 as a watershed in the development of automobile holidays as this sudden shortage led people to question whether the ubiquitous use of the automobile – “le tout-automobile,” as they put it – was sustainable.⁵⁰ The 1973 fuel crisis will form the cut-off point for this thesis as its economic impact forms a natural break from the economic expansion of the *Trente Glorieuses*.

The growth of automobile use after the Second World War saw its influence extend to other forms of popular culture. The road movie, which had already been made popular in the United States, now came to France. *À bout de Souffle* (1960) and *Un Homme et une Femme* (1966) became important films in the *Nouvelle Vague*, as the automobile began to play a more central role in modern life. Charles Trenet, in his song *Nationale 7*, evoked the summer holidays by referencing the road taken to get to the sun. The automobile also figures in the popular literature of the time, for instance, famous car-lover Françoise Sagan's first novel *Bonjour tristesse* (1954), set on the *Côte d'Azur*, involves the death of a major character in a car accident *cum* suicide.⁵¹ The automobile and its destructive power were beginning to become part of popular discourse at this time, a process that had been highlighted and intensified with the high-speed crash of James Dean in his Spyder in 1955. The incidence of death at high speeds quickly crossed the Atlantic and began to figure in French cinema and in real life, with Sagan herself almost dying in an accident, and Albert Camus and Roger Nimier both meeting their ends in a blazing car.⁵² With larger numbers of cars on roads, the number of road deaths inevitably rose and this began to be reflected in literature and cinema. The novel *Les Choses de la vie* by Paul Guimard, published in 1967, describes the final thoughts of a man as he lies dying at the side of the road having crashed while driving at high speed. Less catastrophically, the ubiquitous nature of the car is explored and parodied in Jean-Luc Godard's *Week-end* (1967), Jacques Tati's *Playtime* (1967), and the same

⁴⁹ André Rauch, *Vacances en France : de 1830 à nos jours* (Paris: Hachette, 1996).

⁵⁰ Jean-Pierre Rioux, *La France, d'un siècle à l'autre* (Paris: Hachette, 2002).

⁵¹ Françoise Sagan, *Bonjour tristesse* (Paris: Julliard, 1954).

⁵² See Ross, *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies*. p. 27.

director's *Trafic* (1971) in which the car becomes the star.⁵³ The sheer number of cars now led people to question whether they were truly happy with this evolution.

The automobile had also appeared in early 20th-Century French literature, most notably in *La 628-E8* (1908), by Octave Mirbeau, in which he talks about the love he has for his car.⁵⁴ The title refers to the number-plate of the vehicle. Marcel Proust, an avid fan of the automobile, published in 1907 a front page article in *Le Figaro* that took the form of a short story. In this story, he describes a journey taken in a chauffeur-driven car from Reims to Paris, making reference to the way in which he interacts with the spaces around him through the front windscreen.⁵⁵ Proust also had an affair with his chauffeur, Alfred Agostinelli, in 1907; he refers to him in this story in terms of desirability and speed:

Mon mécanicien avait revêtu une vaste mante de caoutchouc et coiffé une sorte de capuche qui, enserrant la plénitude de son jeune visage imberbe, le faisait ressembler, tandis que nous nous enfoncions de plus en plus vite dans la nuit, à quelque pèlerin ou plutôt à quelque nonne de la vitesse.⁵⁶

Proust also associates the automobile with death as he says that: “le volant de direction du jeune mécanicien qui me conduit reste toujours le symbole de son talent plutôt que d’être la préfiguration de son supplice !”⁵⁷ Agostinelli died in an airplane crash in April 1914.⁵⁸ Pierre Frondaie's *L'homme à l'Hispano* (1925) is an example of the evolving social perception of the automobile as his novel surrounds the misunderstanding of the social standing of the main character.⁵⁹ This misunderstanding comes as a result of him appearing for the first time at the wheel of an elegant Hispano-Suiza, a marque that was famous in the 1920s for its luxury cars. Russian writer Ilya Ehrenburg's *La vie de l'automobile* (1929) was written while he was resident in Paris and was published in 1929. It examines in a semi-fictional chronicle the system of automobility as experienced by drivers and others who produced or consumed the car.⁶⁰ *La vie de l'automobile* examines its positive

⁵³ Jean-Luc Godard, *Week-end* (France: 1967); Jacques Tati, *Playtime* (France: 1967); Jacques Tati, *Trafic* (France: 1971).

⁵⁴ Octave Mirbeau, *La 628-E8* (Paris: Charpentier et Fasquelle, 1908).

⁵⁵ *Le Figaro* (19 November 1907). 1.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ Perez Zagorin, “Proust for Historians,” *New Literary History* 37, no. 2 (2006): 389-423. 405.

⁵⁹ Pierre Frondaie, *L'Homme à l'Hispano* (Paris: Émile-Paul, 1925).

⁶⁰ Ilya Ehrenburg, *The Life of the Automobile* (London: Pluto, 1985 [1929]).

and negative aspects. It describes a world that has become increasingly subservient to technologies.

The automobile has featured more significantly in more contemporary literature. In *Automobile et Littérature* (2005), Frédéric Monneyron and Joël Thomas published an edited volume of articles exploring the instances of car use in literature.⁶¹ Their collection volume engages with the place occupied by the car not only in French literature but also in American writing, the two most famous examples explored being J. G. Ballard's *Crash* (1973) and Stephen King's *Christine* (1983). While there are some articles on French literature in this volume, and, in particular, two of which engage with Octave Mirbeau's *La 628-E8*, the majority of this edited volume explores instances in which the automobile has been incorporated into American literature. One article which examines the extent to which the automobile appeared in *Bandes Dessinées* from 1950 to 1970 is the only example dedicated to post-1945 literature on the car in France in this volume.

The car is featured in the work of many artists, Gerald Silk's *Automobile and culture* (1984) and *L'Art, la femme et l'automobile* (1989) being two examples of the scholarly analysis of this relationship between artist and automobile as well as gender, in the latter.⁶² Henri Matisse (1869-1954), in veering from his usual inspiration of life as seen through a window or in a mirror,⁶³ painted two landscapes as encountered through the windscreen of a car.⁶⁴ The Futurist movement featured many artists who were devoted to promoting modernity and in particular to their adulation of the car as paradigmatic symbol of that modernity. While Francis Picabia was not a Futurist, his work was concerned with man's relationship with modernity and he made regular use of the modernising image of the automobile. The work of Picabia and other early 20th-Century artists will be further explored in Chapter 2. Turn-of-the-century advertising very quickly became an art form in its own right, and O'Galop, the cartoon artist who created Bibendum, became famous for the

⁶¹ Frédéric Monneyron, *Automobile et littérature* (Perpignan: Presses universitaires de Perpignan, 2005).

⁶² Gerald Silk, *Automobile and Culture* (New York, NY: Abrams, 1984).; Gilles Néret and Hervé Poulain, *L'art, la femme et l'automobile* (Paris: EPA, 1989).

⁶³ *Le Pare-brise: Sur la route de Villacoublay, 1916/1917 ; Route à Clamart, 1917.*

⁶⁴ Peter Wollen, *Autopia: Cars and Culture* (London: Reaktion, 2002). 28.; Sara Danius, "The Aesthetics of the Windshield: Proust and the Modernist Rhetoric of Speed," *Modernism/modernity* 8, no. 1 (2001): 99-126. 118. Sara Danius, *The Senses of Modernism: Technology, Perception, and Aesthetics* (New York, NY: Cornell University Press, 2002). 136.

iconic poster he created depicting the Michelin man in various guises.⁶⁵ The cartoon has itself made ample use of the automobile; while fun is often poked at the car, it provided very rich subject material for cartoonists, particularly during the major growth of the car in the *Trente Glorieuses*. Two cartoonists in particular engaged with the car and modernity in the post-1945 era, as they lampooned the devotion to commodities which epitomized modernity yet also enslaved their owners. Chaval and Sempé both had their work regularly published in post-war periodicals; as commentators on modern France, their work is both informative and rich in meaning.⁶⁶ All these interpretations of the car provide windows into the public image of the automobile, as these representations present a valuable insight into the ways in which the car was consumed.

In its early days, the car was engaged with in different ways by the written media; the car was even seen as being so dangerous that a campaign to ban the automobile was launched. Articles and letters received by newspapers were very often negative in their views on the impact of the automobile on the lives of French citizens; indeed, many advocated a return to using horses. The pioneering architect Le Corbusier wrote extensively about the conversion of urban spaces so as better to manage the modernising effect of the car. Le Corbusier accepted that modern life which involved the automobile inevitably implied living in a world where “la fureur de la circulation grandissant, quitter votre maison signifiait qu’une fois le seuil franchi, vous deveniez une proie possible de la mort, sous forme d’innombrables moteurs.”⁶⁷ Nevertheless, *Urbanisme* (1924) proposes a city which, rather than rejecting the car, creates an urban utopia within which the automobile is central. The city is built around the ubiquity of the car, and the immense glass and metal structures illustrated in the book show a modernism that is not only utilitarian but also construed as a new object of beauty.

Cultural geographers in France and elsewhere have also engaged with the automobile in terms of its impact on urban and rural spaces. Henri Lefebvre and John Urry have both written about the conquest of space by the car and how journeys

⁶⁵ O’Galop was the pseudonym of Marius Roussillon. See Pierre-Gabriel Gonzalez, *Bibendum : publicité et objets Michelin* (Paris: Le Collectionneur, 1995). 32.

⁶⁶ Sempé is best-known for his illustrations of *Le Petit Nicolas*. See Pascale Corten-Gualtieri, “L’humour visuel de Sempé : une pratique de la sagesse populaire,” *Communication et langages* 149, no. 1 (2006): 29-44.

⁶⁷ Le Corbusier [Charles-Édouard Jeanneret-Gris], *Urbanisme* (Paris: Flammarion, 1994 [1924]). 3.

have both been made shorter by the capacity of the car to cover long distances and longer by the volume of automobiles on a road making a journey more prolonged than it should be.⁶⁸ Marc Augé has taken the idea of space further by suggesting that motorways and their corollaries are *non-lieux*, they are non-places, they are not lived in, not inhabited, but are simply crossed in order to get to where one wants to go.⁶⁹ The non-lieu as a counterpoint to Pierre Nora's *lieu de mémoire*⁷⁰ will be of importance in this thesis, especially in Chapter 3 where we will examine the importance of holiday-making and the growth of the road network which inevitably led to the motorways and the *non-lieux* postulated by Augé.

When analysing the car, the ideology of speed must also be examined. Celebrated writer and *hussar* Paul Morand engaged with the idea of speed in 1929 in an essay entitled *De la vitesse*,⁷¹ in which he claims that speed has existed for 100 years and in which he eulogizes its newest form, furnished by the car, stating that:

Lorsque nous partons sur une voiture nouvelle, nous pensons : « Que l'aiguille du compteur atteigne une fois 100 km. à l'heure et je serai content » ; mais au retour, ayant vingt fois touché le chiffre prestigieux, nous ne sommes pas plus heureux; le maximum rêvé, puis atteint, est bientôt devenu un monotone train de route.

Il y a dans l'attrait de la vitesse ce noble désir de faire mieux qui a élevé la race aryenne au-dessus des autres et d'elle-même [...].⁷²

Morand, who was a functionary in the Vichy government and whose application to join the Académie Française was blocked by de Gaulle, published a novel in 1941 entitled *L'homme pressé* in which he questions the need for man to be constantly on the move.⁷³ The main character is incapable of relaxing and enjoying life as he rushes from one activity to the next. *Ce que nous dit la vitesse* (2000) is an example of how speed can be viewed from the sporting perspective; it describes in detail the feeling of crossing space and time at high speeds, as done in a racing car.⁷⁴ Written by former racing driver Jean-Philippe Domecq, it is a description of a sensation

⁶⁸ Henri Lefebvre, *La production de l'espace* (Paris: Anthropos, 2000 [1974]); John Urry, *Consuming Places* (London: Routledge, 2006).

⁶⁹ Marc Augé, *Non-lieux : introduction à une anthropologie de la surmodernité* (Paris: Seuil, 1992).

⁷⁰ Pierre Nora, *Les lieux de mémoire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1997).

⁷¹ Paul Morand, *De la vitesse* (Paris: Kra, 1929).

⁷² Ibid. p. 16.

⁷³ Paul Morand, *L'homme pressé* (Paris: Gallimard, 1972 [1941]).

⁷⁴ Jean-Philippe Domecq, *Ce que nous dit la vitesse* (Paris: Pocket, 2000).

aimed at a broad reading audience, rather than an analysis of the meaning of speed or how it is portrayed via representations or the car.

Notwithstanding these works, and as already stated, there has been a dearth of critical analysis in social, geographical, and representational terms of the automobile, with the possible exception of its significance in the United States. However, more recently, attempts have been made to address this issue. In the past ten years, two edited collaborations have emerged with the automobile as their theme, both, in their introductions, making reference to this long-term scholarly absence. *Car cultures* (2001) was edited by Daniel Miller, who dedicates its first chapter to a critical review of academic engagement with the automobile.⁷⁵ *Automobilities* (2005), compiled by Mike Featherstone *et al.*, also refers to this absence in its introduction, while the chapters which follow address this deficiency.⁷⁶ Most relevant for this work is the chapter written by David Inglis, which examines post-1945 French theorists, in particular the work of Barthes and Baudrillard, and how they engaged with the automobile.⁷⁷ Concentrating on the period from 1950 to the 1970s, Inglis argues that this theorising of the car and its use is still of relevance in contemporary analyses of automobility. Inglis' decision to concentrate on the second half of the *Trente Glorieuses* once again highlights the impact of the fuel crisis on the car. David Gartman's contribution on the three ages of the automobile will also be particularly relevant to this thesis, as he divides the life of the car into three distinct eras based on public perceptions.⁷⁸ Peter Merriman's treatise on Marc Augé's *non-lieu* theory is also relevant, as it questions the reading of the car as suggested by Augé in his often cited anthropological study.⁷⁹ While Merriman's article applies to England's M1, it nonetheless contains insights which can be explored in relation to the French road system.

In French critical circles, two recent commentators have been particularly prolific in academic work on the car. Gabriel Dupuy has examined car usage from an urban development standpoint. In what is generally a negative review of the car, Dupuy examines the effect of the ubiquity of the car on the development of urban

⁷⁵ Miller, *Car Cultures*.

⁷⁶ Featherstone *et al.*, *Automobilities*.

⁷⁷ Inglis, "Auto Couture."

⁷⁸ David Gartman, "Three Ages of the Automobile: The Cultural Logics of The Car," *Theory, Culture & Society* 21, no. 4/5 (2004): 169-95.

⁷⁹ Peter Merriman, "Driving Places," *Theory, Culture & Society* 21, no. 4/5 (2004): 145-67.

France.⁸⁰ Matthieu Flonneau has more recently written on the automobile, his writings being mainly based on the use and perceptions of the car in Paris. His book *Les cultures du volant* (2008) explores popular interaction with the car from its earliest days up to modern times.⁸¹ Flonneau in his comprehensive book alludes to many instances where the car has had an impact on society. It makes use of resources ranging from popular songs to stamps as well as examples of work by other writers who engage with the car. It would be fair to say that it fails to examine adequately many of the interesting links and representations mentioned, as many references and quotations are provided with little or no commentary on them.

3. Theorizing the car as a fetishized commodity

3.1 Fetishizing the Modern

As modernization began to take hold in the late 19th-Century, symbols of this transformation were ostentatiously displayed as iconic landmarks of progress. Urban networks “along with their ‘urban dowry’ – water towers, dams, pumping stations, power plants, gas stations etc.” came to be constructed in the city as “iconic embodiments of and shrines to a technologically scripted image and practice of progress.”⁸² These urban networks reflected the commodification of technology. The automobile in its early stages symbolized modernity and was displayed as the embodiment of a new emancipatory movement. The automobile thus became both symbol and vehicle of a technologically enhanced world.

The fetishizing of new technologies is revealed in the exhibitions in their honour held in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Henry Adams’ account of his experience of the hall of dynamos at the Universal Exposition in Paris in 1900 underlines this veneration of technology. Referring to the dynamo as an “occult mechanism” and “a symbol of infinity,” Adams says that he “began to feel the forty-foot dynamos as a moral force, much as the early Christians felt the cross.... Before

⁸⁰ Gabriel Dupuy, *Les territoires de l'automobile* (Paris: Anthropos, 1995).

⁸¹ Matthieu Flonneau, *Les cultures du volant : essai sur les mondes de l'automobilisme, XXe-XXIe siècles* (Paris: Autrement, 2008).

⁸² Maria Kaika and Erik Swyngedouw, “Fetishizing the Modern City: The Phantasmagoria of Urban Technological Networks,” *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 24, no. 1 (2002): 120-38. 121.

the end, one began to pray to it; inherited instinct taught the natural expression of man before silent and infinite force.”⁸³

An early aspect of modernity was a quest for the improvement of city and society through the newfound wonders of technology. Technology would improve living standards and the car was a tool by which this improvement could be obtained. Kaika and Swyngedouw posit that “As long as there was ‘progress,’ there was no fear of going ‘backward,’ no question or doubt about the positive trajectory of fulfilment of history’s destiny, if not mission.”⁸⁴ The industrialization of nations, the expansion of free trade, and the mass movement of goods from the mid-19th-Century augmented the need for improved connections in the world. Rail and steam travel preceded the motor car as “Being connected became an icon and expression of progress.”⁸⁵ The capacity of the car to conquer space by facilitating this connection was an expression of this modernity. The car’s ability to tame nature, and to render the countryside trivial, placed it at the forefront of progress. As the automobile established itself further and became more familiar, it started to become aestheticized, as did other talismanic objects. The Eiffel tower, which initially served as a symbol of and shrine to modernity, is the ultimate example of this aestheticizing of the modern. Originally built in 1889, the decision to tear it down was reversed, and this symbol of technology has remained on the skyline of Paris as a reminder of how a new aesthetic appreciation could be afforded to technology.

Portaliou posits that “The proliferation of phantasmagorical forms in public spaces encloses the aura of art and the content of fantasy and senses within the commodity’s pitiless power, hidden behind the phantasmagoria.”⁸⁶ He notes that Benjamin would define the fetish as an object of delight and desire in itself. As regards fetishized objects: “They are signs and wish images of a better society that has yet to arrive.”⁸⁷ The phantasmagoria defined by Marx is refined by Benjamin with the concept of the commodity on display. It is thus the representational value of the commodity that is emphasized, rather than that which is concealed:

⁸³ Henry Adams, *The Education of Henry Adams* (New York, NY: The Modern Library, 1931). 380.

⁸⁴ Kaika and Swyngedouw, "Fetishizing the Modern City." 125.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Eleni Portaliou, “Alienation from Urban Space and the Crisis of Collective Memory. The Historical Centres of the Cities and the Spatial Constraints. Space, Inequality and Difference.” *Space, inequality and difference. From radical to cultural formulation* (1998): 284-89. in Kaika and Swyngedouw, "Fetishizing the Modern City." 129.

⁸⁷ Kaika and Swyngedouw, "Fetishizing the Modern City."

Everything desirable from sex to social status could be transformed into commodities as fetishes-on-display that held the crowd enthralled even when personal possession was far beyond reach. Indeed, an unattainably high price tag only enhanced a commodity's symbolic value.⁸⁸

As a fetish, the automobile performed not only the task of facilitating physical freedom for its owners, it also embodied the promise of a new world. As a “cathedral of progress” it “represented, displayed and celebrated the aestheticized dreams of tomorrow's utopia.”⁸⁹ In consequence, the desire to acquire a motor car constituted much more than the desire to acquire its use-value; it was the desire to partake in progress, to participate in the emancipation offered by technology. The display of the motor car kept the dream of betterment alive, and nurtured its phantasmagorical nature; while the city and the streets were the shop window in which this commodity was put on display. Steps were taken to infuse further this good with an ideology of advancement. As we shall see in Chapter 1, the car was actively promoted through the use of sporting events, through advertising, and later as a vehicle of propaganda in colonial expeditions in Africa. It became a “wish image” for a better society.⁹⁰ “The imagineered capacity” of the car to “create the not yet known” turned it into an object of desire.⁹¹

The fetishized nature of the automobile was to evolve and change dramatically particularly after the watershed of the Second World War. Initially fetishized as an object of desire, specifically as an emancipator, the motor car gradually became fetishized for its mundanity, as a household object, the “mechanical bride” of the *Trente Glorieuses* as McLuhan referred to it.⁹² Technology as a necessity was embodied in the refrigerator, the television, and gradually the car. Kaika and Swyngedouw reiterate Ross' emphasis on the importance of cleanliness as they describe the cleansing process inherent in the modernising project: “High modernity emerged from the 1930s onwards, with its obsession with clarity of form, purity, functionalism and cleanliness, translating the myth of the machine from the distant future into everyday experience.”⁹³ The functionality and efficiency of the machine over time supplanted the

⁸⁸ Ibid. 130.

⁸⁹ Ibid. 131.

⁹⁰ Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999). 893.

⁹¹ Portaliou, "Alienation from urban space and the crisis of collective memory." in Kaika and Swyngedouw, "Fetishizing the Modern City." 130.

⁹² Herbert Marshall McLuhan, *The Mechanical Bride* (London: Routledge, 1967).

⁹³ Kaika and Swyngedouw, "Fetishizing the Modern City." 132.

phantasmagorical image previously afforded to it. This availability gradually became a reality and the myth of progress cultivated through the creation of “urban technological cathedrals whose aesthetics belied the social realities”⁹⁴ ceased to be desired. The phantasmagoria of the automobile became the mundanity of the everyday object regarded as a necessity in the modern household.

3.2 The Car as a Fetishized Commodity

Stephen Bayley, in his study of *Sex, Drink and Fast Cars* (1986), argues that the car is “the ultimate talisman” of the 19th and early 20th centuries.⁹⁵ Through the appropriation of the car, by naming and anthropomorphising it, people created gods from these machines. Car expositions still provide sites at which new versions of cars can be viewed, desired, and consumed as anthropomorphic images. The process of the followers of the car all coming to one place in order to worship it has been compared to that of attending church or, indeed, a cathedral:

The colors, the lights, the music, the awe of the worshippers, the presence of temple priestesses (fashion models), the thronging crowds – all these would represent in any other culture a clearly liturgical service. ... The cult of the sacred car has its adepts and its initiati. No Gnostic more eagerly awaited a revelation from an oracle than does an automobile worshipper await the first rumors about the new models.⁹⁶

The image of the cathedral in relation to technology is a motif which has been widely used. The early fetishizing of urban networks and the services they provided led to the creation of “cathedrals of power” such as the early electricity generating stations built ostentatiously in the public eye: “With upwardly-thrusting, gravity-defying lines and elaborate buttressing against wind pressures, a cathedral structure may seem to conquer elemental force just as surely as Concorde.”⁹⁷ Barthes compares the DS to the great gothic cathedrals, and, in an early article on the car, Proust likens it to the cathedral of Reims as he makes his way to Paris.⁹⁸ The car may conveniently be regarded as a cathedral of progress. It is imbued in its physical character with the wish-image of a better world, much as a traditional cathedral would be. In implying a link between the two, the quasi-religious worship of the

⁹⁴ Ibid. 135.

⁹⁵ Stephen Bayley, *Sex, Drink, and Fast Cars* (New York, NY: Pantheon, 1986). 45.

⁹⁶ Cynthia Golomb Dettelbach, *In the Driver's Seat: the Automobile in American Literature and Popular Culture* (Westport: Greenwood, 1976). 99.

⁹⁷ Arnold Pacey, *The Culture of Technology* (Cambridge, MA: MIT, 1983). 91.

⁹⁸ Marcel Proust, *Impressions de route en automobile*, 19 November 1907, *Le Figaro*. 1.

automobile is portrayed in terms of a desire. As the cathedral symbolizes the wish for something better, so too can the automobile, which embodies the possibility of social progress through a commodity.

The desire to acquire this good often does not depend on the buying power of the consumer; the early car was desired even though it could not be afforded by the majority of people. The phantasmagorical nature of the motor car as displayed through the various forms by which it was presented in its early days served to further distance it from its original production value: "The price the consumer is prepared to pay for a commodity depends heavily on the ability of the market to render opaque the socioenvironmental relations embodied in the production process of commodities and to celebrate their uniqueness and phantom-like character."⁹⁹ Thus the car's fetishistic character turned it into an object of desire in itself. As a symbol of modernity, the automobile not only physically emancipated its privileged owner, it also carried the promise of a better society for its less privileged admirers. This image was nurtured through the illusion of a happier life facilitated by the arrival of technology, most notably the car.

The concept of the phantasmagoria is particularly relevant in early automobile development, where goods were fetishized to the point where they "subsume and mystify the underlying relations of production."¹⁰⁰ The automobile among other early technologies became an abstraction. Thus, it "ceased to be a project controlled by human beings" and took on a "phantom-like objectivity and led its own life."¹⁰¹ Although Marx's concept of the commodity fetish predates the car, technology, more generally, fits his definition of the fetish as "a bewildering thing full of metaphysical subtleties and theological capers."¹⁰² The automobile became an embodiment of an imagined progress and a vehicle for the quasi-religious belief that a better world was taking shape.

Marx's theory of the commodity fetish and his associated belief in the phantasmagorical nature of the commodity are particularly apt in the exploration of the consumption of the motor car, especially during early modernity. At a methodological level, a focus on commodity fetishism allows for the examination of

⁹⁹ Kaika and Swyngedouw, "Fetishizing the Modern City." 123.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid. 124.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Marx, *Capital*. 24.

economics, politics and culture.¹⁰³ The automobile became a technological fetish, admired, coveted, marvelled at; it enacted an ideology of progress in turn-of-the-century France. The fetishizing of the car went hand-in-hand with its commodification; it is “the process through which the commodity form becomes *the* form of existence, severed from its historical and geographical (hence social) process of production.”¹⁰⁴ The commodity assumes a new identity, alienated from that of its production and often alienated from its use-value. It is this commodification which creates the alienation between the use-value and the exchange-value of a manufactured object, as we shall explore in the specific case of the automobile.

3.3 Marx’s Theory of the Commodity Fetish

Capital includes a section entitled “The Fetishism of Commodities and the Secret Thereof” in which Marx theorizes on the properties appropriated by the commodity as distinct from the utilitarian values of any given item.¹⁰⁵ The fetishism of commodities leads to items becoming alienated from their origins and assuming values that are unrelated to the original role envisaged for them. It is this change in value that interests Marx. An analogy employed by Marx is that of wood being altered to be made into a table; it is still wood, but has acquired a utilitarian value in its new form as a table, and while this is clear:

so soon as it steps forth as a commodity, it is changed into something transcendent. It not only stands with its feet on the ground, but, in relation to all other commodities, it stands on its head, and evolves out of its wooden brain grotesque ideas, far more wonderful than “table-turning” ever was.¹⁰⁶

Through its becoming a commodity, a “mystical character” is conferred upon the table which, Marx claims, does not originate from its use-value: “Whence, then, arises the enigmatical character of the product of labour, so soon as it assumes the form of commodities?”¹⁰⁷ Marx’s answer lies in his concept of the fetish.

As previously noted, perhaps the first example of engagement with the fetish is that of Charles de Brosses, in a work written in 1760.¹⁰⁸ The De Brossian image of the fetish draining humanity from the idolater is taken up in Marx in his treatment of the commodity fetish. De Brosses claims that this process of fetishizing leaves the

¹⁰³ Kaika and Swyngedouw, “Fetishizing the Modern City.” 122.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid. 121.

¹⁰⁵ Marx, *Capital*. 25.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Charles de Brosses, *Du culte des dieux fétiches* (Paris: Fayard, 1988 [1760]).

idolater in a state “in which the idol is more alive than the idolater.”¹⁰⁹ Pietz points out that Marx had engaged with 19th-Century anthropology and had in particular studied “primitive” religion: “As early as 1842 he had read Charles de Brosses’s classic *Du culte des dieux fétiches*, and he continued to take voluminous notes on ethnology and history of religion throughout his life.”¹¹⁰ Thus, the image of the idol becoming more alive than the idolater provides a framework for his application of fetishism to the process by which an object becomes a commodity. Marx posited that societies concealed the “real” basis of existence in religious illusions. In *Capital*, he states that in order to understand “the fantastic relation between things... we must take flight into the misty realms of religion.”¹¹¹ Thus, borrowing heavily from anthropological literature, Marx’s concept of the commodity fetish criticizes capitalism for deluding its followers. The appropriation of the word “fetish” for a commodified good links the properties this good acquires with those associated with primitive relations, and this process is seen as merely superstitious in modern society. Thus, Marx’s commodity fetish forms a two-pronged critique of modern capitalist society and also of the religion underpinning it. In linking the origin of the fetishized character of a good to religion, Marx highlights how a product of human imagination can obscure its “real” essence and, by extension, the world.

The Marxist concept of the commodity fetish is derived from the analysis of the relationship between the use-value and the exchange-value of a product. The use-value of an object in Marx’s thesis is objective and thus “real.” It satisfies human needs and performs no other function. Exchange-value, however, is much less clear. Exchange-value is the value placed upon a good as it goes through the process of exchange in capitalist society. In order to accrue a higher value, a product is perceived as a commodity, and is thus alienated from its use-value, with the processes through which it was produced being concealed. The “real” value of a product should be calculated as a function of the social labour involved in its production; however, as a product is commodified, it takes on further properties. The fetishizing of a commodity is the attribution of qualities to an inanimate object which fosters a misconception of the true value and true uses of the product. Thus, for

¹⁰⁹ Cited in W.J.Thomas Mitchell, *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1986).190.

¹¹⁰ Pietz, "The Problem of the Fetish, I." 7.

¹¹¹ Marx, *Capital*. 164.

Marx, while at first sight an object may appear simple, it is “a very queer thing, abounding in metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties.”¹¹²

The Marxist theory of the fetish is, in essence, a critique of capitalist society. The true value of a good should, according to Marx, originate in the social labour involved in its creation. Thus, the exchange-value of a good is a misrepresentation of the true origins of value in capitalism. The term, as Dant suggests, allows for the linking of these misconceptions with:

a pre-humanistic scheme in which spirits, sometimes residing within material objects, were treated as a significant part of the ontological order of the world. Their use of the terms “fetish” and “fetishism” continue a tradition of cultural critique with its origins in commentary on religious practices surrounding objects. To identify a fetish is to expose the inadequate beliefs of those who revere it for what they believe it is capable of, by pointing to the real, material, qualities of the object and identifying its presumed capacities as really residing elsewhere – in the “true” god; in human labour; in arousal by a person of the opposite sex.¹¹³

The central idea of the fetish is that an object or good is embraced by people and is venerated in a form of idolatry that would seem to be misplaced. The term was originally coined in the 15th-Century by the Portuguese in describing the religious practices of West Africa.¹¹⁴ Edward Tylor describes fetishism as “the worship of inanimate objects by endowing them with magical powers and ascribing to them a life of their own”.¹¹⁵ Marx, in the 19th-Century, extended this concept to the world of capitalism and more specifically to the category of the commodity. It thus became “a polemical weapon with a wider range of references and was used to apply more broadly to describe the operations of a misguided and miscreating society.”¹¹⁶ The fetishizing of technology accords it a certain god-like character, indeed the idea that technology has a life of its own recalls the animism prevalent in “primitive” West African fetishism.

According to Tylor, an object is considered to be a fetish when a spirit is believed to be embodied in it. The object thus is “talked with, worshipped, prayed to, sacrificed to, petted or ill-treated with reference to its past or future behavior to its

¹¹² Ibid. 165.

¹¹³ Tim Dant, “Fetishism and the Social Value of Objects,” *The Sociological Review* 44, no. 3 (1996): 495-516. 498.

¹¹⁴ Pietz, “The Problem of the Fetish, I.” 7.

¹¹⁵ Edward B. Tylor, *Religion in Primitive Culture* (Gloucester, MA: P. Smith, 1970).231.

¹¹⁶ David Simpson, *Fetishism and Imagination: Dickens, Melville, Conrad* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982). 13.

votaries.”¹¹⁷ The fetishized object thus becomes a god, venerated for invisible powers it embodies and capable of affecting and improving the lives of those who worship it. Tylor explains the ubiquity of the fetish in Africa thus:

the traveler finds them on every path, at every ford, on every house-door, they hang as amulets round every man’s neck, they guard against sickness and inflict it if neglected, they bring rain, they fill the sea with fishes willing to swim into the fisherman’s net, they catch and punish thieves, they give their owner a bold heart and confound enemies....¹¹⁸

Fetishism, according to William Mitchell, provided a rationale for 19th-Century missionaries to convert North Africans to enlightened capitalism. This *mission civilisatrice* was a theme that was to form the backbone of the imperial campaign. The view of Africa was thus changing “from an unknown, blank space, a source of slave labor, to a place of darkness to be illuminated, a frontier for imperialist expansion and wage-slavery.”¹¹⁹ That much of this “civilising” process was accomplished through the use and misuse of totemic objects provides us with a valuable entry-point into technology’s function as a fetish in colonial Africa. Lewis Mumford refers to the machine as Western culture’s totem animal, half-god and half-slave.¹²⁰ This image is precisely that which was characteristic of French activity in Africa after the First World War and will be explored in Chapter 2 in which the *mission civilisatrice* in North Africa is examined.

Marx writes in *Economic and philosophical manuscripts of 1844* that the supporters of the capitalist regime are “fetish-worshippers.”¹²¹ Their veneration of private property has replaced real human relations, and objects thus appear to wield a power over subjects. Marx uses the term “fetish” to criticize capitalist culture and, more broadly, social organization. “Private property” and later in this same work “metal money” are the only fetishes actually named. Marx’s most famous work, *Capital* (1867), also delves into the world of the commodity fetish. It follows the ideas already posited, namely, that the concept of private property is replaced by that of the commodity form. The “real” value of a commodity is determined by the amount of labour required for its production and is unrelated to its material form.

¹¹⁷ Tylor, *Religion in Primitive Culture*. 231.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.* p. 244.

¹¹⁹ Mitchell, *Iconology*. 205.

¹²⁰ Lewis Mumford, *Art and Technics* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1952). 16.

¹²¹ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus, 1988).

The exchange-value, however, is dependent on the relationship of the good with other objects. This perceived value, however, is illusory since the relationship between objects leads to what is termed a “fantastic” relationship. These “fantastic” goods thus hide the true value of goods in the capitalist market.

Commodities thus sever the connection between the production of exchange-values and use-values, which “masks the qualitative social and environmental relations of production.”¹²² The acquisition of exchange-value, through the obscuring of the social values of its production, enables an Althusserian reification of the commodity, in that the appropriation of imagery creates a good which functions over and above its use-value. This reification underlines the desirability of the good and makes the customer prepared to pay a price unrelated to either the production costs or use-value of the good. Indeed, the price itself plays a role in the creation of the value accorded to a good. Hence, a good through commodification becomes fetishized. Marx refers to this process as abstraction: “commodities become fetishes when quantification of qualitative relations allows for abstraction to take over.”¹²³ With this abstraction “commodities supply their own ideology in the market.”¹²⁴

Fetishizing is the appropriation of desire, of reverence, of worship for an inanimate object. This may be done in a religious, economic or erotic context as theorized by Lorraine Gamman and Merja Makin. They suggest that “Fetishism ... is by definition a displacement of meaning through synecdoche, the displacement of the object of the desire onto something else through processes of disavowal.”¹²⁵ Fetishism is the imbuing of objects with properties, and thus the consecrating of them as commodities. This transformation is a social process. Identifying these social relations, therefore, affords us an understanding of the true nature of the object; moreover, it allows us an access-point through which we can examine the social and cultural movements at play in and through this object.

¹²² Kaika and Swyngedouw, "Fetishizing the Modern City.", 123.

¹²³ Marx, *Capital*. 35.

¹²⁴ Terry Eagleton, *Ideology: An Introduction*, vol. 9 (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ Press, 1991). in Kaika and Swyngedouw, "Fetishizing the Modern City." 123.

¹²⁵ Lorraine Gamman and Merja Makinen, *Female Fetishism* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 1995). 45.

3.4 Fetishizing a Need: The Baudrillardian Fetish

As already stated, Marx, in his treatment of the commodity fetish, engaged in a form of cultural critique. He explored the displacement of real human relations and criticized their substitution with objects. Marx's work was intended for the liberation of human nature as it highlighted the oppression of man through the valorization of objects; the effects of living in capitalist society were thus responsible for repressing social life. The Marxian fetish belied the true nature of goods, and it was this misrepresentation that created class distinction in society. However, Marx does not examine how these objects impacted upon individual humans. Baudrillard, in his *Système des objets*, examines this relationship in terms of "sign-values" and even goes so far as to suggest that objects have a causal effect on social beings.

The use-value, which Marx claims to be simple as it responds to a human need, has been identified by Marxist commentators such as Leiss, Sahlins, and especially Baudrillard as an area in which Marx's critique is flawed. By separating use-value from exchange-value, and by placing all symbolic importance in exchange-value, these writers posit that Marx is omitting an important element in his treatment of the commodity. So, for instance, Leiss states that "the idea of the symbolic constitution of utility is indispensable for a critique of consumer behaviour."¹²⁶ Sahlins likewise argues this point saying that use-values are also subsumed in the symbolic: "In so far as 'utility' is the concept of 'need' appropriate to a certain cultural order, it must include a representation of the object, of the differential relation between persons...".¹²⁷ Thus regarded, Marx's materialist conception of society ignores the symbolic value of socially created needs. Baudrillard similarly questions Marx's differentiation of the use-value and exchange-value of an object. As regards Marx's claim that use-value does not lead to the fetishizing of an object, Baudrillard suggests that Marx is mistaken. Much like Sahlins, Baudrillard points to the use-value of an object, and argues that it too is imbued with symbolic values:

C'est ici que joue l'idéalisme marxiste, c'est ici qu'il faut être plus logique que Marx lui-même, dans son propre sens, plus radical : la valeur d'usage,

¹²⁶ William Leiss, *The Limits to Satisfaction: An Essay on the Problem of Needs and Commodities* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1976). xix.

¹²⁷ Marshall David Sahlins, *Culture and Practical Reason* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1976). 150.

l'utilité elle-même, tout comme l'équivalence abstraite des marchandises, est un rapport social fétichisé, - une abstraction, celle du système des besoins, qui prend l'évidence fautive d'une destination concrète, d'une finalité propre des biens et des produits – tout comme l'abstraction du travail social qui fonde la logique de l'équivalence (valeur d'échange) se cache sous l'illusion de la valeur « infuse » des marchandises.¹²⁸

Thus use-value for Baudrillard is not independent of symbolic constructions as needs are constructed as “l'équivalent du travail social abstrait” and “sur eux se fonde le système de la valeur d'usage.”¹²⁹ In short, “use-value” is itself a mystified relationship. While exchange-value is a major constituent of the fetishizing of an object, its use-values can equally be mystified. Marx stated that there is nothing mysterious about use and that a commodity is only mystified in exchange. Baudrillard posits that utility is not an absolute term and that needs can be socially created just as exchange-values are.

The commodity fetish in Marx's writings involves the relationship between humans and objects. In his critique, Marx saw the attribution of properties to objects as a constitutive feature of the commodified world of capitalism. The concept of the fetish consists in the conferring of agency upon objects, which in reality is not possible as agency is limited to human beings. Baudrillard, a century after Marx, draws on the theory of the commodity fetish in his exploration of objects. However Baudrillard explores the object's gaining of value “through the social exchange of sign values, showing how objects are fetishized in ostentation.”¹³⁰ The theory of the fetish, as explored by Marx and then reconfigured by Baudrillard, will form the framework for this work. However, the fetish not only functioned on the level of distorting exchange-value; in addition, and crucially, cultural representation of the object, as Baudrillard makes clear, placed the automobile at the centre of semiotic fetishizing. However, as an ostentatious symbol, consumed for its sign-value, the Baudrillardian fetish of the car overlooks the use-value of the commodity. It is not only through ostentation that the motor car is fetishized; additionally, the valorization of its capacities as a means of transport, as a vehicle for emancipation must also be examined in an exploration of its fetishized nature.

¹²⁸ Baudrillard, *Pour une critique de l'économie politique du signe*. 155.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Dant, "Fetishism and the Social Value of Objects." 496.

Viewed as a misconception, and thus not real, the Marxian fetish did not offer a theoretical basis for examining the ability of one commodity to be more fetishized than another. Baudrillard, however, establishes such a hierarchy, and moreover suggests that the automobile carries more ostentatious prestige than many other commodities in *Trente Glorieuses* France. This thesis will use the concept of the fetish not to criticize but rather as a tool with which to explore the political, economic and cultural context of a rapidly modernising country. Baudrillard's expansion of the fetishism theory will be relevant here as the car will be examined as a sign of social value; it becomes part of a system of Bordelian distinction in which the object is seen to embody the owner's social status.¹³¹ The fetish is no longer denied as not "really" existing; rather Baudrillard sees it as "a means of mediating social value through material culture."¹³² The car consequently fits into his theory of the attribution of properties to commodified goods.

Baudrillard based much of his work on the nature of the object on the Marxian analysis of the fetish. However, in focusing on the relationship between the social subject and the object, he significantly develops Marx's theory, particularly regarding the object's impact on the subject. Whereas Marx strove to assert the primacy of the human subject, Baudrillard's work is a development of the subject/object relationship. In his critique of Marx, Baudrillard suggests that use-value is just as fetishized as exchange-value. This is because the object functions in a system of signs and values. Baudrillard argues that :*"Il n'est rien que les différents types de relations et de significations qui viennent converger, se contredire, se nouer sur lui en tant que tel."*¹³³ The object is not consumed as a direct response to a human need; instead, it exists as a sign in a system of relations with other objects. Thus consumption is not a human need but the social exchange of signs and values. Objects for Baudrillard function in a system which operates on two planes, functionality and ostentation. It is the extent to which a good achieves ostentation that transforms the good into a fetish.

Baudrillard uses the television as an example to explain this point. Even if broken, in a society where a television can hardly be afforded, the television

¹³¹ Pierre Bourdieu, *La distinction : critique sociale du jugement* (Paris: Minuit, 1979).

¹³² Cited by Tim Dant, "Fetishism and the social value of objects," *The Sociological review*. 44, no. 3 (1996): 495. 498.

¹³³ Baudrillard, *Pour une critique de l'économie politique du signe*. 60.

becomes a “pure fetish” for its ostentation-value. The television functions as a machine that mediates information which is consumed; it is also, however, consumed in itself, its possession signifying membership of a community as “un gage de légitimité sociale.”¹³⁴ According to Baudrillard, the television has a sign-value well in excess of its functional capacity. Each object “ne prend de sens que dans la différence avec d’autres objets, selon un code de significations hiérarchisées.”¹³⁵ It is this “système des objets” which involves sign-values and their social exchange that Baudrillard calls “consommativité.” This is a system of needs which is imposed on consumers, including the need for choice. Needs are not created in a void, but are established in the consumer through the “stratégie de désir,”¹³⁶ which ensures that, through the exchange of signs, the use-value of objects is distinguished. In *Séduction*, Baudrillard further develops his theory of the fetish as he explores how objects seduce the subject. This further blurs the distinction established by Marx between subject and object. The determining effect of the social sphere is questioned: “La réaction à ce nouvel état de choses n’a pas été un abandon résigné des anciennes valeurs, mais plutôt une surdétermination folle, une exacerbation de ces valeurs de référence, de fonction, de finalité, de causalité.”¹³⁷ For Baudrillard, the fetish symbolizes the power of the object to determine the subject and thus to reverse causality.

In his system of objects, Baudrillard examines objects according to their (semiotic) system of meanings in conjunction with their use-value. This involves examining the quotidian consumption of objects, that is, the way in which they are experienced as a result of their capacities. Baudrillard rejects Marx’s analysis of the object as incomplete as it does not accord any semiotic worth to the use-value of an object. However, he follows Marx’s theory as he examines the images concealed in the design of vehicles, much as Barthes did in his analysis of the DS. In his famous discussion of tail fins on American cars, Baudrillard exposes the ways in which design contrives to nurture an image of speed, which in reality leads to the opposite:

[Les ailes de voiture] ont d’autres significations encore : à peine dégagé des formes des véhicules antérieurs et structure selon sa fonction propre, très vite l’objet automobile ne fait que connoter le résultat acquis, se connoter lui-

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Ibid. 61.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Baudrillard, *Stratégies fatales* (Paris: Librairie générale française, 1986). 15.

même comme fonction victorieuse. On assiste alors à un véritable triomphalisme de l'objet : l'aile de voiture devient le *signe* de la victoire sur l'espace, – signe pur parce que sans rapport avec cette victoire (la compromettant plutôt, puisqu'elle alourdit la voiture et en accroît l'encombrement).¹³⁸

As these tail fins symbolize speed, yet their weight means that they actually slow the car down, the sign-value of the automobile has partially replaced its use-value. The tail fins were derived from the fighter planes of the Second World War. Baudrillard and the general public believed that they originated from shark fins and birds' wings, a belief that echoes Futurism's animism of the automobile, in which machines were afforded the characteristics of different animals as they interacted with nature as we shall explore more fully in Chapter 2.

Baudrillard also insisted on the everyday capabilities of the car, claiming that it had the capacity to be used as an abode. The automobile thus embodies a home away from home, one that can serve as a refuge, a place of privacy and intimacy, outside the house. As we shall see, Tati's 1973 film *Trafic* explores this as the car that is to be brought to an exhibition incorporates all the functionalities of a house, but is built on the mobile platform of a car in order to facilitate holiday-making. Baudrillard, in his famous dialectic of the automobile as both projectile and dwelling place, shows that whether or not the motor car is perceived as a symbol of speed in its appropriation as a quotidian object, it is alienated from its "real" use-value: "La voiture est d'abord, – et par tous, hommes, femmes, enfants –, vécue comme phallus, objet de manipulation, de soins, de fascination. Projection phallique et narcissique à la fois, puissance médusée par sa propre image."¹³⁹ This image of the phallus further underlines the distancing of the car in popular perception from its origin as, according to Baudrillard, it is experienced not as a "simple" means of transport but rather as much more as it becomes ever more invested with meaning.

Baudrillard accepts that abstraction occurs in the exchange of an object. However, use-value and thus the perception of a need, which are indisputable for Marx, in Baudrillardian theory figure in a system of needs which is just as fetishized as the exchange object. Thus, that which may appear to be a need has become fetishized, crucially, and is also historically determined, as what may be perceived as needs are continually changed and updated as pertaining to a certain social order, and

¹³⁸ Baudrillard, *Le système des objets*. 83.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.* 98-99.

this order is based on the fetishizing of certain signs. In post-1945 France, the home was the site for the transmogrification of these signs, as fridges, televisions and cars came to be perceived as needs in a culture that was beginning to define itself according to a new standard of cleanliness and progress.¹⁴⁰ Baudrillardian theory thus posits that the commodity fetish not only occurs as a result of social abstraction in which the value of an object is defined by its capacity for exchange, but also through the abstraction of the need system in society. While the car gradually ceased to be considered a mythological or phantasmagorical object, becoming a symbol of mundanity as it started to acquire a domestic function, it was, however, still part of a system within which it was fetishized. Evolving from a phantasmagorical object of desire, to become a part of the home that was fetishized as a need, the automobile continued to function in a system of signs. Whether as goddess or as maid, the automobile remained a fetishized commodity, whose role became greater as its image became more mundane and commonplace. The concept of phantasmagoria is one which requires further consideration as it will play an important part in the assigning of a fetishized value to the car.

3.5 The Phantasmagoria of the Fetish

Further explanation of the phantasmagoria is needed in order to understand fully the entire range of this trope and how it was intended to be viewed by Marx. As we have seen, according to Pietz, Marx had studied religion and specifically the work of de Brosses in 1841.¹⁴¹ Thus, when using the term fetishism in *Capital* in his theory of commodity fetishism, it was intended to portray the negative aspects of capitalism. The fetishizing of a commodity concerned the creation of an illusion which shrouded the object. According to Hetherington, Marx used a popular mechanical visualising apparatus called the phantasmagoria as a metaphor for the illusion created by object alienation in an attempt to dissimulate meaning and shroud value in mystery. This idea has since been explored by Debord (1977) in his concept of the spectacle¹⁴² and Baudrillard (1981) in his concept of the simulacrum.¹⁴³ Lukács, Adorno, and Benjamin also describe commodity fetishism as the means by which products that are consumed can be perceived, or in Hetherington's formulation: "Something that

¹⁴⁰ Ross, *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies*. 5.

¹⁴¹ Pietz, "The Problem of the Fetish, I." 11.

¹⁴² Guy Debord, *La société du spectacle* (Paris: Gallimard, 1996).

¹⁴³ Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacres et simulation* (Paris: Galilée, 1981).

seemingly involves consumers in the worship of the misleading figural or signifying qualities of material culture.”¹⁴⁴ Marx suggests that in order to understand the fetish it is necessary to view it in religious terms. As Hetherington points out, Marx had previously made reference to fetishism in a critique of religion:

Fetishism is so far from raising men above his sensuous desires that, on the contrary, it is ‘the religion of sensuous desire.’ Fantasy arising from desire deceives the fetish-worshipper into believing that an ‘inanimate-object’ will give up its natural character in order to comply with his desires. Hence the crude desire of the fetish-worshipper smashes the fetish when it ceases to be its most obedient servant.¹⁴⁵

Fetishism is thus a sensuous desire. It is not based in the supposedly rational world of production. It involves a mode of consumption that is disguised through the concealment of the object by using an illusion that impairs the ability of the consumer to see the object for its true qualities. In *Capital*, Marx highlights the substitution of the social relation between individuals by that with the object. It is this alienation of the meaning of an object that leads to its consumption as an image rather than for its use-value.

Hetherington argues that by comparing the original German text of this celebrated treatise with its 1887 English translation, we get a further insight into the emphasis Marx was placing on the visual aspect of the fetish nature of an object. He compares specifically the following lines with the German original:

There is a definite social relation between men that assumes, in their eyes, the fantastic form of a relation between things.

Es ist nur das bestimmte gesellschaftliche Verhaeltnis des Menschen selbst, welches hier fuer sie die phantasmagorische Form eines Verhaeltnisses von Dingen annimmt.¹⁴⁶

It thereby becomes apparent that one phrase in particular has been translated in a rather reductive way. “Die phantasmagorische Form” is translated as “the fantastic form,” and as such it loses the reference to a common early 19th-Century spectacle, that of the phantasmagoria. Hetherington argues that Marx was making direct and deliberate reference to this phenomenon as a means of portraying his reading of the illusory nature of the product: “In using the metaphor Marx tries to demonstrate

¹⁴⁴ Kevin Hetherington, *Capitalism's Eye: Cultural Spaces of the Commodity* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2007). 57.

¹⁴⁵ Marx, in Hetherington, *Capitalism's eye*, 59.

¹⁴⁶ Marx, *Capital*. 25.

something of the bewildering capacity of the commodity and of the subject constituted in relation to it.”¹⁴⁷

The original phantasmagoria was a spectacle that began in late 18th - and early 19th-Century Europe. It originated in Paris, and involved the projection of images that concealed the projectors and thereby attempted to deceive its audience. The phantasmagoria was an advance on the magic lantern show of the earlier 18th-Century. It involved the projection of ghostly images onto a translucent screen or onto smoke in the centre of a darkened room and around which the audience sat. In its earliest forms in Paris, the phantasmagoria presented images of figures from history in ghostly form. Paradoxically, the Enlightenment figures of Voltaire and Rousseau, amongst others, were displayed. As Hetherington argues, the fact that phantasmagoria projectors were concealed was significant. The images thus seemed to have a life of their own as their source was never identified. The concealment of the projectors as well as the use of a darkened room in order to obscure the screen allowed for the creation of a spectacle in which false images were created to appear amongst the viewing audience. The spectators, while conscious of the existence of projectors and a screen, were unable to see either and thus were encouraged to consume the image purely as such.

The etymology of the word “phantasmagoria” is also of interest. According to Hetherington, three suggestions for the source of the word have been made:

Most simply as “ghost-speak” or “speak to the ghosts”.

Phantasma agoreuein: to speak in public (from the agora – a place of public discourse that was also a market place) under the influence of allegory.

Fantasme agourer, which translates as “ghostly deceiver” or “deceiving ghost.”¹⁴⁸

As Hetherington suggests, the overlap in meaning between the definitions highlights the paradoxical nature of the phantasmagoria: “Concealment and uncertainty are central motifs.”¹⁴⁹ The “agora” or marketplace forming part of the etymology of the word would also seem to be particularly apt given Marx’s use of the term in the context of purchase and consumption. That the phantasmagoria dealt principally with the projection of ghostly images is also significant on two levels. Firstly, associating

¹⁴⁷ Hetherington, *Capitalism's Eye*. p. 61.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid. 63.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

a sinister being, namely, a ghost, with a produced object implies the attribution of the same negative values to the perception of the product. Secondly, the fact that ghosts remain in the realm of the occult, as does religion as conceived by Marxists, suggests that while an image is portrayed, it is indeed a false one, one that can potentially be seen for what it really is, providing crucially that the subject of the experience is able to see through the mists within which the object is shrouded. This allows for the possibility of critically informed demystification.

Thus, the phantasmagoria metaphor as used by Marx focuses attention on the fetishizing of an object. This trope is a means of understanding commodity fetishism which can be applied, according to Marx, to any product consumed within a capitalist framework. In this thesis, I will apply Marx's theory of the commodity fetish – revised and refined in the light of the theoretical reflections of Baudrillard and others – to the automobile. More specifically, I will use this theory as my entry-point into French society's consumption of the car. The trope of the phantasmagoria will be particularly relevant in the first part of the thesis, in which the car is examined in terms of its idolized status. The car as fetishized vehicle of modernity is consequently apt as the primary focus for this analysis.

4. Thesis Structure

The first two chapters form the first part of the thesis, the cut-off point of which is the Second World War. As previously outlined, I examine how the car was portrayed and consumed by applying Marx's theory of the commodity fetish. More specifically, I explore how Marx's trope of the phantasmagoria can be used as a tool to decipher the impact of the automobile on early 20th-Century France. Over the longer term, from its birth until its democratization during the *Trente Glorieuses*, the automobile played a singular role in French society. In this first period, it was essentially portrayed as an object of desire, being perceived and consumed as a vehicle capable of delivering much more than its use-value. As a result of the fetishizing of its capacities through motor racing, touring and a close linkage with modernity, the automobile became very visible in French society; however, the image portrayed belied the true qualities and capacities of the car. Instead, the phantasmagorical image of the surplus capacity of the automobile was that which was consumed.

The first chapter of the thesis centres on the invention of the car and its subsequent adoption by French manufacturers and the upper classes. Chapter 1 examines how the automobile was fetishized through motor sport; while the phantasmagoria of speed and surplus capacity is highlighted as we examine how cars linked the largest cities, first in France and later throughout Europe. In this early period (1890-1906), the car is not portrayed as a democratized vehicle which will transport significant numbers of people. Rather, it is portrayed and consumed as a purveyor of speed and creator of freedom for the social elite. The automobile, in a series of highly publicized turn-of-the-century city-to-city races, demonstrated an ability to perform tasks that had never previously been considered necessary. Motor sport thus validated practices that were, objectively regarded, not needed at all. In reifying modernity, motor sport created an image of power and freedom for the automobile that was surplus to the needs of French society. This portrayal of the automobile's speed succeeded in creating a fetishized image that was, in fact, quite alienated from its use-value.

Chapter 2 explores the presence of the automobile in popular culture in the era prior to the Second World War. I focus on the Michelin brand and examine the steps taken by this company to establish itself as the main tyre producer in the automobile industry. A pioneer in advertising terms, the Michelin company was central to the fetishizing of the automobile and automobility. Its attribution of agency to a pile of tyres in the creation of the *Bonhomme Bibendum* (Michelin Man) is an example of its pioneering engagement with the automobile. By giving the car a central position in its advertising campaigns, Michelin was also instrumental in the construction of the desire phantasmagoria that enveloped the car up until the Second World War. Against this backdrop, I also explore the Futurist movement of the early 20th-Century. Led by Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, and following the *Futurist Manifesto* published in 1911 in *Le Figaro*, the Futurist movement had a profound effect on perceptions of the motor car and of modernity in general in the period either side of the First World War. This impact was to be seen specifically in the realm of art, where the automobile played an increasing part. The second brand I focus on is Citroën and this marque's attempts to fetishize car-ownership by closely linking it to modernity. I also explore how the fetishized nature of modernity and technology, as embodied by the car, is central in post-1918 attempts to valorize the

French colonies. In the 1920s and early 1930s, as French colonies became central to foreign policy, a series of automobile expeditions across Africa and Asia promoted the image of France and her civilising mission. The *croisières*, as they were called, took place in a highly politicized context, having received official state recognition, and effectively appeared in the empire as fetishes of modernity to rival the ancient West African fetishes first analysed by de Brosses.

Part 2 moves away from the phantasmagoria of the car. Here, I examine how the gradual proliferation of the automobile in the *Trente Glorieuses* led to a new form of fetishizing. Chapter 3 will explore the means by which the motor car became a symbol of holidays and holiday-making for working-class people. The impact of *Les Congés Payés* and the ever-growing purchasing power of the working classes meant that the automobile was gradually becoming available to the masses. The advent of mass holidaying in France in the 1950s and 1960s reflected the ubiquity of the automobile. Route Nationale 7, the road that leads from Paris to the Côte d'Azur, became a *lieu de mémoire* just as much as did the destination itself for holidaymaking workers. The perception of the car, moreover, evolved in this period. It was no longer an unobtainable object of desire, but a practical purveyor of the freedom that it symbolized for so many in the pre-war era. The Marxist concept of the fetish, where the use-value of the product is obscured by its exchange-value, is still applicable; however, the car is fetishized in a different way from the pre-war era.

Chapter 4 examines how the phantasmagorical fetishizing of the car was gradually replaced by a fetishizing of mundanity. Baudrillard's re-reading of the commodity fetish will be particularly useful here, as the gradual evolution of the perception of the car is examined in post-1945 magazines. Three periodicals in particular will be explored over a thirty-year period: *Elle*, *Paris Match* and *L'Express*. This chapter will examine how these primary sources treated the vehicle in a time of vast societal change. Moreover, with the gradual development and promotion of car ownership in France in the post-war era, traffic congestion became a major issue. The *autoroute* network was thus a by-product of the *Trente Glorieuses*. These motorways, which were built to tackle the numbers of cars on the roads, led to the establishment of what Augé has referred to as *non-lieux*. Built to satisfy the needs of automobiles, this accommodation of the machine rather than of the human being had a dehumanising effect on the latter, as theorized by Augé.

These *non-lieux* exist not only because of the automobile, but rather are products of what Augé refers to more broadly as “hypermodernity.” However, in the case of motorways it was the willingness to meet the need of an object rather than a social need that led to their construction. Moreover, as Mumford points out, the emancipatory ideal embodied by the car has been destroyed in many cases by its own success:

In using the car to flee from the metropolis, the motorist finds that he has merely transferred congestion to the highway and thereby doubled it. When he reaches his destination in a distant suburb, he finds the countryside he sought has disappeared; beyond him, thanks to the motorway, lies only another suburb, just as dull as his own.¹⁵⁰

The specific applicability to France of this general observation will be further explored in Chapter 5, which devotes particular attention to the portrayal of the growing democratization of the car in the cinematic works of Tati and Godard.

In Chapter 5, I explore two essays written by Roland Barthes, both on the subject of the automobile, to explore the evolution of the fetishizing of the car in popular French culture. By comparing and contrasting “La nouvelle Citroën” from *Mythologies* (1957) and “La voiture, projection de l’égó,” written in 1963, I show how Barthes updated his own beliefs about the car in society. Written just a few years apart, these two essays reflect a rapid evolution in perceptions of motorized France. I use these two essays as a springboard to examine how the car was portrayed in other influential representations. In particular, as suggested, I examine *Nouvelle Vague* cinema, within which the automobile played a large part. I specifically examine Godard and explore how the car is portrayed as a symbol of modernity in the films of a director who was notoriously distrustful of Americanization and the modernity that this embodied. This focus on the *Nouvelle Vague* is followed by an exploration of the films of Jacques Tati, as his gradual rejection of a rapidly modernising nation mirrors the broader evolution which took place in society up to the early 1970s.

The chronological span of this thesis reaches from the late 19th-Century to the oil crisis of the early 1970s. This gives a logical cut-off point for this study, as the automobile inevitably came to be viewed in a more utilitarian light as a result of the fuel shortages that ensued from this crisis. The central scope of this thesis is,

¹⁵⁰ Lewis Mumford, *The Highway and the City* (New York, NY: Harcourt, 1963). 234.

therefore, the exploration of the fetishizing of the automobile in France prior to the Second World War and the subsequent evolution of this fetishizing as post-war France grew in wealth and power. The automobile provides a unique but as yet untapped resource with which to observe the evolution of society through the first three-quarters of the 20th-Century. As an object of both popular and cultural investment and as a durable symbol of modernity, the automobile has been consumed by the overwhelming majority of French people. In pre-war times, it was consumed as an object of desire, an object that symbolized upper-class leisure, and, in mediatic terms, as a vehicle the capacities of which far exceeded actual needs. While only possessed by a few, the car was consumed in images by the nation as a whole, whether it was through seeing Citroën's name illuminate the Eiffel tower, or meeting Michelin's Bibendum promoting some aspect of automobility. This consumption of images was transformed into consumption through possession after the Second World War, where the car became fetishized as a need, an integral part of the modern French household. This thesis thus examines social transformation in France both before and after the Second World War, the former from the perspective of car-ownership, and the latter through popular consumption of and interaction with the car.

Part 1: A Phantasmagoria of Desire

Chapter 1: Motor Sport in France: Fetishizing Surplus-Capacity

Central to the initial growth of the automobile was motor sport, which came into being in France in the 1890s, on the model of the bicycle races that had successfully linked up the nation's major towns. Turn-of-the-century city-to-city races provided stern tests for these early vehicles, becoming advertising platforms upon which manufacturers displayed their models to an initially reluctant public. Pioneering manufacturers, such as Renault and Peugeot, quickly realized that it was necessary to participate in these events to ensure the commercial viability of their vehicles.¹ The new sport was inevitably extremely expensive, and it was thus France's upper classes who were the first to test and promote the automobile. However, motor sport gradually served to democratize the car as a broader public began to take an interest in it. Gordon Bennett served as an important catalyst in the emergence of the sport when he inaugurated the first international races. Le Mans, just 200km to the west of Paris, also played an active role in the early development of motoring.

Motor racing appealed to large numbers of people as it served to build the social perception of the car while at the same time testing its capacities. In asking the car to reach destinations which were further and further away in shorter and shorter times, the surplus capacity of the car, its ability to exceed its original use-value, was the means through which the automobile began to be fetishized. Speed became the principal criterion by which a motor car was judged. The linking of French towns in a new way, via automobile, also promoted the modern aspect of the horseless carriage, as it proved capable of carrying passengers at greater speeds than hitherto imagined to places which were previously out of reach. Speed and modernity as embodied by these hugely popular races brought the image of the motor car in motion to turn-of-the-century France.

In this chapter, I will discuss the genesis of motor racing in France, showing how sport helped the automobile to establish a foothold in society. I will also examine the impact of an American, Gordon Bennett, in placing the sport on the international stage. I shall additionally propose a case study of Le Mans, birthplace

¹ Michelin, Peugeot and Bollée are examples of three *familles artisanales* who adapted their businesses to automobile production.

of the Grand Prix and synonymous with French motor sport, having now hosted its iconic 24-hour race for over 80 years. Motor sport in its infancy was an important testing ground for the newly invented motorized vehicles, and early races gave manufacturers the opportunity to trial and promote their cars on public roads. This provided the opportunity for a marque to stand out by showing the world its potential. Finally, I will examine two more modern examples of engagement with motor sport, firstly Claude Lelouch's *Un homme et une femme*, (1966),² in which motor racing plays a central role and secondly I will briefly examine a short film entitled *Le sport et les hommes* (1959); this documentary was written by Roland Barthes and does not appear in his *oeuvres complètes*.³ These two films will be used to explore the manner in which motor sport continues to be fetishized in the latter half of the 20th-Century.

The conceptual frame for this short survey is our previous discussion of Marx's theory of the commodity fetish and his concept of phantasmagoria, understood as an overabundance of values and images projected on to an object, which valorizes the object's exchange-value, thus alienating it from its use-value. The distinction between these two values with regard to motor sport is important as an overemphasis on the surplus capacity of an object is the particular type of fetishizing that will be discussed in this context, with particular reference to Tim Dant's reading of Marx and Baudrillard. It is consequently necessary to develop here some specific aspects of the theoretical consideration presented in the introduction.

1.1 Fetishizing a Use-Value

As we have seen, Baudrillard suggests that Marx does not apply his commodity fetishism theory to the use-value of a good.⁴ It is the exchange-value that is inflated due to the fetishized nature it has assumed as a commodity. According to Marx, as the original purpose of the good is no longer treated as such, the use-value is transformed into exchange-value. Tim Dant, another theorist who has engaged with the Marxist concept of the social value of objects, argues that this analysis is restrictive as it "obscures the processes of consumption and the links between use-

² Claude Lelouch, *Un homme et une femme* (France: Les films treize, 1966).

³ Hubert Aquin, *Le sport et les hommes* (Montreal: Office national du film du Canada, 2012 [1961]).

⁴ Jean Baudrillard, *Pour une critique de l'économie politique du signe* (Paris: Gallimard, 1972). 155.

value and exchange-value.”⁵ In the consumption of the good which has been so fetishized, a judgement is made on its quality. This judgement also confers a social value on the good, as it becomes known whether or not its capacity fits the image created. These judgements also affect the determining of the economic value of goods. They “are derived from the exchange of signs concerning the relative merits and capacities of goods to meet needs. They are realized as the desire for a particular object which is then expressed in the willingness, given sufficient capacity, to exchange for it.”⁶ Dant argues that Marx overlooked the possibility that objects might hold a complex form of social value such as beauty, functionality or longevity, as he endeavoured to criticize exchange-value in capitalism.

Dant additionally posits four problems with Baudrillard’s treatment of the fetish. Firstly, he questions the assertion that objects only have two social dimensions – function and ostentation. The lack of exploration of the relation between sign-value and practical use-value is also a concern. Thirdly, the extent to which commodities are fetishes in comparison to one another is unclear, and, finally, Baudrillard’s post-1972 work on the hyper-determination of the sign-value does not concern material objects in everyday life. Dant, in his own analysis of the fetish, suggests that consumption involves not only the purchase of the commodity but also “the use, enjoyment and disposal of the capacities” of the object.⁷ Dant goes on to specify the “capacities” of the object which the human subject enjoys:

The human subject derives the benefit of various “capacities” when s/he interacts with material objects that enhance her/his capacity in a number of ways:

1. **Function** The object extends or enhances the human physical action of its user; e.g., as a tool the car actually transports its user.
2. **Ostentation** The object signifies the social group membership of its user; e.g., the distinction of a tiara, the clan identification of a football scarf.
3. **Sexuality** The object arouses its user or others or both, as a sign from a code indicating sexual action, identity and interest, through bodily display, sensuality or substitution; e.g., the wearing of tights or tight-fitting jeans.

⁵ Tim Dant, “Fetishism and the Social Value of Objects,” *The Sociological Review* 44, no. 3 (1996): 495-516. 501.

⁶ Ibid. 502.

⁷ Ibid. 512.

4. **Knowledge** The object delivers knowledge to its user by storing simple information or a synthetic understanding of some aspect of the world; e.g. book or any other complex textual object.

5. **Aesthetics** The beauty or form of the object directly moves the emotions of users by representing pure values; e.g. the “objet d’art”.

6. **Mediation** The object enables or enhances communications between humans; e.g. a telephone; the decorative item that is a talking point; the heirloom that links generations.⁸

These capacities stem not from the material form of the object but from the social environment in which the object is consumed. Dant argues that fetish quality is the reverence and fascination associated with these capacities; it is, however, expressed over and beyond simple consumption:

This fetish quality is attested through ritualistic practices that celebrate or revere the object, a class of objects, items from a “known” producer or even the brand name of a range of products. These ritualistic practices will involve expressing desire for the object and fantasising about its capacities prior to its consumption. The object itself becomes a sign for these fantasised and desired capacities so that its use or enjoyment can restimulate the play of fantasy and desire [...]. Expressing desire for and approval of the object and its capacities, celebrating the object, revering it, setting it apart, displaying it, extolling and exalting its capacities, eulogising it, enthusiastic use of it, are the sorts of practices that fetishise objects.⁹

This fetishizing leads to an over-determination of the social worth of the object as it is not just consumed, rather it becomes an object of desire. Significantly, Dant uses the example of a powerful automobile to express that social value can be overdetermined through the demonstration of excess capacity. He focuses on the excess capacity of a car, in this case the ability to go at high speeds that cannot be used on roads, highlighting the paradox that knowledge of this ability partakes in the ostentation of this power. Thus, this excess capacity is valorized in itself. Such over-determination of sign-value extends the capacities of the fetish object to its owner; the powerful car is driven by a powerful character:

It is not then the simple capacity of the object that indicates its fetish character but what it means as a sign of social value. Identifying the fetish is not a matter of judging true or real capacities in the object but recognising the multiple sources of positive valuation that overdetermine its value. [...] Advertising, critical commentary, discussions of product development, reports of consumer testing, as well as evaluations of objects in interpersonal

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid. 513.

exchanges have not only created a market for commodities but have also defined modes of consumption.¹⁰

This veneration of a good was applied universally by Marx as a criticism of capitalism. Dant posits that this position is untenable as the worship of commodities differs according to the cultural code within which the commodity is embedded. Therefore, “what is real” in one cultural code is “unreal” in another.”¹¹ Applying the theory of the fetish to establish the “real” properties of a good in universal terms is to engage in an unsustainable cultural critique. Dant thus argues that this view of the fetish is too narrow and is too open to interpretation. However, taking Marxist theory and applying Baudrillardian insights, as expanded upon by Dant, allows for a more complete understanding of fetishism to be fleshed out. This is a concept of fetishizing which encompasses the use-value as well as the exchange-value of the good, and these must be analytically woven into the cultural fabric of the society which has so valorized the commodity.

The over-determination of a commodity is thus a fetishizing that occurs as properties that are superfluous to the daily functioning of this object are valorized. Fetishizing the surplus capacity of the automobile occurred in different ways in the early 20th-Century. First and foremost, the use of the motor race to promote the automobile proved a successful arena within which not only the use-value of the car was highlighted, but also – and especially – its surplus capacity, as automobiles crossed France, Europe and the world. As we shall see, the fetishizing of surplus capacity was modified with the establishment of the Le Mans 24 Heures in 1923. Motor racing in its early forms thus helped the creation of a semiotically complex market for this commodity as not only its use-value but also its ability to exceed its use-value became valorized. Finally, the examination of Barthes’ and Lelouch’s films will illustrate how the automobile’s surplus capacity retained a fetishized quality as we move into an era where the car was becoming a more banalized commodity.

1.2 Early Automobile Racing

Although the internal combustion engine was invented by Gottlieb Daimler in Germany in the 1880s, the automobile developed more rapidly in France for a

¹⁰ Ibid. 514.

¹¹ Ibid. 512.

number of reasons. Firstly, the more developed road network allowed the transition from horse-drawn vehicles to the automobile to be made without too much difficulty. Napoléon Bonaparte's creation at the turn-of-the-19th-Century of a star-shaped road network with Paris as the hub allowed easy access to and from the capital.¹² Paris was, itself, capable of accommodating the motor car, having been rebuilt in the mid-19th-Century by Baron Haussman on the orders of Napoléon III. Fashionable houses were built on elegant boulevards with open intersections which had been designed to deter the building of barricades by rebels, but which now allowed for the coexistence of both horseless and horse-drawn carriages.¹³

A second major factor was the foresight of French entrepreneurs, anxious to make up ground lost as a result of France's belated and partial industrial revolution. The traditional *famille artisanale* only began to industrialize in the latter half of the 19th-Century. These small businesses typically engaged in trades such as metal and wood working, and thus had both the necessary flexibility and the existing infrastructure to turn their workshops into automobile manufacturing plants. These family-run businesses rapidly established themselves as the core of what came to be known as the Second Industrial Revolution.¹⁴ Thus, by the turn of the century, France had over six hundred car manufacturers compared with fewer than one hundred in the rest of Western Europe and the United States combined.¹⁵

The upper classes accepted the motor car with open arms for the most part. It became the latest in a series of inventions to grab their attention, in much the same way as the steam engine and the bicycle had previously. Many different figures in society embraced it for varying reasons. Baron de Zuylen, who was to become the first director of the *Automobile Club de France* (ACF), was a major advocate of the car, not only because he believed in its potential but also, intriguingly, because of his love for horses. He specifically saw the automobile as a means of lessening the workload placed upon Parisian horses.¹⁶ More generally, the link between aristocracy and horseracing at the time was strong, as exemplified by the *Jockey-club*

¹² David H. Pinkney, *Napoleon III and the Rebuilding of Paris* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1958). 125-127.

¹³ For more information on the redesign of Paris as well as the use of barricades in conflict, see Henri Lefebvre, *La proclamation de la Commune, 26 mars 1871* (Paris: Gallimard, 1965). 92-94.

¹⁴ Miriam R. Levin, *Urban Modernity: Cultural Innovation in the Second Industrial Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: MIT, 2010). 13-75

¹⁵ James Michael Laux, *In First Gear: the French Automobile Industry to 1914* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1976). 40.

¹⁶ *Ibid.* 31.

de Paris, a gathering of the elite of 19th-Century society. It was two members of this exclusive club who formed two-thirds of the founding members of the *Automobile Club de France* in 1895. The Count de Dion, Baron de Zuylen, and Paul Meyan, a journalist with *Le Figaro* and editor of the newsletter *La France Automobile*, met in September 1895 to create the world's first automobile club. De Dion was nominated club president, a nomination which he immediately ceded to de Zuylen as he saw his position as a major manufacturer as a conflict of interest with the promotion of the car. Although the creation of the *Association Internationale des Automobile Clubs Reconnus* (AIACR) in 1904 may be seen as the logical development of a governing body for automobile clubs, this predecessor to the FIA (*Fédération Internationale de l'Automobile*), which came into being in 1947, was essentially the body by means of which the ACF organized its international races. Its headquarters are located next door to that of the ACF at 8 Place de la Concorde, and the body had, until 1963, the same series of presidents as the ACF. Indeed, the link between motor sport and aristocracy endured through much of the 20th-Century; to this day, only four out of the eleven presidents of what is now known as the FIA have not had noble titles.¹⁷

The growing importance of automobile racing was also to have an impact on the highly politicized arena of journalism. The Comte Albert de Dion and Pierre Giffard found themselves on opposite sides of one of the biggest political scandals in French history: the Dreyfus Affair. Giffard founded *Le Vélo* in 1892, and pursued an active role in promoting both bicycle and automobile sport; as a result, his paper was widely used for the advertising of these vehicles by manufacturers.¹⁸ One such manufacturer was the Comte de Dion, a vocal anti-Dreyfusard. De Dion became involved in a highly publicized spat with French president Émile Loubet at the Auteuil races, for which he was jailed for fifteen days. Having been heavily criticized by Giffard in the newspaper he sponsored extensively, de Dion removed his advertising from *Le Vélo* and set about creating a new newspaper. He and a number of other industrialists, including the Michelin brothers, created *L'Auto-Vélo* in 1900, with Henri Desgrange as editor-in-chief. It became *L'Auto* in January 1903, when Giffard successfully sued the paper for infringement on his own paper's name.

¹⁷ Ibid. 205. The last four presidents have not been linked to the nobility, a further indication of the strong association between motor racing and the upper classes in its earlier years.

¹⁸ Hugh Dauncey, "Entre presse et spectacle sportif, l'itinéraire pionnier de Pierre Giffard (1853-1922)," *Le Temps des médias*, no. 2 (2008): 35-46. 36.

It was *L'Auto* in 1903 that was responsible for the creation and organization of what was to become the largest sporting event in France: cycling's Tour de France.

The popular press at this time was also experiencing substantial development, reflecting growing levels of literacy in society, and each newspaper was striving to come up with ideas that would attract members of the reading public and urge them to buy its issues. A particularly strong link developed between journalism and the expansion of sport. As sport was of growing interest, it was seen by journalists as a means of acquiring and then maintaining a high readership. The coverage of a sporting event which lasted over a number of days or even weeks was used as a tool to promote the purchase of newspapers on a regular basis. In a precursor of the Tour de France, Pierre Giffard, the then editor-in-chief of *Le Petit Journal*, the largest selling newspaper of the 1890s, had organized in 1891 a bicycle race from Bordeaux to Paris; this was followed later the same year by Paris-Brest-Paris. These bicycle races allowed Giffard to create a daily column relating to the race build-up and the preparations involved in it, encouraging readers to buy his paper each day, for the duration of the race period, in order to learn about the progress each competitor was making.¹⁹ It was only a matter of time before this technique of newspaper marketing was adapted and used as a model to promote a motoring event.

The first attempt to test the efficiency of automobiles in public was organized as early as 1887, when the newspaper *Le Vélocipède illustré* announced the holding of a "reliability" trial.²⁰ The event involved a short distance, from Paris to Versailles. Only one competitor showed up, however, and the event had to be abandoned. The following year the same trial was organized, and this time two automobiles turned up; the trial was completed, but little importance was given to it since the two cars involved were both by the same manufacturer, namely the Comte de Dion. An automobile was allowed to take part in the Paris-Brest-Paris bicycle race of 1891. This race also marked the first competitive appearance of pneumatic tyres. The *frères* Michelin convinced the renowned cyclist Charles Terront to use their invention on his bicycle. While he had to stop to repair numerous punctures, the pneumatics' ability to cope with the rough terrain helped Terront to a famous

¹⁹ Hugh Dauncey and Geoff Hare, *The Tour de France, 1903-2003: A Century of Sporting Structures, Meanings, and Values* (London: Frank Cass, 2003). 60.

²⁰ Christophe Studenly, *L'invention de la vitesse* (Paris: Gallimard, 1995). 305.

victory.²¹ Terront actually finished the course some seventeen minutes before the car did, which is perhaps indicative of why the first automobile race was not to take place for a number of years. Pierre Giffard, having sponsored the Paris-Brest-Paris bicycle race, decided to apply his model to a motoring trial. Having seen the automobile first hand in 1891, Giffard organized and publicized a trial for *Voitures sans Chevaux* to be held on the public roads between Paris and Rouen in 1894.²² It was not a race, but rather a reliability trial intended to assess the potential of the motor car. Unlike previous attempts, this event mustered a high level of interest, not least due to its constant front-page promotion by Giffard in *Le Petit Journal*. It gradually began to catch the attention of the public and what has been qualified as a “significant” crowd turned out at the Porte-Maillot for the departure on 11 June 1894.²³ Of the one hundred and two entrants, twenty-one actually appeared on the start line and seventeen made it to the finish. It was not the automobile that finished first that was awarded first prize, however. The Comte de Dion, on a steam engine of his own invention, crossed the line first; his vehicle, as it required a stoker, was deemed to be impractical and first prize was jointly awarded to the second- and third-placed marques, both of which were petrol-powered. De Dion covered the distance of 127km in a time of six hours and forty-eight minutes giving him an average speed of just over 18km/h, but it must be taken into account that all competitors stopped for lunch during the event.

Thus, the early attempts to promote the automobile were trials, testing grounds which publicized the ability or use-value of the car. By being supported by the newspapers of the time, the commodification of the car had begun. While speed was not the goal of these trials, asking the early car to link two cities was a first step in the valorising of its surplus capacity. The trials fulfilled two of Dant’s fetishized capacities in that these trials highlighted, first, the function of the car by enhancing the ability of its user to travel. Second, they enhanced its capacity through ostentation, as it is evident that the early automobile users formed part of user’s elite social group. The decision to take the time to stop for lunch during the trial highlights the place of both the automobile and its user within a codified performance of privilege. The car’s ability to reach greater speeds soon meant that a

²¹ Pierre Souvestre, *Histoire de l'automobile* (Paris: H. Dunod, 1907). 227.

²² Studeny, *L'invention de la vitesse*. 306.

²³ Mike Varey, *1000 Historic Automobile Sites* (Oakland: Elderberry, 2003). 332.

fetishizing of speed itself and an associated aesthetics of speed came to the forefront as trials were replaced by races which covered longer distances.

Giffard was immediately approached to organize an automobile race in 1895, but declined as he was unwilling to take responsibility for an event on open roads with vehicles capable of reaching what were perceived at the time to be dangerously high speeds. De Dion and Baron de Zuylen duly organized the Paris-Bordeaux-Paris race themselves. The choice of route may have been modelled on the first city-to-city bicycle race which was successfully run from Bordeaux to Paris in 1891. This route was also chosen in order to show those still sceptical about the automobile that it could not only cover a great distance with a minimum of mechanical problems, but also, by linking two of France's largest cities, confirm the car's utilitarian role. De Dion, in the rules, showed that he was aware of what was at stake:

Il se borne uniquement à rappeler aux concurrents les principales règles qu'ils doivent observer, tant dans leur intérêt propre que pour la réussite de l'importante manifestation des progrès réalisés dans la construction des automobiles et que le Comité a eu principalement en vue de faire ressortir dans l'organisation de cette course.

En conséquence, à l'exclusion de toutes règles strictes, le Comité invite les concurrents à ne jamais perdre de vue que l'épreuve de 1.200 kilomètres, à laquelle ils prennent part, pourra être décisive au point de vue de l'usage pratique, présent et à venir, de la locomotion automobile.²⁴

While car trials were a thing of the past, as a desire for speed was beginning to take over, the use-value of the car remained a concern, as although Emile Levassor on a Panhard finished the race first, in a time of forty-eight hours and forty-eight minutes (24.5km/h), he was not awarded first prize due to the fact that his automobile only had two seats and was thus not considered a viable option.²⁵ Nevertheless, it is the ostentation of speed which was remembered, as Levassor's achievement is commemorated by a statue situated at the start/finish line at the place Porte-Maillot, Paris. Commissioned by the Automobile Club de France in 1898, a year after Levassor's death, the monument was originally to be sculpted by Jules Dalou, but upon his death in 1902, one of his students, Camille Lefèvre, completed the Greco-Roman-style triumphal arch in 1907. The arch, which depicts Levassor in his car

²⁴ Paris-Bordeaux race rules. *Le Vélo*, 1 June 1895.

²⁵ Rudi Volti, *Cars and Culture: The Life Story of a Technology* (Westport: Greenwood, 2004). 13.

being watched by onlookers, remains there to this day.²⁶ [Figure 1] The epic nature of this statue evokes a fetishized impression of the car; this was to be recurrent theme in early 20th-Century art and will be explored further in Chapter 2.



Figure 1. La Place Porte-Maillot²⁷

The success of this race led the newborn ACF to hold city-to-city races on an annual basis. Race organizers chose routes which always incorporated Paris as the starting point, but gradually moved destinations further away. Thus, if Paris-Bordeaux-Paris covered a total distance of almost 1200km, the following year's race distance was extended to more than 1700km for the Paris-Marseille-Paris race. In 1898, the race may have been shorter, but had a much more significant destination as it was from Paris to Amsterdam. National borders were crossed as the automobile was proving capable of linking countries. Races linking Paris with Berlin, Vienna, and Madrid followed, interspersed with some national competitions including the holding of the *Tour de France automobile* in 1899, organized by Paul Meyan and *Le*

²⁶ Laux, *In First Gear*. 23.

²⁷ Taken on 6 June 2013

Matin, a full four years before the cycling version.²⁸ Indeed, the largest sporting event to take place in 1903 was not, as most would assume, the inaugural *Tour de France* bicycle race, but the Paris-Madrid road race organized by the ACF, which left from Versailles on 24 May 1903 in front of a reputed two hundred thousand spectators.²⁹ A further two million people lined the roads from Paris to Bordeaux and, according to newspaper reports, the two hundred thousand population of Bordeaux came out to see the arrival at the end of the first major stage of this race.³⁰ A spate of fatal accidents, however, brought about the cancellation of the Bordeaux-Madrid stage of the race. Among the victims was Marcel Renault, brother of Louis, co-founder of the company that still dominates both motor sport and French automobile production today.

As the automobile was becoming more celebrated, it was also beginning to find detractors in both the journalistic and literary fields; among others, Léon Bloy stated in *Le Journal* (26 May 1903) that “all ambitious automobilists *are premeditated killers*.”³¹ Motor racing had taken a firm hold, however, on the imagination of the public, and the promotional potential of up to three million people attending a single race could not be ignored. The ill-fated Paris-Madrid race signalled the banning of city-to-city races, as it was deemed impossible adequately to marshal motor races on open roads.³² The predecessor to circuit racing came into being as a result; this was the closure of roads to public use in order to form a circuit, which became the compromise required by the authorities to allow races to take place.

Motor racing was commanding a large viewing public and this growth allowed manufacturers to display further the abilities of their vehicles. As discussed, speed was the predominant surplus capacity to be fetishized in motor racing; however, at the turn of the century, motor racing also became an arena within which a highly publicized struggle between energy sources was fought out. Speed and distance constituted the yardstick by which these tests were measured as a set of one-on-one races were organized to decide which power source was the “best”. In testing these two particular objectives, the events underlined the fetishized nature of the

²⁸ Jean Cadène, *L'automobile : de sa naissance à son futur* (Perpignan: Cap Béar, 2005). 59.

²⁹ Dauncey and Hare, *The Tour de France, 1903-2003*. 60.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ Léon Bloy, in Laux, *In First Gear*. 40.

³² Jacques Rousseau, *La commémoration de la course Paris-Madrid : 24 mai 1903* (Bordeaux: Automobile-Club du Sud-Ouest, 1985). 4.

perception of the car. As we shall now see, the public nature of this power struggle strengthened the growing link between the public desire for and the ostentatious display of two surplus-capacities of the car.

While certain race organizers were intent on conquering the roads of France and Europe, and at a later stage the world, there were others who were still not convinced of the feasibility of the internal combustion engine, and the late 1890s saw a competition between three forms of vehicle: internal combustion, steam and electric power. Each system had its own qualities and weaknesses. Electric cars were quiet and reliable; however, their batteries never lasted for more than forty or fifty kilometres and were difficult to recharge outside the city. Electric cars were essentially seen as city cars. Steam-powered automobiles worked along the same lines as locomotive engines, albeit in a much smaller form. These cars required a *chauffeur*, literally a *heater*, to feed the engine with fuel in order to provide the necessary steam to propel the car. Steam cars therefore required two people at any one time and were generally quite large and cumbersome. They were also slow to start, as a period of twenty minutes was generally needed for an automobile to build up a head of steam. Internal combustion engines were noisy, smelly, and largely unreliable; however, they could cover large distances and for those who converted from steam, their *chauffeur* now was concerned with actually driving the car.

La France Automobile, which was essentially the journal of the ACF, initiated a series of short speed tests in the late 1890s that captured public attention for a different reason from the city-to-city endurance tests; their purpose was not long-distance driving, but speed alone. A straight stretch of road, the Parc Agricole d'Achères near Paris, was the venue chosen for these sprints and it was here in 1898 that Gaston de Chasseloup-Laubat set the world's first land speed record when he achieved 63km/h driving a Jeantaud, an electric vehicle.³³ In 1899, Camille Jenatzy would become the first person to break the 100km/h barrier driving another electric car which he named *La Jamais Contente*.³⁴ [Figure 2] This proved to be the electric car's highest point, but also the beginning of its downfall, as it was becoming more and more apparent that there was no scope for improvement in the power or longevity of electric batteries. Steam and, especially, internal combustion, remained the more viable options. The Le Mans-based *famille* Bollée persisted with steam

³³ Jean-Jacques Chanaron, *L'industrie automobile* (Paris: La Découverte, 1983). 8.

³⁴ Souvestre, *Histoire de l'automobile*. 381.

power until the late 1890s before converting to petrol, as did the Comte de Dion. Léon Serpollet, the last of the great steam-powered vehicle-producers, made one late flourish in securing the land speed record in April 1902 when driving his *Oeuf de Pâques* along the Promenade des Anglais in Nice to record a speed of 120km/h.³⁵ This was usurped within a matter of months when prominent American industrialist William. K Vanderbilt II drove a French Mors at 122km/h to become the first internal-combustion-powered automobile to hold the land speed record. Serpollet continued to work on steam power until his death in 1907, which signalled the gradual demise of steam-powered transportation in France. Across the Atlantic, the success of the Stanley Steamer and the Doble steam car meant that steam power retained a commercial market in the United States until the late 1920s; however, the advent of electric ignition for internal combustion, which simplified starting a car, along with greater affordability, allowed Henry Ford and his celebrated Model T to take control of the automotive market.³⁶



Figure 2. Parc Agricole d’Achères³⁷

This turn-of-the-century struggle for power demonstrated the two main criteria which were coming to the fore in the public desire for a car. The ability to cross space and the ability to do so at speed, these were the use-values that

³⁵ Chanaron, *L'industrie automobile*. 8.

³⁶ The advent of the assembly line helped Ford produce cheaper cars which sold in much larger numbers than the workshop built models in France.

³⁷ Taken on 6 June 2013

increasingly became fetishized as the automotive world moved into an era of standardized motor racing. As the automobile was becoming more accepted, it was no longer the practicality of the vehicle which was of interest, but its ability to surpass that which had gone before. The technical ability of a car to cross more space at increasing speeds was identified by Gordon Bennett as an arena in which he could enhance his name in the early 1900s. The Gordon Bennett races, precursors to the first Grand Prix, brought a further international dimension to these early competitions.

1.3 Gordon Bennett: Modern Motor Sport Arrives

Although, by 1898, the automobile had successfully crossed borders by reaching Amsterdam and other capital cities, it still faced resistance in other countries. Seeing this, a wealthy American journalist named James Gordon Bennett Jr. decided to sponsor an international race inviting competitors from different countries to compete for the Gordon Bennett trophy.³⁸ Bennett (1841-1918) was born in the Alpes Maritimes, France. He was the son of an Irish-American mother and a Scottish-American father who owned the famous *New York Herald*, the leading American newspaper of the day. When he took over the reins from his father in 1866, he was twenty-five and keen to spread the family firm abroad. Gordon Bennett had a keen sense of the newsworthy, and he introduced daily weather forecasts to Europe as well as wireless telegraphy for sending news dispatches. He had earlier been responsible for Henry Morton Stanley's 1869 search for explorer David Livingstone, which resulted in one of the most celebrated journalistic scoops of all time and the universally quoted greeting: "Dr. Livingstone, I presume!"³⁹ Another scoop he managed to obtain was the reporting of the Custer massacre at Little Bighorn in 1876. Bennett was also an avid sailor, having won the first transatlantic yacht race in 1866. As a sports fan and, much like Pierre Giffard, seeing sports promotion as a means of improving newspaper readership, he inaugurated competitions in yachting, football and boxing. He publicized his *Herald* with a series of spectacular stunts, such as sponsoring Arctic and African expeditions, predecessors to the Citroën "Raids" of the 1920s and 30s which used exploration to promote sales.

³⁸ Bennett was later to sponsor an annual ballooning competition (1906-1938).

³⁹ Patrice Besquent, *La coupe Gordon-Bennett 1905* (Clermont-Ferrand: La Montagne, 1985). 5.

Bennett moved to Paris in 1877, where he established the *Paris Herald* ten years later; he was, therefore, in France at the birth of the motor car and was ideally placed to observe its progress. Consequently, when he announced the inauguration of his *Coupe Internationale*, he was aware of the automobile's potential and hoped his helping hand would make it into a truly international vehicle. These first international races followed a set of rules devised by Bennett but enforced by the ACF. Each annual race was open to a maximum of three entries per nation and they were to be held in the country of the winner of the previous year's race.⁴⁰ The cars of each nation were to be painted a national colour irrespective of their manufacturer. French cars were painted blue, Americans red, Belgians yellow, Italians black and Germans white. As there was no British entry in the inaugural race and since the three traditional colours from the British flag were taken by other countries, the Napier driven by Selwyn Edge in 1901, and which won in 1902, was green and this is reputedly the source of British Racing Green.⁴¹ The *Coupe Internationale* added another layer to the affective investment in the surplus capacity of cars. By distinguishing competitors according to nationality, and by demarcating cars visually, Gordon Bennett was valorising the aesthetic quality of the cars as they were now recognizable through national colours. The trophy awarded to the winner of the race also implied a fetishizing of sorts. The *Coupe Gordon Bennett* – a sculpture of a winged female standing on top of a turn-of-the-century motor car, upon which a boy, reminiscent of images from Greek mythology, sits holding aloft an Olympic-type torch – utilizes classical imagery to fetishize motor racing. [Figure 3] The use of these two characters on the trophy is indicative of a growing association between symbols of modernity and those of Greek mythology. This is a theme that will be examined further in Chapter 2, where we shall see that the Futurist movement and trans-Saharan raids both made regular use of classical mythology in their promotion of the car as a symbol of modernity.

⁴⁰ Ibid. 7.

⁴¹ Frank McNally, "An Irishman's Diary," *The Irish Times*, 09 September 2010.



Figure 3. The Gordon Bennett Trophy⁴²

While initially quite farcical affairs, with only France filling its quota of three cars, it was not until the French were defeated that manufacturers and the public opened their eyes to the potential of the competition. In its third year, a British car, once again a Napier, won the Paris-Vienna race, albeit in rather fortunate circumstances as the three leading cars, all of which were French, each broke down in quick succession. Nevertheless, this foreign victory brought to an end a perception of French invincibility not only by the French themselves, but also by other nations. A dramatic rise in the number of entries in the qualifying competition the following year is indicative of the importance attached to this result. 1903 saw the largest number of entries in the race to date, twice the number of the previous year, and with full quotas of competitors for the first time from France, Germany, Britain and the USA. As the previous race had been won by a British driver, it was now Britain's responsibility to host the race and this proved problematic. Britain had always been hostile towards the automobile. The Red Flag Law set a speed limit of twelve miles per hour on all British roads and stipulated that all motor cars must be preceded by a man on foot waving a red flag.⁴³ Although this law had been repealed by 1903,

⁴² <http://kildare.ie/community/kilmead/gordon.htm>

⁴³ Laux, *In First Gear*. 72.

speed limits were still maintained. Thus, it was decided that the race should be hosted in Ireland where a relaxation of speed laws was permitted on rural roads, but not in towns. The racing track consisted of two parts forming a figure “8” centred on the town of Athy, Co. Kildare.⁴⁴ At seven points where the track passed through towns, there were non-racing zones where the cars followed a bicycle through the streets. This was the first example of an international motor race taking place outside France; it was also the first time motor sport attracted global attention. Camille Jenatzy, who had previously driven *La Jamais Contente* during speed trials, and now driving a Mercedes, won the race, taking the Gordon Bennett Trophy to Germany along with the privilege of hosting the following year’s competition. The final two Gordon Bennett races in 1904 and 1905 took place in a highly charged political atmosphere. The Franco-Prussian war of 1870 was still part of mentalities, and this was no more evident than in Alsace, which had been ceded by France to what was to become Germany in the aftermath of France’s high profile military defeat. Léon Théry’s 1904 victory on German soil and subsequent triumphant return to France through Alsace, where he and his supporters were ordered to hide their Tricolours, demonstrated the potential of the motor car to become a symbol of national pride.⁴⁵ The ostentatious welcoming of Théry by the President of France on the Champs-Élysées further augmented the political impact of the event.⁴⁶ [Figure 4] These races took place against the backdrop of a series of events that would ultimately bring about the First World War. Germany’s policy of *Weltpolitik* and the subsequent signing of the Entente Cordiale in 1904 between the United Kingdom and France heightened international tensions and the automobile – as a symbol of progress, modernity and technicity – became a powerful player in the build-up to the First World War. The final Gordon Bennett race took place in France, and was the centre of media attention across the globe. Léon Théry’s triumph for the second year in a row was front-page news simultaneously in France, Britain and the US among other countries; it even relegated the Russo-Japanese War to page 2.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ “After the Race” is a short story by James Joyce which is set against the backdrop of this race. James Joyce, *Dubliners* (New York, NY: Modern library, 1926).

⁴⁵ Besquent, *La coupe Gordon-Bennett 1905*. 7.

⁴⁶ Victor Breyer, *La belle époque à 30 à l'heure* (Paris: France-Empire, 1984). 71.

⁴⁷ Besquent, *La coupe Gordon-Bennett 1905*. 5.

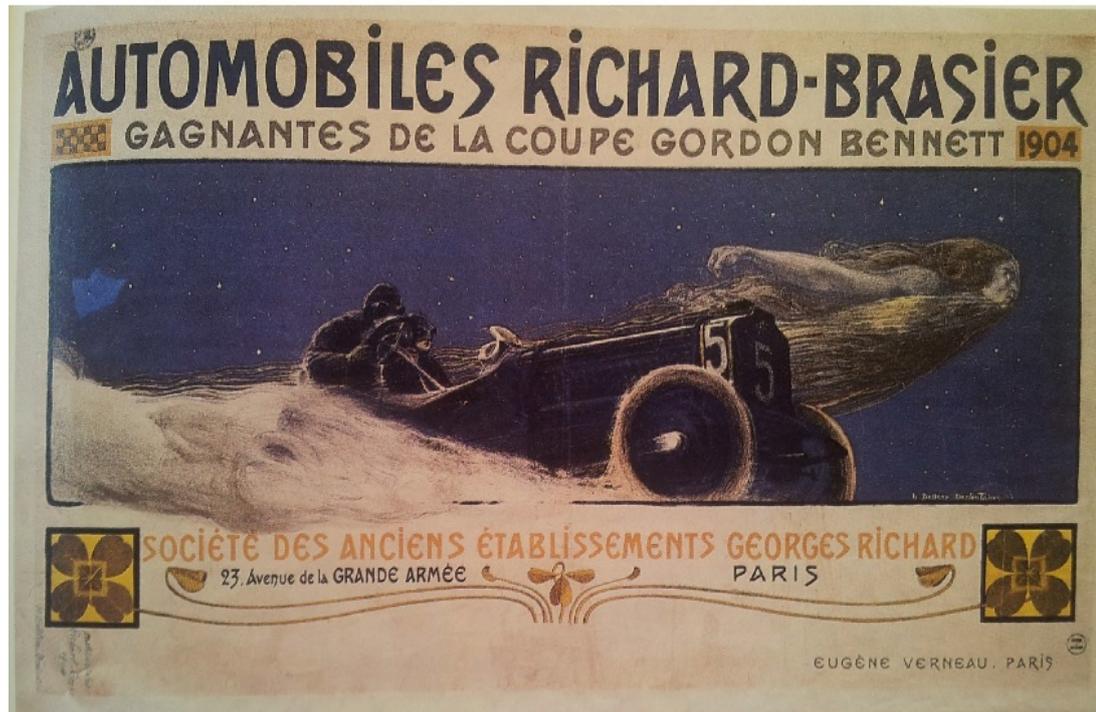


Figure 4. Advertisement for Richard-Brasier cars⁴⁸

While the Gordon Bennett Cup races (1900-1905) had been a success in the internationalization of motor sport, these competitions had left France increasingly frustrated. While other nations had to struggle to assemble a team, France had to hold separate qualifiers to choose its representatives. Thus, with only three French cars out of twenty-nine qualifying for the 1904 race, manufacturers like Clément-Bayard, Darracq, De Dietrich, Gobron-Brillié, Hotchkiss, Panhard, Serpollet and Turcat-Méry found themselves without a chance to prove themselves on the international stage. When the Gordon Bennett Cup was inaugurated in 1899, the motor industry was still struggling to make their products viable, but, by 1905, the US had overtaken France as the world's largest automobile producer.⁴⁹ Motor racing was becoming, to an even greater extent, the arena in which manufacturers marketed their products. The ACF, seeing this gradual erosion of its power, decided to boycott the 1906 Gordon Bennett competition. It inaugurated a race in which all manufacturers could have a chance to compete without limiting entries. Bennett, in turn, withdrew sponsorship from his motor race and created the *Coupe Aéronautique*

⁴⁸ Christophe Zagrodzki, *L'automobile et la publicité : 100 ans d'automobile française* (Paris: Musée de la publicité, 1984), 34.

⁴⁹ Laux, *In First Gear*. 210.

Gordon Bennett in 1906 for balloons, an event which exists to this day.⁵⁰ He followed this, in 1909, by sponsoring, in Reims, the Gordon Bennett aeroplane race, which continued until the First World War. It is particularly apt that the street named in Bennett's honour in Paris is located beside the Stade Roland-Garros, which itself commemorates a renowned First World War pilot and the first person to fly across the Mediterranean, although the stadium is, of course, primarily associated with tennis.

1.4 Le Mans: Continuities and Changes

Whenever the town of Le Mans is mentioned, it is the 24-hour car race that springs to mind for the majority of people. While it is true that the *Le Mans 24 Heures* is universally recognized, the role of this town in the evolution of motor sport goes back much further than the 1923 start date of the first 24-hour race. As host of the world's first Grand Prix in 1906, Le Mans holds a singular place in motor-sport history, but the automobile tracks stretch back even further in the history of the town and its surrounding area, which can justifiably claim to be the hub of motor sport in France. The growth of motor sport in Le Mans will be examined with a view to tracing how the evolving sport developed and how a fetishizing of the surplus-capacity of the cars was adjusted to allow for the a gradual banalization of the car. This will be seen not only in the creation of the *24 Heures* but also in post-1945 engagement with the area and the race.

1.4.1 Early Le Mans Racing

The department of La Sarthe was the home of the *famille* Bollée. Originally bell-makers, this *famille artisanale* took up car construction when steam locomotion was being developed. Amédée Bollée invented *L'Obéissante*, a twelve-seat estate car that was advertized as the "first road locomotive" in 1873.⁵¹ [Figure 5] This vehicle made national news in 1875 as Bollée drove it the 200km that separate Le Mans and Paris. In 1878 *La Mancelle*, meaning a female native of Le Mans,⁵² became the first

⁵⁰ Hugh Dauncey and Geoff Hare, "Cosmopolitanism united by electricity and sport: James Gordon Bennett Jnr and the Paris *Herald* as sites of internationalism and cultural mediation in belle époque France," *French Cultural Studies* 25, no. 1 (2014): 38-53. 42.

⁵¹ Michel Bonté, François Hurel, Jean-Luc Ribémon, and François Bruère, *Le Mans : un siècle de passion* (Le Mans: Automobile club de l'Ouest, 2006). 21.

⁵² The gendered names given to these vehicles are clearly indicative of the patriarchal society in which they were produced.

automotive vehicle to be presented at the Exposition Universelle de Paris.⁵³ Such was the lack of familiarity with this new mode of transport that, being steam-powered, it was classified at this *Exposition* in the railroad section. The family's *Nouvelle* took part, as previously mentioned, in the first ever automobile race, the 1895 Paris-Bordeaux. Many different vehicles built by *les Bollée* won various small races over this period, including Paris-Dieppe (1897) and Paris-Trouville (1898), while in 1898, Léon Bollée took part in the highly publicized world land speed record attempts, averaging 60km/h. The Bollée family was a prime example of the success that could be achieved with the automobile. Its achievements inspired an ethic of innovation in the region of La Sarthe, which encouraged an entire community to mobilize in order to attract what was to become the largest race of the time to their department.⁵⁴



Figure 5. *L'Obéissante*⁵⁵

In late 1905, the ACF announced that a new *Grand Prix*⁵⁶ would be held the following year, allowing three entries from each automobile manufacturer. The

⁵³ Cadène, *L'automobile*. 37.

⁵⁴ See René Plessix, "Au berceau des sports mécaniques : Le Mans," *Jeux et Sports dans l'histoire* (1992): 205-28. 207-209.

⁵⁵ Archives A.C.O. <http://www.24h-lemans.com/>

newspaper *L'Auto* announced "La Course au Circuit" on 1 December 1905.⁵⁷ Among the 17 proposals was one from Georges Durand on behalf of the Circuit du Mans, received on 15 December, just fourteen days after the original advertisement. Durand had, before the end of 1905, acquired the financial backing of the Conseil Général of the Sarthe and had convinced the board members of the ACF to visit the proposed circuit, a triangular formation joining the towns of Le Mans, St. Calais and La Ferté Bernard.⁵⁸ After examining the proposal and visiting the projected site between 14 and 16 January, the ACF declared on 17 January 1906 that La Sarthe would host the inaugural *Grand Prix de l'ACF* in 1906. The Automobile Club de la Sarthe was created on 24 January 1906 and immediately made the Baron de Zuylen (the then president of the ACF) and Amédée Bollée honorary presidents.⁵⁹ Durand himself was elected general secretary, having turned down the opportunity to become president. An energetic fundraising campaign ensued, the circuit was prepared, and on 26-27 June, the race took place on the 103.16km circuit which every car had to complete six times on each of the two days. Twenty-three French cars took part in this race, which despite a significant attendance made a loss for the ACS with most of the spectators deciding to watch the race from areas where it was free rather than paying for entry into the main stand.⁶⁰ This setback notwithstanding, the entire weekend was deemed a success by the ACF, and Le Mans went down in history as having hosted the first automobile Grand Prix.

In an effort to promote the Grand Prix series, the ACF moved the 1907 and 1908 editions of the race to other circuits, and Le Mans found itself in need of a way of remaining at the cutting edge of innovation.⁶¹ The next big step in technology was also embraced with the creation of the *Aéro-Club du Mans* in 1908. Ballooning was becoming more and more popular and, in August 1908, Léon Bollée, son of Amédée, took the logical next step in aviation promotion by welcoming Wilbur Wright to Le

⁵⁶ The term "Grand Prix" was a borrowing from horseracing, which inaugurated a "Grand Prix de Dieppe" in 1870. However the origins of the term may actually stem from the world of art, where a "Grand Prix de Rome" was offered as early as 1803. This term was also applied to races previously hosted by the ACF. The Paris-Bordeaux-Paris race was thus retrospectively named *Le premier Grand Prix de l'ACF*.

⁵⁷ Bonté *et al.*, *Le Mans.*, 29.

⁵⁸ Cadène, *L'automobile*. 111.

⁵⁹ Plessix, "Au berceau des sports mécaniques." 223.

⁶⁰ Bonté *et al.*, *Le Mans*. 55.

⁶¹ Jean-Pierre Delaperrelle, *L'Invention de l'automobile : Bollée : de la vapeur au turbo* (Le Mans: Cénomane, 1986). 106.

Mans.⁶² The main straight of the Le Mans Grand Prix circuit, *La Ligne Droite des Hunaudières* (the Mulsanne Straight in English), was used for a series of flight exhibitions over a number of days. Wright left after a week of stunning the large numbers of spectators, amongst whom was Louis Blériot, who became the first man to fly across the English Channel.⁶³ The use of part of the Le Mans circuit in showcasing this newest form of technology is, perhaps, an indication of the strong role of motor sport in generating public interest in modernity; but it could also be seen as an evolution in that popular interest. As we shall see, motor sport lost some of its popularity at a time when aviation was gaining in attractiveness. It is conceivable that a fetishizing of speed was transferred to aviation during this transitional period.

In the event, a period characterized by a relative lack of interest in motor sport followed these first Grands Prix, during which France lost the national events two years in a row to German competition. In consequence, French manufacturers took the radical decision to pull out of competitive international motor racing. Subsequently, the ACF decided to discontinue its Grand Prix just three years after its inauguration.⁶⁴ This first “depression” in French motor racing would appear to be linked to a disenchantment amongst manufacturers with the realization that other countries were capable providing stiff opposition to them. Rather than lose to what they saw as inferior rivals, these manufacturers decided to withdraw from competition altogether. Economic interests may also have been a factor, as the financial investment in high speed cars was significant, while at the same time Grand Prix cars were becoming increasingly different from road cars. Smaller national races were still popular and Le Mans continued to host events through this period of transition. As general secretary of the ACS, Durand decided, in 1911, to host the first *Grand Prix de France* in Le Mans on a circuit of just over 54km.⁶⁵ This new Grand Prix, which was seen as a distinct entity from the *Grand Prix de l'ACF*, turned out to be such a success that the following year the *Grand Prix de l'ACF* was revived and run in Amiens, while the *Grand Prix de France* remained in Le Mans. That two Grands Prix were held in France within one calendar year was indicative of the

⁶² Bonté *et al.*, *Le Mans*. 71.

⁶³ Studeny, *L'invention de la vitesse*. 343.

⁶⁴ Cadène, *L'automobile*. 112.

⁶⁵ Plessix, "Au berceau des sports mécaniques." 222.

swing in popularity once again in favour of motor racing which was to continue until the outbreak of the First World War.⁶⁶

Georges Durand and the Circuit du Mans had one more role to play before the birth of their most famous offspring: the *24 Heures du Mans*. Durand took the decision to attempt to bring French motor racing out of its post-1918 doldrums by launching the *Coupe des Voiturettes* in 1920.⁶⁷ This was the first motor race to take place in the wake of the Great War. While the country was still reeling from the effects of this conflict, Durand saw an opportunity for the ACS to come to the fore once again in the world of motor racing. This initiative provided the impetus for the hosting of the first post-war *Grand Prix de l'ACF*, run in Le Mans the following year. Le Mans and Durand thus were instrumental in the growth of the automobile and motor racing in France. Durand not only oversaw the inauguration of the first automobile Grand Prix, he also ensured the maintenance of Le Mans as a site for motor racing as he attempted to re-launch public interest in the sport both before and directly after the First World War. The drop-off in interest in motor racing at the time was to become a source of concern for car manufacturers. Many withdrew from motor racing as they saw that it no longer fulfilled the role for which it had originally been conceived. In its earliest form, motor racing served to make the public aware of the capacity of the car, and through the over-determination of its use-value, it created a fetishized image of the automobile which increased its exchange value and thus increased its affective attraction. As city-to-city races evolved into Grands Prix, the type of car used in races developed to become one-seater, large-engined vehicles. These racing cars were developed with the single goal of winning races and thus satisfied the requirement to demonstrate surplus capacity as regards speed, but no longer satisfied the more basic use-values of a car, namely transporting a small group of people. In the next section, we will discuss a motor-sport modification of the fetishizing of use-value, as the *24 Heures du Mans* can be seen as an over-determination of the values of the everyday car, carried out in tandem with the consumption of those contrasting values via the ongoing Grand Prix races.

⁶⁶ Cadène, *L'automobile*. 112.

⁶⁷ Plessix, "Au berceau des sports mécaniques." 224.

1.4.2 Les 24 Heures du Mans

As Grand Prix racing became more specialized, Georges Durand saw an opportunity to return to the roots of motor racing and to promote its original ideals. While Grand Prix racing continued to fetishize the surplus capacity involved in obtaining ever higher speeds, the construction of purpose-built racing cars meant that the public felt alienated from them and, therefore, its ability to identify with these vehicles became diminished. Thus the beginning of a change in the way in which motor racing was perceived and fetishized became apparent. The creation of the *24 Heures du Mans* consequently stemmed from an urge to make motor racing both more practical and more relevant to the public.⁶⁸ The Le Mans event came, as we have seen, after more than 20 years of groundwork and it was to become the world's most famous annual race. The *24 Heures du Mans* was the brainchild of Georges Durand, who, becoming worried about the relevance of motor sport in its current form, held a meeting during the *Salon de l'Automobile* of 1922 with Charles Faroux, of the newspapers *L'Auto* and *La Vie Automobile*, and with Émile Coquille of Rudge-Whitworth, the well-known British wheel-makers.⁶⁹ [Figure 6] It was decided that motor racing needed to be simplified and made more accessible. It was by now apparent that cars were reasonably reliable and could reach high speeds. The problem was that race cars were moving further and further from vehicles on the roads, and the resulting technical advances were no longer of direct benefit to the everyday driver. Coquille was of the belief that car lights and starters were particularly behind the times and that, in the interests of building a safer car, a high profile night race was needed.⁷⁰ Durand suggested instead a 24-hour race as this would not only put the lights to the test, but would also test man and machine to the limit. It was agreed that the resulting race of "tourist cars" would take place during the second half of June, when days are at their longest, and that the race would be run from four o'clock in the afternoon until the same time the following day. Thus while this new race continued to fetishize the surplus-capacity of the automobile, as theorized by Dant, the fact that it targeted normal cars is indicative of how Grand Prix motor racing had alienated the Marxian use-value of the car from spectators, encouraging a move towards an increasingly banalized car being fetishized for its more everyday features.

⁶⁸ Ibid. 225.

⁶⁹ Bonté *et al.*, *Le Mans*. 136.

⁷⁰ Plessix, "Au berceau des sports mécaniques." 224.



Figure 6. Advertisement for the first Le Mans 24 Heures⁷¹

The “Le Mans start” was an initiative introduced to test the cars’ starters; this involved the drivers lining up on one side of the road and, once the French flag was dropped at four o’clock sharp, they would run across the road, jump into their respective vehicle, start it up and drive off. The advent of racing harnesses did nothing to stop this practice, and it took the actions of a prominent racing driver to show the lunacy of competing at getting ready to race. In 1969, instead of running across to his car, Jacky Ickx, the eventual winner, made a point of walking slowly across the track and belting up carefully before driving off.⁷² The following year would see the race start with the drivers already strapped into their cars. The Le Mans start did, however, ensure that Durand and Coquille accomplished the two goals they had set for themselves, namely testing the starters and lights of the cars:

Pourtant, à l’origine, il est incontestable qu’une course comme celle du Mans, disputée pendant vingt-quatre heures, de nuit et de jour, et par n’importe quel temps a joué un rôle primordial dans le développement de l’industrie automobile. Grâce au Mans, des améliorations constantes ont été apportées aux pneumatiques, aux freins, à l’éclairage et au revêtement des routes. En

⁷¹ Archives A.C.O. <http://www.24h-lemans.com/>

⁷² Bob Montgomery, “PastImperfect,” 11 June 2008, *The Irish Times*.

somme, les 24 Heures ont parfaitement justifié leur existence tant qu'elles sont restées fidèles à leur titre de « prix d'endurance ».⁷³

The *24 Heures* has continued to be used as a testing ground for new technologies, and aerodynamics improved immensely in the early years due to the long straights on the circuit. Disc brakes were first used at Le Mans in 1953.⁷⁴ Alternative fuel sources have also been tested here, from ethanol, used on a class-winning Porsche in 1980, to a diesel-powered Audi that won three successive races from 2006 to 2008. Audi managed to achieve from diesel a similar speed to that obtained normally from a petrol car. This, allied with the fuel economy of diesel, meant that the Audi pitted fewer times than other cars, giving it the necessary margin to win.⁷⁵ The 2012 and 2013 versions of the race were also won by Audi TDI engines, but these were significantly different from their predecessors in that they were the first cars to win this race using a hybrid electric engine.

Le Mans is also the site of the single most devastating accident in motor sport, which had severe repercussions not only in France, but throughout the world. In 1955, just seven hours into the race, French driver Pierre Levegh, driving a Mercedes, was forced to swerve wildly by another car, lost control of his own car, and flew into a packed stand.⁷⁶ He died instantly along with eighty-two spectators. The decision to continue the race was taken in order to allow emergency services to get access to the circuit, as stopping the race would have flooded the roads with over two hundred thousand people. Later in the race, Mercedes withdrew its two other participating cars and retired entirely from competitive racing until 1987. When the curtain fell on this event, it would be followed by the cancellation of a number of races throughout the world, including the Grand Prix de France for that year. It also brought about a complete ban on circuit racing in Switzerland, which exists to this day.⁷⁷ The following year an article entitled “Plus de monstres au Mans” appeared in *L'Express*, which questioned the continuing relevance of the *24 Heures*, stating that: “le vertige de la vitesse l'a emporté” suggesting that the race had moved away from

⁷³ “Plus de monstres au Mans,” 27 July 1956, *L'Express*. 8.

⁷⁴ Bob Montgomery, “PastImperfect,” 8 June 2005, *The Irish Times*.

⁷⁵ Neil Broscoe, “Le Mans 24hrs race is the Glastonbury of motorsport,” 17 June 2009, *The Irish Times*.

⁷⁶ Anne-Claude Ambroise-Rendu, “Dangers et tourments du sport,” *Le Temps des médias* 9, no. 2 (2007). 272.

⁷⁷ Leonard Setright, *Drive on! A Social History of the Motor Car* (London: Granta, 2003). 99.

its original objective as a race designed to test different parts of a car and had regressed to a fetishizing of speed:

Le problème de savoir si les courses d'automobiles servent à quelque chose – ou ne sont qu'un spectacle hallucinant – n'a jamais été résolu clairement. Les grands constructeurs français, en tout cas, semblent unanimement nier l'utilité de la compétition, puisqu'ils ne font pas le moindre effort pour y prendre part.

A l'origine, les 24 Heures du Mans étaient un banc d'essai des voitures de série. C'est ce qui en faisait l'énorme popularité. Même en 1951 et en 1953, lorsque Jaguar tripla son chiffre de vente après avoir gagné au Mans, c'est parce que, pour beaucoup de gens, cette course restait une épreuve pratique, destinée à mettre en valeur des voitures normales.

En fait, cela n'était plus vrai depuis longtemps. Depuis le jour, exactement où les organisateurs acceptèrent d'engager au Mans ce que l'on appelle des « prototypes ». Ce mot devrait désigner un modèle, un premier exemplaire. En fait, il désignait un monstre.⁷⁸

It would seem that the role for which the *24 Heures* was conceived had, by the 1950s, become redundant. However, the enduring popularity of the race meant that the ability of the car to exceed its use-capacity continued to be fetishized even though a closer link to everyday cars served to reduce the alienation experienced by spectators.

The *Le Mans 24 Heures* has a mythical quality. It is difficult to define why it has acceded to this status, but its significant history certainly contributes. The race's enduring and ever-growing popularity also has much to do with the fact that it is one of the only races left in the world that actually uses public roads as part of the circuit. Much like the *Tour de France*, the *24 Heures* evokes strong feelings in spectators as it strives to maintain a relevance to the ordinary person, while locals from each town cheer on competitors from the area taking part on their roads in this prestigious event. Equally, there is a sense of pride evident in seeing the biggest marques in the world taking part alongside French cars on a local road. In Le Mans, the Bugatti Circuit (named in honour of Ettore Bugatti, a famous French car manufacturer of Italian extraction) joins up with public roads, for one weekend of the year, to form the 13km track which is covered on average two hundred and fifty times over the 24 hours. The fascination of seeing these cars race on public roads which have been closed to traffic just for this special weekend in June is exceptional. It is a homage to

⁷⁸ Plus de monstres au Mans, 27 July 1956, *L'Express*. 8.

the tradition of motor sport in La Sarthe that the main thoroughfare which joins it with Paris and which connects Paris to the west of the country is closed for this spectacle.⁷⁹ It is perhaps the attempts to maintain a link with ordinary cars and with ordinary people which has made the *Le Mans 24 Heures* the iconic race that it is. Georges Durand's initiative to launch a race which restored motor sport's links with ordinary cars was a response to the growing alienation of spectators with powerful single-seater racing cars. The 24-hour race, continued to fetishize the surplus-capacity of the car and indeed augmented this fetishizing by increasing the number of hours in succession the car was to be used. However, as stated, through the use of more everyday cars and the incorporation of public roads, Durand had undeniably anticipated a banalization of the automobile and a consequent alienation of motor racing. Thus the *Le Mans 24 Heures* provided at least a partial alternative to the over-valorization of the surplus capacity of Grand Prix cars, as it seemed that a fetishizing of speed alone was no longer universally sufficient. The next section will examine two examples of how motor sport continued to be fetishized in the post-1945 era of the increasingly banalized car.

1.5 Representations of Post-Second World War Motor Sport

As we have seen, in the early 20th-Century, motor racing constituted a form of fetishizing of the surplus capacity of the automobile, more specifically a fetishizing of speed and endurance. We also saw how the *Le Mans 24 Heures* race expanded this fetishizing while at the same time addressing the alienation which ensued from the growth of Grand Prix cars as they moved further and further away, in both appearance and performance, from everyday cars. In this section, we will look at how motor sport continued to be fetishized even as the automobile was becoming more mundane and thus part of Baudrillard's system of needs. Firstly, we will examine a short text written by Roland Barthes which engages with, among other sports, motor racing. Secondly, the Lelouch film *Un homme et une femme* (1966) will be explored as an example of how, while banalized, motor racing continued to be fetishized for its original surplus-capacity as regards speed.

⁷⁹ This example of the closing of public roads is also practised in the legendary TT motorcycle races in the Isle of Man, as well as in the North West 200 in Northern Ireland.

1.5.1 What is Sport?

In 1961, Roland Barthes wrote the narrative for a documentary which was filmed by Canadian author and director, Hubert Aquin. The film discusses six sports and sets them in different countries, with the intention of showing them as a “social and poetic phenomenon.”⁸⁰ The sports which are examined are bullfighting, motor sport, soccer, ice hockey and the Tour de France cycle race.⁸¹ Barthes had previously written about two sports in his *Mythologies*, in which he engaged with wrestling and the Tour de France.⁸² This second essay on the Tour can be seen as a more sport-oriented and less Marxist reading of the sport. As we shall see in Chapter 5, Barthes engaged with the automobile in in his *Mythologies* and once again, a little later in his career (1965), when he published an article on the growing commodification of the car. This 1961 engagement with motor racing during the *Trente Glorieuses* is particularly worthy of examination, as it discusses how motor sport was perceived at an important stage in French social and automotive history.

In this documentary, Barthes begins by describing the process through which a racing driver and his team must go in order to prepare for a race. This involves the use of science and human courage with one sole aim, namely to defeat time: “Le vainqueur d’un ennemi bien plus subtil: le temps.”⁸³ Barthes highlights the importance of man’s relationship with the automobile, stating that it is the balance of man and machine that is the difference between winning and losing, and, indeed, living and dying. [Figure 7] The power of the car over the very life of a person underlines the continued fetishizing of speed:

Par elle, l’homme vaincra mais peut-être aussi par elle il mourra. Aussi le rapport de l’homme et de la machine est ici infiniment précautionneux, ce qui se jouera très vite doit d’abord s’essayer très lentement, car la vitesse n’est jamais que la récompense d’une extrême lenteur.⁸⁴

Thus the relationship which exists between a racing driver and his vehicle is one which must be entered into with great caution. In deciding to exploit the surplus-capacity of the automobile, the racing driver knowingly is placing more pressure on

⁸⁰ Roland Barthes, *What is Sport?* (New Haven, CN: Yale University Press, 2007). viii.

⁸¹ Scott MacKenzie, “The Missing Mythology: Barthes in Québec,” *Canadian Journal of Film Studies* 6, no. 2 (1997): 65-74. 67.

⁸² Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (Paris: Seuil, 2003 [1957]).

⁸³ Transcribed from Aquin.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

the vehicle than is needed for “ordinary” use. These precautions must also be carried onto the racetrack.

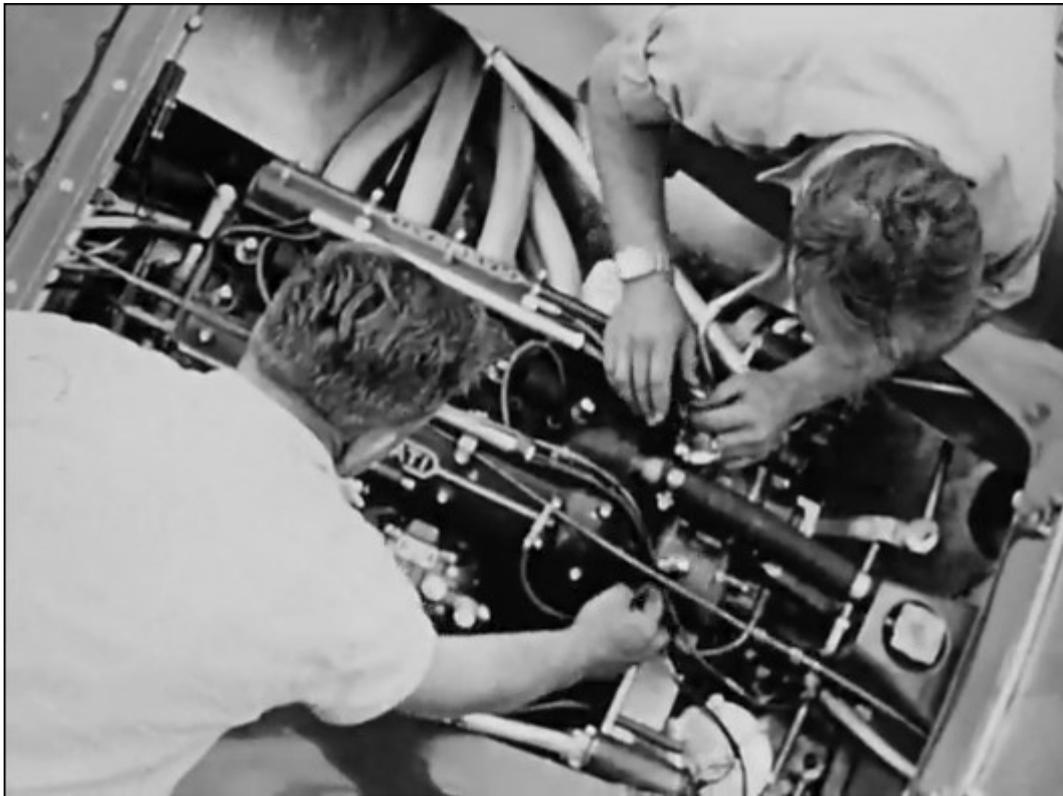


Figure 7. *Le sport et les hommes*⁸⁵

This paradoxical “extrême lenteur” is further highlighted by Barthes in the next section of the documentary as we see a testing session for the car on track. In a scene which uses long shots of a sole car testing, the narrator interrupts the sound of the roaring engine to remind us that:

Ensuite, l’essayer, courir seul, sans autre ennemi que le temps, et affronter à ce temps à la fois la machine et le terrain, car ce sont eux, tous les trois à la fois que le coureur doit d’abord vaincre avant de triompher de ses rivaux humains [...]. Il faut enfin et surtout préparer le moteur, et sa richesse comme celle d’un cerveau génial est embarrassante : ici ce sont douze bougies à changer tous les cinq tours.⁸⁶

Having taken all these precautions, we proceed to the filming of a motor race. Taking place in Sebring, Florida, the 12-hour endurance race featuring cars of different sizes and different classes is depicted at length as Barthes’ text continues to

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

be narrated intermittently in the background. [Figure 8] Filmed in 1959, it features a “Le Mans-type start”, as the drivers run across the racetrack to jump into their cars and drive off. Once again this is followed by a number of long shots during which the text is narrated and in which the relationship between man and machine is explored.



Figure 8. *Le sport et les hommes*⁸⁷

More specifically, Barthes explores the relationship between man and machine as they encounter the different challenges that the circuit offers. This relationship is different on straights as it is in corners, and Barthes examines how the balance of the relationship ebbs and flows accordingly:

Dans les lignes droites, c’est l’effort du moteur qui emporte la décision, mais cet effort reste humain à sa manière, en lui sont déposés le travail, l’invention et le soin d’une dizaine d’hommes qui ont préparé, raffiné et vérifié la plus difficile des équations : une puissance extrême, une résistance minime, que ce soit celle du poids ou celle du vent.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

Mais dans les virages, mise à part la suspension de la machine, c'est le coureur qui fait tout ; car ici l'espace est contre le temps. Il faut donc savoir tricher avec l'espace, décider si on le ménage... ou si on le coupe brutalement ; et ce pari il faut oser le pousser jusqu'au bord de l'impossible.⁸⁸

Much of Barthes' text focuses on the relationship between the driver and his car; it does not concern how motor sport is perceived by an audience; thus, this text cannot be considered in the same context as his earlier mythologies. This text is a reflection on the how and why of individual engagement in this sport together with its personal and social importance. The English translation of the text of the document is "What is Sport?" and it is this that Barthes reflects upon here.

Barthes is also aware of the danger involved in the sport, during a shot of a particularly brutal car crash which leaves one in no doubt that the driver has perished, the narrator explains why, although part of the sport, it is particularly tragic here:

Dans ce combat contre le temps, si terrible parfois qu'en soit la sanction, il n'y a aucune fureur, rien qu'un courage immense dirigé contre l'inertie des choses. Ainsi la mort d'un coureur est infiniment triste, car ce n'est pas seulement un homme qui meurt, c'est un peu de perfection qui disparaît de ce monde. Mais c'est précisément parce que cette perfection est mortelle qu'elle est humaine. A peine tout est-il perdu ici que d'autres hommes vont recommencer là.⁸⁹

The last line of this section is, perhaps, a further indication of how motor sport and speed are fetishized. Barthes suggests that while speed and motor sport are extremely dangerous, the human desire for both is such that the cyclical nature of life and death is effectively replicated in this sporting practice.

The use-value of the car or rather parts of a car is referred to also as Barthes explains how these vehicles are different from everyday cars. They are not equipped with a starter; the reason for this is very simple, starters are heavy and are not needed and anything that reduces the weight of a car can mean that it is gaining seconds on the track. However, this is also indicative of how the Grand Prix car has been alienated from the standard road vehicle. It is not necessary for an ordinary car to be designed with a view to gaining seconds; thus, in an attempt to maximize the surplus-capacity of the car, the racing car has been moved further away from its original use-value. Barthes goes further with this in comparing a motor car to a bird:

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

Au repos ces machines sont lourdes, passives, difficiles à déplacer, comme un oiseau gêné par ses ailes, c'est leur puissance virtuelle qui les fait peser. Pourtant, à peine alignées, rapprochées de leur fonction qui est le combat, elles s'allègent déjà, deviennent impatientes. [...]

S'arrêter c'est presque mourir, si la machine est malade il faut en informer son maître avec ménagement. Car un grand coureur ne dompte pas sa machine, il l'apprivoise ; il n'est pas seulement celui qui gagne, il est aussi celui qui ne détruit rien. Une machine hors du jeu, c'est la tristesse d'un être qui meurt, et qu'on ne peut remplacer, même lorsqu'autour de lui la vie continue.⁹⁰

This close association of an automobile with an animal echoes the early 20th-Century animism of cars, which will be explored in Chapter 2. In using the verb “apprivoiser” and later speaking of a car breaking down in terms of a death, much like that caused by the car accident earlier in the text, the fetishizing of the car through this sport is underlined.

Barthes concludes his reflection on motor sport by suggesting what a race signifies; once again he highlights the importance of the relationship between man and his machine as they both work in unison in an attempt to conquer the laws of physics:

Voilà ce que signifie une grande course automobile : que la plus rapide des forces n'est qu'une somme de patience, de mesures, de subtilités, d'actes infiniment précis et infiniment exigeants.

Ce que cet homme a fait c'est se mener lui-même et sa machine à la limite du possible. Sa victoire il l'a emportée non sur ses rivaux, mais au contraire avec eux, sur la pesanteur obstinée des choses : le plus meurtrier des sports est aussi le plus généreux.⁹¹

Thus the goal of motor sport is to bring both man and machine to the extremes of what is possible in a practice which actively strives ever to expand the surplus-capacity of the automobile. Motor sport, in the eyes of Barthes, is a rejection of the everyday car and a fetishizing of an alienated version of the automobile, with the ultimate goal of transcending the apparent limits of the machine through its intimate relationship with its driver. In the next section, and against this suggestive backdrop, we shall see how the automobile impacts on the relationship of the human protagonists in Claude Lelouch's *Un homme et une femme*.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid.

1.5.2 Fetishizing Motor Sport in Nouvelle Vague Cinema

Claude Lelouch released *Un homme et une femme* in 1966. [Figure 9] It received critical acclaim, winning the Palme d'Or in Cannes, two Oscars and a multitude of awards all over the world. It was also a financial success, saving Lelouch's filming company from the bankruptcy which had threatened immediately prior to its release. This movie has motor racing as a theme, its main character being a racing driver, yet Lelouch was careful to emphasize that this film formed part of the Nouvelle Vague movement. This film is of interest as it depicts a fetishizing of speed through the automobile and through motor sport at a time when, as we shall see in later chapters, the automobile was becoming further banalized as an everyday commodity. In this film, the automobile and racing serve as the backdrop to the story; as we shall see, much as in Barthes' reflection on the sport, motor racing in *Trente Glorieuses* France was not immune to the fetishizing of speed.



Figure 9. *Un homme et une femme*⁹²

Un homme et une femme introduces the audience to two widowed parents as they meet for the first time in Deauville, where their respective children are in a boarding school. Jean-Louis Trintignant's character, also called "Jean-Louis," gives

⁹² Lelouch, *Un homme et une femme*.

Anne, played by Anouk Aimée, a lift back to Paris as she has missed her train. Thus begins the first of many journeys taken by the protagonists by car. The basis for their relationship is formed in Jean-Louis' Ford Mustang. Lelouch said in an interview shortly after the movie's release that he wanted the weather to play an important role. He wanted fog and rain to help create the atmosphere, and it is the ambience of being sheltered together from the elements that brings the two closer. We learn in flashbacks how each became widowed. Anne's husband was a stuntman; he is introduced in flashback crashing a flaming car into two others. He is killed in a work accident, dying before Anne's eyes while filming a battle scene for a movie. Anne's husband is portrayed as a loving and charismatic character and thus the scene is set for Anne to be loath to enter a relationship with someone who has a dangerous profession. Later on, during another car journey in the rain we learn how Jean-Louis' wife died. We cut to an elaborate flashback of the start of the Le Mans 24 hour race. There is a long shot of the 'Le Mans Start', i.e. the racing drivers lining up on one side of the road and once the French flag is dropped at exactly 4 o'clock they run across the track, jump into their vehicle, start it up and drive off in a flurry of dust and waving flags. This, allied with the camera cutting to a large clock with 'Le Mans' written on it and saying 4 o'clock, leaves us with no doubt as to what race we are at.

Using footage from the 1964 Le Mans race, the entire flashback, including Jean-Louis' accident and his wife's subsequent suicide, is recounted in what seems to be a radio commentary. This form of narrative gives the race a more authentic feel, with the viewers having the impression that they are no longer watching a movie but rather an actual motorcar race at which there has been a terrible accident; it serves to highlight the almost matter-of-fact way motor racing deals with life and death. While telling this terrible tale of grief, the radio commentator interrupts himself to let the listener know that Graham Hill has gone in to pit and then continues the commentary on the Ferraris leading the race, as if this suicide was merely a trivial aside. Much like the footage of the crash in *Le sport et les hommes*, Lelouch does not shy away from racing being dangerous; while Jean-Louis does survive this crash, he nevertheless remains in a coma after a three-hour operation. However, it is as a result of seeing him leave the operating theatre that his wife decides to take her own life. The amount of time allocated to the transfer of Jean-Louis to the operating theatre and his wife's subsequent wait for any news contrasts

with the amount of attention given by the commentator to her own death. The choice of Le Mans for this accident scene would most likely have resonated strongly with many viewers for, as already discussed, just 11 years earlier the worst ever motor racing accident took place at Le Mans.

The shots of the Le Mans race comprise one of three sporting clips in the movie. Lelouch, in choosing the racing scenes, went for arguably the three most famous and historical arenas in France. As already mentioned, Le Mans was the scene of Jean-Louis' accident and was also the hub of motor sport in the country. Prior to this flashback, we have a testing scene set in the days immediately following Jean-Louis' first meeting with Anne. While not explicitly referred to in the film, this testing takes place at the oval test track of Monthl ry just south of Paris.⁹³ What follows is 8 continuous minutes of Jean-Louis driving two different cars around the track. [Figure 10] This scene echoes the testing shots in *Le sport et les hommes*, as we see the importance of precision and preparation in the relationship between driver and car. At one stage there is a second car on the track which runs alongside on the slope, but for the most part it is just Jean-Louis and his machine. [Figure 11] The very famous soundtrack for this movie is for once absent, hardly anything is said, and the only music is the sound of the Ford GT-40 revving and shifting gears. It is a homage to the racing car.



Figure 10. *Un homme et une femme*⁹⁴

⁹³ Lelouch confirmed this in an interview about the film. Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid.



Figure 11. *Un homme et une femme*⁹⁵

This scene is also evocative of a short, which was filmed by Lelouch in 1976. *C'était un rendez-vous* has become a film of mythical proportions in motoring circles. [Figure 12] This *court métrage* is an eight-minute shot taken by one camera positioned on the front bumper of what was claimed at the time to be a Ferrari, driven at high speeds through the streets of Paris.⁹⁶ At times cars are overtaken as if they are not there, and the film ends at the top of the steps at Montmartre where the driver gets out to embrace a girl running up the steps to meet him. The soundtrack to this short is again the sound of the engine roaring. As no permits to drive through Paris were obtained, Lelouch was arrested shortly after the release of this movie, while a plethora of urban myths surfaced about the speed driven, the car used and whether the movie was tampered with in any way. It remains as an example of what has been called *cinéma vérité* and the scene in *Un homme et une femme* can be seen in much the same way. It is a typical testing session; at the only point where we have dialogue, it is a commentary on the revs used in completing a lap of the circuit.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Iain Borden, *Drive: Journeys Through Film, Cities and Landscapes* (London: Reaktion, 2013). 20.

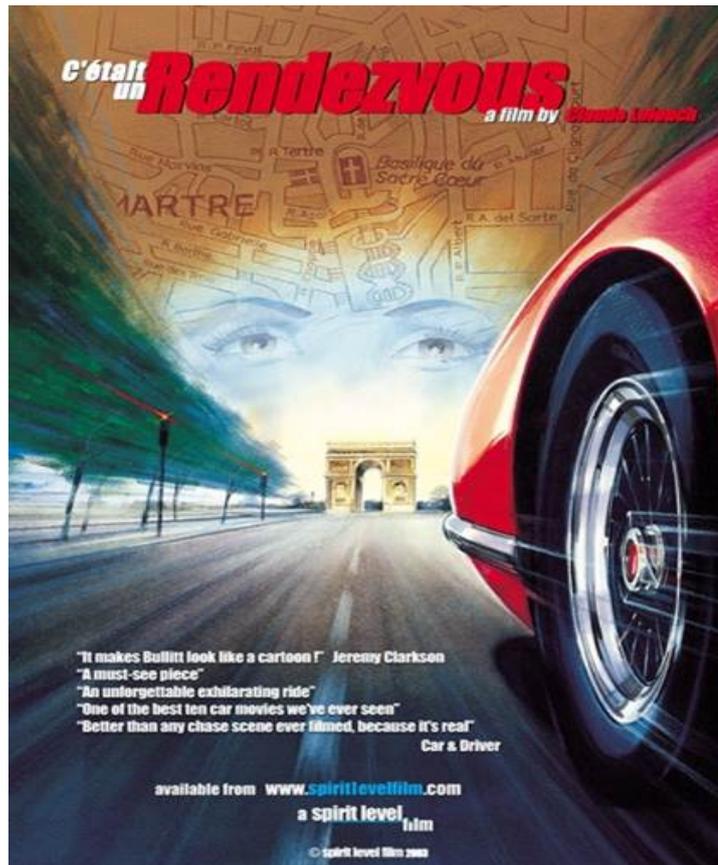


Figure 12. *C'était un rendez-vous*⁹⁷

The final race portrayed in the film is the *Rallye de Monte-Carlo*. Departing from various cities all over Europe to converge on Monaco, this rally is the oldest of its type in the world. Once again, radio-type commentary is used to introduce the competitors; however, in this race Jean-Louis is not the driver but the co-pilot. The footage shown in the movie is taken from an actual Monte Carlo rally. Lelouch entered a three-man team in the race driving a Mustang. The drivers were Lelouch himself, Jean-Louis Trintignant and a representative of the Ford company known as Monsieur Chemin. There is footage of the Mustang but also of other vehicles filmed in dry, wet and snowy conditions. We see images of Citroën DSs, Mercedes, and Aston Martins skidding through corners. Lelouch entered the race so that he could film for the entire five days of the rally; in this way he could record the progress of the race and its effects on the drivers. This race scene is different from the earlier test sequence in that it is interspersed with shots of Anne carrying on with her life. As

⁹⁷ Claude Lelouch, *C'était un rendez-vous* (Paris: Spirit Level Film, 2003 [1976]).

co-pilot, Jean-Louis is required to describe the itinerary of twists and turns to be taken by the team. This is paralleled in Anne's profession as a script-writer. As Jean-Louis is barking out instructions to Monsieur Chemin, who is at the wheel, Anne is talking the film director through her script and discussing how it will work best on camera. This synchronicity between the protagonists is symbolic of the place they are now at in their relationship.

The choice of car in *Un homme et une femme* is also of interest. All race cars used by the main protagonist as well as his own personal car are American: Fords. The Ford Mustang was a very iconic car at the time but the question must be asked: why did the director not choose a French car of the time? Ross argues that as a tool to indicate an "object from another planet," the use of a foreign, preferably American car is common.⁹⁸ The Ford Mustang as an American car has an exotic element to it; the very name Mustang suggests something of the Wild West. During their first encounter, Anne states that Jean-Louis does not look like someone who would be married; the fact that she is being driven home in his high-powered American sports car surely influences this assumption.

Un homme et une femme was a very successful movie with a strong motor racing current throughout. It shows scenes from three of the highest profile circuits and races in France and devotes a large slice of its running time to each; however it is the final sequence that is perhaps the most significant for this study. Jean-Louis' character is a reasonably well-known car racer but in this film his race, as is seen in the last scenes, is to beat the train from Deauville to Paris to win the woman he loves. Having been abandoned at the train station, Trintignant's character jumps into his Mustang and drives directly from Deauville to Paris to meet Anne as she gets off the train. An earlier scene is much like this one, when Trintignant's character, upon receiving a telegram from Anne at the end of the Monte Carlo rally saying that she loves him, gets into the car in which his team has just completed the rally and drives across France to see her. In both these scenes, the importance of speed is apparent. Using a specialist rally car to drive to Paris just after finishing a race underlines the affective link between motor sport and the standard road car, showing how speed is not only fetishized in racing but can also be transferred, under emotionally charged circumstances, to the public roads. However, in the last scene, when the Mustang

⁹⁸ Kristin Ross, *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies: Decolonization and the Reordering of French Culture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT, 1998). 33.

defeats the train in a race to Paris, the fetishizing of the surplus-capacity of the car is most obviously highlighted. By giving the Mustang a direct opponent in the form of the train, Lelouch's film echoes Barthes' text where he sees time as the enemy of the driver and car. Thus, in a more modern France, there is still room for a fetishizing of commodities for their use-values and, more specifically, in this case, for their surplus-capacities:

La publicité est partout à l'œuvre dans *Un homme et une femme*: dans l'omniprésence des voitures en cette décennie du « règne de la bagnole » [...]. L'univers de Lelouch apparaît ainsi à la fois comme celui d'une midinette fascinée par la société de consommation et comme celui d'un promoteur de cette même société, qui maîtrise les méthodes de sa mise en valeur.⁹⁹

In *Un homme et une femme*, motor sport adds to the fetishizing of the motor car and, unlike in Barthes' text, it is applied in everyday life, as the surplus-capacity of the car is used to good effect in the *dénouement* of the film.

In both *Le sport et les hommes* and *Un homme et une femme*, we see post-1945 engagement with motor sport. Barthes' text eulogising five different sports devotes most attention to motor sport and the Tour de France. Beautifully shot and featuring long silences during which the viewer can admire the drivers racing along the Florida circuit, and punctuated with the narration of the critic's reflections on the sport, *Le sport et les hommes* displays how motor sport and speed were fetishized in this period. These cars and drivers are different from the DS which Barthes discussed in his *Mythologies* a few years earlier and also from his treatise on the role of the 2CV in modern society, both of which will be discussed in Chapter 5. In this text, he is concerned with the automobile as a purveyor of speed and its ability to conquer place and time. In *Un homme et une femme*, Lelouch depicts motor sport as a quest for speed which can still be fetishized in a modern France, in which the car has become more commonplace. However, we might usefully note that Ross argues that this film is almost nostalgic, as the myth of speed had already been "waning" for a number of years when this film was released.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁹ Jean-Michel Frodon, *Le cinéma français : de la nouvelle vague à nos jours* (Paris: Cahiers du cinéma, 2010). 225.

¹⁰⁰ Ross, *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies*. 33.

1.6 Conclusion

France has been a testing ground for motor racing from the very beginning of the sport. The first ever races took place with Paris as their focal point, and the first attempts at motor sport events, such as an early switch from road-racing to circuits, were a result of a national desire to promote this technological innovation. The early growth stemmed from the initiative taken by *familles artisanales* to adapt their work and build what, they hoped, would be the future of horseless transport. This desire was then adopted by the upper classes, as epitomized by the early presidents of the FIA, who embraced organising and taking part in races in order to build the reliability and reputation of the self-propelled vehicles. The impact of Le Mans in the further advancement of motor sport is significant; its name will forever be associated with the hosting of the first international *Grand Prix*, but it is for its endurance race that this city is truly famous. The Le Mans race has successfully maintained its link with everyday automobile tourism and, as such, has established a much more enduring relationship with supporters. The race continues to grow in spite of recession and it has shown an ability to adapt and change to face new challenges. This has seen it remain as relevant today as it was over eighty years ago.

Speed and modernity became intrinsically linked with the automobile in early 20th-Century France as trials and then shortly thereafter city-to-city races drew hundreds of thousands of spectators. The automobile was consumed in image for capacities that were not necessarily essential to its functioning, as it covered ever greater distances at ever greater speeds. As images of speed and modernity were inscribed in the automobile, it was increasingly consumed as a desired object, and, thus, the Marxist concept of the commodity fetish, an object valorized for properties over and above its utilitarian-value. By fetishizing speed and the modernity associated with it, the basic properties of the car – the capacity to transport passengers to different destinations – became alienated. Motor racing played an important part in the expansion of this desire for speed. The fetishized desire for the surplus capacity of the car was not restricted to the field of motor racing however. The automobile as a purveyor of speed and as a symbol of modernity also became the totemic embodiment of modern life for the Futurist movement of the early 20th-Century. It is consequently to that representation of the automobile that we shall now turn.

Chapter 2: A Phantasmagoria of Desire: Early 20th- Century Representations of the Car

This chapter will extend the discussion to examine representations of the automobile in early 20th-Century France outside the domain of motor sport. The fetishizing of the automobile in a motor-racing context will be compared with representations of the car by manufacturers of the time and also with representations in mainstream media. The impact of Michelin and Citroën in the development of the fetishized vehicle will be explored. The Futurist movement of the 1900s and 1910s, which impacted on painting, sculpture and literature, will also form a major focus of this chapter. These three different elements each shed light on the ways in which the automobile was valorized during the early 20th Century. The cultural manifestations and representations explored in this chapter examine how the car was consumed as a phantasmagoria of desire not only in the vehicles produced but also in the imagery used in advertisements as well as in early art, as we shall see.

Les frères Michelin and André Citroën are renowned for their role in the development of the car and automobility. What perhaps sets their two companies apart in the early years of their existence is the way in which these industrialists availed of the media in order to publicize their products. As the automobile was gaining popularity, Michelin first, and later Citroën, utilized the media as a tool to further their own renown. By closely aligning the automobile with modernity and progress, these two manufacturers contributed to the establishment of a desire for the car. Their efforts to modernize French society through the promotion of the car were portrayed as a means of improving the country. The automobile became popularly associated with speed and mobility, and the car was marketed as a provider of properties which extended beyond its utilitarian capacity. The early fetishizing of the automobile was crucially linked with the cult of modernity. Philip Hadlock examines this interest in the modern in early 20th-Century France:

It would be difficult to speak of the "modernity" of early twentieth-century French culture without considering its frenetic interest in machinery, and especially in modes of transportation. The first decade of the twentieth century in France produced numerous emblems of this craving to develop more powerful machines, to observe them at work, and to interact with them in new ways: the initial Tour de France cycling race took place in 1903; the internal-combustion engine, invented in the 1880s, was developed for use in

the project to establish a rail network throughout France; and numerous automobile races were inaugurated in the years preceding and following the turn of the century.¹

He goes on to suggest that:

What differentiates this period from the latter part of the nineteenth century is not merely the increased presence of mechanical or motorized devices in the functioning and organization of the social sphere, but also the dramatically altered roles that machines begin to play in shaping and (re)defining relationships between consciousness, the human body, and notions of subjectivity.²

Thus the automobile was destined to play a larger role in a society where it was going to be possessed by some and gazed upon and desired by others. The fetishizing of the car through ostentation was a means by which possession of an automobile served to portray class distinction and this distinction of possession was displayed in different forms. This class distinction which the car incarnated also extended to art and mythology as it did in Bourdieu's famous work on the subject.³

The association of the car with mythological characters as well as the attribution of animal characteristics to it are recurring themes which are also prevalent in the ideals of the Futurist movement. The impact of the Futurist movement on art will be examined with particular attention being paid to one of its most common themes, which was to spill over into the work of other artists, namely animism. The attribution of animal characteristics to objects, in this instance the automobile, is a symptom of religious imagery being linked to commodities, in line with Marx's thinking. In the attribution of animism to cars, these vehicles are fetishized as objects capable of accomplishing tasks for which they were not built. Animism added to the desire-value in the automobile, which formed part of the strong phantasmagoria associated with the car in early 20th-Century France.

2.1 The Futurist Movement

Labelled mere "automobilism" by artist and writer Wyndham Lewis,⁴ the Futurist movement, with the automobile as its symbol par excellence, advocated the abandonment of past tradition, in particular classical Italian culture, aiming instead

¹ Philip G. Hadlock, "Men, Machines, and the Modernity of Knowledge in Alfred Jarry's *Le Surmâle*," *SubStance* 35, no. 3 (2006): 131-48. 131.

² Ibid.

³ Pierre Bourdieu, *La distinction : critique sociale du jugement* (Paris: Minuit, 1979).

⁴ Andrew Thacker, "Traffic, Gender, Modernism," *The Sociological Review* 54, no. 1 (2006): 175-89. 177.

to focus on the beneficial qualities of a modern orientation in life.⁵ While the Futurist movement has been traditionally associated with Italian history, and latterly with Fascism, this movement was actually launched by F.T. Marinetti in *Le Figaro* in 1909; Paris provided the setting for this automobile-inspired movement as Marinetti's *Manifesto* creates a Parisian street scene where he vaunts the modernising and cleansing powers of the automobile.

The location of the automobile at the centre of the Futurist agenda imbued it with hyperbolic qualities and, as we shall see, the situating of the car as a substitute for classical or traditional beliefs was indicative of the ideological transfer that Futurism was proposing. The automobile became infused with an image of divinity as it was worshipped as the new saviour of modern society. The vocabulary used in Futurist literature is unambiguous in according it god-like status. Thus the Futurist depiction of the car in early 20th-Century France was one characterized by fetishized rhetoric within which it was portrayed as the single entity capable of creating a new future for the world. Fetishizing the automobile in terms of the occult and the divine, led it to accrue a further variety of phantasmagoria which continued to enthrall its desirers. This process may best be understood by considering pre-Futurist representations, and then the movement's full blooming under Marinetti's leadership.

2.1.1 Precursors to Futurism

The ability of the automobile to produce speed and to communicate this feeling of speed to its driver is of fundamental importance to Futurist ideals. Many Futurist depictions in art show the car in motion as it underlines the difference with static classical tradition; for instance, the paintings of Giacomo Balla from 1911 to 1915 all concentrated on the speed produced by the car rather than focusing on the car itself.⁶ Marinetti also makes direct reference to this in his *Manifesto*, as he eulogizes the creation of a divine feeling which is experienced while driving at high speed: "Nous vivons déjà dans l'absolu, puisque nous avons déjà créé l'éternelle vitesse omniprésente."⁷ The ability of the car to conjure feelings of divinity in the driver highlights the part it plays in the Futurist abandonment of tradition. As a dynamic

⁵ Gerald Silk, *Automobile and Culture* (New York, NY: Abrams, 1984). 58.

⁶ Christine Poggi, *Inventing Futurism: The Art and Politics of Artificial Optimism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009). 31.

⁷ *Ibid.* 1.

symbol of power, the car can inscribe a new system on the world, a system which is oriented towards modernity and embraces it.

Gerald Silk posits that Paris was central to Futurism's development as it made extensive use of Cubism in its work. The French Cubist movement, which had Pablo Picasso among its prominent members, made use of devices such as fragmentation and the dematerialization of form to find true meaning.⁸ Silk suggests that these techniques were adopted by Futurists to express speed and dynamism. Italian Futurist artists such as Severini, Russolo, and Boccioni all visited Paris to experience Cubism first hand, and began to apply Cubist style to their representations of modern technology.⁹ Fernand Leger and Marcel Duchamp were amongst the French artists who engaged with technology in their work, although they stopped short of becoming Futurists.¹⁰ Paris, as capital of the Cubist movement, and later Futurism proper ensured that much of the artistic production in France at the time was devoted to technology and, in particular, the automobile.¹¹

In the writing of the early 20th Century, the transmogrification of the automobile into an animal, a human or a fusion of man and machine and thus into a kind of super-being is a prevalent theme. This bestowing of animalistic or human capacities onto the car predates Futurism; however, it was in Futurism that it became a major theme.¹² The creation of this variety of phantasmagoria added another layer of meaning to the automobile that had previously been commodified by manufacturers through motor sport, among other methods. While Futurism worshipped technology as its god, and the car as its principal muse, the animism of the automobile served to strengthen this fetishizing as it created another image for the car. In addition to its status as the symbolic totem of modernity, the anthropomorphosis of the car also alienated it from its origins. Suggesting that the automobile was alive, in many cases portraying it as possessing animalistic capabilities, changed the image of the car once again, and this phantasmagoria of

⁸ Silk, *Automobile and Culture*. 63.

⁹ Jean-Michel Rabaté, *1913: The Cradle of Modernism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007). 36. Fanette Roche-Pézarid, *L'aventure futuriste : 1909 - 1916* (Rome: École française de Rome, 1983). 3.

¹⁰ Gilles Néret and Hervé Poulain, *L'art, la femme et l'automobile* (Paris: EPA, 1989). 61.

¹¹ Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991). 36.

¹² Dorthe Gert Simonsen, "Accelerating Modernity: Time-Space Compression in the Wake of the Aeroplane," *The Journal of Transport History* 26, no. 2 (2005): 98-117. 101.

animism created a further desire amongst consumers as the automobile was accorded life-like abilities.

In Octave Mirbeau's *La 628-E8* (1907),¹³ the author refers to his car as a breathing organism bestowed with all the organs that a human being possesses:

Quand je regarde, quand j'écoute vivre cet admirable organisme qu'est le moteur de mon automobile, avec ses poumons et son cœur d'acier, son système vasculaire de caoutchouc et de cuivre, son innervation électrique, est-ce que je n'ai pas une idée autrement émouvante du génie humain.¹⁴

That Mirbeau named his work after his car, 628-E8 being the licence plate number of the car, is also a indication of the importance he places upon the automobile. The speed generated by the car is also significant to Mirbeau as he dedicates long passages to the driver's perception of things passed by as the car speeds along. Mirbeau stops short of explicitly giving a car human agency, but he does, however, compare it to a beautiful woman as he explains the love that a man can feel for a car: "Et puis, il aime sa machine; il en est fier; il en parle comme d'une belle femme."¹⁵ The fusion of man and machine also appears in Mirbeau's work and is one which is taken up in Futurist literature: "Un homme toujours lancé à travers l'espace, comme la tempête et le cyclone, a vraiment quelque chose de surhumain."¹⁶ This creation of a new super-being composed of man and machine is a Futurist theme that has been suggested to have been prefigured by Mirbeau's work to a certain extent.¹⁷

The creation of phantasmagoria around the car through animism is a strong theme in Futurist literature. Investing the car with animal or human qualities served to highlight the relationship between man and the car. Either a faithful pet or, at a later point, a fusion of driver and vehicle, the fetishized vehicle became imbued with life-like qualities which placed it beyond the category of a simple vehicle of transport. Italian writer Mario Morasso in his 1905 novel *The New Weapon: the machine*,¹⁸ describes the car as "an iron monster."¹⁹ Alfred Jarry in *Le Surmâle*

¹³ Octave Mirbeau, *La 628-E8* (Paris: Charpentier et Fasquelle, 1908).

¹⁴ Ibid. 13.

¹⁵ Ibid. 18.

¹⁶ Ibid. 19.

¹⁷ Silk, *Automobile and Culture*. 66; Sara Danius, "The Aesthetics of the Windshield: Proust and the Modernist Rhetoric of Speed," *Modernism/modernity* 8, no. 1 (2001): 99-126. 111 ; Claire Nettleton, "Driving Us Crazy: Fast Cars, Madness, and the Avant-Garde in Octave Mirbeau's *La 628-E8*," *Nineteenth-Century French Studies* 42, no. 3 (2014): 250-63. 250.

¹⁸ Mario Morasso, *La nuova arma : (la macchina)* (Torino: Fratelli Bocca, 1905).

¹⁹ Mario Morasso, in Silk, *Automobile and Culture*. 66.

(1902)²⁰ describes a creature capable of surpassing all known limits of love-making and locomotion. Silk posits that Jarry's expressions of mechanomorphism, which predates Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* (1915), infiltrated the Futurist programme as he attributes a host of animal associations to the car: "La bête métallique, comme un gros scarabée,²¹ essaya ses élytres, gratta, trépida, mâchonna avec ses palpes et s'en alla."²² The machine protagonist in Jarry's work is given animacy as, in the final chapter of *Le Surmâle*, entitled "la machine amoureuse," we see that it falls in love with the "Surmâle." This uneasy mixture of man and machine is furthered as Jarry describes at length a sexual encounter between man and machine culminating in a union which conducts huge amounts of electricity into the body of the man. *Le Surmâle* was an early 20th-Century novel set in the future, 1920, in which a world is created in which man and machinery are fused. The use of animism throughout the novel is revealing of this fetishizing:

Through its extravagant depictions of exceptional situations and circumstances in the integration of machinery into modern life, Jarry's novel implies the emergence of a new stage in the body's intelligibility.²³

These early engagements with the automobile and with modernity in general were to have an impact on the Futurist movement and Marinetti's 1909 *Manifesto* as they provided many of the creative tools and devices which were to be exploited by Futurists later in the decade.

2.1.2 Marinetti and Futurism

Using modern technology as their inspiration and the automobile as their totem, the futurists' motivation was dramatically to alter perceptions of the world through a complete rejection of past ways and an embracing of modern technology. In a 1905 poem which prefigured the *Futurist Manifesto*, Marinetti instilled animal qualities in a car. "À mon Pégase" employs this mythical creature with a double function. As a symbol of freedom, this winged animal offers an image of liberation, while it also provides an interesting counterblast to those who rejected the "horseless carriage" as they preferred to retain their horses. In portraying the automobile as Pegasus,

²⁰ Alfred Jarry, *Le surmâle* (Paris: Eugène Fasquelle, 1930 [1902]).

²¹ This reference to the automobile in terms of an animal, more specifically a beetle, is echoed in Citroën's trans-Saharan raids, where the lead vehicle is named "Scarabée d'or." This will be examined in further detail later in this chapter.

²² Jarry, *Le surmâle*. 32.

²³ Hadlock, "Men, Machines, and the Modernity of Knowledge in Alfred Jarry's *Le Surmâle*," 132.

Marinetti is fetishizing the car in order to display its capacity to go beyond that of the horse:

je déchaîne ton cœur aux teuf-teufs diaboliques,
et tes géants pneumatiques, pour la danse
que tu mènes sur les blanches routes du monde.
Je lâche enfin tes brides métalliques... Tu t'élances,
avec ivresse, dans l'Infini libérateur!...

Hurrah! Plus de contact avec la terre immonde!...
Enfin, je me détache et je vole en souplesse
sur la grisante plénitude
des Astres ruisselants dans le grand lit du ciel!²⁴

The automobile as Pegasus is the exaltation of technology as the author unleashes the metallic bridle of his beast and is launched into space. The use of a mythological beast to describe the car is a motif which is repeated in Futurist work, as will be examined later in this section. In this later trend, which appears with the 1920s Citroën raids, mythological characters are evoked in an attempt to highlight the epic nature of the journeys. By making the capabilities of the car analogous to the supernatural powers of Pegasus, Marinetti is creating a modern-day myth. This 1905 poem gives us an early indication of Marinetti's theory of modernity, as it places the automobile at the centre of progress and imbues it with life.

Le Manifeste du Futurisme (1909) is composed of two parts, the first being a story narrated in the first person; this is followed by the numbered main points of the *Manifesto* itself. In the first part, Marinetti recounts in the first person a car ride in which he was the driver:

Nous nous approchâmes des trois machines renâclantes pour flatter leur poitrail. Je m'allongeai sur la mienne comme un cadavre dans sa bière, mais je ressuscitai soudain sous le volant – couperet de guillotine – qui menaçait mon estomac."²⁵

The gothic quality of this quotation as well as the close link with speed and the threat of death are themes that are recurrent in Futurist literature. We see the automobile described as a beast as the narrator is filled with glee as he sits at the wheel. The

²⁴ 'A Mon Pégase', in Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, *La ville charnelle* (Paris: E. Sansot, 1908). Quoted in Tim Benton, "Dreams of Machines: Futurism and l'Esprit Nouveau," *Journal of Design History* 3, no. 1 (1990): 19-34. 20.

²⁵ *Le Figaro*, 20 February 1909, 1.

story goes on to recount an accident experienced by the narrator as he leaves the road in order to avoid two cyclists. Once again the car is referred to in terms of animal characteristics. Firstly, the narrator speaks of death and how he eventually manages to revive his car. By addressing it as a shark, Marinetti invokes a darker impression than that of Pegasus. It is a more malevolent experience as Futurism prepares to cut all links with the past: “On le croyait mort, mon bon requin, mais je le réveillai d’une seule caresse sur son dos tout-puissant, et le voilà ressuscité, courant à toute vitesse sur ses nageoires.”²⁶ The reference to the shark’s fins is echoed in Baudrillard’s later analysis of car tail fins in American car design.²⁷

Marinetti also makes use of classical mythology in his *Manifesto* to fetishize the car as he had done in his 1905 poem. In a rejection of the past and any link with it, he announces that:

Nous déclarons que la splendeur du monde s’est enrichie d’une beauté nouvelle : la beauté de la vitesse. Une automobile de course avec son coffre orné de gros tuyaux tels des serpents à l’haleine explosive... Une automobile rugissante, qui a l’air de courir sur de la mitraille, est plus belle que la Victoire de Samothrace.²⁸

This reference to la Victoire de Samothrace also echoes the winged emblem on Rolls Royces entitled “Spirit of Ecstasy” which was first produced in 1911 and highlighted the link between speed and desirability. In stating that there is more artistic merit in an automobile than in the famous winged sculpture in the Louvre, Marinetti simultaneously rejected classical art as well as modern-day devotion to it. He refers to this statue as “l’image même du mouvement.”²⁹ However, Marinetti evokes an automobile as preferable to this now antiquated way of viewing the world.³⁰ He also announced a new world within which the real object of beauty is a mechanical vehicle of modernity. This rejection of the past and embracing of technology was to become the fulcrum of Futurist philosophy.

Marinetti also alludes to a fusion of man and machine in Futurism’s new vision of the world. Once again, a symbol of mythology is utilized as the invocation of a mechanical centaur describes the union which occurs between the driver and his vehicle. This fusion, which creates a hybrid of human and machine, is seen as the

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Jean Baudrillard, *La société de consommation : ses mythes, ses structures* (Paris: Gallimard, 1986 [1970]). 119.

²⁸ *Le Figaro*, 20 February 1909, 1.

²⁹ Peter Wollen, *Autopia: Cars and Culture* (London: Reaktion, 2002). 27.

³⁰ Roche-Pézard, *L’aventure futuriste*. 93.

inevitable outcome of embracing modern technology.³¹ Fetishizing automobiles by according them animal characteristics is thus furthered as man becomes one with these machines in a new world order. It is a step towards divinity as the creation of the centaur is a logical step before humans becoming like angels: “Enfin la Mythologie et l’Idéal mystique sont surpassés. Nous allons assister à la naissance du Centaure et nous verrons bientôt voler les premiers Anges!”³² As Silk posits: “This theory reflects the Futurist’s naively utopian belief in technological progress and its potential to transmute the psychology and physiology of the human race.”³³ Marinetti believed that the fusion of man and machine would create a new superbeing, capable not only of physical superiority, but also in which any emotion would be removed to leave a machine capable of conquering time and space in what Christine Poggi refers to as “Metallized flesh”.³⁴

Futurism was at its pinnacle during the 1910s. Its stated aim was to “ébranler les portes de la vie pour en essayer les gonds et les verrous!”³⁵, in order to close the gap between art and everyday life. This was to be achieved through its adoption of technology, as it was envisaged that this would become central to a modern society. The car as fulcrum for this transformation provided a dynamic totem, capable of enthraling its followers, and proved a malleable subject matter. The automobile became alienated from its origins as it took on a wide range of appearances which distanced it from its use-value. The attribution of agency to the motor car transferred new layers of meaning on to it, just as it was gaining a more visible position in society. The animism of the car, as well as the according of human characteristics to it, served to add phantasmagorical imagery on to the automobile, as these representations appeared in many artistic forms of the day. Futurism was to inspire later artists who began to experiment with mechanical imagery in their production.

2.1.3 Futurist and Post-Futurist Art

The agency of the automobile is a theme which continued in French art after Futurism began to lose its popularity. The incidence of artists featuring technology

³¹ Simonsen, "Accelerating Modernity." 101.

³² *Le Figaro*, 20 February 1909, 1.

³³ Silk, *Automobile and Culture*. 68.

³⁴ Christine Poggi, “Metallized Flesh: Futurism and the masculine body,” *Modernism/modernity* 4, no. 3 (1997): 19-43. 20.

³⁵ *Le Figaro*, 20 February 1909, 1.

and the automobile in their work increased as it became an accepted subject. It was also a theme that was taken up by the nascent film industry with the automobile taking a larger role in movies. Often the agency employed in Futurism moved away from the comparison of the car with an animal or human being. In the work of Francis Picabia, whose work became popular in the 1910s and 1920s, both in France and the United States, the iconography of the car is accorded human characteristics. Marcel Duchamp also placed the automobile in his work; this is particularly to be seen in the unfinished *Mariée mise à nu par ses célibataires, même* or *Grand Verre* as it is more commonly called.³⁶ We will now examine some of the work of these artists.

Francis Picabia, in a series of object-portraits, depicts the machine world, and in the majority of his creations, he utilized automobile iconography. Using images of car parts to portray human beings, anthropomorphism is a common feature in his work. Picabia thus highlights the ability of the car to emote while still portraying a mechanical object. His self-portrait, “Le Saint des Saints,” depicts the horn of a car which was borrowed from an advertisement. The car horn is surmounted on a cross-section of a car engine as this is done to suggest a mechanical analogy for sexual activity.³⁷ In naming the portrait “Le Saint des Saints,” Picabia is sarcastically referring to his own reputation as a womanizer.³⁸ [Figure 1] The use of car parts to represent both his physical and mental disposition highlights the affective qualities of the automobile as it symbolizes and embodies human capacities. Picabia’s most famous object-portrait, “Portrait d’une jeune fille américaine dans l’état de nudité” (1915) is an image of a spark plug, once again copied from an advertisement. The shape and function of the spark plug are both utilized in this work to portray the artist’s impression of American women. The curves of the spark plug can suggest that Picabia is attracted to this woman, while its actual role, to penetrate and ignite the engine of a vehicle, is a symbolic reflection of this attraction.³⁹ Picabia explained the importance of the machine as a reflection of human behaviour as a response to its central position in modern society:

³⁶ Jean Clair, “De quelques métaphores automobiles,” *Revue de l’Art* (1987): 77-79. 77.

³⁷ William Rozaitis, “The Joke at the Heart of Things: Francis Picabia’s Machine Drawings and the Little Magazine 291,” *American Art* 8, no. 3/4 (1994): 43-59. 49.

³⁸ William Innes Homer, “Picabia’s *Jeune fille américaine dans l’état de nudité* and Her Friends,” *The Art Bulletin* 57, no. 1 (1975): 110-15. 111.

³⁹ Poggi, *Inventing Futurism*. 163.

The machine has become more than a mere adjunct of life. It is really a part of human life ... perhaps the very soul. In seeking forms through which to interpret ideas or by which to expose human characteristics I have come at length upon the form which appears most brilliantly plastic and fraught with symbolism. I have enlisted the machinery of the modern world, and introduced it into my studio... I mean... to work simply on and on until I attain the pinnacle of mechanical symbolism.⁴⁰

Thus the automobile is capable of reflecting human characteristics as its physical appearance and movement symbolize and even replace human behaviour.

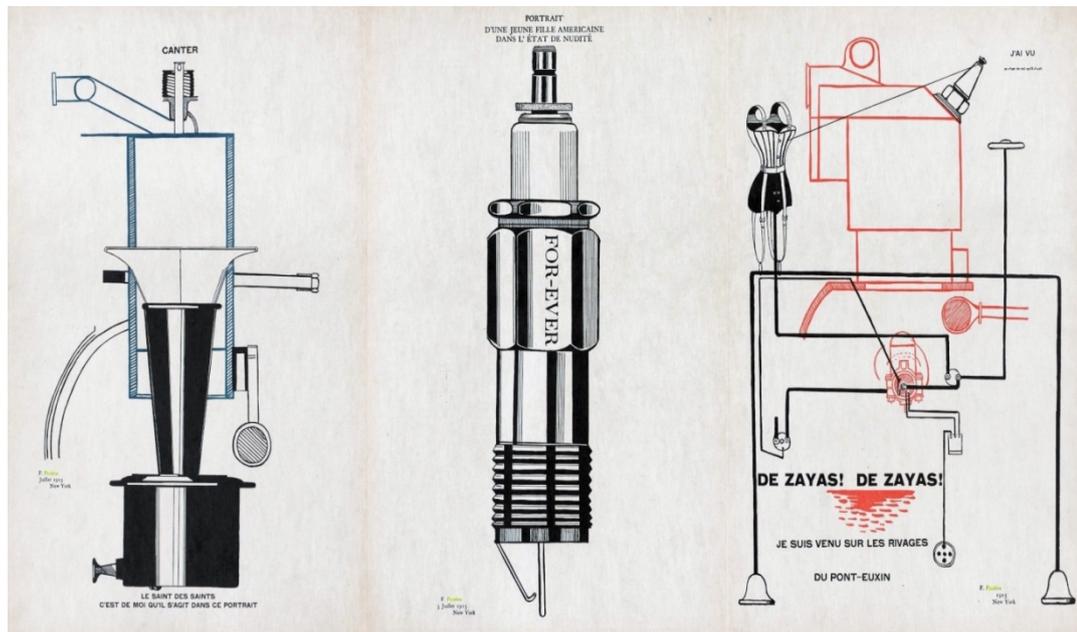


Figure 1. Le Saint des Saints⁴¹

The work of Marcel Duchamp, a contemporary of Picabia, also makes extensive use of technology. According to Silk, a journey along the Paris-Jura road with Picabia provided the inspiration for Duchamp's work, the *Grand Verre*. [Figure 2] Silk describes this work as:

Related to Picabia's painting *Child Carburetor* (c. 1919), in which the operation of a carburetor serves as a metaphor for the sexual act, Duchamp's *Large Glass* contains mechanical imagery suggestive of a sexual encounter. Much of the pseudo-scientific operation of the *Large Glass*, elucidated by the notes in the *Green Box*, is described or perhaps veiled in automotive terms. The bride is a "motor ... with quite feeble cylinders, in contact with the sparks of her constant life (desire-magneto)....At her base, is a reservoir of love-

⁴⁰ Francis Picabia in Silk, *Automobile and culture*. 79.

⁴¹ <http://bluemountain.princeton.edu/bluemtn/cgi-bin/>

gasoline,” which Duchamp called “a sort of automobiline.” Among the bride’s other parts are “desire-gears” and cogs, and her blossoming is explained as “the image of a motor car climbing a slope in low gear. (The car wants more and more to reach the top, and while slowly accelerating, as if exhausted by hope, the motor of the car turns over faster and faster, until it roars triumphantly.)⁴²

While more complex on first view than Picabia’s work, the *Grand Verre* retains many explicit references to the machine in human terms.⁴³ The love-gasoline and desire-magneto serve to humanize the car; in so doing, the automobile is once again fetishized as an object of desire. The layers of imagery placed on the car in Picabia’s and Duchamp’s work serve to alienate it from its origins and, more specifically, the use of the term desire in relation to the machine further strengthens the link with Marx’s theory of the fetishized commodity as phantasmagoria. Duchamp himself refers to his *Grand Verre* almost as a phantasmagoria, “it is like the hood of a car, the part that covers the motor.”⁴⁴ Just as the original phantasmagoria hid the source of its projections and thus its true nature, these artistic representations of the car perform the same function as they screen the origins of the car. Thus such object-portraits and more abstract forms may be seen as another representation of the automobile which serves to shroud its origins. While it may be argued that these portraits dehumanize as they use mechanical imagery to portray human behaviour, the opposite case may also be made, since the motor car was being fetishized as something which was more than the sum of its parts. What recurs almost obsessively in these works of art is the animism of mechanical parts, strengthening the perceived link between humanity and modern technological machinery.

⁴² Silk, *Automobile and Culture*. 82.

⁴³ Linda Dalrymple Henderson, “Ethereal Bride and Mechanical Bachelors: Science and Allegory in Marcel Duchamp’s “Large Glass,”” *Configurations* 4, no. 1 (1996): 91. 91.

⁴⁴ Silk, *Automobile and Culture*. 82.

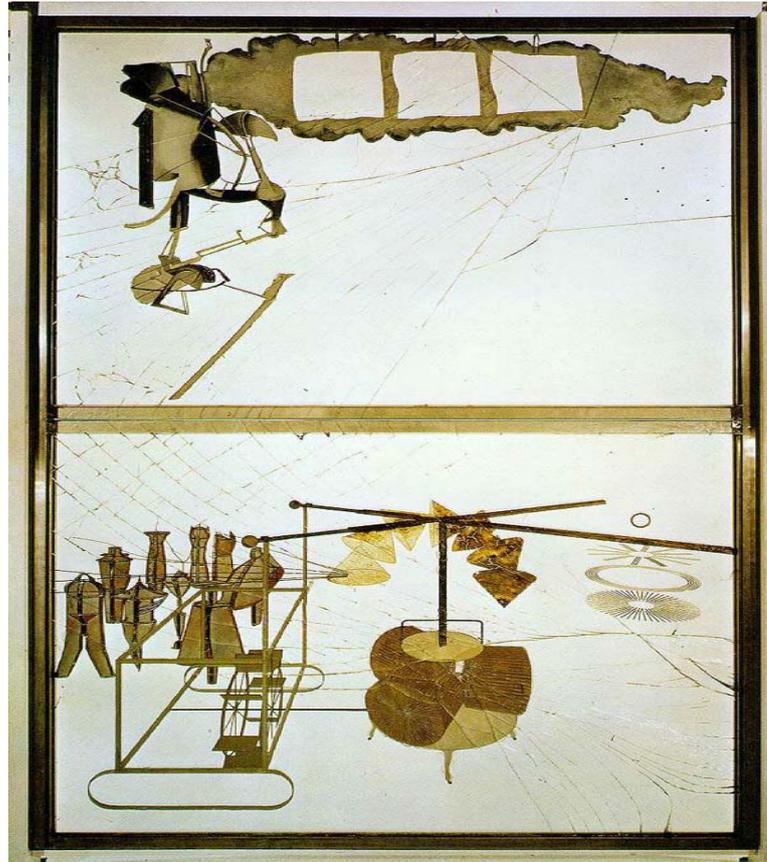


Figure 2. *Grand Verre*⁴⁵

To conclude this section, in the early 20th Century the automobile was fetishized in art and literature as the Futurist movement attempted to sever ties with the past and exalt a mechanized future. Futurism tried to capture the speed offered by the automobile in various art forms as this was seen as the ultimate symbol of modernity. The mechanolatry⁴⁶ promoted by the Futurists was the creation of a Marxian phantasmagoria as the automobile was shrouded in layers of meaning which alienated it from its use-value and hence valorized it further as a commodity.⁴⁷ Such fetishizing served to increase desire for the car as it became more prominent in society and in cultural representations. The overdetermining of the link between the automobile, speed and modernity is a motif that can be seen in the attempts of early car manufacturers to promote their cars. André Citroën and the Michelin brothers are the earliest examples of this.

⁴⁵ <http://www.beatmuseum.org/duchamp/images/bride.jpg>

⁴⁶ A term utilized by Tim Benton in Benton, "Dreams of Machines." 24.

⁴⁷ David Gartman, "Reification of Consumer Products: A General History Illustrated by the Case of the American Automobile," *Sociological Theory* 4, no. 2 (1986): 167-85. 178-179.

2.2 André Citroën

André Citroën played an extraordinary role in the early development of the automobile in France and internationally. He laid the groundwork for many innovations and left a legacy which resulted in the creation of two of the most iconic cars of the post-1945 era, the DS and the 2CV. However, as owner-manager of Citroën until his death in 1935, the conception and construction of the Traction Avant was undoubtedly his greatest triumph as it revolutionized car production in the country; the solid steel shell with front-wheel drive were important technological innovations, while the vehicle was created on a production line and thus introduced Fordism to early 20th-Century French automobile manufacturing.⁴⁸ Citroën's contribution to the growth in popularity of the automobile stretched beyond its construction. A charismatic man, it was his attempts to promote the car through various media outlets that made him a singular entrepreneur. During the 1920s and early 1930s, he embarked on a series of heavily mediatized events aimed at building his renown and that of his cars. While overtly championing “la voiture à la portée de tous,” his forays into marketing indulged in much fetishizing of the use-values of the automobile. Indeed, his attempts to demystify the car, as they were portrayed in the media, may actually be seen as a way for Citroën to make the shroud of phantasmagoria which enveloped the car even denser.

2.2.1 Early Automobile Adventures

André Citroën's grandfather was one of twelve children in a Jewish family that came to have business connections all over Northern Europe. His father settled in Paris, where André was born and enjoyed an upper-class education at the prestigious Lycée Condorcet, alumni of which included Henri Bergson and Marcel Proust, who was seven years his senior.⁴⁹ Citroën went on to follow in the footsteps of such scientists as André-Marie Ampère and François Arago and public figures such as Alfred Dreyfus in graduating from the Ecole Polytechnique.⁵⁰ Having trained as an engineer, it was on a family visit to Poland that he happened to see wooden double-helical gears in operation. He bought the patent and returned to Paris to produce a

⁴⁸ Jacques Wolgensinger, *André Citroën* (Paris: Flammarion, 1991). 48.

⁴⁹ Jacques Séguéla, *80 ans de publicité Citroën et toujours 20 ans* (Paris: Hoëbeke, 1999). 74.

⁵⁰ James Michael Laux, *In First Gear: the French Automobile Industry to 1914* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1976). 128.

metal version of the innovation and develop it into a successful gearwheel-manufacturing business. The double-chevron insignia found on the radiators of Citroën vehicles is a stylized version of the gears that launched their namesake in business.⁵¹ This business, set up in 1904, grew steadily and gradually Citroën developed a name for himself as not only a talented engineer, but also a gifted promoter of his wares. By the time André became directly involved in the manufacturing of cars, the automobile industry had already become well-established in France. Better productivity and the proliferation of car manufacturers meant that, by the later 1900s, many of the original car manufacturers were struggling to compete with their rivals. It was with this in mind that Émile and Louis Mors, car manufacturing brothers with a factory in the Rue du Théâtre, approached André to become part of the company in an attempt to improve its efficiency by increasing output and publicising the car. The Mors brothers already had an impressive sporting history, having won their first race, the Paris-Saint-Malo event, in 1899, followed by victory in the Bordeaux-Biarritz, and having also been declared winners in the infamous Paris-Madrid race.⁵² However, when the French monopoly on the racing track ended with sustained competition from Italy and Germany, coinciding with a downturn in the business, the Mors brothers decided to withdraw altogether from motorsport in 1908 in order to concentrate on maximising automobile production.⁵³ Citroën, as an advocate of mass-production, was judged to be the best person to see the Mors company through this period of difficulty. Spending five years with Mors while still running his own firm, Citroën succeeded in modernising the Rue du Théâtre factories, the production of which went from ten cars a month, each of them different, to one hundred cars a month in 1913.⁵⁴ This increase was not significant enough to turn the tide for Mors, and when Citroën left in 1913, the company was still operating at a loss. This experience gave Citroën the opportunity to travel to the United States in 1912 to meet Henry Ford and learn about his system of mass production. Citroën has often been referred to as the “Henry Ford of Europe” or the “French Ford,” and it was his adoption of assembly-line production that was to

⁵¹ Jean Cadène, *L'automobile : de sa naissance à son futur* (Perpignan: Cap Béar, 2005). 115.

⁵² Laux, *In First Gear*. 126.

⁵³ Paul Smith, “La place de l’automobile dans le développement des stations,” *In Situ. Revue des patrimoines*, no. 4 (2004): 2-20. 5.

⁵⁴ Laux, *In First Gear*. 131.

transform the automobile in France into a standardized vehicle along the lines of the Model T in the United States.

The First World War was to play a substantial role in Citroën's becoming a car manufacturer. Drafted as a captain in the reserves, André quickly set about drawing up a proposal for the construction of a factory capable of building 20,000 shells a day, using the methods and techniques already in practice in his gearwheel business. This proposal found its way on to the desk of Army's Chief of Artillery, General Baquet, who immediately had Citroën removed from the army in order to fulfil his promise.⁵⁵ In 1915, André Citroën purchased thirty acres of waste ground on the Quai de Javel in Paris where he set up a state-of-the-art factory, incorporating facilities deemed to be necessary at the time including production lines, shops, canteens, and clinics.⁵⁶ Citroën, while installing the assembly-line, also endeavoured to enshrine workers' rights in his theory of mass production. While Taylorism promoted the de-skilling of the worker and the dehumanization of the workplace,⁵⁷ it was to be applied in a wide range of industrial plants between the wars.⁵⁸ Citroën in his creation of an all-encompassing production centre promoted a similar sense of paternalism that, to his mind, would see his workers reward his generosity by boosting production.⁵⁹ Citroën was a staunch defender of Taylorism and spoke about its merits on many occasions:

Lorsqu'on a choisi la production dans laquelle on entend se spécialiser, il existe pour réussir une méthode excessivement simple: elle consiste avant de commencer le travail à faire la liste de toutes les opérations que l'on peut avoir à réaliser, et lorsque cette liste est faite, à bien calculer quelle est la durée exacte de chaque opération, à voir combien de machines il faut pour l'exécuter, à placer les machines dans l'ordre prévu pour cette opération et à mettre d'autant plus de machines pour une opération que cette opération est plus longue; si on sait prévoir tout cela d'avance, la fabrication est réglée d'une façon absolument mathématique.⁶⁰

⁵⁵ Wolgensinger, *André Citroën*. 32.

⁵⁶ Pierre Dumont, *Quai de Javel, quai André Citroën* (Paris: Éditions pratiques automobiles, 1973). 5.

⁵⁷ Jackie Clarke, "Taylorism," in *French Culture and Society: The Essentials*, ed. Michael Kelly (London: Arnold, 2002). 253; See also Patrick Fridenson, "Un tournant taylorien de la société française (1904-1918)," *Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales* 42, no. 5 (1987): 1031-60. 1035.

⁵⁸ Jackie Clarke, *France in the Age of Organization: Factory, Home and Nation from the 1920s to Vichy* (New York, NY: Berghahn, 2011). 21.

⁵⁹ David Owen, "Gear Maker, Arms Maker, Car Maker: The Legacy of André Citroën," *Automobile Quarterly* Vol. 13, no. No. 2 (1975). 4.

⁶⁰ André Citroën, in Jean-Louis Loubet, "Citroën et l'innovation (1915-1996)," *Vingtième siècle. Revue d'histoire* (1998): 45-56. 47.

This adoption of the production line was a gamble taken by Citroën as it had never before been used in Europe, and, while having seen it in action in the United States, there was still no guarantee that it would be successful in France. This was the ambitious goal set out by Citroën in 1915 with the opening of his factory:

...fabriquer 10 000 obus par jour au moment où l'ensemble des arsenaux nationaux ne peuvent dépasser 4 000 pièces quotidiennes. Pour un tel bond en avant, Citroën envisage d'installer une usine moderne sur le quai de Javel à Paris, de créer un bâtiment d'un seul tenant, sans étage comme chez Ford afin de permettre un meilleur flux de production.⁶¹

Financed by the army, Citroën set about producing shells, and while at the start production was slow, at 1,500 shells per day, this output gradually grew to 10,000 the following year. 1918 saw Citroën employ 18,000 workers, almost half of whom were female, and produce a maximum daily output of 35,000 shells.⁶² By the end of the war, Citroën's factory had produced 20 million shells, which was more than the other major manufacturers combined.⁶³ Citroën had also generated enormous profits for his company,⁶⁴ money which he used to convert his modern factory in Quai de Javel into a car manufacturing plant. Such developments remind us of the previously noted strong link between war and technology in Futurist theory. The increased use of technology during the First World War served as the catalyst for a major transformation in industrial production methods and thus facilitated the car's development. While the war had consolidated the positions of the larger manufacturers in France, with the use of their facilities for the construction of arms, and, to a lesser extent, vehicles, it had at the same time sounded the death knell for the smaller producers, who were already struggling to keep up with rates of output prior to 1914.⁶⁵ These smaller businesses were requisitioned during the war and, without adequate funding, were unable to continue in its aftermath. 1919 saw the emergence of intense competition between what were to become the giants of the motor industry. Citroën, Renault, Peugeot and Berliet were the firms to benefit most from the war, and the following years saw attempts to either grow in the motoring

⁶¹ Ibid. 46.

⁶² Yves Cohen, "The Modernization of Production in the French Automobile Industry between the Wars: A Photographic Essay," *The Business History Review* 65, no. 4 (1991): 754-80. 759.

⁶³ "Citroën : 20 millions d'obus, Renault : 8.6 millions, Peugeot : 6 millions, Berliet : 6 millions." See Jean-Louis Loubet, *Histoire de l'automobile française* (Paris: Seuil, 2001). 75.

⁶⁴ Michael Stephen Smith, *The Emergence of Modern Business Enterprise in France, 1800-1930*, vol. 49 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006). 406.

⁶⁵ Sylvie Schweitzer, "Rationalization of the Factory, Center of Industrial Society: The Ideas of André Citroën," *International Journal of Political Economy* 24, no. 4 (1994): 11-34. 27.

field or, in the case of Berliet, to try to survive a series of misjudgements which saw this company go into liquidation in the early Twenties.⁶⁶

Adopting the principles of Taylorism acquired during his trip to Detroit, Citroën announced that “l’auto doit être un instrument de travail et de plaisir pour chacun.”⁶⁷ He accompanied this statement with the production of his Citroën A, which was released in 1919. He concentrated on the production of one car, available at a lower price than that of his competitors, as he embarked on a marketing campaign aimed at helping the public discover the delights of the automobile. He, thereby portrayed himself as a liberator, and an automobile manufacturer intent on opening up the automobile market, thus boosting his sales figures. The inauguration of the Traction Avant proved to be the culmination of his work, as it was an attractive, reliable car available to a larger market than previously possible. It is, however, the way in which Citroën marketed his cars, and indeed automobility in general, that is most noteworthy. His stated aim to place the car within the grasp of all was based on a campaign associating the automobile with aspects of modern France. André Citroën commodified the car in such a way that he made it an object of desire for a wider audience than ever before. The automobile became fetishized by larger numbers of people who, unable to purchase one, were bathed in a rhetoric revolving around speed, mobility and modernity, as Citroën presented the car to the media in a series of forms.

2.2.2 The Early Cars

While mechanically the Type A, Citroën’s first car, did not differ greatly from other cars of the time, it stood out in its accessories. Mass production meant that it was more economical to fix a lot of extras to every car rather than fulfil the whims of each individual buyer. Electric lighting and an electric self-starter were provided along with a soft top, a spare wheel and a host of other items at no extra charge.⁶⁸ The initial planned price of 7,250 francs was significantly cheaper than that of any other car available at the time and stimulated a huge response from the public, eager to become motorized. Citroën received over 16,000 orders within two weeks of the

⁶⁶ Pierre Dockès, “Les recettes fordistes et les marmites de l’histoire (1907-1993),” *Revue économique* (1993): 485-528. 504.

⁶⁷ Séguéla, *80 ans de publicité Citroën*. 69.

⁶⁸ Jean Panhard, “Petite histoire de l’automobile en France,” *Culture technique* “Les transports”, no. 19 (1989): 29-42. 3.

announcement that this car would go into production; the company reached its target of 30,000 orders well before the first models were wheeled out of the factory.⁶⁹ Well-known as a gambler,⁷⁰ André decided to accept orders for a vehicle which was yet to be actually built, and any evaluations of costs and output were at best estimates based on information received from Ford and also gleaned from experience of assembly-line production throughout the war. While interest was immense, production did not initially go as planned. Original output targets of one hundred cars per day were not realized, with factories averaging only thirty cars a day for the first two years. This was still a higher output than any other French manufacturing firm, but it did, however, mean a steep rise in the price of the Type A, which climbed to 12,500 francs in 1920, a price which was still viewed as reasonable considering all of the extras included.⁷¹

These problems notwithstanding, Citroën's sense of marketing came to the fore. The launch of the Type A had been preceded by weeks of carefully deliberate rumour-mongering, and at the 1919 Salon de l'Automobile, he parked 50 Type As outside the gates of the Salle d'Exposition, readily available for test-driving.⁷² The Salon was now not merely a means for people to discover new cars, for Citroën was using it as a veritable *support publicitaire*. A Type B and Type C followed this first foray into the automobile market, and, as it was easier to improve an already established vehicle rather than build a new one, each of these models was gradually enhanced. The Fordist practice of following the alphabet was expanded to incorporate these developments; thus, a B2 emerged in 1922, which was improved upon with the B12 in 1925, and then the B14 in 1926.

The Type C or 5CV produced in 1922 was an attempt by Citroën to extend his market to include female drivers. The Type C and Type C2 which were to emerge two years later were consequently smaller and more manoeuvrable than their predecessors. These two-seaters had an electric starter fitted as standard and were advertised as especially suitable for "la femme moderne." Initially only available in bright yellow, the new model gradually became known as "Le Petit Citron", a nickname that André must surely have considered when deciding on the colour for

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ John Reynolds, *André Citroën: the Henry Ford of France* (New York, NY: St. Martin's Press, 1996). 135.

⁷¹ Wolgensinger, *André Citroën*. 130.

⁷² Séguéla, *80 ans de publicité Citroën*. 194.

this car.⁷³ As previously, Citroën showed a keen eye for marketing, and the C series of cars turned out to be a considerable success, running until 1932, during which time over 360,000 cars were built.⁷⁴

The Citroën C was replaced in 1932 by another powerful small car which had been making a name for itself on the motor testing track of Montlhéry, as this was another means utilized by Citroën to increase interest in his vehicles.⁷⁵ Indeed, Citroën in the Twenties and early Thirties availed of an array of media to publicize his cars. As already mentioned, this began in 1919 with the launch of the Type A, but this “controlled leak” along with the use of the Salon de l’Automobile were early examples of Citroën’s attempts to stimulate the French public’s perception of the car and of Citroën the man. The launch of each new version of a Citroën was preceded by a series of rumours, carefully allowed to escape from Quai de Javel about the maximum speed or the reliability of the car. Each launch was also accompanied by a full-page advertisement in the Parisian dailies. Thus began Citroën’s attempt to create an environment within which the car would become more popular and thus more desired. After-sale service became part of the automobile-selling business as Citroën set up 400 car dealers throughout France.⁷⁶ Once again, this was the adoption of the American mass marketing approach which had proved so successful. Paying for purchases in instalments was also promoted, as Citroën attempted to open the market to as wide an audience as possible.

Le service, c’est d’abord la vente : dans chaque garage, le personnel est chargé de vendre, mais aussi de prospecter les clients potentiels. Le service est aussi l’aide à la vente, grâce au crédit, une pratique courante aux Etats-Unis mais encore mal aimé en France. Ventes à crédit chez Citroën 5% en 1926, 14% en 1928 et 30% en 1930. Le service c’est enfin l’après-vente, l’entretien et la réparation automobiles. L’un des premiers à utiliser la publicité.⁷⁷

2.2.3 Citroën and the Media

The familiarization process with the French public extended to many aspects of marketing. Citroën promoted the car, and underlined its desirability through a close association with modernity which embraced the newest means of advertising. The

⁷³ Jonathan Wood, *The Citroën* (Princes Risborough: Shire, 1993). 5.

⁷⁴ Steven Parissien, *The Life of the Automobile: A New History of the Motor Car* (London: Atlantic Books, 2013). 98.

⁷⁵ Jacques Wolgensinger, *Citroën : une vie à quitte ou double* (Paris: Arthaud, 1996). 54.

⁷⁶ Ibid. 50.

⁷⁷ Loubet, *Histoire de l’automobile française*. 105.

name Citroën was written out in skywriting over Paris in 1922, when this new form of advertising had just been invented. [Figure 3] Citroën famously in 1924 illuminated his name on the Eiffel tower using 250,000 light bulbs [Figure 4]:

Et puis, c'était inévitable, il y eut la tour Eiffel. Elle avait toujours été pour Citroën le symbole du modernisme et du progrès. Déjà, pour vanter la robustesse de la « tout acier » il avait fait paraître des publicités représentant la tour. Alors, quand Fernando Jacopozzi, ce « fou des lampes », lui eut proposé d'écrire, grâce à la Fée électricité, son nom en lettres de feu sur la tour Eiffel, il n'avait pas hésité longtemps.⁷⁸

It was purported that it was these lights that guided Charles Lindbergh on his pioneering trans-Atlantic flight which was to land in Paris. Citroën seized upon this opportunity strengthen his links with modernity by inviting Lindbergh to the Quai de Javel.⁷⁹ Citroën also made the most of the occasion to become associated with a further modern symbol by inviting Gaumont to film his introduction of Lindbergh to his factory workers. It was the meeting of air and road travel, and also the meeting of the working classes with what the future could possibly hold.⁸⁰ This was the conscious creation of an atmosphere in which modernity could be embraced. American ways epitomized by Lindbergh's heroic solo flight were welcomed as mobility in all its forms was honoured. The filming of the jovial party lent itself to the atmosphere and helped create an aura of technical revolution, with an additional aura of democratization, within which symbols of modernity were being made more accessible. Whether this was true or not was immaterial; Citroën was creating an atmosphere in which his automobiles were symbols, symbols of modernity, of mobility, and of something to which the man and woman could aspire. [Figure 5] He was attempting to democratize a vehicle which remained in the twenties the domain of the upper and middle classes, but which was gradually being seen as an attainable commodity by the lower classes too.

⁷⁸ Wolgensinger, *André Citroën*. 52.

⁷⁹ Séguéla, *80 ans de publicité Citroën*. 10.

⁸⁰ Wolgensinger, *André Citroën*. 54

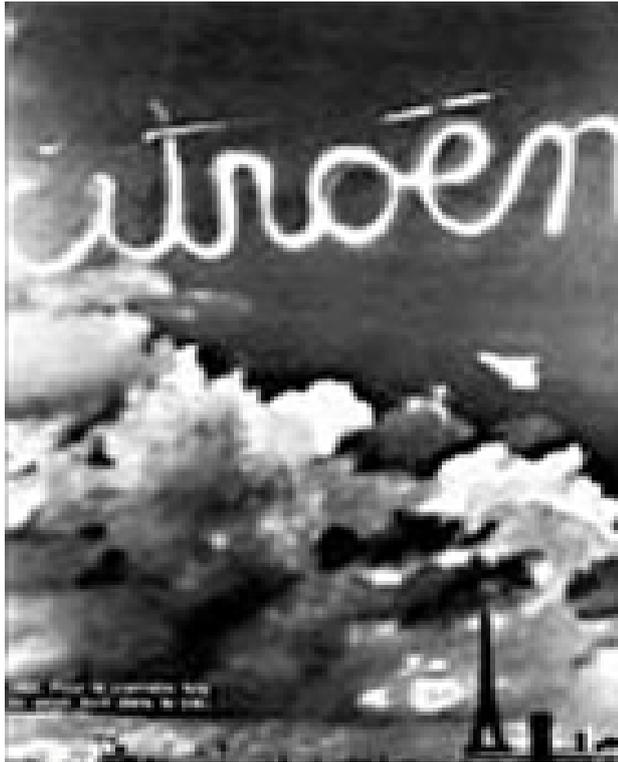


Figure 3. Citroën Advertising⁸¹

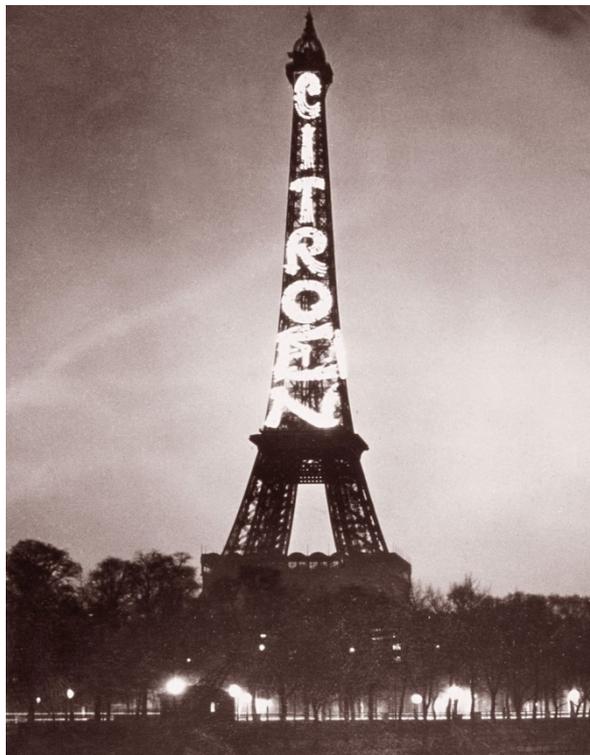


Figure 4. Citroën Advertising⁸²

⁸¹ <http://www.blog.leschevrons.fr/dotclear/index.php?tag/HistoireFigure>

⁸² www.retronaut.com/2012/01/eiffel-tower-sponsored-by-citreon-1925/

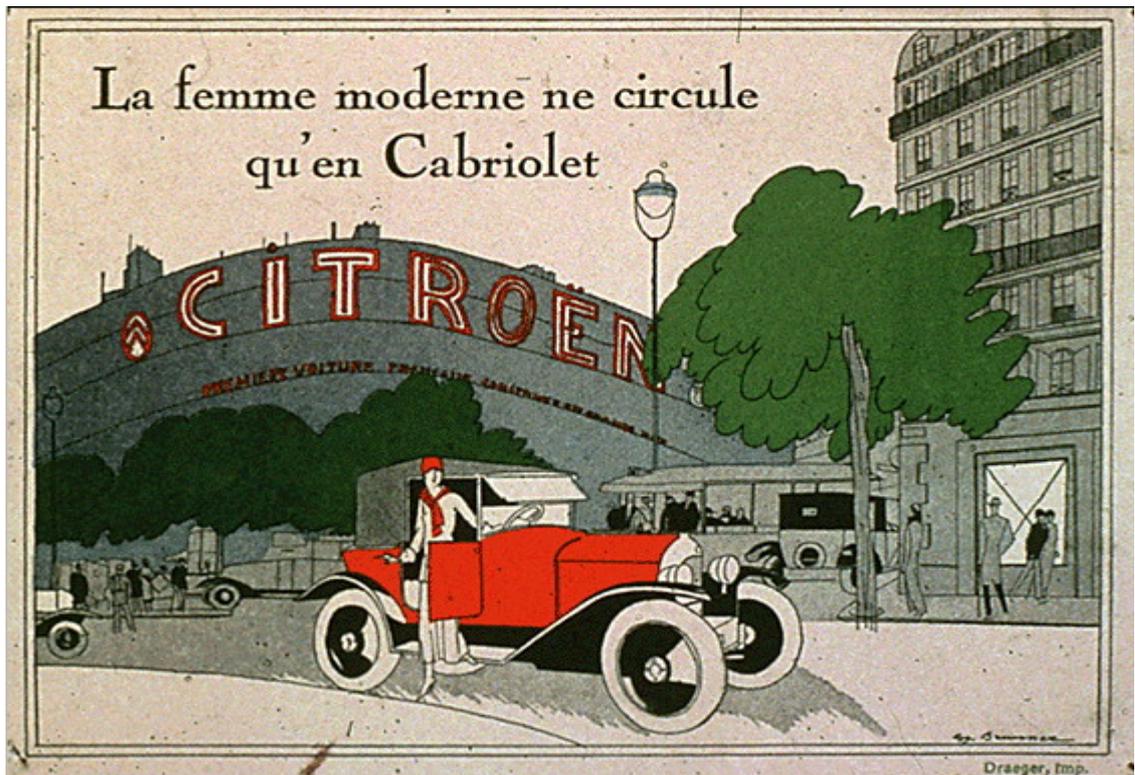


Figure 5. The modern motorized woman⁸³

While his stated aim was to democratize the car, the steps taken by Citroën in its promotion suggest otherwise. By closely allying the automobile to other forms of modernity, he established the car as another totem of modern France. David Gartman suggests that the emergence and continuing success of aviation had a direct impact on the growth and design of cars:

But this airplane obsession drastically intensified in the late 1920s, when Lindbergh's trans-Atlantic flight cemented in the public mind the association of aviation with progress, excitement and adventure. Manufacturers of luxury autos tapped these meanings visually by giving the smooth, integrated look of flight to the surface of cars.⁸⁴

While Charles Lindbergh may have been considered to be one of the “people”, he also became associated with and admired by different classes in society through engaging with modernity. Michel Rachline describes Citroën's success in welcoming

⁸³ http://www.citroen-5hp.ch/fr/L_Histoire.htm

⁸⁴ David Gartman, *Auto Opium: A Social History of American Automobile Design* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1994). 118.

Lindbergh to the Quai de Javel factory as a “coup de maître”, as he describes his marketing process as a series of moves to “séduire, attirer, conquérir, informer”.⁸⁵ Citroën’s links with aviation also strengthened the impact of the skywriting of his own name over the city of Paris. Indeed, the *coup* of having his name illuminated on the side of the Eiffel tower is also indicative of this strong fetishizing of the modern. This proclivity was also evident in Citroën’s perception of the role of the car in society. Announcing that he wanted to “satisfaire les fantaisies de chacun”,⁸⁶ Citroën highlighted the desirability of the automobile. In a process which was purported to make the automobile more accessible, Citroën effectively added to the exchange-value of the car by strongly fetishizing it.

As explored in Chapter 1, Citroën also engaged in the fetishizing of the surplus capacity of the car; more specifically, he promoted his own vehicles through widely publicized special tests which he organized for his vehicles on the racetrack of Monthléry.⁸⁷ A Citroën 6 broke a number of speed and endurance records on 22 October 1931 and was baptized “Rosalie” in honour of that day’s saint.⁸⁸ While Citroën was not an early participant in motor racing, the choice of a racetrack to showcase the abilities of the new Citroën is significant. The association with a saint is also suggestive of a further fetishizing of the car. Broadly publicising its ability to complete a huge number of laps at high speeds is indicative of how the use-value of the car was overstated by Citroën thus adding to its associated phantasmagoria. Citroën furthered this valorization of the surplus ability of the car through the inauguration of the trans-Saharan and trans-African raids which will now be discussed.

2.2.4 Citroën Expeditions in Africa

André Citroën’s commitment to modernity, and his stated aim of satisfying the fantasies of all, was a strategy that afforded him a lot of publicity. In emphasizing the modern aspect of his vehicles he kept himself and his marque to the fore in the media and thus kept his brand in the public eye. In the aftermath of the First World War, he initiated a large public relations exercise with the decision to demonstrate his vehicles’ ability in the colonies. The timing of this decision was particularly

⁸⁵ Michel Rachline, *La genèse d'une automobile* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1992). 63.

⁸⁶ Silvain Reiner, *Des moteurs et des hommes* (Paris: Fayard, 1958). 63.

⁸⁷ Wolgensinger, *André Citroën*. 54.

⁸⁸ This might also be considered an example of the link between the automobile and the divine.

significant. France, having emerged victorious yet devastated from the war, embarked on a policy of promotion of its colonies. This policy was to increase awareness within the *métropole* of French overseas possessions. The reasons for this decision were twofold and contradictory as France decided to celebrate its accession to the position of a major imperial power. For, on the one hand, the French Empire had reached new heights in terms of the number and extent of its colonies in the wake of the Versailles Treaty and this was something to be celebrated in *l'Hexagone*.⁸⁹ However, the war also provided glimpses of a new world power in the form of the United States, whose entry into the war ultimately defined its outcome. In the face of this new force, France took steps to strengthen its links with its colonies by making its citizens more aware of its territories outside Europe. Ellen Furlough consequently suggests that the Colonial Exposition:

...came at a moment in France of heightened attempts by pro-empire individuals and groups, along with the French government, to represent the colonies as an essential part of Greater France (*la plus grande France*). No longer envisioned as a prolongation of French space overseas, Greater France in the interwar period signified an aggregate of *petit pays* marked by “unity in diversity.” This concept, as historian Gary Wilder puts it, both “reflected the confidence of an organized empire at the height of its power” and “revealed the anxiety of a colonial project ... facing an imminent crisis of colonial authority.” The elaboration of Greater France after World War I corresponded to French concerns about national security and economic regeneration. The colonies were seen as an economic bulwark as well as a reservoir of labor and military goods.⁹⁰

Thus, in Citroën’s decision to launch his cars on highly mediatized trips into Africa and Indo-China, he was taking advantage of the political situation of the time to associate his vehicles with the modernizing movement of the nation.

The impetus for Citroën’s interest in colonial expeditions came in 1920 with the acquisition of the patent from Russian-based engineer Adolphe Kégresse, who had worked for Tsar Nicholas II from 1906 to 1917, for his half-track caterpillar system.⁹¹ This involved attaching a rubber belt to a set of two wheels on each side of the rear axle of Citroën Model A and Model B cars. This “auto-chenille” was now equipped to brave the harshest territory in North Africa, which included sand dunes

⁸⁹ Philip Dine, *Sport and Identity in France: Practices, Locations, Representations* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2012). 177.

⁹⁰ Ellen Furlough, “Une leçon des choses: Tourism, Empire, and the Nation in Interwar France,” *French Historical Studies* 25, no. 3 (2002): 441-73. 441.

⁹¹ Christian Pociello and Daniel Denis, *A l'école de l'aventure : pratiques sportives de plein air et idéologie de la conquête du monde : 1890-1940* (Voiron: Presses universitaires du sport, 2000). 149.

and rocky terrain. Citroën's first assault on the desert saw Georges-Marie Haardt, director-general of the Citroën factories at the time, and Louis Audouin-Dubreuil lead a team of 10 companions, which included military personnel, geographers and a film crew, on an expedition scheduled to leave Touggourt in Algeria in December 1922 and arrive in Timbuktu, in the French Sudan, some 20 days later in January 1923.⁹²

André Citroën ensured that the expedition's preparation and its subsequent success were extensively covered in the national media. Citroën carried out well-publicized testing of the system in the sand dunes in Arcachon near Bordeaux, which culminated in the successful ascent of the Dune du Pyla. [Figure 6] A short film of the Citroën auto-chenille was also released. Entitled "Arcachon, le tourisme de l'avenir avec les voitures Citroën", the film by Pathé-Gaumont showed two Citroën half-tracks emerge from the hotel Régina in Bordeaux, each carrying five passengers and a driver. The two cars proceed to descend the steep steps leading to the street. An intertitle explains the scene:

Arcachon – France...

Le Tourisme de l'Avenir

Des voitures CITROËN munies du propulseur KÉGRESSE HINSTIN, venues par la route de Paris à Arcachon, font la joie des touristes de "l'HOTEL RÉGINA" que peuvent excursionner d'une façon inédite dans les ravissants paysages du PYLA.⁹³

The cars are filmed bringing their passengers to the Arcachon dunes, driving in the countryside, climbing and descending sand dunes and driving into the water from the beach before returning to the city, going back up the steps and entering the hotel. A picture of one the Citroën auto-chenilles also appears on the front page of the local newspaper, *La Petite Gironde*, with the title "Une maison qui voyage." The picture shows the Citroën pulling a large trailer parked in front of the Grand Théâtre.⁹⁴

⁹² Jacques Wolgensinger, *Raid Afrique* (Paris: Flammarion, 1974). 59.

⁹³ Citroën, *Arcachon, le tourisme de l'avenir avec les voitures*, (Bordeaux: Pathé-Gaumont, 1921), film. <http://villegiature.gironde.fr/?id=072-regina-chenilles> (accessed December 2013).

⁹⁴ *La Petite Gironde*, 11 septembre 1921. http://villegiature.gironde.fr/?id=072-regina-chenilles&pattern=cms_viewer_v2.xml&img_num=1 (accessed December 2013).

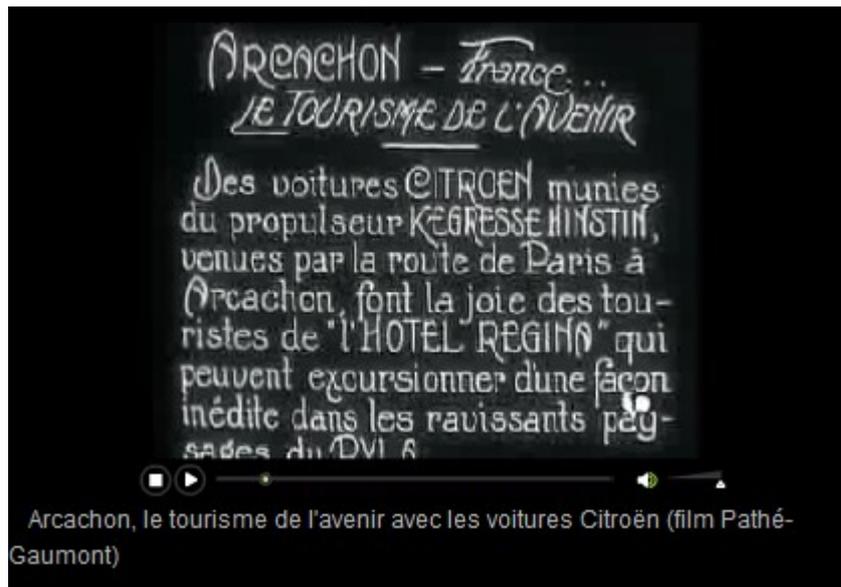


Figure 6. Arcachon, le tourisme de l’avenir avec les voitures Citroën⁹⁵

The “Première Traversée du Sahara” consisted of five vehicles. It left Touggourt on 17 December 1922 and arrived in Timbuktu on 6 January 1923. Upon its successful arrival at its destination, the Citroën team symbolically handed over the mail, an act which strengthened the link between the expedition and the state. By carrying out this function, the Citroën team was, in effect, acting in France’s name, while the expedition was also seen to embody the values of industrial rationality, as its vehicles travelled through African communities, in the process offering an image of renewed national dynamism:

The will toward the values of speed and endurance embodied by the automobile, capable of overcoming the hardship of the Saharan desert, galvanized aspirations of revitalizing the French national body, still traumatized by the effects of the war.⁹⁶

The automobile thus had a central role to play in the imperial project, as its surplus-capacities, in this instance the speed and endurance which provided the ability to cross the barren territory of the Saharan desert, was portrayed as a means of “civilizing” the colonies. These capacities, which had earlier been so important in motor racing, were now to serve further as they were viewed as values which could help France recover some of its prestige in the post-war era.

⁹⁵ <http://villegiature.gironde.fr/?id=072-regina-chenilles>

⁹⁶ Peter J. Bloom, *French Colonial Documentary: Mythologies of Humanitarianism* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2008). 74.

The initial forays into the Saharan desert were done as military exercises. These were carried out in the wake of a number of attacks by local tribes on colonial forces. The early Citroën half-tracks were militarized, each carrying heavy machine guns. The members of the initial Citroën expedition were not chosen randomly as certain members had significant military experience, including Lieutenant Louis Audouin-Dubreuil, the joint leader of the three *Croisières*, and Commander Bettembourg, who functioned as military advisor on the first two expeditions. It was their experience with automobile-led military detachments that led to their being chosen. The choice of Georges-Marie Haardt as joint leader of the expeditions with Audouin-Dubreuil was significant also. As director-general of the Quai de Javel factory, Haardt was an example of how an executive could be promoted to take part in this ground-breaking expedition.⁹⁷

The success of the mission had a double impact: it proved the ability of automobiles to cross hostile terrain previously limited to the camel; and it did so in a Citroën, thereby promoting this brand over and above the others. The triumph of the expedition had a strong commercial impact, with Citroën's sales rising by 50% in 1923.⁹⁸ In the cultural sphere, the expedition was supported by a short documentary film that was shown throughout France, while an account of the voyage written by Haardt and Audouin-Dubreuil was published. André Citroën is presented in *La première traversée du Sahara en automobile : de Touggourt à Tombouctou par l'Atlantide* (1923) as a ground-breaking pioneer whose goal was the promotion of the nation and technology. [Figure 7] In the preface to the volume, written by Citroën himself, he makes direct reference to the colonies and to how his automobiles as purveyors of technology are capable of replacing the traditional mode of transport in the colonies, namely the camel. He also refers to his own role in this process as a duty, suggesting that the French presence in their colonies was of such importance that it was necessary for him to undertake this expedition:

Là où une voiture avec un moteur de 10 HP passait facilement grâce à la chenille, il fallait mettre sur une voiture à roues un moteur beaucoup plus puissant pour affronter ces mêmes obstacles et encore n'arrivait-elle à les vaincre qu'avec l'aide du chameau ou des hommes ; ce qui prouvait que la chenille pouvait être envisagée, pour l'instant, comme le seul moyen pratique, économique et sûr pour les transports sahariens.

⁹⁷ Séguéla, *80 ans de publicité Citroën*. 32.

⁹⁸ Wolgensinger, *Raid Afrique*. 122.

C'est alors que des coloniaux, des militaires, des explorateurs nous posèrent le problème de la traversée du Sahara.

L'intérêt d'une telle expérience me parut si grand que je considérai comme un véritable devoir de la tenter. L'expédition Touggourt-Tombouctou était décidée; il restait à la préparer.⁹⁹



Figure 7. *La première traversée du Sahara en automobile : de Touggourt à Tombouctou par l'Atlantide*¹⁰⁰

This automotive mission turned what was an exploratory expedition of African colonies into an effective advertizing tool. While the expedition was used by Citroën to boost his company's profile, the government welcomed the efforts of a privateer to facilitate access to the colonies. With the shared political goal of consolidating *la plus grande France*, the government welcomed this attempt by Citroën to display that not only was it possible for citizens to traverse the colonies but that it was feasible using French innovations. This partnership between the state and Citroën proved to be mutually beneficial and, in a highly publicized lead-up to

⁹⁹ Georges-Marie Haardt and Louis Audouin-Dubreuil, *La première traversée du Sahara en automobile : de Touggourt à Tombouctou par l'Atlantide* (Paris: Plon, 1923). 13-14.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

the event, André Citroën accompanied the expedition leaders to the Palais de l'Élysée to explain to the President of the Republic, Alexandre Millerand, the route to be taken by the group, as Haardt recollects:

Je repasse mes souvenirs des derniers jours. Le 1^{er} décembre, ma visite, accompagné de M. André Citroën, au Président de la République qui, dans une audience très longue, se renseigna minutieusement, carte en mains, sur tous les détails d'organisation de l'expédition et adressa à ses membres les vœux les plus chaleureux.¹⁰¹

La première traversée du Sahara en automobile is a 343-page publication which describes in detail the expedition and the return journey across the Sahara. While much of the book deals with the daily events and obstacles to be overcome in such uncharted territory, a colonial undertone runs throughout the work as reference is regularly made to France's civilizing mission in the colonies. As the journal highlights the beauty of this apparently untamed land, it also makes reference to the modernizing aspect of the expedition. The beauty of the scenery is in the foreground, but this is, first and foremost, the context within which the vehicle functions at its optimum level. This explicit valorising of the modern, of the technical, implicitly draws attention to the colonial aspect of the journey, as the sound of progress echoes through the desert:

Il serait injuste que le seul côté pittoresque du voyage sollicitât l'attention du lecteur. A la splendeur des sites entrevus, des souvenirs rencontrés, doit se mêler sans cesse le bruit de nos moteurs. Cela aussi a sa beauté; c'est le chant du progrès, c'est le rythme de l'effort humain affirmant sa victoire sur les éléments. Notre grand désir serait que le récit de notre voyage puisse prendre place au livre d'or de l'industrie française.¹⁰²

There is little or no overt mention of the word "colony" in the text, yet the colonial aspect of the mission is evident throughout. The support received from the Ministry for the Colonies is clearly noted and by highlighting the state's position on the expedition, the authors do accord a certain importance to the colonial issue. However, it is in the valorising of the modernity represented by the expedition that the text implies the importance of the *Patrie* in the development of these less fortunate regions and, crucially, its own expansion:

¹⁰¹ Ibid. 28.

¹⁰² Ibid. 6.

L'auto-chenille a eu raison du désert. Grace à elle l'avion et le rail vont venir. Leur triple et féconde alliance va pousser au-delà de l'Équateur, jusqu'au Congo, les frontières de la patrie.¹⁰³

References to the “natives” (*indigènes*) encountered in the course of this expedition are imbued with the self-promoting attitude of the colonial *mission civilisatrice*. Interaction is seen as a novelty, as an experiment in the introduction to technological modernity of a people heretofore uncivilized. These references help to reinforce the impression that this colonial mission was being carried out also for the good of the lands crossed. This interaction, at times, can be seen in terms of colonial cliché, the age-old exchanging of trinkets *à la* Columbus:

Les Touareg nous entourent. Distribution de cadeaux à ces grands pillards du désert qui trouvent très naturel ce que nous leur offrons. Autrefois, avant que nous soyons les maîtres du pays, ils nous auraient massacrés pour les prendre eux-mêmes.¹⁰⁴

The use of words such as “pillards” and “massacre” serves to highlight the beneficial impact of the French presence in Africa; since the colonizers have become “les maîtres du pays,” the natives have not only acquired the civilisation to appreciate the gifts bestowed upon them by their masters, but have also ceased to be a threat to the latter.

The film of the raid indulged in clichés to emphasize the modernizing effort of the expedition. [Figure 8] The opening intertitles of *La Traversée du Sahara* thus begin with the following statement:

From the dawn of antiquity, communication across the desert could only be assured by camel-driven caravans... Which slowly crossed the immense desert landscape... The vast French colonial domain in Africa requires more rapid communication... This is being made possible by courageous men, with the help of the *auto-chenilles*.¹⁰⁵

These seemingly authoritative statements are accompanied by a series of shots incorporating camels and vast expanses of desert, penetrated by the half-track vehicles. The ability of the half-tracks to cross the desert easily and efficiently is contrasted with the slow meandering progress of camel-powered transit. The beneficial impact of the automobile, particularly on the promotion of a modern way of life, is also highlighted:

¹⁰³ Ibid. 307.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid. 97.

¹⁰⁵ Cited in Bloom, *French Colonial Documentary*. 75.

Rapid communication facilitated the efficient deployment of French troops, the promotion of French hygienic and medical techniques, mail service, and French educational efforts based on the “universality” of the French language. Short segments throughout the film illustrate these efforts.¹⁰⁶

La Traversée du Sahara proved a box-office success. It introduced the cinema-going public to the North African colonies, and presented the civilizing work being carried out there as well as the indelible mark being left by the automobile. The automobile thus served as a powerful vehicle to sell this modern image of the colonizer. Its ability to reach these untamed territories and “civilize” them was important as it strengthened France’s actual and symbolic role in Africa.

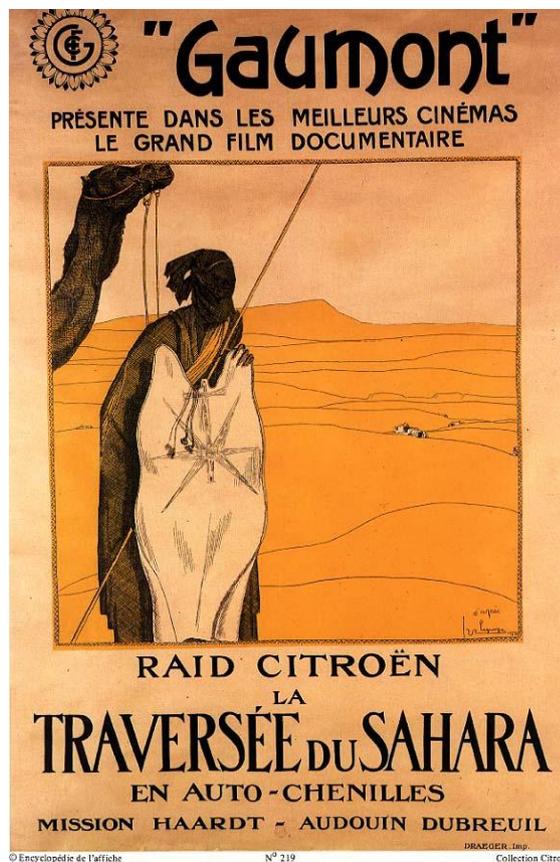


Figure 8. *La première traversée du Sahara en auto-chenilles*¹⁰⁷

In February 1923, André Citroën triumphantly travelled to Africa to welcome the expedition as it arrived back into Touggourt. There he greeted them with a congratulatory telegram from the president of the Republic.¹⁰⁸ The written

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ *La première traversée du Sahara en auto-chenilles*

¹⁰⁸ Wolgensinger, *Raid Afrique*. 68.

account of the expedition, which was published in 1923 and which serves as an excellent primary source in the investigation of prevailing attitudes, perhaps fittingly finishes with the statement that one of the cars, the “Scarabée d’or,”¹⁰⁹ has been housed in the Army Museum at the Invalides. That one of the vehicles used to cross the Sahara was welcomed and subsequently housed in the Invalides is once again indicative of the military nature of the expedition and of its aspirations to triumphal national *grandeur*. With the memory of the First World War still fresh, the choice of the Invalides is highly significant as it places Citroën’s raid on a par with previous military successes achieved by the nation. This entrepreneur with his privately purchased caterpillar wheels had made the most of contemporary politics to promote the colonies and thus received ample support from the authorities. The government, in turn, having observed that the Citroën expedition effectively crossed and symbolically united the French African territories, made the most of the publicity this garnered to promote overseas France within the Hexagon:

Cette réussite concrétisait la conviction chère à des coloniaux acharnés que la France pouvait, par ses propres moyens, maîtriser la vaste étendue du Sahara – une barrière stratégique et administrative entre les deux parties de l’Empire africain français – et ainsi accélérer le processus de transformation de cet Empire en une union solide et stable.¹¹⁰

The success of the military expedition was enough to persuade Citroën to attempt to promote the automobile in the colonies in a civilian context. However, this patriotically commercial engagement was itself part of a broader societal awakening to the colonies at this time.

2.2.5 La Croisière Noire

In much the same vein as the first trans-Saharan mission, the *Croisière Noire*, which lasted from October 1924 to June 1925, was used by Citroën as a vehicle for promoting automotive travel and technology. Perhaps what set it aside from other

¹⁰⁹ The cars each had a name, “Toutes les cinq sont, en effet, blasonnées comme l’étaient jadis les palefrois des chevaliers partant pour la croisade, comme le furent pendant la guerre les avions, les autos et même les pièces d’artillerie. La première porte au “Scarabée d’or”, la seconde au “Croissant d’Argent”, la troisième à la “Tortue Volante”, la quatrième au “Bœuf Apis”, et enfin la dernière à la “Chenille Rampante.” Haardt and Audouin-Dubreuil, *La première traversée du Sahara en automobile*. 50. The naming of the vehicles in association with the Crusades from the Middle Ages is a further example of fetishizing of this civilizing mission by colonial France. Attributing to the vehicles the names of animals can be linked to the early 20th-Century animism of the car as explored earlier in this chapter.

¹¹⁰ Alison Murray, “Le tourisme Citroën au Sahara (1924-1925),” *Vingtième siècle. Revue d’histoire*, no. 68 (2000): 95-107.

raids into the desert was the public acclaim which it garnered in comparison with, among others, successful attempts by Renault to negotiate this inhospitable terrain. Renault's six-wheelers traversed the Sahara, and did so in comparable times to those of Citroën. [Figure 9] However, a lack of publicity ensured that these early Renault expeditions would remain little known.¹¹¹ The *Croisière Noire*, on the other hand, constitutes a significant chapter in the history of French colonialism. Its running was accompanied by daily accounts in the national newspapers and radio broadcasts; it was also followed up by a well-received book. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, it led to a film entitled *La Croisière Noire*, released in 1926.¹¹² [Figure 10] André Citroën's *Expédition Centre-Afrique*, as the project was also known, was the next step in the scheme to modernize the colonies. It was organized in the wake of the successful trans-Saharan crossing and its aim was to link France's North African colonies with those in West and Central Africa, as well as Madagascar. It served to mask the difficulties experienced by Citroën's other African project, CITRACIT, and became the most successful African expedition mounted by Citroën, not only because it succeeded in reaching its stated goal, but also because of the very positive publicity garnered by the "mission". As with his two previous projects, Citroën energetically sought state support for this venture. In a letter to the President, he highlighted the national interest of his project: "au point de vue national, le succès de cette deuxième mission montrera une fois de plus à l'étranger la place prépondérante prise par l'industrie française automobile dans le monde."¹¹³

¹¹¹ François Bordes, (ed.) *L'Automobile à la conquête de l'Afrique (1898-1932)* (Aix-en-Provence: Centre des Archives d'Outre-Mer, 1988). 55.

¹¹² Léon Poirier, *La croisière noire. Film de l'expédition Citroën Centre-Afrique* (France: Gaumont, 1926).

¹¹³ Alec G. Hargreaves, *Memory, Empire, and Postcolonialism: Legacies of French Colonialism* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2005). 84.



Figure 9. Renault six-wheelers ¹¹⁴

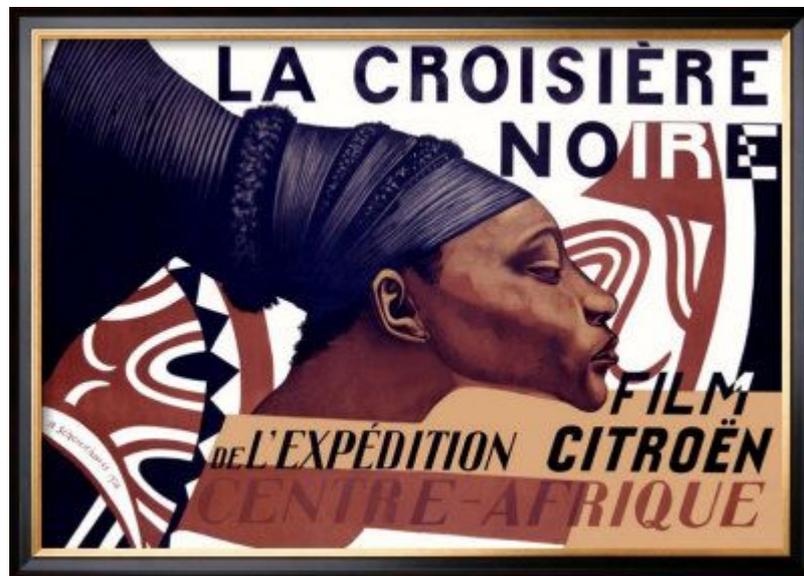


Figure 10. *La Croisière Noire* ¹¹⁵

The *Croisière Noire* left Colomb-Béchar in Algeria on 24 October 1924 and arrived at its destination of Tananarive, Madagascar on 26 July 1925. Of all the trans-African expeditions carried out in this period, it is this voyage that not only most clearly captured the imagination of the public at the time, but has also continued to do so up to the present day with the film version of the expedition still being screened on national television.¹¹⁶ The film premiered with a live orchestra at the Opéra de Paris on 2 March 1926 with, significantly, the President, Gaston

¹¹⁴ <http://images.forum-auto.com/mesimages/440499/6%20roues%20renault%205.jpg>

¹¹⁵ Poirier.

¹¹⁶ Hargreaves, *Memory, Empire, and Postcolonialism*. 92.

Doumergue, in attendance.¹¹⁷ It presented Africa as an infinitely large continent of exotic primitiveness through which the Citroën vehicles forged a way. [Figure 11, 12 & 13] It depicted the unifying action of the automobile, linking north to south and east to west. Gilbert Meynier has referred to colonial conceptions of the empire as a body needing to be activated, incapable of action without the mental ability of the supposedly superior French mind.¹¹⁸ In successfully crossing the African continent, the Citroën expedition demonstrated the capabilities of the automobile and technology as a whole to a public who saw a continent still in darkness but now ready to be shown the light of civilization. Indeed, in a twist on both Conrad's classic formulation of the African "heart of darkness" and Meynier's metaphor of the body, French technology was now bringing light to the continent's heart and thus promoting life itself. By forging a way through the colonies, the automobile was improving the functioning of that heart and thus the whole African continent. This image was apparent in the advertisements used to promote the expedition. A map of the African continent aerated by arteries spreading to all areas highlighted the life-bestowing nature of the civilizing mission. This is one of the first images to appear in the *Croisière Noire* film, with the arterial routes travelled by the automobile in the course of the expedition suggestive of the early 20th-Century animism of the car.¹¹⁹ Reference to the continent in terms of the human body had earlier been made by Moroccan entrepreneur, Gaston Gradis in his 1924 account of Renault's crossing of Africa, where he stated that the plan was to: "chercher l'axe pour former la colonne vertébrale de l'Empire."¹²⁰

¹¹⁷ Wolgensinger, *Raid Afrique*.91.

¹¹⁸ Quoted in Bloom, *French Colonial Documentary*., 91.

¹¹⁹ Poirier.

¹²⁰ Gaston Gradis, *À la recherche du grand-axe : Contribution aux études transsahariennes* (Paris: Plon, 1924). 5.

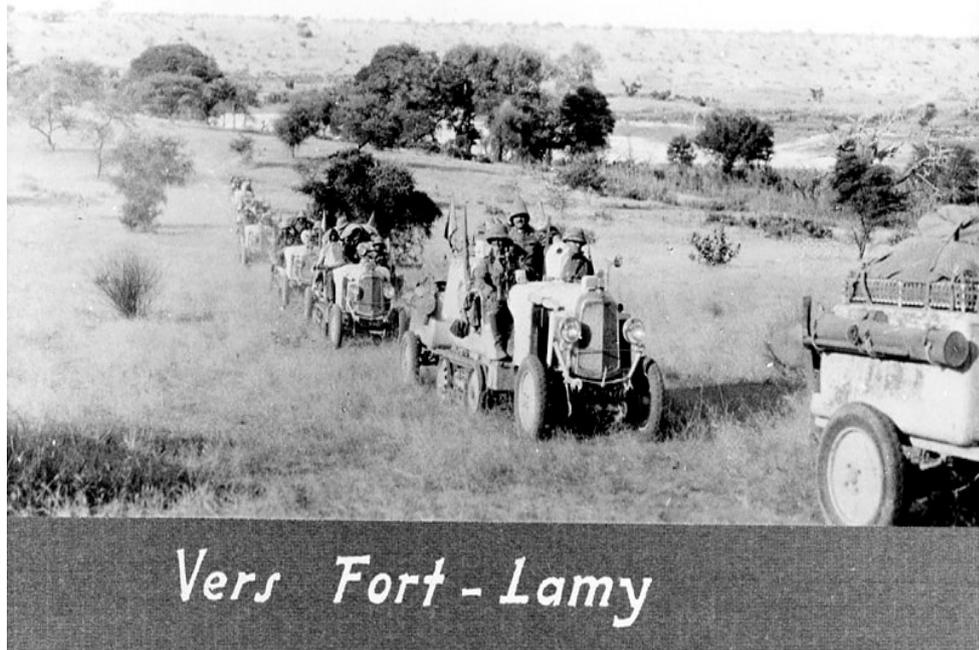


Figure 11. *La Croisière Noire*¹²¹

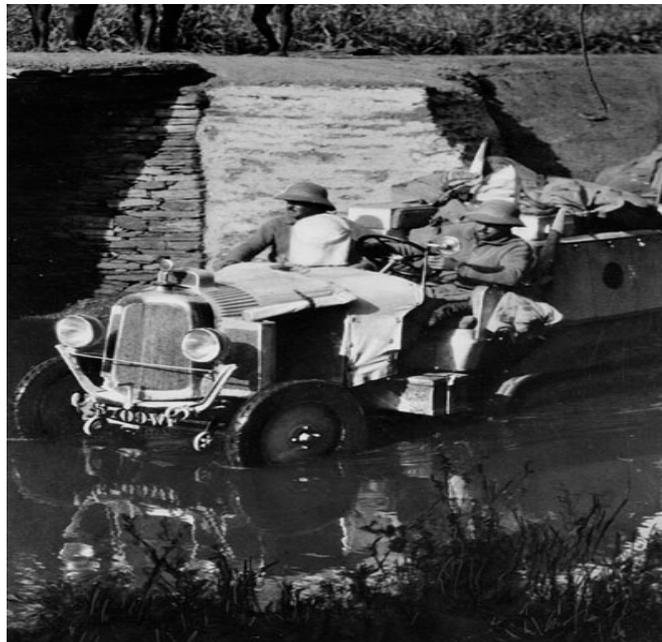


Figure 12. *La Croisière Noire*¹²²

¹²¹ Poirier.

¹²² Ibid.



Figure 13. La Croisière Noire¹²³

The public success of the *Croisière Noire* was nurtured by a series of events throughout 1926, culminating in the exhibition held at the Musée des Arts Décoratifs in the Louvre. *Le Scarabée d'or* took pride of place and was surrounded by stuffed animals and other items collected along the journey. In an adjoining room, a constant projection of images from the expedition served to place all objects found in context. Also associated with the expedition were glamorous galas at which Josephine Baker was a noted regular.¹²⁴ The mutual admiration between André Citroën and Baker originated in Citroën's presenting her with a B14 Sports Cabriolet in appreciation of her work; in response, Baker updated the lyrics of her most celebrated work, *J'ai deux amours*, singing that the two loves of her life were her country and Citroën.¹²⁵ In a direct reference to a marketing poster for the *Croisière* which used the image of a Mangbetu woman with a distinctive headdress, Baker wore a hat and hairstyle that resembled the coiffure on the poster. This celebrated fashion statement resonated strongly in affluent circles in Paris, the Mangbetu hairstyle being featured in *Vogue* magazine in 1926, and becoming fashionable, with Parisian designer Madame Agnès developing it for her wealthy clientele.¹²⁶ [Figure 14] Baker came physically to embody African culture although she herself had no direct link with it:

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Baker was a black American who moved to France in 1925 and became linked to all forms of exoticism due to the frenetic nature of her dancing. Cf. Michael Sheringham, *Parisian Fields* (London: Reaktion, 1996), 46.

¹²⁵ Wolgensinger, *André Citroën*, 55.

¹²⁶ Kenneth J. Perkins, "The Compagnie Générale Transatlantique and the development of Saharan tourism in North Africa," *The business of tourism: Place, faith, and history* (2007): 34-55, 93.

Baker's body stands for the non-western body functions in a racial signifying process in which the timeless, placeless locale of the primitive is fixed in opposition to the West and civilisation.¹²⁷

Thus African exoticism as perceived through Josephine Baker and Citroën's adopted civilizing mission were linked as both became popular in 1920s Paris.



3 A Belgian poster used to promote *La croisière noire* (1926) using the image of a Mangbetu woman with a distinctive headdress. Copyright Citroën Communication.

Figure 14. The distinctive Mangbetu headdress¹²⁸

Such was the success of the repeated expeditions into North Africa that G. Arnaud announced in a paper written for the *Annales de Géographie* in 1927 that “On peut donc confirmer que la conquête du désert saharien par l’automobile est réalisée.”¹²⁹ Not only had automobiles conquered the Sahara, the mechanical progress of the car was such that it was no longer necessary to resort to half-tracks or six-wheelers, as Arnaud proudly claims that “en janvier dernier le lieutenant Estienne a couvert en dix jours Paris - le Tchad - Niamey sur une simple 6 CV Renault.”¹³⁰ Even the safety question on desert roads seemed to be fading, as “elles [les voies centrales] n’ont guère à redouter les dissidents.”¹³¹

The Citroën expeditions served as incarnations of the French automobile industry, the emerging tourist industry and the state's geopolitical and geosymbolic

¹²⁷ Carole Sweeney, *From Fetish to Subject: Race, Modernism, and Primitivism, 1919-1935* (London: Praeger, 2004). 48.

¹²⁸ Bloom, *French Colonial Documentary*. 154.

¹²⁹ G. Arnaud, "La conquête automobile du Sahara" (paper presented at the *Annales de Géographie*, 1927). 176.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.* 175.

¹³¹ *Ibid.* 176.

ambitions. The *Croisière Noire* which traversed central Africa to finish in Madagascar was followed by the *Croisière Jaune*, which was an expedition to French possessions in Indo-China. The fact that each expedition set more distant colonies as its goal was evidence of the ever improving quality of automotive transport. The geostrategic importance of the colonies in Africa and Indo-China ensured that they became fertile advertising grounds for the Citroën brand as representations of their “civilizing” expeditions were widely distributed in France.

André Citroën, through his many innovative marketing techniques and through his close association with modernity, fostered a strong desire for the automobile which was transferred to a wider public than previously. While his stated aim was to bring the car to all, in publicising it through the most expensive and outlandish means he increased its fetishized value. It was this penchant for opulence and for taking risks that eventually brought an end to the career of André Citroën as the owner of the car brand. Citroën went bankrupt in 1933 and died shortly thereafter. His ailing company was bought by the Michelin brothers who quickly set about completing a number of projects which had been initiated by Citroën, most notably the completion and marketing of the Traction Avant, which went on to become one of the best selling cars of the interwar era. Originally tyre producers, the Michelin brothers had played an important role in the growth of the automobile in early 20th-Century France and it is to this company and its innovations that we now turn.

2.3 Les Frères Michelin

The titles of the books dedicated to Michelin are striking in how they differ from studies of most other protagonists in the story of the car. Terms included such as “adventure,” “saga,” “secret,” and “magic” are examples of this.¹³² They are revealing as they suggest that Michelin was remarkable in its attempts to publicize and sell tyres. This dynamic image of the Michelin company was nurtured by an aggressive marketing campaign. Their innovations, seen as being for the good of the

¹³² Alain Jemain and Bernard Hanon, *Michelin : un siècle de secrets* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1982).; Manufacture française des pneumatiques Michelin, *La saga du guide Michelin : de 1900 à aujourd'hui, un formidable voyage à travers le temps* (Clermont-Ferrand: Manufacture française des pneumatiques Michelin, 2004).; Olivier Darmon, *Le grand siècle de Bibendum* (Paris: Hoëbeke, 1997).; Lionel Dumond, *L'épopée Bibendum : une entreprise à l'épreuve de l'histoire* (Toulouse: Privat, 2002).

car and of tourism as a whole, put Michelin at the forefront of travel in France. Bibendum, the rotund Michelin man, is one of the world's most recognizable company symbols today; the Michelin guide remains the point of reference for French tourists; the Michelin star system in gastronomy is the pinnacle of haute cuisine.¹³³ More recently, a new culinary award has been added. Entitled the Bib Gourmand, this award is for restaurants that do not make Michelin Star standards of cooking, yet achieve a consistently high level of food.¹³⁴ The title of the award is further reference to the Michelin man. All of this and we still have not mentioned the pneumatic tyre, the invention which set this process in motion. The Michelin company played a significant part in the birth and nurturing of the car before taking over Citroën, one of France's largest manufacturing companies to oversee production of arguably the most iconic cars France has ever produced. The growth of Michelin, firstly, as a commercial enterprise, and then as a household name in France and throughout the world will be explored here. Analysis of the various marketing endeavours undertaken by the firm will show how Michelin gained a foothold in what was, at the turn of the century, a very precarious industry. *Les frères Michelin* set in motion a train of events and marketing models that were to assure the company's future and to place it firmly in the public eye.¹³⁵ These varied approaches will be analysed along with the relationship established between Michelin and its competitors, between Michelin and the government, and between Michelin and the public. Finally, the effects of the central role played by Michelin in transforming and modernising the perception of the physical geography of France will be examined.

2.3.1 Et Dieu Créa Bibendum: Marketing Michelin

Michelin's most famous marketing creation was conceived in the late 19th Century and exemplifies one of the key tropes associated with fetishizing a commodity, as it instils life into the company's tyres to create a human-like creature. Michelin's "Bibendum" was born just before the turn of the century, and has become such an iconic character that the actual details of how he came into being have become unclear. The *famille Michelin* was eager to claim its conception for themselves, as was the cartoonist employed by the brothers for the design of posters. Michelin

¹³³ Dumond, *L'épopée Bibendum*. 5.

¹³⁴ Herbert Lottman, *The Michelin Men: Driving an Empire* (New York, NY: I.B. Tauris, 2003). 270.

¹³⁵ Georges Ribeill, "From Pneumatics to Highway Logistics: André Michelin, Instigator of the Automobile Revolution, Part I," *Flux* (1991): 9-19.

claimed that at the Universal and Colonial Exhibition in Lyon in 1894 the entrance to the Michelin stand, decorated with two columns of tyres, piled high, prompted Edouard Michelin to remark to his brother: “Dis donc, s’il avait des bras et des jambes, ça ferait un bonhomme !”¹³⁶ This version of events has largely been accepted by the general public, in that it romanticizes the conception of this icon. However, the cartoonist Marius Roussillon, who worked under the pen-name “O’Galop”, and who was to be the chief designer of Michelin marketing posters throughout the early 20th Century, contended that it was through his various sketches presented to Michelin in 1898 that “Bibendum” was born.

O’Galop’s conception, based on the story of Gambrinus, the king who was said to have invented the art of brewing, was to be the source of the slogan. Gambrinus holding up a pitcher of beer and exclaiming *Nunc es bibendum*, a Latin verse from the poet Horace meaning “now is the time to drink”, was suggested by André as an addition. The first in a series of *Nunc es bibendum* posters appeared in April 1898. The slogan, from which the character derived his name, is very liberally translated into French as “*Á votre santé, le pneu Michelin boit l’obstacle.*”¹³⁷ [Figure 15] This is accompanied by an image of a nice, plump Bibendum, smoking a cigar, and giving a toast with a champagne glass full of nails, glass shards and other miscellaneous items capable of puncturing a tyre. Alongside Bibendum are “Pneus X et Y,” both of which have been punctured. They appear old, worn and unstable, apparently unable to deal with the obstacles as well as the Michelin. The Michelin character earned his name in a highly-mediatized incident when a reputed racing driver, Léon Théry, upon his triumphant arrival in the Amsterdam-Paris race, and seeing André Michelin, announced “*Et voilà Bibendum.*”¹³⁸ Once again, Michelin was able to make the most of this opportune moment to baptize his character. This personification of their own tyres has gone on to become one of the most recognized trademarks the world over.

¹³⁶ Pierre-Gabriel Gonzalez, *Bibendum : publicité et objets Michelin* (Paris: Le Collectionneur, 1995). 32.

¹³⁷ Antoine Champeaux, “Bibendum et les débuts de l’aviation (1908-1914),” *Guerres mondiales et conflits contemporains*, no. 209 (2003): 25-43. 26.

¹³⁸ Gonzalez, *Bibendum.*, 33.



Figure 15. O'Galop cartoon of Bibendum¹³⁹

As the owner of one of the world's most identifiable logos, André Michelin set about using his "bonhomme" at every available opportunity. From his rather modest beginning in poster form in 1898, Bibendum was to be drawn by a number of cartoonists. Although essentially the same character, his form moved with the times to make him relevant to and popular with each changing generation. Thus, he effectively replaced André Michelin in the public's mind as this tall, portly, smiling, bespectacled *bonhomme*, who was always there, always willing to lend a hand. In using Théry's nickname, Michelin had transposed the image of their jovial character on to their own public image.

In 1901, André Michelin began a process to make the name of Bibendum readily familiar; he took out a weekly slot in the newspaper *L'Auto-Vélo*, which was later to become *L'Auto*, and in so doing used it to familiarize the public with not only his latest products but also his mascot, who appears in all manner of guises in marketing rubber-based products:

¹³⁹http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Michelin_Poster_1898.jpg#mediaviewer/File:Michelin_Poster_1898.jpg

André dota le bonhomme (Bibendum) de la parole, lui fit pratiquer tous les sports, tous les métiers, toutes les pitreries. Il se gonfla ou se dégonfla à volonté, fuma le cigare, dansa la valse, se transforma en marionnette, parla devant le tableau noir.¹⁴⁰

Very often presented in the form of an editorial, this marketing innovation was used as a vehicle for keeping the public up-to-date with the development of automobile travel and the obstacles that it faced. In presenting itself as a provider of information and as a conveyor of public opinion, the slot pushed people to consider and think about automotive transport. The portrayal of Bibendum in comical settings served as a tool to appeal to a wider audience, attracting the curious eye to the segment, then engaging the reader with broader issues. Michelin decided on a Monday slot, and in so doing, he tapped into a much larger reading market than during the week: Mondays are traditionally the day when readers buy a newspaper to catch up on events over the weekend, including sports news and various spectacles.¹⁴¹ *Le Lundi de Michelin* began on 11 March 1901 and was to continue for thirteen years, up to the First World War. This regular slot was also a new venture in the field; up to then, advertising had been carried out on an ad-hoc basis, slots being allocated on demand and often without any real method or message to portray. *Le Lundi de Michelin* appeared for over a decade and had 690 editions, providing a strong platform to promote Michelin. This socio-cultural embedding, whereby Bibendum was portrayed in various guises with which the French public could identify, allowed for Michelin's mascot to become more recognizable and thus more accepted. The fact that not only Michelin's competitors, the British company, Dunlop, and the German firm, Continental, but also various car manufacturers, such as De Dion and Peugeot, also adopted similar marketing strategies is testament to the effectiveness of *Le Lundi de Michelin* as a vehicle for informing the public about its products.

Le Lundi de Michelin was novel in its format and also in its content. Moreover, it featured Michelin's mascot, in a plethora of different incarnations.¹⁴² It is in this context that Michelin marketed more than tyres. They advertized the phenomenon of automobility itself as *Le Lundi de Michelin* was to be the first in a long series of innovations aimed at marketing the car and, if not actually making it a commonplace commodity, at least making it familiar to all. What was to follow was

¹⁴⁰ Jemain and Hanon, *Michelin*. 54.

¹⁴¹ Darmon, *Le grand siècle de Bibendum*. 44.

¹⁴² Michelin, *La saga du guide Michelin*. 31.

the full weight of Bibendum being thrown into far-reaching activities, from the creation of signposts and campaigning for the numbering of roads, to the creation of tourist guides and a tourist office in Paris.

While *Le Lundi de Michelin* was to continue until the First World War, it was not the only source of publicity for Michelin and Bibendum. From 1911, this weekly slot was added to, as Bibendum began to appear in *Le théâtre illustré du pneu*, a supplement to the popular newspaper *L'Illustration*, which had never before allowed any form of advertising to be carried.¹⁴³ [Figure 16] Bibendum would engage with the theatrical theme in the newspaper to transmit the particular message Michelin had in mind. Very often, what appeared were forms of advice for the Michelin-user, presented from a different slant on a weekly basis. So, for instance, “Être ou ne pas être... antidérapant” and “Tartuffe ou la multiplication des... pannes” show Bibendum assuming the persona of the main character in these celebrated works and explaining how to get the best out of the Michelin tyre.¹⁴⁴ [Figure 17 & 18] There was a moral to be found in each Michelin story. These little cartoons sought to explain any perceived deficiencies in the Michelin tyre. Thus, as any problem was encountered on the roads, Bibendum would address this fault and explain what the client needed to do to avoid any further problems. The use of well-known classics also pushed the audience to identify with Bibendum. Bibendum’s role in *Le théâtre illustré du pneu*, much like that in *L'Auto*, drew to a close on the eve of the First World War but not before providing over forty different morals to be drawn from the tragedy of a Michelin puncture.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴³ Darmon, *Le grand siècle de Bibendum*. 47.

¹⁴⁴ Michelin, *Recueil. Documents techniques et publicitaires* (Clermont-Ferrand: Michelin et cie, 1908). 2.

¹⁴⁵ Darmon, *Le grand siècle de Bibendum*. 47.

MES ALBUMS

 Vous connaissez sans doute le premier.
 Le second vient de naître.
 Il renferme, comme son aîné, 20 Tableaux de mon *Théâtre du Pneu*, tout remplis de fructueux conseils, et qui seront pour les Automobilistes source de *Plaisir* et d'*Économie*.

THÉÂTRE ILLUSTRÉ DU PNEU
 PAR BIBENDUM

THÉÂTRE ILLUSTRÉ DU PNEU
 PAR BIBENDUM (2^e Série)

DEMANDEZ :
 l'Album 1^{re} série
 ou l'Album 2^e série
 ou les deux Albums
 à **MICHELIN**
 105, B^e Pèreire, PARIS
 en joignant à votre lettre
 0 fr. 30 en timbres-poste
 par Album demandé.

Figure 16. *Le théâtre illustré du pneu* ¹⁴⁶

LE THÉÂTRE ILLUSTRÉ DU PNEU

HUITIÈME TABLEAU

ÊTRE OU NE PAS ÊTRE..... ANTIDÉRAPANT

En ce printemps, saison des Schuss, où les collines s'arment aux épreuves plus nombreuses que les feuilles aux arbres, postérieurement, à la vue de votre enveloppe, que Bibendum, chaussé par les Muses, s'est avisé de l'ébaucher pour ornier ses pneus d'agréables sculptures.

Il n'en est rien.

Nous vous montrons simplement une enveloppe Bess-vielaine du pneu antidérapant amovible dont elle avait été revêtue l'hiver dernier. *Antidérapant?* Pourquoi, mais évidemment, quelle ironie! En glissant et en frottant à chaque instant du point sur les parties de l'enveloppe, ce mouillant protecteur a profondément usé la gomme et ainsi plusieurs points les talles à nu.

Les crochets qui le fixaient sur la roue, enroulés entre les lamelles et l'arrosage, ont sailli les lamelles, déformé la gomme, et permis à l'eau et à la poussière de pénétrer dans le pneu.

Le Bess n'a pas de prétentions antidérapantes. Laissez-le faire son métier, sans plus, et, plutôt que de le marteler avec un antidérapant amovible, prenez notre *Semelle*. Seule, elle est à la fois antidérapante et efficacement protectrice contre les dangers de la roue.

Autant le soleil ferait du chasseur, qui se moule exactement sur le pied sans le fatiguer, diffère du brodequin de cuir de l'antique Quercus, autant notre *Semelle*, dans la laine de son système de crans fait corps avec l'enveloppe, diffère des lamelles usées des pneus amovibles antidérapants.

Ne croyez pas d'ailleurs que ces derniers soient bien mauvais! Ajoutez au prix d'un pneu amovible le prix de l'enveloppe Bess sur laquelle il est monté et vous constaterez que la *Semelle*, tout en faisant un meilleur service, *coûte moins cher*.

Figure 17. *Le théâtre illustré du pneu* ¹⁴⁷

LE THEATRE ILLUSTRE DU PNEU

DOUZIÈME TABLEAU

TARTUFE ou la multiplication des... pannes

"Donne félic! J'ai crevé deux fois... et à la même roue! C'est une infamie!" s'écriait, à l'époque de Pannes, un courrier de *Bordeaux-Paris*, en 1901. Et c'était naturellement le frère de ce "*cochon de Michelin*!"

Un de nos employés démonte le pneu fatal et trouva... l'unique fendeur des douze pannes : un *clou sans tête* de quatre centimètres, que le chauffeur, dans sa précipitation, n'avait pas vu. Ce clou, s'étant introduit obliquement dans l'enveloppe, y fit à la fois le bon apôtre et resta couché entre l'enveloppe et la chambre, qu'il laissa rouler douze fois quelques kilomètres avant de la crever irrémédiablement.

Le pneu que nous vous présentons comme un sort semblable. Vous lui voyez le même *clou sans tête* entre cuir et chair.

Il portait, d'autre part, sur sa bande de roulement, un second clou à grosse tête, très visible et très inutile. Le chauffeur s'y frotta et se crut, en arrachant ce dernier, enlever le vrai coupable, qui resta tranquillement dans son trou.

Il fallut, pour l'y découvrir, une seconde crevaison.

Moralité. — Glissez, mortels... la main dans l'enveloppe que vous remettez après crevaison, pour être sûrs de n'y point laisser subsister la *cause* après avoir remédié à l'*effet*.

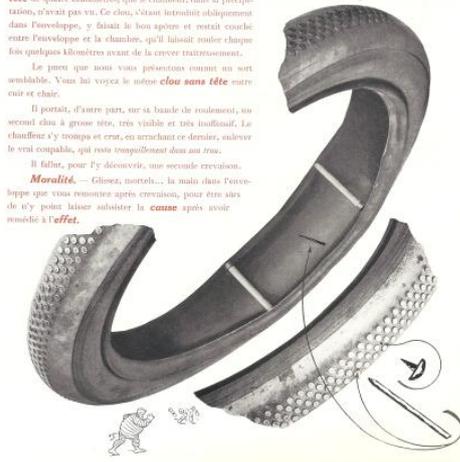


Figure 18. *Le théâtre illustré du pneu*¹⁴⁸

Apart from these two weekly spots in the press, Michelin also made use of more irregular appearances in the media. The company notably issued at various times what were called “documents techniques.”¹⁴⁹ Ostensibly aimed at informing the public about the latest innovations to come from the Clermont factories, these were another example of Michelin placing Bibendum and the company’s product firmly in the public eye. One such document dating before the First World War and dedicated to transport and trucking shows Bibendum, on the rear cover, supporting the globe on his shoulders *à la Atlas*.¹⁵⁰ These documents were issued to meet a need in the market; they supported the role played by the more regular media slots in reassuring the public as to the reliability of the company’s tyres. In 1912, another “document technique” was issued to inform the public about the availability of tools which were to be used in the changing of tyres; these “leviers Michelin” meant that changing a tyre was so easy that a 14-year-old boy could do it.¹⁵¹ Proof of this was supplied in an account of an experiment carried out at the 1912 Salon de l’Automobile. During this

¹⁴⁷ http://www.bibimage.com/galerie/index.php?/category/Carte_Michelin_France/start-10

¹⁴⁸ http://www.bibimage.com/galerie/index.php?/category/Carte_Michelin_France/start-10

¹⁴⁹ Michelin, *Recueil*. 3.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.* 5

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.* 6

spectacle, various children of the age of 14 were asked by Michelin to change a tyre. This report is supported by a series of photographs in which a young-looking man, wearing a chauffeur's uniform and hat, carried out the task with apparent ease. Astute use was made of the politics of the time to further penetrate the market. In 1916, at the height of the war, a "document technique" was brought out as a homage to the steel-rimmed wheel.¹⁵² On the cover, we see Bibendum wearing the jacket and helmet of the French army and holding aloft a steel-rimmed wheel. In the background, there are a number of army trucks, all shod with steel-rimmed wheels, and also the outline of a plane, the wheels of which are visible.¹⁵³ In the foreground, at the feet of this triumphant Bibendum, lies a broken German helmet. The next logical step for Michelin was to bring out a series of guides dedicated to the visiting of First World War battlefields.

Through the association of the Michelin man with many publicity ventures, Bibendum became the mascot of the brand. In the attribution of human characteristics to their tyres, Michelin was indulging in a fetishizing that was similar to that promoted by the Futurist movement in 1900s France. By instilling life into a set of tyres, the Michelin brothers created an identifiable character which would be used to increase interest in and desire for the car. Bibendum would appear in magazines and newspapers to help stricken cars by producing fresh tyres from the ample supply in his physical make-up. Initially a newspaper drawing, a physical incarnation of the Michelin man began to appear at the firm's publicity events, where a man dressed up in a suit of tyres would stand beside André Michelin to embody the jovial, progressive image put forward by the firm.¹⁵⁴ This character would go on to play an important role in the advancement of tourism, as Michelin sought to further automobility through its capacity to help the public discover France, an effort which encouraged patriotism and nationalism especially before and after the First World War.

2.3.2 Michelin and Tourism: The Tools for Promoting Mobility

The Michelin company had an important early impact on the promotion of tourism in France. In encouraging the discovery of the French countryside, Michelin was developing a strong link between automobile travel and pleasure tourism. Thus a

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Gonzalez, *Bibendum*. 34.

further reason to obtain a car was valorized, which increased the demand and thus the exchange-value of the car. Much as Citroën had promoted the car in tandem with modernity, this linking of the car and pleasure tourism served to increase desire for it as the public was made aware of destinations and monuments deemed worthy of visiting. The creation of driver's guides, of tourist guides, and of a tourism office in Paris, as well as campaigning for better road marking all served to increase the visibility of the car all the while, endorsing automobility in a process which can be understood in terms of Marx's theory of the fetishizing of the exchange-value of a commodity.

1912 saw Michelin bring out a publicity brochure entitled "Ce que Michelin a fait pour le Tourisme."¹⁵⁵ [Figure 19] It mentioned "Les Plaques Michelin (Offertes gracieusement aux municipalités)," *la carte Michelin, les itinéraires gratuits*, and *le guide Michelin*. All of these innovations were conceived by André Michelin in his attempts to widen his company's market-base. A campaign to obtain the numbering of roads and another to add "bornes kilométriques" were to follow. This seven-page "document publicitaire" informed the reader of all the steps taken by Michelin in promoting automobility since the advent of the automobile. This ensured that the public was in no doubt as to who was responsible for the modernising of the nation's transport. Olivier Darmon explains this tactic:

Promouvoir leurs produits en développant un service adapté aux constructeurs alors totalement livrés à eux-mêmes sur les routes de France [...] ces initiatives qui dépassent largement le domaine d'un fabricant de pneumatiques, assoient très opportunément la marque comme un acteur quasi institutionnel, un protagoniste essentiel d'une entreprise infiniment plus vaste : l'aménagement d'un réseau routier et, au-delà, l'essor du transport et du tourisme.¹⁵⁶

In assuming this "quasi institutionnel" role, the Michelin brothers once again were attempting to embed their reputation in automobility.

¹⁵⁵ Anonyme, *Ce que Michelin a fait pour le tourisme : guides Michelin, bureaux de tourisme, plaques indicatrices, cartes Michelin* (n.p.: n.p., 1912).

¹⁵⁶ Darmon, *Le grand siècle de Bibendum*. 44.



Figure 19. *Ce que Michelin a fait pour le tourisme* ¹⁵⁷

In 1908, Michelin set up, at 105 Boulevard Pereire, a “bureau de tourisme Michelin” in which staff helped the car-owner establish the best way to reach a given destination in France and beyond. Bibendum explains the process thus:

Il suffit d’indiquer à l’un des Bureaux de Tourisme Michelin, les grandes lignes du voyage qu’on projette pour recevoir gratuitement un itinéraire détaillé donnant tous renseignements sur la route à suivre. ¹⁵⁸

The objective of the *Bureau de Tourisme Michelin* was to remove any trepidation experienced by the motorist before a journey. The lack of road signage and consequent difficulties in reaching one’s destination were stumbling blocks to the expansion of car travel. Michelin, by providing the driver with an in-depth, detailed itinerary to be followed, attempted to eliminate any such uncertainty from the equation while at the same time promoting tourism. Not only would the driver receive the complete itinerary, he would also get details of any site in the vicinity of

¹⁵⁷ Anonyme, *Ce que Michelin a fait pour le tourisme*.

¹⁵⁸ *ibid.* 2.

his travels which, in a phrase which was to become famous, “vaut un détour.”¹⁵⁹ Thus, in the creation of tools for the physical mapping of the French landscape, the Michelin office was also contributing to its mental mapping. The growing reliability of the car combined with the discovery and appropriation of new certainties about the nation in an increasingly technological age strengthened the link with modernity, just as it cut links with old France. Weber in *Peasants to Frenchmen* (1976) refers to the impact of the machine in this broader rejection of traditional French values:

Just as the schools and the skills they taught created a new breed of children, so the machines when they came introduced a different relationship between man and nature. The earth lost its sacredness, the gods their divinity, magic its power.¹⁶⁰

The office was also a good *centre de recherches* for this new initiative as it provided material resources for the establishment of maps. From a single person in 1908, the “bureau des itinéraires,” as it became known, grew to employ 120 people in 1925, who together provided carefully constructed itineraries for 155,000 requested routes.¹⁶¹ [Figure 20] Carefully compiled, each itinerary was later to be used as the basis for the “guides régionaux,” the forerunner to the Michelin *Guide Vert*.

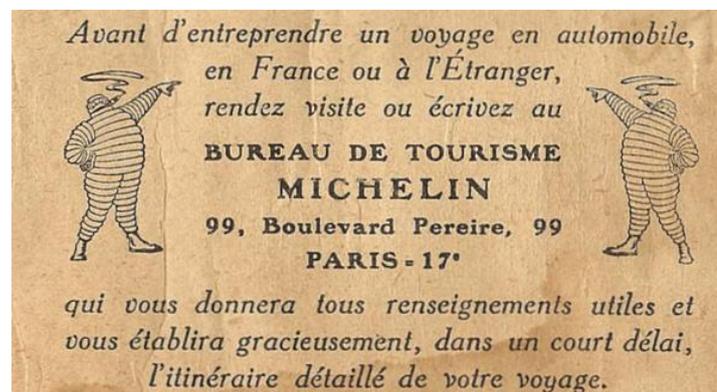


Figure 20. Poster advertising the *Bureau de Tourisme Michelin* ¹⁶²

¹⁵⁹ Michael Rowland, “Michelin's *Guide vert touristique*: A Guide to the French Inner Landscape,” *The French Review* 60, no. 5 (1987): 653-64. 654.

¹⁶⁰ Eugen Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen: The Modernization of Rural France, 1870-1914* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1976). 484.

¹⁶¹ Lucien Karpik, “Le guide rouge Michelin,” *Sociologie du travail* 42, no. 3 (2000): 369-89. 13.

¹⁶² http://www.bibimage.com/galerie/index.php?/category/Carte_Michelin_France/start-10

While the *Guide Rouge* in its early life did incorporate some town plans and smaller maps, it was not until 1910 that “les cartes routières Michelin” were established commercially. The roads sketched on these maps were sourced through the French ministries of War and of the Interior, and use was made of information collected by the “bureau des itinéraires” in adapting these official details to the needs of the motorist.¹⁶³ The distances between towns and the numbers of routes were added to the list; these were followed by the conversion of the map from a simple tool to get from A to B into a tourist-orientated document which proved a helpful supplement to the *Guide Rouge*. An eight-colour code scheme is used to distinguish the various roads from those that are “régulièrement entretenue(s)” to at the other extreme, those that are “non empierré(es) ou trop étroit(es).”¹⁶⁴ Each area became linked with tourism; picturesque roads were bordered in green, while forests, churches, castles and other such features were highlighted. The *Cartes Michelin* were conceived with the motorist in mind;¹⁶⁵ the way they were folded facilitated them being read while the driver was at the wheel. This newest tool to expand tourism was essentially a combination of information which was already available, but which was now presented in a manner that made it accessible to even the most ill-at-ease of drivers:

Produit sophistiqué s’il en est, la carte Michelin, qui prend l’automobiliste par la main, crée un marché sur lequel elle va régner en maître.¹⁶⁶

The first map to be issued was that of the Clermont-Ferrand area; this was followed by Marseille-Cannes-Nice, then the Paris area, culminating in a foldable forty-seven-page map of the whole of France issued in 1913.¹⁶⁷ The creation of these maps was announced by Bibendum in the 1909 edition of the *Guide Michelin*:

Ce nouveau document se recommande aux chauffeurs par l’exactitude et la précision de ses renseignements qui ont été puisés aux sources officielles les plus sûres (Service des Ponts et Chaussées et service vicinal).¹⁶⁸

In this announcement, the words “exactitude” and “precision” are once again indicative of how new “certainties” are being fetishized; the Michelin maps

¹⁶³ Marc Francon, *Le guide vert Michelin : l’invention du tourisme culturel populaire* (Paris: Economica, 2001). 41.

¹⁶⁴ Olivier Darmon, *La route autrefois* (Paris: Hoëbeke, 2004). 19.

¹⁶⁵ Gonzalez, *Bibendum*. 44.

¹⁶⁶ Darmon, *La route autrefois*. 19.

¹⁶⁷ Michelin, *La saga du guide Michelin*. 73.

¹⁶⁸ Michelin Pneu, *Guide Michelin* (Clermont-Ferrand: Michelin-Guide, 1909). 648-49.

represented a further proof that modern France, which was cutting links to its past, was a more scientific and exacting country. In the Michelin guides over the following years, numerous references to the maps were made in order that the user would consider purchasing one before going on a journey. The maps, after the guide and the *bureau des itinéraires*, were another way of opening up the country to its citizens. All were linked and all had the same goal of stimulating tourism; indeed, the creation and evolution of these guides have been referred to as the invention of “popular tourism.”¹⁶⁹

The creation and expansion of Michelin maps of France went hand in hand with a concerted campaign to establish numbering on French highways and byways. “Que faudrait-il pour révolutionner le tourisme automobile?” asked *Le Lundi de Michelin*. “Simplement que toutes les routes aient un numéro qui soit reporté sur les cartes et les routes elles-mêmes.”¹⁷⁰ Roads at the time were already classified into four groups by the Ministère des Ponts et Chaussées: N for Nationale, D for Départementale, GC for roads “à Grande Circulation,” and IC for those of “Intérêt Communal.”¹⁷¹ However, these details were very rarely transferred to signage on the roads, and, more often than not, roads were devoid of any information. If distances in kilometres were made available, it was unclear what they related to and made little sense to anyone but Ponts et Chaussées officials. André Michelin, having publicly helped an Englishman drive from Geneva to Clermont-Ferrand in 1911, immediately began a new campaign to establish an official link through numbering between his maps and roads.¹⁷² His original approaches to the government being rejected, Michelin initiated a petition at the 1912 Salon de l’Aviation, during which he obtained the signature of Armand Fallières, president at the time. It is uncertain whether Fallières knowingly signed a petition for something that his government had recently refused.¹⁷³ [Figure 21] Alain Jemain suggests that the president thought that he was signing the visitor’s book for the Salon.¹⁷⁴ Michelin created a poster calling for people to follow their president in signing the petition, in which a picture of

¹⁶⁹ For a detailed account of how the maps were conceived, refer to Francon, *Le Guide vert Michelin*. 51-54.

¹⁷⁰ *Le Lundi de Michelin de 1912* in Darmon, *La route autrefois*. 14.

¹⁷¹ Antoine Beyer, “La numérotation des routes françaises. Le sens de la nomenclature dans une perspective géographique,” *Flux* 1, no. 55 (2004). 20.

¹⁷² Gonzalez, *Bibendum*. 88.

¹⁷³ Georges Ribeill, “From Pneumatics to Highway Logistics: André Michelin, Instigator of the Automobile Revolution, Part II,” *Flux* (1991): 5-19. 8.

¹⁷⁴ Jemain and Hanon, *Michelin*. 60.

Fallières leaning over to sign and bordered by the French colours made it appear as if this petition was a matter of national interest; within a month 200,000 signatures were collected and sent to the Ministre des Travaux Publics, Jean Dupuy. The latter signed his approval for the numbering of the roads just months later. André Michelin ensured the public knew it was thanks to his efforts that tourism was being improved. In *Le Journal de Rouen* of 26 April 1913, he stated:

Donnant satisfaction aux 200.000 signatures de la pétition pour le numérotage des routes, les ministres de l'Intérieur et des Travaux publics viennent d'adresser aux préfets et ingénieurs en chef des Ponts et Chaussées, deux circulaires en exécution desquelles les bornes kilométriques de nos routes et de nos chemins, vont être numérotées. Tous les amis de la route se réjouiront de cette décision qui nous donne enfin un jalonnement parfait.¹⁷⁵

Sponsored by the “Touring Club de France,” the first road to be numbered was the route between Paris and Trouville, the shortest route between Paris and the seaside, with Trouville having already become one of the country’s first “stations balnéaires”, thanks to the railway line running there. This growth in leisure tourism in France will be examined in a later chapter.

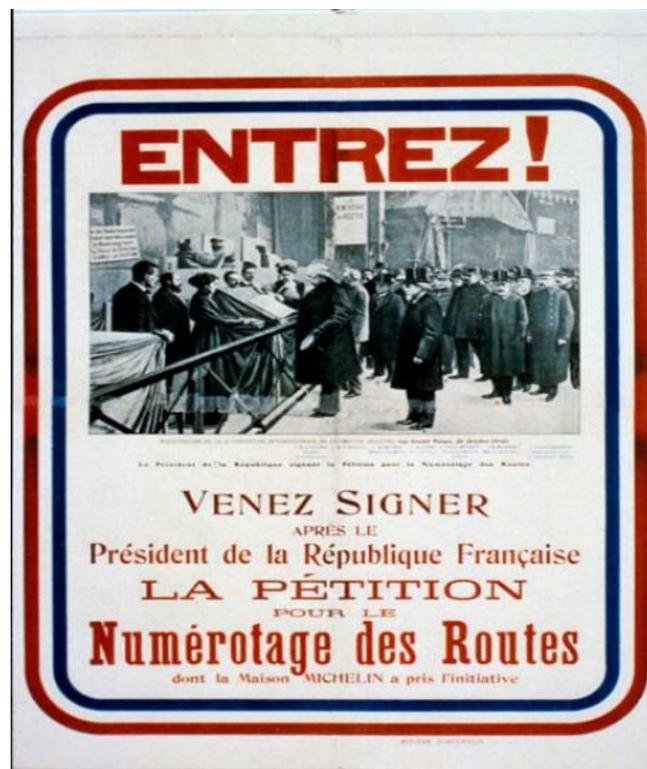


Figure 21. Poster advertising the Michelin petition to number roads¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁵ Quoted in Gonzalez, *Bibendum*. 88.

¹⁷⁶ http://www.bibimage.com/galerie/index.php?/category/Carte_Michelin_France/start-10

Another ingredient in Michelin's recipe for the expansion of tourism was the creation and distribution of town signs. André Michelin in 1910 commissioned the conception of a sign which would indicate the name of the town being traversed. These were placed at the entrances and exits of towns throughout France. It was another step towards the brand recognition to which Michelin aspired. Each sign comprised the name of the relevant *commune* and the number of the road. They also had two pieces of advice for the safety of the town's inhabitants: "Veillez Ralentir" and "Attention aux enfants."¹⁷⁷ In so doing, Michelin were contributing to the broader processes of homogenization and codification which had been enshrined in the Third Republic, as discussed by Weber.¹⁷⁸ Placed above all this information were the words: "Don de Michelin." The fact that these signs were a self-serving gift is referred to also in the previously cited brochure "Ce que Michelin a fait pour le Tourisme" (1912), in which Bibendum proudly announced that these "Plaques Michelin" are "offertes gracieusement aux Municipalités."¹⁷⁹ This was a relatively cheap way of introducing the name Michelin to urban and rural settings alike:

Grand seigneur, Bibendum installe des "plaques de village" où figure le nom de la commune à l'entrée de l'agglomération entre les deux mentions "Veillez ralentir" et "Attention aux enfants", et des tables d'orientation. Sans oublier d'y inscrire "Don de Michelin". Manière comme une autre – et peu coûteuse – de s'intégrer dans le paysage obligatoire des automobilistes, en faisant sa publicité.¹⁸⁰

Thus Michelin had succeeded in culturally embedding its name into early automobility. By taking up an almost institutional role in the codification of the automobile network, it ensured strong visibility in this "paysage obligatoire des automobilistes". Through different forms of fetishizing, with "Grand seigneur" Bibendum as totem, Michelin succeeded in investing additional value in the car as, in the changing society before the First World War, new beliefs in technology and modernity were being espoused and the nation was gradually turning its back on "old France". The design and creation of maps and later itineraries by Michelin served to further the impression that the country was becoming increasingly "known". This

¹⁷⁷ Séguéla, *80 ans de publicité Citroën*; Darmon, *La route autrefois*. 16.

¹⁷⁸ Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen*. 303.

¹⁷⁹ Anonyme, *Ce que Michelin a fait pour le tourisme*.

¹⁸⁰ Jemain and Hanon, *Michelin*. 60.

process was enhanced with the inception of the Michelin travel guides, as we shall see in the next section.

2.3.3 Les Guides Michelin

In the early years of its existence, the Michelin firm spent more on advertising than was actually earned by the company, but this was seen as necessary to gain a firm foothold in the emerging market. While all of the above measures promoted the motor car and motor tourism, they essentially consisted of the creation and expansion of that market, in which Michelin would have an ever larger role to play. The Michelin Guides, initially intended to introduce drivers to the mechanics of cars and to give them a helping hand in their travels, were transformed into a comprehensive tourist guide, complete with reviews of restaurants and hotels. In Bernard Lerivray's 1975 review¹⁸¹ of the various tourist guides historically made available in France, he shows that Michelin Guides aimed at a different customer from others as the company attempted to make its guides less austere and more accessible to wider sections of the public. The constant promotion of everyday tourism which was to continue well into the *Trente Glorieuses* amounted to a very cost-effective way of promoting automobility and thereby boosting tyre usage. All attempts to improve and modernize roads can essentially be seen as a way of sensibilising both the public and the state to the reality that the car existed and that the infrastructure to accommodate it did not. Michelin and Bibendum together built a France that was very well informed about the capacities of automobiles. Lucien Karpik in his analysis of *Le Guide Rouge Michelin* sees the steps taken as a form of seduction:

Mais pour que cette liberté puisse s'exercer, il fallait neutraliser les préjugés, écarter les dangers, dissiper l'ignorance, susciter le désir : ce sont les tâches qu'affrontent les guides Michelin de la période 1900–1907.¹⁸²

Thus in order to increase a desire for the car and automobility, it was first of all necessary to eradicate any uncertainty, any reluctance felt by the potential driving public not only with regard to the vehicles themselves but also, as we have seen, with regard to the discovery of country itself. Through the technology offered and facilitated by the car, the public could feel assured that in a modern nation it was

¹⁸¹ Bernard Lerivray, *Guides bleus, guides verts et lunettes roses* (Paris: Le Cerf, 1975). 11.

¹⁸² Karpik, "Le guide rouge Michelin." 5.

increasingly possible to turn one's back on the past and embrace a new future. In 1900, Michelin produced the first example of *Le Guide Rouge*, which was designed to promote the automobile across the country. Its goal was stated as follows:

Le présent ouvrage a le désir de donner tous les renseignements qui peuvent être utiles à un chauffeur, voyageant en France, pour approvisionner son automobile, pour la réparer, pour lui permettre de se loger et de se nourrir, de correspondre par poste, télégraphe ou téléphone.

Cet ouvrage paraît avec le siècle ; il durera autant que lui. – L'automobilisme vient de naître ; il se développera chaque année et le pneu avec lui, car le pneu est l'organe essentiel sans lequel l'automobile ne peut rouler.¹⁸³

The timing was well-judged. The guide was launched the year after the first “Tour de France automobile” and made the most of the aura of modernity established at the 1900 “Exposition Universelle” in order to establish a foothold in France. Initially, the red guide was more a professional aid than an out-and-out guide for tourism. This was to change as the automobile became more popular. However, it would be accurate to say that *Le Guide Rouge* was a technical guide in its infancy before gradually assuming the role of tourist guide. The reasons for this are apparent; in the early years of the 20th Century, it was as important to have a driver who also fulfilled the duties of a mechanic as it was to know where one was going. The first *Guide Rouge* was “Offert gracieusement aux Chauffeurs” (my emphasis), so it was the driver, not the person being driven, who used the guide. The guide consequently comprised a series of “Conseils Pratiques,” including notes on “pièces de rechange,” and a “Décret portant règlement relatif à la circulation des Automobiles”, in other words, information to facilitate the job of the “chauffeur” in transporting his employer.

In a further attempt to demystify the French countryside, a large section of the first *Guide Rouge* was dedicated to the “Nomenclature des villes par ordre alphabétique et plans.” This litany of towns is not arbitrarily chosen; nor is it insignificant that the towns are classified alphabetically. The taxonomy proposed in *Le Guide Rouge* also constituted an attack on the monopoly of the railway system in transporting French citizens. During the second half of the 19th Century, the national railway network had gone some way towards the opening up of the country, but in alphabetising a list of towns, Michelin was making a statement: no longer were towns simply to be considered as places on a railway line. Rather, all towns featured

¹⁸³ Michelin Pneu, *Guide Michelin, offert gracieusement aux chauffeurs* (Paris: Albouy, 1900). 5-6.

in the *Guide Rouge* were accessible to the car-owner, and the list was a symbol of the freedom which was now the prerogative of any motorist. It created a new France for the traveller, a France that was not restricted to the compass of the railway. This list provided a taste of what the future was to hold for the country; the railway network had initially promoted travel, but now it was the turn of the motor car to expand personal mobility.

The choice of towns in this “nomenclature” is also significant. We are told in a “note explicative” that this is not a simple list of towns; rather it is a repository of the towns which are capable of sustaining the motor car:

Du moment où il existe dans une ville ou un village un vendeur d'essence, un mécanicien susceptible de faire intelligemment une réparation, ce village ou cette ville se trouve inscrit dans la présente liste.¹⁸⁴

Michelin thus prioritized towns, not according to the values of conventional tourism but from the more practical point of view of the motorist. This was the filter that was applied to the choice of towns before any other factors were considered. Michelin created a hierarchy of places to visit with the first criterion being an ability to sustain the automobile. Thus, this hierarchy broke from older ways of imagining the national space, as it constructed a new social and cultural reality which depended on possession of a car. Once this basic necessity was established, the Guide would furnish extensive details about each town describing hotels using a three-star system, promoting restaurants (going so far as to say if they were recommended by the Automobile-Club de France or not) and giving details as to the presence of a train station and post office. These details are provided for all towns once they have satisfied the most basic criterion of all, namely, the availability of fuel.

The street plans of thirteen cities, from Agen to Tours, are also presented to accompany this nomenclature. While Paris is mentioned in the guide, no details of hotels or of places to refuel are supplied; nor is there a plan of the capital. Paris appears on the list but only as a source of automobiles: “les Principaux Constructeurs d'Automobiles de Paris et de la Seine, les Constructeurs d'Automobiles Électriques de Paris et de la Seine and les Constructeurs d'Automobiles à Vapeur de Paris et de la Seine” are provided. The aim of the Guide is not to facilitate the exploration of Paris; instead Paris is the centre from which all exploration is to be initiated. Moreover, this is, first and foremost, a traveller's guide, and, as such, its aim is

¹⁸⁴ Ibid. 54.

systematically to promote the use of the car. From 1901, roads are variously classified as: “très pittoresques,” “pittoresques” ou “ennuyeuses ;” “roulantes,” “droites” ou “sinueuses,” “plates” ou “ondulées,” “dures,” “très dures” ou “exceptionnellement dures.” The mention of the distance in kilometres from Paris of each town mentioned in the 1900 nomenclature tells us much about the orientation of the guide; it was an aid to those venturing from the known (Paris) into the unknown (Province). The Michelin guide was not the first tourist guide. It was, however, innovative in that it aimed at a new audience which was not considered by the assortment of guides available at the turn of the century:

Chacune de ces collections de guides à sa spécificité et sa clientèle, les deux premiers, les Guides Baedeker et Joanne sont nés au temps des diligences, le Guide Conty s’adresse prioritairement au touriste qui voyage par chemin de fer, le Guide Thiolier à l’utilisateur des transports en commun.¹⁸⁵

Lucian Karpik classifies the development of the *Guide Rouge* with three distinct timeframes: 1900-1908 for “Le Guide Technique,” 1908-1933 for “Le Guide Touristique,” and 1933-1998 for “Le Guide Gastronomique.” This evolution has a clear parallel in the progression of the automobile. Michelin developed its product over the years to match the progress made by the car. Initially a breakdown and technical manual for the chauffeur, the creation of the Bureau des Itinéraires coincided with the change in approach adopted in the *Guide*. The itineraries provided by the Bureau were to be used extensively in an attempt to introduce tourism to a wider audience.

Le guide touristique s’occupe de moins en moins de l’automobile et de plus en plus des humains. S’il présente une information objective par exemple sur les installations et les prix des chambres d’hôtel, pour l’essentiel, *et c’est la différence fondamentale avec le guide technique*, il extrait du vaste univers, un ensemble limité de routes, d’itinéraires, de sites et de curiosités, de stations de villégiatures et d’hôtels, qu’il ordonne selon des critères esthétiques ou des critères de confort : il construit, par là, une réalité sociale et culturelle arbitraire.¹⁸⁶

The guide was gradually becoming more human – than machine – orientated, and this was reflected in the addition of listings of sites of tourist interest. In 1908 spas are added, 1910 sees the addition of seaside resorts, and in 1912 ski resorts make it into the guide. Monuments are classified using a star system, and, while they are not discussed, this is another step towards the creation of a country in which automobile

¹⁸⁵ Francon, *Le Guide vert Michelin*. 193.

¹⁸⁶ Karpik, "Le guide rouge Michelin." 14.

ownership is both desired and even required, as places beyond the reach of the railway are shown to be accessible. Hotels were classified first by price then by quality. All of these changes reflected the fact that the France portrayed in the Michelin guide had, albeit arbitrarily – as Karpik suggests – evolved as a country and specifically as a social and cultural reality. It was no longer a vast land stretching out into the distance, but rather a national space comprised of picturesque routes, important monuments, and tourist resorts. La France “non-vue” was evolving into a France “à voir,” and *Le Guide Michelin* with all of its accessories was providing the key information on how to access it.

Le Guide Vert was born in 1934, and from the outset the target audience was broader than the previous Paris-centric guides. Michelin expanded the scope of the guide to make it more accessible to this wider audience. In both Bernard Lerivay’s comparative study¹⁸⁷ of the *Guide Vert* and *Guide Bleu*, and in Marc Francon’s critical study¹⁸⁸ of the *Guide Vert*, the approach taken by Michelin is seen to be different from other guides available at the time. Central to this process was the construction of the selected sites as readily accessible, both geographically and conceptually. Catherine Bertho-Lavenir speaks of “La Théâtralisation de la visite du Monument”,¹⁸⁹ by which she means the recounting of the history of a monument in theatrical terms:

C’est un guide destiné à un large public de touristes curieux mais dont le degré d’instruction est relativement modeste. Il convenait donc de proposer à ce public de néophytes un outil facile à utiliser et accessible à tous. [...] La solution a bien été la bonne puisque soixante ans plus tard elle n’a pratiquement pas évolué.¹⁹⁰

In what was effectively an early exercise in cultural democratization, *Le Guide Vert* discussed the history of each town and each monument in a more anecdotal manner than that adopted by other guides. While all accounts were fact-based, the emphasis was placed on the extraordinary. There was scene-setting which involved dialogues between historical figures as they explained the history of the area. The style and tone used were similar to that of *Le Tour de la France par deux enfants* (1877), the reader which had been used in classrooms throughout the land

¹⁸⁷ Lerivray, *Guides bleus, guides verts et lunettes roses*. 11.

¹⁸⁸ Francon, *Le Guide vert Michelin*. 46.

¹⁸⁹ Catherine Bertho-Lavenir, *La visite du monument* (Clermont-Ferrand: Presses universitaires Blaise Pascal, 2004). 154.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.* 157.

since the Third Republic and which described France through the eyes of its two young protagonists as they travelled through the country providing accurate historico-geographic accounts to the book's young audience.¹⁹¹ In similar fashion, the *Guide Vert* began to breathe life into history, making it more accessible, using everyday language, while at the same time maintaining historical accuracy. The level of language employed is also revelatory of the projected audience of the guide.¹⁹² The *Guide Vert* took a step back from the aloofness apparent in other guides and tried to make France accessible to all its readers. Less detail is used in descriptions of monuments in the *Guide Vert*, which suggests the ability to travel to and see a large number of monuments in a short period of time.¹⁹³ The automobile driver was the target, capable of travelling from town to town and discovering monuments which were beyond the reach of the railway network without having to learn the entire history of each attraction.

The *Guide Vert* thus developed from the *Guides Régionaux* to become a popular tourist guide for motorists. It was aimed at a motorized public from the outset and hence did not suffer from any transitional issues, unlike the *Guide Bleu*, which was an updated version of the *Guide Joanne*, a tourist aid for well-to-do train travellers. Through reducing the price of the guides, through animating the histories with heroes such as Joan of Arc and Napoléon, through using uncomplicated and everyday language, Michelin succeeded in creating a tourist guide capable of reaching as broad an audience as possible. Selling 86,000 copies in 1912,¹⁹⁴ and going on to adapt itself to the growing tourist public, the creation and evolution of the various Michelin guides had an early impact on the discovery and exploration of a new, more open France. In reducing ongoing fears, initially with regard to the reliability of the car and later about travelling into the unknown, the guides played a key role in increasing the desire for possession of a car. The promotion of the country as tourist destination encouraged a nationalism that was fostered with “patriotisme commercial”, of which the guides to the First World War battlefields are perhaps the most famous example.

¹⁹¹ G. Bruno [Augustine Fouillée], *Le tour de la France par deux enfants : Devoir et patrie* (Paris: Belin, 1877).

¹⁹² Lerivray, *Guides bleus, guides verts et lunettes roses*. 83.

¹⁹³ Francon, *Le Guide vert Michelin*. 17.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.* 54.

The valorization of automobile use through the regular advertising by Michelin of progress being made in the field served to heighten demand for the vehicle. As reliability improved, moreover, a strong association with tourism was fostered through a Michelin campaign to modernize the road network and road marking. This, as well as the inauguration of the tourist guides also served to heighten the visibility of and demand for the automobile. By foregrounding the pleasures that could be experienced through the use of the car, the Michelin company increased interest in it. This was reflected in the strong link that was established between Michelin and automobility, and which culminated in its acquisition of the Citroën company in 1934. Michelin owned Citroën until 1975, and oversaw the construction of three of the most iconic cars in French automotive history: the Traction Avant, the 2CV, and the DS. This history was founded on a legacy of marketing the automobile and the company's own related products, all of which impacted profoundly on its early growth.

2.4 Conclusion

The early part of the 20th Century saw the automobile become more prominent as it became a regular motif in art. The Futurist movement, through its fetishizing of the automobile and more specifically through animism, projected a form of phantasmagoria onto the early car. In associating the car with mythological creatures such as Pegasus, by fetishizing the speed associated with it and by imbuing it with life, the Futurists consecrated the car as a totem of modern France. The car became a desire-object to be idolized, as it symbolized a rejection of the past and was embraced by a new, modern public which craved the speed which the automobile was capable of providing. Citroën further fetishized the car by placing it as a totem of modernity with the ambitious trans-Saharan and trans-African expeditions.

André Citroën and André Michelin both established clear links between the automobile and modernity as they endeavoured to market their products. The close association of the automobile with progress was highlighted by both companies as they portrayed themselves as eager to promote the automobile and to make it available to a maximum number of people. However, the means by which they engaged in the marketing of the car, by promoting it as an object of desire, added prestige-value to the automobile. Through the efforts of these two companies to

democratize it, the automobile in early 20th-Century France became fetishized for its exchange-value. A close association with technology and modernity ensured that the automobile remained an object of desire. As explored in Chapter 1, the surplus-capacity of the automobile was also valorized by these companies. Both participated in early motor racing to prove their products, and this was extended to the racetrack at Montlhéry which Citroën used as an effective *support publicitaire*. The creation of the Michelin guides and tourist offices was a further step to increase the desire for the automobile, as these initiatives attempted to reduce ignorance and enhance knowledge about travelling in France. The Citroën *Croisières* combined these techniques with the decision to extend testing of its vehicles to sub-Saharan Africa. Through the application of science and technology, the *Croisières* and the resulting documentaries, which were screened throughout mainland France, ensured that the automobile remained a vehicle for and a symbol of modernity. The examination of the automobile as a vehicle for tourism in North Africa will now be extended to wider consumption as we move into the second part of this thesis where we will see the automobile gradually becoming more attainable, and, in Chapter 3, its impact on the development of mass tourism will be examined.

Part 2: Towards a Democratized Mundanity

Chapter 3: Vers le Midi: The Automobile Discovered and as a Vehicle of Discovery

Je m'appelle Laurent Patrick Fignon et je suis né un vendredi au cœur des Trente Glorieuses, qui connaissaient alors leur apogée. C'était le 12 août 1960, à 3 h 10 du matin. [...] A l'époque, jusque dans les rues de nos grandes villes, l'orgueil de la vitesse devenait une valeur sûre, une aspiration de chacun, une preuve de liberté. Renault, Citroën ou Peugeot rivalisaient d'innovations pour offrir aux couples "modernes" le grand frisson de la route et de l'évasion. Aller vite, toujours plus vite.¹

This chapter will examine how the car was to have a substantial impact on post-1945 holiday-making as the effects of the *Trente Glorieuses* were increasingly felt. Fignon's parents experienced this change, previously unobtainable speed now a "valeur sûre, une aspiration de chacun, une preuve de liberté". As we shall see, the automobile was to be central in the growth of mass tourism, and came to incarnate what it meant to be "modern".

Le Viaduc de Millau is a supreme example of the tradition in France of travelling to the sea on holiday. [Figure 1] Opened in 2004, it was built in order to cater, particularly, for the traffic flows during two months of the year. The large number of cars heading south and later returning for "la rentrée" cross this bridge on their way to and from the sea during the summer holidays. Spanning the Tarn valley, the Viaduc de Millau is the highest road bridge in the world and is a modern-day testament to the number of car-driving holiday-makers.² In 2010, it was the fifth most visited "non-cultural" monument in France.³ Another reminder of the social significance of holidaying occurred in 2006 in the small town of Lapalisse, which hosted a *fête de l'embouteillage* to commemorate the traffic jams caused by those going on holiday in *Trente Glorieuses* France. It was a nostalgic commemoration of the time during which the *Nationale 7* was the main route for reaching the Côte d'Azur.⁴ These two locations serve as monuments to, or "lieux de mémoire" as Pierre Nora might put it,⁵ of the role played by the automobile and the road in the

¹ Laurent Fignon, *Nous étions jeunes et insouciantes* (Paris: Librairie générale française, 2009). 43.

² Millau is also symbolic as the town in which José Bové destroyed a McDonalds in an attack on globalization in France.

³ *Mémento du tourisme*, (Observatoire National du Tourisme, 2006). 8.

⁴ *La vie de l'auto*, 9 November 2006.

⁵ Pierre Nora, *Les lieux de mémoire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1997). "Le front de mer" and "La forêt" are two relevant essays in this collection.

explosion of mass tourism and in the tradition of holiday-making as they are still lived today. This evolution in holidaying emerged as a result of a number of factors, amongst which the transformation in the perception of the car amongst all classes played an important role, particularly after the Second World War.



Figure 1. Le Viaduc de Millau⁶

The number of French holiday-makers indicates a history of mass-motorized tourism which emerged during the late 1940s and early 1950s. André Rauch states that of the two-thirds of the population that currently takes holidays, 85% do so between 1 July and 30 August and that 80 % of these holiday-makers remain in France.⁷ The third interesting statistic is that more than 50% of holiday-makers spend their time on the beach. As he states: “refusing to spend some days there each year approaches sacrilegious contempt.”⁸ In order to investigate these figures, it is necessary to examine the factors that influenced the genesis and evolution of holidaymaking. In this chapter, I will explore the influences that have played a part in holidaymaking just before and during the *Trente Glorieuses*. The holiday-maker of the interwar years can be seen as a distinct entity from those who left *en masse* for

⁶ <http://www.tourisme-aveyron.com/fr/decouvrir/incontournables/viaduc-millau.php>

⁷ Susan C. Anderson and Bruce Tabb, *Water, Leisure and Culture: European Historical Perspectives* (Oxford: Berg, 2002). 224. See also Wilhelm Pompl and Patrick Lavery, *Tourism in Europe: Structures and Developments* (Wallingford: Cab International, 1993). 211.

⁸ Anderson and Tabb, *Water, Leisure and Culture*. 224.

the beaches during the economic upturn of the *Trente Glorieuses*. Having remained a largely upper-class activity until becoming a political priority in the 1930s with the rise of the *Front Populaire*, the practical ability to go on holidays before the Second World War stayed to a large extent out of reach for the majority of workers. It was not until the 1950s that what has been called mass tourism began to take hold, when a series of factors including the growth in car ownership came into play. In this chapter, we will examine how the evolution of holiday-making played a role in the change in perception of the automobile. The object of desire became an object of desired mundanity, and, later, it came to fit into an epistemological system, as has been theorized by Baudrillard and Urry.⁹ The fetishized car as commodity continued to be desired, but was desired as commodified mundanity. The phantasmagoric properties that surrounded the automobile in the pre-war era were replaced by those of a social need as the car became more commonplace.

3.1 Holidaying Distinction

The advent of the *congés payés* in 1936 allowed all workers two weeks of paid holidays during the summer period each year. The trend of escape from the urban space and the discovery of the beaches of the Riviera reflected a new desire on the part of the worker to indulge in the pleasures and leisure activities hitherto perceived as those of the wealthier classes. The obsession with St Tropez and the glamorous lifestyle associated with it, as we shall see later in this chapter, is indicative of this desire. In *La Distinction*, Pierre Bourdieu examines the need of certain classes to imitate other classes in an attempt to bridge the perceived gap between them.¹⁰ The social group that Bourdieu and others have referred to as the new “petite bourgeoisie”¹¹ was a major part of this holidaying trend. Bourdieu’s portrait of an archetypal “new petit bourgeois” was a twenty-nine-year-old draughtsman in an engineering firm, married to a secretary.¹² This Bordelian need to emulate the traditional upper classes on the Côte d’Azur mirrored the way in which the

⁹ Jean Baudrillard, *Le système des objets : la consommation des signes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1968); John Urry, “The ‘System’ of Automobility,” *Theory, Culture & Society* 21, no. 4/5 (2004): 25-39.

¹⁰ Pierre Bourdieu, *La distinction : critique sociale du jugement* (Paris: Minuit, 1979). 8.

¹¹ Defined by Crossick as “the world of small retail, artisanal and manufacturing enterprise.” Geoffrey Crossick, “Metaphors of the Middle: The Discovery of the Petite Bourgeoisie 1880-1914,” *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 4(1994): 251-79. 251.

¹² Bourdieu, *La distinction*. 387.

automobile was beginning to be seen as part of a Baudrillardian system of needs, as explored in the introduction, as the appeal of beach holidaying grew after 1945.

3.1.1 The Desire to Holiday

Going on holidays became an expression of the capacity of the petit bourgeois and later the working classes to engage in the practices of the upper classes, as Rauch explains:

While the holidays of the French masses are changing destinations and mentalities, they are often repeating inherited savoir-faire. Visiting places that have borne the dreams of past generations [...] is a must, that is “to do” the Côte d’Azur, the English Promenade at Nice, the port of St. Tropez in Var, the coves of Cassis near Marseille, etc.¹³

The automobile, as a vehicle for holiday-making, had previously facilitated the escape from industrialized cities and enabled wealthy factory-owners to run their industries yet still indulge in seaside holidays. As this process was observed by others lower down the social ladder, the car became a coveted commodity as its flexibility and usefulness became more understood. As a commodity which initially was consumed by the wealthier classes, the car was transformed into an attainable product as the working classes came to acquire the financial benefits of the *Trente Glorieuses*. Thus, it became fetishized as a vehicle of liberation, as the automobile symbolized the ability to imitate other better-off members of society. It was an integral part of an era in which broader social classes would themselves come to acquire this symbol of opulence and modernity, and possession of it would signify a progression in society.¹⁴ Car ownership signified reaching what was generally perceived as a world hitherto confined to the domain of the upper classes. The purchase of an automobile, and the associated ability to engage more easily in holiday tourism, enabled the workers to experience pleasures previously unknown to them.

The desire to indulge in the leisure practices of the upper classes is reflected in Joffre Dumazedier’s landmark 1962 examination of the evolution of French

¹³ Rauch in Anderson and Tabb, *Water, Leisure and Culture*. 224.

¹⁴ See Ross’ discussion of French movie *La belle Américaine*, in Kristin Ross, *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies: Decolonization and the Reordering of French Culture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT, 1998). 30. In this 1961 film, possession of an opulent American car allows its owners to accede to a higher class in society simply because of their ownership of this car.

leisure, in which he critiques the inability of facilities in traditionally popular holiday resorts adequately to cater for the greater numbers travelling in the 1950s:

On connaît le succès de la Côte d'Azur. Saint-Tropez en est un curieux exemple: on y compte 360 chambres d'hôtel et environ 500 chambres meublées; or, selon les chiffres officiels, 20.000 personnes environ viennent y passer leurs vacances.¹⁵

These figures are indicative of two things. Firstly, they display the growing number of holiday-makers in these traditional resorts. The lack of facilities suggests an unsympathetic attitude to these masses of workers from an upper-class point of view. The refusal or inability adequately to cater for the arrival of such large numbers may suggest an unwillingness to accept this new form of tourism. André Rauch also refers to, in terms which echo Bourdieu, this growth in mass tourism as an attempt to imitate a privileged lifestyle, and one which the upper classes wanted to keep to themselves:

Soleil, mer, sable et foule conviennent le plus souvent aux vacanciers situés au bas de l'échelle sociale; cette promiscuité est en revanche moins appréciée des classes aisées où le goût de la solitude est tenu pour un signe de distinction, surtout lorsqu'elles redoutent de côtoyer « des gens qui ne sont pas du même milieu. »¹⁶

In consequence, the choice of destination as a sign of distinction is one that played a key role in holidaymaking in early *Trente Glorieuses* France as the impact of the automobile in this sector became more apparent.

The automobile, as a vehicle for vacationing, played very different roles before and after the Second World War. As we have seen, the car was portrayed and perceived in a context which revealed it as a definer of social class. With their right to annual *congés payés* now a decade old, working classes began to desire the car for its ability to provide freedom, after the Second World War. The automobile thus took on a new phantasmagoric image, one which signified liberty for the factory workers engaged in its construction in the huge Parisian factories owned by Citroën and Renault, amongst others. The French capital constituted a mix of many of the richest people in the country co-existing beside the workers who worked in the city's factories on a daily basis. Popular holidaying evolved as the ability to reach and stay in destinations developed alongside the growth in the reliability and later the

¹⁵ Joffre Dumazedier, *Vers une civilisation du loisir ?* (Paris: Seuil, 1972 [1962]). 132-133.

¹⁶ André Rauch, *Vacances en France : de 1830 à nos jours* (Paris: Hachette, 1996). 149.

accessibility of the motor car.¹⁷ This became most obviously embodied in what has become known as “Le tourisme bleu” – seaside vacationing – and the development of this form of holidaying rather than any other stemmed from a need for the Parisian population first and foremost to escape from the city. As Urry states in *The Tourist Gaze* (1990):

Resorts were believed to be extraordinary because concentrated there were the sea, the sand, sometimes the sun, as well as the absence of the manufacturing industry that was present in almost all other substantial towns and cities.¹⁸

Holidaymaking thus became fetishized as “escaping” from everyday life and was promoted and desired accordingly. At a more fundamental level, the belief in the regenerative power of sun, sea and sand led to the development of a need for this characteristically modern form of escape.

3.1.2 Holidaying as a Need

A growing interest in holidaying was not statistically present until the late 1940s and early 1950s. The mass tourism which ensued led to the creation of the perceived “need” for a holiday. Jean Baudrillard’s reading of the creation of need value and also that of kitsch,¹⁹ both of which he associates with consumer society, are such that: “de larges couches de la population procèdent le long de l’échelle sociale, accèdent à un statut supérieur et en même temps à la demande culturelle, qui n’est que la nécessité de manifester ce statut par des signes.”²⁰ The broad social need for holidays and more specifically the need to go to the beach was a motif that figured widely in the *Trente Glorieuses* media.

Tourism was highlighted particularly in French magazines with early accounts of Paris being abandoned to non-French tourists as its population headed towards the beaches:

Dans les rues de Paris, les Parisiens qui abandonnent Paris pour les vacances ont l’impression de laisser une ville vide. C’est pure présomption de leur part,

¹⁷ Chris Rojek, Susan M. Shaw, and Anthony J. Veal, *A Handbook of Leisure Studies* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006). 482.

¹⁸ John Urry, *The Tourist Gaze* (London: Sage, 2002 [1990]). 32.

¹⁹ Baudrillard refers to “kitsch” as the equivalent of “cliché” in Jean Baudrillard, *La société de consommation : ses mythes, ses structures* (Paris: Gallimard, 1986 [1970]). 165.

²⁰ *Ibid.* 166.

car Paris est plein. Le tourisme à Paris accuse une augmentation importante par rapport à l'année dernière."²¹

This was also echoed in *Paris Match* in August 1950: "A Paris sans Parisiens."²² Holidays took up a lot of magazine space during the summer months of the 1950s and 1960s. In July 1955, the front cover of *Elle* is adorned with a woman bathing in the sea with the caption reading "Bonnes vacances!"²³ In August of this same year, a woman dressed in a white dress walks along the beach, while the caption underneath has a quotation from designer Alice Chavane: "C'est la femme brune qui est à la mode!"²⁴ Spending time on the beach in order to get a tan is highlighted as it shows how the image of the human body can reflect social status. The steady growth in popularity of sun-holidaying began to signify a social need to get away and avail of the beneficial properties of the beach.²⁵ The importance of the sun rather than the sea is a factor which Urry stresses:

In the post-war period it has been the sun, not the sea, that is presumed to produce health and sexual attractiveness. The ideal body has come to be viewed as one that is tanned. The viewpoint has been diffused downwards through the social classes with the result that many package holidays present this as almost the reason for going on holiday. The north European resorts have thus come to be seen as less attractive, less fashionable, because they cannot guarantee to produce a tanned body... in Europe this concentration on the sun has enormously benefited the development of resorts around the Mediterranean. This began in France and Spain, then spread to Greece, Italy, Yugoslavia, and then to North Africa and most recently Turkey.²⁶

The physical benefits of seaside holidaying correspond to the notions of pleasure and the importance of the body advocated by "the new petite bourgeoisie" as explored by Bourdieu, who posits that:

...la nouvelle avant-garde éthique oppose une morale du devoir du plaisir qui porte à éprouver comme un échec, propre à menacer l'estime de soi, toute impuissance à "s'amuser," "to have fun" ou, comme on aime à dire aujourd'hui avec un petit frémissement, à "jouir", le plaisir étant non seulement autorisé mais exigé au nom de raisons qui se veulent moins

²¹ *Elle*, 15 July 1952, 13.

²² *Paris-Match*, 26 August 1950, 36.

²³ *Elle*, 4 July 1955, cover.

²⁴ *Elle*, 22 August 1955, cover.

²⁵ See also Bernard Andrieu, "Du teint hâlé honni au bronzage de rigueur," *Cerveau et psycho*, no. 22 (2007): 54-65; Robert L. Rutsky, "Surfing the Other: Ideology on the Beach," *Film Quarterly* (1999): 12-23; Michel Rainis, "French Beach Sports Culture in the Twentieth Century," *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 17, no. 1 (2000): 144-58; Michel Pinçon and Monique Pinçon-Charlot, "L'aristocratie et la bourgeoisie au bord de la mer : La dynamique urbaine de Deauville," *Genèses* 16, no. 1 (1994): 69-93.

²⁶ Urry, *The Tourist Gaze*. 38.

éthiques que scientifiques : la peur de ne pas avoir assez de plaisir, suite logique du souci de surmonter la peur du plaisir, se combine avec la recherche de l'expression de soi et de son corps ("l'expression corporelle") et de la communication avec les autres.²⁷

The physical emancipation of the body was of primordial importance in the quest for freedom as it was important to: "substituer la relaxation à la tension, le plaisir à l'effort, 'la créativité' et la 'liberté' à la discipline, la communication à la solitude".²⁸ What became mass tourism presented the opportunity for such physical expression, replacing work in an office with exercise and relaxation under the sun and in the sea; the tanned body thus represented a welcome contrast to Parisian life. The Côte d'Azur was the region in which such outlets primarily existed for the working classes. While the Norman beaches were much closer geographically to Paris and many of the northern industrialized cities, the image and perception of wealth and decadence associated with resorts such as Cannes and St Tropez meant that the tourist gaze moved to these resorts through the *Trente Glorieuses*.²⁹

The growth in popularity and accessibility of the automobile also led to an evolution in the way it was perceived. As the *Trente Glorieuses* progressed, the place of the automobile in working class society evolved. While it remained an object of desire, a commodity to be acquired, it had evolved additionally into a Baudrillardian need, possession of which signified belonging to a more modern society. As houses were in the process of modernising, the need for a fridge and later a television emerged. These items became inscribed as needs and were coveted in order to engage in everyday life. Thus, a household needed these commodities in order to fit into the new culture of modernity and hygiene which, as Ross posits, became prevalent in the post-colonial era.³⁰ The automobile became part of this expansion; although it remained desired, this desire can be seen to have evolved from that for a mysterious purveyor of power and prestige to that for a constituent part of the household. The car continued to be fetishized. However, this was in a different way to before the Second World War or indeed during the early *Trente Glorieuses*.

²⁷ Bourdieu, *La distinction*. 424.

²⁸ Ibid. 426.

²⁹ Ginette Vincendeau, *Stars and Stardom in French Cinema* (London: Continuum, 2000). 102.

³⁰ Ross, *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies*. 155.

3.2 Holidaying before the Second World War

3.2.1 Deauville et Trouville, Nous Nous Sommes Tant Aimés³¹

Having the closest resorts to Paris, early seaside vacationing in France began in Normandy in the 19th-Century. The English upper classes, as the beneficiaries of an Industrial Revolution which took place first in England and then in continental Europe, took to vacationing before many of their European counterparts. This began on the south coast in resorts such as Brighton, Margate and Newhaven, but, in the 1820s, spread to the other side of the Channel, to the beaches of Normandy and, more particularly, to the resort towns of Dieppe, Cabourg, Trouville and Deauville.³² The upper classes also made these resorts their summer destination primarily for their proximity to Paris.³³ It was becoming easier to reach the sea from the capital, and the construction of the rail line to the region in 1848 meant that it was possible to reach Normandy's golden beaches within five hours.³⁴ Hotels and particularly casinos began to spring up in these towns as the wealthy classes made their way there. In the 1850s, the town of Trouville was the preferred holiday retreat of Napoleon III's court and it was his half-brother the Duc de Morny who identified the marshland across from Trouville as the perfect location for a new town to be built specifically to welcome increased tourism to the area.³⁵ This new town, Deauville, was constructed with upper-class holiday-making in mind.

³¹ "Nous Nous Sommes Tant Aimés" was a 1974 Italian film, the title of which was subsequently used in a books devoted to the 2CV: Jacques Wolgensinger, *La 2 CV : nous nous sommes tant aimés* (Paris: Gallimard, 1995).

³² Urry, *The Tourist Gaze*. 27; Catherine Bertho-Lavenir, *La roue et le stylo : comment nous sommes devenus touristes* (Paris: Odile Jacob, 1999). 30.

³³ Bertho-Lavenir, *La roue*, 169.

³⁴ An iconic poster of the time, which was subsequently commemorated on a stamp, shows members of the upper classes in the sea off the coast of Cabourg trying to catch a bewitching mermaid dressed in white, the caption reading "Cabourg à 5 heures de Paris." [Figure 2]

³⁵ Didier Hébert, "Deauville : création et développement urbain," *In Situ. Revue des patrimoines*, no. 6 (2012): 1-13. 4.



Figure 2. Cabourg à 5 heures de Paris³⁶

The growth in popularity of the automobile among the wealthier classes in the early 20th-Century gave the so-called *Côte Fleurie* a new lease of life following the economic downturn which had occurred in the aftermath of the Franco-Prussian war.³⁷ With the advent of the automobile, members of the upper classes enjoyed further autonomy as their latest purchase duly made its way to the nearest *station balnéaire*, which was evolving to welcome the famous and glamorous resort of the day. In 1911, the Count Le Marois had the surroundings of the racecourse at Deauville-La Touques redeveloped in the image of Longchamp.³⁸ Coco Chanel opened her second boutique in Deauville in 1913, and Printemps opened also its first shop outside of Paris there.³⁹ The resorts were places in which the gentry wished to be seen and a number of artists and writers also made this area their summer home. Marcel Proust was amongst them, being chauffeur-driven to Cabourg and spending every summer from 1907 to 1914 in the Grand Hotel; he used the town as a model for the town “Balbec” in his epic novel *À la recherche du temps perdu*.⁴⁰ André Citroën became emblematic of the type of rich Parisian who brought his family to

³⁶ <http://www.art-memoires.com/letrbis/33ilivembb.htm>

³⁷ Paul Smith, “La place de l’automobile dans le développement des stations,” *In Situ. Revue des patrimoines*, no. 4 (2004): 2-20. 2.

³⁸ Marc De Villiers, “Comte Le Marois,” *Journal de la Société des Américanistes* 13, no. 1 (1921): 129-30. 129.

³⁹ Axel Madsen, *Coco Chanel: A Biography* (London: Bloomsbury, 2009). 28.

⁴⁰ Daniel Karlin, *Proust's English* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007). 122.

stay in a rented villa and to stroll along the “Promenade des Planches”.⁴¹ Catherine Bertho-Lavenir has commented on the growth of Deauville in the following terms:

Les stations modernes de villégiature sont en effet des entreprises commerciales. Les casinos, grands hôtels, syndicats d’initiative, poussés par les actionnaires de la station, rivalisent pour offrir aux résidents des plaisirs tels que des courses hippiques, des régates, des compétitions de golf ou de tennis, susceptibles d’attirer et de retenir des gens élégants qui, à leur tour, fixeront des résidents plus ordinaires. L’image de la station dans la presse mondaine est, dans cette perspective, un capital qu’il faut savoir gérer. Deauville, au tournant du siècle, représente parfaitement cet esprit ambigu où s’associent spéculation foncière, loisir élégant et affichage publicitaire. A une distance de Paris susceptible d’être raisonnablement parcourue en automobile, la station – dont les animateurs cherchent à relancer la fréquentation – va ainsi devenir le prototype de la ville organisée autour de la voiture dans un processus autant symbolique que technique.⁴²

Thus, the perception of the town of Deauville is critical as Bertho-Lavenir refers to the importance of its image in the press and also, crucially, to its role as the standard-bearer for automobile-oriented tourism.

Leisure activities were of particular importance to the upper classes. In consequence, these resorts incorporated the facilities to host events that would amuse their clientele.⁴³ Horse racing was seen as the principal sport in the social calendar, and with the emergence of Deauville as a resort, horse races began to be held there. The Grand Prix de Deauville (originally called the Coupe de Deauville), a prestigious flat race, first run in 1866, still exists today.⁴⁴ The nascent motor industry also invested in this area with the running of one of the first automobile trials from Paris to Trouville in 1897.⁴⁵ This race was a resounding success which attempted to exploit the established interest in equine sport and transfer it to the automobile as it was gaining currency as a means of transportation. The prominent journalist, Pierre Giffard, was even quoted as saying at the time: “Nous voici au seuil d’un siècle qui verra l’homme se séparer du cheval. Ce sera la fin d’une collaboration vieille de plusieurs milliers d’années.”⁴⁶ The choice of route for the race was by no means arbitrary, as it showed the possibility to reach the sea outside the constraints of the

⁴¹ Sylvie Aubenas and Xavier Demange, *Elegance: The Séeberger Brothers and the Birth of Fashion Photography, 1909-1939* (San Francisco, CA: Chronicle, 2007). 35.

⁴² Bertho-Lavenir, *La roue et le stylo*. 169.

⁴³ Mike Huggins, “Culture, Class and Respectability: Racing and the English Middle Classes in the Nineteenth Century,” *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 11, no. 1 (1994): 19-41. 19.

⁴⁴ Pinçon and Pinçon-Charlot, “L’aristocratie et la bourgeoisie au bord de la mer.” 73.

⁴⁵ Jean-Luc Ribémon and Ray Toombs, *Deauville 1936 : un Grand Prix près des planches* (Mulsanne: ITF, 2010). 11.

⁴⁶ Pierre Giffard in Christophe Studeny, *L’invention de la vitesse* (Paris: Gallimard, 1995). 339.

train timetable. Motor racing was to remain popular in the region as Dieppe vied with Le Mans for the hosting of the first ever motor racing Grand Prix and the inaugural Grand Prix Automobile de France.⁴⁷ Although unsuccessful in securing this pioneering race, Dieppe went on to host the following four Grands Prix de France in 1906, 1908, and then, after a three-year break, in 1911 and 1912.⁴⁸ A speed trial was held at Deauville in 1901 and again the following year, the success of which is attested to by the specialist newspaper, *La Locomotion*:

Le kilomètre à Deauville, inauguré en 1901 par l'Auto-Vélo aura lieu le 26 août 1902 pour la deuxième fois. Cette course qui a remporté un grand succès l'année dernière, peut être assurée d'un non moins grand cette année. Elle jouit, en effet, de la faveur du public et des constructeurs, cela pour des raisons bien simples. Les concurrents n'ont pas grands frais à faire pour aller prendre part à l'épreuve, beaucoup même y vont par route. D'autre part, la saison battant son plein sur les coquettes plages de Trouville et de Deauville, les spectateurs y sont naturellement fort nombreux et sont encore augmentés de bon nombre de Parisiens qui profitent de cette occasion pour aller passer un jour ou deux au bord de la mer.⁴⁹

Deauville also welcomed the Grand Prix de France in 1936 when the race was run in the streets of Deauville in what was an imitation of Monaco, where the first street race had taken place in 1929.⁵⁰

The importance of leisure activities in the region was highlighted in 1933 by the *Michelin Guide*, which stated:

Cette élégante station, dont la vogue s'est accrue avec éclat, attire à elle ce que le monde compte de plus aristocratique. Son luxe raffiné, ses distractions de choix, ses courses, ses régates, ses terrains de polo et de golf, son tir au pigeon la classent parmi les centres de séjour les plus appréciés de la clientèle la plus select. Aux jours de courses et de tournois internationaux, une affluence énorme s'y presse.⁵¹

Early tourism in Normandy was fuelled by the upper classes as they sought a form of *dépaysement* from Paris. Initially linked via train, and later by car, the *Côte Fleurie* was the initial seaside destination of choice of the Parisian wealthier classes and remained so until sufficient advances in the road network and the car itself allowed for the possibility of reaching the Côte d'Azur with relative ease. The emergence of the *Côte Fleurie* as a tourist destination at the turn of the 20th-Century was closely

⁴⁷ Michel Bonté, François Hurel, Jean-Luc Ribémon, and François Bruère, *Le Mans : un siècle de passion* (Le Mans: Automobile club de l'Ouest, 2006). 19.

⁴⁸ Ribémon and Toombs, *Deauville 1936*. 3.

⁴⁹ *La Locomotion*, 9 August 1902, 1.

⁵⁰ Jean-François Jacob, *Monte-Carlo : 60 ans de rallye* (Paris: Laffont, 1973). 66.

⁵¹ Michelin Guide, in Olivier Darmon, *La route autrefois* (Paris: Hoëbeke, 2004). 56.

linked to that of the car; this was evidenced by the number of automotive events staged in the area.

3.2.2 Interwar Holiday Growth

In the decades following the First World War, the first signs of a larger public taking an interest in holidaying were beginning to appear as the question of the everyday became a key theme in the 1930s.⁵² There were indications that more widespread leisure time would be availed of by all citizens. This growing interest in leisure time is explored by Bertho-Lavenir as she states:

Les années 1930 représentent une brusque accélération à cet égard. Ce que les pionniers de 1900 avaient rêvé, leurs successeurs le réalisent à grande échelle. Et l'esprit de 1936 est surtout la mise en évidence de changements profonds qui travaillent toute la société depuis plusieurs dizaines d'années.⁵³

The belief became widespread that a certain amount of leisure time would not only increase productivity, but would give people a sense of worth and a sense of working towards a specific objective. In Italy, in 1925, Mussolini's Fascist state established the Opera Nazionale Dopolavoro (OND, the national organization for after-work).⁵⁴ This body was to "veiller à la constitution et à la mise en service d'institutions capables d'élever physiquement, intellectuellement et moralement les travailleurs intellectuels et manuels pendant leurs heures de liberté."⁵⁵ Leisure time was thus seen to be of benefit both for the previously mentioned "petits-bourgeois" and the working classes. One section of the OND was dedicated to "excursionism" and promoted tourism, thus increasing a feeling of belonging to the country and encouraging patriotism. This initiative was mirrored in Nazi Germany in 1933 when Robert Ley created "Kraft durch Freude" (Strength through Joy).⁵⁶ This new initiative was apparently decreed by Hitler announcing:

Je veux qu'un congé suffisant soit accordé au travailleur allemand et que tout soit fait pour que ce congé, de même que les autres temps de loisirs, soit pour lui une vraie détente. Je le souhaite, parce que je veux un peuple aux nerfs solides; car ce n'est qu'avec un peuple maître de ses nerfs que l'on peut vraiment faire de la grande politique.⁵⁷

⁵² Michael Sheringham, *Everyday Life: Theories and Practices from Surrealism to the Present* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010). 121.

⁵³ Bertho-Lavenir, *La roue et le stylo*. 343.

⁵⁴ Marc Boyer, *Le tourisme de masse* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2007). 145.

⁵⁵ Alain Corbin, *L'avènement des loisirs : 1850-1960* (Paris: Aubier, 1995). 381.

⁵⁶ Régine Robin, *Masses et culture de masse dans les années trente* (Paris: Ouvrières, 1991). 116.

⁵⁷ Corbin, *L'avènement des loisirs*. 388.

Much like the OND, “Kraft durch Freude” aimed at providing fulfilling leisure time for citizens; its promotion of tourism also aimed at dissipating any rivalries that existed between regions in Germany at the time.⁵⁸

Thus, workers in Europe were discovering that free time could be available in order to not only to enrich their lives but to also discover their countries and engage in a form of tourism heretofore unknown to the working classes. The emergence of the *Front Populaire* was to prove the catalyst for the creation of paid holidays. However, its roots originated in a pan-European increase in interest in leisure time.

3.2.3 Il Était une Fois les Congés Payés⁵⁹

Les congés payés, as paid holidays are called in France, have nostalgically been linked with the development of mass tourism. They have also been popularly associated with a growth in personal wealth and freedom. These popular memories, while they hold a certain amount of validity, are largely overstated as any increases in personal wealth among the working classes was not apparent until after the Second World War and accompanied the reconstruction of France during the *Trente Glorieuses*.⁶⁰ However, the paid-holidays law itself and its backdrop are significant as they laid the foundation for the unprecedented democratization in automobile ownership in the 1950s and 1960s.

Paid holidays became law in France in June 1936. The left wing coalition of the *Front Populaire*, under the leadership of Léon Blum, came to power in May 1936 in marked contrast to the right-wing regimes in Italy and Germany. The appointment of Léo Lagrange as junior minister in charge of the *Secrétariat d'État aux loisirs* demonstrated the *Front Populaire*'s commitment to the promotion of this aspect of workers' lives. In the creation of this department, the government showed that it was interested in “improving both the moral and physical health of the population at large.”⁶¹ This was to be achieved by affording workers the time to leave the cities and spend time carrying out healthy activities such as cycling or

⁵⁸ Rauch, *Vacances en France*. 108.

⁵⁹ A reference to the traditionally popular introduction to fairy tales as it underlines the nostalgic image held with regard to the inception of paid holidays. See Agnès Chauveau and Isabelle Veyrat-Masson, “L'histoire dans les spots publicitaires : un mariage antinomique,” *Le Temps des médias*, no. 1 (2004): 127-36. 128.

⁶⁰ Boyer, *Le tourisme de masse*. 103.

⁶¹ Michael Kelly, “Holidays,” in *French Culture and Society: The Essentials*, ed. Michael Kelly (London: Arnold, 2001). 125.

hiking. The two-week paid holidays decree was signed into law by the *Front Populaire* government on 11 June 1936. Anybody who had completed two years' continuous work was entitled to these holidays with one condition: holidays had to be taken during the summer months.⁶² This allowed for children to be brought on holidays also and thus promoted the family unit. The creation of paid holidays was accompanied by reductions in the price of a train ticket to be used during the summer period, which promoted the positive use of free time.⁶³

While 1936 remains symbolic for the creation of free time for French citizens, it would be untrue to say that all eligible citizens seized this opportunity immediately.⁶⁴ Generally seen and commemorated as the beginning of mass tourism, the numbers travelling during the summer period remained broadly the same as during previous years, paid holidays and train ticket reductions notwithstanding.⁶⁵

As Françoise Cribier puts it:

La réalité ne ressemble ni aux images répandues par la presse réactionnaire – les “congs payés” qui envahissent les villes de saison ou les ouvriers en casquette qui “saucissonnent” sur la plage de Deauville dans les caricatures du *Figaro* – ni aux images optimistes de la presse du Front populaire – “la route des vacances ouverte aux travailleurs,” “la Côte d’Azur accessible aux masses laborieuses.”⁶⁶

The reality of the situation was that the working classes simply could not afford to indulge in tourism during the early years of paid holidays, and, instead, used the time to carry out necessary DIY, while some even worked clandestinely in order to boost their salaries.⁶⁷ Thus, the inauguration of paid holidays in 1936 was essentially a symbolic gesture, with many workers viewing it with suspicion and even fear that when they returned to work, there might no longer be a job for them. As Rauch puts it:

Il est vrai par ailleurs que dans l’opinion une conception libérale reste latente : le tourisme, consommation de luxe, se situe, par définition, hors de toute intervention : dans les milieux ouvriers en 1936, “personne ne peut croire que l’on va être payé à ne rien faire.”⁶⁸

⁶² Corbin, *L'avènement des loisirs*. 375.

⁶³ Ibid. 375; Boyer, *Le tourisme de masse*. 116.

⁶⁴ A 2000 commemorative stamp, depicting a family cycling along a beach, illustrates the popular image that with the *congs payés* came mass holidaying. [Figure 3]

⁶⁵ Rauch, *Vacances en France*. 100.

⁶⁶ Françoise Cribier, quoted in Corbin, *L'avènement des loisirs*., 394.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Rauch, *Vacances en France*. 99.

Thus the ability to leave on holiday remained an unfulfilled desire in interwar France as workers continued to fantasize about escape rather than actually to experience it.



Figure 3. Commemorative stamp celebrating the inauguration of the *congés payés*⁶⁹

The effects of the introduction of the *congés payés* were not seen until a number of years after the Second World War. The war delayed any increase in holiday-making until the 1950s, when the *Trente Glorieuses* and the growth which this brought introduced the possibility for the working classes to benefit sufficiently from the economic expansion in the country in order to go on holiday. Two million people went on holiday in 1947. This figure rose to eight million in 1951, and by 1966, twenty million French people were going on holidays.⁷⁰ The emphasis of these first holidays was on the outdoors, on mountain hiking and most notably on the sea. Caravanning and camping became very popular as a cost-effective way of spending time while away from home. To understand the full impact of these later changes in mass automobility, it is necessary to develop our understanding of the period from 1918 to 1939.

⁶⁹ <http://www.lafeuillecharbinoise.com/?p=2538>

⁷⁰ Kelly, "French Culture and Society." 125.

3.2.4 Interwar Automobility

Personal automobility typically remained accessible during the interwar period mainly to the upper classes as the lower classes were still unable to afford a car. Private cars production rose from 41,000 in 1921 to 212,000 in 1929⁷¹ while the number of inhabitants per motor vehicle progressed from 318 in 1913 to 28.5 in 1930 and down to 18.5 inhabitants per motor vehicle in 1938.⁷² Interest in acquiring an automobile grew during this period with the introduction of a number of cars which were seen to be targeted at a wider market than many of the sumptuous cars produced before the First World War. As we have seen, André Citroën's productions, perhaps more than those of any other company, targeted a mass market as he adopted many of the marketing techniques and strategies put forward by Henry Ford. This growing popular interest was also encouraged by political regimes of the time, as we shall see, in an attempt to foster greater self-worth and to encourage national unity during the period.

The increase in interest in smaller, more affordable cars originated in Fascist social policy. Hitler, in 1933, gave the order to Ferdinand Porsche to create a people's car, a *Volks-wagen*.⁷³ The original requirements were that it be capable of carrying two adults and three children at a top speed of 100 km/h. This vehicle was to be made available to citizens of the Third Reich through a savings scheme which was not only intended to make the vehicle affordable, it was also to give the working class something to which it could aspire.⁷⁴ Originally called the *KDF-wagen*, an indication that the aims of the KDF ("Kraft durch Freude") movement extended to the mass automobilization of the German people, the Beetle did not go into production before the outbreak of war, and its factories were soon redirected toward military vehicles. [Figure 4] The idea of the people's car did not go unnoticed in France. Smaller firms decided to take a chance on this concept and began designing cars that would be both affordable and practical for a wider consumer base.⁷⁵ The advent of the Second World War meant that any plans to successfully produce and

⁷¹ James Michael Laux, *The European Automobile Industry* (New York, NY: Maxwell Macmillan, 1992). 74.

⁷² Ibid. 130.

⁷³ André Gunthert, "La voiture du peuple des seigneurs : Naissance de la volkswagen," *Vingtieme siecle. Revue d'histoire* (1987): 29-42. 36.

⁷⁴ Jean Cadène, *L'automobile : de sa naissance à son futur* (Perpignan: Cap Béar, 2005). 240.

⁷⁵ Ibid. 241.

commercialize an inexpensive car were postponed, and, thus, the growing demand for a more affordable car was not met until after 1945.

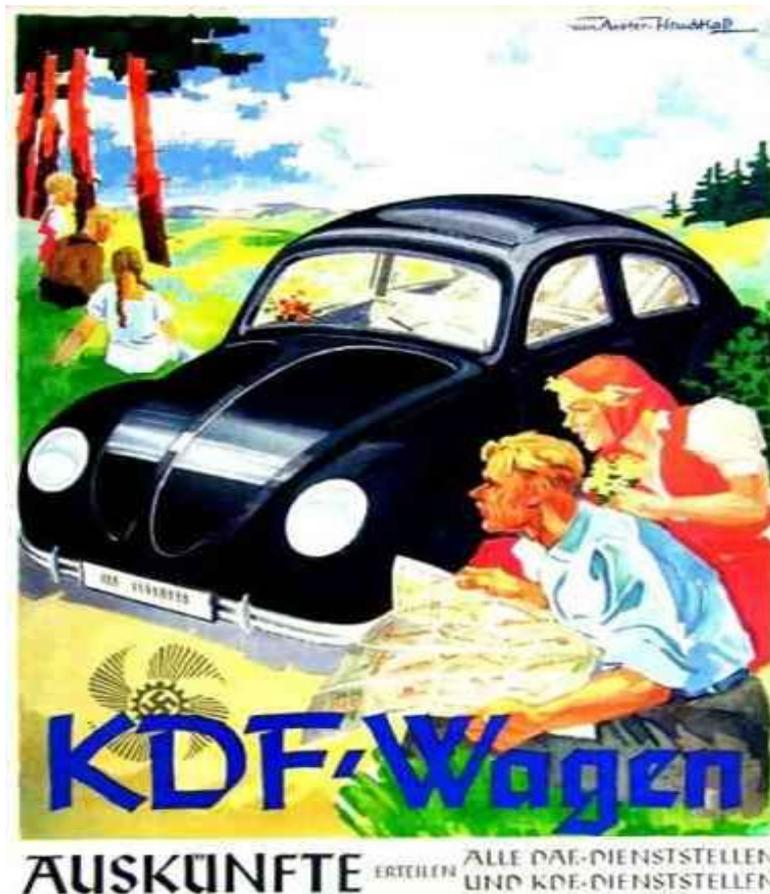


Figure 4 Poster advertising early version of the Volkswagen Beetle⁷⁶

Nevertheless, the first significant French attempt to build a people's car took place before the Second World War in the *Quai de Javel* factory. The Citroën company, having been bought by Michelin in 1935, was placed under the control of Pierre Boulanger, who immediately launched the “projet TPV” (toute petite voiture). Boulanger had specific demands: “transporter à travers un champ labouré un panier d’œufs sans les casser.”⁷⁷ This criterion, as Forsdick states, reflects the utilitarian nature of what was expected of the 2CV. Work began on this TPV, and so much progress was made that 250 examples of the 2CV were built and delivered to be exhibited at the 1939 Salon de l’Automobile. The Salon, however, never took place

⁷⁶ <http://www.oldclassicar.co.uk/kdf-wagen.htm>

⁷⁷ Pierre Boulanger in Charles Forsdick, *Travel in Twentieth-Century French and Francophone Cultures: The Persistence of Diversity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005). 112.

due to the war, and the cars were quickly taken apart and returned to the *Quai de Javel* factory. It was not until after the hostilities that the 2CV was eventually placed on the market, albeit with a three-year wait in order to acquire one, as the low-budget, mass-production market saw the greatest development in the post-war era.

The conception and design of the Volkswagen and the 2CV in Germany and France may be seen as examples of efforts both political and social to strengthen the mobility of the lower classes in the respective countries. While neither car went into production before the war, the decision to invest in their development was indicative of the growing wish to possess an automobile. The huge success of the Beetle and the 2CV, and later of the Renault 4CV and the Fiat 500 in Italy, in the 1950s and 1960s, was a reflection and a vindication of this aspiration.

3.3 Early Post-War Automobility

La Seconde Guerre mondiale constitue, en effet, une coupure décisive dans l'histoire de l'invention du temps libre et dans celle des modalités du loisir de masse. Au milieu des années cinquante, la « révolution estivale » l'emporte sur le rêve militant d'une régénération ouvrière par les congés payés. L'irruption des méthodes des professionnels du loisir assure la victoire du loisir collectif, certes organisé voire subtilement discipliné – il n'est que de songer aux clubs de vacances – mais totalement soumis à la quête du profit et ouvertement dessiné en fonction des désirs individuels de dépaysement et de libre activité corporelle.⁷⁸

As part of reconstruction after 1945, which focused on infrastructure and more specifically housing, the French government was also aware of the important new role the automobile was to play. The *Plan d'Équipement National and the Tranche de Démarrage*, both drafted by the Vichy administration, were used by the provisional government as they designed their own programme for economic expansion.⁷⁹ The government, in the late 1940s, nationalized the coal, gas and electricity industries in an effort to strengthen post-war productivity.⁸⁰ While nationalizations took place for both economic and punitive reasons, with companies accused of collaboration being nationalized, the acquisition of the Renault company,

⁷⁸ Corbin, *L'avènement des loisirs*. 375.

⁷⁹ Richard F. Kuisel, *Capitalism and the State in Modern France: renovation and Economic Management in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983). 147.

⁸⁰ Brian Bliss, "Nationalisation in France and Great Britain of the Electricity Supply Industry," *The International and Comparative Law Quarterly* 3, no. 2 (1954): 277-90. 278.

in 1945, was taken over for economic reasons as much as any other.⁸¹ The increasing importance of the automobile and, more specifically Renault's 4CV, the car which was to rival the 2CV in popularity, meant that the automobile industry was of strategic importance to the state. Charles de Gaulle, as President of the Republic, was significant in this new stance, as he made a number of public appearances in which he was seen to support the French automobile industry. The promotion of the automobile was, perhaps for the first time perceived as an avenue for growth as the automobile became a constituent part of the *Trente Glorieuses*, with vehicle production growing from 2,000 vehicles in 1945 to 357,000 in 1951, this progression was to continue to peak at 3,596,000 vehicles produced in 1973.⁸²

3.3.1 The Role of the French State

As mentioned, Renault, having been accused of collaboration, was nationalized in 1945 and became the Régie-Renault.⁸³ This gave the state a more central role in, and greater incentive to relaunch the automobile industry. The number of cars on the roads had been greatly reduced with many automobile companies having had their factories used for the manufacturing of arms with the resulting inability to recommence immediately automobile production after the war.⁸⁴ With the ending of the conflict in 1945, a new interest was born in the automobile. This was mirrored within the post-war government, which made car manufacturing a strategic industry, and, thereby, encouraged its development:

Dans le domaine de l'automobile, la reconstruction française offre une voie originale [...]. Les années quarante constituent une phase critique, marquée, pour les firmes automobiles, par l'éloignement de leur métier de base, le vieillissement des machines, le pillage et les bombardements. La gravité de la situation de l'automobile française explique la volonté d'intervention des pouvoirs publics. Elle conduit, au lendemain de la Libération, à l'adoption du plan quinquennal de l'automobile, ou Plan Pons, qui prévoit de regrouper les industriels autour d'un petit nombre de fabrications et de modèles.⁸⁵

⁸¹ Alain Frerejean, *André Citroën, Louis Renault : un duel sans merci* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1998). 298.

⁸² Laux, *The European Automobile Industry*. 178.

⁸³ Jean-Louis Loubet, "Les grands constructeurs privés et la reconstruction. Citroën et Peugeot 1944-1951," *Histoire, économie et société* 9, no. 3 (1990): 441-69. 442.

⁸⁴ Patrick Fridenson, "La question de la voiture populaire en France de 1930 à 1950," *Culture technique* (1989): 205-10. 208.

⁸⁵ Jean-Louis Loubet, "Le modèle moyen chez Peugeot 1945-1965," *Histoire, économie et société* 6, no. 4 (1987): 569-85. 571.

As noted, the war left many car manufacturing plants unfit for automobile production in its immediate aftermath. It was not within the capacities of these companies to deal with any newfound interest in or demand for the automobile. The government, in an attempt to maximize output and rebuild the automobile industry, decided that the largest automobile manufacturers would each function in different sectors of the automobile market. Renault was allotted the low-end market, Peugeot was assigned the mid-range sector, and Citroën was allotted the upper end or luxury market. This division was at the heart of the “Plan Pons”. In this way, the government aimed to consolidate the existing automobile companies and re-launch what was, prior to the war, a prosperous sector of the economy. By allotting different sectors to each company, the government envisaged higher production as each company would be producing fewer models. Theoretically, less competition between the companies would serve to promote overall production over the range of vehicles produced. This would provide the public with fewer choices, but at least a minimum number of vehicles to buy.⁸⁶ Named after Paul-Marie Pons, the deputy-director of mechanical and electrical industry in the Ministry for Industrial Production, this state-managed approach was greeted with equal measures of welcome and hostility.⁸⁷

By prioritising the largest manufacturing companies and by recommending the absorption of smaller firms into these companies, it immediately sounded the death knell for a large number of the traditional family carmakers who had up until this point been struggling for their very existence. The recommendation of the amalgamation of these groups into a small number of super-companies consolidated these larger firms and strengthened their hold on their respective sectors of the industry. Peugeot, as the middle-range producer, absorbed the enterprises of Saurer, Hotchkiss and Latil in a concerted effort by the government to make it into as strong an entity as Renault and Citroën.⁸⁸ Citroën, as the receiver of the higher-range market, while placed in a market where they had almost no competition, was

⁸⁶ Dominique Barjot, “La reconstruction économique de l’Europe (1945-1953),” *Histoire, économie et société* (1999): 227-43. 242.

⁸⁷ Jean-Pierre Bardou, Jean-Jacques Chanaron, Patrick Fridenson, and James M. Laux, *La révolution automobile* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1977). 194.

⁸⁸ Loubet, “Les grands constructeurs privés et la reconstruction.” 444.

unhappy to have been so hamstrung by a government directive.⁸⁹ Seen traditionally as a Jewish company (André Citroën was the son of a Jewish diamond merchant), Loubet suggests that there may have been an anti-Semitic motive behind this decision, as he claims that this absorption was first proposed by the same department in 1942 under the Vichy government.⁹⁰ Indeed, Francois Allain lends weight to this argument in positing that Paul-Marie Pons was fortunate to still have the position of assistant-director having played a full role as a member of the Pétainiste administration.⁹¹ The decision to award the recently nationalized Régie Renault the low-end market was also met with opposition as this sector was increasingly seen as the area within which most growth was possible. While there was a certain need for a top-of-the-range car, the interest of lower classes in the car, fueled by the *congés payés*, suggested that the numbers looking for affordable cars would be growing at a higher rate than any other sector. Hence, when the Plan Pons was decreed, this directive to Citroën was met not only with hostility but with strong opposition. It was becoming clear that the sector in which there was going to be the most development in the post-war era was the economy sector. Citroën met on a number of occasions with the ministry to discuss the possibility of them building a product that already had had years of research carried out on it. The ministry eventually allowed Citroën to enter into direct competition with the Renault 4CV, which was seen by the government as the French answer to the Beetle.

In October 1946, General de Gaulle decided to open personally the Salon de l'Automobile in the Grand Palais.⁹² In this first post-war Salon, after a gap of seven years, 809,000 people attended compared with the 440,000 visitors in 1938.⁹³ The French people, now led by its wartime "saviour", was urged to forget the dark days of the war and to embrace a new future within which accessibility to these vehicles and, hence, to all of France was being prioritized. At this 1946 Salon, the Renault 4CV was exhibited for the first time, as was the Dyna Panhard. The harsh reality of a country in the aftermath of a war was disguised as much as possible, yet it could not be wholly avoided. While there were 671 exhibitors in 1946 as opposed to 526 in

⁸⁹ Jean-Louis Loubet, "L'industrie automobile française : un cas original ?," *Histoire, économie et société* 18, no. 2 (1999): 419-33. 426.

⁹⁰ Loubet, "Les grands constructeurs privés et la reconstruction." 451.

⁹¹ François Allain, *Citroën 2 CV* (Boulogne-Billancourt: ETAI, 2002). 15.

⁹² Dominique Rizet, *100 ans de passion automobile : le salon de l'automobile, 1898-1998* (Paris: Mazarine, 1998). 71.

⁹³ Jean-Louis Loubet, *Histoire de l'automobile française* (Paris: Seuil, 2001). 245.

1938,⁹⁴ the cars themselves were not available for purchase, and waiting lists ranging from 12 months to five years reflected the reduction of the nation's *parc automobile* from 800,000 vehicles in 1938 to less than a third of this figure in 1946.⁹⁵ Meanwhile, Citroën, having received permission to produce its TPV, was encountering problems with its 2CV and failed to exhibit it in 1946. The TPV became known under another acronym – *Toujours Pas Vue*.⁹⁶ The 2CV was eventually exhibited at the 1948 version of the Salon, but the waiting list that grew for this car meant that customers would be unable to benefit from its low price or well-publicized reliability until the 1950s.⁹⁷ Nonetheless, the decision taken in the 1930s to promote the development of such a car, a decision which coincided with the election of the *Front Populaire*, laid the foundation for what was to become the bedrock of vacationing in the years following the Second World War.

3.3.2 La TPV

The two cars that defined the early period after the Second World War were the Renault 4CV and, particularly, the Citroën 2CV. These two cars, alike in terms of specifications and target buyers, according to Loubet, turned out to complement one another rather than actually to compete.⁹⁸ The 4CV became popular in cities, with the *Deuche*, as it was affectionately called, remaining in the countryside. Upon its first appearance at the Salon de l'Automobile in 1948 and in response to subsequent marketing from 1950, the *Deuche* was roundly criticized by motoring journalists. [Figure 5] While they had accepted the similarly low-budget 4CV's launch in the immediate aftermath of the war, they now deplored the cheap, minimalist image associated with the 2CV. This "parapluie sur quatre roues"⁹⁹ initially had no radio, no power-steering, while the windows did not wind down, but rather flipped out. In its earliest days, the 2CV had just one headlight; it was air-cooled, and hence had no need for a radiator. It was equipped with a tiny two-horsepower engine that needed thirty seconds to reach 60 km/h. Catherine Bertho-Lavenir succinctly encapsulates all the characteristics of the *Deuche* saying:

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Rizet, *100 ans de passion automobile*. 72.

⁹⁶ Loubet, *Histoire de l'automobile française*. 245.

⁹⁷ Ibid. 279.

⁹⁸ Ibid. 254.

⁹⁹ Wolgensinger, *La 2 CV*. 21.

À l'origine elle n'a qu'un phare, guère d'essuie-glace, pratiquement pas de sièges. Les tôles embouties de la carrosserie aux nervures étranges, le toit de toile, les sièges suspendus, sont des solutions radicalement neuves qui cherchent l'économie de conception et la légèreté. Le moteur, en effet, n'est guère puissant. Il oblige à un mode de conduite bien reconnaissable. On prend son élan dans les descentes pour gravir les côtes et rien ne doit vous obliger à freiner car il faut un siècle à l'embrayage, d'une conception révolutionnaire, pour remettre l'objet en route. La suspension vous couche dans les virages, les fenêtres se rabattent sur vos doigts, la pluie s'insinue par les interstices de la capote: telle qu'elle est ce n'est pas une voiture, c'est un mode de vie, un choix éthique et esthétique. En tout cas, ce n'est pas une routière. Paris-Nice en 2 CV est une aventure longue et cahotante.¹⁰⁰

For all of this, the *Deuche* boasted exceptional build quality, it was economical to run, and it seemed to go on forever. Because of these virtues, the *Deuche* quickly became an integral part of lives. It was the incarnation of early mass motorization and, as such, was very different from the vehicles which had been fetishized to date. Acquiring a 2CV was not seen as an indicator of class distinction and it was not desired as such. Bertho-Lavenir suggests that the acquisition of a 2CV was, in fact, a choice of personal lifestyle; and while following the *route des vacances* in one was not recommended, in popular memory, the role of this car in the expansion of *Trente Glorieuses* holiday-making remains undisputed.



Figure 5. The Salon de l'Automobile in 1948¹⁰¹

¹⁰⁰ Bertho-Lavenir, *La roue et le stylo*. 367.

¹⁰¹ <http://nostalgic-events.skyrock.com/3131552526-7-Octobre-1948-Au-salon-de-l-automobile-Citroen-presente-la-2-CV-type.html>

The first car of families in the 1950s, the 2CV remained in the family and went on to become its second car, or the car that French youth inherited in the 1960s when more than one third of the population was aged less than twenty.¹⁰² Due to its simplicity, the *Deuche* rarely broke down, complicated parts were at a minimum, and, thus, repairs, if necessary, were minor and relatively cheap. The 2CV entered society at a time when car ownership was expanding. In 1938, one household in ten owned a car; by 1957, a quarter of all households possessed at least one automobile, and in 1968 some 69% of households owned a car.¹⁰³ As the car that was bought by the masses, the 2CV has often been referred to as the Ford Model T of France.¹⁰⁴

The early *Trente Glorieuses* saw the emergence of more economical cars, as the four remaining large automobile companies sought to make advances into a previously untapped market. The 2CV, the 4CV and, to a lesser extent, the Dyna Panhard were cars which became the new popular vehicles.¹⁰⁵ This constituted the beginning of an evolution in the fetishizing of the car as it came to be viewed and desired as a vehicle to fulfil the possibility of escape whilst on holiday. Nevertheless, automobile consumption remained linked to a phantasmagoria-inspired fetishizing as the car and now holiday-making were desired as signs of distinction and a means of acceding to a higher social class. The phantasmagoria, however, had been removed from the physical appearance of many cars to be transposed onto another Marxian exchange-value, i.e. the ability to facilitate independence and specifically independent mobility. This growth fit with the subsequent rise of *Route Nationale 7*, the road by which these new tourists travelled to the sea.

3.4 Direction Côte d’Azur

Je quittai Paris [...]. Égarée par l’émotion des adieux, je tournai en rond dans les banlieues puis je filai sur la nationale sept, heureuse d’avoir devant moi ce long ruban de kilomètres pour me souvenir et pour imaginer.¹⁰⁶

Written about by Simone de Beauvoir, amongst others, the *Route Nationale 7* has become a *lieu de mémoire* as it is popularly perceived as the site upon which the holidaying public made its way to the Côte d’Azur. However, the *Nationale 6* was

¹⁰² See Roland Barthes, *Oeuvres complètes* (Paris: Seuil, 2002). 1137-8.

¹⁰³ Bardou *et al.*, *La révolution automobile*. 224.

¹⁰⁴ Forsdick, *Travel in Twentieth-Century French and Francophone Cultures*. 112.

¹⁰⁵ Luc Boltanski, “Les usages sociaux de l’automobile : concurrence pour l’espace et accidents,” *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales* 1, no. 2 (1975): 25-49. 36.

¹⁰⁶ Simone de Beauvoir, quoted in Bertho-Lavenir, *La roue et le stylo*. 366.

busier during the summer months than its more illustrious counterpart¹⁰⁷ in a further example of how a site of memory was invested with more nostalgic importance than what it actually had at the time. Referred to in Rioux's and Sirinelli's *La France d'un siècle à l'autre*,¹⁰⁸ much like popular perception of the 1936 inauguration of paid holidays, *Nationale 7* has become closely associated with the development of summer tourism until replaced by the motorway network.

3.4.1 On est Heureux, Nationale 7¹⁰⁹

The *Trente Glorieuses*, a period of unprecedented economic expansion, coincided with the beginning of a tradition of mass migration by the French during their holidays.¹¹⁰ Reaching the Mediterranean, the ultimate symbol of freedom and opulence, was about to become a reality. *Nationale 7* is the national primary road that goes from Paris through Lyons, and finishes in the Côte d'Azur town of Menton.¹¹¹ It is a road that originally dates back to Roman times and that saw major development during the 1920s and 1930s, during which time *La Route Bleue* emerged to promote tourism along a road that was being increasingly used by bicycle, by coach and also by car. This growth in use for pleasure purposes resulted in the establishment of tourist-based industries along the route. Garages, filling stations, post offices, hotels and restaurants appeared along the *Route Bleue*, all hoping to make the most of this new culture of movement. *Nationale 7* was the fastest way from Paris to the Mediterranean and among the first roads to be repaired in the wake of the war.

Places such as Cannes, Nice and St Tropez became the primary holiday destinations. These resorts formed part of the broader social construction of a dream of tourism as Urry puts it:

Places are chosen to be gazed upon because there is an anticipation, especially through daydreaming and fantasy, of intense pleasures, either on a different scale or involving different senses from those customarily encountered. Such anticipation is constructed and sustained through a variety

¹⁰⁷ Thierry Dubois, *L'automobile populaire* (Issy-les-Moulineaux: Le fil conducteur, 2012). 73.

¹⁰⁸ Jean-Pierre Rioux and Jean-François Sirinelli, *La France d'un siècle à l'autre* (Paris: Hachette, 1999). 349.

¹⁰⁹ Lyrics from Charles Trenet's iconic song of the same name.

¹¹⁰ Seven million tourists in France in 1951 compared with 2 million in the period 1936-39. See Boyer, *Le tourisme de masse*. 151.

¹¹¹ Peter Jacobs, Erwin De Decker, and Isabelle Vanmaldeghem, *Nationale 7 : la route des vacances. Le guide pour flâner de Paris à Menton* (Paris: Hachette, 2009). 28.

of non-tourist practices, such as film, TV, literature, magazines, records and videos, which construct and reinforce that gaze.¹¹²

The regular representations of the Mediterranean in *Trente Glorieuses* magazines played a central role in this construction. To the Paris-based press, mass tourism was, in effect, Parisian tourism. It was the Parisian worker's attempts to find an escape in his or her time off. As Rauch states, the proportion of inhabitants in a town leaving to go to the seaside was directly proportional to its size and population:

À revenu égal, les Français partent d'autant plus que l'agglomération où ils résident est plus importante: au milieu des années 60, pour des revenus médians de l'ordre de 6 000 à 10 000 F par an, 67 % des Parisiens partent en vacances, 45 % des habitants d'agglomérations de plus de 50 000 habitants, 42 % de ceux des agglomérations de 20 000 à 50 000, mais seulement 15 % des communes rurales.¹¹³

As such, tourism was the discovery of the South by Parisian workers, first and foremost, and cultural references to holidaymaking had Paris as its starting-point.

1950, the year of the first Salon du Tourisme, was also the year in which special funding was approved for the redevelopment of the French road network.¹¹⁴ This move prioritized automobile travel over rail as the main means of reaching holiday destinations. Hence, the N7 was redeveloped, and, once this wider set of roadworks was completed, the *Trente Glorieuses* expansion led to the building of a network of motorways leading from Paris to different destinations throughout France. In 1970, the Paris-Nice motorway was officially opened, and the N7 was no longer necessary for tourists to reach the Mediterranean. The relative anonymity of the motorway meant that the symbolic nature of the N7, although no longer the main route south, remained intact.¹¹⁵ The N7 as a site of memory persists as the means by which the travelling masses of the 1950s and 1960s liberated themselves from the city to reach the goal that was "the beach, bathing, partying and sociability."¹¹⁶

The role of the automobile in the development of mass holidaying was thus closely linked with the nostalgic image of the *Nationale 7* as it came to symbolize a means of escape from the urban environment to the sea. This link was strengthened as the car began to figure more regularly in popular culture of the day in a close

¹¹² Urry, *The Tourist Gaze*. 6.

¹¹³ Rauch, *Vacances en France*. 131.

¹¹⁴ Véronique Lefebvre, *Paris-Rhin-Rhône : histoires d'autoroutes* (Paris: Le Cherche Midi, 2001). 7.

¹¹⁵ Jacobs *et al.*, *Nationale 7*. 30.

¹¹⁶ Anderson and Tabb, *Water, Leisure and Culture*. 223

association with the summer holidays. Print media carried advertisements highlighting a strong relationship between the two; they also made use of the image of the car during the summer months as it came to define individual mobility. *Nationale 7* consequently became a *lieu de mémoire* celebrated in songs and magazines as the automobile gained impetus in the late 1940s and 1950s.

3.4.2 Popular Representations of Automobiled Holidaying

When Charles Trenet released one of his most famous songs, *Nationale 7*, in 1956, the government was in the process of increasing the *congés payés* by a week to three weeks. France had overcome the post-war rationing of the late Forties, a period during which this continuing hardship had also seen a growing interest in a more modern nation.¹¹⁷ Holidaying itself was becoming emblematic of what was perceived to be authentic modernity. Urry posits that:

To be a tourist is one of the characteristics of the “modern” experience. Not to “go away” is like not possessing a car or a nice house. It is a marker of status in modern societies and is also thought to be necessary to health.¹¹⁸

The baby boom was another pointer to a public aiming for a time when they could enjoy the comforts that were promised and now gradually becoming available.¹¹⁹ In visiting the Salon de l’Automobile in the immediate aftermath of the war, General de Gaulle was also seen to promote self-improvement and self-modernising. The growing interest in holidaying and individual mobility was reflected in popular culture and in particular in magazines in the early *Trente Glorieuses*. This growth will be examined at further length in Chapter 4.

Trenet is possibly best known for his song *La Mer*, which he penned in 1943 and which was translated into English as *Beyond the Sea* for Bobby Darin. *La Mer* was reputedly written in ten minutes by Trenet while on the train from Paris to the town of his birth, Narbonne.¹²⁰ It speaks of the beauty of the sea to which he is travelling as it symbolizes for him a whole vision of the south of France. The sea is once again referred to in *Nationale 7*, which similarly alludes to the journey from Paris to the Mediterranean. Both songs also mention “un ciel d’été” and are both

¹¹⁷ Boyer, *Le tourisme de masse*. 152.

¹¹⁸ Urry, *The Tourist Gaze*. 4.

¹¹⁹ Richard John Neupert, *A History of the French New Wave Cinema* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2002). 6; Ellen Furlough, “Making Mass Vacations: Tourism and Consumer Culture in France, 1930s to 1970s,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 40, no. 2 (1998): 247-86. 272.

¹²⁰ Darmon, *La route autrefois*. 50.

firmly rooted in the summer months when holiday-makers can make the most of the weather and other pleasures that the seaside offers. It is interesting, however, to see the evolution in both Trenet's and French society's approach to the sea and the south of France through these two songs.

While *La Mer* can be seen as an ode to the beauty of the sea under the summer sun, *Nationale 7* refers instead to the possibility of making the most of the sea and the summer weather. The sea is no longer a far-off place that people can only dream about. In *Nationale 7*, the sea is the destination, it is the goal of holiday-makers, and it is access to it via this road that makes it attainable. Trenet refers to seaside resorts that can be reached by taking this road, but, more importantly, he describes the evolution that has taken place as a result of the democratization of automobility. The "Route des Vacances" has had the effect of transforming Paris into a "Faubourg of Valence" and a "Banlieue of Saint-Paul de Vence." By referring to Paris as a *faubourg*, traditionally an industrial suburb of a city, and a *banlieue*, Trenet, far from removing the centralist bias that is associated with the capital, in fact reinforces it and in essence underlines the fact that without a Paris there would be no N7, and that the wish to engage in tourism would no longer exist. In fact, Paris has been left behind only temporarily, and all eyes are on the "ciel d'été" which has the ability to fill our hearts and chase away the bitterness caused by life in the big city, at least for a while.

In a 1959 video associated with this song, a tanned Trenet, wearing only a swimsuit, idly fixes a sail on his yacht. [Figures 6 & 7] He is the epitome of joyful insouciance, something which, it appears, can only be accessed by distancing oneself from the working world, and the "malheur" associated with living in a large city. While lounging on a yacht would suggest an upper-class activity, the lyrics of this song constitute an ode to mass tourism rather than that practised by an elite few. In the opening lines, as Trenet describes the *Nationale 7* as the road that leads to the Mediterranean, he states that one can get there by driving or by hitchhiking, and he later evokes the image of the entire family climbing into one vehicle, "que l'on soit deux trois quatre cinq six ou sept." *Nationale 7*, the "route des vacances" is the means by which workers in France's capital can now avail of the beauty of the sea spoken of in such dreamy terms by Trenet in his earlier hit. It echoes the nostalgic Popular Front mood which, as previously stated, created a rose-tinted view of the

early days of the *congés payés*. *Nationale 7* is a reflection of the times when workers were demonstrating the will for the freedom to enjoy themselves, to forget the routine of city life and work. The French word *dépaysement* describes this need, coming from the word “pays,” it describes the changing of scenery, getting away from what one is used to in order to get a total break from the everyday routine. In his song *Nationale 7*, Trenet alludes to the places crossed by holidaymakers in their quest for *dépaysement*. This *dépaysement* is explored by Urry when he states that:

Tourism results from a basic binary division between the ordinary/everyday and the extraordinary. Tourist experiences involve some aspect or element which induces pleasurable experiences which are, by comparison with the everyday, out of the ordinary.¹²¹

Corbin refers to holidaymaking as a social norm and a mark or sign of civilization:

Aujourd’hui le loisir fonde une nouvelle morale du bonheur. Celui qui ne profite pas ou ne sait pas profiter du temps libre n’est plus tout à fait un homme, c’est un homme “sous-développé”, intermédiaire entre l’homme et la bête de somme.¹²²

As a sign of civilization, the act of going on holidays can be compared to the Baudrillardian need to possess an automobile or other commodity as outlined in *Le système des objets* as already explored.¹²³ This socially created “need” occurred as the car became apparent in popular cultural representations.

¹²¹ Urry, *The Tourist Gaze*. 11.

¹²² Corbin, *L’avènement des loisirs*. 388.

¹²³ Baudrillard, *Le système des objets*. 165.



Figure 6. Nationale 7, Charles Trenet¹²⁴



Figure 7. Nationale 7, Charles Trenet¹²⁵

¹²⁴ Charles Trenet and Pierre-Gérard Verny, *Route nationale 7* (Lyon: Vianelly, 1955).

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*

The belief that modernity had caused man to engage in less satisfying work, and, therefore, had augmented the need to relax, was a common theme in both articles and advertisements in magazines of the time. The car functioned as a vehicle capable of bringing its owners to the goal of relaxation, it was also marketed as a space within which one could escape from the bustle of everyday life. Articles featuring the beneficial role of the car became relatively common in the 1950s as print media promoted the need for holidays. The growth in people leaving on holidays also became an issue of importance for magazines as the summer period approached:

La date du 1^{er} juillet a bouleversé la vie de 40 millions de Français : vacances pour les uns (un million et demi de Parisiens) travail supplémentaire pour les autres (127 trains supplémentaires), invasion des campagnes par les citadins, apparitions des auto-stoppeurs sur les routes, réveil des villégiatures endormies, facilité pour les automobilistes de garer leurs voitures. Depuis que la date des vacances scolaires a été avancée du 14 au 1^{er} juillet, cette dernière date est celle du grand départ. Cette année 200.000 Parisiens de plus que l’an dernier sont partis.¹²⁶

The symbolic date of 1 July was also marked by *Elle* with the inauguration in 1957 of a new weekly section, entitled “Elle à la mer”, which was to run during the summer months each year.¹²⁷ This section encouraged its readers to make the most of the summer holidays. Many advertisements also served to advance this aim. In an advertisement for the Renault Frégate, the forerunner to the Renault Floride, which will be examined later in this chapter, which appeared in *Elle* in 1956, we see a qualitatively new fetishizing of the capacity of the car as it is portrayed as capable of providing succour from everyday life, even in the simple act of returning home:

l’heure apaisante, lorsque vous roulez pour vos affaires, quand vous partez en week-end ou, tout simplement, lorsque vous rentrez chez vous le soir, au volant de votre voiture, vous goûtez cette heure de détente si nécessaire...¹²⁸

The need for holidays was similarly highlighted by magazines as covers and full sections are entirely devoted to getting away. *Elle*, in particular, carried a number of cover pictures of people on the beach. The 5 August 1957 edition ran a picture of a woman in a bikini in the sea, while the corresponding description stated that:

¹²⁶ *Paris-Match*, 9 July 1955, 33.

¹²⁷ *Elle*, 5 July 1957,

¹²⁸ *Elle*, 8 October 1956, 8.

L'été, c'est la saison où l'on a des loisirs, où l'on peut enfin lire, aiguïser son esprit en scrutant jeux, devinettes et mots croisés, comme vous allez le faire en parcourant ce numéro de loisirs, jeux et lectures. Et c'est aussi la saison du plein air, des vacances et des éclats de rire dans l'éclaboussement des vagues.¹²⁹

These primary sources are important as they enable us to gain an insight into how holidaymaking was portrayed to the public. Advertisements for automobiles and automobile-linked products were instrumental in the broadening of this image which became more widespread as France moved into the 1960s. An advertisement for Esso in 1962 is a further example of the popular image which was associated with travelling on holiday:

Au diable les soucis ! Les vacances-en-voiture, au fond, qu'est-ce que c'est ? Plein de soleil et de ciel bleu, des arbres, du sable fin, un brin d'exotisme et beaucoup de dépaysement. A servir très chaud. Avec, en plus, pour le conducteur l'indispensable tranquillité d'esprit d'une mécanique fidèle et sans histoires grâce aux produits Esso. Ne pensez qu'à vos vacances... les stations Esso, elles, pensent à votre voiture. Vive la voiture avec Esso !¹³⁰

Once again *dépaysement* is mentioned as one of the key factors in the need to go on holiday. While it may be expected that a trade advertisement would highlight the role of the automobile in the perception of going on holidays, this advertisement is indicative of the strong association between the two and, in particular, the ability of the car to provide this needed *dépaysement*. However, we will see in the next chapter and very briefly in the coming discussion that the late *Trente Glorieuses* sees the beginning of a disenchantment with the car due to its ubiquity.

References to holidaying and more specifically to the automobile become noticeably more negative as we approach the end of the 1960s. Magazines in general will be examined in the next chapter; however, their impact on the popular perception of holidays is important in the context of this section. Magazines seemed to hold an ambiguous relationship with holidays during the period. In an article published in *Elle*, French author and underwater explorer Philippe Diolé accepts the need to “decompress” while at the same time questioning the merits of doing so with the huge numbers now holidaying:

il y a les dangers de la route, de la mer, du soleil, ceux des rencontres et des séparations mais la plus grande menace est dans nos âmes: nous voulons

¹²⁹ *Elle*, 5 August 1957, 3.

¹³⁰ *Paris-Match*, 28 July 1962, 6.

déjouer pendant les mois d'été toutes les folies et tous les désirs que nous avons étouffés l'hiver.¹³¹

Such thinking also explains why and how the phenomenal increase in seaside holidays through the 1960s was parodied by cartoonists, as the huge numbers which invaded beaches and blocked roads became a source of comedy. The crowds at St Tropez were mocked by Sempé in a cartoon which appeared in *L'Express* in 1965, in which a woman in a bikini is lying on a beach which is overflowing with holidaymakers.¹³² This drawing is his representation of the front cover picture of the resort in this same issue. In a 1968 cartoon which appeared in *Elle*, entitled "Sempé à St Tropez," we can barely make anything out with the multitudes of people and cars which fill the page.¹³³ The noted cultural historian André Rauch also comments on the imbalance between the need for the worker to go on holiday and the fact that the numbers involved had a negative impact on these destinations. The use of the words "freed" and "invading" highlight this contradiction: "Travelling some hundred kilometres by car transforms a 'freed' employee into an invading tourist; departing makes him beam; arriving turns him into a devastating force."¹³⁴

More broadly, Rauch has broken down the holiday-making habits of the French nation into four distinct periods. His third phase, the "Tourisme de Masse (1950-1975)," where city-dwelling workers become summertime tourists, invading seaside resorts all along the Mediterranean, does not begin until 1950, coinciding with the removal of fuel rationing in France.¹³⁵ This third period is the focus for an examination of the democratization of holidays for the typical worker. The euphoria experienced at the possibility of making an extended visit to an area which can often be quite far from home is discussed. Tourist destinations frequented by the rich evolved into destinations within the reach of all, and had now to cater for a new type of tourist. Thus began the newly intensive commodification of the tourist space. The ability to reduce unit costs while boosting profit margins by selling less to larger numbers, much like the philosophy of massification behind the development of the people's car, meant that what was once the exclusive reserve of the rich came to be

¹³¹ *Elle*, 4 August 1969, 76.

¹³² *L'Express*, 26 July 1965, 29.

¹³³ *Elle*, 12 August 1968, 44.

¹³⁴ Rauch in Anderson and Tabb, *Water, Leisure and Culture*. 225.

¹³⁵ The four sections are: "Nouvelles Distinctions: Santé et Loisir (1830-1918)," "Les Années Folles et Les Congés Payés (1920-1950)," "Les Vacances de Masse (1950-1975)," and "Les Vacances de Crise (1975 à nos jours)." Rauch, *Vacances en France*. 310-311.

considered a place for all. The Côte was a destination where Parisian workers met during their summer holidays, and relaxed and participated in activities made available for this new market. Rauch highlights the importance of the influence of American consumer culture on French vacationing tastes, stating that: “family budgets, market offers and the evolution of living conditions are bringing profound transformations in concepts and practices.”¹³⁶ These transformations and how they were accepted will be explored in detail in Chapter 5.

3.5 From Liberation to Deceleration

Nationale 7 led to the Côte d’Azur and more specifically to tourist destinations such as St Tropez, Nice and Cannes, towns that had long been associated with a richer clientele. The expansion in mass tourism resulted in the facilities at these resorts becoming saturated and additionally in the loss of their allure for richer tourists. The appeal of the resorts was also the result of the film and music stars who made these towns their summer homes and were happy to be shot by the growing photo media, indulging in the pleasures that the Côte had to offer. It was these images that appeared in popular magazines and tourists travelled there with the hope of enjoying such activities.¹³⁷ This uneasy mixture of stars and their followers led to a clear hierarchy in resorts, as the elite hoped to maintain a certain distance from “ordinary” holiday-makers.¹³⁸ This trend originated in the early *Trente Glorieuses* but as we shall see, it was to have its biggest impact later. In Chapter 4, the evolving way in which the automobile was perceived in post-1945 magazines will be examined. In what follows here, I will explore how some of these magazines promoted holiday-making over the same period. These primary sources are important as they give a flavour of how tourism was consumed by a mass readership.

3.5.1 Resort Hierarchy

Urry refers to the emergence of a resort hierarchy as some places became overrun with tourists:

¹³⁶ Anderson and Tabb, *Water, Leisure and Culture*. 223.

¹³⁷ Brigitte Bardot was regularly photographed holidaying at her St Tropez holiday home, “La Madrague” as she cultivated an image of her need to return to nature. See Vincendeau, *Stars and Stardom in French Cinema*. 100.

¹³⁸ One such example of this appears in *Paris-Match* 26 July 1958, “BB : vacances d’animal traqué”. 54.

A resort “hierarchy” developed and certain places were viewed as embodiments of mass tourism, to be despised and ridiculed... And some such places, the working-class resorts, quickly developed as symbols of “mass tourism’, as places of inferiority which stood for everything that dominant social groups held to be tasteless, common and vulgar.¹³⁹

This hierarchy had been noticed in Deauville in the late 1940s, when it remained popular with Parisian holiday-makers as the closest seaside resort to Paris. What can be perceived as the beginning of a new brand of holiday-maker appears as *Elle* suggests that the clientele of these traditionally upper-class resorts is changing:

Pour la pentecôte, 2.000 touristes de plus que l’an passé ont envahi Deauville et pourtant ‘il n’y avait personne’ – entendez par là que les anonymes étaient les plus nombreux. La mode de plage qui, à Deauville, naît tous les ans à la Pentecôte, n’a pas révélé de grandes nouveautés.”¹⁴⁰

Proximity to Paris allied with the *congés payés* allowed for people to make this relatively short trip to the seaside resort. *Elle* was perhaps suggesting that this new clientele was not warmly welcomed to the resort by its traditional visitors. The lack of novelty due to this “invasion” of an anonymous crowd meant that Deauville was, perhaps, no longer capable of displaying class distinction through its visitors. This trend was soon to extend to the Côte d’Azur.

Paris Match also highlighted quite early after the war the desire to go on holidays. In 1949, on its July cover, it announced: “ouvrez... et vous serez sur la Côte d’Azur.”¹⁴¹ In the same issue, it referred to “la ruée au soleil,”¹⁴² which again engaged in the mythology of all of France leaving on holiday in the post-war boom. While it was too early to talk of crowds in the summer resorts, the growth in the lower classes making their way to the beaches is referred to in *Paris Match* as it states that it was no longer only stars that are to be seen in the most exclusive settings: “Les jolies filles d’Eden-Roc sont des inconnues.”¹⁴³ This echoed *Elle*’s earlier assertion that Deauville was being frequented by “des anonymes,” a further reference to Urry’s analysis of resort hierarchy.

The increase in holidaying extended to the Côte d’Azur as *Elle* from an early date gave the Mediterranean a lot of coverage. In a 1946 article, it showed the

¹³⁹ Urry, *The Tourist Gaze*. 16.

¹⁴⁰ *Elle*, 1 June 1948, 5.

¹⁴¹ *Paris-Match*, 30 July 1949, cover.

¹⁴² *Paris-Match*, 30 July 1949, 11.

¹⁴³ *Paris-Match*, 27 August 1949, 26.

attractions available to holiday-goers. This article shows the early development of a hierarchy in resorts in comparing and contrasting Monte Carlo, Cannes and Nice:

La Côte d'Azur est très demandée.

Monte-Carlo est un petit coin de l'ancienne Europe oublié dans un des plus beaux paysages du monde. On y trouve encore de vieilles demoiselles anglaises laissées sur le rocher par la saison de 1939, des habitués du Casino qui n'ont pas franchi la frontière depuis six ans. On y voit maintenant des centaines, des milliers de touristes qui cherchent, au soleil, des souvenirs des temps sans souci.

Mais les stations françaises, Cannes, Nice, ont connu pour ces courtes vacances, une affluence inespérée. Le duc et la duchesse de Windsor ont inauguré le bar de l'Eden Roc, à Cap d'Antibes ; les petits pois ont monté en trois jours de soixante-dix francs à cent vingt francs le kilo ; Reynaldo Hahn a "dirigé" à Nice, Albert Wolff à Cannes ; des messieurs aux chaussures très jaunes, les poches bourrées de billets de cinq mille et des dames style Juan-Les-Pins-1936 doublaient au volant de leur torpédo les autocars dans les tournants.

Le grand prix d'élégance automobile, à Nice, a été disputé devant une foule que les compétences évaluent à cinquante mille personnes. Il faisait beau. Le ciel était bleu. La cohue joyeuse...¹⁴⁴

The reference to the increase in the price of peas in this article could perhaps be seen as an interesting reminder of wartime France, as this staple is used as the yardstick to measure the wealth of those visiting the area. Two well-known "adopted" French composers, Reynaldo Hahn and Albert Wolff, are referred to as "directing" in Nice and Cannes; however it is the allusion to automobiles that is most remarkable. "Des messieurs aux chaussures très jaunes, les poches bourrées de billets de cinq mille et des dames style Juan-Les-Pins-1936" overtaking coaches "au volant de leur torpédo" create an image of desire, desire for wealth but also for speed. This article was accompanied by a picture of actress Martine Carroll at the wheel of her Packard car.¹⁴⁵ The association of Nice with holidays and a "grand prix d'élégance" is strengthened with the presence of Carroll, as her prestige added to the desirability of both the Côte and automobile use. This prestige-value linking popular stars and automobiles is a theme that will be explored further in the next chapter.

The enduring association of Deauville with the automobile was highlighted in 1953 as *Paris Match* chose to focus on well-known celebrity Cécile Aubry launching

¹⁴⁴ *Elle*, 7 May 1946, 4.

¹⁴⁵ Martine Carroll was a very popular actress in early *Trente Glorieuses* France. Seen as a "French sex goddess," Brigitte Bardot took on this mantle in the 1950s. See Vincendeau, *Stars and Stardom in French Cinema*. 86.

the summer festivities in the town.¹⁴⁶ The sequence of ludic events is centred around the car, as a “rallye” from Paris to Deauville is organized, followed by a number of challenges which involve the car as a prop:

Cécile Aubry inaugure l’été à Deauville.

Pour fêter la promotion d’Albert Willemetz au grade de la Légion d’honneur, vingt acteurs du cinéma ont disputé samedi un rallye automobile sur le trajet Paris-Deauville. Paris Match, qui avait assisté il y a trois ans à l’examen de permis de conduire de Cécile Aubry, a suivi le parcours de celle-ci. La jeune vedette conduisit sa Simca-sport avec un remarquable brio. Elle n’obtint que la septième place pour avoir commis deux erreurs. La plus importante avait été de faire un détour de 25 km pour dire bonjour à un oncle qu’elle n’avait pas vu depuis trois ans ; la seconde, d’avoir dévié de trente centimètres sur une ligne où elle devait conduire les yeux bandés (photo du haut). Le gymkana prévu à l’arrivée comportait d’autres épreuves : parcourir 500 mètres à bicyclette, exécuter un dessin imprévu au tableau noir et faire le tour de sa voiture avec un verre d’eau plein sans en verser une goutte.¹⁴⁷

The growing importance of female drivers as well as the sporting connection between stars and their cars is highlighted in this article as *Paris Match* decides to focus on this female actress, having, as is stated, already covered her successful attempt to pass her driving test. There is also the suggestion that, in visiting an uncle she had not seen in three years while participating in this rally, she did not have the necessary application credibly to challenge to win it. The participation of twenty cinema actors in this automobile rally to Deauville, in particular that of Cécile Aubry, further strengthened the affective link between holiday destinations and stars. This practice also occurred on the Côte d’Azur, as *Paris Match* shows Gisèle Pascal¹⁴⁸ leaning against her Cadillac convertible in 1953 with the caption running: “Gisèle Pascal qui a été élevée à Cannes est revenue, comme chaque été pour ses vacances sur la Côte d’Azur.”¹⁴⁹

St Tropez became synonymous with such an image, with Brigitte Bardot and Roger Vadim particularly adding to the allure of the port-town. It was his film *Et Dieu créa... la femme*¹⁵⁰ which launched not only the career of Bardot as sex-kitten

¹⁴⁶ Cécile Aubry made her break in cinema in “Manon” (1949) and went to Hollywood where she found short-lived success, most notably in “The Black Rose” (1950). See Christian Gilles, *Le cinéma des années cinquante par ceux qui l’ont fait: Tome V: La qualité Française: 1951-1957* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2001). 12.

¹⁴⁷ *Paris-Match*, 18 July 1953, 42.

¹⁴⁸ Gisèle Pascal was a film star of the 1940s and early 1950s, but was probably more famous for a five-year relationship with Rainier III, Prince of Monaco. See Bertrand Tessier, *Grace, la princesse déracinée* (Paris: Archipel, 2014). 156.

¹⁴⁹ *Paris-Match*, 16 August 1953, 44.

¹⁵⁰ Roger Vadim, *Et Dieu... créa la femme* (France: Cocinor, 1956).

of the French, but also that of the seaside resort as a primary destination on the Côte d'Azur. In this film, released in 1956, we see Bardot living in the town which had become a haven for the rich and trendy. It shows the development of a village into a tourist destination, with St Tropez itself becoming very much like the town portrayed on screen in the aftermath of the film's release as it welcomed an influx of visitors intent on catching glimpses of the resort's more prestigious visitors and, perhaps, indulging in the hedonistic activities embodied by Bardot on screen.¹⁵¹ With its successful release, Bardot became a worldwide star and was sold as France's answer to Marilyn Monroe. As Simone de Beauvoir stated in a 1956 article for *Esquire* magazine: "BB est considérée à présent comme un produit d'exportation aussi important que les automobiles Renault. Elle est la nouvelle idôle de la jeunesse américaine."¹⁵² This linkage was to be evoked by Renault in the late 1950s as she appeared in a number of marketing campaigns for the company and in particular for their newest car, the Floride.

3.5.2 Partir vers le Sud en Floride

Et Dieu... créa la femme confirmed Bardot as the foremost star of St Tropez, with this link being solidified with her subsequent purchase of *La Madrague*, a beachfront estate in the area. It was a link that was to be evoked subsequently by Renault in the marketing of the company's latest automobile. The *Floride* was launched in 1958, as a small rear-engined convertible. It was designed to target the wealthier tourists intent on heading to the beach resorts. It used the floor plan and engine of the *Dauphine*, itself the follow-up to Renault's hugely successful, but "economy", R4. This latest conception was designed with owner image as a primordial concern. By updating an older, lighter car, it left the *Floride* woefully underpowered and, hence, referred to as "a sheep in wolf's clothing" by the media in its early years.¹⁵³ This, however, was immaterial to Renault, as the aesthetics of the car were of more importance. This vehicle was to exploit the newfound interest in leisure in the country. In a commemorative brochure about the Floride, Renault stated:

¹⁵¹ Jacobs *et al.*, *Nationale* 7. 176.

¹⁵² Simone de Beauvoir, "Brigitte Bardot et le syndrome de Lolita," in *Les écrits de Simone de Beauvoir*, eds. Claude Francis and Fernande Gontier (Paris: Gallimard, 1979), 363-376, 363. [Originally published in *Esquire* (August 1959), 32-38].

¹⁵³ H DeWayne Ashmead, "History and Articles: The History and Development of the Renault Caravelle." [Internet: <http://www.renaultcaravelle.com/tech.html> Accessed 28 May 2009]. 1.

A la fin des années 1950, la France renoue avec la joie de vivre et la prospérité. D'abord présentée comme « Dauphine GT » au Salon de Genève 1958, la Floride apparaît dans sa version définitive sur le stand Renault à Paris, en octobre de la même année. Elle va incarner à merveille cette ère d'insouciance et de gaieté.¹⁵⁴

Initially designated a GT, *Grand Tourisme*, Renault made the link with tourism even more explicit by rebranding it as the Floride. The contextual irony of the timing of this brochure is striking as the “ère d'insouciance et de gaieté” referred to in this commemorative brochure coincided with an intensification in hostilities in the Algerian War, which led to the collapse of the Fourth Republic.

Renault based its marketing campaign for its new Floride on Bardot and the image she embodied. In an iconic illustration of the time, Bardot posed as an elegant yet casually dressed young woman sitting barefoot on the boot of the *Floride* while, at the same time, feeding her dog against a backdrop of palm trees and deck chairs. The image is suggestive of the relaxed, leisurely, and, above all, desirable atmosphere that Renault was trying to create. This was an aesthetically pleasing car, which gave the opportunity not only to relax but also to look good while doing so. Another picture showed Bardot hanging out of the convertible, this time looking much more like the cheeky, seductive blonde in *Et Dieu... créa la femme*. [Figure 8 & 9] The palm trees and deckchairs are replaced by the sea and what appears to be a summerhouse on its shore. The link between Bardot, the sea and the car was thus highlighted in this advertisement. The aim was to encourage the viewer to imagine Bardot looking beautiful and sensual and at ease in her Renault parked near the port that brought her much of her fame, St Tropez. In its commemorative brochure on this car, Renault confirmed the nature of the link with Bardot, as it stated:

N'a-t-elle pas une marraine de choix avec Brigitte Bardot ? Cheveux au vent, visages halés, sourires heureux de ceux qui prennent en Floride les chemins du soleil et du grand air... Joie de l'évasion au volant d'une voiture jeune, brillante, raffinée...¹⁵⁵

The rhetoric of the brochure attempted to emulate the carefree nature associated with the Sixties, during which time the Floride was marketed.

¹⁵⁴ Commemorative brochure, Renault [Internet: <http://www.renault.com/passionsport/les-vehicules-historiques/pages/renault-floride.aspx>. Accessed 28 May 2009].

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.



Figure 8. Bardot en Floride¹⁵⁶



Figure 9. Commemorative exhibition of the Renault Florida¹⁵⁷

The name of the car is an indication of the intentions of the car firm with this vehicle. By using the state of Florida as its name, Renault was associating itself with

¹⁵⁶ <http://www.braine-en-anciennes.com/contents/fr/d78.html>

¹⁵⁷ Taken on 12 June 2009

the American ideal of travelling to the sun. Car dissemination at this time in the United States was far higher than in France; it was a market that Renault was interested in entering.¹⁵⁸ In naming their sleek convertible “Floride,” however, it was attempting to enhance an American trend that was growing in France, that of reaching the sun, sea and sand by means of automotive transport.¹⁵⁹ In an advertisement which was published in *Elle* in 1961, Renault uses the name to underline this link with holidays. Entitled “Les vacances comptent double en Floride,”¹⁶⁰ a woman and a child are at the beach and the Floride in the background with its top down. This obvious wordplay between the name of the car and the American state, in relation to going on holidays, strengthens the association between the automobile and the beach.

Renault was also pioneering in its commitment to the expansion of paid holidays; the nationalized company negotiated their extension by one week for its employees in 1955.¹⁶¹ This was a full year before the government decided universally to extend paid holidays to three weeks. It was also ahead of its time by negotiating a fourth week for its employees in 1965, a full four years before all workers could benefit from this addition.¹⁶²

In an intriguing twist, the growth of beach vacationing and its links with the car were furthered by the advent of the revolutionary two-piece swimsuit which enabled women to get a better tan than that which was possible in a conventional one-piece. The bikini, as it is known today, was designed and marketed by a Paris-based Renault engineer who left Billancourt in 1946 to take over his mother’s lingerie shop.¹⁶³ His invention, consisting of four triangles made from only 30 square inches of fabric, was claimed to be the smallest swimsuit in the world. Louis Réard named his invention after Bikini Atoll in the Pacific, where nuclear testing was being carried out at the time. It was Réard’s ambition that reaction to his invention would

¹⁵⁸ Loubet, “L’industrie automobile française.” 430.

¹⁵⁹ Renault was not the only company to choose names that invoked holidaying and free time. Simca brought out versions of their cars in the 1950s and 1960s which they called Week-End, Océane and Plein Ciel. Indeed, they gave a Week-End to Bardot as a present.

¹⁶⁰ *Elle*, 23 June 1961, 11.

¹⁶¹ Boyer, *Le tourisme de masse*. 98.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*

¹⁶³ Rutsky, “Surfing the Other.” 19.

be as atomic as the tests going on so far away, but being heard of all over the world.¹⁶⁴

The bikini was not launched on the Côte d'Azur, which Réard was targeting as its market, but in the *Piscine Molitor* in Paris; this decision probably had much to do with logistics since that was where Réard's boutique was based. The decision in favour of the Paris launch was linked to the fact that of the anticipated numbers going to the Mediterranean coast, many of them would do so from the French capital. The bikini met with some opposition, and the launch itself was threatened as Réard was unable to find a model willing to wear it. Eventually, he was forced to enlist the services of Michelle Bernardini, an exotic dancer from the Casino de Paris, to model the bikini for photographs.¹⁶⁵ [Figure 10] While it proved popular, it was rejected initially by some parts of society, with *Vogue* stating in 1951: "Our readers dislike the bikini, which has transformed certain coastlines into the backstage of music halls and which does not embellish women."¹⁶⁶ Its gradual acceptance was helped by Brigitte Bardot in her defining role as the bikini-clad protagonist in *Et Dieu créa... la femme*. Bardot, as an icon for the modern French woman, comfortable in her near-nudity, willing to be part of a pleasure-seeking Mediterranean existence, modernized the image of the holiday-going youth. Seeking out the sea was not only about breaking out of the routine of *métro, boulot, dodo*; for pleasure-seeking youth, the seaside became a place where the body was worshipped. It was a time when sun, sea and sex, and the development of a youth culture of holidays were together taking hold in the Mediterranean.¹⁶⁷ The popularity of the Côte d'Azur and its ability to have an influence on the fashion of the time was underlined by *Elle* in 1950 when it stated that "A Cannes j'ai vu naître la mode de la plage."¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁴ Ibid. 19.

¹⁶⁵ James J. Farrell, "The Crossroads of Bikini," *Journal of American Culture* 10, no. 2 (1987): 55-66. 55.

¹⁶⁶ *Vogue* in The Independent, "From Boom to Bust: The Bikini is 60," 24 June 2006.

¹⁶⁷ Furlough, "Making Mass Vacations." 276.

¹⁶⁸ *Elle*, 19 June 1950, 8.

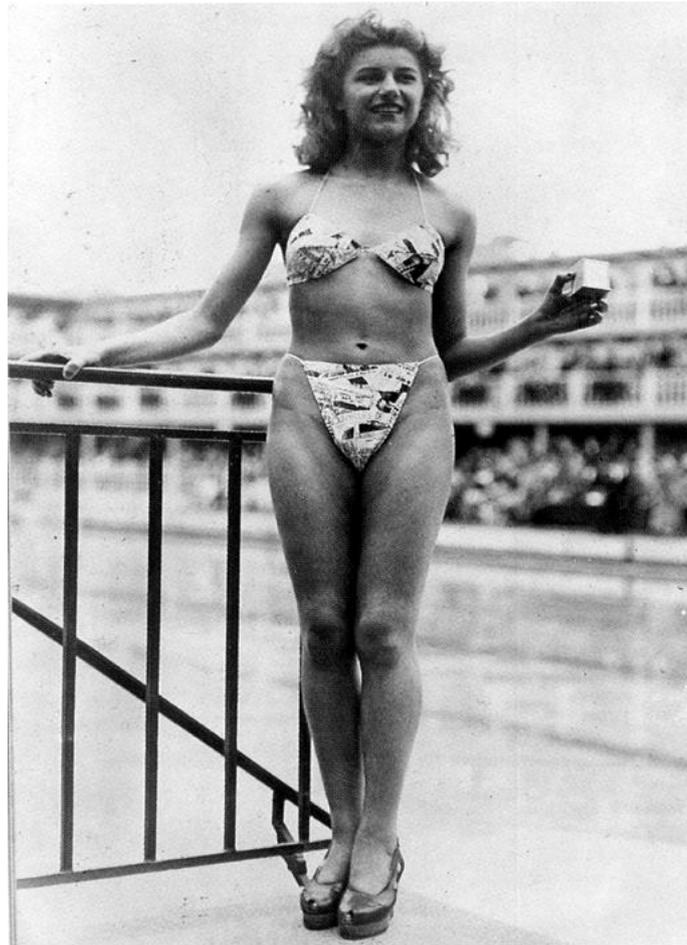


Figure 10. Michelle Bernardini ¹⁶⁹

The capacity of the car to provide independent mobility was very desirable, particularly as its strong links with holidaying were highlighted in popular culture. The close association of Renault's marketing with holidaying was an example of the use of stars to promote the company's products. The linking of celebrities, their cars and holidays was already common during the early *Trente Glorieuses*, with Renault's decision to employ *BB* to become the face of their marketing campaign for the Floride being an explicit indication of the importance of this popular association. In the later 1960s, however, we see a dilution of this linkage as, while the importance of holidaying is maintained in magazines, the impact of car numbers on the roads leads to a questioning of the role of the car in its development.

¹⁶⁹ <http://www.nydailynews.com/life-style/history-bikini-gallery-1.1620338>

3.5.3 Nos Routes à l'Abandon¹⁷⁰

As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, the town of Lapalisse along the *Nationale 7* has in recent years engaged in a celebration of the *Trente Glorieuses* traffic jam. As the numbers of cars increased on national roads, the infrastructure of the country struggled to meet this new-found demand, and small towns along the way to the south started to become bottlenecks particularly at weekends and during summer holidays. The 1960s became synonymous with a general deceleration as the car began to suffer from its own success. Lapalisse's nostalgic commemoration of this era is a celebration of the beginning of the end of the *Trente Glorieuses* as well as the eventual rejection by French youth of a modernising society.

The baby-boom had begun before the end of the Second World War.¹⁷¹ Thus, in the late Fifties and Sixties, the vacationing masses were made up of distinct groups, the largest of these being the products of the baby-boom, the impact of which, as Rauch states, was to increase the numbers leaving on holidays during the summer months:

Pour l'ensemble des catégories sociales, l'âge importe aussi; il compte d'autant plus en France que le baby-boom a gonflé les effectifs de jeunes. En 1964, pour dix-huit millions de partants, sept millions ont moins de 18 ans (il y a en France onze millions de jeunes de 6 à 17 ans en 1964). [...] L'allongement de la scolarité au cours de la Ve République favorise le départ des adolescents durant les congés scolaires.¹⁷²

As these baby-boomers approached the social and political watershed of 1968, a different attitude amongst some of them towards holidaying became more apparent, one which Bertho-Lavenir explores:

Envahies par de nouveaux pratiquants, les vacances au soleil semblent vulgaires à l'élite et déplorables petites-bourgeoises aux révoltés de Mai 68. On lit sur les murs de la Sorbonne en ce mois de révolte « N'allez pas en Grèce cet été, restez à la Sorbonne », ou encore « Allez mourir à Naples avec le Club Méditerranée ». ¹⁷³

Club Med, which was created in 1950, epitomized, as Furlough puts it, French consumer society, as it represented "huge meals, idle bronzed bodies, abundance in the midst of underdeveloped countries, and a commitment to narcissistic, apolitical

¹⁷⁰ *Paris-Match*, 25 July 1970, 3.

¹⁷¹ Jean-François Sirinelli, "La France des sixties revisitée," *Vingtième siècle. Revue d'histoire*, no. 1 (2001): 111-24. 13.

¹⁷² Rauch, *Vacances en France*. 137.

¹⁷³ Bertho-Lavenir, *La roue et le stylo*. 404.

hedonism.”¹⁷⁴ This rejection of holidaying as part of a bourgeois way of life can be seen as separate from the perception of the car. However, the role of the car in advancing seaside holidaying continued to be questioned towards the end of the *Trente Glorieuses*.

The use of the car to go on holidays was a motif that regularly featured in magazines. In an article in July 1963 entitled “Les vrais rois du volant sur la route de vacances,” *Paris Match* questions the popular image attributed to *la route des vacances*. In comparing tourists to four-wheeled animals, the author gently lampoons the large numbers of people leaving all together in search of freedom, only to be further stressed by lack of mobility on the road. In fusing the car with its driver in the creation of a new being, the author unconsciously echoes pre-1914 Futurism, where, as we have seen, animism was a form of fetishizing of the car; and also highlights the advent of the car as a need in *Trente Glorieuses* France:

Le touriste est un animal à quatre roues qui peste et se brise les nerfs sur les routes de l’été. Qu’il soit un bon papa prudent ou un mordu de la vitesse, un adepte du 60 ou du 160, de la petite cylindrée ou du double arbre à cames, de la molle flânerie ou du dégagement rapide, il souffre, sur la route, de voir qu’elle ne ressemble pas à l’idée qu’il s’en fait.

Pour lui qui part en vacances, la route devrait être le tapis roulant du loisir, une espèce de toboggan où il se laisserait glisser sous la verdure vers les paradis du soleil et de la paresse.¹⁷⁵

In referring ironically to car and driver in these terms, as well as parodying the idealized image of holiday-making, the author sheds light on the popular perception of mass-mobility and of driving happily to the Mediterranean.

Such questioning became increasingly visible as more and more people went on holiday. In an article entitled “La vérité sur vos vacances en France,” *Paris Match* wonders whether vacationing in France can provide the possibility to make the most of hard-earned respites:

La France paradis du tourisme ! Le tourisme d’aujourd’hui est celui des grandes migrations, elles ont des idoles qui se nomment confort et soleil. Elles veulent, l’été, se venger des jours gris du travail et oublier pour un mois la tristesse des grandes métropoles du béton. Pendant de longs mois ces touristes de la multitude ont économisé sou par sou pour s’offrir quelques semaines de rêve. Ils aiment jouer avec leurs autos, mais la France est dépourvue de ces autoroutes où l’on peut se griser de vitesse et d’espace...

¹⁷⁴ Ellen Furlough, “Packaging Pleasures: Club Méditerranée and French Consumer Culture, 1950-1968,” *French Historical Studies* (1993): 65-81. 65.

¹⁷⁵ *Paris-Match*, 17 July 1963, 73.

Dans le monde d'aujourd'hui, la France du tourisme propose encore les séductions d'hier. Elle croit que le tourisme est un art, il est devenu une industrie.¹⁷⁶

This article highlights the need for a holiday and, above all, for the sun, and suggests that this need is a result of work carried out without respite. It is no longer the fact that there are too many cars on the roads that is the source of the problem, rather it is that the infrastructure required in order to be able to facilitate the automobile adequately has not been constructed. This is a theme that became prevalent as France moved towards 1973 and the oil crisis.

Holidaymaking and more particularly travelling by road to go on holidays increasingly became a target for criticism towards the end of the *Trente Glorieuses*. The noted journalist and anti-imperialist Raymond Cartier, amongst others, criticized the state of roads through the later 1960s and 1970s. He claimed that it was the poor condition of the roads that led to the high numbers of fatalities as the system became overloaded with holidaymakers:

Nos routes à l'abandon

La grande migration a commencé. Par millions, les Français ont envahi les routes des vacances. Un autre flot va suivre, puis ce sera le ressac. Et le bilan : comme chaque été, des morts et des blessés plus nombreux. La route est devenue un fléau. L'imprudence des conducteurs, au premier chef, en est la cause. Mais aussi l'état, parfois lamentable, du réseau routier, qui coûte également au pays d'énormes pertes de temps et d'argent. Le mal empire. Si rien n'est entrepris au plus vite, la catastrophe est certaine.¹⁷⁷

Cartier, in this article, uses the verb “envahir” when referring to the numbers involved in tourism. This term is used by other commentators, but particularly with regard to resort hierarchy, as the inability adequately to deal with growing numbers is linked with a broader range of social classes accessing tourism for the first time. In blaming drivers for the most part for the road becoming a “fléau”, Cartier may be suggesting that the numbers of less experienced drivers who have newly started driving contribute largely to this issue. In using words such as “envahi”, “flot” and “ressac”, Cartier, in this 1970 article, was highlighting the extent to which the numbers of vehicles on roads meant that it was only a matter of time before there would be catastrophic results.

¹⁷⁶ *Paris-Match*, 2 October 1965, 3.

¹⁷⁷ *Paris-Match*, 25 July 1970, 3.

The increase in post-1945 holidaying ultimately led to an explosion of mass tourism and mass automobilization in late *Trente Glorieuses* France. The two phenomena were intertwined as one facilitated the other. It is ironic, however, that this mutual stimulation was to lead to an eventually perceived deceleration as the expansion in car use, particularly for leisure purposes, led to a more general disenchantment. As the *Trente Glorieuses* drew to a close and the baby-boom generation came to criticize and finally to reject many aspects of modernity, the fact that the automobile had become an obstacle to, rather than a purveyor of, liberty figured largely in this discontent. This is a theme that will be explored at further length in the next chapter.

3.6 Conclusion

The democratization of tourism can be linked to a number of contributory factors. The rise to power of the Popular Front and the passing of the law allowing two weeks paid holidays to all workers has often been marked as the birth of holidaying *en masse*. The baby-boom and the growth in wealth due to the *Trente Glorieuses* are also important events to consider. The development of people's cars also must be taken into account. The development firstly of the Beetle in Germany, to be followed by the Renault 4CV and perhaps more importantly the Citroën 2CV were watershed moments in the early stages of mass tourism.¹⁷⁸ The virtuous circle of the mass production of automobiles to be made available to the workforce resulted in a large increase in the numbers of people travelling to the Mediterranean to indulge in sea, sun and other forms of leisure.¹⁷⁹

The *Nationale 7* road from Paris to Menton on the Côte d'Azur became closely associated with holidays and the escape from everyday routine. The practical implementation of paid holidays proved a watershed moment with *le grand départ* during the summer and *la rentrée* etched into the public memory. This evolution was also marked by the disappearance of *Nationale 7* as the *Route des Vacances*. In 1970, the "Autoroutes 6 et 7" motorways were officially opened by Président Georges Pompidou, thus marking the end of *Nationale 7* as the principal means of access for cars to the Mediterranean.¹⁸⁰ This new motorway link, "l'autoroute du soleil," as it

¹⁷⁸ Boyer, *Le tourisme de masse*. 100.

¹⁷⁹ Yves Carsalade, *Les grandes étapes de l'histoire économique* (Paris: Ellipses, 1998). 288.

¹⁸⁰ Lefebvre, *Paris-Rhin-Rhône*. 7.

was officially called, greatly reduced the journey time from Paris to the Riviera. While it facilitated what remained essentially the same process, as an Augéan *non-lieu*¹⁸¹ it has not become invested with the same meaning that is still nostalgically associated with the *Nationale 7*. Hence, the great history of one of the most iconic roads in France drew to a close. *Nationale 7* is now used mainly for local traffic between towns along the route south. However, it remains an iconic site, a name which remains in public memory when the theme of holidays is evoked.

¹⁸¹ Viard refers to motorways as a “no man’s land” which facilitate “l’aller-retour” as trains do, as opposed to roads which permit “rayonnement”. See Jean Viard, *Penser les vacances* (La Tour-d’Aigues: L’Aube, 2007). 128.

Chapter 4: Three Ages of the Car in French Post-War Magazines

Généralement appréhendée comme l'une des composantes du média presse écrite, la presse magazine peut aussi être étudiée comme un média spécifique. L'importance du visuel, sa périodicité et l'impératif de créativité, la segmentation du public et le contrat de lecture, l'internationalisation et le poids des groupes constituent cinq de ses traits dominants qui concourent à en faire un média en très grande adéquation avec son époque.¹

As explored briefly in Chapter 3 in the context of tourism, in this chapter, the important impact of popular magazines in their interaction with the car will be examined. As Charon states above, magazines are contemporary cultural artefacts which have to be closely in touch with their public. For this project, the use of images which were abundant in these magazines is particularly interesting as these will help create an impression of how the car was perceived in post-1945 France. In an effort to trace trends in perception of the car, I examined three news magazines published over the *Trente Glorieuses*. The initial expectation was to see some quite apparent changes regarding the perception of the car as it became ubiquitous through this period of French prosperity. With the proliferation of vehicles, coupled with greater spending power, it was expected that the image of the motor car conveyed by the press of the day would move from one of desire to one of mundanity. The news magazines were thus chosen in an attempt to record the implied attitude of the French population as their spending power increased, and as they began to take advantage of the economic prosperity. Three overlapping periods of interaction with the automobile can be observed, from continued fetishizing, with the car maintaining an aura of unattainability, through to a rapidly modernized society within which the automobile as a symbol of modernity has been accepted, and then, has become needed. The third period occurs in the years immediately prior to the 1973-oil crisis and is defined by a growing rejection of the ubiquity of, and the need for, a car.

4.1 The Selected Magazines: A Background

I chose three news and current affairs magazines for this study. I made the choice to examine general interest magazines rather than automotive publications as it was felt that they would provide a more authentic overview of the broad feeling in French

¹ Jean-Marie Charon, *La presse magazine* (Paris: La Découverte, 1999). 124.

society. The examination of an automobile-oriented magazine would have led to an exploration of a very specific public, one which actively sought to engage with the automobile, be it as an observer or as an owner. The automobile was not consumed, however, only by those who took an interest in cars, but by society at large. Thus, the selection of mainstream magazines seemed likely to produce a more faithful reflection of the time. The first magazine chosen was *Paris Match*, which was founded in 1949. This weekly magazine was originally news-oriented while at the same time making abundant space available for advertising. While it followed the trend of using a strongly photo-oriented style, *Paris Match* maintained a news-oriented policy until the events of May '68 led it to push for a younger audience, one which was more interested in the cult of the celebrity. *Paris Match* famously interviewed Jacques Mesrine in 1977² and President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing in 1979,³ showing thereby that while it now valorized celebrity in a sensationalist press, it still maintained the reputation needed to attract a more serious readership. In terms of its audience, undoubtedly the magazine was at its most successful in the late 1950s and early 1960s with its mixture of photo-reporting, news items and showbiz news.⁴ The advent of *Télé 7 Jours*, which grew with the mass acquisition of the television, spelled the end of the golden age of *Paris Match*. During its most successful period, it averaged 1.5 million copies sold per issue, peaking in November 1955.⁵ This magazine thus lay at the heart of the *Trente Glorieuses*, and reflected the effects of the modernization of society as France became more prosperous. Its mixture of news stories and showbiz makes it an apt choice for examination.

Elle appeared for the first time on 21 November 1945, created by Hélène Lazareff,⁶ with Françoise Giroud joining as editor from 1946 until 1953 when she left to set up *L'Express*. Ross calls Giroud "one of the key figures behind the proliferation of women's magazines in the 1950s"⁷ and describes the type of reader

² Jacques Mesrine was a glamorous criminal who was Public Enemy No. 1 until his death in 1979. He published an autobiography in 1977 in which he claimed to have killed over forty people. Jacques Mesrine, *L'instinct de mort* (Paris: Lattès, 1977).

³ Valéry Giscard d'Estaing was a French centrist politician and President of the French Republic from 1974 until 1981. The TGV was inaugurated during his presidency.

⁴ Charon, *La presse magazine*. 39.

⁵ Michel Jamet, *La presse périodique en France* (Paris: Colin, 1983). 140.

⁶ Hélène Lazareff was a journalist who, having spent the Second World War working in America for the New York Times, returned to France in 1945 intent on promoting American ideals in her homeland.

⁷ Kristin Ross, *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies: Decolonization and the Reordering of French Culture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT, 1998). 1.

these two women imagined they would have: “The reader envisioned by the staff at *Elle* was most likely young, between twenty-five and thirty-five, tired of wartime deprivation, in need of frivolity, and she lived in Angoulême.”⁸ *Elle* quickly introduced regular slots intended to build a strong and loyal readership. In 1946 “le courrier du coeur” and the horoscope appeared for the first time. In 1947 its readers were given the opportunity to win prizes, while 1948 saw the introduction of vouchers (“le bon magique”). Initially dealing with perceived female interests, such as knitting patterns and cooking, *Elle* soon started to discuss broader social issues. Sex education was debated, as was premarital sex, divorce, and religious education. In 1956, birth control was discussed. Highlighting modern values, *Elle* sold an image of female readers who were not happy simply to remain in the home, yet who took the time to look after their appearance. While traditional in nature, the magazine tried to promote female emancipation. From its very beginning *Elle* was extremely popular, selling 700,000 copies of its first edition. *Elle* promoted a consumer-oriented and “American” way of life:

Elle devait participer pleinement à la reconstruction du pays, apporter sa pierre à cette œuvre exaltante en procurant aux femmes – qui, pour la première fois dans l’histoire de l’humanité, avaient autant souffert de la guerre que les hommes – le rayon de soleil tant attendu afin de redécouvrir les plaisirs de la consommation, de la séduction, de la frivolité.⁹

The evolution of advertisements in *Elle* is of particular interest for this project as it imparts valuable information on how the automobile was – at least by implication – perceived amongst a group that was itself changing in stature. The proliferation of articles on and advertisements for the car in *Elle* is therefore important. The growing importance of the female driver will be significant also in studying *Elle*; this developing trend which saw more attention paid to women as potential drivers and car-owners will be explored. This new market allied with the strong readership that the magazine was gaining is of particular interest as it can shed light on the will to buy a car. From 1945 to 1950, *Elle* sold an average of 110,000 copies weekly, more than tripling to 340,000 in the 1950s, and levelling off at 500,000 in the 1960s, with some special issues selling more than one million copies.¹⁰

L’Express is a more obviously news-oriented magazine than *Paris Match*. Founded in 1953 by Jean-Jacques Servan-Schreiber and Françoise Giroud, its initial

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Vincent Soulier, *Presse féminine : la puissance frivole* (Paris: L’Archipel, 2008). 108.

¹⁰ Jamet, *La presse périodique en France*. 61.

strength was its focus on decolonization as it functioned as a “journal d’opinion” until its transformation into a more photograph-oriented news magazine along the lines of *Time* magazine in September 1964. As already mentioned, Françoise Giroud was editor of *Elle* from 1946 to 1953, when she joined forces with her lover, Jean-Jacques Servan-Schreiber, to create *L’Express*. Servan-Schreiber was as prominent as Giroud and was particularly famous as a commentator on France’s relationship with America, advocating “a discriminating Americanization”¹¹. He also commented on France’s role in its own colonies; indeed, he was conscripted to serve in Algeria in 1956 and famously wrote a critical account of his experiences.¹² In the magazine’s early years, it adopted a progressive stance vis-à-vis the French colonies as it promoted their transformation into autonomous states and openly supported Pierre Mendès-France in his eventually successful attempts to become Prime Minister.¹³ In order to survive, it moved to a more centrist stance, adopting a news magazine style. This change saw a growth in interest from companies looking for a more cost-effective way of advertising their products. The new *L’Express* boasted increased readership and advertising costs less than daily newspapers; as such, it became a very advertisement-oriented weekly. Divided into seven sections – *France*, *Monde*, *Économie*, *Vie Moderne*, *Spectacles*, *Livres*, *Madame Express* – its weekly readership grew from 152,917 in 1964 to 261,823 in 1965 and 614,101 in 1972.¹⁴

In choosing to discuss these three magazines, I am examining a media form that was itself evolving and modernising during the *Trente Glorieuses*. The development of colour photography on magazine covers and also in the interior of the magazines added to their allure. With average weekly sales of 702,000 in 1952, which grew to 1.8 million copies in 1957, Gilles Feyel suggests that the expansion of news magazines at the time was due to stylistic changes which made them more accessible:

On assiste alors à une mutation générale, et de la présentation grâce à l’adoption du papier couché, et du style par la généralisation de la formule du magazine illustré, et du contenu par la diversification des rubriques de vie

¹¹ Ross, *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies*. 66.

¹² Jean Jacques Servan-Schreiber, *Lieutenant en Algérie* (Paris: Julliard, 1957).

¹³ Christian Delporte, “L’Express, Mendès France et la modernité politique (1953-1955),” *Matériaux pour l’histoire de notre temps* 63, no. 1 (2001): 96-103. 96.

¹⁴ *Ibid.* 72.

moderne, de conseils, de loisir. Le genre magazine colonise désormais ce qu'il est convenu d'appeler la 'presse périodique spécialisée grand public'.¹⁵

With 70.7% of space devoted to photographs in 1958-59, these increasingly popular magazines engaged with a wide range of topical issues:

Les informations les plus illustrées par rapport au texte traitent des princes et des grands de ce monde – 86,4% de photographies – la vie des stars (85,1%), les faits divers (78,6%).¹⁶

The three magazines examined in this chapter made abundant use of photographs, however each magazine can be seen to be distinct as its audience was different. *Elle* targeted a mainly female readership, while *L'Express*, as already mentioned, was more political in nature. *Paris Match* was regarded as the most mainstream, with the notable exception of the contributions by Raymond Cartier,¹⁷ remaining middle-of-the-road in nature according to Batailler *et al.*¹⁸ Each of these magazines will provide insights into the development of the perception of the automobile post-1945.

The growth in news magazines was reflected in the increase in advertisements in comparison with the daily press. As weekly magazines, and thus available for purchase over a longer period of time, advertisements were more cost effective than in daily newspapers and the better quality of the appearance of the advertisement was also important. The fact that weekly periodicals were more nationally oriented than the Paris-based dailies also aided this increase:

Tout y concourt: la qualité de l'impression – en héliogravure ou offset – et du papier, la périodicité plus ou moins longue qui favorise la prise en main d'un même exemplaire par de nombreux lecteurs, la spécialisation des contenus et la segmentation des publics qui offrent aux annonceurs le certitude de toucher au plus près le public qu'ils souhaitent approcher, une audience nationale qui a permis aux magazines, dès les années 1950, de relayer une presse quotidienne nationale repliée sur la région parisienne, alors qu'elle rayonnait avant la guerre et depuis les origines sur tout le territoire national.¹⁹

The distinctive nature of the magazines meant that advertisements could also be better targeted than in the daily press. This progression appears to have reached its peak in 1968, when the fall-out from the events of May of that year – perceived as a

¹⁵ Gilles Feyel, "Naissance, constitution progressive et épanouissement d'un genre de presse aux limites floues : le magazine," *Réseaux*, no. 1 (2001): 19-51. 40.

¹⁶ *Ibid.* 38.

¹⁷ Noted journalist and anti-imperialist, Raymond Cartier, was *Paris Match*'s most famous reporter during the 1960s, when he gained renown for his articles on national and international current affairs.

¹⁸ Francine Batailler, Alain Schifres, and Claude Tannery, *Analyses de presse* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1963). 60.

¹⁹ Feyel, "Naissance, constitution progressive et épanouissement d'un genre de presse aux limites floues." 44.

rejection of the consumer society by a segment of the French population – was translated into a fall-off in weekly press advertisements, while daily advertisement rates remained steady:

La crise sociale de 1968, et sa traduction dans les mœurs, les modes de vie, les valeurs (les questions de contraception, d'émancipation de la femme, d'égalité des sexes dans le travail et dans le couple, etc.), n'est pas suffisamment appréhendée par la presse magazine, qui voit une partie de son lectorat, jeune, actif, à niveau culturel et intellectuel élevé se tourner davantage vers les « news magazines ». Il s'ensuivra une profonde restructuration de ce secteur durant les années 1980.²⁰

The growth of news magazines until 1968 together with the seeming drop in the political and literary press, as seen with the conversion of *L'Express* to a magazine format, appeared to mirror *Trente Glorieuses* society as it embraced an American style of consumerism in which commodities became assimilated into the fabric of everyday life. The malleability of news magazines allowed for changing trends and offered the ability to cover all aspects of a rapidly shifting society which was also becoming more segmented:

Le contenu est toujours très diversifié, naturellement lorsqu'il s'agit de magazines d'actualité ou de lecture, mais aussi lorsque le titre s'adresse à une certaine catégorie de lecteurs, par exemple les femmes. Après les expériences de l'entre-deux-guerres, le genre magazine profite des succès de *Paris Match* et des grands magazines féminins, de l'essor aussi des news-magazines, pour coloniser de plus en plus le monde des périodiques. Très souple, le magazine sait s'adapter à tous les publics et se spécialiser dans les contenus, de manière de plus en plus fine. Chacune des activités humaines – autant de travail que de loisir –, chacun des domaines de la connaissance peuvent être couverts. Les effets de mode, les passions du moment trouvent rapidement leur support.²¹

Analysing the growing presence of the automobile in these three magazines from 1945 to 1973 provides a window on the evolution of the perception of the car, through articles dedicated to it and also advertisements selling it.

In this study of *Elle*, *Paris Match* and *L'Express*, I looked at numbers of all three magazines from their creation in 1945, 1949 and 1953 respectively up until 1973, which is the end of this study. While consulting these magazines, I decided to focus on two periods of the year in particular. Firstly, I chose to concentrate on the summer months of June, July and August in an attempt to identify trends in relation

²⁰ Charon, *La presse magazine*. 12.

²¹ Feyel, "Naissance, constitution progressive et épanouissement d'un genre de presse aux limites floues." 46.

to the appearance of the car and its impact on the democratization in holiday-making in post-war France. This is a theme that was examined at length in Chapter 3, yet it is relevant here as it provides important insights into the car as a perceived purveyor of freedom. Secondly, I concentrated on the weeks around the annual “Salon de l’Automobile,” i.e. the last two weeks in September and first two weeks in October. The Salon de l’Auto grew in popularity post-1945, and was the site for the launch of new cars to an expectant public. While concentrating on these two periods, I also recorded other significant references to the car in the media. I am particularly interested in how the car was portrayed in images, cartoons and advertisements. The evolution in the perception of the automobile, that is to say, the image that is represented during the *Trente Glorieuses* in the eyes of both the consumer and the vendor, is of primary interest here.

The examination of these three news magazines will be divided into three sections aligned with three periods. These periods overlap to a certain extent as they happen over a relatively short period of time. During this rapid modernization, and as far as representations of the automobile are concerned, the immediate post-war period can be defined by references to modernity and more specifically to the car conceived in terms of grandeur and desirability. The second period, which essentially covers the 1950s, is a transitional one, during which it is possible to observe instances where the automobile and modernity in general are still fetishized as aspirational, yet there are also examples of the car becoming more accessible and more commonplace. This transitional period coincides with the extension of paid holidays, and runs until near the end of the decade as the car becomes ubiquitous. The final period (1960-1973) is one of acceptance and even rejection, in which the automobile has been converted from a commodity that was coveted for its social status to a Baudrillardian need. While the car was still not possessed by the majority of French households until between 1965 and 1970,²² demand grew on average by 5% every year until 1973;²³ however, by 1960 its image in contemporary magazines shows how it had evolved, such shifts being reflected in the car’s editorial coverage as well as in the advertisements and cartoons devoted to it during this final decade of the *Trente Glorieuses*.

²² Jean-Jacques Chanaron, *L’industrie automobile* (Paris: La Découverte, 1983). 120.

²³ Jean Sauvy, *L’industrie automobile* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1984). 93.

4.2 A Phantasmagoria of Desire

As *Elle* began publication in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War, it was the best positioned to examine the early post-war attitude toward modernity in French society. This first section of the analysis offered here, which identifies a continued fascination with modernity, and, in particular, the car, involves a close reading of *Elle* and, to a lesser degree, *Paris Match* articles and advertisements. As *L'Express* was founded in 1953, the themes covered in this first section are not relevant for this magazine.

4.2.1 Post-War Modernising

With the suppression of *Marie-Claire* for collaboration after the Liberation,²⁴ *Elle* was created in September 1945, and the first issue appeared in November 1945.²⁵ Ostensibly aimed at a female readership, as its name clearly suggests, *Elle* often made reference to skiing holidays during the first winter of its existence, with a section in December 1945 dedicated to exercises in order to prepare for going skiing (5 Dec. 1945). Yet *Elle* also provided practical information to its readers with a weekly section simply entitled “Tricotons” (19 Dec. 1945). The first reference to the automobile appears on 28 January 1946, when a young woman modelling a knitted jumper embroidered with “numéros de telephone” sits at the steering wheel of a convertible. This fusion of two emblems of modernity, the telephone and the automobile, is indicative of the role this new magazine wants to play. The position to be played by modernity is seen in the very next edition, where a “scène de vie courante,” as it is subtitled, depicts a woman and her need for a telephone:

Comme le scaphandrier a besoin d'un tuyau d'air pur pour respirer sous l'eau, la jeune fille moderne ne peut vivre sans le téléphone. C'est une vérité de notre temps qui se vérifie sous toutes les latitudes : à Paris comme à Londres et à New York.²⁶

In comparing the telephone to an airline, albeit in an exotic setting, this commodity is beginning to be treated as a need. It is a comparison that is similarly afforded to the car in a later issue of *Elle*, as we see actress Josette Day announce “Je conduis comme je respire.”²⁷

²⁴ It was relaunched in 1954. See Feyel, “Naissance, constitution progressive et épanouissement d'un genre de presse aux limites floues.” 42.

²⁵ Charon, *La presse magazine*. 11.

²⁶ *Elle*, 30 January 1946, 8.

²⁷ *Elle*, 16 October 1950, 15.

Elle portrayed itself as a liberating and progressive magazine, intent on advancing the rights of women. With Françoise Giroud as editor, *Elle* “fut un puissant instrument de libération au service des femmes,”²⁸ however this was never done at the expense of fashion, as Giroud herself explained that there existed:

une relation directe entre la situation des femmes dans la société et leurs vêtements. Et j’aime ce qui est beau... Une matière, une coupe, un accord de tons, un équilibre réussi entre les volumes... Une jolie femme bien habillée, c’est très joli.²⁹

In one issue, the magazine showed women how to do exercises in order to stay in shape; however, the image of a woman using an iron carrying out these exercises strengthens the perceived notion that she should remain in the house.³⁰ This is also true of the incitations to take the initiative in the family home: “je repeins moi-même ma maison, voilà comment je m’y prends”³¹; “*Gaie, claire, simple*, telle sera la maison que vous *lui* ferez”³²; and in the same issue, “Les 7 métamorphoses de mon unique robe”.³³

Early issues of *Elle* carried allusions to modernity and specifically to “la femme moderne”; these were often linked to portrayals of the automobile. The next section will examine further linkages between the car as a desired commodity and female celebrities, and, indeed, with celebrities in general. We will see, in the early *Trente Glorieuses*, a continuing desire for the car as representations of it are shown in news magazines in close association with its famous owners.

4.2.2 Star Talk

Much of the column-space devoted to the car was accompanied by a reference to a star of the time, generally of stage or screen. The strong link between stars and what they term “glossy” magazines has been explored by John Gaffney and Diana Holmes when they state that:

At the simplest commercial level, star figures functioned to sell newspapers, magazines (such as the new postwar *Paris Match* and *Elle*), books, films and

²⁸ Soulier, *Presse féminine*. 111.

²⁹ Quoted in *ibid.* 112.

³⁰ *Elle*, 2 February 1946, 16.

³¹ *Elle*, 5 March 1946, 20.

³² *Elle*, 13 avril 1946, 12.

³³ *Ibid.* 14.

all kinds of other products that could play on the consumer's desire to acquire something of the star's aura.³⁴

In many instances, the story would be about the star. However, reference would be made to the car this person drove, as a close association between the car and its owner served to increase the desire-value of the car and at the same time increase the prestige surrounding the star. This was a reciprocal exchange, one which was particularly prevalent in the late 1940s and early 1950s.

On 7 May 1946, *Elle* used the image of an automobile to show the opulence of summer holiday-makers on the Côte d'Azur:

Le grand prix d'élégance automobile, à Nice, a été disputé devant une foule que les compétences évaluent à cinquante mille personnes. Il faisait beau. Le ciel était bleu. La cohue joyeuse...³⁵

The image of "Martine Carroll, son chien et sa Packard" accompanies this article. The Côte d'Azur, while growing in popularity, thus remains the domain of the rich, as does the automobile. In closely associating the triumvirate of the wealthy, the Côte d'Azur and the automobile, the magazine imbued the French population with a sense of desire for the pleasures at the disposal of the upper classes.

Representations of the automobile are generally accompanied by a star at the wheel; for instance, Tyrone Power is photographed giving an autograph to a fan while at the wheel of his white convertible. Indeed, the type of car was also significant as the close association of stars with desirable cars, and more specifically convertibles, served to feed further this desirability. Convertibles evoked the image of holidaying in the sun; they also evoked an image of America and the American car, an image which Lazareff and Giroud at *Elle* in particular were intent on promoting.³⁶ As the newest cars were launched at the Salon de l'Auto, it provided the perfect opportunity to engage with the car, as we can see in the example below in which *Elle* refers to the car in terms of grandeur and opulence:

L'auto... au Salon, parce que, pour la première fois depuis la guerre, n'importe qui est libre d'acheter n'importe quelle voiture présentée, avec la certitude d'être livré dans des délais raisonnables (paraît-il). Les femmes disent : "Vous avez vu la petite Simca-6 rouge fuschia, doublée d'écosse comme mon manteau ? La Dyna-Panhard vert nil ? La boîte à maquillage de la Cadillac ? " Les hommes disent : "Vous avez vu le volant télescopique ?

³⁴ John Gaffney and Diana Holmes, (eds.), *Celebrity and Stardom in France* (Oxford: Berghahn, 2006). 8.

³⁵ *Elle*, 7 May 1946, 4.

³⁶ Ross, *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies*. 79.

Le tableau de bord rabattable ? Le réservoir musical ? Les pères de familles nombreuses disent : ‘Ah ! si j’avais une 203 six places...’ Quant aux ingénieurs, ils disent : ‘Nous sommes contents de nous. Les voitures françaises ont repris leur petit air raffiné d’avant-guerre.’ C’est la grande folie des “décapotables”, des ‘découvrables’ et des ‘toits ouvrants’ (recommandées pour chapeaux à plumes).³⁷

The suggested distinction in approaches to car buying by both men and women is clearly stereotypical and gendered as women focus on the colour and accessories of the car while men are much more attracted by its mechanics. Convertibles are also recommended for women as well, as the author ironically suggests that they are ideal if you want to wear a “chapeau à plumes”. The author in this article makes reference to the most opulent and iconic of large American cars, the Cadillac, as it is suggested that this kind of car that continues to attract the attention of the French public. The Cadillac is a car that will be further explored in Chapter 5 as we examine the 1961 film “La belle Américaine”, in which a working-class family’s life is changed dramatically by its acquisition. The author also refers to convertibles as the desirability of cars which are not available to all is highlighted.

The Salon came to be covered more regularly by *Elle*, but the Salon of the following year has a different tone as *Elle* takes an interest in the practicalities of driving in an article entitled “*Elle et les voitures.*” *Elle* studies the number of women who succeeded in obtaining a driver’s licence, proceeds to examine the types of cars driven by women, and also explains how, statistically, women are better drivers than men.

Elles ont été 43.445 à passer leur ‘permis’ l’an passé, 38,9% seulement ne l’ont pas obtenu.

Elles ont, entre 18 et 30 ans, le maximum de chances pour réussir : les examinateurs l’affirment ; et ils ajoutent : ‘Elles sont plus prudentes que les hommes’.

Elles encourent – proportionnellement – moins de contraventions que les hommes : les registres de la préfecture en font foi.

Elles conservent toujours, ou presque, leur permis ; parce que son retrait n’est, en principe, motivé que par ‘l’état d’ivresse au volant’ (et qu’elles sont sobres).

Elles choisissent plutôt les cabriolets décapotables et les petites voitures de série.

³⁷ *Elle*, 17 October 1949, 5.

Elles préfèrent les carrosseries noires ; mais si elles aiment les robes et les tenues voyantes, elles choisissent des teintes claires.³⁸

Once again, in this article, as in the previous one, allusion is made to convertibles as well as to other aesthetic aspects of the cars; thus while attainability may be suggested by the numbers of women obtaining their driving licence, appearance and desirability are still explicit. The threshold of obtaining one's driving licence is a rite of passage which Baudrillard echoes in his "Le Système des Objets".³⁹ The way in which the automobile is described echoes Barthes' critique of images of food in *Elle*.⁴⁰ In describing "recipes in *Elle* as fantasies for the magazine's modest readership",⁴¹ Barthes stated that the magazine was creating an image for its readers that they were unable to obtain. Equally by speaking of convertibles, *Elle* was fuelling this image at a time when car ownership was still quite low with less than 20% of households actually possessing a vehicle.⁴² This article concludes with a previously noted quotation from Josette Day⁴³ which echoes a sentiment expressed about the telephone three years previously: "Je conduis comme je respire."⁴⁴ Still an object of desire, the car was becoming commodified, and designated as a need by the rich and famous. That it still had not entered the domain of the everyday need is suggested in issue 259 in which *Elle*, in looking back on the year gone by, suggests: "En 1950, on roule, on porte, on lit, on caresse, on convoite."⁴⁵ As previously suggested, the figures showed that it was not entirely true to say that "on roule", however the car was becoming more visible and thus desired. *Elle* continued to afford more attention to the automobile as the plaything of the stars, but it was also becoming of more interest as a commodity that could perhaps be acquired by some of its female readers. Thus, in an article entitled "non, ne vous habillez pas comme ceci," *Elle* highlights the fact that fashion does not always extend to the automobile,

³⁸ *Elle*, 16 October 1950, 14.

³⁹ Jean Baudrillard, *Le système des objets : la consommation des signes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1968). 93.

⁴⁰ In a "Mythology" entitled "Cuisine ornementale" Barthes questions the need for photos of food to be made to look attractive, exploring the tension between being modern yet remaining at home. See Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (Paris: Seuil, 2003 [1957]). 120.

⁴¹ Susan Weiner, "1950s Popular Culture: Star-Gazing and Myth-Making with Roland Barthes and Edgar Morin," in *Celebrity and stardom in France*, eds. John Gaffney and Diana Holmes (Oxford: Berghahn, 2006).

⁴² Chanaron, *L'industrie automobile*. 120.

⁴³ Josette Day was a famous actress and lover of Marcel Pagnol, she appeared in a number of his films, however she is best known for her role as la Belle in Jean Cocteau's *La Belle et la Bête* co-starring Jean Marais.

⁴⁴ *Elle*, 16 October 1950, 14.

⁴⁵ *Elle*, 13 November 1950, 19.

and that many dresses are not conceived to be worn in a car.⁴⁶ It also suggests a number of tips for how to dress properly to look good in a car, once again highlighting the continuing tension between freedom and social expectation.

Image was of central importance in glossy magazines. The close association of the automobile with style and, more specifically, with celebrities was also apparent in the other news magazines of the era. From its creation in 1949, *Paris Match* was a publication which had abundant images and, as we shall see, devoted significant space to the automobile as a vehicle of distinction and as part of a broader movement towards modernity:

But from the immediate postwar period on, a new style of glossy magazine was perhaps the most important vehicle of both a national sense of specifically French modernity, and of star culture. From 1949, the weekly *Paris Match* chronicled national life, from changes of government and colonial wars to the *Salon de l'auto* (Motor Show) and the marriages of famous actors, in large, visually appealing photo spreads and up-beat, reader-friendly articles.⁴⁷

L'Express was not created until 1953 and thus was not part of this early trend.

References to the automobile in *Paris Match* are typically in relation to its opulent size and to well-known drivers. Michèle Morgan⁴⁸ appears on the cover of the 4 June 1949 edition at the wheel of a convertible with a caption reading “Vous pouvez être jeune vingt ans de plus”⁴⁹, once again highlighting the convertible and how its image impacts favourably on that of its owner. The linking of youth or the appearance of youth with convertibles reinforces the notion that the car was still a desired commodity. This association of age with the automobile and with modernity is a theme that is echoed in Susan Weiner’s study of *Mythologies* (1957) and *Les stars* (1957) as she posits that both the cultural critic Roland Barthes and the sociologist Edgar Morin had:

observed the same odd principle at work in mass culture, odd in light of the apparent thrall of technology in the postwar period. That principle was myth: technology, paradoxically, had the power to renew the ancient imaginative function of mythic thinking in contemporary industrial society. Through the

⁴⁶ *Elle*, 6 October 1952, 22.

⁴⁷ Gaffney and Holmes, *Celebrity and Stardom in France*. 14-15

⁴⁸ Michèle Morgan was an actress who acted in a series of French films over three decades and was also moderately successful in Hollywood. Her most famous role was in *La symphonie pastorale* (1946).

⁴⁹ *Paris Match*, 4 June 1949, front cover.

mass media, the mythic was rendered visible, palpable, legible and ubiquitous.⁵⁰

Thus, Weiner argues that although it was becoming more ubiquitous, technology continued to play a fetishized role in society.

Again in the 4 June 1949 edition of *Paris Match*, we see the Russian foreign minister Andrey Vyshinsky being ridiculed as the huge car transporting him is too long to take the turn at the Elysée palace. Inspired by this story, the magazine goes on to examine the cars driven by the leading politicians of the day. The choice of car is intended to say something about the extravagant character of the politician it transports. Similarly, references to the car in *Paris Match* evoke images of celebrities and the cars they drive. The car thus serves as a symbol of these stars' success. "C'est Garbo à Paris" is the caption for a photo in which we see Greta Garbo at the height of her fame, at the wheel of a car.⁵¹ In the same edition, Henri Vidal⁵² is photographed standing beside his car, a Lancia. Announcing the marque has a double effect as it associates celebrity with a certain type of car, specifically imbuing a Lancia with a phantasmagorical quality as the car of predilection of this famous actor. In November 1949, there is a similar image of Rita Hayworth: "Cette photographie a été prise la semaine dernière au moment où Rita Hayworth partait pour sa promenade quotidienne. Rita se rend en voiture (une Cadillac décapotable marquée M.A.K.) dans un salon de thé."⁵³ The type of car is mentioned as the importance of the brand is indicative of the star quality of its owner. Also in November 1949, Charles Lindbergh's⁵⁴ visit to France is covered, "Lindbergh explore l'Europe en 4CV."⁵⁵ The brand of car is once again revealed; however in this instance it is a modest car which is driven by the famous aviator. Charles Lindbergh had previously visited the Citroën factories in Javel, and saw himself as a man of the people.⁵⁶ His choice of the 4CV may thus be seen to reflect his

⁵⁰ Weiner, "1950s Popular Culture." 28.

⁵¹ *Paris Match*, 6 August 1949, 4.

⁵² Henri Vidal was a prominent actor in the 1940s and 1950s. Reputedly discovered by Édith Piaf, his most notable roles were in *Les Maudits* (1947) and *Une Parisienne* (1957) which co-starred Brigitte Bardot. [Internet: http://fiches.lexpress.fr/personnalite/henri-vidal_171370/ biographie. Accessed 28 May 2009]

⁵³ *Paris Match*, 12 November 1949, 7.

⁵⁴ Charles Lindbergh's arrival in Paris in 1927 is important as it highlighted his symbolic role as an icon of modernity and mobility. See discussion on this in Chapter 2.

⁵⁵ *Paris Match*, 19 November 1949, 7.

⁵⁶ Barthes commented on the fact that Lindbergh flew wearing a lounge-suit, a fact he suggests underlines his humanity as opposed to distancing himself from it. See Barthes, *Mythologies*. 89.

construction of a proletarian image for himself as: “A Paris, Charles Lindbergh s’est procuré une 4CV Renault. Il y a péniblement casé ses longues jambes et, sa femme à son côté, il est parti sur les routes d’Europe pour se faire une idée personnelle de la situation en Europe.”⁵⁷

The instances in which the automobile was associated with its owner, in these early cases a well-known popular cultural figure or star, became less apparent as the *Trente Glorieuses* progressed. Stars were still used to market cars, as we shall see; however, the association was less relevant as possession of the car became fetishized differently.

4.2.3 A Changing Fetish

The beginning of an evolution in the perception of the car in magazines becomes apparent in the late 1940s and early 1950s, as we see articles appear which engage with the car as a more attainable commodity, while in the same moment dismantling some of the image of opulence associated with it.

The 1949 Salon de l’Auto was announced on the cover of the 8 October 1949 edition of *Paris Match*. Inside, the magazine declares “Si vous visitez le Salon, voici les treize nouveautés que vous devez voir”, explaining that: “Il est difficile de bien visiter le Salon de l’Automobile. L’affluence et la fatigue empêche parfois de voir l’essentiel. Voici une sélection des nouveautés du Salon 49 qui vous permettront d’économiser votre temps.”⁵⁸ *Paris Match* picks a selection of cars that includes the Citroën 2CV, the Renault 4CV and the Simca 3CV. Including these smaller cars on its list shows that there is a growing interest in these more functional vehicles. A growing will to acquire a car is evidenced in the Salon de la Voiture d’Occasion which is covered in the 22 October 1949 edition of *Paris Match*:

Un million de Français ont visité le Salon de l’Automobile. Quelques dizaines de milliers y ont passé commande d’une voiture neuve. Les autres, ceux qui ne peuvent pas réunir trois cent mille francs, prix minimum d’une petite voiture, ceux qui ne vont au Salon que pour nourrir leur rêve, ceux qui rentrent chez eux en métro, ceux-là ont encore un espoir : la voiture d’occasion. On les retrouve à la Foire aux Autos, à la porte de Versailles. Les voitures à vendre y paraissent étonnamment propres et brillantes.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ *Paris Match*, 8 October 1949, 19.

⁵⁹ *Paris Match*, 22 October 1949, 17.

Those who go to the Salon in order to “nourrir leur rêve” do so with the aim of acceding to a new freedom. In describing the 26CV Delahaye, *Paris Match* declares that it has “l’apparence confortablement bourgeoise.”⁶⁰ The Delahaye was a four-litre convertible, thus in this context, the magazine is highlighting the elite nature of this car. While this second-hand Salon suggests that would-be car-owners can now “nourrir leur rêve”, an obvious tension exists as the only type of car available seems to be luxury vehicles. Car acquisition is still a dream as mentioned in the article, and the dream is not only to experience the freedom associated with the car, but also to indulge in all its trappings, in the “apparence confortablement bourgeoise,” that is to say a desire to experience, and to be seen to experience, possession of a vehicle which hitherto symbolized belonging to an elite circle. [Figure 1]



Figure 1. *Paris Match*⁶¹

The Salon de l'Automobile is referred to for the first time by *Paris Match* in September 1951, a month prior to its opening, as it shows one of the cars which is due to star at the event:

⁶⁰ *Paris Match*, 15 October 1949, 6.

⁶¹ *Paris Match*, 14 October 1950, front cover.

Devant le Grand Palais, avec un mois d'avance, nos reporters ont photographié la nouvelle Grégoire qui sera, à partir du 4 octobre un des clous du salon. C'est une traction avant à 5 places, 13 CV, 4 vitesses qui atteint 150km/h. Au volant son éventuelle propriétaire, habillée par Christian Dior, porte un manteau de lainage beige et longs poils.⁶²

The accompanying picture shows a well-dressed woman who is apparently proud of her purchase. The close association between a desirable car and a fashionable woman, in this case a woman wearing Dior, serves to strengthen the impression that the automobile remains fetishized as an object of desire. This fetishizing, however, is portrayed rather differently in this issue as it begins to introduce cars to potential new owners. The Salon, which begins in mid-October is given front-page coverage in *Paris Match* with the picture of a car, Le Sabre. [Figure 2] The relevant edition is almost entirely dedicated to the Salon and specifically to the purchase of a car: “Des 38 nouvelles voitures sélectionnées par *Paris Match*, laquelle sera la vôtre?”⁶³ This imagined step in the generalization of motoring is the beginning of the magazine's portrayal of the car as an obtainable commodity. While still a luxury object, the articles in this edition suggest that it was becoming of interest as a possible purchase for more people. This will be explored in detail in the next section.



Figure 2. *Paris Match*⁶⁴

⁶² *Paris Match*, 8 September 1951, 19.

⁶³ *Paris Match*, 13 October 1951, 24.

⁶⁴ *Paris Match*, 13 October 1951, front cover.

In 1953, the year of its foundation, *L'Express*, as a news-oriented magazine, devoted a full page to the Salon de l'Automobile. Entitled "à quoi pourrait servir le salon," in which the usefulness of the Salon is questioned, the relevant article shows us a journalist who has embraced the concept of the car for all, who is conscious of its wide availability, and thus is unconvinced about the need for a Salon, which only serves to maintain an image of the car which is no longer necessary:

Le Salon, opération qui consiste à garnir pendant deux semaines les hôtels et les restaurants de clients, les théâtres de spectateurs moins exigeants que les Parisiens saturés, les carnets des agents de contraventions et le portefeuille des organisateurs d'honnêtes revenus, le Salon ainsi conçu n'a qu'un défaut: il expose ce qu'à moindres frais on peut en toute tranquillité voir rouler dans sa rue.⁶⁵

Thus in its first reference to the Salon, this new magazine questioned the Salon as a place where modern cars were displayed, suggesting that a growing familiarity with the automobile meant that its fetishizing as an object of desire was similarly evolving.

Both *Elle* and *Paris Match* engaged with modernity and with the automobile in the late 1940s and early 1950s. We see a valorization of modernity through the association of the automobile with the telephone and through the placing of the car in the domain of wealthy stars. The linking of famous people with their vehicles constituted a reciprocal fetishizing as car ownership and social status strengthened each other and was written about and photographed by the mass media. The coverage of the Salon de l'Automobile is also largely phantasmagorical in nature, as it introduced readers to an exhibition rather than actually imparting utilitarian knowledge about the car. Rather than allowing testing to take place, cars were placed on stands to be admired for their physical appearance. In the next section, we shall see how this consumption of the car developed over time.

4.3 Learning about the Car

The second period identified in these magazines is the late 1950s and the early 1960s, during which the car goes through the gradual process of becoming demystified. In this intermediate period, it is possible to come across further examples of the automobile being associated with wealth and social status; however, this is diluted as these magazines introduce the car to a broader public. Attempts are

⁶⁵ *L'Express*, 26 September 1953, 10.

made to educate the reader about the workings of the car as well as about ways to afford one. We also see a growth of the Salon de l'Automobile, which begins to engage with a wider audience as the 2CV and the 4CV gain more coverage during this period. Rather than depict stars, magazine articles induce the reader to discover more about the car itself.

4.3.1 Car Coverage

During this second period, the democratization of the car is more accepted, as is its potential to give its owners great freedom. We see examples of the car being addressed through the life of its owner with articles entitled “votre voiture et vous,” for example. Here, the automobile is no longer simply being aspired to, it is being mentioned as a realistic goal for readers of these magazines.

In 1953, *Elle* accords the Salon more space than in previous years, and, on the cover of issue 408, depicts a woman wearing a “tailleur-voiture,” which according to *Elle*, “va bien avec la nouvelle 4CV.”⁶⁶ In one article, *Elle* explains how the Salon is now catering more for the needs of women.

Au Salon : Les constructeurs ont travaillé pour les femmes. Le 1er octobre, les portes du Grand Palais s'ouvriront sur le Salon de l'Automobile. Les constructeurs d'autos, qui constatent l'accroissement considérable du nombre de femmes automobilistes, ont pensé à elle. Parmi les améliorations, certaines ont été conçues pour le confort et l'agrément de la femme.⁶⁷

“Elle au Volant,” which appears in issue 410, examines five women who participate in motor racing. Opening the way for women not only to race but to compete on an equal footing with men in motorsport, this fits the profile of the magazine in promoting equality between men and women. That motorsport has become an area of importance for the public is an indicator of the growth in general interest in the car:

Elle au volant - Ces 5 femmes vivent ‘à 200 à l’heure’
Ces cinq femmes ont jugé, le 4 octobre, à Montlhéry, les concurrentes de la Coupe du Salon de l'Automobile, réservée aux débutantes du volant de compétition.
Toutes estiment n'avoir réussi que le jour, non pas où elles ont gagné une épreuve, mais où les mécaniciens les appellent par leur nom de famille – comme des hommes.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ *Elle*, 28 September 1953, front cover.

⁶⁷ *Elle*, 28 September 1953, 9.

⁶⁸ *Elle*, 12 October 1953, 19.

From the mid-1950s, the change in perception of the car, or more specifically the way in which the car is portrayed in *Elle*, is quite apparent. Firstly, more attention is accorded to the Salon de l'Auto. In order to celebrate the opening of the 1955 Salon, *Elle* runs four images of a car on its cover. In two of these images, a woman is at the wheel of the car, in the third she is driving and is accompanied by a young boy, and in the fourth image a man is driving with a woman seated beside him. In all four images, the woman is wearing a fur coat, and the caption runs "Elle aime les voitures, les fourrures... et les confitures."⁶⁹ The linkage of these three items suggests a continued fetishizing of the car as it is associated with style as characterized in this context by the "fourrures"; however, the reference to jam in this same context suggests that the car is, perhaps, beginning to be perceived as more commonplace.

Thus car coverage was becoming more generalized and this was highlighted with the use of the "info-pub" to advertise cars. In *Paris Match*, we see a full page "info-pub," a page which in the guise of providing information to the reader is actually selling a product; in this case, advertising the Renault Frégate and depicting the driver, an elegantly dressed woman, leaving her car and going into a detached house with a beautifully maintained front garden.⁷⁰ This new form of advertising targeted prospective customers while at the same time serving to increase knowledge about the cars. It was also indicative of a move towards a new market for automobile manufacturers.

4.3.2 Introducing the Car to a New Market

This transitional period saw a number of articles published which introduced the car to a potential new market. Articles which discuss the affordability of the car, as well as increasing customer awareness of the makes that existed, became more prevalent as working-class spending power was increasing.⁷¹ These articles serve to place the automobile in a prominent position in French society. In effect, they served to introduce the motor car to a new public, a new potential buyer, who hitherto was unable even to consider acquisition of a car as a possibility, and thus only saw it in terms of unobtainability. This retelling of the history of the car is indicative of the

⁶⁹ *Elle*, 3 October 1955, cover.

⁷⁰ *Paris Match*, 4 October 1952, 10.

⁷¹ Pierre Jouin, *Une liberté toute neuve : culture de masse et esthétique nouvelle dans la France des années 50* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1995). 26.

growing belief that the greater spending power of the French working classes could be transferred to the acquisition of a car.

An article which appeared in October 1954 entitled “Pouvons-nous acheter une voiture?” explores a conversation between a husband and wife as they try to calculate whether they can afford a car or not. The choice of car, while difficult, is a practical one for Marceline and Jean in this article. It depends on their budget. What follows is a breakdown of all the costs involved in the acquisition and running of a car. The final paragraph of this article is of particular interest as all these factors no longer seem to matter, as it seems that while it may not make financial sense to buy a car, the affective quality of car ownership is such that it is worthwhile:

A moins de voyager ou de circuler beaucoup et à un minimum de 2 personnes, vous ne réaliserez pas une économie par rapport au train et aux transports en commun. Mais de toute façon, vous réaliserez un rêve. Avoue, m’a dit Marceline, que ça vaut bien 19.000 fr. par mois. Ma foi, elle avait raison.⁷²

The realization of a dream, rather than the utilitarian value of the car, is agreed to be worth the price of the car.

The affordability of the car is a theme which was more prevalent during this second period. The cover of *Elle* in October 1957 portrays a well-dressed woman standing up in a car, and the caption runs “une nouvelle petite reine: la Vespa 2CV.” In its description of this car, this is a departure from the usual rhetoric associated with it. This car, while beautiful, is also “imbattable sur le plan économique.” We are seeing the assimilation of the car into the household budget.

The increase in demand for automobiles had already become apparent as early as 1952, with an article entitled “pourquoi les Français ont des raisons de ne pas être contents,”⁷³ which laments the fact that although there is growing interest, there are waiting lists for all makes of cars. It confidently declares that “Depuis la libération, les Français ne rêvent plus que d’automobiles,” but that manufacturers have not responded to this dream. In merely attempting to satisfy the existing demand for cars, *Paris Match* argues that the French automotive industry is allowing itself to fall behind its international rivals.⁷⁴ [App 3] In the same article, the journalist attempts to explain “pourquoi la France a laissé mourir l’automobile de

⁷² *Elle*, 4 October 1954, 32.

⁷³ *Paris Match*, 4 October 1952, 32.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

luxe,” and proceeds to suggest that possession of a luxury car is a “*signe extérieur de richesse. Il est devenu infiniment plus compromettant d’avoir une Salmson ou une Talbot que de porter des diamants ou un manteau de vison.*”⁷⁵ Thus the image associated with possession of a luxurious car is no longer necessarily a good one. This perceived fall in popularity of luxury cars occurs at the same time as more modest cars are enjoying significant growth.⁷⁶ The Renault 4CV and Citroen 2CV in particular cost significantly less than larger cars. Moreover, their running costs could be as little as half of that of their larger counterparts.⁷⁷ The car is thus becoming of interest not for its image as much as for its functional ability. The Marxist commodity fetish is still present in this evolved perception of the car, which is that of something other than a vehicle; there is still agency at play in the car. The luxury commodity was disappearing; however, the notion of the purveyor of freedom, additionally offering the ability to emulate other social classes, remains enshrined in the desire for a car.

The next edition of *Paris Match* carries a story which reinforces the notion that the automobile is no longer perceived as something mysterious. Paradoxically entitled “*le mystère du Salon: une voiture qui ne cache rien,*”⁷⁸ it describes a Simca which has its shell made from transparent material in order to display the workings of the car. It is significant that as the automobile is becoming more accepted within the everyday sphere, and is becoming a target purchase for the lower classes, Simca sensed the timeliness of this marketing approach. The motor car, hitherto shrouded in mystery with its fetishized images hiding its true nature, is now being fully exposed with this transparent nakedness forming the centrepiece of the Simca collection. Cordoned off from the public, the car was constantly surrounded as patrons examined this curiosity. The transparent Simca Aronde is indicative of the change in the perception of the automobile in the early 1950s. It shows that the car manufacturers themselves are eager to move on from the phantasmagoric image of the fetishized commodity that had been sold to date. Less an object of wonder, the car was becoming part of the everyday. This 1952 Salon which was called “*celui de l’achat*” was an ideal platform from which to project the new more utilitarian image of the automobile.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Jean-Louis Loubet, *Histoire de l’automobile française* (Paris: Seuil, 2001). 284.

⁷⁷ Ibid. 282.

⁷⁸ *Paris Match*, 11 October 1952, 17.

The 1954 Salon is similarly covered in *Paris Match*, and, to promote it, *Paris Match* includes an article entitled “Onze vedettes présentent les voitures françaises 55.”⁷⁹ Unlike previous incarnations in which stars are presented with cars as a symbol of wealth and success, this article is very clear as it states from the outset “Les artistes de la scène et de l’écran qui ont posé pour ‘*Paris Match*’ au volant des voitures du 41^e Salon de l’Auto n’en sont pas les propriétaires, ils correspondent aux types de ceux qui les achèteront.” Since these cars are not owned by the stars, these associations function differently from previous images. While, once again, using stars to create desirability through possession, *Paris Match* here is also trying to create an associative linkage. These cars are not owned by the stars, but if one identifies with the personality of a star, the paired car is perhaps one you should be thinking about buying. This is a middle ground between a fetishized object and an obtainable commodity which is consumed in its use as well as through its image. [Figure 3]



Figure 3. *Paris Match*⁸⁰

⁷⁹ *Paris Match*, 2 October 1954, 29.

⁸⁰ *Paris Match*, 4 October 1952, front cover.

4.3.3 The Car as Commodity

The mid-1950s is a period during which the automobile is portrayed as a commodity that can be purchased by the majority of the French population. Prominent journalist and later a member of General de Gaulle's cabinet, Jean Duché, in a series of editorials for *Elle*, examines the positive, and, more often, negative aspects of the automobilization. This series of articles on the car begins in 1955 with "L'Automobile?", which draws clichéd comparisons between a man's desire for a car and for a woman. Duché also suggests that it is the woman who applies common sense with regard to the car. Men expect a car to possess qualities that go beyond that of a vehicle:

D'une voiture, les hommes attendent des choses incroyables. Ils la veulent robuste, brillante, souple, économique, moelleuse, silencieuse, nerveuse, maniable et racée; ils veulent qu'elle soit digne de confiance, qu'elle ait de la tenue, de la classe... Ne croirait-on pas qu'ils sont en train de rêver à quelque femme idéale ? Pour un peu, ils exigent de leur auto qu'elle ait du charme.⁸¹

Moreover, "dans le choix d'une voiture, comme dans sa conduite, les femmes manifestent clairement le côté pratique de leur esprit quand les hommes considèrent ces problèmes d'une façon trop romanesque."⁸² The subtitle for this article – "pour un homme : captivante comme une femme, pour une femme : seyante comme une robe" – portrays opposing views of men and women about cars. This suggests that the desire for, and desirability of, a car still remain while also suggesting enduring gender hierarchies. It must, however, be remembered that Duché is writing for a predominantly female readership, and, much as Nimier earlier evoked the stereotype of the woman unable to drive, Duché may here be indulging in a compensating tactic, suggesting that men remain enthralled by the car. It is noteworthy, moreover, that in both these articles it is the person who is under the spell of the car who is ridiculed, while the one who has accepted the ordinariness of the car is seen as a genuinely modern individual.

An article dedicated to the car the following October, in 1956, entitled "Il faut créer la légion d'honneur de l'automobiliste," makes reference to the ubiquity of the car and to the fact that this very ubiquity has contributed to eliminating the freedom aspired to by the car-driver. Duché asks what pushes somebody to buy a car:

⁸¹ *Elle*, 3 October 1955, 30.

⁸² *Ibid.*

C'est, dit-on, la commodité. Est-il rien de plus pratique, en effet, pour se rendre à son travail, que de s'asseoir dans une boîte à roulette se déplaçant par ses propres moyens, sous réserve que d'autres boîtes similaires ne vous contraignent pas à vous arrêter quand vous voudriez rouler, et à rouler plus loin quand vous voudriez vous arrêter? Considérant que, dès neuf heures du matin, dans le centre de Paris, les carrefours sont encombrés et toutes les bordures de trottoirs occupées, un de mes amis se lève un quart d'heure plus tôt afin de pouvoir rouler, et s'arrêter à sa guise ; mais il n'est pas le seul à témoigner d'une si belle intelligence ; encore un ou deux ans et il faudra qu'il rogne une heure sur son sommeil pour gagner cinq minutes sur le parcours en métro.⁸³

The car as a ubiquitous commodity can be seen to play a more prominent role in later 1950s France. That this is followed by a reference to rush-hour in Paris on a work-day morning, with fears of worse to come, illustrates that the car's popularity has grown, and that it has become the commodity once aspired to and now universally attainable. By "commodité", Duché means the utilitarian value of the car, as he explains its use in transporting its owner to work. Its utilitarian value is not the reason for its popularity, however, according to Duché. It is rather the car's ability to provide its owner with a feeling of freedom, having the freedom to go where he or she wants, when he or she wants. This is a rush-hour impossibility, but at the weekend, the car is still capable of both symbolising and providing autonomy:

S'il n'est pas dans la commodité, où donc est-il, ce moteur de l'automobiliste? Peut-être dans un sentiment de liberté, d'indépendance? L'automobiliste est un homme autonome. Il va où il veut, comme il veut, quand il veut, tout seul. A la campagne, par exemple. Cela se voit clairement le dimanche soir aux portes des grandes villes.⁸⁴

It is particularly interesting that Duché, while writing for *Elle*, refers to the automobilist as a man. In doing so, he reinforces gender hierarchies and thus according to Duché, the car is capable of providing freedom to its owner to go wherever *he* alone wants.

Duché's by now annual article on the car, which coincides with the Salon de l'Auto, becomes considerably more negative in 1957 than in previous years. One year after agreeing that the automobile was a symbol of freedom, Duché now asks "Je me demande enfin s'il est très bon signe que nous ayons si grand besoin de bouger pour bouger. Serions-nous si mal à l'aise, immobiles, là où nous sommes?" The weekend trip has now also become as overcrowded as the work-time rush-hour

⁸³ *Elle*, 1 October 1956, 7.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

of the previous year. Duché refers to the Salon de l'Auto as follows: "Je m'avise que lorsque cette chronique paraîtra, la France célébrera dans le tohu-bohu et les vapeurs de gaz imbrulées son culte annuel des temps modernes, l'automobile. Sur quoi je me demande si nous ne serions pas en train de perdre les pédales."⁸⁵ Thus while Duché refers to the Salon as a "culte des temps modernes", he questions it as he suggests that it may be playing too central a role. He proceeds to refer to non-drivers in ironically pejorative terms as it seems incomprehensible that anyone could function without a car:

Je ne veux aucun mal à l'industrie automobile ni aux automobilistes. D'ailleurs, chacun sait qu'un piéton est un pauvre type, un paria, un minus, un demeuré de Cro-Magnon, donc je roule en auto, comme tout le monde, et même il m'arrive d'y prendre bien du plaisir. Mais est-ce la mélancolie de l'automne ? Il me semble que cet instrument conçu pour nous servir, nous réduit chaque jour un peu plus en esclavage.⁸⁶

Duché explains this feeling as a "snobisme de l'automobile," and associates it with a mystifying of the car as he states:

Il y a un snobisme de l'automobile qui pourrait bien être une espèce de mystique. Si un Français moyen déclare qu'il n'a pas d'auto on s'inquiète : qu'est-ce qui ne va pas chez lui ? On parle toujours de la crise du logement : cela a tout l'air d'une mauvaise plaisanterie, quand on songe que nous dépensons deux ou trois fois plus pour rouler sur les routes le dimanche que pour nous loger dans la semaine.⁸⁷

While these references to the Salon, the automobilist, the non-automobilist, and the general image of the car are hyperbolic in an attempt to poke fun at the position assumed by the automobile, it is interesting that Duché feels that the car is a commodity that has been so democratized that it seems now almost strange not to own one. The mystified nature of the car has changed, however, from one associated with its form, to a fetishizing of the need for one. In comparing the expenditure on personal transport with that on housing, which by 1957 was eventually beginning to meet public demand,⁸⁸ Duché questions why the automobile has come to be perceived as a need alongside the more obvious issue of the housing crisis. The car has at this stage reached a tipping-point in becoming a commodity which is

⁸⁵ *Elle*, 7 October 1957, 7.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ Jean-Pierre Rioux and Jean-François Sirinelli, *La France d'un siècle à l'autre* (Paris: Hachette, 1999). 307.

increasingly perceived to be so “needed” that it “nous réduit chaque jour un peu plus en esclavage.”⁸⁹

In mentioning both the utilitarian and fetishized qualities of the car, it is apparent that Duché, and, by extension, late Fifties France, are struggling with this changing order as the car becomes more recognized for inconveniences caused by its ubiquity than by its previously heralded qualities. Duché questions the car and how automobility has gained a more central role in French society. In the next section, this central status and how it is parodied by cartoonists in these magazines will now be examined.

4.3.4 Sketching the Car

The further commodification of the car, reflected in the growth in automobile use,⁹⁰ inevitably led a number of writers to question the merits of this surge in traffic on French roads. Cartoonists, in particular, seem to have been among the first to question this development, and they began to parody the public infatuation with cars. While, initially, these cartoons lampoon the luxurious nature of the cars, the cartoons can also tell much about how the car is beginning to be accepted into society.

Possessing a motor car as a contributing factor to how one is viewed by society is parodied in a cartoon which appears on 25 June 1949 in which a woman says to her husband “Comprenez-moi bien, Edmond, il ne s’agit pas de renier vos origines paysannes...”⁹¹ as they step out of an elegant car to be met by a butler wielding an umbrella. As members of the *petite bourgeoisie* or *nouveau riche*, this couple illustrate the effects of the rural exodus, with large numbers leaving to work in cities.⁹² The car as an indicator of wealth is underlined here as this couple has acquired a car and a butler in order to demonstrate their newfound wealth. Desirability and the elegance associated with possession of a car are apparent at the end of the decade. In another cartoon, which appears in the 9 July 1949 edition of *Paris Match*, entitled “l’élégance automobile,” we see a man driving an expensive-looking car. After proceeding to crash, he is transported away in an expensive-

⁸⁹ *Elle*, 7 October 1957, 7.

⁹⁰ The percentage of homes that owned a car increased from 14% in 1938 to 21% in 1953, to 30% in 1960 and 47.5% in 1965. See Chanaron, *L’industrie automobile*. 120.

⁹¹ *Paris Match*, 25 June 1949, 33.

⁹² Rioux and Sirinelli, *La France d’un siècle à l’autre*. 271.

looking hearse.⁹³ Indeed, the automobile seems to become an object of derision for cartoonists, or rather, the image that ownership of a car conveys. In its first edition of 1951, a *Paris Match* cartoon shows a woman crashing into a car driven by a man. The caption reads “Bonne Année!”⁹⁴

A cartoon in August 1952 parodies the image of the car as the plaything of the rich while also constructing an image of opulence for whoever owns one. Here, a middle-aged couple dressed in fine clothes leave a shop called “Snob;” a porter/doorman opens the door of the large modern car parked in front of the shop, the couple duly gets in, proceeds to get out the door of the opposite side, and then gets into another – more modest – car which is parked adjacent to the first.⁹⁵ The second car, belonging to the finely attired couple, is dilapidated and dates back to the 1920s. While the image of car ownership was once again associated with wealth, car ownership alone no longer sufficed in order to indulge in ostentation. Although this couple possesses a car, it would seem, as we enter the 1950s, that ownership of a modern, fashionable car is fetishized. Car possession alone has taken a step towards being normalized as is seen as this couple is ridiculed for trying to portray an image of wealth by “merely” possessing a car, one that is no longer desirable.

A cartoon appearing the following month, in September 1951, also plays on the image of car ownership. The cartoon portrays a man standing up on the driving seat of his car, his wife seated beside him says: “oh alors ! si tu dois à chaque fois monter sur la banquette pour voir ce qui se passe devant ton capot...”.⁹⁶ In contrast to the previous cartoon, here, the couple is in a modern, fashionable car. Once again, however, the owner of the car is ridiculed. By poking fun at the car-owner for buying a car too large for his needs, we might infer that public opinion is moving towards a utilitarian viewpoint. However, the man standing on the seat of his car may be attempting to draw attention to himself and his recent purchase. The fetishizing of the car is ridiculed through questioning the “need” to possess a large car in order to obtain autonomy and freedom. In choosing a large car, which is superfluous to his needs, the car owner is engaging in a fetishizing that was becoming more and more at odds with the perceptions of the French public. The shift from desiring an automobile to needing one is becoming apparent as cars which were previously

⁹³ *Paris Match*, 9 July 1949, 7.

⁹⁴ *Paris Match*, 6 January 1951, front cover.

⁹⁵ *Paris Match*, 1 August 1952, 27.

⁹⁶ *Paris Match*, 6 September 1952, 47.

coveted in image are increasingly questioned as a more utilitarian automobile begins to hold more importance. Thus, while mass ownership was not yet a *fait accompli*, *Paris Match* in the early 1950s shows a public that is beginning to take a new interest in the automobile. As *Elle* had already suggested, with particular regard to its target readership, as women were now taking more of an interest, it was for its utilitarian possibilities as well as those related to image. The affective quality of the car, particularly its fetishized image, appeared to be changing as the automobile took a more central position in society.

A sketch by the cartoonist Chaval, which appears to coincide with the 1954 Salon, pokes fun at man's obsession with the automobile. With an explicit nod at Simca's attempt at openness with its transparent car at the Salon of the previous year, Chaval depicts an x-ray of a car with someone at the wheel. The driver in the x-ray, however, appears so fused with the vehicle that both driver and car are one and the same, a cyborgic creation resulting from man's dependency on the car. The cartoon calls to mind the Futurist man-machines, as posited by Marinetti.⁹⁷ In this cartoon, Chaval is aware of the fact that Simca has made a conscious effort to win over the general public. He is suggesting the consequences of a possible over-reliance on the car by creating a dystopian creature in which a mutated being almost goes unnoticed due to its very mundanity. The portrayal of the fused car and driver pokes fun at this perceived over-reliance on the car as more and more time is spent at the wheel.

Automobile enthusiasts are parodied in a full-page cartoon in 13 October 1956, in which the illustrator of "Les Carnets du major W. Marmaduke Thompson"⁹⁸, a very popular book published in 1954 which described the French through the eyes of the eponymous bowler-hat-wearing and umbrella-brandishing Englishman, depicts Parisian landmarks:

Paris à l'heure du Salon. La passion déforme tout. Et, selon Walter Goetz, l'illustrateur du Major Thompson, la passion de l'automobile risque de déformer aux yeux des visiteurs du Salon l'aspect habituel de Paris. Voici les principaux monuments de la capitale tels que les verront – selon le dessinateur – les passionnés de voiture venus à Paris cette semaine pour la grande fête de l'automobile.⁹⁹

⁹⁷ Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, *Manifesto of Futurism* (New Haven, CN: Yale Library Associates, 1983).

⁹⁸ Pierre Daninos, *Les carnets du major Thompson* (Paris: Hachette, 1962).

⁹⁹ *Paris Match*, 13 October 1956, 107.

There are five drawings of famous Parisian landmarks which have taken the form of different automobiles. Napoleon's tomb resembles a 4CV; there is also "le gothique mécanique en Notre-Dame de Cadillac," and the Opéra resembles an American roadster. The Chambre des Députés doubles as a Rolls Royce and the Gare d'Orsay is depicted as a "voiture de course," complete with a driver on top of it. That only one French car (the 4CV) is depicted in these drawings is due to the shape of the buildings. It may be suggested, however, that since the majority of French cars on the market in 1956 were smaller, the cartoonist was obliged to look elsewhere for vehicles of appropriate size to depict these monuments. In naming "Notre-Dame de Cadillac" as such, the cartoonist is mocking the fetishizing of the supernatural properties of the automobile before the Second World War. The worshipping of the Cadillac as almost a religious idol ascribes totemic qualities to this car because of its physical characteristics. The American-looking cigar-smoking drivers of the two Cadillacs which form the two towers of Notre-Dame fit a stereotype of the wealthy American Cadillac driver. The ability or right of the woman to drive a car is conspicuous in its absence in many of these representations. In the next section, we will explore this omission.

4.3.5 Elle au Volant

The woman as car-owner or driver is a theme which gains more and more traction throughout the *Trente Glorieuses*, however early references to the association are made in terms that clearly suggest a strong gender bias, with stereotypical "truisms" being employed. [Figure 4] The relationship between a woman and the car is very rarely explored, unless in the context of her husband. The growth in the popularity of the automobile amongst women drivers is more apparent in the 1960s, not only with articles dedicated to the woman driver but with automobile advertising aimed at women also becoming more prevalent. This advertising provides an example of how the perception of the car has evolved. In this section we will look at how the automobile gained further impetus in magazines, in *Elle* in particular, and we will examine how the automobile continued to be desired but had become more accessible in general.



Figure 4. *Paris Match*¹⁰⁰

In 1952, Roger Nimier wrote an article in *Elle* entitled “L’amour, la mécanique et les voitures”, in which he described the car as “la grande-duchesse des machines, la plus perverse des mécaniques, celle qui tient du pétrole et de la haute-couture.” According to Nimier, the car is “un signe de puissance pour son possesseur.” While not quite according the car agency, but in a disturbingly sexist comparison, he claims that it is a formidable competitor with the woman in attempting to gain the affections of a man:

Il a trouvé une compagne assez silencieuse, jolie à regarder, très obéissante, aussi féminine que possible, facile à prendre, facile à laisser. Une voiture dont l’usager n’est pas une brute finit par prendre une personnalité. Elle devient sensible aux blâmes, aux compliments, aux caresses. Pour ses sorties au grand air l’homme a retrouvé une esclave.¹⁰¹

He also suggests that while men may desire – and yearn for such quasi-sexual domination over – cars, they have nevertheless become accustomed to them, while for women, the car “leur paraît une chose sale et louche, plus proche de la magie que de la science.” Paradoxically, Nimier himself questions this sexist perception, and

¹⁰⁰ *Paris Match*, 9 October 1954, front cover.

¹⁰¹ *Elle*, 6 October 1952, 20.

claims that men fuel this myth so that women do not take any more than a passing interest in the car. The reality, however, according to Nimier, is that the growth in the number of women obtaining a driving licence shows that while the conventional representation of the female driver is that of a helpless creature unable to accomplish the simplest of tasks in car maintenance, she is happy to maintain this impression as long as she has access to the driver's seat:

Les femmes accepteraient très volontiers de laisser ce rôle aux hommes. Ceux-ci seraient toujours garagistes, mécaniciens, passagers au besoin. En cas de crevaison, ils auraient le droit de changer la roue. Elle, de leur côté, auront la garde du volant, des pédales et de tous ces petits boutons amusants qu'on a mis sur le tableau de bord pour les distraire. Ce sera leur dernière revanche.¹⁰²

While the article paints the car in terms of its desirability, it is also apparent that the automobile is becoming more integrated into everyday life. More and more women are obtaining driving licences, and while this is a source of amusement for men, it shows that the automobile is beginning to be perceived as more attainable as we approach the second period in the *Trente Glorieuses* to be examined in this chapter.

In October 1956, *Elle*, in a two-page article entitled “une voiture vous ouvre son cœur,”¹⁰³ published a series of photographs aimed at making women familiar with the various parts of a car. This was an effort to diminish the perception that women did not understand the workings of a car. It is, however, the subtitle and information provided that are of interest. “Si vous n’avez pas encore de voiture... sachez que : la voiture d’occasion peut être une bonne solution, la voiture neuve payée à tempérament en est une autre.”¹⁰⁴ By familiarising the (female) reader with the more obscure parts of a car, and by giving practical information on how to afford one, *Elle* was contributing to the growth in the car market. In suggesting that the second-hand market or else the use of credit were also options in the purchase of a car, *Elle* was playing an active role in the banalization and democratization of the car.

This issue also features two further articles on the car. Entitled “Votre voiture et vous,” the first gives a description of the small cars on the market. “Savez-vous le français?” teaches readers how to “parler voiture.” It equips readers with a

¹⁰² Ibid. 21.

¹⁰³ *Elle*, 1 October 1956, 7.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

comprehensive vocabulary for talking about cars. The increased engagement with the car is also apparent in advertisements. On 6 October 1958, an advertisement for the Simca Aronde is captioned “ouvre l’ère de la voiture personnalisée.” This advertisement, notably placed in a women’s magazine, targets the female population by adding a numbers of extras to one of the bestselling cars of this generation, the Aronde, by allowing the buyer to choose the colour and interior décor. This increase in attention accorded to potential female drivers is quite apparent albeit it is portrayed in quite clichéd terms as design and decoration are common themes. In 1959, *Elle* brought out a book for women on how to drive properly. This book, which was intended to erase the perception of poor women drivers, was advertised in the periodical by the publication of extracts under the title “Enfin une... qui conduit bien!” The volume was published in a seemingly progressive series that included *Elle-Cuisine*, *Savoir Vivre Aujourd’hui*, and *Bonnes Vacances en France*. The introduction to this book mentions the growing ubiquity of the car as it states:

Concevez-vous la vie sans automobile?

L’auto n’est pas seulement un moyen agréable de transport, elle n’est pas seulement votre premier outil de travail et l’instrument de vos plaisirs. Votre voiture est davantage encore puisque c’est votre compagne de tous les jours.

Avez-vous déjà calculé le nombre d’heures que l’homme et la femme modernes passent en voiture ? Essayez-vous à un calcul approximatif et vous serez surpris, quelle que soit votre activité : deux heures par jour sont une moyenne courante ; vous passez donc au volant au moins un mois par an!

L’automobile est aussi un sujet inépuisable de conversation. Elle est liée aux récits de vos beaux week-ends, à ceux de vos plus agréables vacances. Elle est toujours au premier plan ou à l’arrière-plan des images que vous conservez du passé.

Puisque cette automobile tient une si grande place dans la vie, il importe de la bien connaître.

C’est le but de ELLE AU VOLANT.¹⁰⁵

By 1960, 30% of households owned a car, thus it can be suggested that *Elle* was overstating the social situation. As Ross has noted in a theme which will be explored further in Chapter 5, engagement with the car in films and print media predates car-ownership, as can be seen in this publication.¹⁰⁶ The introduction to this driver’s guide makes direct reference to automobile users as “modern”, as it states that the car is more than a means of transport. Thus the introduction suggests a fetishizing of the car as it is accorded animism when referred to as a companion that one should

¹⁰⁵ Marc Gignoux and Françoise Gignoux, *Elle au volant* (Paris: Fayard, 1959). 3.

¹⁰⁶ Ross, *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies*. 27.

get to know, yet the close association of modern man and woman with the car allied with high daily usage is indicative of a move towards a more everyday perception of the car.

In 1964, Renault financed a number of page-long advertisements in *Elle* in which the company gave women advice in order to improve their driving skills.¹⁰⁷ The 1967 Salon inspires an article in *Elle* entitled “Au salon de l’auto: les petites voitures de ville”, which discusses the difference in opinion between men and women on the automobile. The choice of automobile as described in this article is reflective of the position to which the car has acceded in society. It is no longer a question of the possibility of acquiring a car; it is now a question of which type to choose:

Cette différence fondamentale se rencontre déjà au niveau du choix de l’auto. Pour les hommes, l’auto de rêve est un monstre : celui qui sera capable de battre toutes les autres autos de tous les autres hommes. Pour les femmes, il s’agit d’engins avant tout utiles, destinés à faciliter leur vie, et non à l’obnubiler.¹⁰⁸

The difference in preference mirrors the evolution in the place that the car now occupies in French society. As the fridge and television have become part of the household, so too has the car. The difference in choice indicates that the automobile can still be mythic as it is capable of provoking strong emotions in a man. The suggestion that a car might have a negative impact on one’s life, and might, indeed, become an obsession, reflects a questioning of the role of the car. This differing relationship that women and men have with the car is examined again at the start of the holiday season in 1970, when *Elle* asks “Pourquoi les femmes ont peur en voiture.”¹⁰⁹ This rhetorical question is immediately answered by the magazine’s condemnation of the behaviour of men once they get behind the wheel of a car:

Au moment de prendre la route des vacances, beaucoup de femmes sont dans l’angoisse ; elles vont retrouver ce cauchemar familial : la peur en voiture. Une peur qui prend souvent le visage de l’être le plus aimé : ce mari qui, au volant, tout à coup, devient un autre, un monstre. Quand mon mari est au volant, il se prend pour un dieu.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁷ *Elle*, 14 July 1964, 18; *Elle*, 13 August 1964, 17.

¹⁰⁸ *Elle*, 19 October 1967, 17.

¹⁰⁹ *Elle*, 27 July 1970, 6.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

The claim that the man thinks of himself as a god while at the wheel of a car is reminiscent of the earlier fetishizing of the automobile for its supernatural properties. Instead of worshipping the automobile for its heavenly features, now it has the ability to bestow a feeling of omnipotence upon its (male) drivers. Further in this same issue, the car is referred to as “un emblème sexuel”, which echoes strongly Baudrillard’s discussion of the car as a phallus.¹¹¹ The implication in this article is that male pride means that men are compelled to show their supposed superiority once at the wheel.

The growing importance of the female market becomes much more apparent throughout the 1960s. On the cover of the 6 October 1962 edition of *Paris Match*, there is an image of a young man at the wheel of a sporty red convertible. The caption reads “Femmes... jeunes, c’est votre Salon de l’Auto.”¹¹² [Figure 5] Another caption on this same cover reads: “Jean-Paul Belmondo à 200 à l’heure sur sa Ferrari 250GT”. With a return to associating a young movie star with a powerful sports car, and by suggesting that it is women’s and young people’s turn, it seems that the market for the first car is saturated, and that it is time to seduce a new market through a new fetishizing of speed and of youth, and more specifically young female drivers:

Depuis trois ans le nombre des conductrices a doublé ; et le Salon, cette année, attend plus de femmes que d’hommes. Poche à chaussures, voiture qui se conduit d’une main, miroirs partout... Les constructeurs font du charme.”¹¹³

In France, the 1960s was the decade during which youth began to indulge in the freedom offered by the car. Françoise Sagan and James Dean, youth idols both famously involved in car crashes, somehow seem to embody this need for modernity and specifically its expression as speed. Through the regular photographic capturing of Françoise Sagan, the teenager who became a millionaire overnight, at the wheel of a succession of sports cars, and in the media coverage dedicated to Dean’s fatal

¹¹¹ Baudrillard, *Le système des objets*. 69.

¹¹² *Paris Match*, 6 October 1962, front cover.

¹¹³ *Ibid.* 70.

car accident and Sagan's near-fatal crash, the automobile was desired and the fetishizing of speed grew amongst the youth of France.¹¹⁴



Figure 5. *Paris Match*¹¹⁵

¹¹⁴ Nouvelle Vague films also played a role as American sports cars became symbolic of youth and speed. Cf. Jean-Luc Godard, *A bout de souffle* (France: Studio Canal, 1960); Claude Lelouch, *Un homme et une femme* (France: Les films treize, 1966). See also Ross, *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies*. 46.

¹¹⁵ *Paris Match*, 6 October 1962, front cover.

New forms of fetishizing the car were growing, as in this same 1962 issue of *Paris Match* an article suggests that the contemporary car has been banalized to such an extent that pre-war cars are now desired:

Mais pour être vraiment à la mode il faut une voiture d'avant-guerre. La voiture d'aujourd'hui est un véritable instrument de travail, et le souci des constructeurs porte sur l'économie, la standardisation et la facilité de manœuvre. Il n'y a plus au Salon de ces voitures 'faites à la main' qui cristallisèrent l'émotion de la jeunesse d'il y a vingt-cinq ans, comme peut le faire maintenant l'aviation à réaction. Ces 'élégantes' de la belle époque connurent un véritable culte. Elles retrouvent aujourd'hui une nouvelle gloire, car des collectionneurs du monde entier convoitent les survivants. Les voitures les plus chères sont celles des salons d'autrefois.¹¹⁶

This reference to the second coming of pre-war cars provides a insight into the evolving role of the car. Firstly, in a quickly modernising society where greater spending power leads to the ubiquity of automobiles, and where once possession of an automobile sufficed to highlight prosperity, it is now necessary to acquire a car from an earlier era in order to create this impression. Secondly, this desire to acquire a pre-war automobile, i.e. a vehicle which was ridiculed in 1950s France as symptomatic of a lack of wealth, may now be seen as an attempt to acquire the phantasmagoric, mystery-shrouded vehicles which were the original objects of desire. While possession of an automobile means belonging to modern France, the new and smaller vehicles that provide utilitarian help do not resemble the pre-war fetishized vehicles, and they do not fulfil their owners as they were expected to do. Thus, the modern car has ceased to be fetishized for its ostentatious quality, yet pre-war, previously fetishized vehicles have retained their phantasmagorical capacities. While temporarily forgotten in the dash to acquire a vehicle, these cars have resumed their earlier position as mainstream car ownership is no longer fetishized as a desire.

The extension of the appeal of the car to women is also evident in *L'Express* as advertisements for the car begin to be aimed at this market. In a full page info-ad in October 1959 entitled "Une voiture se choisit à deux", Simca explores how the car has progressed from being reserved for men to also becoming the possession of women:

le pilotage de jadis, qui nécessitait l'usage simultané des deux pieds et des dix doigts, a cédé la place aux commandes groupées à portée de l'index...

¹¹⁶ Ibid. 81.

Apprivoisé par les femmes, le monstre est devenu docile, et racé comme un pur-sang.¹¹⁷

This advertisement indulges in many hierarchical myths and stereotypes with regard to women's driving, yet in referring to the car in animalistic terms, we see how the once unattainable monster has been tamed to become more user-friendly. The inauguration of a section in *L'Express* entitled "Madame Express" is an indication of the growth in buying power amongst women, and Madame Express often featured women's impressions on cars by carrying out road tests. In August 1961, Madame Express tries a Volkswagen Beetle, and in October 1961 "le match 2CV/R4"¹¹⁸ takes place in which the two smallest and best-selling cars on the market are compared. The awarding of marks to each car for different categories gives us useful information on the perception of French women with regard to these two cars. Under "Esthétique," both cars are equally disappointing: "Esthétique: elles sont laides toutes les deux. Mais les phares incorporés, et un tissu assez gai habillant les sièges font un peu plus ressembler la R4 à une vraie voiture."¹¹⁹ In showing how the car has become part of life but not necessarily for its ostentation, the adjective "humilié" is applied to those driving the 2CV later in the review: "Sur route: la comparaison est là, décisive. Il suffit de noter l'expression humiliée des innombrables conducteurs de 2CV que nous avons doublés sans effort." The review however also defends the 2CV as a reliable vehicle whose sales alone show that it has value: "La 2CV est une voiture qui depuis 13 ans tirée à 1 million ½ d'exemplaires, a largement fait ses preuves. Elle est solide, économique, ne craint aucune intempérie et ne réserve aucune surprise à ses acquéreurs." Madame Express continued to test a car on a weekly basis over the following decade as such reviews made the car more transparent and accessible to readers.

The huge sales of the 2CV and other more affordable cars is evoked the following year as *L'Express* comments on the growing difficulties related to the increased number of cars on the roads. It indicates a growing disenchantment with the car as it becomes more ubiquitous:

¹¹⁷ *L'Express*, 8 October 1959, 25.

¹¹⁸ *L'Express*, 5 October 1961, 23.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

Sur les routes de France il y a une voiture tous les cinquante mètres environ. A Paris, le stationnement sera bientôt interdit dans le centre et certaines grandes villes de province s'apprêtent à appliquer la même mesure.¹²⁰

Even with the launch of the Renault Floride on 2 October 1958, *L'Express* questions the continuing desirability of the car. This new convertible, modelled by Brigitte Bardot, embodied the image of the Mediterranean and the sun:

Depuis quelques jours, on connaît son nom: elle s'appelle la 'Floride'. Présentée d'abord à la presse comme une pièce de théâtre avant d'affronter le vrai public et préalablement soumise au verdict de la critique et de quelques invités, elle n'est apparue à vos yeux ignorants, admiratifs ou étonnés que le jour d'ouverture – ce 2 octobre – du Salon de l'Automobile. Devant elle, les hommes parlent cylindrée, bielles, culasse et essence ; les femmes apprécient le coloris ou la forme inédite de la boîte à gants.¹²¹

It also maintained gender stereotypes as men and women each admire it in traditionally different ways. Even this convertible, which Renault intended to associate with the image of sun and holidays, is treated as any other commodity, as it will be bought and assimilated into one's possessions:

Dans quelques mois, vous ne la verrez plus. Elle sera devenue un objet familier, anonyme comme un paquet de cigarettes ou un appareil de téléphone. Elle participera du décor où vous vivrez. Peut-être même serez-vous assis à son volant... C'est la nouvelle Renault."¹²²

As late as 1970, the continued commodification of car is once again highlighted in the Salon edition of *Elle* which includes an article entitled "La dame sans auto", which questions why a modern woman would choose not to acquire a car: "La voiture fait partie de la panoplie de la femme moderne. Elle est le garant de son indépendance, le symbole de sa libération. Alors pourquoi certaines femmes refusent-elles de conduire?"¹²³ This article seemingly contradicts many more negative treatments of the car and traffic in highlighting the image of a vehicle that is "le garant de son indépendance" and "symbole de sa libération". While, as previously mentioned, a woman is supposedly interested in the car, her position in the home and society is not that of her male counterpart, thus the ability to avail fully of the car would not necessarily have been open to her in the same way as to men. It fits Barthes' treatise on the DS written in 1957 rather than his later reflection on the

¹²⁰ *L'Express*, 3 October 1957, 20.

¹²¹ *L'Express*, 2 October 1958, 17.

¹²² *Ibid.*

¹²³ *Elle*, 12 October 1970, 141.

car in 1963, which highlights its ordinary nature.¹²⁴ [Figure 6] As we shall see in the next chapter, Barthes' mythology of the Citroën DS is written in terms of a male public, and any reference made to a car-owner or driver is masculine. This concept of the "garant d'indépendance" and the "symbole de libération" might more appropriately be a reflection of the mediatic image of the car in general as consumed by men in the 1950s rather than by women in the late 1960s. That this article should be published in 1970, suggests that the democratized "ordinary" car is not such for all.



Figure 6. *Paris Match*¹²⁵

¹²⁴ Barthes, *Mythologies*. 140-42.

¹²⁵ *Paris Match*, 15 October 1955, front cover.

This same 1970 article asks what is wrong with those women who have refused to succumb to the “need” for a car. The automobile nowadays “fait partie de la panoplie de la femme moderne,” and those who reject it have refused to embrace modern France and are now in the minority. The evolving commodification of the car – from object of desire to purveyor of freedom to facilitator of life – means that by not fully engaging in modern society (i.e. not acquiring an automobile), these women are refusing to act as equals, where to appear (but not necessarily be) “normal”, ownership of a car is paramount. It does a disservice to women, the article suggests, if some should decide not to fulfil their duty and fully embrace modern France. From 1967, *Elle* regularly ran a section entitled “Comment vivre la vie moderne” in which ownership of a car is a prerequisite. As *Elle* valorizes female independence, this is a central part of modern life; therefore, an independent woman must necessarily possess an automobile.

The growing banalization of the car meant that it spread more obviously, albeit somewhat later into the realm of the female driver. In a series of articles and advertisements that frequently carried strong gender stereotypes women – and, later, younger drivers – became the focus as they were gradually introduced to the car. The way in which women are seen to engage with the car is contrasted with that of men, typically in a highly stereotypical fashion. Nevertheless, by visibly engaging with the car in terms of safety, price and usefulness, these newly motorized women suggest that the automobile is becoming more and more everyday.

4.3.6 Towards Mundanity

The process of making the car a household appliance gathers pace as we move into the latter half of the 1950s. An advertisement for the Simca Aronde in October 1955 does this explicitly as we see an image of a woman climbing into an Aronde which is in the living room of the house parked beside the armchairs. The caption reads “comme dans votre salon.”¹²⁶ The commodification of the automobile as a “needed” appliance is the aim of this advertisement. The car is taking up its rightful place in the heart of the family home; no home should be without one, as the automobile enters the realm of the Baudrillardian commodification of need.¹²⁷

¹²⁶ *Paris Match*, 22 October 1955, 29.

¹²⁷ Jean Baudrillard, *Pour une critique de l'économie politique du signe* (Paris: Gallimard, 1972). 155.

In the same issue, there is also, in an info-ad for the Renault 4CV, an instance of agency and fetishizing of the image as “Au Salon Fernand Raynaud habille sa 4CV à la mode 1956.”¹²⁸ An image shows this comic actor, who was renowned for playing typical, average French characters, standing beside a 4CV with 70 assorted car body parts at his feet.¹²⁹ He has one of his trademark confused looks. “Fernand Raynaud vous présente les 70 accessoires homologués par la Régie Renault qui peuvent faire de cette 4CV Affaires une voiture de grand luxe.” This is accompanied by a list and a process for all the body parts. While the 4CV – which Ross claims to be: “the first French car produced to be affordable on a mass level, the first ‘people’s car’ from what had been until then a successful luxury industry”¹³⁰ – remains the car of predilection due to its price and economical running costs, it is apparent that the cheap image associated with it is not appealing to many potential buyers. This 70-piece kit allows the owner to “dress” the 4CV so that it is “à la mode 1956” and “une voiture de grand luxe.” As the practical democratization of the car is taking place, particularly in lower-end vehicles, the chance to indulge at the level of individual perceptions in the creation of a phantasmagoria of desire is, nevertheless, still provided to buyers. The transition to the mundanity of car ownership is still not complete. The 1956 Salon is given front-page coverage in *Paris Match* with a picture of Maurice Chevalier¹³¹ at the wheel of a convertible: “Deux vedettes de Paris: le Salon et Maurice Chevalier.” It would seem that as the true shrine to the automobile, the Salon de l’Auto succeeds in maintaining a link with the more image-based interest in automobiles which had been typical prior to their democratization. As cars became more commonplace, there was still the obsession with those cars that were beyond the reach of less well-off buyers. It is these cars that give the Salon a new relevance as distinct from that provided by what could be called more everyday models. The perception of the need for a car in French households thus does not preclude a fetishizing of powerful, high-speed and image-based cars. By 1956, while the Salon is still immensely popular, it no longer serves the purpose of announcing to

¹²⁸ *Paris Match*, 22 October 1955, 42.

¹²⁹ Fernand Raynaud was one of the best known French comic actors during the 1950s and 1960s. He appeared in a large number of films and also penned and performed many popular comic sketches. He was killed in a car accident in 1973.

¹³⁰ Ross, *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies*. 24.

¹³¹ Maurice Chevalier was a world-renowned French actor and cabaret singer. In a career that spanned over fifty years he was twice nominated for an Oscar and appeared in a number of successful Hollywood musicals including *Gigi* (1958) and *Can-Can* (1960).

the French population what their first car could be. It functions now as a platform to display new models. But as car ownership has become more common, it is the more spectacular cars which now attract attention. Indeed, the suggestion now is that those who attend the Salon are no longer ordinary people but motoring enthusiasts, still hungry for new cars while the majority of previous visitors have had their thirst quenched with the ubiquity of the car.

Late 1955 is perhaps the beginning of the transition period during which the car moved from being desired as a vehicle of distinction to one of mundanity. Yet Yonnet suggests that the car *still* has some value for class distinction when he examines the sales figures for that year:

En 1955, 7 % des acheteurs de voitures neuves en France sont des ouvriers, contre 2 % en 1949. Ils constituent 38% des acheteurs de 4 CV. En 1951, 4 ménages sur 5 ne possèdent pas d'automobile (en 1981, 7 ménages sur 10 en possèdent une). C'est l'époque où l'analyse de la possession automobile a encore valeur d'opposition de classe et peut être généralisée à partir d'observations similaires sur la diffusion restreinte d'autres biens durables (frigo, machine à laver, télévision).¹³²

A similarly slow transition is suggested in an article in *L'Express* which, while it acknowledges that the Salon is still popular, questions its relevance and suggests that it is no longer of use to the public as it continues to fetishize past images of power while the French public has moved on. This normalization of the car due to its proliferation is examined by *L'Express* at the Salon of 1955:

Dans quelques jours, l'essor prodigieux de la branche la plus dynamique de l'industrie française, l'automobile, va recevoir sa consécration annuelle: le Salon 1955. Cette manifestation, qui draine chaque année la province vers Paris et vaut à la capitale des embouteillages géants, permet de mesurer la place que tient désormais l'auto dans la vie de chacun de nous – même de ceux qui n'en possèdent pas. C'est beaucoup plus qu'une foire-exposition : un festival... Cette année, les constructeurs français sortent plus de 700.000 véhicules, deux fois plus qu'en 1950, près de quatre fois plus qu'en 1938. Les plans ambitieux qu'ils établissent pour l'avenir concluent à la possibilité de fabriquer, à partir de 1959, plus d'un million de voitures et camions chaque année. A l'occasion du Salon, *L'Express* s'est efforcé de rassembler dans ces pages ce que tout le monde doit savoir sur l'automobile française. Cette enquête apporte d'abord la réponse aux questions les plus souvent posées sur la marche de cette industrie, une 'note' sur 100 pour chaque voiture résume les appréciations des experts appelés à juger les cinq caractéristiques essentielles de chaque modèle : mécanique, carrosserie, tenue de route, confort et rentabilité. Enfin, un coup d'œil sur les nouveautés

¹³² Paul Yonnet, *Jeux, modes et masses 1945-1985* (Paris: Gallimard, 1985). 266.

du Salon – et en particulier sur la fameuse ‘traction 56’ Citroën – fait le point des progrès de la construction nationale.¹³³

The five essential characteristics mentioned in the article are of interest as they encompass both forms of fetishizing of the car. The first two mentioned, mechanics and bodywork, can be associated with a fetishizing of desire, particularly the importance of form; engine size can be seen to be central in the desirability of the automobile as already seen through the fetishizing of motor racing. The last three characteristics, however, can be associated more closely with those of a more mundane commodity, in that safety, comfort and affordability are characteristics that suggest that the automobile is less perceived as a desired product but rather as a one that has entered the realm of the everyday. The car which comes out on top in the comparison in this article is the Citroën Traction Avant, a car which was first built in 1934. This might indicate a lingering nostalgia for larger cars which carry a certain amount of prestige. It also suggests that there is a dearth of new quality cars in spite of a huge demand which has seen production rise from 34,000 in 1945 to 285,000 in 1949, and to 600,000 in 1954. Purchase of a 2CV still entailed a two-year wait for delivery. The 2CV together with the 4CV made up 20% of all cars sold in 1955, while the four large manufacturers sold 93.5% of all cars on French roads to an increasingly diversified market in which the most dynamic sector was that of ‘employés/ouvriers’, increasing modestly from 9.4% to 11.8%.¹³⁴

The second period (1955-1962) is marked by an opposition between the image of desire which the automobile continued to incarnate and also its banalization. By the end of the 1950s it was becoming clearer that a desire for the automobile was changing into an acceptance of the car due to its ubiquity. Possession of a car proved that it was incapable of providing all the wish images for which it was consumed. This intermediate period is characterized by articles which engaged with the car in different ways, some introducing it, while others questioned its position in society. As we move into the 1960s, these contradictions become fewer as the car seems to have been accepted only to be fetishized in a new way.

¹³³ *L'Express*, 24 September 1955, 10.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*

4.4 Fetishizing the Mundane

The third and final period of the *Trente Glorieuses* as examined in these three news magazines is one during which the transition of the car from fetishized object of desire to fetishized need is more complete. The social necessity of the car by the end of the 1960s is more apparent than earlier. In July 1970, a new regular section appears in *Paris Match* entitled “Mieux vivre;” it is here that news on automobiles begins to appear rather than in a specially dedicated section. The 1970 Salon is covered briefly in this section as the everyday car is presented to us as a way of improving the quality of life. “Mieux vivre” involves improving what one already has. No longer a commodity which is desired for its aesthetics alone, the use-values of the car are now part of its fetishized properties, and the resulting road saturation has led to inevitable problems with traffic and accidents. The third period is punctuated by growing public outrage over such unintended and unexpected consequences.

4.4.1 Traffic

Jean Duché’s editorials in *Elle* in the 1950s questioned the need for the car to play such a large part in French society. In the 1960s, these articles evolve into a rejection of the car for all of the problems caused. Traffic and road safety issues are at the forefront of his work, which coincides with the annual Salon de l’Automobile in Paris. In October 1960, Jean Duché “welcomes” the Salon with an article about the automobile. “En voiture” makes explicit reference to traffic issues and refers to the car as no longer a symbol of freedom, but rather a symbol of our absurdity:

Ces belles machines qui proposent leurs tentations au Salon de l’Automobile me paraissent un symbole de notre absurdité: plus nous en achetons, moins nous pouvons nous en servir. Au rythme actuel de la production, chacun sait que les routes ne sont pas près de rattraper les véhicules ; mais la route, même à la queue leu leu un soir de rentrée de week-end, c’est encore une divine liberté, comparée aux rues de nos villes. Pour ma part, j’ai résolu le problème par la marche, l’autobus et le taxi ; voilà donc une voiture au garage – ou le long du trottoir – qui me coûte mille francs par jour (amortissement, assurances, etc.) à ne rien faire. C’est intelligent, n’est-ce pas ?¹³⁵

Even the symbolic freedom which the car can provide outside town is affected as it is mentioned in terms of traffic jams and is a brief respite in comparison with city

¹³⁵ *Elle*, October 1960, 6.

streets. The car has become part of everyday life, an example of mundanity which has its advantages and disadvantages much like any other commodity. The utilitarian value of the car, for which it is now consumed, has come to the foreground as its ostentation has been surpassed. This practical aspect of the car becomes apparent in *Elle*. In September 1961, it published an article entitled “Ceinture de sécurité: les pour et les contre.”¹³⁶ This is followed in the next edition by an article entitled “Des manières d’automobiliste.”¹³⁷ We are witnessing the genesis of a universal automobile culture, where rules of acceptability are being decided, and where accession to the car has become a way of life. The car is once again discussed in a 1961 article as the behaviour of drivers towards other road-users is examined. It asks why men in particular lose their manners once they get behind the wheel of a car. The establishment of a code of conduct whilst driving is indicative of the development in the position of the car amongst the population, and more specifically within the family. Duché’s explanation for any lack of manners resides mainly in the inability of a driver to be brought to task for his indiscretion.

The proliferation of cars also leads to questions being asked about their viability due to road casualties. The first reference to this in *Elle* is by Jean Duché who in 1962 in an article entitled “Arbres et autos”,¹³⁸ questions the need for the trees that traditionally border country roads to be cut down in order to reduce the number of fatal injuries from road accidents. The question of fatalities is one which is addressed on a number of occasions in *Elle*, *L’Express* and *Paris Match*. However, the solution of removing trees to reduce deaths rather than address the issue of automobile accidents in general changes over the Sixties. Further, as editorials in *Elle* discuss the fact that it is holidaymakers that die more frequently in car crashes than any other population segment, the dangers and implications of drink-driving are also raised. In 1969, *Elle*’s position is much stronger than earlier in the decade as it posits that: “pour punir les assassins de la route... il faut changer le code pénal. Ils sont plus dangereux avec une voiture qu’avec un revolver.”¹³⁹ The questioning of the causes of motor accidents continues and the problem is again highlighted in October 1969 when *Elle* tries to discover the factors involved in the choice of a new car. It finds that price is the number one factor, and that safety figures last on the list.

¹³⁶ *Elle*, 29 September 1961, 31.

¹³⁷ *Elle*, 6 October 1961, 4.

¹³⁸ *Elle*, 5 October 1962, 7.

¹³⁹ *Elle*, 29 September 1969, 10.

The questioning, not of the car itself, but rather of its annual Parisian shop-window is also visible the following year. *L'Express* marks the opening of the Salon by accepting very ironically the fact that the car is part of modern life:

L'homme est la plus noble conquête de l'automobile; il suffit de se trouver à 6 heures du soir dans un embouteillage pour s'en persuader! Or, un gigantesque 'rallye' d'automobilistes – vétérans et néophytes – se déroule à Paris à partir du 6 octobre : des milliers d'hommes venus des quatre coins de France et même du monde entier vont se retrouver dans la capitale ; ils ont tous un but : visiter le Salon de l'auto, un point de rencontre : le Grand Palais et un rêve : acquérir le nouveau modèle et – si possible – enrichir leur écurie-moteur de quelques chevaux supplémentaires.¹⁴⁰

The article then goes on to question the function of the Salon as, once again, it is not presenting any new cars. Given that the car is part of society and recognized as such, "A quoi sert le Salon ?", the magazine wonders as "Le Salon de l'Automobile où aucun constructeur français ne présente plus de nouveaux modèles, a-t-il encore une justification ? André Chavanne a mené l'enquête."¹⁴¹ Chavanne effectively argues that the Salon in its present form, continues to present the car as a fetishized commodity, and is consequently no longer in touch with modern life. It may thus actually have a negative effect on the status of the car:

Certes, le Salon d'octobre procure aux constructeurs une profonde satisfaction morale: ne donne-t-il pas l'image en raccourci du monde auquel ils rêvent? Pendant onze jours, toute la vie de Paris est organisée autour de la déesse-voiture. La 'saison' des théâtres, des cinémas, etc. commence sous son évocation. Mais cette extraordinaire animation est comme la caricature de l'économie capitaliste actuelle, axée sur l'industrie automobile comme celle du XIXe siècle l'était sur l'industrie cotonnière. Cette caricature, le Salon la présente dangereusement au public : en créant des encombrements records à Paris, il montre à l'évidence tous les inconvénients d'un développement anarchique des moyens de transport individuels.¹⁴²

In echoing Barthes' image of the car as a "Déesse", Chavanne ironically questions its place in society and more specifically the impact that the Salon has on Paris. Chavanne suggests that the Salon de l'Automobile transforms the city into an automobile-centric hub, thus echoing a Le Corbusian world where "la fureur de la circulation grandissant, quitter votre maison signifiait qu'une fois le seuil franchi, vous deveniez une proie possible de la mort, sous forme d'innombrables moteurs", as previously mentioned in our introduction.¹⁴³ The power of the Salon and thus the

¹⁴⁰ *L'Express*, 6 October 1970, 28.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.* 31.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*

¹⁴³ Le Corbusier [Charles-Édouard Jeanneret-Gris], *Urbanisme* (Paris: Flammarion, 1994 [1924]). 3.

car to launch cultural events such as theatre seasons is noted ironically. Chavanne calls to mind a Marxian view of the capitalist economy as he compares it to the cotton industry of the 19th-Century. The implications of this new 20th-Century capitalist economy would seem to be an anarchic growth in individual movement, one which has led to the gridlocked modern society. The Salon de l'Automobile is thus questioned as it continued to display and fetishize the car as an object of ostentation, a position which had been significantly reduced in 1960s France. The automobile was no longer fetishized solely for its phantasmagorical properties; while the car was desired, its surplus-value was no longer critical to this desire. While Salon attendance remained high, with 800,000 visitors in 1959, the perception of the car had changed, and Chavanne suggests that the Salon may actually be seen to be damaging the way in which car ownership was viewed.¹⁴⁴

The proliferation of cars on French roads by this stage had become the main cause of concern and even consternation. The car was no longer a purveyor of freedom but a victim of its own popularization as, in an effort to escape the cities, travellers became caught in the traffic jams that roads could not manage: "Sur l'autoroute le dimanche soir, vous roulez facilement à 35 kilomètres/ heure."¹⁴⁵ A cartoon in the same issue of *Paris Match* makes fun of the seemingly eternal traffic jams which drivers are forced to deal with as we see two men sitting in a queue in their respective cars playing chess, while a woman in another car is catching up on her knitting. While these cartoons show the lighter side of a topical issue, Raymond Cartier wrote an article entitled "Pourquoi la route des vacances n'est-elle pas une autoroute?" in which he highlights the significant safety issues that arise from such an abundance of cars:

Plusieurs millions de voitures ont emmené ces trois derniers week-ends les citadins vers les vacances. Avant le soleil et le repos ce fut pour eux l'épreuve du voyage : encombrements, temps perdu, accidents : 108 tués, 2.703 blessés pour les trois premiers jours de juillet. Pourquoi ? Parce que la France, qui possède le plus grand parc automobile d'Europe (8 millions de voitures) et le réseau routier le plus dense du monde, n'a pratiquement pas d'autoroutes. Les chiffres sont éloquentes : 198 km contre 1100 en Italie, 2700 en Allemagne et 20000 aux Etats-Unis. Notre reportage couleur vous raconte le chemin sinueux semé d'embûches qu'il faut parcourir sur la R.N. 7, avant de déboucher enfin sur la nouvelle autoroute de l'Esterel et la Côte d'Azur.

¹⁴⁴ *L'Express*, 6 October 1960, 31.

¹⁴⁵ *Paris Match*, 8 October 1960, 149.

Et Raymond Cartier commence une grande enquête sur ce problème national qui devient un drame : le réseau routier moderne dont la France a besoin.¹⁴⁶

Thus the route *Nationale 7* which had been fetishized as a *lieu de mémoire*, as discussed in Chapter 3, was now being perceived as an obstacle to the car and to mobility. The lack of a motorway network to enable automobility and to improve road safety was one issue which Cartier explored, and can perhaps be seen as part of his anticolonial agenda as he promoted the advancement of the French *Métropole* at the expense of its colonies.¹⁴⁷ Cartier followed up this article with another in the following issue of *Paris Match* entitled “Comment donner à la France les autoroutes dont elle a besoin.”¹⁴⁸ This was an indictment of the state of the road network and also a message about the broader need for France to modernize itself.

The proliferation of the car, allied with the ensuing problems of road accidents and traffic jams, becomes the focus of numerous articles in the late 1950s and the early 1960s. As the car is being viewed in negative terms, a fetishizing of the car is no longer occurring as a phantasmagoria of desire; it is now apparent what the realities of car ownership involve. An advertisement for a product which purports to lower cholesterol is symbolic of the new position of the car in the minds of French people: “Êtes-vous tendu?... énervé?... Attention à l’excès de Cholestérol! Buvez Hépar”¹⁴⁹ reads the caption over the image of a large traffic jam. In choosing this image, the advertiser is selecting an experience to which modern France has become accustomed. The automobile has, in certain circumstances, become associated with negative connotations. This theme is reinforced by the deaths of a number of high-profile celebrities and internationally. While the death of James Dean in 1955 was remembered as the fusion of fast living and speed,¹⁵⁰ the deaths of Camus in 1960 and Nimier in 1962, coupled with the large numbers of people, predominantly holidaymakers, losing their lives on overcrowded roads, meant that the allure once held by the car was now fading quickly.

The continued growth of automobiles on roads not capable of taking them is a recurrent theme in Raymond Cartier’s articles. In August 1966, high season for holidaymaking, in an article entitled “Nous ne sommes pas prêts pour la civilisation

¹⁴⁶ *Paris Match*, 21 July 1962, 42.

¹⁴⁷ Batailler *et al.*, *Analyses de presse*. 55.

¹⁴⁸ *Paris Match*, 28 July 1962, 66.

¹⁴⁹ *Paris Match*, 19 October 1963, 22.

¹⁵⁰ According to Ross, Dean “provided a legend of angst-ridden mobility, a particularly appealing package of the American myth of speed and freedom.” Ross, *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies*. 46.

des loisirs”¹⁵¹ he refers to “deux lacunes béantes en France: le logement et la route.”¹⁵² While work is being done to improve the road network, it is not being done quickly enough, and this is particularly evident during the summer holidays, when

Rouler sur les routes de vacances c’est vivre dangereusement. On l’a calculé avec précision, 46% des accidents mortels ont lieu durant les grandes migrations automobiles de l’été et durant les week-ends de mai à septembre, [...] en 1970, il est prévu qu’elle sera presque entièrement autoroute jusqu’à la frontière italienne. Malheureusement, en 1966, elle demeure encore pour les ‘vacanciers’ un assemblage hétéroclite de chaussées déformées et de carrefours pièges entrecoupés de trop courts passages sur les tronçons d’autoroutes existants.¹⁵³

Cartier builds on this with a piece in the following edition entitled “Attention ! Nous serons bientôt le dernier pays routier d’Europe”, in which he calls for the construction of “9,000 km d’autoroutes avant 1985.”¹⁵⁴ The president of the Union routière de France, George Gallienne, addressed many of Cartier’s questions in an article in October of this same year just as the Salon de l’Auto was about to open in which he acknowledged that it was an issue that was given more newspaper space than any other with regard to the car in the 1960s.¹⁵⁵

The 1966 Salon, according to *L’Express*, does not have any new models to display: “Le Salon 66 risque, après bon nombre de ses devanciers, d’être encore ce que les spécialistes appellent d’un air entendu un Salon de transition. Il faudra attendre, avant de savoir vers quoi.”¹⁵⁶ This stagnation is examined as the article investigates the Citroën DS21, and the answer provided by Citroën is an indication of an evolution in perceptions of surplus capacity in automobiles: “Avant de lancer sa DS21, Citroën avait fait une discrète enquête pour savoir comment serait accueillie une augmentation de la vitesse des DS. A l’unanimité la réponse fut ‘C’est tout à fait inutile.’”¹⁵⁷ The DS, as will be examined in the next chapter, was a car for which form remained central to its abiding popularity. However, a further boost in the surplus capacity of the car, an increase in its top speed when the car would only

¹⁵¹ This echoes Joffre Dumazedier’s thesis which places leisure at the centre of modern society: Joffre Dumazedier, *Vers une civilisation du loisir ?* (Paris: Seuil, 1972 [1962]).

¹⁵² *Paris Match*, 20 August 1966, 36.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.* 42-49.

¹⁵⁴ *Paris Match*, 27 August 1966, 35.

¹⁵⁵ *Paris Match*, 1 October 1966, 17.

¹⁵⁶ *L’Express*, 3 October 1966, 106.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.* 107.

be caught in traffic jams was seen by the public as unnecessary, as this no longer had an impact on its attractiveness.

4.4.2 Parodying a Need

The cartoons which sporadically appeared in all three magazines are revealing as they poke fun at the occurrences of everyday life, and can provide different insights than articles and advertisements which are strategically placed to seduce readers. They habitually lampooned car drivers in their attempts to accede to more elevated social circles and later as they struggled with overcrowding. An examination of these cartoons is helpful to deduce the public's view of the car in *Trente Glorieuses* France.

Two cartoons appear on the same page of the 9 October 1965 edition of *Paris Match*, both of which ridicule the impotence of the automobile in the face of its growing ubiquity. In the first, we see a driver observe a snail overtaking him while he remains stationary in a traffic jam.¹⁵⁸ The second cartoon also pokes fun at the fight for the freedom supposedly provided by the car. In this cartoon, a rather smart gentleman abandons his car in the middle of a traffic jam to allow him to be carried by his chauffeur to his destination. While each cartoon depicts a traffic jam, the rather different protagonists are a reflection of the car's ubiquity. Not only do traffic jams afflict the common man; not even the upper-class automobile-user, chauffeur-driven, can escape its clutches.

In a cartoon by Sempé,¹⁵⁹ originally published *Rien n'est simple* (1962),¹⁶⁰ and later in in *L'Express*, "L'histoire de l'automobile... vue par Sempé,"¹⁶¹ we see a series of four situations involving two individuals in the same setting. [Figures 7, 8 & 9] We start with a man walking past the gates of an opulent house out of which we see emerge a man cycling an old-fashioned bicycle. The second image has the same passer-by walking past the same house, the man emerging from the property is at the wheel of a turn-of-the-century automobile, much like the Renaults used in the first Grands Prix. The third image shows the same passer-by, this time on a bicycle as he observes the owner of the opulent house leave in a large 1920s-style car. The fourth

¹⁵⁸ *Paris Match*, 9 October 1965, 132.

¹⁵⁹ Sempé is a renowned French cartoonist who mainly contributed to *Paris Match*. He is best-known for his illustrations of *Le Petit Nicolas*. See Pascale Corten-Gualtieri, "L'humour visuel de Sempé : une pratique de la sagesse populaire," *Communication et langages* 149, no. 1 (2006): 29-44.

¹⁶⁰ Jean-Jacques Sempé, *Rien n'est simple* (Paris: Folio, 1962).

¹⁶¹ *L'Express*, 8 October 1963, 21.

image shows the passer-by still on a bicycle and still observing the rich man, who once again leaves the grounds of his mansion ahead of him, this time at the wheel of a large American-styled car. The final image shows the passer-by arriving at the gates of the opulent house, this time in a car that resembles a 2CV. He observes the rich man leaving his grounds on a bicycle just ahead of him; however, the passer-by is unable to overtake him as there is so much traffic that the bicycle can easily overtake everyone else. By inverting the desires of the rich and less well-off over time, Sempé shows how the car, while it initially gained in prestige, once it became more democratized was less fetishized as an object of desire but also, in itself, became a barrier to the freedom that it had for so long embodied.

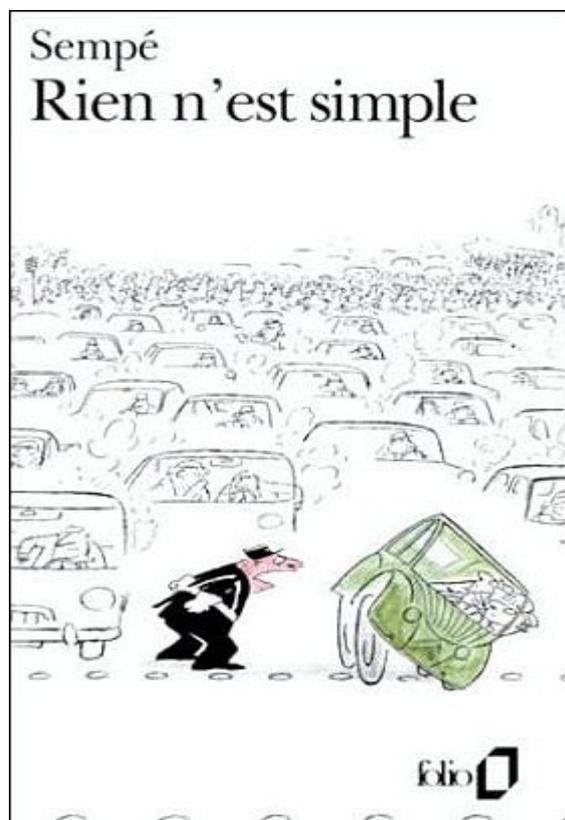


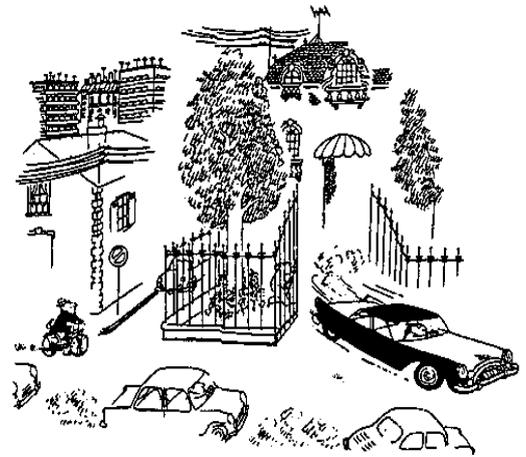
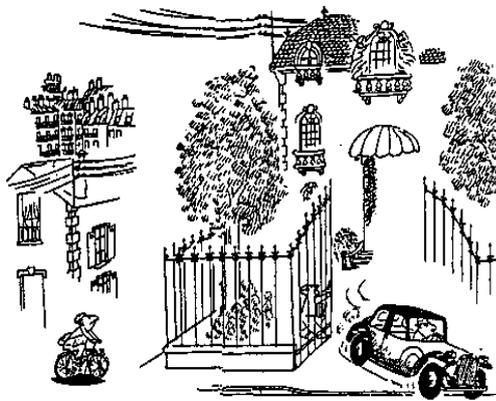
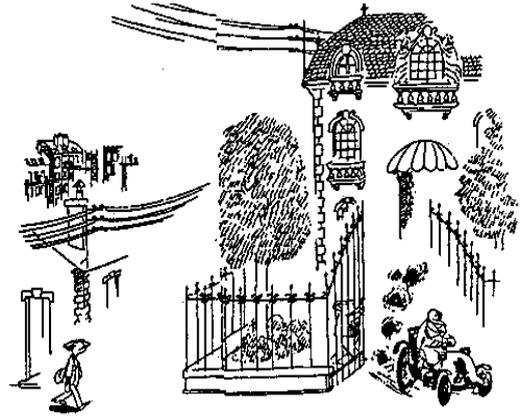
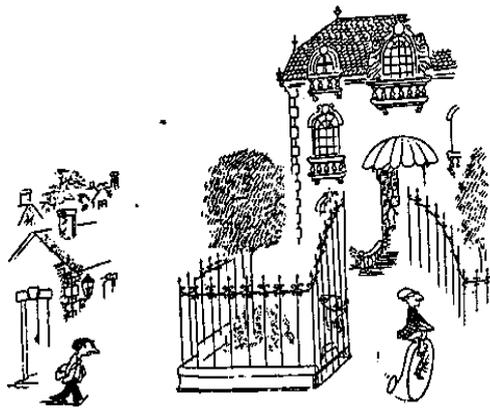
Figure 7. *Rien n'est simple*¹⁶²

¹⁶² Sempé, *Rien n'est simple*.



Figure 8. *Rien n'est simple* ¹⁶³

¹⁶³ Ibid.



Sempé, *Rien n'est simple*,
Folio, 1962.

Figure 9. *Rien n'est simple* ¹⁶⁴

4.4.3 Rejecting the Car

The 1959 Salon inspires a number of articles in *L'Express*. In “Faut-il être ‘autophobe’”, Jean Cau, a well-known writer,¹⁶⁵ juxtaposes the car with the home: “Des économistes déclarent : ‘il faut choisir ou le logement ou l’auto.’”¹⁶⁶ Cau criticizes this position as he suggests that “Il ne faut pas choisir : c’est le logement avec la voiture.” Cau also argues that owning a house inevitably means possession of a car: “Toute politique en faveur du logement est effet et cause de l’expansion industrielle, et que celle-ci définit automatiquement un ‘besoin’ d’automobiles. Il ne peut donc être question de choix : tout se tient et tout est lié dans l’économie d’un pays.” However, this growth is such that the perception of the car-owner is no longer that of a dandy or a “flâneur,” but rather “C’est un délinquant en puissance, un tueur, un embouteilleur, un mauvais payeur, un empoisonneur d’atmosphère, un créancier peu sûr, l’âne qu’il faut immoler pour le salut des animaux malades de la peste.” The forceful vocabulary used here suggests a complete rejection of the car, yet, at this stage, only 30% of households owned a car.¹⁶⁷ The contrast between manufacturers’ views and those in this article is such that while manufacturers refer to cars in a positive light and, as such, consider them a need for the household, the common perception is that while this may be true, this very ubiquity has led to unforeseen consequences over a short period of time.

The 1968 Salon is “greeted” in *L'Express* by an article highlighting the number of deaths caused by the automobile. In comparing the car to a weapon, the author, Françoise Giroud herself, uses hyperbole to underline the number of deaths caused by the car: “S’il y avait à Paris, un Salon de l’Arme à feu, inauguré par le Président de la République, ou seraient exposés, en vente libre, les plus récents modèles de carabines, de revolvers et de fusils mitrailleurs, nous serions surpris, choqués, désapprobateurs.”¹⁶⁸ It is significant that Giroud, who was to later serve in the French government, questions the fact that the French President openly continues to promote the automobile. Having been part of the modernizing process in France with her editorial role in *Elle* and then *L'Express*, the fact that she now attacks the car in such hyperbolic terms indicates the extent to which the automobile and, more

¹⁶⁵ Jean Cau won the 1961 Prix Goncourt for *La pitié de Dieu* (Paris: Gallimard, 1961).

¹⁶⁶ *L'Express*, 1 October 1959, 34.

¹⁶⁷ Chanaron, *L'industrie automobile*. 120.

¹⁶⁸ *L'Express*, 14 October 1968, 89.

specifically, road accidents have negatively impacted on society. The dangers of the road constituted a theme which continued to be widely discussed in print media, and, in July 1970, “Nos routes à l’abandon”¹⁶⁹ marks the start of the holidays by reminding us of the inherent dangers of the road. It blames not only the state of the roads, however, but also drivers:

La grande migration a commencé. Par millions, les Français ont envahi les routes des vacances. Un autre flot va suivre, puis ce sera le ressac. Et le bilan : comme chaque été, des morts et des blessés plus nombreux. La route est devenue un fléau. L’imprudence des conducteurs, au premier chef, en est la cause. Mais aussi l’état, parfois lamentable, du réseau routier, qui coûte également au pays d’énormes pertes de temps et d’argent. Le mal empire. Si rien n’est entrepris au plus vite, la catastrophe est certaine.

This article is followed by an announcement on 29 August 1970 that the 8,000th person has been killed on French roads since the beginning of the year.¹⁷⁰

Over the later 1960s, the amount of space dedicated to the Salon de l’Automobile and its cars becomes drastically reduced as we see the negative impact of the car taking more column space. As has been explored, the Salon de l’Automobile had remained a site where the car continued to be fetishized as a desire; however, the disenchantment with the car combined with and partly as a result of its own success meant that the relevance of the Salon was questioned. The evolution of the Salon can thus be seen to mirror the way in which the car came to be viewed. While still desired, this desire came to form part of a new system of needs based in a more modern France.

4.5 Conclusion

Elle, *Paris Match* and *L’Express* showed a shift in their perception of the automobile during the *Trente Glorieuses*. We have charted an evolution from a fetishizing of desire for the car to a new need-based fetishizing. Towards the end of this period of economic expansion, there is almost a rejection of the car as its ubiquity and the limitations of a road network incapable of adequately accommodating it led to traffic-jams which strangled the car’s utility by bringing it to a stop. The number of deaths in car accidents also climbed, and negative reactions were reflected in the growing number of articles which rejected the car or called for a road network to match the car’s needs.

¹⁶⁹ *Paris Match*, 25 July 1970, 3.

¹⁷⁰ *Paris Match*, 29 August 1970, 28.

The move from fetishizing an object of desire to fetishizing it as a need which is fully inscribed in the modern French home can be observed in the evolution in advertisements for the car as well as in the articles dedicated to it. The changing coverage of the Salon de l'Automobile provides an interesting site in which to gauge this evolution. Run annually in Paris in the early autumn, the Salon provides us with a valuable window on changing perceptions of the car as it gains importance in the general cultural consciousness.

This chapter has covered three periods which partially overlap during the *Trente Glorieuses* in these magazines. The pre-war phantasmagoria of desire is apparent in the early post-war period as the car continues to represent an object of desire which appears to be unobtainable, and, therefore, is solely associated with opulence and the rich stars of the time. A transitional period follows, which places the expansion of paid holidays and greater economic growth in France alongside the launch and availability of the Citroën 2CV and the Renault 4CV. This period, as we have seen, can be symbolized by the transparent Simca Aronde, as the car begins to be perceived as attainable, while remaining an object of desire. The third period identified in these magazines encompasses the adoption of the car as part of the household. As the car became more ubiquitous, these magazines portray a modernized French society that has accepted the car, and stand as witnesses to a transformation of the car from a desired object of wonder to the object of a Baudrillardian desire for the acquisition of a socially created need.

The study of the primary sources of *Elle*, *Paris Match* and *L'Express* provides us with a valuable record of the evolution in the perception of the car. The car can be seen as a reflection of the change in society produced by the *Trente Glorieuses*. In the next chapter, I will examine representations of the car in other media in an attempt to identify a similar evolution to that found in these magazines. Two works by Barthes on the automobile will be examined for echoes of changes in French society. I will also explore representations of the automobile in the cinema, in particular in the works of two of the most important directors of the era, Jean-Luc Godard and Jacques Tati. These directors' works will be examined with a view to identifying engagement with the modernization of France as reflected in the representation of the car.

CHAPTER 5: EVOLVING CRITIQUES OF THE CAR

As we saw in Chapter 4, in the print media in post-1945 France, the automobile went through a process whereby it moved from being perceived as a highly desired commodity to eventually being perceived as a need. To reiterate a point made by Kristin Ross regarding the *Trente Glorieuses*, the automobile had become ubiquitous in the press before it had become so in reality:

In fact, the centrality of the car in movies, novels, in the print consciousness of the period to a large extent precedes the car's becoming commonplace in French life. [...] Although in the early 1960s the automobile could no longer be considered a luxury item, it was not yet a banality either. [...] In France the automobile occupied an intermediate status, that of being within the purview of most French. Neither a fantastic, luxurious dream nor a 'necessary commodity,' an element of survival, the car had become a project: what one was going to buy next.¹

With this in mind, I will focus on selected cultural representations of the car, with the aim of charting the evolution of its fetishized status in French society. One of the most famous pieces ever to be written about a car, "La Nouvelle Citroën," by Roland Barthes, and published in his 1957 *Mythologies*,² will be examined. The piece will also be compared and contrasted with a further essay written by him in 1963. The evolution in Barthes' perception of the car in these two pieces will be examined and placed in the context of the *Trente Glorieuses*, as discussed in Chapter 3. The works of Jacques Tati and Jean-Luc Godard will also form a central part of Chapter 5, as their works mirror a broader cultural evolution in society in which the car was central.

5.1 The Car According to Barthes

Barthes' analysis of the mythology of the automobile, specifically his deconstruction of what he identifies as a reification of the DS, and in particular the attribution of god-like characteristics to the car, strongly echoes Marx's theory of the commodity fetish, as the "spiritual" form of the car is consumed rather than its use-value. Barthes wrote a second article about the car in 1963, six years after the publication in

¹ Kristin Ross, *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies: Decolonization and the Reordering of French Culture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT, 1998). 27.

² Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (Paris: Seuil, 2003 [1957]).

book form of his *Mythologies*, in which he associates a very different image with the car. In “La voiture, projection de l’égotisme,” published in *Réalités*, he appears to reject or at least update his more famous piece on the DS.³ The automobile is no longer a luxury item; in the eight years since the launch of the DS, the automobile has become socially more neutral, more of a domestic appliance, like the fridge. Barthes maintains that while the car still holds a central position in French discourse, its mythical standing has changed. Therefore, while not possessed by all households, the car has progressed from being an object of desire to becoming “a project,” in Ross’s terms.⁴ For Barthes, it now has an intermediate status; it is what will next be bought for the house. The car has lost its dream-like quality. The characteristics that were shrouded in obscurity have dissipated, and the car has become a somewhat more banal part of everyday existence. The shift in perception of the car from an object of desire to an object of quotidian consumption is examined in particular by Barthes and Baudrillard. Their joint conclusion is that fetishizing does not disappear, rather it mutates. The specific social context within which this mutation occurs becomes evident in Barthes’ and Baudrillard’s writings, which we will examine in turn.

The use of religious terminology not only echoes Marx’s use of religion to explain the way in which the “real” values of an object are shrouded in mystery; the use of such imagery also echoes more primitive forms of fetishizing, where religious idolatry and animism were integral characteristics of the object:

Il ne faut pas oublier que l’objet est le meilleur messager de la surnature : il y a facilement dans l’objet, à la fois une perfection et une absence d’origine, une clôture et une brillance, une transformation de la vie en matière (la matière est bien plus magique que la vie), et pour tout dire un silence qui appartient à l’ordre du merveilleux.⁵

While the automobile in general and the DS in particular may embody such epistemological blurring, this is certainly not a new phenomenon, and it cannot be restricted to automobiles, as Kaika’s and Swyngedouw’s discussion of early watertowers shows.⁶ Barthes, in his treatment of the DS, examines a vehicle which was fetishized in its form, and through the desired image it created. He refers to the

³ Roland Barthes, *Oeuvres complètes* (Paris: Seuil, 2002).

⁴ Ross, *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies*. 27. It should be noted that Ross is herself drawing on Barthes.

⁵ Barthes, *Mythologies*. 140-141.

⁶ Maria Kaika and Erik Swyngedouw, “Fetishizing the Modern City: The Phantasmagoria of Urban Technological Networks,” *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 24, no. 1 (2002): 120-38. 128.

quasi-religious experience involved in the consumption of the DS, which echoes the fetishizing of an object as its true character becomes obscured through the process of commodification.

While the Citroën DS did not appear until 1955, the concept of the car was proposed in the immediate aftermath of the war. An issue for manufacturers was that from the original concept to production could take from 5 to 10 years; therefore, many vehicles when they eventually left the production line no longer satisfied the demands of the market.⁷ As a revolutionary automobile, which improved on many aspects of *haut de gamme* cars of its time, the DS was not, arguably, the vehicle that was desired by the majority of prospective car owners. Although a huge success in terms of sales, the DS had its greatest impact on a middle- and upper-class clientele; it thus had little effect on the democratization of the car, or on its commodification as a utilitarian object. Indeed, we might argue that Barthes' essay only served to prolong a Marxian phantasmagoria of the automobile, which was slowly but steadily ebbing away in the France of the *Trente Glorieuses*.

This essay explores the mythology of the car in terms of its affective capacity. He explores how the car is consumed as an object of desire. He does so by revealing many means of fetishizing which had earlier been explored by Marx.⁸ For Marx, the commodity fetish constituted more than the mystification of goods, it also implied the effect that commodities can have on social relations. In his examination of the DS, Barthes, in often quite ironic terms, referred to many of these effects as he highlighted the extent to which this car has become a mythologized object. Marx uses religion as a means of explaining his theory of the fetish. Through the use of secrecy and magic, the occult can be created. It is this blurring that Marx attributes to capitalism as it fetishizes objects. As he refers to the automobile in religious terms, his mythology of the car not only echoes Marx's theory, it is an application of his religious analogy to the characteristics of the car. Indeed, the strong links between Marxist theory and Barthes' work have been explored by a number of writers.⁹ This highlighting of fetishizing must be seen as almost a direct reference to Marx

⁷ *Paris Match*, 15 October 1955, 40.

⁸ Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy* (London: Penguin, 1990 [1867]).

⁹ Gary Genosko, *McLuhan and Baudrillard: Masters of implosion* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2002). 32; Meenakshi Gigi Durham and Douglas M. Kellner, *Media and Cultural Studies: Keywords*, vol. 2 (New York, NY: John Wiley & Sons, 2009). 91; Charles J. Stivale, "Mythologies Revisited: Roland Barthes and the Left," *Cultural studies* 16, no. 3 (2002): 457-84. 459; Annette Lavers, *Roland Barthes, Structuralism and After* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982). 89.

although never overtly stated. This treatment exposes the display, the desire and consumption of the DS in terms of its fetish nature. This material object is thus valued for characteristics that are alienated from its use-value.

5.1.1 La Nouvelle Citroën

In Barthes' famous mythology of the DS entitled "La Nouvelle Citroën," he describes its appearance at the Salon de l'Automobile in 1955, where it is accompanied by film star Gina Lollobrigida. [Figure 1] In his introduction, he compares modern cars to a gothic cathedral which is "consommée dans son image, sinon dans son usage", as they are appropriated as "un objet parfaitement magique."¹⁰ This allusion reveals Barthes' perception of the DS as symbolic of a new step in automobility. He posits that cars are appropriated in magical terms; as such, the DS is situated at the pinnacle of the occult and otherworldliness as theorized by Marx in his reflection on the commodity fetish. Éric Cobast argues that such terminology is designed to shock our sensibilities.¹¹ Many of the metaphors used in this mythology suggest a phantasmagoria of the car and will be explored in the following section.

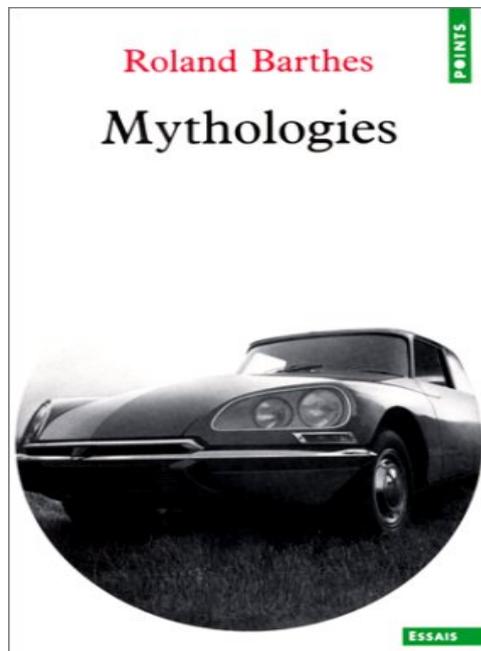


Figure 1. *Mythologies*¹²

¹⁰ Barthes, *Mythologies*. 140.

¹¹ Éric Cobast, *Mythologies de Roland Barthes : premières leçons* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 2002). 82

¹² Barthes, *Mythologies*.

Barthes immediately refers to the DS drawing critical attention to its name. The DS, the name of which, according to Stephen Bayley was formed from a contraction of the factory code name “Automobile de Grande Diffusion”,¹³ becomes a *Déesse*, which at once connotes the car in religious terms while at the same time transforming it into an image of adoration. Barthes is explicit in his analysis of this fetishizing of the *Déesse*; this vehicle has all the trappings of an otherworldly being. The direct reference to an “absence d’origine”¹⁴ echoes Marx, and this is expanded upon in the following paragraph as the author compares the car’s shell to Christ’s outer garment. This comparison serves to highlight the impression that this car appeared fully built with as little trace of its construction as Christ’s seamless robe, which, during his crucifixion at Calvary, was not destroyed, but for which lots were drawn to see who would get it in its entirety. Not only does the examination take recourse to the Marxian “mists of religion” in a direct reference to the car as a goddess, it also underlines its phantasmagorical nature by highlighting its apparent absence of origin:

Il y a dans la DS l’amorce d’une nouvelle phénoménologie de l’ajustement, comme si l’on passait d’un monde d’éléments soudés à un monde d’éléments juxtaposés et qui tiennent par la seule vertu de leur forme merveilleuse, ce qui, bien entendu, est chargé d’introduire à l’idée d’une nature plus facile.¹⁵

Barthes also includes the reaction of the public: “on tâte furieusement la jonction des vitres, on passe la main dans les larges rigoles de caoutchouc qui relie la fenêtre arrière à ses entour de nickel.”¹⁶ This petting of the fetishized object imbues the vehicle with a further quality of desire, as it is viewed as animate as it is caressed. Gilles Néret refers to this section as “un hommage [...] d’un érotisme brûlant” to the DS as exposed here.¹⁷ The earlier tradition of depicting the car as female adds credence to this erotization.

Barthes underlines the magical connotations of the DS through an examination of the material used in its construction: “Quant à la matière elle-même, il est sûr qu’elle soutient un goût de la légèreté, au sens magique.”¹⁸ The streamlining suggests a more relaxed style of design; it does not express speed in the aggressive way that was employed up to this point. It is in the glasswork, however,

¹³ Stephen Bayley, *Sex, Drink, and Fast Cars* (New York, NY: Pantheon, 1986). 72.

¹⁴ Barthes, *Mythologies*. 141.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Gilles Néret and Hervé Poulain, *L’art, la femme et l’automobile* (Paris: EPA, 1989). 7.

¹⁸ Barthes, *Mythologies*. 141.

that Barthes locates “spiritualization”: “[la DS est une] exaltation de la vitre, et la tôle n’y est qu’une base.”¹⁹ In Le Corbusier’s conception of Paris, towering glass structures which house the population in an automobile-centred civilization form a striking aspect of the modern city.²⁰ As we shall see, Tati’s 1967 film *PlayTime* echoes this Le Corbusien future. Although, for Barthes, glasswork can make an object more organic, for Tati, shiny glass and metal structures only serve to sanitize and dehumanize modern life. The material used in the construction of the car is also portrayed in fetishized terms as Barthes sees in this design a considered attempt to make this vehicle more alive. A reference to a futuristic Pegasus, which also echoes Futurist rhetoric, can be inferred from his reading of the Citroën chevrons on the bonnet as the DS becomes more animate through its very form: “L’insigne Citroën, l’insigne fléché, est devenu d’ailleurs insigne ailé, comme si l’on passait maintenant d’un ordre de la propulsion à un ordre du mouvement, d’un ordre du moteur à un ordre de l’organisme.”²¹

While we may see this mythology as a reflection on Marx’s concept of the fetishized commodity, and, more specifically, that of the phantasmagoria, there also appears the suggestion that the attitude toward the automobile in French society is evolving. In a more precise reading of the car, Barthes suggests that the DS marks a change in the mythology of cars as it does not symbolize sheer power alone:

Jusqu’à présent, la voiture superlative tenait plutôt du bestiaire de la puissance ; elle devient ici à la fois plus spirituelle et plus objective, et malgré certaines complaisances néomaniaques (comme le volant vide), la voici plus ménagère, mieux accordée à cette sublimation de l’ustensilité que l’on retrouve dans nos arts ménagers contemporains.²²

In suggesting that the car is “homely,” and in the use of the term “ustensilité” in relation to household equipment, we can see that even in terms of this luxurious vehicle, Barthes is beginning to see the car as commodified in a new way. By leaving the realm of the “bestiary of power,” this vehicle is fetishized as a part of the household, and, therefore, as a socially constructed need. He continues to compare the dashboard of the DS to the working surface of a modern kitchen:

Le tableau de bord ressemble davantage à l’établi d’une cuisine moderne qu’à la centrale d’une usine : les minces volets de tôle mate, ondulée, les petits leviers à boule blanche, les voyants très simples, la discrétion même de

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Le Corbusier [Charles-Édouard Jeanneret-Gris], *Urbanisme* (Paris: Flammarion, 1994 [1924]). 6.

²¹ Barthes, *Mythologies*. 142.

²² Ibid.

la nickelerie, tout cela signifie une sorte de contrôle exercé sur le mouvement, conçu désormais comme confort plus que comme performance.²³

Here, we are viewing a desire for comfort rather than performance, we are thus moving away from a fetishized surplus capacity as the common denominator in the perception of the car. The alchemy of speed which was most ostentatiously fetishized prior to any real democratization of the car, is gradually replaced by a “une gourmandise de la conduite.”²⁴ As the car becomes more widespread, it is placed within what Urry calls the system of automobility, which is defined as:

the major item of *individual consumption* after housing which provides status to its owner/user through its sign-values (such as speed, security, safety, sexual desire, career success, freedom, family, masculinity); through being easily anthropomorphized by being given names, having rebellious features, seen to age and so on.²⁵

It was the desire to be part of this system which became a need for the public. Ross has argued that mass French car ownership was preceded by engagement with it in popular media.²⁶ Barthes' treatise on the DS would seem to support this as he sees the car as fetishized because it is desired. The last two paragraphs of his mythology, however, suggest that this is slowly ceasing to be the case with the car becoming ubiquitous and everyday.

The final paragraph of the mythology suggests that the DS, and the automobile more generally, may have become less fetishized as an object of desire. Barthes explains the demystifying role of the Salon de l'Auto as the public visits it to discover more about these vehicles:

Dans les halls d'exposition, la voiture témoin est visitée avec une application intense, amoureuse : c'est la grande phase tactile de la découverte, le moment où le merveilleux visuel va subir l'assaut raisonnant du toucher (car le toucher est le plus démystificateur de tous les sens, au contraire de la vue, qui est le plus magique).²⁷

While a form of fetishizing is implied in this petting of the desired object, Barthes posits that in the actual fetishizing act itself, the phantasmagorical object is demystified. The original phantasmagoria of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was known to be a spectacle, and was only “believed” through a willing suspension

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ John Urry, “The ‘System’ of Automobility,” *Theory, Culture & Society* 21, no. 4/5 (2004): 25-39.

²⁶ Ross, *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies*. 27.

²⁷ Barthes, *Mythologies*. 142.

of disbelief, in the case of the DS, and the automobile in general, its phantasmagorical nature was seen by people, but perhaps not fully understood. Through petting, this totem ceases to function as such; demystification through touching and familiarity displaces the phantasmagoria of the image: “Les tôles, les joints sont touchés, les rembourrages palpés, les sièges essayés, les portes caressées, les coussins pelotés; devant le volant, on mime la conduite avec tout le corps.”²⁸ This process leads to an exorcism as Barthes once again refers to the car’s existence in terms of a Marxian fetish; however, it now seems that through familiarity with the fetishized object one can reject its phantasmagorical qualities. This is by no means a rejection of Marx, but rather an attempt to identify the commodified object through a process of demystification. The DS, however, remains highly desired once it is transformed into a need which symbolizes progress in modern French society: “L’objet est ici totalement prostitué, approprié : partie du ciel de Metropolis, la Déesse est en un quart d’heure médiatisée, accomplissant dans cet exorcisme, le mouvement même de la promotion petite-bourgeoise.”²⁹ This final process, in which the DS is prostituted, suggests that while the automobile is becoming more mediatized and normalized, it is coming to symbolize an advance in society for the “petite-bourgeoisie”, who aspire to imitate their wealthier counterparts in the acquisition of an object of distinction.

We thus see, in this mythology of the DS, a Marxian treatise on the desire-inflected phantasmagoria of the automobile. This modern-day incarnation of modernity, speed and power is consumed in its image, and is viewed as a magical object. Barthes’ knowing use of religious imagery in relation to the DS serves to underline a fetishizing of the image as it is the physical form of the DS that leads to the construction of the phantasmagoria around it. However, we begin to see a move towards a society that sees beyond this phantasmagoria as the DS does not wholly reflect traditional totems of power and speed in the automobile. Published in 1957 in book form, having previously been published in *Les Lettres Nouvelles*, this mythology may be situated at a turning-point in consumption of the automobile. Still fetishized as an object of desire, the demystification of the automobile is a process which has been set in motion with its ubiquity in the media, and the gradual growth in car ownership. Barthes posits that it is through familiarity that demystification

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

occurs and in so doing, the idolized properties of the automobile are gradually being exorcized. We will see in his second treatise on the automobile, written six years later, that he now sees this demystification process as complete.

5.1.2 The Banalized Car in Barthes

“L’Automobile, projection de l’égo,” which appeared in 1963, is a less well-known essay than his 1957 essay in *Mythologies*; however, it is of interest as it provides a window on how interaction with the car evolved over the six years of sustained economic expansion in France between the publication of these essays. It is based on a series of interviews carried out in an attempt to understand the role of the car in French society:

On imagine sans peine, aujourd’hui, la complexité des représentations attachées à l’automobile : pas un homme, à première vue, dans nos sociétés, qui n’en parle (s’il l’a) ou qui n’en rêve (s’il ne l’a pas). Quels sont ces rêves, ces paroles ? Comment s’organisent les images mentales de cette automobile que tout homme de maintenant porte « dans la tête » ? Comment ces images évoluent-elles, au gré du développement de la société ? Une série d’interviews libres, menées tout récemment, va peut-être nous permettre d’approcher cet univers intérieur que le Français d’aujourd’hui construit autour de la voiture qu’il possède, qu’il convoite ou qu’il refuse.³⁰

While there is no indication as to what percentage of men and women were interviewed in this study, it is quite apparent that Barthes is examining this question from a male perspective. In referring to “tout homme” and “le Français d’aujourd’hui”, we can legitimately question if this step towards banalization of the car is available to all of society.

In this essay, while a Marxian conceptual frame remains with references to “l’objet-automobile,” it is, however, a Baudrillardian construction of the fetishized commodity which comes to the fore, as Barthes posits that the automobile has become a need:

L’auto a cessé d’être un luxe, elle est devenue un besoin; elle n’est donc plus l’objet d’un discours utopique, on ne la rêve plus sur un mode fabuleux, son image n’est plus « photogénique », elle a définitivement rejoint la classe des objets domestiques, où rien, sinon son prix, ne la sépare de l’électroménager, du téléphone ou de la douche.³¹

³⁰ Barthes, *Oeuvres complètes*. 1156.

³¹ Ibid.

He makes it clear that while the way in which the car is viewed has evolved, this does not mean that it has become a ubiquitous object, as the majority of people still do not own one. The image of the car has evolved hugely, however, from that portrayed in the first part of his mythology of the Citroën DS. By using language such as “apprivoisé” and “passé de la féerie à la réalité,” Barthes underlines the shift from fetishized desire to mundanity:

On voit ici qu’un objet banal n’est pas forcément – aujourd’hui – un objet universel; l’automobile pose à la grande majorité des Français des problèmes financiers d’achat et d’entretien; six Français sur sept ne possèdent pas d’auto; cela n’empêche pas la voiture d’être désormais un objet parfaitement apprivoisé, entièrement passé de la féerie à la réalité, même quand on ne la possède pas.³²

Peter Wollen suggests that the power-based “bestiaire” which Barthes refers to in *Mythologies* can be tamed with more mundane alternatives. He suggests that the Panhard Dyna Z, which was in production from 1954 to 1959, is a perfect example of this, and that it may even be more homely than the DS.³³ We can see this later essay as an evolution from the second part of the DS mythology, where the author suggests that through familiarization demystification can occur. In this 1963 essay, he believes that any desire-fetish in the car has now been exorcized. This is not to say that the automobile is no longer important, but that it has evolved to have a more central standing, as he posits: “La nourriture a autant de place que l’automobile dans le discours des Français.”³⁴ What has evolved is the way in which the automobile is fetishized. Less perceived as an object of desire, and in particular no longer craved for its phantasmagorical properties, the automobile has made its way towards the world of the banal, as Barthes refers to its holding an intermediary status: “L’auto n’est pas encore, pour les Français, un accessoire universel, mais elle a cessé d’être un objet fabuleux; ni luxe inouï, ni besoin fatal, elle dispose d’un statut intermédiaire: elle est ce qu’on va acheter: elle n’est plus rêve, mais projet.”³⁵ As we have seen, Ross also suggests that the automobile had reached this intermediary status.

The transition from the phantasmagoria of desire to an almost mundane object is one which Baudrillard has explored in his analysis of the Marxian

³² Ibid.

³³ Peter Wollen, *Autopia: Cars and Culture* (London: Reaktion, 2002). 351.

³⁴ Barthes, *Oeuvres complètes*. 1136.

³⁵ Ibid. 1136-37.

commodity fetish.³⁶ The automobile has become inscribed in everyday society as an object or appliance and as such has become a need for the modern French family and has become refetishized. This reworking of Marxist theory amounts to a critical acceptance of the concept of the commodity fetish, but it is also its extension from the realm of exchange value to the fetishizing of its use-value. As Barthes previously argued, the automobile as gothic cathedral was worshipped in image solely. It was not as a transport provider that it was desired, but rather for the phantasmagorical qualities with which it was imbued. Marx did not allow for the use-value of an object to be fetishized, yet it is this Baudrillardian re-reading of the Marxist commodity that Barthes is effectively invoking in this later essay:

L'utilité *en tant que telle* échappe à la détermination historique de classe: elle désigne un rapport final objectif de destination propre qui ne se masque pas et dont la transparence défie l'histoire, *en tant que forme* (même si son contenu change continuellement avec les déterminations sociales et culturelles). C'est ici que joue l'idéalisme marxiste, c'est ici qu'il faut être plus logique que Marx lui-même, dans son propre sens, plus radical: la valeur d'usage, l'utilité elle-même, tout comme l'équivalence abstraite des marchandises, est un *rapport social* fétichisé, – une abstraction, celle du *système des besoins*, qui prend l'évidence fautive d'une destination concrète, d'une finalité propre des biens et des produits – tout comme l'abstraction du travail social qui fonde la logique de l'équivalence (valeur d'échange) se cache sous l'illusion de la valeur « infuse » des marchandises.³⁷

Using the word “infuse”, Baudrillard echoes Marx's original text on the concept. His argument that a use-value can also be fetishized is particularly applicable as the “innate” value of the automobile has been placed with this system of needs.

Barthes explores the utilitarian nature of the car as he explains how it has become a mundane object. He argues that the fact that it no longer functions as a symbol of social status (“standing social,” as he calls it) is an indication of its integration into everyday society, hence of its banality. He also posits that it is no longer “un objet de classe ou de promotion” as:

l'homme ne peut plus investir sa vanité dans un instrument dont le projet d'achat est à peu près universel; devenue objet de masse, l'auto cesse d'exciter, du moins en soi, une psychologie de la distinction: l'objet lui-même est devenu socialement neutre, il n'affiche plus.³⁸

³⁶ Jean Baudrillard, *Le système des objets : la consommation des signes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1968). 70.

³⁷ Jean Baudrillard, *Pour une critique de l'économie politique du signe* (Paris: Gallimard, 1972). 155.

³⁸ Barthes, *Oeuvres complètes*. 1137.

In so far as Barthes posits that as the automobile has become so pervasive that it no longer has the ability to represent a variety of “distinction,” a term which echoes the work of Pierre Bourdieu, he effectively rejects the perception that the automobile can characterize the class distinction that Bourdieu famously explores in his seminal work.³⁹ Barthes suggests that this “insignifiante” goes further than simple possession of a car; it extends to the various brands of car that exist on the market. The brand and type of car no longer carry any form of fetishized value as they have all come to be seen as homogenous:

certes, les types n'apparaissent pas absolument uniformes, on continue de distinguer, affectivement, une 403 d'une DS; mais du point de vue mythologique – que l'on retient seul ici – la conscience automobile ne semble reconnaître vraiment qu'une seule voiture personnalisée (les sémanticiens diraient : *marquée*).⁴⁰

The only exception to this blurring is that of the Citroën 2CV as this is the only car capable of capturing the imagination. According to Barthes: “tout le parc français semble ainsi se réduire à une opposition signifiante entre la 2 CV et ‘le reste’ dans lequel les sujets n'éprouvent nul besoin, en dépit des différences de prix, d'introduire des différences de signes, c'est-à-dire de standing.”⁴¹ The way in which the 2CV “‘frappe’ encore l'imagination” seems unclear: is it because it is the only car which can be afforded by the lower classes and is a reminder of their growing automobilization? Even if this is the case, it is not because of the aesthetic qualities of these cars. Barthes, however, suggests that there are still some remnants of a phantasmagorical image as this needs to exist in order to form a counterpoint to the homogenous nature of the French car market. This phantasmagoria is to be found in foreign imported cars as “la Jaguar et la Mercedes font encore rêver, sans doute en raison de leur sportivité confortable.”⁴² The link drawn between the sporting nature of the car and a phantasmagorical property is one which Barthes refers to again later in this essay and is one which has been explored in Chapter 1.

The transition from a fetish of desire to one of mundanity, or to a “truc tout à fait ordinaire” is one that, it would seem, is hard to follow at times. As the author suggests, there exists a paradox in this transition, since while the automobile may have been banalized through ubiquity, it remains a “lieu d'investissements

³⁹ Pierre Bourdieu, *La distinction : critique sociale du jugement* (Paris: Minuit, 1979). 164.

⁴⁰ Barthes, *Oeuvres complètes*. 1137.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

psychiques extrêmement riches.”⁴³ Not only this, but “cet objet banal” is capable of encapsulating and portraying the personality of its owner. As we shall see, this phenomenon is parodied by Tati in *Trafic* where the motion of the automobiles’ wipers resembles the physical characteristics of their owners and people take on the mechanized characteristics of their vehicles. For Barthes, possession of a certain type of car or series of cars undoubtedly tells us much about the status and social position of the owner. Bourdieu examines this when he discusses imitation through the purchase (using credit) of a “mock luxury car” or “mock luxury holidays”.⁴⁴

For his part, Barthes uses the example of the family to explain the concept of car-possession and suggests that the car and the family are closely linked. The automobile has become such a central element in the household that the type of car owned by an individual is reflective of his/her family situation. Those who have owned a succession of cars may have updated their vehicle due to a change in their family situation; this can only happen if the car is perceived as a need in the household. While Barthes suggests that there is no tension between husband and wife with regard to the car – “les interviews ne livrent ici aucun problème : devant leur auto, les époux ne semblent vraiment faire qu’un”⁴⁵ – his examination of the family car contains strong gender assumptions as neither wife nor daughter are mentioned in this relationship. The car, he argues, is different for each member of a family as it is different for the father than it is for his son. What was once an object of desire for the father has become mystified differently, and is now both desired and rejected by the son in a paradox which is explained thus:

lorsque le fils n’a pas encore d’auto, celle du père est à la fois objet convoité et modèle rejeté (*je n’achèterai jamais la même marque que mon père*), en sorte qu’emprunter l’auto du père est toujours pour le fils un acte ambigu qui témoigne à la fois d’une obligation et d’une sujétion (la plupart des souvenirs d’auto commencent par ce rapport entre un père qui a et un fils qui n’a pas).⁴⁶

Barthes elucidates this paradox of desire and rejection as he explores how the car has become central in the passage of the son from childhood to adulthood. The son’s first car, which will generally have previously been the father’s car, constitutes the first real, tangible example of ownership in the son’s life. Barthes terms it as a rite object, and thus a new form of fetish, as it marks an important step into adulthood:

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Bourdieu, *La distinction*. 164.

⁴⁵ Barthes, *Oeuvres complètes*. 1137.

⁴⁶ Ibid. 1137-1138.

la première auto du fils fonctionne essentiellement comme sa première propriété, plus conséquente que la montre de première communion, plus accessible que la maison future; elle est donc ici un objet-rite, un objet d'initiation, dont le contact marque le plein avènement de l'adulte.⁴⁷

This is echoed by Baudrillard in his *Système des Objets*, where he refers to the driver's licence as a symbol of freedom, a sort of passport to life as experienced by adults:

Le déplacement est une nécessité et la voiture est un plaisir. La possession d'une automobile est plus encore : une espèce de brevet de citoyenneté, le permis de conduire est la lettre de créance de la compression et la vitesse de pointe. Le retrait de ce permis de conduire n'est-il pas aujourd'hui une espèce d'excommunication, de castration sociale ?⁴⁸

In both Barthes' and Baudrillard's works, and with echoes of Freud, perhaps, the automobile continues to be fetishized; the fact that it is important in the accession to adulthood of French youth underlines how much more democratized the automobile has become as we move towards the end of the *Trente Glorieuses*. The gender assumptions of both texts, such as Baudrillard's image of "castration sociale" which is heavily gendered, would support the impression noted in Chapter 4 that banalization was largely restricted to male drivers. Baudrillard admits to this later in the same discussion saying:

La voiture reste en effet souvent l'apanage de l'homme. "Papa a SA Peugeot, Maman a SES Peugeot," dit une réclame. A l'homme la voiture, à la femme le batteur, le moulin à café, le robot électro-culinaire, etc. L'univers familial est celui des aliments et des appareils multifonctionnels. L'homme, lui, règne à l'extérieur, sur un monde dont le signe efficace est la voiture : on ne le voit pas sur l'image.⁴⁹

In an attempt to explain the partially banalized nature of the car, Barthes draws an analogy between the mundanity of the car and the most basic object in the life of French people: bread. In this comparison, we can see once again that the automobile has become a need, "fondamental dans la vie des Français."⁵⁰ Bread maintained a powerful real and symbolic quality over the century before the writing of this essay and has a strong emblematic link with the French Revolution. Bread was still "au cœur de la lutte vitale" as "l'ouvrier se nourrissait essentiellement de

⁴⁷ Ibid. 1138.

⁴⁸ Baudrillard, *Le système des objets*. 93.

⁴⁹ Ibid. 96-97.

⁵⁰ Barthes, *Oeuvres complètes*. 1138.

bouillon et de pain”.⁵¹ It was no longer a luxury, as it has become an insignificant object. By 1963, the automobile had achieved much the same status as bread had. The automobile was banal, yet there remained traces of mythology as the car continued to be desired. Barthes thus considered the car to be a banalized object which had not yet reached insignificance in society. This mythical status was evolving and was probably to disappear in the near future:

L’automobile, semble-t-il, est arrivée au dernier moment de cet itinéraire; on lutte pour elle, pour l’acheter, pour l’entretenir (d’où l’acuité de la conscience qu’elle provoque), mais déjà banale, il suffirait de peu pour qu’elle devienne insignifiante (il n’y a aucune mythologie du réfrigérateur en Amérique). Comme ce n’est pas encore le cas, il reste dans l’automobile française des traces mythiques, mais ces traces sont faibles, probablement provisoires.⁵²

The mythical remnants still apparent in the automobile are thus the only obstacle to its becoming as socially banal and as everyday as bread. Barthes, however, does not explore how a need is constructed and fetishized.

The mythologized aspect of the car resides in its representation. This Marxian reference to phantasmagoria, which, according to Barthes, is diminishing, is underlined in the automobile through an opposition between a sporting function and a domestic one. Thus, the phantasmagorical remnants which imbue the car with an image of sport and speed prevent it becoming a domestic object. This “phantasme sportif,” which is “faible et qui semble s’épuiser,” is a different fetishizing to that which was experienced in the earlier days of the car: “ce mélange de vitesse, d’inconfort et de danger qui a marqué le premier mythe de l’automobile.”⁵³ In this *Trente Glorieuses* incarnation, “le phantasme sportif” is “une certaine façon de se soustraire au conformisme de la conduite et de rechercher une certaine complication technique de l’engin.”⁵⁴ It is thus a way in which the automobile can break free from the demystified system within which the car and its driver must now function. Any mechanical innovation allows the automobile to retain an image of power. This aspect of a car prevents it from being seen as nothing more than “une moto superlative.”⁵⁵

The fetishizing of the car through the worshipping of its surplus capacity, as in motor sport, is fundamental in constructing its mythology. This was initially

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

portrayed as a struggle between man and machine as man tried to conquer the physical size of vehicles through speed, “pesanteur/vitesse”. Barthes’ analysis of the challenge to make powerful, heavy race cars go fast is examined in Chapter 1.⁵⁶ However, this struggle has subsided as he posits that sport now is “le contact privilégié d’un corps et d’une mécanique.”⁵⁷ “Le sportif” is now much harder to define; it is no longer a question of speed, and while the desire to go quickly may still exist, this has dissipated:

Aussi, pour autant qu’il existe encore, le projet sportif n’est presque plus compétitif (la vitesse semble une motivation dépassée: chacun sait que l’armature routière ne permet en fait qu’une même vitesse à tout le monde; on préfère la ‘puissance,’ qui permet de dépasser).⁵⁸

Since speed is no longer a possibility in this regulated world, what is left is the ability to differentiate oneself in the pursuit of “l’exercice d’un certain individualisme.”⁵⁹ This idea of standing out is to be seen as an opposition to the growing ubiquity of the car as a domestic appliance and fits Bourdieu’s theory of cultural capital and the concept of distinction; in order for the automobile to retain any of its mythologized status, it must move away from the mass market and stand alone. Whereas, in the past, mere possession of an automobile sufficed, now its purchase symbolizes belonging to an Urryan system of automobility⁶⁰ within which one must conform to the rules of the traffic jam:

Le “sportif” est donc déplacé vers des comportements : voyager à des heures inhabituelles (c’est-à-dire quand les autres ne voyagent pas), parcourir sans but une autostrade (pour se défouler), c’est là le ‘sportif’ automobile, vertu surtout éthique qui consiste à détourner l’auto de ses usages de masse pour retrouver à travers elle une certaine solitude.⁶¹

Thus, while in historical terms motor sport was a mode of fetishizing the automobile, in *Trente Glorieuses* France this became reduced. The deceleration of the car in the traffic jams caused by its ubiquity means that “le sportif automobile” is the mechanism by which an automobile and its driver may stand out from others. This is achieved “soit en disposant, si l’on peut, d’un objet plus compliqué que les autres, soit en pliant cet objet à des conduites singulières.”⁶² Barthes offers an explanation

⁵⁶ Hubert Aquin, *Le sport et les hommes* (Montreal: Office national du film du Canada, 2012 [1961]).

⁵⁷ Barthes, *Oeuvres complètes*. 1138.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Urry, "The ‘System’ of Automobility." 25-39.

⁶¹ Barthes, *Oeuvres complètes*., 1139.

⁶² Ibid.

for this demystification. As the car has been banalized, its ability to conquer space has been surpassed by that of the space rocket. The automobile's capacities have been demystified to such an extent now that it no longer fulfils any desire to discover unknown space. Its transition to immobility is complete :

Mais il est normal que l'auto perde tout fabuleux héroïque, car l'aventure est aujourd'hui entièrement absorbée par l'exploration de l'espace sidéral : face aux engins cosmiques, l'automobile ne peut plus accomplir aucun rêve de mouvement inconnu : c'est un objet désormais immobile.⁶³

The shift in fascination from the automobile – via the aeroplane, historically – to the space rocket is explored by Tati in *Trafic*, and is discussed later in this chapter.

The representation of the car as a house, which is also explored and parodied in *Trafic*, forms an important part of Barthes' thesis. Having shown that fetishizing through sport is getting more and more difficult, he explains that this domestic function has taken over: "L'auto est une maison." In this direct comparison, the author underlines the accession of the automobile to the status of a domestic appliance. As it is cheaper to acquire than a house, it becomes "une maison par procuration." He describes the acquisition of both as needs. One does not choose one or the other, although Lefebvre suggests that one has a predilection for a car, which he refers to as "l'Objet-Roi", when he says: "Il est vrai que, pour beaucoup de gens, leur voiture est un morceau de leur 'habiter', voire le fragment essentiel."⁶⁴ Both are necessities that must be satisfied in order for the owner to be socially successful: "L'acquisition d'une auto, puis d'un logement n'est nullement sentie comme une alternative posée entre deux besoins différents, mais comme les moments successifs d'un itinéraire unique."⁶⁵ Barthes explains this comparison through an examination of the interior. This is a step away from the fetishizing of the external shell of the DS, as interiors are now being personalized in an exercise in individualism much like "l'esprit sportif," which is gradually disappearing. The automobile has become "un espace à meubler" with "l'équivalent du bibelot domestique."⁶⁶ This personalizing of the interior is an effort to create a homely atmosphere: "On attend de l'auto qu'elle reproduise le chez-soi."⁶⁷ The housing crisis of the *Trente Glorieuses* no doubt had an impact on this trend. More familiarly characterized as less "les années de béton",

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Henri Lefebvre, *La vie quotidienne dans le monde moderne* (Paris: Gallimard, 1968). 100.

⁶⁵ Barthes, *Oeuvres complètes*. 1139.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

Yvan Gastaut refers to this period as the “années de boue” and “temps des barraques,” as France struggled to cope with the need adequately to house its expanding population, including the influx of foreign workers.⁶⁸ Barthes highlights this problem by underlining the importance of having a *chez-soi*: “on sait combien cette valeur est importante dans la mythologie générale des Français.”⁶⁹ Thus, he explains the need to feel at home in one’s car as well as to experience the freedom that this provides:

Le ‘chez-soi’ est évidemment, dans la civilisation d’aujourd’hui, valeur de détente (opposée au travail) et de liberté (opposée aux contraintes sociales); l’auto permettra donc à son propriétaire les actes libres et reposants qu’il accomplit ordinairement à la maison (et qui ne sont plus du tout des actes ‘automobiles’) : lire le journal, s’allonger ‘comme sur un sofa,’ dormir (ces deux notations sont plus fréquentes qu’on ne pourrait s’y attendre), y dire ce qu’on veut.⁷⁰

The automobile thus becomes what Barthes describes as “une maison appendice”⁷¹ as it serves as a sanctuary of familiarity while at work. This concept of the automobile as personal space is echoed in Eric Laurier’s article on the car as a personal workspace,⁷² and, to a certain extent, is the opposite of Augé’s “non-lieux” of hypermodernity.⁷³ Baudrillard also links home and the car as he sees both as capable of reinforcing the everyday:

En fait, par rapport à la sphère sociale, foyer et voiture participent de la même abstraction privée, – leur binôme venant s’articuler sur le binôme travail, loisir pour constituer l’ensemble de la quotidienneté.⁷⁴

This comparison between an automobile and a house is a new mythologizing of the former: “Tels sont les éléments qui font mythiquement de l’auto une seconde maison, protectrice, comblée, inviolée.”⁷⁵ This new mythology of the car, in according to its characteristics that align it more and more with a house, can be read as a return to the Marxist concept of the phantasmagoria in a process which is referred to as “phantasmatique”: “C’est une maison *ambiguë*, et c’est son ambiguïté

⁶⁸ Yvan Gastaut, “Les bidonvilles, lieux d’exclusion et de marginalité en France durant les trente glorieuses,” *Cahiers de la Méditerranée*, no. 69 (2004). 12.

⁶⁹ Barthes, *Oeuvres complètes*. 1139.

⁷⁰ Ibid. 1140.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Eric Laurier, “Doing Office Work on the Motorway,” *Theory, Culture & Society* 21, no. 4/5 (2004): 261-77.

⁷³ Marc Augé, *Non-lieux : introduction à une anthropologie de la surmodernité* (Paris: Seuil, 1992).

⁷⁴ Baudrillard, *Le système des objets*. 96.

⁷⁵ Barthes, *Oeuvres complètes*. 1141.

même qui est phantasmatique.”⁷⁶ What follows almost appears as a return to the positivity of earlier *Trente Glorieuses* imagery, as Barthes links the automobile and popular culture as spending power increased, highlighting the car’s ability to provide freedom:

L’auto permet de sortir de la ville, de donner aux enfants des week-ends aérés, elle débarrasse de la contrainte des horaires, des calendriers, elle aide à “capturer” le beau temps (il suffit d’aller plus loin), elle fournit docilement à son usager le rythme même auquel il veut consommer la vie (par exemple, regarder un paysage, faire un détour, ne pas louer sa chambre d’hôtel à l’avance, etc.); c’est un instrument parfait de liberté, de disponibilité, il donne à l’homme d’aujourd’hui ce qui lui est le plus rare : l’imprévisible.⁷⁷

These “vérités évidentes,”⁷⁸ are only achievable in a relationship involving the domestic character of the automobile. The “liberté” offered by the car is a “liberté de consommation, non d’exploration.”⁷⁹ It has ceased to be a determiner of class distinctions, “l’auto n’est plus signe de ‘conquête,’ mais rêve d’un retrait hors de la société de masse; ce n’est plus la liberté d’être *l’autre*, c’est la liberté d’être soi.”⁸⁰ Consequently, acquiring one no longer means acceding to the higher social class epitomized by a certain marque, rather the ubiquity of the car means that its possession must be fetishized in a different way. Personalising one in order to differentiate it from others suggests an altered fetishizing. Through usage and not exchange, the automobile became imbued with a Baudrillardian mundanity, closely associated with the modern everyday which itself also became desired:

L’hypothèse est en effet que les besoins (le système des besoins) sont *l’équivalent du travail social abstrait*: sur eux se fonde le *système de la valeur d’usage*, comme sur le travail social abstrait se fonde le système de la valeur d’échange. [...] c’est en tant que telle d’ailleurs, en tant que système, et non pas bien sûr en tant qu’opération pratique, que la valeur d’usage peut être « fétichisée ». C’est toujours l’abstraction systématique qui est fétichisée. Il en est de même pour la valeur d’échange. Et ce sont les *deux* fétichisations, celle de la valeur d’usage et celle de la valeur d’échange, elles seules *réunies*, qui constituent le fétichisme de la marchandise.⁸¹

In the conclusion to this essay, Barthes reiterated the alternative means of mythologizing the automobile, either through sport or domestication. In a gender

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Baudrillard, *Pour une critique de l’économie politique du signe*. 131.

assumption, he states that the decision to imbue his own personalized meaning is dependent on man as “les hommes ont le pouvoir illimité de donner aux objets le sens qui leur plaît; toute l’histoire humaine, celle de toutes les sociétés (‘civilisées’ ou non) atteste la puissance et l’ampleur de ce don sémantique.”⁸² Barthes takes this a step further by suggesting that the car itself can no longer be straightforwardly fetishized, and that, instead, it is driving that has now become the mythology: “la fabulation semble se déplacer de l’objet automobile lui-même à la façon d’en user, c’est-à-dire de la conduire.”⁸³ The very ubiquity of the automobile is posited as the reason for this change: “Le nombre élevé des voitures en circulation rendent de plus en plus difficile la conduite ‘sport’, et d’autre part, l’uniformité des modèles semble condamner l’idée même de performance technique; la conduite ‘normale’ devient alors le champ étroit, mais le seul champ possible où investir des phantasmes de puissance et d’invention.”⁸⁴ The continued uniformity of the automobile market, where the numbers produced are beginning to meet demand, but at the same time are saturating road networks, means that any attempt to fetishize the automobile itself is disappearing. Therefore, there is a need to transfer “le pouvoir phantasmatique” of the car to the mythology of driving. The automobile has become a “truc très ordinaire,” and, thus, Barthes is beginning to see the end of the fetishized vehicle: “Ce ne sont plus ses formes ou ses fonctions qui vont solliciter le rêve humain, c’est son maniement; et ce n’est plus bientôt, peut-être, une mythologie de l’automobile qu’il faudra écrire : c’est une mythologie de la conduite.”⁸⁵

The evolution of Barthes’ perception of the car is one which also occurs in French cinema. Two directors in particular engaged with technological modernity and, more specifically, its imbrication with the automobile during the *Trente Glorieuses*. Jean-Luc Godard was the Nouvelle Vague director *par excellence* as he rejected literary influences to experiment with Hollywoodian and other cinematic techniques. Jacques Tati cannot be described as a Nouvelle Vague director, although his work is from this period. In the works of both these filmmakers, we see a gradual rejection of the modernization of French society and of the automobile as a result.

⁸² Barthes, *Oeuvres complètes*. 1141.

⁸³ Ibid. 1142.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

5.2 Godard: From Americanization to *Week-end*

Two of Jean-Luc Godard's films, *À bout de souffle* from 1959 and *Week-end* from 1967 are important as they indicate Godard's own journey from a desire for American society to its rejection, as well as that of capitalism [Figures 2 & 3]:

The direction followed by Godard's own work from the late 1950s to the mid-1960s shows an interesting evolution. All of his films from this period establish a dialogue, directly or indirectly, with American cultural hegemony. But the distance from his first film, *A bout de souffle* ("*Breathless*"), made in 1959, to films like *Weekend* or *Made in U.S.A.*, made six or seven years later, is significant. [...] *Weekend*, however, best remembered for its eight-minute tracking shot of an interminable car wreck, registers Godard's total estrangement from the American-inspired technological wizardry he had admired in his days as a film critic.⁸⁶

Godard's interest in all things American at the time of the shooting of *À bout de souffle* is noted by Ross. She quotes the director's reference to America using Barthes' type of terminology: "things American have a mythical element which creates their own existence."⁸⁷ Michel Poiccard (played by Jean-Paul Belmondo), the hero of *À bout de souffle*, is very taken with American popular culture; he steals and drives American cars and mimics the mannerisms of Humphrey Bogart, his cinematic idol. Godard's shift in attitude towards the Americanization of society and more specifically the role of the car echoes that which we have already seen in the analysis of *Trente Glorieuses* magazines. Having been initially embraced, desired and, indeed, fetishized in Godard's works, in *Week-end* the automobile is rejected for the way in which it has entered French society and obliterated the traditional way of life. In calling his film *Week-end*, Godard is referring to the car's creation or facilitation of notionally free time that must be consumed in the active pursuit of leisure. The automobile has, in effect, forced us to engage in leisure activity while at the same time becoming a barrier to it, as in the now famous rolling shot early in *Week-end*.

⁸⁶ Ross, *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies*. 44-45.

⁸⁷ Godard in *ibid.* 44.

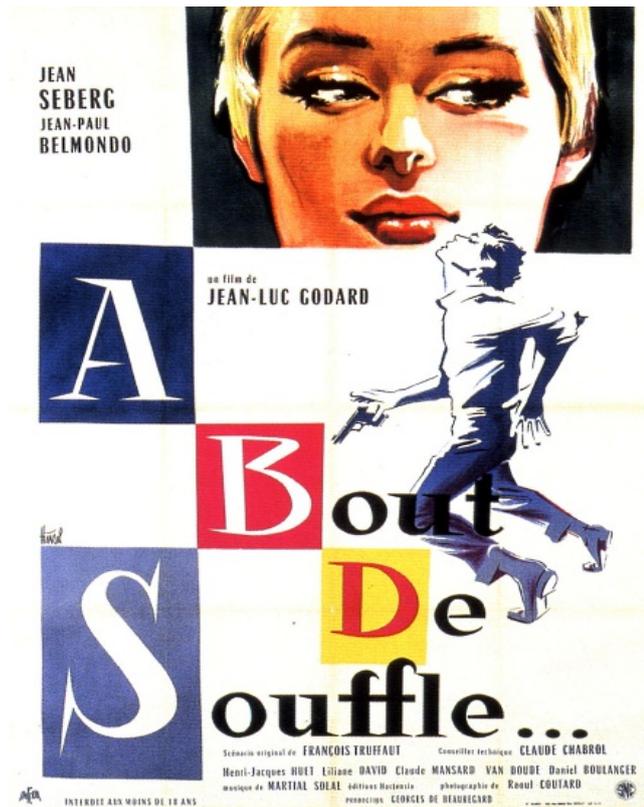


Figure 2. *A bout de souffle*⁸⁸



Figure 3. *Week-end*⁸⁹

⁸⁸ Jean-Luc Godard, *A bout de souffle* (France: Studio Canal, 1960).

In his earlier work, *À bout de souffle*, we see Jean-Paul Belmondo at the wheel of the American car he has stolen, and he speaks to himself insouciantly as he passes people and cars:

S'il pense qu'il va me doubler, ce con... Maintenant, je fonce, Alphonse... Pourquoi elle dépasse pas ? Les femmes, c'est la lâcheté personnifiée... Il ne faut jamais freiner. Comme disait le vieux père Bugatti, les voitures sont faites pour rouler, pas pour s'arrêter."⁹⁰

Poiccard as an anti-hero displays deeply anti-social characteristics while at the wheel of the car. However, this suggests that the automobile has become more mundane as it incarnates natural, even negative, emotions. It is an everyday object in which both bad and good traits are possible. A pedestrian is killed by a car in Paris, yet it is still fetishized as an object of desire as Belmondo's character only steals powerful American cars. The car is reaching the intermediary stage that Barthes, cited by Ross describes, where it is becoming perceived as a constituent part of modern society.⁹¹ Godard hints at the potential dangers of the car, while at the same time giving it prominent space on screen.

Released in the same year as *Bonnie and Clyde*,⁹² *Week-end* differs from this celebrated road movie as Godard refuses to valorize road travel as a means of escape from, or a form of rebellion against, society. In late *Trente Glorieuses* France, this 'need' for escape has become symbolic of a materialistic, Americanized society. Godard portrays a middle-class couple as they encounter a series of bloody car accidents on their weekend trip away from the city. The clichéd image of an idyllic countryside to which one may escape is attacked as Godard rejects the notions of freedom and leisure associated with the car. He replaces it with an almost post-apocalyptic country which has been destroyed by an overabundance of automobiles, and associated consumerism, as embodied by the car:

This sensation of numbness and ennui recurs in Jean-Luc Godard's film *Week-end*, in which car wrecks become symbolic of the paradox of progress. Through repetition and stylization of violent acts, Godard created a humorous situation that becomes a horrible one. After scores of crashes, the idea of another crash becomes ludicrous, but the viewer, catching himself laughing at these grisly events, feels shameful and confused about his response. Both

⁸⁹ Jean-Luc Godard, *Week-end* (France: New Yorker Video, 1967).

⁹⁰ Anne Boissel, "L'accident ou la chair dévoilée," *Champ psychosomatique*, no. 4 (2004): 101-17. 106.

⁹¹ Barthes, *Oeuvres complètes*. 1136. Ross, *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies*. 27.

⁹² Arthur Penn, *Bonnie and Clyde* (United States: Warner Home Video, 1967).

Warhol and Godard have pointed up the savage assault of mass culture on the mind and the body, and the reduction of “advanced” civilization into a mental and physical wasteland.⁹³

Annie Goldmann posits that the use of everyday scenes and their exaggeration are Rabelaisian in nature; however, they are used by Godard not in a comic way, but rather to ensure that the viewer is fully focused on his message.⁹⁴ Jean Douin also makes reference to Rabelais in the context of *Week-end* as he refers to all travellers as “hordes de Panurge.”⁹⁵ This carnivalesque hysteria, while severed from comedy, creates an atmosphere which serves to ridicule modern France, or at least Godard’s impression of it; yet this is done in a very serious tone.

Week-end portrays a negative image of the middle classes by, first and foremost, inspiring dislike of the bourgeois couple who leave on their weekend trip. They are portrayed as greedy, unfaithful and, once in their car, constantly angry. An early scene during which the couple, in a conversation, wish a fatal accident upon the father of the wife, cuts to a scene of road rage in the car park below, seen from the vantage point of the couple’s apartment:

A long, high-angle shot exaggerates the cars as “characters” more than the people (since the latter are so tiny in the frame), as two cars back into each other. The occupants then get out and fistfight. As demonstrated here, Corinne and Roland’s relationship – full of hate, distrust, and selfishness – is contextualized by cars as vehicles of violence, extensions of human domination and abuse.⁹⁶

Taking place in a leafy suburb, the surroundings contrast with the animalistic characteristics of the cars’ occupants as their overreaction to a minor incident conveys the message that acquisition of all these new symbols of modernity has not made people happier. The consumerist nature of competition amongst the characters, as they vie for superiority, first in their cars, and then physically, underlines the new world where possessions dominate, and, thus, the automobile assumes the characteristics of its owners. This is a theme which is prevalent in the work of Jacques Tati, discussed later in this chapter. The spectacle of two couples fighting as they prepare to leave for the weekend, as the main characters in the film are also doing, is framed by the title of the film, *Week-end*, appearing onscreen as their fight is in full flight.

⁹³ Gerald Silk, *Automobile and Culture* (New York, NY: Abrams, 1984). 135.

⁹⁴ Annie Goldmann, *Cinéma et société moderne* (Paris: Anthropos, 1971). 177.

⁹⁵ Jean-Luc Douin, *Jean-Luc Godard, dictionnaire des passions* (Paris: Stock, 2010). 432.

⁹⁶ David Laderman, *Driving Visions: Exploring the Road Movie* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2002). 256.

The iconic travelling shot of the traffic jam early in the film conveys in hyperbolic terms the overabundance of the automobile. The camera moves along in a tracking shot that lasts for over eight minutes as we see every type of person imprisoned in the vehicle that was designed to procure the liberty for which they have all departed on this particular weekend. People are playing cards while waiting, an image that had already been parodied in cartoons which appeared in magazines of the time. [Figure 4] There are overturned cars, while others try to overtake in a vain attempt to make a minimum of progress. [Figure 5] We also witness the barbaric behaviour of the occupants which contradicts the clichéd image of the middle classes typically associated with the automobile and leaving for the weekend. Finally the camera reaches the cause of the traffic jam, an accident where bodies are strewn in a bloody mess across the road. [Figures 6 & 7] This famous scene is not constructed so as to be realistic; rather it is apparent that the artificial world constructed by Godard is one which critiques modern-day society:

Yet the scene reeks of theatrical artifice – as does the entire tracking shot, too conspicuously and elaborately staged to be even remotely realistic. This suggests that “good” middle-class people out on their weekend are false, prone despite the veneer of civility to cruelty and barbarism. Moreover, the traffic jam suggests a social phenomenon, which Roland and Corinne embody.⁹⁷

More particularly, the extent of the traffic jam, allied with the clichéd image of interactions between drivers, portrays a society which has been destroyed by consumerism. It is Godard’s rejection of the American road movie and of American automobile-centric society as well as of consumerism itself. The burlesque nature of the scene is additionally reminiscent of the Second World War *exode*, during which Paris was abandoned in the face of the German invasion of the city.

⁹⁷ Ibid. 257.



Figure 4. *Week-end*⁹⁸



Figure 5. *Week-end*⁹⁹

⁹⁸ Godard, *Week-end*.

⁹⁹ Ibid.



Figure 6. *Week-end*¹⁰⁰



Figure 7. *Week-end*¹⁰¹

The clash of cultures and classes is explored in a further accident. We see a sports car trying to overtake a tractor, and then hear a crash off-screen before cutting to a scene where the male driver of the sports car is dead and the blood-spattered young woman who was accompanying him is arguing hysterically with the tractor driver over who had the right of way, almost unaware of her dead partner. This screaming match, which arguably signifies the collision of classes, again underlines a rejection of modernity as, by moving ahead too quickly, the nation has forgotten its roots, and it is not only the forgotten classes that suffer as a result. In an ever increasing attempt to speed up life, modernize, and to get where one is going, France needs to be careful that it does not become a victim of its own aspirations. The

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

similarity in reaction of both characters to the crash counterpoints this collision of classes. By reacting hysterically to each other, the only distinction between the two can be seen in terms of their possessions. Thus any Bordelian distinction is portrayed in this scene solely through the ownership of a vehicle. Laderman posits that this accident occurs off-screen in a rejection by Godard of the American cinema of the spectacular. It is the social consequences of Americanization that interest Godard rather than its cinematic conventions.¹⁰²

Week-end is a film in which Godard demystifies modern society, in particular by rejecting any French devotion to American society. The early car-park scene in which the members of middle-class society attack one another is paralleled in a later episode where two hippie groups face off. Society in Godard's film is malfunctioning at all levels. The consumerist nature of modern life has led to society devouring itself, as we see cannibalism later in the film as a trope for how life is literally consumed. Society seems to have become indifferent to this as the central couple initially drive and later walk past overturned cars and bodies strewn along the road with complete indifference. The deaths in *Week-end* occur amongst the middle classes and remind us of Camus, Nimier and Sagan, amongst others, who were all involved in accidents at this time. Kristen Ross explores how incidents involving such well-known personalities were extensively covered in the press of the day, stating that: "The violent automobile death of Nimier himself and novelist Sunsiaré de Larcone in 1962, along with those of Albert Camus and Michel Gallimard in 1960, Jean-René Huguenin in 1962, the two sons of Andre Malraux, the Ali Khan, and the near fatal accident of Johnny Hallyday in the surrounding months, each produced a torrent of horrified, lurid articles."¹⁰³ While initially seen as reflecting the desire for high-performance vehicles, in particular in the representation of James Dean, who died in 1955 in a Porsche 550 Spyder nicknamed "Little Bastard",¹⁰⁴ the adulation of speed and specifically death at speed was gradually supplanted by a growing discourse on the dangers of the car reinforced, as Ross states, by the coverage these deaths received. It is in this context of the mediatized car accident that *Week-end* is set.

¹⁰² Laderman, *Driving Visions*.

¹⁰³ Ross, *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies*. 27.

¹⁰⁴ Lee Raskin and Tom Morgan, *James Dean: At Speed* (Phoenix, AR: David Bull, 2005). 101.

Week-end proved to be a commercial success in France, particularly amongst the middle classes as they, it would seem, identified with this rejection of modern society.¹⁰⁵ Godard's film uses the automobile to portray the rapid modernization of society, and more specifically to signify one of the ways by which society can destroy itself:

Godard, like many other postwar European filmmakers, forges a cinema that de-glamorizes the car and debunks Hollywood's myth of American automobility. But he does so in a newly Fordist society where the car, along with Hollywood films and other American consumer products, are quickly encroaching on everyday life.¹⁰⁶

This rejection of "American automobility" contrasts strongly with the acceptance and, indeed, the valorization of the car in earlier productions such as *À bout de souffle*, and can be seen to reflect the evolution of society as rapid modernization was being increasingly questioned. Jacques Tati's films through this period provide us with evidence of this rejection.

While not a Nouvelle Vague director, and obviously more comedy-oriented, Tati's later films have been compared by a number of writers to those of Godard.¹⁰⁷ His work did not undergo the same evolution as that seen in Godard. A strong believer in tradition and community, Tati shows us, over a period of 20 years, a changing France, a France which slowly abandons its links to community, and moves towards being a society which is only too willing to forget its roots, as the modernization of the nation washes away any vestiges of a more humane, more traditional society.

5.3 Tati: Critical Chronicler of Modernization

Jacques Tati's standing as a social observer and as a critical chronicler of the post-1945 modernization and especially, technicization of France has been examined widely.¹⁰⁸ The gradual evolution of his films from *Jour de Fête* (1949) up to *Trafic*

¹⁰⁵ Thomas M. Kavanagh, "Godard's Revolution: The Politics of Meta-Cinema," *Diacritics* (1973): 49-56. 52.

¹⁰⁶ Lindsey Green-Simms, *Postcolonial Automobility: West Africa and the Road to Globalization* (Minnesota, MN: University of Minnesota, 2009). 136.

¹⁰⁷ See Chris Darke, *Alphaville: Jean-Luc Godard, 1965* (Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2005). 29; Laura Laufer, *Jacques Tati ou le temps des loisirs* (Paris: L'If, 2002). 20; Corinne François, *Roland Barthes, Mythologies* (Paris: Bréal, 2002). 12.

¹⁰⁸ See Laufer, *Jacques Tati ou le temps des loisirs*. 20; Ross, *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies*. 5; Stéphane Goudet, *Jacques Tati : de "François le facteur" à "Monsieur Hulot"* (Paris: Cahiers du cinéma, 2002); Macha Makeieff and Stéphane Goudet, *Jacques Tati : deux temps trois mouvements* (Paris: Naïve, 2009).

(1971) may be seen as a reflection of that same modernization.¹⁰⁹ In *Jour de Fête*, a postman who, enthralled by American production, decides to adapt this method to his own work, only to reject it to return to traditional ideals. [Figure 8] Tati's last feature film, *Trafic*, as the title would suggest, uses the car as a means of critiquing modernism. In between these two films, there is a shift from *Les Vacances de Monsieur Hulot* (1953), in which the car is a rickety old banger, to a gleaming modern car in *Mon Oncle* (1958).¹¹⁰ [Figure 9] In the latter film, we see two very different societies, divided by a crumbling wall.¹¹¹ There is the marginalized traditional community within which Hulot lives, and in which his characteristic insouciance is given free rein. [Figure 10] This is contrasted with the sterile house in which Hulot's brother-in-law lives on the other side of the collapsing wall. *PlayTime* (1968), a further step in Tati's interpretation of a rapidly modernising society, portrays a futuristic, Le Corbusian city,¹¹² in which traditional Paris has been replaced by glass and metal high-rise buildings.¹¹³ Tati's acute sense of the visual creates a striking impression of *Trente Glorieuses* France. While he remains optimistic, particularly through the happy-go-lucky personality of Monsieur Hulot, played by Tati himself, the director condemns the constant and furious attempts to modernize the nation. Ross refers to Tati's work as a reflection of how objects had become more central since the Second World War:

If I return throughout the book to the films of Jacques Tati, it is because they make palpable a daily life that increasingly appeared to unfold in a space where objects tended to dictate to people their gestures and movements, gestures that had not yet congealed into any degree of rote familiarity, and that for the most part had to be learned from watching American films.¹¹⁴

Ross refers to Tati as “the greatest analyst of postwar French modernization,”¹¹⁵ and, therefore, a reading of his work, and more specifically of how society reacts to modernization and the car is consequently worthwhile. The earlier films will set the scene for the change. *Mon Oncle* will be shown as a reflection of an evolving society as it changes, while *PlayTime* and *Trafic* are examinations of how this change has

¹⁰⁹ Jacques Tati, *Jour de fête* (France: Voyager, 1949); Jacques Tati, *Trafic* (France: Ciné vidéo film, 1971).

¹¹⁰ Jacques Tati, *Les vacances de Monsieur Hulot* (France: Criterion Collection, 1953).

¹¹¹ Jacques Tati, *Mon oncle* (France: Voyager, 1958).

¹¹² Le Corbusier designed and built a series of modernist buildings throughout Europe, the first one being in Marseille and named “Cité radieuse”, but which is locally called “la maison du fada”. Fada means “crazy/nutter” in Provençal.

¹¹³ Jacques Tati, *PlayTime* (France: Les films de mon oncle, 1967).

¹¹⁴ Ross, *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies*. 5.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.* 30.

occurred. These last two works merit special attention. Tati's ability to convey a critique of society makes his work particularly rich for this analysis.

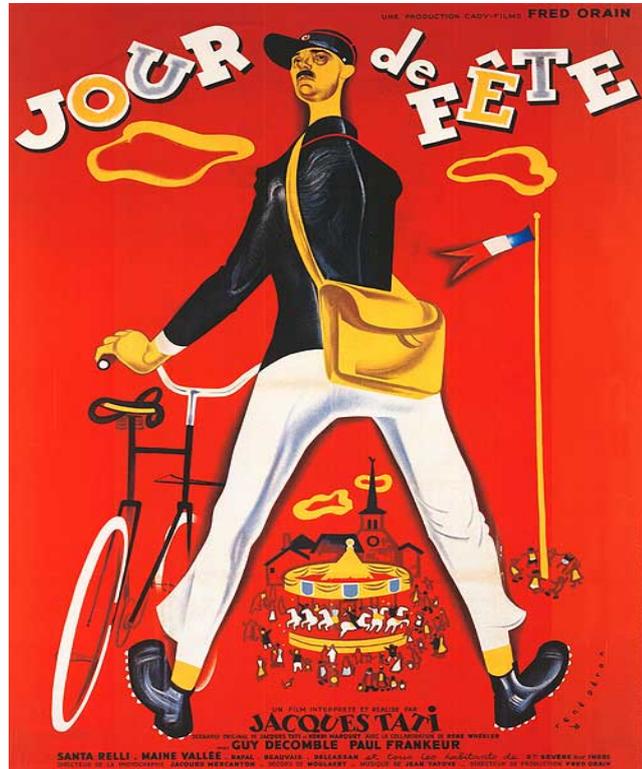


Figure 8. *Jour de fête*¹¹⁶



Figure 9. *Mon oncle*¹¹⁷

¹¹⁶ Tati, *Jour de fête*.



Figure 10. *Mon oncle*¹¹⁸

Tati's work explored the technological advances within French society in the 1950s and 1960s. The rapid urbanization and modernization which included the expansion of the automobile sector are examined as they are consumed in everyday society.¹¹⁹ While *Jour de Fête* and *Les Vacances de Monsieur Hulot* do not prioritize these themes, the emergence of a society beginning to be impacted by Americanized culture can be seen. François in *Jour de Fête*, becomes so entranced with a promotional video short on the modernization of the postal service that he decides to devote himself entirely to a modern professional approach as he begins to do things "the American way."¹²⁰ In *Les Vacances de Monsieur Hulot*, leisure time and, to a lesser extent, the automobile are examined as the importance of traditional community is highlighted. The trope of community is one which stands out in Tati's work. Similarly, the importance of family in the face of a more modern, business-oriented society is explored briefly in *Les Vacances de Monsieur Hulot*, as the eponymous protagonist forms a stronger bond with a young boy than the latter is able to do with his own father, who is constantly on the phone engaged in business conversations while he is supposed to be on holiday. This theme forms the main thrust of *Mon Oncle*, as Hulot remains part of the old France, while his brother-in-law and family become symbols of modern France. This tension is central in all of

¹¹⁷ Tati, *Mon oncle*.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Jean-Pierre Bardou, Jean-Jacques Chanaron, Patrick Fridenson, and James M. Laux, *La révolution automobile* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1977).

¹²⁰ Ross, *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies*. 42.

Tati's later works; as modernization takes hold, Tati's works reflect how society has dealt with this evolution.

5.3.1 Le Modernisme chez Tati: Tout Communiqué

Mon Oncle, which was released in 1958 and for which Jacques Tati received the Academy Award for best foreign language film, deals directly with the conflict between the old and the new France. These two worlds are separated physically and metaphorically by a crumbling brick wall which Hulot on one occasion takes care not to destroy any further by carefully replacing a brick which he has inadvertently displaced. Hulot manifestly belongs to old France and his effort to physically maintain this rapidly crumbling wall is indicative of his desire for his past not to disappear. [Figure 11] While happy to enter new France with all its technology and gadgets, Hulot prefers to reside in the people-centred community to which he is accustomed and which, through its refusal to move with the times, appears to have been marginalized from modern society. That Gérard, Hulot's nephew, and Arpel's dog both choose to leave modern France to have fun is indicative of Tati's negative impression of the modernizing effect. Gérard appears delighted to be told that he can spend the afternoon with his uncle, much to the disapprobation of his own father. This conflict between the old and the new appears on a number of occasions in *Mon Oncle* and more often than not is caused by Hulot's inability, whether voluntary or otherwise, to integrate into a cleaner, but also more sterile France.



Figure 11. *Mon oncle*¹²¹

¹²¹ Tati, *Mon oncle*.

Released in the year that the Fourth Republic gave way to the Fifth, *Mon Oncle* can be seen as representing a pivotal point during the *Trente Glorieuses* as regards the modernization of France, and in particular the democratization of the automobile. In the opening sequence of the film, Monsieur Arpel brings his son, Gérard, to school. He pulls out of his house in his car to join three lanes of constant traffic moving in unison in a mid-1950s rush-hour. While there are large numbers of cars, it is important to note that they are still moving; it is thus possible to make progress even though there are increased volumes of traffic. This, however, is not the case in later Tati movies, such as *PlayTime* and *Trafic*; both make use of the traffic jam as a tool to demonstrate how the ubiquity of the car has halted mobility. In another traffic jam in *Mon Oncle*, as drivers are making their way home from work, we are introduced to some of them when a children's trick leads them to believe that they have been crashed into and they consequently engage in arguments with the drivers of the following cars. We thus meet the "jeune cadre," referred to by Ross as the "high priest of Fordism,"¹²² as well as a young business-woman and an elderly gentleman. In this scene, as in the early morning traffic jam, the cars being driven are all large and American-looking, as the car appears to be reserved for the upper and middle classes. The drivers' reactions to the imagined accident are quite understated as a certain type of behaviour is expected of them. Here the automobile is clearly class-specific and its possession alone is symbolic of social status, reflecting the broader reality of class distinction explored by Bourdieu.¹²³

The objects consumed by the Arpels are similarly reflections of France's attempts to modernize during the 1950s and 1960s. They also symbolize the family's position in society as possession of these commodities signifies for them adherence to the modern upper class. Madame and Monsieur Arpel and their son live in a hyper-modern house which is surrounded by a high wall and a garden which has almost everything imaginable in it other than grass or plants. [Figure 12] The metallic fish fountain is only turned on when important or respected guests visit. It is unceremoniously turned off when Hulot shows up. Inside, Madame Arpel prides herself on the immaculate condition in which everything is maintained. As she says on a number of occasions, "Tout communique," referring to the open-plan nature of

¹²² Ross, *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies*. 7.

¹²³ Bourdieu, *La distinction*. 164.

the house; however, the sterile nature of the building, with its complicated appliances, is incapable of communicating anything other than emptiness. This critique of modern minimalism is conveyed through every aspect of the house. The furniture is chosen for its stylistic quality rather than for its use, as a neighbour asks “on peut s’asseoir?” to which Madame Arpel is forced to reply “c’est fait pour ça.” When Monsieur Hulot tries to sleep on the couch, he is obliged to turn it onto its side in order to make it comfortable enough. The appliances are also parodied as we see Madame Arpel proudly going through a whole series of procedures in order for a steak to be flipped over automatically. The pride with which both Monsieur and Madame Arpel display these commodities underlines the objects’ importance as social differentiators. The Arpels symbolize a modern France which contrasts with the more traditional but now marginalized community in which simple pleasures are highlighted, such as that derived by Hulot, as we observe him getting a bird sitting outside his bedroom window to sing.



Figure 12. *Mon oncle*¹²⁴

The couple’s wedding anniversary provides an opportunity to examine their devotion to all things modern. Monsieur Arpel purchases a pink and green Chevrolet as a present for his wife, while she surprises him with an automatic electric garage door. Both purchases are demonstrations of the need for this couple to indulge in such ostentatious acquisition and conspicuous consumption. The Chevrolet, a “belle Américaine” as in Robert Dhéry’s film of the same name,¹²⁵ is displayed to

¹²⁴ Tati, *Mon oncle*.

¹²⁵ Robert Dhéry, *La belle Américaine* (France: Matinee Classics, 1961).

Monsieur Arpel with the modern catchphrase “Tout est automatique.” Mere possession of such a car does not suffice; the choice of an American vehicle fuels a yearning for all things American and automatic. The couple’s joy at their respective presents is short-lived, however, as they get trapped in the new Chevrolet as the automatic garage door is inadvertently closed when triggered by the couple’s dog. This episode underlines Tati’s message that, despite all these new gadgets, life is not necessarily made any easier; in fact, the opposite may actually be true. The hysterical reaction of the maid when asked to pass through the motion sensor in order to open the garage underlines the social differentiation which is reinforced by this rapid modernization. The maid’s overpowering fear of being electrocuted almost prevents her from releasing her employers from being locked in their own garage.

Mon Oncle was the first film by Tati in which we see any attempt to discuss the modernization of French society. Tati does this by opposing the lifestyle of the eponymous character with that of his sister-in-law’s family. The automobile served as one example of how France has become putatively more efficient and indisputably more modern. It also symbolized the Bordelian aspiration to distinguish oneself from others. This distinction is also displayed in the design of the Arpels’ house and garden. The predilection for shiny, metallic surfaces is further explored in *PlayTime*, a futuristic work within which it seems that the entire population has become part of a mechanized and sanitized society.

5.3.2 Reflections of the Future

By the time *PlayTime* came out in 1967, a number of social critics had engaged at length with the rapid modernizing of France. In 1961, sociologist Henri Lefebvre brought out a reworked version of his 1947 study of everyday life. His *Critique de la vie quotidienne* was revised once again in 1981 in order to address how the category of the everyday had once again evolved. The 1961 version has the subtitle *Fondements d’une sociologie de la quotidienneté*,¹²⁶ and in 1968 *La vie quotidienne dans le monde moderne*¹²⁷ was also published as Lefebvre once again updated his analysis of a still modernizing France. As a social analyst, he argued that the country was in a state of transition between being a traditional country and becoming one

¹²⁶ Henri Lefebvre, *Critique de la vie quotidienne II : Fondements d’une sociologie de la quotidienneté* (Paris: L’Arche, 1961).

¹²⁷ Lefebvre, *La vie quotidienne dans le monde moderne*.

that was modernizing too rapidly. Building on this analysis, Baudrillard also commented on this evolution and mentioned *PlayTime* as an excellent illustration and critique of this rapid transformation, highlighting these competing national identities:

Nous sommes encore, dans notre société de consommation de services, au carrefour de ces deux ordres. C'est ce qu'illustre très bien le film de Jacques Tati : *PlayTime*, où l'on passait du sabotage traditionnel et cynique, de la parodie méchante des services (tout l'épisode du cabaret de prestige, le poisson refroidi qui va d'une table à l'autre, l'installation qui se détraque, toute la perversion des « structures d'accueil » et la désagrégation d'un univers trop neuf) à la fonctionnalité instrumentale et inutile des salons de réception, fauteuils et plantes vertes, des façades de verre et de la communication sans rivages, dans la sollicitude glaciale des innombrables gadgets et d'une ambiance impeccable.¹²⁸

Baudrillard thus explores the transition highlighted by Lefebvre and suggests that France was still at a “carrefour de ces deux ordres” in the late 1960s. As illustrated by Tati, a tension between personal relationships and a new, more sterilized world order is apparent as there seems to be no room for traditional warmth, as incarnated by Monsieur Hulot, in modern France.

PlayTime, released in 1967, and the film which bankrupted Tati, is almost certainly his finest work. [Figure 13] The film is set in a futuristic Paris in which, as Daney puts it, Tati has “construit la Défense avant que la Défense n'existe.”¹²⁹ Tati replaces the city centre with Le Corbusian shiny glass and metal skyscrapers. These glass shells house enterprises within which workers are themselves placed in glass booths. The modern house of the Arpels in *Mon Oncle* has here been condensed into an apartment with a large glass wall on its side, through which one can panoptically observe the uniformity of the occupants. These Foucauldian structures are explored by Martouzet and Laffont, who suggest that social practice in tandem with technology has created a homogenized country with no room for individuality or tradition:

Dans *PlayTime*, on a [une] longue scène où M. Hulot retrouve son ami. Celui-ci donne en spectacle tous les traits de sa vie et notamment ses possessions : parc-mètre réservé, télévision, appartement (00.46.30). Tout y est uniforme, banalisé, dépersonnalisé. Lorsqu'il allume son téléviseur, le

¹²⁸ Jean Baudrillard, *La société de consommation : ses mythes, ses structures* (Paris: Gallimard, 1986 [1970]). 261.

¹²⁹ Serge Daney in Lee Hilliker, “In the Modernist Mirror: Jacques Tati and the Parisian Landscape,” *The French Review* 76, no. 2 (2002): 318-29. 320.

spectateur voit l'ensemble des résidents de ces cubes à vivre regarder tous le même programme de télévision (00.49.32). Individualisation et uniformisation vont de pair. [...] On ne peut que constater que l'ensemble de la vie est homogénéisé, *via* la technique et plus encore par les pratiques sociales et les modes de vie.¹³⁰

The old Paris, which was evoked by its eccentric and interesting inhabitants in *Mon Oncle*, is no longer visible. Indeed, the only glimpses we get of any recognizable Parisian structures are when we see the Eiffel Tower and the Arc de Triomphe as reflections in the glass facades of these modern structures. [Figure 14] The only link with the past is personified by the flower-seller, as the rich colours of the flowers, and the reminders of nature, are in stark contrast to the grey and transparent structures which surround her.

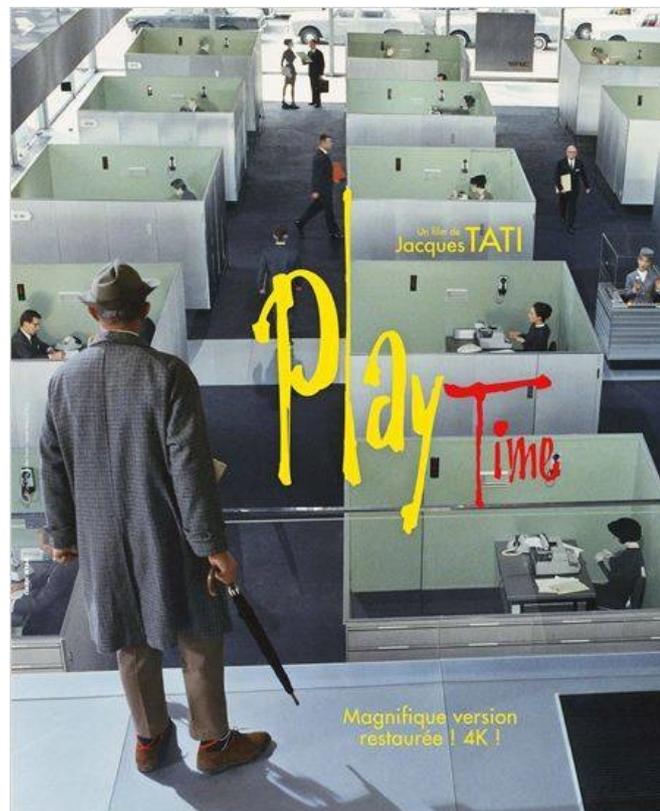


Figure 13. *PlayTime*¹³¹

¹³⁰ Denis Martouzet and Georges-Henry Laffont, "Tati, théoricien de l'urbain et Hulot, habitant," *L'Espace géographique* 39, no. 2 (2010): 159-71. 164.

¹³¹ Tati, *PlayTime*.



Figure 14. *PlayTime*¹³²

In this dehumanized, sterile world, Monsieur Hulot appears to be homeless as he does not belong to modern Paris, yet we do not see where he goes. Hulot arrives from where he left in *Mon Oncle*, the *non-lieu* of the airport: “Enfin, en guise de trait d’union entre les deux films, le spectateur retrouve M. Hulot, une dizaine d’années plus tard, de retour à Paris par la même porte d’où il l’avait quitté : l’aéroport.”¹³³ Hulot is as out of place in this new Paris as he was in the world inhabited by his sister and brother-in-law. However, in *PlayTime*, Hulot’s screen time is largely diminished, since Tati chooses to focus on the way in which, in this modernized setting, people all behave uniformly while they become depersonalized due to the sterile nature of their surroundings. Much of the film is a sequence of sounds; automobile engines and horns provide the soundtrack for much of the film as human life and social interaction have been suppressed. The homogenous nature of modern life is underscored in one scene by four similarly dressed young businessmen simultaneously getting into four identical cars which are parked beside one another. [Figure 15] The rush-hour traffic, which moved at a relatively brisk pace in *Mon Oncle*, has now been reduced to a crawl. In the film’s final scene, there is a further demonstration of the homogenized nature of modern France; cars and buses alike crawl along in unison and circle roundabout after roundabout to the sound of

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Martouzet and Laffont, "Tati, théoricien de l'urbain et Hulot, habitant." 165.

carnival merry-go-round music. [Figures 16 & 17] The Tatian carnival echoes strongly with Bakhtin's analysis of the same; but here the carnivalesque serves to subvert modern rather than traditional social hierarchies.¹³⁴ The sheer ubiquity of the car has meant that all classes have been able to mingle and yet not necessarily interact on the streets of Paris. This mingling is noted by Lefebvre, who posits that real interaction is impossible: "Dans la circulation automobile, les gens et les choses s'accumulent, se mêlent sans se rencontrer."¹³⁵ Thus, once again, Tati demonstrates how objects which were associated with modernity – with the car to the fore – through their proliferation merely serve to deprive people of their individuality as they become inserted into a system which functions (or ceases to function) over and above that for which these objects were conceived. However, as Martouzet and Laffont argue, Tati does not identify the car or any other commodity as the cause of this; rather he accuses society of having allowed itself to become dependent on "le progrès technique":

Toutefois, Tati ne condamne pas le progrès technique mais une société où l'objet, fin en soi, a perdu toute fonctionnalité réelle dans la mesure où il détruit les rapports humains. Dans *PlayTime*, c'est plus clairement aux formes urbaines que Tati s'intéresse. Paris a disparu et est devenu un élément d'un vaste et anonyme agglomérat urbain. Les personnes y vivent dans des 'boîtes en verre' semblables à des écrans de télévision empilés les uns sur les autres.¹³⁶

Mon Oncle and *PlayTime* both reflect how modernization has impacted on *Trente Glorieuses* France. Tati himself was quick to highlight the fact that it is not the objects themselves that he ridicules in his films, but the impact that they have had, or have been allowed to have, as they are consumed. "La satire du film ne porte pas sur le lieu où nous vivons mais comment nous le pratiquons."¹³⁷ The urbanization of France as a result of the growth of the car provided Tati with a fertile ground for much of his comedy. Both *Mon Oncle* and *PlayTime* explore a country increasingly controlled by technological modernity. In his final feature film, *Traffic*, Tati focuses his attention on the automobile as he moves away from housing and the workplace.

¹³⁴ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1984 [1965]). 10.

¹³⁵ Lefebvre, *La vie quotidienne dans le monde moderne*. 100.

¹³⁶ Martouzet and Laffont, "Tati, théoricien de l'urbain et Hulot, habitant." 169.

¹³⁷ Jacques Tati in *ibid.* 167.



Figure 15. *PlayTime*¹³⁸



Figure 16. *PlayTime*¹³⁹



Figure 17. *PlayTime*¹⁴⁰

¹³⁸ Tati, *PlayTime*.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

5.3.3 The Globalized Car in *Trafic*

Trafic was released in 1971, just two years before the oil crisis of 1973. [Figure 18] Much like Tati's more famous work, *Trafic* is a comedy which parodies society's devotion to the car as the epitome of modernity and also as a commodity that has made its way ubiquitously into everyday life. It has been said that *Trafic* was a step backwards for Tati after *PlayTime*.¹⁴¹ *Trafic* is set in a recognizable world and it restores Monsieur Hulot as the main source of comedy.¹⁴² The film moves away from the futuristic society created in *PlayTime*; Hulot is now employed, for the first time, as an automobile designer for a small car-making firm in Paris called Altra. Hulot's boss asks him to take their latest design, a small camper van or "camping-car," to be displayed at the International Motor Show in Amsterdam. What follows is a series of misadventures on the road as Hulot and companions struggle with unforeseen obstacles only to arrive at the Salon just as it is closing. Hulot is promptly fired by his boss and is left to make his own way in the world, walking off into the crowd as he has previously done in both *Mon Oncle* and *PlayTime*.

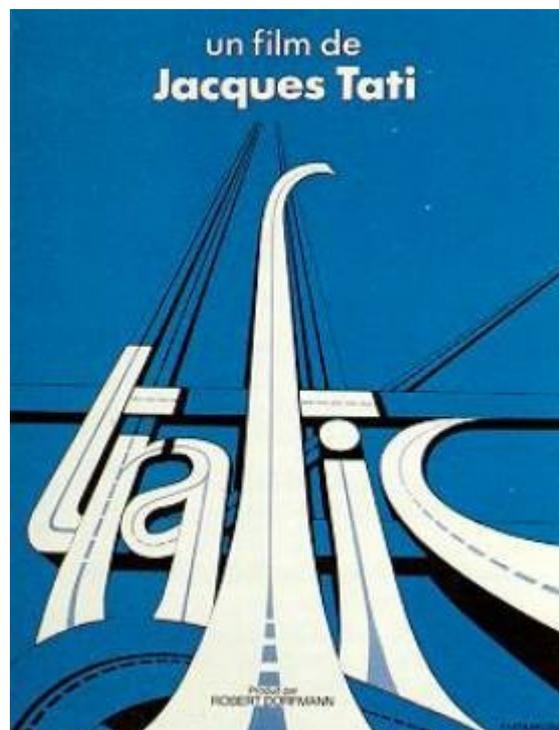


Figure 18. *Trafic*¹⁴³

¹⁴¹ Michel Chion, *Jacques Tati* (Paris: Seuil, 1987). 81.

¹⁴² The financial failure of *PlayTime* was attributed to the absence of Hulot's character for large parts of this film.

¹⁴³ Tati, *Trafic*.

With Hulot's journey outside France, we are moving away from the modernizing post-war world into one characterized by globalization. Indeed, while place was of central importance in Tati's earlier works, here it falls into the background. Film critic Michel Chion echoes Augé's theory of the *non-lieu* as he says that the roadtrip in *Trafic* is "un trajet entre deux lieux dont aucun n'a d'existence propre," adding that Paris "est une sortie d'autoroute et un coin de place entr'aperçu; Amsterdam un palais d'exposition. Plus rien n'existe que le trajet."¹⁴⁴ The journey by car thus takes centre stage as *Trafic* becomes a commentary on the system of automobility that has taken over, not just in France, but in continental Europe. We see motorways and various intersections, we also see an overabundance of cars as numerous traffic jams display how the automobile is suffering from its own success. Interestingly, Hulot goes on this journey while Apollo XI is making its way to the moon. At different points in Hulot's itinerary, we catch glimpses of the explorers in outer space as they are observed with awe by terrestrial society. In one scene, mechanics in a garage abandon their work to sit in front of a television and watch this new conquest of space. Tati pokes fun at this manifestation of modernization. While two men land on the moon, Hulot and his comrades are incapable of making it to Amsterdam in the same time, as mankind's inability to adapt properly to technology in the everyday is counterpointed by the first steps on the moon. This echoes Barthes on the space rocket in 1963, where he stated that the rocket was the only vehicle which was left capable of conquering space.

In fact, it is the overabundance of gadgets in Hulot's car that causes him to be late for the Motor Show. While being investigated by the police, Hulot must demonstrate all of the appliances that have been integrated into his creation. As previously mentioned, Tati for the first time moves away from the theme of place in terms of buildings, housing and community. However, as Barthes and Baudrillard have both suggested in their studies of the car, the automobile has become a substitute for the house in that it provides many of the comforts originally associated with a home, functioning as "une maison par procuration," as Barthes refers to it.¹⁴⁵ In *Trafic*, Tati parodies this as the camping-car automatically extends in order to accommodate two people sleeping in the back. The various gadgets demonstrated to the police remind us of the gleaming appliances which are the pride and joy of

¹⁴⁴ Chion, *Jacques Tati*. 82.

¹⁴⁵ Barthes, *Oeuvres complètes*. 1139; Baudrillard, *Le système des objets*. 65.

Madame Arpel in *Mon Oncle*. Hulot's creation has incorporated many of the modern appliances without which French homes were felt to be incomplete. There is a table and chairs which extend from the back, and which are surrounded by a canopy for privacy. On the front of the car, the grill can be converted into a barbecue. There is also a shower at the back of the car. Inside, there is a stove, a sink, a coffee-maker, a soap dispenser and an electric razor that extends from the steering wheel. The camping-car even has a television that comes out from the wall to be viewed by the inhabitants while in bed in their extended vehicle. Modernity has thus moved forward from the incorporation of such appliances in the modern house. The automobile has now become a substitute for the house, and in this world where one spends more and more time in the car due to its ubiquity, its conversion into a living space, where one can function "normally", is almost expected.

There are two further scenes in *Trafic* that are noteworthy. The pile-up on the motorway and the traffic jam at the end of the film are both highly significant. These scenes have become the most iconic images to be retained from *Trafic*, a film that was not a box office success. The motorway collision occurs as a result of a traffic warden losing his bearings and two flows of traffic start running into one another. The iconic image of a DS going up on its two front wheels marks the beginning of this mass pile-up, which is very different from those seen in *Week-end*. [Figure 19] In this scene, Tati turns things on their head by attributing unexpected sounds to different objects. As the DS comes back down onto four wheels, we hear the sound of an aeroplane landing. Throughout the entire scene, there is an absence of any human sounds; there are thus no exclamations or cries as we witness the crash scene as a kind of a mechanical ballet. The vehicles, in a scene which recalls the animism prevalent in Futurism, almost seem to come to life as a Beetle chases a runaway wheel with its bonnet opening and closing like a predatory animal. The humans as they remove themselves from their crashed cars appear to take on the characteristics of their machines as they silently stretch in exceptionally mechanized movements. By this transposing of mechanical characteristics onto humans and vice versa, Tati is suggesting that by constantly submitting to mechanization, it becomes difficult to differentiate subjects from objects. An image of a priest standing in front of his damaged Beetle is particularly strongly symbolic as we see him address his vehicle as he would a church altar. The priest then kneels at the engine of his car and proceeds to hold a circular part of the engine aloft as if it were the host during the

mass. [Figure 20] In this striking scene, Tati shows us a vehicle which has become ubiquitous to the point of immobility, but which is nevertheless still fetishized and worshipped. As such, it is the object which best represents the position assumed by technology in modern France.



Figure 19. *Trafic*¹⁴⁶

Figure 20:



Figure 20. *Trafic*¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁶ Tati, *Trafic*.

In the last scene in *Trafic*, Tati develops the link between the exponential growth of the car and the effect that this has had on people and on life. In this second iconic scene, the motion of the windscreen wipers of each car resembles the corporeal and behavioral characteristics of its driver. The wipers of an old man's car move with the greatest of effort, while those of a fat driver move more slowly and deliberately. As David Bellos notes: "The technology is humanized by Tati in order to emphasize that after purchase, cars become indigenized, reworked and recast to some degree to suit the personalities of their users."¹⁴⁸ This is echoed in Barthes as he alludes to the car which is "bichonnée" or modified in order to make it appear more like the personality of its owner while at the same time differentiating it from that of its neighbour. This final scene, which was shot in a car park, depicts hundreds of cars stuck in a log-jam that shows no signs of moving. We have moved from the limited ability to travel in space in *Mon Oncle*, via the carnivalesque regularity with which vehicles make progress in *PlayTime*, to a standstill in *Trafic*. [Figure 21] In order to emphasize that we have gone full circle, Tati shows groups of people emerging from a metro station and opening their umbrellas as they make their way freely between the cars. Dondey posits that Tati demonstrates to us that modern France has failed, as Hulot and, indeed, mankind as a whole are better off moving away from the modern world:

Dans la séquence finale, tournée en plan large, des piétons, émergeant d'une station de métro, ouvrent leurs parapluies et s'éloignent sous la pluie en se faufilant entre les voitures immobilisées par un embouteillage : les petites taches noires sont autant de points d'exclamation qui célèbrent en bondissant gaiement la victoire de l'homme, bipède génial, sur les embarras du monde moderne. Hulot, à nouveau sans emploi, s'éloigne tête nue, son parapluie a été emporté par la foule de piétons.¹⁴⁹

This final scene suggests that the automobile itself has become the greatest obstacle to freedom, as Tati shows that returning to a simpler way of life is a means of moving forward. Thus, while Godard in his work showed a considerable modification of his position with regard to modernity and the Americanization of France, Tati's work is more consistent in its goals. François the postman's attempts to modernize his work practice are gently lampooned in *Jour de Fête*, while the automobile comes to symbolize modernity in *Les Vacances de Monsieur Hulot* and,

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ David Bellos, *Jacques Tati: His Life and Art* (London: Harvill, 1999). 212.

¹⁴⁹ Marc Dondey, *Tati* (Paris: Ramsay, 1989).

more overtly, in *Mon Oncle. PlayTime*, which Tati considered to be his best film, utilizes the car to highlight the homogenized world which has emerged from the *Trente Glorieuses*, a world in which traditional France has faded into the background. In his final role as Monsieur Hulot in *Trafic*, Tati depicts the harmful impact of the ubiquity of the automobile and society's inability adequately to deal with it. As a chronicle of modernization, Tati's work provides very useful insights into society in the post-war period.



Figure 21. *Trafic*¹⁵⁰

5.4 Conclusion

Roland Barthes' famous mythology of the DS presents a vehicle which is fetishized for its image quality, and which is desired for its ability to confer higher social status upon its owner. Barthes' reworking of this analysis in an essay published some six years later is reflective of the democratization of the automobile in *Trente Glorieuses* France. This rapid expansion of the car and of a commodity-oriented country is critiqued quite violently by Godard and more gently in Tati's comedies, which present us with an intriguing record of how France has desired and consumed these new symbols of modernity. From the modernity of the automatic appliances in

¹⁵⁰ Tati, *Trafic*.

Madame Arpel's kitchen, to the integration of these appliances into Hulot's camping-car in *Trafic*, we see representations of a French society which has accepted the modern and, indeed, has embraced it. The perception of the automobile evolved in the eyes of writers and filmmakers from one where it was broadly desired as a symbol of class distinction to one where its ubiquity in a modern society meant that much of its capacity to differentiate began to disappear.

Conclusion

As has been explored by Forsdick¹ and Inglis² amongst others, car culture has rather curiously been omitted from the study of culture broadly conceived. However, as an object that has been so systematically consumed as to become part of the fabric of society, its impact and its perception make the car “a curiously precise tool for calibrating cultural values.”³ As it has grown in popularity, the automobile has conditioned the texture of modern life. Hall posits that “the automobile is just as much an expression of the culture as is the language and, therefore, has its characteristic niche in the cultural biotype.”⁴ The particularly car-centred society of modern and contemporary France is thus apt for such an examination. Precisely because the automobile has become so ubiquitous, people from all classes have interacted with it, making it part of the national cultural fabric. The automobile thus provides us with an accurate prism through which to examine the evolution of French society in the modern and post-modern eras.

The automobile is a particularly rich tool for the investigation of that society in the 20th-Century. As a vehicle which was democratized gradually, it was consumed in image before it was actually purchased by large numbers of people. Thus, the way the public engaged with it, whether it be as an owner/driver or as a spectator, reflects closely its commodification and society’s affluence. This study has covered a relatively long period of time – from 1895 to 1973 – however, as our critical reading has been carried out, with engagement with the automobile regarded as central, it has allowed us to trace a progression. The range of representations analysed, as well as the parallels established across these forms, indicate that the evolving role of the car reflects a broader societal transformation. This development can be explained by using Marx’s concept of the commodity fetish as a theoretical framework, supplemented and refined by the work of later thinkers.

Marx’s seminal work *Capital* (1867) is a critique of a rapidly industrializing world. His concept of the commodity fetish challenged the perception of industrial

¹ Charles Forsdick, *Travel in Twentieth-Century French and Francophone Cultures: The Persistence of Diversity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005). 116.

² David Inglis, “Auto Couture: Thinking the Car in Post-War France,” *Theory, Culture & Society* 21, no. 4/5 (2004): 197-219. 197.

³ Stephen Bayley, *Sex, Drink, and Fast Cars* (New York, NY: Pantheon, 1986). 62.

⁴ Edward T. Hall, *The Hidden Dimension* (New York, NY: Anchor, 1990). 145.

goods as he posits that in the context of a market, in order for greater profit to be obtained, the process of exchanging any given product leads it to be alienated from its origin. The investment of value in a good during its exchange means that it becomes something that, according to Marx, was not originally intended; it becomes a commodity. Moreover, the phantasmagorical form which is habitually projected onto the commodity serves to increase its value as it fosters values and capacities for which it was not originally designed. We have seen that the term phantasmagoria was, in the original German used by Marx, a “magic” show that involved deceiving its customers about what they were actually seeing. There are many different forms of phantasmagoria that can be linked to the fetishizing of commodities, and it is a phenomenon which typically adapts to its cultural surroundings, hence making this concept a particularly useful one for the purposes of this study.

Perhaps the clearest example of fetishizing an object is through a fetishizing predicated on desire; indeed, a commodity can be so invested with imagined properties that it comes to be highly desired. These properties may vary widely depending on the specific good so invested. In particular, Marx made regular reference to the use of religious imagery in the fetishizing process in that the conferring of supernatural properties upon a product leads it to become a talisman. This phenomenon is explored with regard to the automobile in Chapters 1 and 2, when the car and speed are closely linked to a range of mythological figures evoked by motor racing trophies, as well as through regular comparisons in art and literature of the car and the specific figure of Pegasus. Such associations would also be noted by later cultural commentators on the car. Indeed, in what is arguably Roland Barthes’ most famous mythology, he makes explicit use of the wordplay evident in the naming of the Citroën DS (or “déesse”), as he critiques the way in which the automobile has become venerated in modern society.⁵ Animism is another means by which a commodity can be fetishized, and this phenomenon is quite evident in turn-of-the-century literature and the art of the 1910s and 1920s, as seen in Chapter 2. By according the automobile human characteristics, those who view it are again deceived about its true nature as its origins are, once again, alienated. It is this alienation of the meaning of an object that leads to its consumption as an image

⁵ Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (Paris: Seuil, 2003 [1957]). 140-42.

rather than for its use-value, which explains the priority given to representations by this thesis.

In the first part of our study, in Chapter 1, we explored how the surplus capacity of the automobile was fetishized as cars were raced over increasing distances and at higher and higher speeds at a time when motor sport and, indeed, the industry itself, were both in their infancy. The Gordon Bennett races brought an international dimension into the sport and French patriotism was underlined with victory in the first Grand Prix in 1905. In Chapter 2, we examined how the surplus capacity of the car was promoted once again with the Citroën expeditions in Africa. With state backing, these expeditions endorsed the automobile as a vehicle capable of crossing vast expanses of land. However the geo-symbolic significance of the latest incarnation of western technology, exploring and discovering “darkest” Africa, was equally important in the ongoing “mission civilisatrice” championed by Albert Sarraut as Minister for the Colonies in the French government and culminating in the *Exposition Coloniale Internationale* of 1931. By highlighting the possibilities of the automobile to inhabitants of the colonies and, just as importantly, by widely publicizing this “civilizing” effort back in the *métropole*, the *raids Citroën* served to reinforce the notion that this confidently imperial “Greater France” was entering a new technological age where old beliefs were being displaced by scientific precision. The French colonies could now be crossed without difficulty thanks to this new technology and, as examined in Chapter 2, the Michelin company’s promotion of tourism was also instrumental in this process of taming the extended national space. At home, the creation of the Michelin guide, which initially consisted of technical advice for the early driver, and subsequently the establishment of the tourist office and Michelin maps, were indications of a France reinventing itself thanks to these new and accurate tourist tools. People could now consider visiting a tourist destination which, according to the guide books, “vaut le détour” as the country was beginning to be accessed and enjoyed by its citizens.

The second part of this study explored how the automobile as a commodity was fetishized in a different way during the *Trente Glorieuses* to that which occurred before the Second World War. The conceptual framework proposed here was a Baudrillardian re-reading of Marx’s concept of the commodity fetish which stressed the possibility that a commodity may be fetishized not only for its exchange-value but also for its use-value. Thus a product fits into a system of socially created needs,

in which, Baudrillard suggests, a particular good, by representing membership of a class or system, may become designated as a need in order to fulfil the life of an individual. Baudrillard used the television, the fridge and, crucially, the automobile as examples of such fetishizing. While initially perceived as luxury items, the rapidly modernizing society of *Trente Glorieuses* France came to consider these commodities as a constituent part of this new world. The way in which the automobile came to be considered as a common need during this period is significant as it casts light on how French society evolved at a time of intense social change.

In Chapter 3 of our study, the impact of the car on the growth of tourism was examined as the automobile continued to be fetishized as an object of desire and as a Bordelian manifestation of class distinction. However, with the advent of paid holidays and industrial expansion in the post-war years, the “need” to go on holidays grew as the use-value inherent in the car – the ability to transport people – now became fetishized. This was a gradual process however, and one which was closely linked with a desire to emulate stars and the upper classes in frequenting heretofore exclusive resorts. The linking of certain stars with certain cars was a further indication of this association. Brigitte Bardot, the iconic *Tropézienne par excellence*, was a fitting candidate to sell Renault’s latest convertible, the Floride. The strong connection between stars and cars was notably present in popular magazines in the late 1940s and early 1950s, as the automobile was still regarded as an exclusive commodity and was fetishized as such. However, as explored in Chapter 4, a subtle evolution in this perception became apparent during the late 1950s as automobiles were less often portrayed with stars at their wheel and new magazines began to publish articles in which the automobile was portrayed as attainable and even necessary in modern France. Towards the end of the 1960s, road deaths and congestion became recurring themes as the car began to be questioned for its ability to provide the use-values for which it had hitherto been fetishized.

The evolution of perceptions of the automobile can perhaps best be seen in the two critical essays that Barthes devoted to it in 1955 and 1963. In Chapter 5, Barthes’ celebrated analysis of the way in which the Citroën DS is fetishized as an object which has seemingly descended from the heavens was compared and contrasted with his treatment of the Citroën 2CV in “La voiture, projection de l’*égo*”, where it is likened to bread in terms of its now strictly limited desire-value. Barthes’ critique suggests that while initially desired for values that were linked to the

supernatural, the advent of the more affordable car to a large extent replaced this divine-related phantasmagoria with a fetishizing of an increasingly mundane need, as the automobile had by then “rejoint la classe des objets domestiques, où rien, sinon son prix, ne la sépare de l’électroménager, du téléphone ou de la douche.”⁶ Barthes, however, did not fundamentally question the continued social centrality of the car, as was to happen at the hands of both editorial writers and cartoonists in popular magazines of the late *Trente Glorieuses*. In fact, this cultural *mise en question* was to become most apparent in the cinema.

A very apparent evolution, if not actually a revolution, takes place in the work of Jean-Luc Godard, beginning with his epoch-making *A bout de souffle* in 1959, in which the protagonist, albeit an anti-hero of sorts, loves everything American, and in particular, large American cars. In contrast, the anarchic *Week-end* (1967) overtly rejects the Americanization of French society; however, it is the impact of the automobile that receives the most virulent criticism. The title of the film refers to the popular practice of getting away in one’s car for the weekend; Godard transforms this perceived leisure time into a modern-day hell as epitomized by the now iconic traffic jam scene. The ubiquity of the car has by the end of the 1960s ultimately become the principal barrier to mobility. While Jacques Tati’s work displays strong anti-Americanization and anti-modernization themes, an apparent evolution also takes place here. The portrayal of François the postman, in *Jour de Fête* (1949), offers a gentle warning that being more modern is not necessarily better. In *Mon Oncle* (1958), *PlayTime* (1968) and *Trafic* (1971), this questioning of the rapid modernization of society becomes more explicit. In the accident scene in *Trafic*, in which the priest holds part of his car aloft in an obvious allusion to the mass, we see a fetishizing of the car in terms of religious imagery once again. The car has become a constituent part of society, but it has become so needed that its presence is now reified.

In these and related artistic productions, major cultural figures such as Godard and Tati held up a mirror to a France which had, since the later 19th-Century, come to embrace the internal combustion engine and all its works. It first did so hesitantly, then in the inter-war period enthusiastically, and finally, after 1945, almost obsessively. Of course, the automobile is highly important as an artefact not

⁶ Roland Barthes, *Oeuvres complètes* (Paris: Seuil, 2002). 1156.

only in France but also in global culture. However, in France the automobile industry developed quickly and distinctively, going on to play an important part in the First World War. Having established its commercial and geo-symbolic credentials in the inter-war period, it would develop into the motor of the post-war economic miracle of the *Trente Glorieuses*. All of which underlines the continuing relevance of this automotive revolution for students of France and the French. For while this thesis is inherently interdisciplinary, touching on history, geography and sociology, as well as the arts, it remains primarily located within French studies. In consequence, its most basic argument is that, in the same way as we might look at the country's literature to provide insights into social and cultural change, by focusing on French representations of the car we may further the broader understanding of modern and contemporary France.

The automobile, particularly in its early years, became emblematic of new ways of doing things and this led to new ways of thinking. The emergence of key figures such as André Citroën and the Michelin brothers had a profound impact as they promoted a society within which the car was democratized. Michelin's promotion of sign-posting, maps and tourist guides established a strong link between cartography and the mental mapping of this new France and, indeed, its colonies, as new constructions of the national space were fostered. The automobile thus was instrumental in the creation of a country which became ever more accessible and which, with the affluence accrued during the *Trente Glorieuses*, was increasingly enjoyed by the mass of its citizens.

This thesis has examined the impact and representation of the automobile in a number of key areas. From an historical perspective, the rise of the car was synonymous with the emergence of a number of key-players in the automobile industry, such as Louis Renault, André Citroën and the Michelin brothers, all of whom had a profound impact on the automobile trade. Moreover, this impact stretches well beyond the factory walls, as the emergence of these entrepreneurs' businesses resulted in the automobile being represented in a variety of qualitatively new forms. There have also been a number of key moments in this automotive narrative, from Renault's *taxis de la Marne* through Citroën's African expeditions to the importance of the hydraulic system on the DS in saving President de Gaulle's life in the assassination attempt at Petit-Clamart in the bloody endgame of French decolonization. Since the Second World War, with the car playing an ever larger role

in society, many aspects of broader social history were profoundly influenced by the automobile, with the development in mass tourism being the most obvious example. This study has explored significant areas of structural change, which have revealed the profound cultural impact of mass automobility. By way of a parting reflection, we might simply reflect that it was the ubiquity of the car which led to the construction of what is arguably the defining boundary of the modern French capital: *le Boulevard Périphérique*. Finished, paradoxically, in 1973, the year of the oil crisis, and built in part along the original city walls of Paris, this road, for the most part, delineates the city's administrative limit. A study of the notion of space as defined by this road is a possible future line of research to emerge from this thesis. The *Périphérique* creates a Paris-centric space based primarily on the car, with the motorways which leave this space nowadays competing with the TGV, in what may be regarded as a hyper-modern reinvention of pre-automobile transport systems and infrastructures. This literally boundary-setting example of material culture thus continues to reflect the importance of the car in the industrial and cultural history of the country.

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