

**Sport/utility vehicles as technologies of the suburban self: the only
civilized way to leave civilization**

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Andrew Garnar --- Abstract

The purpose of this thesis is to explore the transactional and transformative relationships between automobiles and their owners/drivers. Using the sport/utility vehicle as a case study, I show how both the automobile and its user go through transformations of meaning. These transformations take place on a number of levels. The one that I am most concerned with is how the sport/utility vehicle changes the owner's conception of his or her identity.

To elucidate these relationships, I appropriate Michel Foucault's concept of "technologies of the self". I use C. S. Peirce's work on the theory of signs, in conjunction with the work of several other pragmatists (including John Dewey, G. H. Mead, and Joseph Pitt) to fill out this Foucaultian idea. This forms the theoretical core of my essay. I go on to analyze the historical formation of the sport/utility vehicle, beginning in World War II through the present. I then bring together the history and my theoretical perspective. In this analysis we find that the sport/utility vehicle is a way for middle-class suburbanites to transform themselves in world they perceive as increasingly dangerous.

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Introduction

Midway along the journey of our
life

I woke to find myself in a dark
wood,
for I had wandered off from the
straight path.

How hard it is to tell what it was
like,
this wood of wilderness, savage
and stubborn
Dante's Inferno, Canto I: lines 1-5

The purpose of this essay is to show that there is a transactional and transformative relationship between cars and drivers. Let me begin with some definitions. I will focus in this section on meaning of “transactional and transformative relationship,” but there are two other important questions that fall out of this main question. First, what do we mean by “car and driver?” Also, is there simply one form of transactional and transformative relationship or are there many relationships? These will be addressed in the discussion below.

What is a transactional relationship? The phrase implies giving and taking. In monetary transactions, one receives a commodified item for a certain amount of money. Trading occurs in such a relationship. What constitutes a transactional relationship between a car and a driver? Clearly there would be need to be an exchange between the two. One example of an exchange between the car/driver pair would be meaning. The car gives new meaning to the driver, especially with respect to conceptions of the self. Meanwhile, the meaning that the car derives from the driver also grows. For example, this can be witnessed in the way in which roads develop. Neighborhoods are no longer designed for pedestrians; they are now designed

for cars and other vehicles. As we will see later, cars only have meaning insofar as it is created. Through this use, it becomes a Sign. Things in themselves have no meaning. Signs do. These Signs we construct in turn define us.

What defines a transformative relationship? This would be a relationship where one or more of the relevant parties is changed in some manner. As noted above, there seems to be a transformation in the meanings between car and driver. As meanings flow (exchanged) between the car/driver pair, there are shifts in these meanings. A person takes on new meanings when driving, as does the car. Taken together in this context, a “transactional and transformative relationship” implies a change and exchange in the meaning the car/driver pair.

To answer the question, “is there a transactional and transformative relationship between cars and drivers,” I will focus on the sport/utility vehicle.¹ With the ever-increasing popularity of sport/utility vehicles, they are an excellent case study. Before 1982, these land crushers were more of oddity in main stream culture than a mass phenomena. The SUV was originally used principally for utility and not so much for sport.. Now they have become enormously popular and many auto makers cannot build them fast enough. Only a handful of popular magazine articles have attempted to make sense of their popularity and no academics have published on this yet.² This presents a fascinating opportunity to explore these transactional and transformative relationships with something that has yet to be adequately understood.

¹Abbreviated **SUV** throughout. I prefer to stick with the more formal sport/utility vehicle, rather than some of the other terms that have cropped up lately. These include “sport/utes,” “utes” or “sputes.”

²A few attempts from popular magazines include Ferguson, 1997; Antoine, 1995b; Birnbaum, 1996.

This essay is structured as follows. In the first chapter I develop an analytic framework. The two chief concerns are identity and technology, since we are looking at how SUVs and selfhood are linked. In an attempt to work these concerns together, I draw extensively from Peirce's theory of signs (or semiotics). I also use several other pragmatists, including John Dewey, George Herbert Mead, and Joseph Pitt, to bolster certain aspects of Peirce's work that are lacking. Chapter Two is a potted history of the SUV. I focus on the major moments in its development, paying particularly close attention to the changes since the early 1980s. Chapter Three weaves together the first two chapters. I analyze the owners of these vehicles and the sorts of relationships that have developed between SUVs and owners. This involves a lengthy discussion of the sorts of SUVs in production. It also requires looking at the context in which the SUV has become so popular.

Technologies of the self

At this point, I will go over two of the key concepts that run throughout this essay and explain two of my word choices that impacts the tone of this piece. The first is Foucault's notion of technologies of the self. I will develop a pragmatic interpretation of this concept in Chapter 1, but it is worth visiting now.

In his last works, Foucault explicitly developed this idea of "technologies of the self," although it is clear that such an idea ran throughout his whole corpus. As I noted in the introduction, Foucault divides technologies into four types:

- (1) technologies of production, which permit us to produce, transform, or manipulate things;
- (2) technologies of sign systems, which permit us to use signs, meanings, symbols, or signification;
- (3) technologies of power, which determine the conduct of individuals and submit them to certain ends or domination, an objectivizing of the subject;
- (4) technologies of the self, which permit individuals to effect by their own

means, or with the help of others, a certain number of operations on their bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality. (Foucault, 1997: 225)

In the essay “Technologies of the Self,” Foucault goes on to explore the implication of this idea. He shows how various Stoic and early Christian practices were, in effect, technologies that allowed the practitioners to transform themselves into a better state. Foucault notes that we should not consider each of these types of technology entirely separate. It is rare to find one set of technologies functioning without one or more of the others. In Foucault's own work, he focused almost exclusively on the intersections of technologies of domination and technologies of the self. Discipline and Punish is an excellent example of Foucault's attempt to link these two groups of technologies. On the other hand, Marx focused more on the connections between technologies of domination and technologies of production.

Foucault's matrix has both strengths and weaknesses. It goes a fair distance to classifying loosely the various sorts of technologies we encounter. On its own, this matrix of technologies does give us a way into thinking about these issues, but it does not give us much more. As much as Foucault was concerned with technology throughout his life, implicitly in the early work and explicitly from Discipline and Punish on, he never made an attempt to define the term. He seems to let the term rest on conventional understandings. This is unfortunate since there seems to be no popular consensus as to what constitutes technology. So what Foucault defines “technology” as remains unclear. Part of this arises from the translations of Foucault from the French. The word Foucault uses is “*technique*”, which covers both the English words “technology” and “technique.” This ambiguity

opens up a number of possibilities for readings, only one of which I explore here.

These technologies present rigorous ways of transforming the self into some desired state. These technologies of the self are not necessarily about power in the ways described in Discipline and Punish or Volume 1 of The History of Sexuality. Foucault began to see the self as something not exclusively determined by domination in a negative, moralistic sense. Technologies of the self do have a sense of domination, but this appears more benign since it is about choosing to control one's self.

Technologies of the self play an important role throughout this essay. It brings into focus one set of relationships between the SUV and its owner/driver. It allows us to see how the owner/driver uses the SUV as a way to transform him or herself. What is obscured is the reciprocal relations where the SUV is transformed into something new. In part, this is why I feel it necessary to integrate Foucault's notion with Peirce's theory of signs. Peirce's theory of signs gives a very detailed method of looking at how meanings flow from one thing to another and how they are changed in the process.

Automobility

Another idea that will be key for this essay is "automobility." I am unsure of the exact origin of the term. James Flink credits John Burnham's essay "The Gasoline Tax and the Automobile Revolution," published in 1961, for introducing the concept to him. (Flink, 1975:1-2) Since 1961 a number of scholars have appropriated this term for their own work. Flink uses it extensively in The Car Culture and more recently David Gartman makes reference to it in Auto Opium. Also, Timothy Luke has taken up this term in some of his recent writings. (Luke, 1996) For as many people to have used

this term, it is woefully underdetermined. The “best” definition I have found comes from Flink, where he states “the term conveniently sums up the combined impact of the motor vehicle, the automobile industry, and the highway plus the emotional connotations of this impact for Americans.” (Flink, 1975:1-2) Unfortunately, he does not go on to explain how “automobility” does this.

Since I am appropriating this term for my own purposes, let me begin this discussion by parsing the term “automobility” to make clear what I mean by it. Clearly it is a fusion of “automobile” and “mobility.” “Auto” meaning directed from within. “Mobility” is being capable of moving. From this, we see that “automobility” implies the ability to move from its own power. There is the added horizon within the term involving “automobile.” When these dimensions are taken together, we see that automobility involves being able to move in an independent manner using a car or similar vehicle. Automobility is a form of apparent self-sufficiency and mastery over the road and the automobile. When one owns and uses the car, the individual is on their own, or at least *has the appearance* of being autonomous.

The strength of this formulation of “automobility” lies in making clear the networks the driver is enmeshed in. It attempts to capture the ethos of living at time when cars and trucks are essential. Possession of an automobile is obviously an important part of automobility. A detailed analysis of ownership reveals that there is more than merely having control/power over the car. The act of ownership is a complicated phenomenon. The owner becomes embedded in a series of intricate systems. Though not exhaustive, these systems include:

- the DMV (Department of Motor Vehicles), which determines who is qualified to have the privilege of mobility (legally). Associated with the DMV would be various educational institutions which train “good” drivers;

- the auto industry, which produces cars to drive;
- the oil industry, which provides the fuel to drive;
- gas and service stations, which keeps cars on the road;
- the auto parts industry, which supplies drivers (directly or indirectly) with parts to keep them on the road;
- the auto magazine industry, which informs would-be mechanics of how to keep themselves on the road;
- the assorted auto accessories, which make the ride more pleasant;
- the roads, which (for most of the driving public) is a necessity if one wants to go places;
- the various planning organizations, which determine where roads go;
- the advertising industry, which keeps drivers informed of what automobiles are now on the road.

This list can go on and on. What is important to see here is how the act of owning (or wanting to own) a car immediately embeds the driver in this series of inter-related systems. These systems overlap and help to determine automobility. Various elements within these systems will be on the same side or at odds. Various governing bodies (local, state, or federal) might seek to cut back auto emissions, while the oil companies will resist this. These systems should not be seen as a homogeneous whole. They constitute a diverse constellation of interests. When one owns a car, one becomes enmeshed in this network. Even more, one is enculturated into this system even before one can legally drive. The desire for (auto) mobility has become a very important part of our culture in the United States. On many levels it is a symbol of status, of success, of power, of gender, of race, of age. For many, owning a good car (how ever that might be defined) is taken very seriously.

It is important to remember that the choice of one's car is embedded with the larger systems of automobility. This choice will be determined, at least to some degree, by the location of the individual in these systems. Economic factors will determine the degree to which the individual can engage in automobility. Those at the lower end of the economic ladder will not have the same options as those with money to burn. This might not

prevent the lower classes from participating, but it limits the options (or constrains other ways to spend money). Geographic considerations will also play into the individuals choices. For someone living in a most major cities, a car may or may not be vital. On the other hand, for the suburban dweller a car or three is seen as indispensable (especially since many of these communities have been designed to limit pedestrian mobility). No doubt, there are other factors playing into an individual's automobility.

These other factors will determine the further field of automobility. In terms of individualization, one has a number of options. There is the popular phenomena of bumper stickers, which is a prime example of self-expression. One can show political allegiance, musical taste, religious affiliation, and life philosophy through a simple sticker. All one has to do is put it on and all the world can see that you support "candidate W, "band X," "god Y," or that you believe "Z Happens." (Case, 1992) In a similar vein, one can get a personalized license plate. This further demonstrates individuality in up to 8 characters (9 in some states). One can also make both internal and external modifications to the automobile, though the external changes are more noticeable (jacked-up tires and neon lights in odd places are two external modifications. There are also inordinately loud stereos, which would qualify as internal modifications, but can typically be heard from blocks away). These are all sign systems and technologies of the self.

Where and how one drives will be expressions of automobility. One's work might determine the range of driving. If one owns a car simply to drive the short distance from home to the office and back, then (in all likelihood) one will be less concerned with using the car as a way of expressing their self-image through their car. Someone commuting from the suburbs to the urban workplace will probably conceive of their automobility in a different manner.

The worker with a shorter commute might drive an older model car that is incapable of being driven over 45 MPH, while the suburban dweller might drive a sport/utility vehicle (which gives a sense of “protection” in both urban and rural environments, though for different reasons). In addition, the very way one drives will play into that person’s conception of automobility. Certain elements of their personality might be seen more clearly while behind the wheel or, conceivably, they might become someone completely different.

All of these things and more will play out in the concept of automobility. While the relationships, the transactions, between car and driver are the nexus of automobility, the concept covers more. It brings in numerous systems in which the car/driver relationship is formed. The car/driver relationship is intricate and nuanced. Meanings flow both ways. The driver might use the car as a means of self-creation, while the car itself is being endowed with new meanings and importance. In deploying the term “automobility” I hope to capture this sense.

Constellations

One metaphor that runs throughout this essay is “constellation.” This is term appropriated from Theodor Adorno, who borrowed it from Walter Benjamin. Constellation is meant to “signify a juxtaposed rather than integrated cluster of changing elements that resists reduction to a common denominator, essential core, or generative first principle.” (Jay, 1984:14-15) What this metaphor does is to give us a way to bring near various things, but without forcing them into a common form.

As I argue in Chapter 3, the ethos of postmodernism plays a large part in the contemporary ownership. Richard Bernstein encourages us to see postmodernism as a constellation and I follow him in this analysis.

(Bernstein, 1992) Postmodernity cannot easily be reduced to a first principle. It is a fluid concept for a changing fluid time. By first taking postmodernity seriously and then by viewing it as a constellation, many things fall out. One significant place is what the self looks like by viewing it as a constellation. This will be explored in detail in Chapter 1.

Nature/denature

The last thing I want to address is the concept of “nature.” Nature and associated terms run throughout the essay, especially since the SUV is supposed to be a vehicle to get you out there. This term also crops up in my discussion of technology. One of the interesting trends in the philosophy of technology has been to expand the scope of what is considered technology. (Hickman, 1990; Latour, 1987; Pitt, Forthcoming) The “common sense” definition tends to be physical artifacts, mainly made of metal or, increasingly, plastic.³ As the philosophy of technology has grown as a field, more and more scholars are coming to reject this narrow definition. Instead, many philosophers are coming to see that much of what we do is technology. These metallic or plastic artifacts are only the flashiest example of this. Other practices also qualify as technologies. Geometry, physics and art are all technologies.

This shift in the definition of technology raises a number of interesting questions, only one of which concerns me here. If everything we do is basically technology, it seems everything we do is either completely natural or completely unnatural. Which is it? We can say that everything we do is natural because we are just following what is in our character. We are doing what comes “naturally.” Conversely, if everything we do is unnatural, this

³I am indebted to David Murphree for coming up with this wonderful way of saying this. A very well developed analysis using this definition of technology is Don Ihde’s Technology and the Lifeworld. I discuss this in Chapter 1.

means we have been slowly bringing everything into our technological systems. It seems that either formulation is basically equivalent, with the exception of the rhetorical thrust involved. Throughout this essay I will use the “unnatural” formulation, since it brings into focus elements I believe are valuable. Specifically, the “natural” formulation seems to justify certain form of right-wing eco-politics I dislike. The reasoning seems to run like this: if everything we do is natural, we can exploit the Earth’s resources, since we are doing what we are supposed to. While I do not think this holds up to any sort of scrutiny, it has been used to justify increased exploitation of “natural” resources. Because of this, I chose to use the “unnatural” formulation since it puts responsibility for preservation of environments and resources in our laps.

This “unnatural” formulation has many implications. The one that I focus on the most has to do with the rise of “denature.” This involves moving away from the juxtaposition of nature and civilization. As our technological systems have grown, nature as some self-sustaining region has become more and more distant. Instead, we are faced with environments that we have impacted, if not created. This makes a distinction between nature and civilization meaningless, since both are subsumed under the heading “environment.” (Luke, 1996; Luke 1997) The significance of this will become clear in Chapter 3.

Context of the study

Let me conclude this Introduction with a brief discussion of the context this study. There are two contexts here. First is the context of the subject being analyzed. Second, there is issue of how this study is situated with respect to other modes of theorizing. Let me deal with these in order.

Throughout the course of this essay I am concerned exclusively with the American experience of the SUV. More specifically, I am concerned with the suburban experience of the SUV. While some analysis is given of other users of the SUV, I focus chiefly on the meanings that have accrued around the middle-class, predominately white, owners. This means that certain other forms of off-road mobility, like dune buggies and dirt buggies, will be left aside. I am concerned wholly with the class of vehicles that have come to be known as the sport/utility vehicles. If these other off-road vehicles have impacted the suburban interpretation of the SUV, it seems to be marginal at best.

This essay is an attempt to understand the relationships between automobiles and conceptions of self. That there is a relationship between these two is commonly acknowledged in popular theorizing. What has been left virtually unexplored is what the structure is of this relationship. This is the case in both academic and popular theorizing. This essay attempts to develop a suitably intricate understanding of this relationship. It is in the context of this absence of theorizing that I write this essay.

Chapter 1:

The Tool Kit

Parable.- Those thinkers in whom all stars move in cyclic orbits are not the most profound; whoever looks into himself as into vast space and carries galaxies in himself also knows how irregular all galaxies are; they lead into the chaos and labyrinth of existence.
Nietzsche in The Gay Science, Paragraph 322.

In this chapter I develop a theoretical perspective. Considering the issue at hand, the transactional and transformative relationships between car and driver, there are several key points that any such perspective must offer. These key points boil down to a broadly constructivist account of identity, an understanding of technology that is not limited to physical artifacts which are mostly made of metal, and a way to chart the flow of meanings across boundaries. The first point is necessary since, if identity is taken to be a static and unchanging, then we have no hope of understanding how things influence that identity. The second point is important for developing a way to see the interactions between artifacts and this constructive account of identity. As we will see below, if we limit our understanding of technology to physical artifacts, then things get very messy very quickly. Lastly, to understand how a physical artifact, in this case the SUV, goes from having one use to another, we need a way to map the meanings ascribed to it and how these change.

As I discussed in my introduction, I have chosen a bricolage of Peirce, Dewey, Mead, Pitt and Foucault. The principle reason why Foucault is listed here is because of the centrality of his “technologies of the self.” The

remaining four philosophers are all members of the pragmatic tradition and have a certain affinities with one another that allows for a relatively painless integration of their projects. Peirce set out a certain way of looking at things, which many of the later pragmatists have continued to use.

Approaches

Let me briefly review a few other possible approaches to this problem, in part to justify taking such a seemingly convoluted perspective. The goal is to show two things. First, why these approaches are inadequate. Second, what we can take away from them. I will limit this discussion to some of the scholars in the philosophy and sociology of technology. I focus principally those who have something to say about the relationship between technology and selfhood.

One the most immediate bodies of work that comes to mind is the technologically oriented social constructivists.¹ The most representative text for this group is The Social Construction of Technological Systems. In this collection of essays a large number of scholars attempt to address the social character of technology. One of the key essays in the collection is Bijker and Pinch's "The Social Construction of Facts and Artifacts." (Bijker, Hughes, Pinch 1987: 17-50) In this piece, Pinch and Bijker analyze the social construction of the bicycle. They propose that the process of construction of any artifact can be broken down into three stages. The first step in this approach is to define the social groups that are attributing meaning to the artifact. It is important to determine whether these groups are homogenous or not. If there are sub-groups within the larger group that have special concerns, these must be taken into account. The next stage is to examine the problems that particular social groups pose. Something should not be

¹Abbreviated **SCOT** for "social construction of technology."

considered a problem until it is formulated as such by a particular group. Every group will have particular concerns dependent on the meaning they ascribe to the artifact. Resolution of these problems does not have to be technical either. The last stage is looking at how meanings ascribed to artifacts stabilize with respect to various social groups.

For purposes of this project, the social constructivists are not that useful. Most of their work focuses more on how meanings are ascribed to artifacts. Because of this focus, the artifact ceases to be as important. What becomes crucial is the politics involved with the artifact's creation. Another trouble that several scholars have pointed out is how the SCOT group takes society as a given and then leave it aside. (Downey, 1998: 29-33; Latour, 1993: 13-29) Let me focus on Latour's account of this briefly. In his critique of Shapin and Schaffer's Leviathan and the Air-Pump, he notes an asymmetry in their account. While Shapin and Schaffer demonstrate how "nature" is constructed by both Hobbes and Boyle, they neglect to show the reciprocal construction of society. Hobbes and Boyle both have a certain vision of society which is bound up with their science. This in turn transforms the society in which their science is performed. Shapin and Schaffer's asymmetry runs throughout many of the texts of the SCOT group. This poses problems for using their scheme to understand what technologies of the self mean.²

While Latour's critique of the SCOT group is useful, his formulation of actor-network theory does not fit this project. Latour has produced two key theoretical texts: Science in Action and We Have Never Been Modern. The first presents an overview of the descriptive aspects of actor-network theory, especially of how technoscientific networks develop. He does an excellent job

²The point I do take away from the social constructivists is the contingent nature of the meanings ascribed to artifacts. While this is not explicitly dealt with in the course of this essay, it should be kept in mind.

exploring how society and nature are outcomes of work and not the precondition of technoscience. Unfortunately with Latour's formulation, one gets trapped into a framework of Machievellian megalomaniacs (actors) that seem to be bent on taking over the world (enrolling every possible ally). This seems to exhibit the very worst of “late” capitalism.³ Capitalism in its current form seeks to commodify everything, leaving no region untouched. This logic seems to underlie Latour's Science in Action. What becomes disturbing is that this book reads like a user-guide to surviving in such a world. (Latour, 1987)

Then there is We Have Never Been Modern. This book attempts to take a much more normative stance. Latour extends actor-network theory into questions of modernity/postmodernity and proposes a fascinating route out of this malaise. He proposes that modernity relies on dividing the world into Nature and Society and then establishes a set of “guarantees” that preserve this work of “purification” (the division of things between the Nature and Society poles). The trouble with this setup is that it produces “things” in the Middle Kingdom between these two poles, but cannot acknowledge their existence. Postmodernism is just one in a long series of attempts to make this scheme work. Latour proposes that the modern project is fundamentally flawed and cannot be attained. Latour derives two conclusions from this. First, since the modern framework is an impossible idealization, we can never be modern. Second, since we can never be modern, we should stop trying. Latour concludes this book with attempt to reconstruct himself as a post-humanist democrat who wants to give a voice to

³I deal more directly with the recent changes in capitalism in Chapter 3, in my discussion of postmodernism. I avoid the term “late capitalism” in favor of “flexible accumulation.” This is due to the remarkable ability of capitalism to survive its contradictions. The term “late capitalism” seems to imply that we could be through with capitalism soon. I am not so optimistic.

silenced actors. He dreams of a “parliament of things” in which the members of the Middle Kingdom are acknowledged openly and honestly. Latour does little to describe what this parliament looks like, since it will come about once we have rid ourselves completely of the myth of modernity. (Latour, 1993)

The Latour of We Have Never Been Modern is much closer to the framework I need. As noted above, he offers a wonderful critique of the SCOT group. He also develops a battery of tools for understanding how the meanings of artifacts reflect back on the users. Yet there is a tension between these two theoretical texts. Despite the normative and almost uplifting tone of We Have Never Been Modern, Latour still relies on the methodology of Science in Action. He proposes no way out of the capitalist logic of the earlier text. This methodology obscures as much as it reveals. While this project is set in a “late” capitalist regime, I believe that assuming everyone to be Machievellian megalomaniac overshadows the core appeal of the SUV.

With all this in mind, Latour is still valuable for this project. Throughout both texts discussed he continually makes the point that in constructing artifacts, we form both society and nature. This is useful, since it gets around the difficulties we saw with the SCOT group. Also, while the tools that uses in We Have Never Been Modern are problematic, some of his conclusions are not. More specifically, the proposition that we have never been modern will play a significant role in Chapter 3. This proposition all fits well with the pragmatic critique of modern philosophy, which will be developed more below.

The framework that Don Ihde develops in Technology and the Lifeworld is closer to what I am looking for. Ihde attempts to analyze technology from a hermenutical and phenomenological perspective. He incorporates the work of phenomenologists such as Husserl, Heidegger, and

Merleau-Ponty into his philosophy of technology. He shows how humans interact with various artifacts and how our lifeworld has become technologically textured. While his work is very provocative, Ihde has one very large problem. Throughout the entire book, he always insists on a firm boundary between humans and technology. He wants to use the term “technology” strictly for material objects. This leads him into a number of difficulties. One example of this is his discussion of writing. (Ihde, 1990: 80-89) Due to his demarcation between humans and technology, speech ends up *not* being a technology, while writing *is*. While there are significant differences between writing and speech, the boundary between the two seems to be murky at best. (Ong, 1982) Especially within our own culture, writing and speech seem to be bound up together, and any firm demarcation of this sort I do not think holds. So, due to Ihde's insistence on the line between humans and technologies, he is of no direct use to the project. He presents no tools for even understanding an idea like “technologies of the self.”

A more promising approach might come from Donna Haraway. In several essays in her Simians, Cyborgs, and Women, she develops the idea of cyborg imagery.⁴ A cyborg is a fusion (or confusion) of technology and animal. It fits into neither realm neatly. The cyborg involves both organic and mechanical parts to create a self. But this is not a coherent self as described in modernist discourse. “The cyborg is a creature in a post-gender world; it has no truck with bisexuality, pre-oedipal symbiosis, unalienated labour, or other seductions to organic wholeness through a final appropriation of all the powers of the parts into a higher unity.” (Haraway, 1991: 150) In typical modern thought about the self, there is an attempt to represent it as a coherent, unified entity (consider Descartes’ *cogito*). The

⁴The best statement about cyborgs is “A Cyborg Manifesto” in Haraway, 1991: 149-81.

cyborg sees no need for such discourse. It exists outside the bounds of such thought. Haraway goes on to explain that the cyborg is outcome of the process of individuation in Western society, but the cyborg transgresses these boundaries.

From the start, the cyborg is a creature that exists at intersections. The (con)fusion of machine and (wo)man defies traditional modernist ontologies. There is a typical assumption that Society and Nature are two separate poles that never meet. The cyborg brings together both these poles. Its construction is part Nature, part Society, but at home in neither. The cyborg is an unnatural creation. It marks the end of nature in some sense. Society, having conquered the “natural” world, turns against itself and begins to conquer itself with the same tools, technology and science. This violation of Nature and Society forces us to reconsider our older ontological positions. The cyborg challenges our typical ideas of being, of (wo)man and machine as separate categories.

At first glance, this might seem to be exactly what I am trying to find to analyze the relationship between cars and humans. Unfortunately, the way that Haraway ends up formulating cyborgs makes it an unworkable concept. I find several problems with Haraway’s brand of the cyborg theorizing. First, it is too bound up with images of the Cold War, especially Reagan’s version. This prevents one from seeing the certain interconnections between technology and identity before this event. In a similar vein, her focus on the “gadgety-ness” of the cyborg also poses problems. She is principally concerned with the mingling of flesh and metal, and the ways these minglings determine identity. In this respect, she has yet to overcome the more common sense definition of technology. The problem that concerns us is

more subtle in some ways. In the relationships we are concerned with, there is no fusion of (wo)man and machine in the way Haraway describes.

One could use some of the post-Haraway cyborg theorizing to compensate for this, but this ends up obscuring as much as it reveals. This arises because of the heavily science-fiction overtones. These metaphors might be illuminating when analyzing the connections between, say, biotechnology and identity. For larger technologies, it begins to unravel. Such work takes on a bizarre and surreal tone, which makes some of these issues appear more distant than they should. While these might be strange times, science-fiction metaphors have yet to entirely connect with many peoples experiences. Despite these troubles, there are still parts of cyborg theorizing that will be useful. As noted in the introduction, the concept of the “end of nature” plays an important role in Chapter 3.⁵ Also, Haraway’s related point about the demise of organic wholeness plays a part in my discussion of Peirce.⁶

Due to the inadequacies of these approaches, I have found that a pragmatic bricolage is the best theoretical perspective for this project. In what follows, I draw together Peirce’s theory of signs, some of Dewey and Mead’s reflections on selfhood, and Pitt’s philosophy of technology and Foucault’s speculations on technology in an attempt to create a model of technologies of the self. I begin with an overview of Peirce’s writings relevant to the topic. Peirce’s theory of signs allows for a very fine grained analysis of the self. From this point, I move to a discussion of Pitt’s philosophy of technology. I

⁵The “end of nature” is not the exclusive province of these theorists. A number of other scholars have engaged in such discussions. For an overview, see Luke, 1996 and Luke, 1997. I have singled out Haraway as being an articulate spokeswoman for this position.

⁶ For a slice of Haraway-inspired cyborg theorizing, see The Cyborg Handbook (Gray, 1995). This book covers a wide range of cyborg topics, including the history of the cyborg and its theorists, biotechnology and other sites.

then turn to Dewey and Mead for expansion of Peirce's idea of a "world without within." I conclude by drawing together all these elements so as to create an adequate model for technologies of the self.

Peirce's theory of Signs

One of the key terms in this essay will be "semiosis." As noted before, I intend to exhibit the intertwining of the self and technology using Peirce's semiotics. In this framework, both technology and selfhood will be brought under the concept of semiosis. Floyd Merrell characterizes semiosis as "a term used by Peirce to designate the general phenomena of sign processes." (Merrell, 1996: 304) Peirce himself develops a relatively clear definition of semiosis in "A Survey of Pragmatism." He states:

By "semiosis" I mean... an action, or an influence, which is, or involves, a coöperation of *three* subjects, such as a sign, its object, and its interpretant, this tri-relative influence not being in any way resolvable into actions between pairs. (CP: 5.484)

As we shall see below, the sign process is a triadic relationship. Whenever these signs are in action, we are enmeshed in semiosis. For a Sign to function as a Sign, it must involve all three parts: sign (representamen), object, interpretant. The importance of this will become clear throughout the course of this essay. What is important to keep in mind is that the act of using signs, or operating in system of signs, grounds us within semiosis. The importance of this will also become clear throughout the course of this essay.

To introduce the concept of the Sign, I want turn to Peirce's "Some Consequences of Four Incapacities." After exploring this early formulation of the Sign, I turn to a later formulation. "Some Consequences of Four Incapacities" followed "Questions Concerning Certain Capacities Claimed for Man," both published in 1868 in the Journal of Speculative Philosophy. This first essay lays out a devastating attack on Cartesianism. Peirce boils down

Cartesianism to four capacities. These capacities include: the ability for universal doubt, the judge of truth is the individual, all reasoning is done as “a single thread,” and that there is something unanalyzable on which we base our philosophy. (CP: 5.264) It should be noted that when Peirce speaks of “Cartesian philosophy,” he brings the whole modern tradition under fire. After listing the 4 major tenets of Descartes, Peirce states “in some, or all, of these respects, most modern philosophers have been, in effect, Cartesians.” (CP: 5.256) These tenets flow throughout most major modern philosophers. While some might emphasize different aspects of these capacities, virtually all have used these as a starting place.

Through his criticism of these capacities, Peirce develops his four incapacities. These are:

1. We have no power of Introspection, but all knowledge of the internal world is derived by hypothetical reasoning from our knowledge of external facts.
2. We have no power of Intuition, but every cognition is determined logically by previous cognitions.
3. We have no power of thinking without signs.
4. We have no conception of the absolutely incognizable. (CP: 5.265)

Each of the incapacities plays an important role in the development of Peirce's theory of signs and the pragmatic movement as a whole. While I will make reference to all four incapacities, I mainly focus on Peirce's discussion of the third incapacity.

After developing some of the implications of the first and second incapacities, Peirce moves on to the third. He defines a sign as:

Now a sign has, as such, three references: 1st, it is a sign *to* some thought which interprets it; 2nd, it is a sign *for* some object in that thought it is equivalent; 3rd, it is a sign, *in* some respect or quality, which brings it into connection with its object. (CP: 5.283)

These three “references” form the basis for Peirce’s notorious semiotic triad. The semiotic triad consists of the representamen (sign), object and interpretant.⁷ The representamen is a sign in a narrow sense. It is something that stands in place of something (the object), for something else (interpretant). The representamen stands in for the object. It is never an exact representation of that object (at least not till the end of inquiry), but something that stands in for that object in thought. It is the interpretant that draws the meaning from the representamen and brings it into connection with that object.

After this initial definition, Peirce begins to explore the implications of the thought-sign. His first conclusion falls out of his understanding of the second and third incapacities. There is a continual flow of Signs; this is our “train of thought.” There are hundreds of things in our mind, but we are only conscious of a fraction of these things. Peirce makes this point clear when he states:

But if the train of thought ceases by gradually dying out, it freely follows its own law of association as long as it lasts, and there is no moment at which there is a thought belonging to this series, subsequently to which there is not a thought which interprets or repeats it. There is no exception, therefore, to the law that every thought-sign is translated or interpreted in a subsequent one, unless it be that all thought comes to an abrupt and final end in death. (CP: 5.284)

Each sign is interpreted and then becomes a sign for further interpretation or translation. The interpretant from a previous triad becomes the ground for the representamen for the next. This is where the second incapacity comes

⁷In an attempt to make clear the narrow and broad meanings of the word "sign" from here on I will use "sign" to designate the narrow meaning of sign (“sign” is equivalent to “representamen”) and "Sign" to designate the broader meaning (the complete semiotic triad). I have *not* revised the quotes from Peirce to agree with this notation. Also, all italics and other notation are in the original, unless otherwise noted.

into play. There is no Sign that does not flow from previous Signs. There is no Intuition, that is, a thought that comes “out of the blue.” While our train of thought might be interrupted for some reason (a crash outside or the sudden realization of a pressing deadline), such thoughts are not spontaneous in the sense that they come from no where.

Peirce then goes on to address some of the issues involved with the object of the Sign. He asks:

For what does the thought-sign stand- what does it name- what is its *suppositum*? The outward thing, undoubtedly, when a real outward thing is thought of. But still, as the thought is determined by a previous thought of the same object, it only refers to the thing through denoting this previous thought. (CP: 5.285)

To illustrate this point, Peirce uses the example of thinking about Toussaint (an early 19th Century Haitian general and political figure). We might first think of Toussaint as a *negro*. From this thought-sign we come to realize that a *negro* is also a *man*. “The subsequent thought, *man*, refers to the outward thing by being predicated of that previous thought, *negro*, which has been had of that thing.” (CP: 5.285) If it is then thought that Toussaint is also a general, we would then think that this man, this negro, was a general. In all these cases, the object, Toussaint, remains the same. It is the meaning attributed to this sign that changes throughout the thought process.

After this discussion of the object, Peirce considers the interpretant. Peirce states:

The thought-sign stands for its object in the respect which it is thought; that is to say, this respect is the immediate object of consciousness in the thought, or, in other words, it is the thought itself, or at least what the thought is thought to be in the subsequent thought to which it is a sign. (CP: 5.286)

The interpretant gives meaning to an object and a representamen. The significance of the first two terms is determined by the last. This meaning

becomes the immediate object of thought. It lays the ground for the next thought-sign. The meaning of the sign and object are translated or interpreted and then the triad is complete. The completed triad, or Sign, is the thought that is held in mind. This completed Sign then becomes the place where the next thought picks up (consider the example of Toussaint).

The phenomenology and a later formulation

Let us now turn to another formulation by Peirce of the Sign, dating from 1910. The strength of this second definition is that it focuses attention on the relationship of Peirce's categories (or modes of being) and his semiotics. Let me digress briefly in an attempt to summarize the categories. In "The Architecture of Theories" Peirce gives a very succinct summary of the categories:

First is the conception of being or existing as independent of anything else. Second is the conception of being relative to, the conception of reaction with, something else. Third is the conception of mediation whereby a first and second are brought together. (CP: 6.32)

Firstness is concerned with quality. This is because the idea of a quality like "red" can exist apart from anything else. When I encounter "red" in "the world" it will be embodied in some object, but the idea of "red" can exist apart from anything else. Secondness is "brute fact." He proposes this because a fact is relational to some degree, though not in a relativist sense. A fact suggests that the world resists someone's will and this implies a certain relation between two (or more) things. Consider me pushing against a wall. The wall resists my every effort to knock it down. This is an instance of Secondness, since there is a relation between myself and the wall. Peirce describes Thirdness as that which brings Firstness and Secondness together. An instance of Secondness as Secondness exists without law; it is brute force. But if I continue to push against the wall and it continues to resist my will,

Thirddness must be involved. There is a law governing my interactions with this wall. Modes of inference (deduction, induction, abduction) are Thirddness, as are laws and “generals.”⁸

With the categories in mind, let us now turn to a second definition of the Sign. It states:

A Sign, or *Representamen*, is a First which stands in such a genuine triadic relation to a Second, called its *Object*, as to be capable of determining a Third, called its *Interpretant*, to assume the same triadic relation to its Object in which it stands itself to the same object. (**B**: 99-100)

So it appears that the semiotic triad is one of the most prevalent ways the categories manifest themselves in our consciousness. Representamen is analogous to Firstness (qualities). Object is analogous to Secondness (brute fact). Interpretant is analogous to Thirddness (that which brings a First and Second together). As we will see in our discussion of the three trichotomies, the categories play a very important role on several levels.

Peirce gives an example which helps to elucidate this definition and the semiotic triad as a whole.

Two men are standing on the seashore looking out to sea. One of them says to the other, ‘That vessel there carries no freight at all, but only passengers.’ Now, if the other, himself, sees no vessel, the first information he derives from the remark has for its Object the part of the sea that he does see, and informs him that a person with sharper eyes than his, or more trained in looking for such things, can see a vessel there; and then, that vessel having been thus introduced to his acquaintance, he is prepared to receive information about it that is carries passengers exclusively. (**B**: 101)

For the second person, the one who does not see the ship, the representamen is the statement “That vessel there carries no freight at all, but only passengers.” The object is the part of the sea on which he focuses. Between

⁸For two extended discussions of Peirce’s categories, see “The Principles of Phenomenology” (**B**: 74-97) or “Lecture Two: Phenomenology or the Doctrine of Categories” (**L**: 123-165).

these two parts of the Sign, he draws the interpretation that the speaker has either better trained or sharper eyes. This interpretation is the interpretant, which endows meaning to the Sign. It then puts this man, a semiotic agent, in a position to gather more information (that the vessel he cannot see carries only passengers). And the triads are off and running.

Three trichotomies of Signs

Peirce proposes that Signs can be divided into three trichotomies. This should come as no surprise. Every Sign contains a representamen, an object, and an interpretant. Within each of these categories, there are further divisions. A particular representamen, in addition to being a First, might partake of some aspect of Firstness, Secondness, or Thirdness. Likewise, an object or interpretant will also partake in the categories, on top of that which it is already a part of.

I want to introduce the three trichotomies since several of the divisions play a significant role down the road. These trichotomies allow Peirce to further refine his theory of signs. Peirce goes some distance with his formulation of the Sign coming out of “Some Consequences of Four Incapacities.” He can go even deeper with the three trichotomies. These trichotomies allow Peirce to further specify in what sort of Sign a thought consists. In Peirce’s account, there are nine different types of Signs, each exhibiting a different behavior. Once Peirce had developed this typology, he was in a position to say that “all thoughts are signs” and “here is what sort of sign this is and how it works.” I will follow Peirce’s analysis of the three trichotomies because it allows me to engage in a more detailed investigation of the self.⁹

⁹While interesting, I will not go into Peirce’s 10 classes of signs since it has little bearing on the task at hand. For more on the 10 classes of signs, see **B**: 115-119.

The first trichotomy is grounded in Firstness, since a representamen is a First. This trichotomy explains the various structures that representamen take on. The first division consists of:

A *Qualisign* is a quality that is a sign... A *Sinsign* is an actual existent thing or event which is a sign. It can only be so through its qualities; so that it involves a qualisign, or rather several qualisigns... A *Legisign* is a law that is a Sign. Every conventional sign is a legisign [but not conversely]. It is not a single object, but a general type which, it has been agreed, shall be significant. (B: 101-102)

While each of these is a particular form of a representamen, they each “demonstrate” this differently. A qualisign is a First that partakes in Firstness. It is pure quality, whereas a sinsign is an existent thing that functions as a sign. Its functioning as a sign makes it a First, but its representation of an actual thing leads it to partake in Secondness. The same will be the case for a Legisign and Thirdness.

It is also in this discussion where he brings up *Replicas*. A Replica is the actual application of a legisign, its manifestation. Since every legisign is a general type or rule, the actual use of that rule will be a Replica. “Each single instance of it [legisign] is a Replica. The Replica is a sinsign. Thus, every Legisign requires Sinsigns.” (B: 102) This is because the sinsign(s) is (are) the manifestation (the actual existent) of the legisign. The sinsign is the object (Secondness) of the legisign (a law or Thirdness).

The second trichotomy concerns Objects, so these all consist in some mode of Secondness. What differs in each is the manifestation of this Secondness. It is broken down as follows:

An *Icon* is a sign which refers to the Object that it denotes merely by virtue of characters of its own, and which it possesses, just the same, whether any such Object actually exists or not.... An *Index* is a sign which refers to the Object that it denotes by virtue of being really affected by that Object... A *Symbol* is a sign which refers to the Object that it denotes by virtue of a law, usually by an association of general

ideas, which operates to cause the Symbol to be interpreted as referring to that Object. (B: 102)

In another attempt at a definition, Peirce states:

The Icon has no dynamical connection with the object it represents; it simply happens that its qualities resemble those of that object, and excite analogous sensations in the mind for which it is a likeness. But it really stands unconnected with them. The Index is physically connected with its object; they make an organic pair, but the interpreting mind has nothing to do with this connection, except remarking it, after it is established. The symbol is connected with its object by virtue of the idea of the symbol-using mind, without which no such connection would exist. (B: 114)

Within Peirce's discussion of the second trichotomy, he goes into greater detail about the nature of icons, indices, and symbols. He also explores further subdivisions within the second trichotomy. I will limit the present discussion to the last group in this division, the symbol

Symbols are connected to objects, but their meanings are determined by a set of rules or conventions. If there were no interpretant, the symbol would have no meaning and would cease to be a sign. In this way, a symbol might be an object, but its significance is determined by the interpretant (a Third). Many things fall into the class of symbols. Words, sentences, books, and texts of all sorts are all symbols. Peirce explains:

All words, sentences, books, and other conventional signs are Symbols. We speak of writing or pronouncing the word "man"; but it is only a *replica*, or embodiment of the word, that is pronounced or written. The word itself has no existence although it has a real being, *consisting in* the fact that existents *will* conform to it. (B: 112)

The writing down of a word is a replica of that symbol, much in the same way any actual occurrence of a legisign is a sinsign. The word (as symbol) has no existence except that existents conform to the symbol when it is brought into play. Peirce makes the distinction between genuine and degenerate symbols. "A *genuine* symbol is a symbol that has a general meaning." (B: 112) A

genuine symbol will cover a class of objects. Such genuine symbols will includes words like “man” or “automobile,” in the sense that it covers a number of things and they all “obey” the symbol. There are two kinds of degenerate symbols. “The *Singular Symbol* whose Object is an existent individual, and which signifies only such characters as that individual may realize; and the *Abstract Symbol* whose only Object is a character.” (B: 112) An example of a singular symbol is an individual person, since it is only a single object. An example of an abstract symbol would be a characteristic like “power,” since it is not attached to any set of objects really.

The power of symbols is that they grow. Words take on new meanings. The term “man” means more now than it once did, as does a term like “electricity.” “Symbols grow. They come into being by development out of other signs, particularly from icons, or from mixed signs partaking of the nature of icons and symbols.” (B: 114) The resemblance between an icon and its object gives ground for new symbols to develop. As noted before, symbols also grow out of older ones. It is the quality that symbols grow that concerns us presently.

The final trichotomy is concerned chiefly with the interpretant. This means that they are a Third, but will partake in Firstness, Secondness, or Thirdness. Peirce divides this up into:

Rheme: a Sign which is for its Interpretant, is a Sign of Qualitative Possibility, that is, is understood as representing such and such a kind of possible object... *Dicisign*: a Sign, which, for its Interpretant, is a sign of actual existence... *Argument*: a Sign, for its Interpretant, is a Sign of law. (B: 103)

An example of a rheme is a word. For the interpretant, a word is a sign of something that might possibly exist, but the rheme does not contain any information as to whether that sign does exist. Consider the difference

between the words "Pegasus" and "man." Just as words, they can be interpreted as possibility, but there is no import as to which actually exists. A dicisign does make a claim about existence though. It can be thought of a proposition, like "man exists" or "Pegasus does not exist." Lastly an argument can be considered a text. It is an interlocking series of words and propositions that leads one to make a judgment. The argument is the only sign of which the interpretant is "determined." By following through "the law that passage from all such premisses to such conclusions tends to the truth." (B:117-118) Of this trichotomy, arguments are the most significant.

Floyd Merrell has proposed an alternate way of understanding this trichotomy. He has argued that we can think of the rheme-dicisign-argument triad in a different terms, which changes the metaphors slightly. He translates this triad into more contemporary terminology. He proposes that word-sentence-text is equivalent to rheme-dicisign-argument. (Merrell, 1997: 53) To move from arguments to texts is not that far. Both are sums of propositions or sentences, which in turn are derived from terms or words. While argument and text are similar, the metaphorical thrust of text is different. When we think of a good argument, we think of a coherent whole. On the other hand, texts do not seem to be necessarily cohesive, regardless of being good or bad. Although I will continue to use the word "argument," I will interpret arguments as texts and use this wider understanding.

Man≈Sign/Self≈Sign

At this point, our discussion seems far removed from cars and other things that concern me in this essay. To show the relevance of Peirce's semiotics to this project, I want to return to "Some Consequences of Four Incapacities." At the close of that essay he argues that man is simply one Sign among others. He starts this section with "we must conclude that the mind is

a sign developing according to the laws of inference. What distinguishes a man from a word? There is a distinction doubtless.” (CP: 5.313) After exploring a number of possibilities, Peirce declares that there is no distinction between a man and a word. He sums up the discussion with the following statement:

The man-sign acquires information, and comes to mean more than he did before. But so do words. Does not electricity mean more now than it did in the days of Franklin? Man makes the word, and the word means nothing which the man has not made it mean, and that only to some man. But since man can only think by means of words or other external symbols, these might turn round and say: “You mean nothing which we have not taught you, and then only so far as you address some word as the interpretant of your thought.” In fact, therefore, men and words reciprocally educate each other; each increase of a man’s information involves and is involved by, a corresponding increase in a word’s information. (CP: 5.313)

This passage and those surrounding it present a wealth of information regarding Peirce’s understanding regarding “man.” It would appear that man is merely the sum of the signs he uses. “Thus my language is the sum total of myself.” (CP: 5.314) The notation for this will be $\text{man} \approx \text{sign}$, since the self is approximately equivalent to the Signs used.¹⁰

In Peirce’s discussion of the $\text{man} \approx \text{sign}$, there seems to be an ambiguity. This rests on his use of the term “man.” On one level there are passages where it seems clear he is talking about man as a particular entity (as in Andrew, David, etc.). There is another level, though, where he seems to be concerned with man as a class of entities (a “general”). The ambiguous nature of this discussion comes out, in part, because in the previous paragraph Peirce discusses the existence of generals. He points out that there is “reality” to the abstraction called “man.” The ambiguity rests on whether

¹⁰The notation of $\text{man} \approx \text{sign}$ and $\text{self} \approx \text{sign}$ is taken from Floyd Merrell. For more on his interpretation of these Signs, see Merrell, 1997.

there is a difference between the two levels. Could this analysis apply to both man as a particular and man as a general? I believe that the answer is yes. Since man is a Sign among others, then there is no reason that there could not be two Signs comprising “man.” The first Sign would be that of particular men; the other being “man” as a general.

To take into account this ambiguity between “man as particular” and “man as general,” I will introduce a distinction. When referring to “man as particular,” I will use the term “self≈sign.” When referring to “man as general,” I will use the term “man≈sign.” With “self≈sign,” this captures the proper sense of a particular; while “man≈sign” captures the sense of a general.

One implication we can draw from this immediately is that the self≈sign is a symbol. Words, as Peirce defines them, are symbols. Thus, the self being a collection of words (and related Signs) is also symbol. This symbol would encompass the other symbols that the self uses. This would be the overarching Sign that draws together the others. The self≈sign is a node around which other Signs develop and accrue meaning. It becomes the definition of the semiotic agent.¹¹

This point should not be seen as positing some form of essence to the self≈sign though. Symbols grow. There is no fundamental “thing” at the bottom of the self≈sign, at least at this point in history. This point does raise the question of what sort of symbol the self≈sign is? The choices are term (rheme), proposition (dicisign) or argument. Using Peirce’s discussions from a number of places, the leading contender would be an argument. Peirce proposes that the universe itself is an argument.

¹¹Following from the point that the “man≈sign is a general” and the “self≈sign is a particular,” and that both these are symbols, we see that the man≈sign is a genuine symbol, while the self≈sign is a singular symbol.

The universe is a vast representamen [Sign], a great symbol of God's purpose, working out its conclusions in living realities. Now every symbol, must have organically attached to it, its Indices of Reaction and its Icons of Qualities; and as such part as these reactions and these qualities play in an argument, that they of course play in the universe, that universe being precisely an argument. (L: 201. The parenthetical remark is mine)

From this conception of the universe, it is not hard to imagine that the self≈sign being part of this argument, or possibly a sub-argument contained within the larger universe≈sign.

The self≈sign conceived of as an argument would consist of a semiotic agent working out his or her "conclusions" over the course of lifetime. The other symbols playing the role of terms and propositions of an argument. As Peirce notes with respect to the universe:

the Universe as an argument is necessarily a great work of art, a great poem, - for every fine argument is a poem of a symphony, - just as every true poem is a sound argument. But let us compare it with a painting, - with an impressionist seashore piece, - then every Quality in a premiss is one of the elementary colored particles of the painting; they are all meant to go together to make up the intended Quality that belongs to the whole as a whole. (L: 201)

There are several revealing things in this analogy that Peirce draws. While not definitively argued, we can see why one might think of the self≈sign as a poem, symphony, or painting. In each of these artistic creations, each quality and reaction should be crucial. They are drawn together through various relations to create some whole. Each self≈sign is comprised of any number of qualities and reactions brought together through relations. There is some sense of order or law to the self≈sign, which arises from the self≈sign being an argument.

The Signs comprising this self≈sign are numerous. There are the indices and icons that form the body and the habits that the body exhibits. Then there are the words that become associated with the self≈sign. These

would include names and adjectives. The self≈sign would also include the sum total of the interpretants the agent uses, since these interpretants will lead to action. The standard interpretants the agent forms creates the basis of their habits. I will have more to say about habits and the semiotic agent below. There will also be some slight refinement of the terminology.

Let me briefly comment on two things. Throughout all of Peirce's work there is a strong religious bent, which informs his teleological view of the world. As I noted in the Introduction, both Peirce's religious overtones and his teleology will be left aside throughout this essay. I am also reluctant to use the term "organic" in describing the relations of indices, icons and symbols, at least when focusing on the nature of the self≈sign. Especially within the context of this study, organic wholeness that Peirce refers to is a myth. While there are connections between the Signs comprising the self, I do not want to characterize the relations as organic. This is one point at which I believe that Donna Haraway is correct. While I do not go as far as she with respect to the concept of fragmentary identities, I accept her critique of the dream of organic wholeness.

This point about the self≈sign being an argument will inform the understanding of the self that I use throughout this essay. Several things fall out from my comments above though. First off, whereas Peirce sees the universe as driven by some sort of ordering principle (i.e., God), I do not. While I do think we can move from the Universe as argument to self as argument, I do not believe the teleology Peirce's associates with the argument as a Sign goes along. Instead, I will propose the "conclusion" self≈sign as argument is undetermined until the end of life. I am also unsure whether we can really call any life-argument/text sound or unsound.

Second, considering my rejection of organic wholeness, there are ramifications for the concept of self≈sign as argument. With the impressionist seashore piece or a symphony by Brahms or Beethoven, there is a theme of deep interconnection. Let me focus just on the symphonic example. Throughout any of Brahms' symphonies there is a sense of underlying connection, be it through continuity in themes, key or mood. At least with respect to contemporary conceptions of self I doubt this holds. In contrast to Brahms, I propose that Alfred Schnittke is the composer who best articulates my point here. Most of his works, symphonic or otherwise, involves the radical juxtaposition of styles, harmonies and forms. While any given piece will form a whole, it is not a whole in terms of one style, key, or melody. In this way, the self≈sign becomes a constellation. The self≈sign involves a juxtaposition of different elements and habits that does not necessarily boil down to one principle or motif.

What is technology?

Now that I have developed one key part of my analytic framework, I want to turn towards technology. I basically will follow Joseph Pitt's philosophy of technology, for reasons that will become clear below. I attempt a fusion of Pitt's work and Foucault's speculations on technologies of the self in the later parts of this chapter. At this juncture, I simply want to describe Pitt's definition and model of technology.

Pitt's technologies

In a forthcoming text on the philosophy of technology, Pitt develops a pragmatic understanding of how people interact with technology on an epistemological level. One of the strengths of his program is the definition of technology he develops. He states "this relationship between us and our tools and technologies is symbiotic, mutually nurturing and reinforcing. In my

view, technology is not a 'thing' in the world, it is *humanity at work* in the world." (Pitt, 1988: 448) Cars, planes and bombs are just as much technologies as geometries, legal systems, and sign systems. Humanity doing things "in the world" constitutes technology. Those constructions we use to navigate through the world, artifactual or not, are technologies.¹²

Pitt begins the discussion of his model by drawing connections between tools, institutions and decision-making procedures. This presents a way into a more intricate model. He proposes:

Common to tools, institutions, and decision-making procedures alike is the simple process of transforming some input into an output... Following this line of thought, in the effort to provide a context for the definition: "technology is humanity at work", leads to a model of technology as an input/output transformation process. (Pitt, Forthcoming: 22)

From here Pitt goes on to explore the nature of first-order and second-order transformations. "Decisions are first-order transformations. The result of a first-order transformation may be either another first-order transformation, i.e., a decision to make another decision, or a second-order transformation, i.e., a decision to create a tool of some sort." (Pitt, Forthcoming: 22) As Pitt reminds us throughout his texts, a tool is not limited to a mechanical-mechanism. Instead, a tool is a mechanism in general; a way of transforming some input into an output. There is no need for a technology to be an artifact in a physical sense. The importance of first-order transformers arises out of the need to firmly root technology in the social. The development of any tool will rely on choices being made by people. Pitt makes no specification as to where these decisions take place. A first-order transformation might take

¹²I will limit the term "artifact" to the more conventional definition of technology, that is some large man-made physical device, usually made of metal. This is simply to ease discussion.

place in a boardroom or a laboratory, though location will matter in the sorts of decisions made.

After developing an understanding of these first-order transformation, Pitt begins his analysis of second-order transformers.

A second-order transformation involves a constructed device. An oil refinery performs a second-order transformation. So does a legal system. They are the results of first-order transformations in which decisions were made using available knowledge, etc., to build a refinery, to adjudicate conflict fairly, or to construct a system to measure special relations. (Pitt, Forthcoming: 22)

These second-order transformations are what we typically think of as technologies. It is important to note two things though. First, the outcome of a second-order transformation does not have to be some physical artifact. Geometry and legal systems are second-order transformations, they are also technologies, by Pitt's definition. Second, the first-order and second-order transformations are all part of the technological process. We cannot isolate technology in mechanical-mechanisms or in all second-order transformations. Both orders of transformation processes are part of technology.

There is one last piece in Pitt's model of "technology as humanity at work." This consists of assessment or feed-back.

The third and final component of our model of technology is assessment feedback. Technology assessment is a special kind of decision-making in which the effects of implementing decisions of the first kind... are illuminated by means of a feedback mechanism which makes it possible to upgrade the knowledge base for further decision-making. (Pitt, Forthcoming: 24)

Where as we can clearly see the nature of first-order and second-order transformations, feedback is more complicated. This statement of Pitt's is both descriptive and normative. It is descriptive in pointing out that typically there are mechanisms for finding how a second-order transformation is

working. Not surprisingly, Pitt does not inform us in a general way of how these operate. This is a matter of empirical investigation, since the nature of the feedback mechanism will depend on the situation in which the technology is embedded. This statement operates in a normative way by pointing out that there should be feedback mechanisms so that the creators of a technology can revise the transformation processes and be held accountable for their failures and improve on their successes.

Pitt's model of technology has the fluidity I need for exploring these transactional and transformative relationships. As mentioned a number of times, technologies are not limited to physical artifacts. This forms my core understanding of technology. It breaks with the SCOT group in that balances between artifacts and their creators. Both play an important role and through the use of Pitt's model, we can understand the relationships between society and artifacts. It also breaks with Haraway in making technology vital for understanding who we are since the development of language and hammers.

Self in a world without within

As explored above, Pitt proposes that technologies are "humanity at work." I will use this as a starting place for developing a pragmatic understanding of technologies of self. While there seems to be an intuitive connection between Foucault's "technologies" and Pitt's definition, it is not obvious how these two can be linked together. At issue is the question: what prevents methods of self-transformation from being considered "humanity at play?" Working from a traditional philosophical conception of "selfhood," we believe that the mental region is private, isolated, and autonomous. If this is the case, then we are prevented from calling modes of self-transformation "technologies." This is because attempts to "refashion" the self operate within a private, autonomous realm. It cannot be considered

“humanity at work in the world,” since this mental domain is not part of the “world” of everyday objects.

We can solve this dilemma by rejecting this philosophy of consciousness that has informed much of Western thought. Peirce made gestures in this direction in “Some Consequences of Four Incapacities,” which is why his critique of modern philosophy was introduced above. The four incapacities he introduces attempt to overthrow the Cartesianism of the dominate philosophy of consciousness. What this rejection does is create a “world without within.” Mind, self, spirit or whatever-you-want-to-call-it is moved into the world of objects and subjects. This position attempts to be neither realist nor idealist. (Hickman, 1990: 31) While the pragmatic move to reject Cartesian inspired philosophy has many ramifications, I will limit myself to questions concerning technology and identity.

In what follows, I will briefly trace out how Dewey and Mead rework the line between the mental and physical worlds in a way so that we can make sense of technologies of the self. The goal is to show how Pitt’s and Foucault’s technologies can be brought together through Dewey and Mead. I will not engage in a rigorous defense of Dewey and Mead, since a proper argument for this “world without within” would require an assault on the whole of modern philosophy.

Environments and organisms

In a brief entry for A Cyclopedia of Education, John Dewey explores the connection between environment and organism. While these two concepts play an important role throughout much of Dewey’s work, this entry gives a succinct account of his use of them. He begins by stating:

These terms are strictly correlative as are brother and sister, buyer and seller, stimulus and response... Life is a process which includes the environment as well as organism within itself; we are apt to connect

life with the organism and not with the environment, this only means that its connection with the former is direct, and with the latter indirect, or by means of the organism. (Dewey, 1978: 437-8)

Any given organism is united with the environment that sustains it. The two terms cannot be completely separated in any meaningful way. From this passage we also see that organism and environment are both subsumed under the overarching idea of “life.” In another entry, Dewey notes “the sum total of functions, in their reciprocal adjustment to one another, constitute life.” (Dewey, 1978: 467) Where a function is understood as “any process, sufficiently complex to involve an arrangement or coordination of minor processes, which fulfills a specific end in such a way as to conserve itself.” (Dewey, 1978: 466) So life is not limited just to the organism, but to the environment that surrounds it (though indirectly).

These definitions of life, environment and organism serve as a way into solving the dilemma described above. In the first few paragraphs of Dewey’s entry on “Environment and Organism,” he makes no specification as to what sort of life or organism is being referred to. As he goes on it becomes clear his remarks are not limited just to animals, but also to humans. We operate as organisms embedded in environments. We cannot explain our existence in terms of disembodied minds. Dewey’s definition of organisms makes clear the way in which our bodies form a key part of who we are. He reinforces the role that the body plays in our everyday operation.

Dewey goes on from here to explore what makes the human different from other organisms.

The greatest change of environment occurs when living beings become conscious of the fact that their reactions to preexistent stimuli modify the old forms in such a way as to create new or different stimuli. When living beings become aware of this fact, modification of the environment for the sake of getting stimuli that will make the exercise of functions more secure, more effective, and freer, becomes a

deliberate end. This transformation is familiar to us in the form of tools, the utensils, weapons, and devices of all kinds, by which man consciously modified the environment in the interest of the exercise of his own life activities. In this way, some parts at least of the environment become what have been called “extra-organic” organs; that is to say, all the tools and devices of all the arts, although outside the body, operate in behalf of the functions of life just as do the eye, stomach, hands, etc. (Dewey, 1978: 439)

Our tools become an extension of ourselves. They operate as an extension of our body. This point is significant for several reasons. First of all, it further blurs the line between organism and environment. Dewey’s remarks here remind us not to reify the distinction between environment and organism. From the previous discussion, he warns that we cannot artificially separate organisms from environments. In this passage it becomes clear that the line between the human organism and the human environment is blurry at best. Weapons, utensils, or automobiles all serve as extensions of the organism, and in a way that should not be ignored. The body of the self≈sign is porous. To understand the functions of the self≈sign, we must look beyond the organism to the environments it is embedded in and how the organism manipulates that environment.

Mead’s social self

Dewey noted that the greatest change in an environment occurs when the organism becomes conscious of its impact on the environment. The issue now turns into how we become conscious in general. George Herbert Mead developed an intricate theory of the social genesis of the self. I will briefly follow out some themes in his writing to show how, for Mead, the self is constructed through social interaction. For purposes of this discussion, I will mainly follow Garrison’s work on Mead, with some help from Gary Cook’s analysis of Mead’s life and writing. (Garrison, forthcoming; Cook, 1993)

There are four key ideas coming out of Mead's writing that bear on the task at hand. Before turning to them, let me introduce the concerns that lead Mead to these concepts. Mead begins by considering the role of habits of action in our lives. When we are successfully operating in the world, "the stimulus-objects and the habitual responses are unified indistinguishably within the act." (Garrison, forthcoming: 66) We function perfectly well when the object of our attention leads us to act in a recurrent manner, but things become more interesting when the reaction to stimulus-objects break down. When the coordination between stimulus and our response is disrupted, we are thrown into a state of confusion. In this situation, we must reconstruct the objects that have caused the rupture in our experience. This reconstruction is two-fold. It means a reconstruction of ourselves and of the stimulus-objects. As Garrison explains:

When certain stimulus-objects no longer control an agent's responses, the agent does not know how to act. Still, she feels the impetus to act in multiple ways, and so she finds herself in cognitive doubt and emotional conflict. Diverse habits of action struggle to be heard, the situation demands immediate action. This is the field of constructive action where the agent must construct new stimulus-objects by means of creative response. (Garrison, forthcoming: 66)

This time of confusion, in which creative responses are developed, is not a permanent phase. Instead, it is only a moment, which lasts until this disintegration of the old world is over and a new world is constructed. Garrison continues "In the transaction between self and world both are transformed... In the pragmatic construction zone *all* objects are open to creative re-construction." (Garrison, forthcoming: 68) There is no *a priori* way to determine what objects will be reconstituted during this phase. Everything is up for grabs.

This analysis allows Mead to develop the distinction between the “I” and the “me.” The “me” is “an empirical self.” It serves as a stimulus-object of consciousness. “There are many instances of the ‘me.’ For example, the same self can be a teacher, a student, a parent, and a child simultaneously.” (Garrison, forthcoming: 69) The “me” is an object, which the “I” can reconstruct. “The ‘I’ is the creative psychic self, the self in disintegration that reconstructs its universe.” (Garrison, forthcoming: 69) The “I” cannot be an object though. It is the active, creative aspect of the self. We cannot directly experience the “I” through reflection, since it is the thing doing such reflection (the “I” cannot turn inward on itself). Instead, when reflecting on the self, the “I” is in “conversation” with the multiple instances of the “me.” There is a dialog between these two facets of the self. When the agent's world disintegrates, the “I” reconstructs the multiple instances of the “me” and when the moment passes, the former “I” becomes part of the “me” for the next “I” to reconstruct. Here we see in Mead a reappearance of Peirce's first incapacity, that we have no direct power of introspection and how the Sign becomes the object of thinking in the next iteration.

Even in this discussion, we have not entirely broken free of the older philosophy of consciousness. The social foundations of the self still must be brought in. There is insufficient space to go too deeply into Mead's theory on this subject, so I will state the major conclusions. First, self-consciousness involves consciousness of meaning. Something can be meaningful for us, while we are not conscious of its meaning. For example, when driving across town, stop signs have a meaning since they produce a certain response. But, an experienced driver will not be reflective on the nature of this meaning. He or she will simply react to the sign without further thought.

Second, we begin to gain reflective consciousness through our transactions with other. In the early stages, we unconsciously coordinate our behaviors with others around use. “The gesture as a significant (linguistic) symbol helps agents coordinate their behavior with respect to other stimulus-objects in the social environment.” (Garrison, forthcoming: 73) This conversation of gestures is the start of language, which is thoroughly social. The stage of self-consciousness arise out of this. It involves the ability to reflect on these gestures, predict outcomes, and, in effect, respond in advance.

At this point we get another of Mead’s concepts which will be of great importance. “The agent who is able to *interpret* and *use* the sense of a gesture to determine her own response must grasp the significance of both the gestures of others and her own; such an agent has a mind.” (Garrison, forthcoming: 73) The mind involves socio-linguistic coordination with others through the use of Signs. This means that some primates have a mind, since they can coordinate their actions through Signs. The crucial difference between us and such Sign-using-animals is the consciousness of the meaning of the gestures used. Mead captures this difference with the term “self.” “To have a self an organism must have consciousness of the meanings they possess.” (Garrison, forthcoming: 73) As Garrison goes on to explain:

Minds emerge when agents can manipulate socio-linguistic meanings; selves emerge when the agent can take the perspective of others in interpreting their own symbolic acts, thereby coming aware of their minds (as a system of meanings). (Garrison, forthcoming: 73)

The importance of mind, self, and fields of actions will become clear below.

The distinction between the mind and the self ties back into the “I.” “A self is comprised of an ‘I’ as well as a ‘me.’ It is the ‘I’ that provides reflective self-awareness of the empirical ‘me.’” (Garrison, forthcoming: 78) As

explored above, the “I” is the agent that creative reconstructs the self in a field of action. When habits fail, the “I” forms new habits from older experiences. The “I” reconstructs the self in an attempt to function better.

It is important to keep in mind that all this is thoroughly social. Without the coordination with other organisms (and the environment), we could not develop the “I.” We could not become self-consciously aware of the disintegration of the previous self and the recreation of a new one. In principle, this is all publicly demonstrable. Like Peirce, meaning for Mead is tied to action. Since meaning is public and social, there can be no private “withins” as the older philosophy of consciousness supposes. We might believe that our self is removed from a sphere of interaction with others. In following Mead we find everything that makes our self to be social from beginning to end.

Putting some pieces together

Between Dewey’s definitions of “environment and organism” and Mead’s social theory of the self, we begin to see what a Peircian world without within looks like. As noted above, a world without within involves removing the assumption that the mind is apart from the world of things.

From Mead we see how to view the self as constructed through our interactions with others. The self is not something intrinsic within us, but something forged. Body, self, and mind are bound together in action. Through our gestures, we communicate with others. Self-consciousness arises when we become aware of how our gestures influence others. We “take the role of the other” in an attempt to understand the impact of our gesture on them. As this becomes more complicated, we begin to develop a mind and then a self. Later in our development, this self-consciousness seems innate; something that has always been there. It is this last stage of

development that modern philosophers have taken as given and Peirce, Mead, and Dewey have attempted to undermine.

In a world without within, we are not disembodied minds that perhaps are attached to bodies. Nor is consciousness an epiphenomenon that arises out of the brain. Consciousness arises out of interaction with other things, people or the environment. There is no “within” where the self is isolated from the world. The self is integral in shaping the world along the lines of what Dewey discussed. The self is a function and an essential part of us as organisms.

In such a world nothing is free from observation, at least in principle. We are not born with a private and inaccessible mind or self. These are constructed through social interactions. Using Peirce, I argued above that we are the sum of the Signs we use. According to Wittgenstein there are no private languages. While Peirce never explicitly explores whether Signs are public or private, there are several passages where he seems to endorse such an assertion with respect to symbols (which forms the core of “natural” languages). Icons and indices are attached to their objects in different ways, but there is a connection that goes beyond the mind. As explained above, a symbol has meaning only in virtue of it being used by a mind that can manipulate symbols. With respect to this class of Signs, I believe Peirce would consent to Wittgenstein’s private language thesis. This means the symbols that determine who we are have their root in a public domain.

Lastly, and most importantly, the key aspect of meaning for Peirce and Mead is action. For both, the meaning of a Sign is the action it precipitates. This action must be in the world, since there is no place else for it to be. There are different sorts of actions, but they all occur in the world. These actions are, in principle, public. While certain actions, like thought, might

seem private, through the use of symbols they are, in an important sense, public. The genesis of such symbols has a public nature.

Technologies of the self in a world of semiosis

We are now in position to establish a pragmatic understanding of technologies of the self. In this section I draw together the strands from the previous discussions and weave them into a framework. I begin by working together Mead's and Peirce's understanding of the self. Returning to the discussion of a world without within, I take this conception and tie it into Pitt's work. Lastly, I draw Foucault in this matrix.

Self≈sign as social

The principle task of this section is to unite the terminologies from my previous discussions of Peirce and Mead. This will involve a refinement of my discussion of Peirce's self≈sign. I will leave aside an attempt at a full integration of Peirce and Mead. Instead, I will focus on translating Mead's work into Peirce. Although Mead did not focus on semiotics explicitly, Peirce's theory of signs can be used as a refinement of Mead's work on symbol manipulation. Also, Peirce gives no account of the social development of selfhood, though it is clear from several remarks that he would be comfortable with such a theory. In the concluding paragraph of "Some Consequences of Four Incapacities" he notes "the individual man, since his separate existence is manifested only by ignorance and error, so far as he is anything apart from his fellows, and from what he and they are to be, is only a negation." (CP: 5.317) This remark seems to imply a social dimension of the self≈sign. We exist as individuals *qua* individuals only through making mistakes. This individual *qua* individual is purely negative, since we never learn anything "who we are" from this mistakes. To learn anything positive from such errors would presuppose a self, which Peirce implies is social. The

second remark from Peirce that concerns us comes from his 1905 essay “What Pragmatism Is.” (CP: 5.411-37) He states:

Two things here are all-important to assure oneself of and to remember. The first is that a person is not absolutely an individual. His thoughts are what he is “saying to himself,” that is, is saying [sic] to that other self that is just coming into life in the flow of time. When one reasons, it is that critical self that one is trying to persuade; and all thought whatsoever is a sign, and is mostly of the nature of language. The second thing to remember is that the man’s circle of society (however widely or narrowly this phrase may be understood), is a sort of loosely compacted person, in some respects of higher rank than the person of an individual organism. (CP: 5.421)

From this statement we see space for integrating Peirce and Mead. The first point implies something along the lines of the “I”/”me” distinction, where we are in a conversation with our other selves. The second point hints at something like Mead’s understanding of the social construction of the self, at least when taken in conjunction with the first point.

As discussed above, Mead makes a distinction between mind and self. Something with a mind has the ability to manipulate and coordinate their actions through the use of Signs. To translate this point into Peirce’s vocabulary, such an organism can communicate through the use of indices and icons. Though not self-conscious of the meaning of such Signs, it has a battery of Signs which it can deploy and manipulate. The mind≈sign is the sum of the Signs used by this organism. To put this another way, the mind≈sign contains all the habits used by the organism, where a habit is a rule of action. When ever a certain event occurs, we will react in a similar manner each time. So the most basic definition of habit is: “if event A happens in situation X, then action Y occurs.” In terms of semiosis, this can be understood as “when a certain representamen (or series of representamens) occurs, then the ritualized translation (an ‘instinctive interpretant’) will be to perform a certain action (or series of actions, which

would constitute the object of the Sign).” The mind≈sign would be the sum of these habitualized interpretants, though it lacks the capacity to reflect on the meaning of such interpretants.

According to Mead, the self contains both the “I” and multiple instances of the “me.” The “I” is the subject, which reconstructs the meaning of things but can never directly observe itself. There is a plurality of the “me.” As noted above, we have “me-as-student,” “me-as-teacher,” “me-as-driver,” and on and on. Each “me” involves the habits that we use in various situations. There is no necessary condition that the sum of these instances of the “me” will be homogeneous. It is entirely possible that the habits used when driving will be nothing like the habits used when leading a discussion. One might be quite aggressive when driving, but very timid when teaching.

These multiple instances of the “me” will be arguments, subsumed under the self≈sign described in the discussion of Peirce. Each of the me≈signs will be sum of habitualized interpretants that are used in a given instance. These me≈signs form a constellation. While there are interconnections between the disparate parts of the self≈sign, there is no guarantee of reconciliation of these me≈signs.

The “I” is the semiotic agent. The “I” interprets, translates, and transforms the Signs it uses. As noted above, the “I” cannot turn inward to view the actions it performs. Because of this, there is no I≈sign. This point is consistent with Peirce’s first incapacity, that we have no power of introspection. The “I” is locked into a dialog with the me≈signs. When the “I” reflects on itself, the previous “I” becomes a me≈sign. The “I” determines the meaning of the me≈sign and this lays the ground for the construction of a new “I” and a new me≈sign.

The self and technology

To conclude, we should now return to the subject of technology. I want to address three questions in this section. First, is the self a technology? Second, if the self is not a technology, can it be “technologized”? If the self can be technologized, what does this mean? The short answers are, respectively, no, yes, and that’s pretty complicated. Let me explain.

Decision-making and “work” are at the core of Pitt’s definition of technology. Self-conscious decisions form the starting place for the development of technologies. People identify a problem and attempt to solve it. The decision to construct some sort of device for navigating through the world is a first-order transformation. The end result of these transformations is a second-order transformer. As explained above, a second-order transformer need not be a “physical” artifact. Galileo’s geometry and the Constitution both qualify as second-order transformers, since they both change a given input into an output. One key part of technologies is artifacts that have the character of input/output transformers.

The other key part of Pitt’s work on technology is the idea of “humanity at work.” Bringing together several strands from Mead and Dewey, I will take as the definition for humanity an organism that has a mind and a self distributed through a field of action. We now come to the issue of what defines “work.” I take “work” to mean the directed use of energy or effort to change or manipulate something. The term “directed” is important, since it emphasizes focus and concentration. In this way a child playing with blocks is engaged in play, since her effort is unfocused. While a teacher using balls and sticks to demonstrate chemical bonds is engaged in work, since his focus is on changing the students. It should be added that when one is “at work” there are certain practices that are integral to that

work.¹³ Consider the example of the chemistry teacher. When he is using the balls and sticks as a pedagogical device, he is enmeshed in a series of practices that guide his use of this device. Taking these two terms, humanity and work, back into Pitt's definition we find the following. Technology is the product of focused effort by organisms with the capacity for reflective consciousness, embedded in a series of social practices. The fact that we have the capacity for reflective consciousness is important since this is what allows us to bring the third component of Pitt's model, feedback mechanisms, into the picture.

Given this understanding of Pitt's technologies, we begin to see why the self is not a technology. Self-conscious organisms are what create technologies. Technology is a product of these organisms, so the self cannot properly be a technology. This is not to say before we become self-conscious beings that we do not have some form of tool-use. Many animals do use tools like sticks and primitive sign-systems (which is why Mead proposes that certain primates have minds, though no self). But such tool-use does not qualify as technology in a full-blown sense. Technology relies on decision-making, construction of artifacts, complex feedback relations, and social practices. While tool-use does involve some form of choice, it is not the reflective decision-making that Pitt describes. In addition with tool-use there is some sense of feedback mechanisms, but these mechanisms appear to be along the lines of if X does not work, then try harder. If it does not work after nth attempt, then try something else. This is the most simple feedback and

¹³Let me note that the line between "work" and "play" should be blurry. These two concepts flow into each other. For example, work can create regions in which play occurs and play can give rise to new fields in which to work. Work and play feed one another and should not be easily separated.

forms the starting point for more complicated mechanisms, but is not as sophisticated as technological feedback.

For these reasons the self is not a technology. What remains to be shown is that the self can be technologized and then explore what this means. For a thing to become technologized, it must be “in the world” and it must be something that can be transformed (i.e., work can be performed on it). Both of these criteria fall out of Pitt’s definition of technology. If technology is humanity at work in the world, then for something to be technologized it has to be in a world where humans can transform it. Technologization involves bringing something that existed outside technological systems and enmeshing it in technological systems. Once the thing has become technologized, it either becomes immersed in social practices or new ones develop around it. These practices will include the first- and second-order transformers described above, as well as feedback mechanisms.

Does the self meet the criteria for technologization? The self meets the first criterion for technologization (that the thing in question is in the world). This was the point of the discussion about our world lacking within. I proposed that everything about the self≈sign was, in principle, observable. There are no hidden regions in which the mind or self exist. Since Signs are public and we are the sum of those Signs, our sense of self is public. This also goes back to the issue of action. According to the philosophers discussed above, the end of thought and meaning is demonstrated in doing things. All this, thought, construction, action, takes place in one world. There are no dualisms here. The self exists along side other objects and subjects that we interact with. At this point, the concept of a world without within is merely a proposition, which has not been defended. Although I have not defend it, I will take it as a given for the remainder of this essay.

Now that we have constructed a way to see how to understand the self as in the world, it is necessary to show that it can be “worked on.” Remember that the self≈sign consists of two parts, the “I” and the me≈signs. Since the “I” is a subject, it cannot be operated on directly. What can be transformed is the me≈signs (or at least one me≈sign), since these are objects. To work on a thing involves a directed effort to transform it. In the case of a me≈sign, this will involve attempting to restructure the meanings drawn from the Signs involved in it. There will be certain Signs that are harder to transform than others. For example, the indices and icons attached to the me-as-body≈sign will be difficult to change without some sort of physical exercise, but we can change the meaning derived from these indices and icons. In effect, this will be a deliberate transformation of the argument that subsumes the icons and indices, which will influence the actions taken by the semiotic agent. The issue of whether the transformations are deliberate or not is an empirical one. It involves an analysis of the intentions of the “I”.

We are finally in a position now to understand what a technology of the self means in terms of semiosis. Simply put, technologies of the self are the deliberate attempt by the “I” to restructure the relevant me≈signs to effect the overall operation of the self≈sign. It involves transformations of and transactions with the symbols forming the me≈sign. These technologies also involve restructuring the meanings drawn from the icons and indices attached to the me≈sign.

Such technologies of the self involve a refinement of the deconstruction and reconstruction of the self Mead describes above. What differentiates these technologies from our usual behavior is the importance of focus. According to Mead, we are constantly reconstructing our selves as our habits fail and new ones must be found. In general when the older

me≈sign disintegrates, the field of action is unlimited. There will be contextual limits, but the field is essentially wide open. This ordinary behavior we engage in does not qualify as a technology, since it lacks the focus to qualify as work.

Technologies of the self involve the reconstruction of the self≈sign, but this reconstruction will be in a limited field of action. With a technology of the self, the field is restrained. The sorts of objects to be reconstructed will follow a more narrow and controlled line. For those technologies that involve the help of another (e.g., psychoanalysis, going to school, or organized religion), the other will help in the restructuring of the self≈sign. Such technologies explicitly involve practices and rituals. The field of action is more open for technologies that lack an “explicit” other. These tend to be more open-ended, but there is still the focus on transforming some part of the self≈sign to make its overall operation more effective.

Although little can (and should) be said about the specifics of these technologies, we can make some generalizations about their operations based upon Pitt’s model. Pitt’s model consists of three parts: first-order transformations (decisions), second-order transformers (artifacts, and feedback mechanisms. In the context of technologies of the self, the first-order transformation is the decision that something about the self needs change. It is usually the case that the habits that we use to navigate through the world are not functioning well (or are perceived to not function well) and this leads to a crisis of some sort. The second-order transformer is the artifact or system that is constructed to reconstruct the self. Sometimes this transformer takes the form of a physical object around which new habits will form. Other times there will be series of practices that help to reconstruct the self≈sign. Lastly

there is the feedback mechanism to see how this is all working. In part these mechanisms will be seen in how well the agent operates in the world.

Conclusion

The full significance of this definition of technologies of the self will become clear in Chapter Three. This pragmatic understanding does have strengths which the other perspectives reviewed earlier lack. The SCOT group does not focus enough attention on the flow of meanings from the artifact to its users. In this way, it would be difficult to understand what a technology of the self means to them. This difficulty is the starting point for Latour's version of actor-network theory. He begins by looking at how actors enrol allies and this transforms each. Unfortunately he has those the eerie political overtones, which are disturbing. Ihde was no way of making sense of technologies of the self, since he limits "technology" to physical things.

Lastly there is Haraway and the other cyborg theorists. If one attempted to do this project from her work, it would look quite different. Instead of focusing on the shifts in meaning, one would look at cyborg ecologies and god-only-knows-what-else. Such an analysis of these transactional and transformative relationships would probably develop serious science-fiction overtones. This is due to the macroscopic character of the present investigation. To use cyborg theorizing, one would need to stretch already tense metaphors further.

Part of what allows this approach to get around this last problem is Peirce's second trichotomy (icon-index-symbol). This allows us to see these Signs as separate entities, but also analyze the overlap on the level of symbols. Also, Peirce's semiotics allows chart the shifts in meaning in a detailed manner. More will be said about this in the following chapters.

Chapter 2:

A brief history of the sport(s)/utility vehicle

The purpose of this chapter is to give a brief history of the sport/utility vehicle. I focus on the history of this vehicle in America. I do make reference to the drivers/owners of these vehicles, but a more detailed analysis of them will be offered in Chapter 3. I begin with an overview of the development of the automobile, because the early structure of this industry has influenced the evolution of the sport/utility vehicle. I then leave automobiles aside and begin to focus my attention on the development of the SUV, which begins at the start of World War II. The most time being spent on the developments from the early 1980s on.

The early years of automobility

While the concept of a self-propelled vehicle dates back at least to Roger Bacon and Leonardo da Vinci, it did not become a full-scale reality until the end of the nineteenth century. The earliest experiments were with self-propelled steam engines, modeled on trains. These experiments met with mixed success. (Flink, 1988:1-7) Additional experiments were attempted with electric and gas-powered vehicles. Experiments occurred on both sides of the Atlantic. In France, between 1894 and 1907, several inventors, including Charles Jeantaud and Alexandre Darracq, worked on electric cars. Due in part to the poor storage capacity of early batteries, these cars did not become very popular in France. They played a brief, but prominent role in the development of the American car though. A number of Americans became involved in the electric car project, including William Morrison, Henry G. Morris, Pedro Salom, and Andrew Riker. While the electric car was

clearner and more comfortable than gasoline automobiles, they were more expensive to operate and manufacture, charging facilities were hard to find outside large cities, and the hill-climbing power was lacking. (Flink, 1988:8-10)

At the same time, there were experiments with gasoline-powered engines. “The internal-combustion engine was first perfected in Germany and France, and it is unequivocal that Continental automobile manufactures were at least a decade ahead of their British and American counterparts in the technological development of the gasoline automobile.” (Flink, 1998:11) The pioneering engine was produced by Nicolaus Otto in 1876. This original engine was far too large and cumbersome for a self-propelled vehicle. By 1885 two of Otto’s underlings, Gottlieb Daimler and Wilhelm Maybach, had refined the original engine so that it might work better for such a vehicle. Dailmer and Maybach’s engine became the prototype for internal-combustion engines and innovations on this engine increased dramatically. “It was Carl Benz... who brought the automobile to the stage of commercial feasibility.” (Flink, 1988:12) He refined the gasoline engine and introduced electric ignition, which was a major improvement over earlier starter mechanisms. Benz’s cars sold well, especially since he anticipated a small market. (Flink, 1988:10-14)

Through a series of technological innovations and other maneuvers, the gas-powered automobile came to dominate the field. Though it was not obvious at the turn of century that the internal-combustion engine would become the industry standard. The success of the gas-powered automobile relied on a number of factors. As noted above, this engine was subject to a number of innovations which allowed it to be smaller and more powerful than steam or electric engines. Also, in 1901 gasoline became cheap

commodity throughout the United States because of the discovery of oil fields in Texas. One could purchase gasoline virtually anywhere. This made ownership of gas-power vehicles feasible for many people outside of cities. Lastly, the electric car had connotations of femininity, since it was comfortable and clean. As the auto industry became increasingly masculine, these connotations created a cultural barrier the electric car never overcame. (Flink, 1988:10-28, 212; Gartman, 1994:21)

During this period, no one company dominated the industry. With a small investment of capital, one could enter the industry and make a profit. The trade-off was the Darwinian ferocity of the competition. Many small companies lasted only a year or two before either going under or being bought out. As time went on, the larger companies began to consolidate and acquire members of the competition. Though it was not until the end 1920s that the Big Three (Chrysler, Ford and General Motors) had almost exclusive control of the American market. (Flink, 1988:56-72)

From the start of the automobile industry, the car has been a way of presenting and transforming the self. In this period before the Model T automobility was limited principally to the rich. Due to the means of production, cars were expensive. They were made in small numbers, principally by hand. As James Flink explains:

automobiles were made and sold much the same way on both sides of the Atlantic; that is, they were assembled from jobbed-out components by crews of skilled mechanics and unskilled helpers at low rates of labor productivity, and they were sold at high prices and high unit profits through nonexclusive wholesale and retail distributors for cash on delivery. (Flink, 1988:40)

For those who could acquire them, they were a sign of status. This exacerbated class difference. The bulk of the population could not afford any mode of transformation. The lack of mobility for the working class seemed to

reinforce their social position. The hope was that if one could get around more easily, things might be better. Since those who were not rich could not afford cars, they felt shut out of something important. The working class felt looked down upon in a new way. As Woodrow Wilson noted in 1906: “Nothing has spread Socialistic feeling in this country more than the use of automobiles. To the countryman they are a picture of arrogance of wealth with all its independence and carelessness.” (Anon., 1904: 12) So long as the automobile was produced in a “craft-like” manner, it would only be a tool for the upper classes, since the price could not be lowered if the auto makers wanted to make a profit. (Gartman, 1994: 33-38)

The birth of Fordism

It had been Henry Ford’s goal for many years to make an automobile for “the great multitude.” He dreamed of a reliable car that would be inexpensive enough for virtually anyone to buy. His first attempt was the Model N in 1906. Although it did not last long, Ford was able to produce a large number of them quickly. At a cost of \$600, the Model N was one of the cheapest cars on the market, and “was one of the better designed and better-built cars available at any price.” (Flink, 1988: 37) The Model N sold so well that orders quickly outpaced production. This success encouraged Ford and he strove to create an even better low-priced car.

The Model T ended up being such a car. It could be produced cheaply and was dependable, though it was aesthetically problematic. The Model T was introduced in 1908 and Ford began mass production of it in 1913. The idea was to create a car that could be static in style and produced in large volumes at a decreasing price. There were two kinds of the Model T, the runabout and the slightly larger touring car. The price in 1908 for the

runabout was \$825 and the touring car cost \$850. By 1916, the prices had dropped to \$345 and \$360 respectively. (Flink, 1988:36-37)

To achieve the goal of a car for the multitude, Ford needed to revolutionize the means of production. He refined the idea of interchangeable parts. Inter-changeable parts had been key to the “American system of manufactures” and was an idea that had been constantly refined since the early 19th century. The basic concept was to produce each part in such a consistent manner that every example of that part could be switched with another. He introduced moving assembly lines which broke down tasks in such a way that one worker would do one task. Machines were designed for each specific task on the assembly line. This eliminated much of the need for skilled machinists. These experiments and others reduced the cost and time expended in production of the Model T. Assembly times dropped from 150 minutes to 26 1/2 minutes over the course of 18 months. These production techniques allowed Ford to flood the market with these very popular vehicles. (Hounshell, 1984: 217-261)

While unskilled workers and specialized machines joined in the assembly line are key parts of mass production, the culmination of Fordism was the institution of the \$5.00 a day wage in January of 1914.¹ There are two reasons why this move by Ford was so important. First, the wage served as an incentive for workers to stay on. It was well above the average wage of workers in other jobs. This incentive helped to obscure the dehumanizing aspects of mass production. Since they were making a “good” wage, they

¹The term Fordism dates back to at least 1930s with an essay by Antonio Gramsci called “Americanism and Fordism,” written while he was rotting away in one of Mussolini’s jails. “Fordism” has since been appropriated by many different disciplines, including the history of technology, social theory and economics, to describe the changes that Ford brought about in virtually ever sphere. See Harvey, 1991 (especially pages 125-172) or Hughes, 1989 (especially pages 249-294) for more detailed discussions.

could accept the tedious, repetitive nature of the assembly line and “forget” they essentially functioned like robots. (Hounshell, 1984: 258-259, 303-330)

The second reason the \$5.00 a day wage was vital relates to a different aspect of mass production. Mass production requires mass consumption. To have items produced in such large quantities, it is necessary to have a large population with enough money to purchase these items. By raising his workers’s wages, Ford gave them the opportunity to consume the objects which they produced. David Harvey brings all these themes together when he states:

What was special about Ford... was his vision, his explicit recognition that mass production meant mass consumption, a new system of the reproduction of labour power, a new politics of labour control and management, a new aesthetics and psychology, in short, a new kind of rationalized, modernist, and populist democratic society. (Harvey, 1991: 125-6)

Ford reworked all of these points into his factories. By the end of World War II, Ford’s factory had become the dominate regime of production and accumulation. It became adopted, with the help of Keynesian economics, throughout the world. What concerns us presently though is the need for a new aesthetic, since the mass production and consumption of automobility relies on this. (Harvey, 1991:125-140)

The Model T sold incredibly well early on. In 1916 Ford controlled about half the market for new cars. These impressive sales continued until the early 1920s, when they began to decline. “Ford saw its 55 percent market share of 1921 dwindle to 30 percent in 1926 despite significant body and mechanical changes in the ‘unchanging’ Model T and a deliberate schedule of price reductions.” (Hounshell, 1984: 263-4) The Ford Motor Company decided to cease production of the Model T in 1927, after having sold over 15 million units. (Flink, 1988:37-8)

The Rise of Sloanism

Although Ford developed what we now call mass production, it is Alfred P. Sloan, Jr. and General Motors that, in some respects, perfected it. One immediate problem with the Model T was its (relatively) constant form. As is often remarked, you could have the Model T in any colour you liked, so long as that colour was black. There was no real differentiation between various cars. Either you were rich and drove an expensive, refined automobile or you were not rich and drove a Model T. Due to the dehumanizing conditions of the Fordist factory, people wanted a way to express their individuality. Many workers rightly thought that they did not have an identity on the assembly line. Only in those hours when workers were not at the factory could they feel human. The Model T prevented many people from exhibiting their individuality, because of their identical form. (Gartman, 1994: 56-61)

Sloan developed a way of resolving this difficulty with Fordism. For many years General Motors (GM) had changed their production lines by modifying old models and introducing new ones. Even during the height of the Model T, they kept with a “strategy” of market segmentation. The various GM divisions went after different audiences. Chevrolet aimed at the low end, Buick was the mid-range and Oldsmobile focused on the high end, while the GMC division focused exclusively on trucks. This strategy was haphazard and disorganized, in part due to the management of William Durant. When Sloan took over in 1923, market segmentation became more efficiently used. Each of the divisions was given more precise and focused program. When the market for the Model T became saturated in the mid-20s, GM had an alternative. Chevy produced slightly more expensive models

than Ford, but their relative distinctiveness made up for it. It is at this time that GM began to break Ford's control of the market.

This solution to one problem with Fordism is referred to as Sloanism. (Flink, 1988: 229-250; Gartman 1994: 68-99) It involves several refinements to the Fordist mode of production. First, instead of one static model, there are a series of models targeted at different needs and different wallets. This allowed cars to be built that would fit the life-style of various consumers. With the refinement of the various models, came the idea of regular model changes. Every few years, typically about three years, a given model would go through a massive restyling of its exterior and interior. In the interim period, there would be slight modifications of the automobile.

Along with this strategy, there was the development of "flexible mass-production." The Fordist assembly line was designed to make only one model. GM used the concept of the assembly line, but it was reworked in such a way that parts could be used to construct different models without a long down time for change over. This involved the reintroduction of more generalized tools, but ones designed in such a way that an unskilled worker could use them with a minimum of training. (Hounshell, 1984: 263-301)

To save on cost, GM began using the same basic engine and frame for many cars. Each division would use the same parts and then style and accessorize to fit the price range that was being targeted. Hence, the Chevy and GMC models would be less "stylized" than the upper-end models, like those produced by Buick and Oldsmobile. Since GMC only produced trucks, style really did not become an issue till the 1980s. Chevrolet did have a styling department which became increasingly important. The refinements introduced on the high-end automobiles tended to be either cosmetic, like better paint jobs and slight differences in the car's body, or the addition of

options that made the car “more pleasant to drive.” Aside from these minor changes though, there were no substantive mechanical differences between the cars produced by the divisions of GM.

Part of the ethos of Sloanism was the doctrine of planned obsolescence. This marks another point of departure from Fordism. Sloan wanted people to “climb a ladder of consumption.” The theory GM worked with was that most consumers would begin at the low-end models and, as they earned more money, move up to more expensive models. To increase sales, GM instituted a program where car owners could trade in their old models for credit on a new one. This program reduced the “life-expectancy” of cars. While the goal of having consumers changing cars every year was not reached on a massive scale, they were able to get many to trade in their older car about every three years.

As noted above, styling took control during this period. By 1927 Ford had to come to terms with the revolution of Sloanism. This involved the discontinuation of the Model T and the development of the Model A. In 1933 the Ford Motor Company “conceded” victory to GM and instituted annual model changes and the styling department came to have a voice. The importance of styling is significant for several reasons. First, it served to simulate sales as observed above. Second, it helped to obscure the methods of production. Especially for factory workers, people did not want to be reminded of the conditions under which these objects were produced. The early automobiles, especially those at the low-end, did nothing to obscure this. They were gangly, awkward, and all looked the same. Sloan’s revolution in styling hid all of the mass produced parts under a seemingly individualized exterior.

The origins of the SUV

The first automobiles that laid the ground for the SUV began during World War II. While Chevy/GMC had introduced the Suburban in 1935, this principally functioned as a vehicle for commercial use. Like many panel trucks and station wagons of the day, it was designed as an off-road vehicle. The Suburban did get “service” in World War II, principally as a transport vehicle on naval bases. It was only after the SUV field became established that the Suburban got “restyled” to fit the concept. (Wolff, 1997)

World War II and the 1950s

Around 1938 a request went out from the U.S. Army for the development of a new reconnaissance vehicle. The standard reconnaissance vehicle in the First World War was a bicycle. The Army wanted a more reliable vehicle that was faster, yet relatively cheap. As is typical, the army held a design competition for a contract to build such a vehicle. Willys-Overland submitted a design of what was to become known as the Jeep.

The first production models were delivered to the Army in June 1941, and competed with designs from Ford and the American Bantam Car Company. A month later, in July, the Army awarded Willys an all-or-nothing contract calling for 16,000 vehicles, delivered at a rate of 125 per day. Even that wasn't enough, and Ford was given a second contract, to build the Willys design, to increase production. (Anon., 1996: 122)

Somewhere between 600,000 and 700,000 jeeps were produced by the end of the war.² This General Purpose vehicle (GP or jeep) had the capability to travel off road and was relatively easy to either repair or junk, since they were

² Although not nearly as important for the story of the SUV in America, the Land Rover has a similar story as Jeep. Both Jeep and Land Rover began as military vehicles and have continued supplying transportation vehicles to both the U.S. and British Armies for many years. Jeep stopped shortly after the take over by AMC. Land Rover has continued to through the present. Also, both companies marketed their vehicles in the private sector after the war.

so cheap to produce. They quickly became a key part of the war and were as important to the army as rifles.³

After the war was over, Willys-Overland began to sell their surplus jeeps on the market. There was only a small demand for the Jeep in this time, but it did become an icon in American culture. It became associated with the American triumph in the war and, through this, a sign of a rugged, out-door experience. As one commentator has noted:

And yet [Jeep] still bears that magic name--the name that ever since its first appearance in war-torn Europe has been a culture emblem of America, the vehicular equivalent of apple pie. The original aura of rough-and-toughness remains, but judiciously tempered--just enough to be appealing, not enough to be daunting. (Hazleton, 1993: 58)

While this might be a bit strong, I believe that Hazleton is correct that the Jeep did become a symbol of American victory and still has some of that meaning. I will return to this point below.

Most of these surplus Jeeps were bought by farmers and ranchers. By 1950, Willys had registered a trademark on the name Jeep and had developed a whole line of trucks and station-wagons, in addition to the slightly modified GP which then went under the name CJ (Civilian Jeep). Willys off-road vehicles were also purchased by hunters, fisherman and other outdoor types, due to their rough-and-tumble image and being relatively inexpensive. While Willys did not fully share in the post-war car boom, throughout the 1950s “Jeep sales typically averaged 70,000 vehicles a year.” (Ramsey, n.d.: 2)

³The importance of the military heritage of the SUV cannot be understated. The exposure the American public has gotten to the GP over the last fifty years informs many of the meanings associated with the SUV. Many SUVs still have a military style to them. As will be seen in Chapter 3, this is an important part of their appeal. Due to this military heritage, the SUV has an image of being an “urban assault vehicle.” In a country that is increasingly perceived as dangerous, the SUV as urban assault vehicle allows the driver/owner to feel not just safe, but also powerful. The Signs associated with the military carry over to the Signs that the driver uses when the SUV is in use.

Willys-Overland was worth enough to be acquired by Kaiser Motors in 1953, which would be first in a series of shifting ownerships of the Jeep and related products.

During the 1950s, relatively few explicitly off-road vehicles entered the American market. The CJ was refined over this period. The Suburban began to be retooled as a vehicle suitable for off-road use. Another significant off-road vehicle was Toyota's Land Cruiser. Toyota's prototype of the Land Cruiser, the 25-Series Model BJ, was brought out in 1951 and used to scale Mount Fuji. The name Land Cruiser was as attached to the 1954 45-series sawed-off pickup and a wagon style truck was introduced shortly thereafter. It is this wagon style truck that we have come to know as the Land Cruiser. Although commercially available in the United States since 1957, its U.S. sales never went above 10,000 per year until 1994. The Land Cruiser has always been a specialty vehicle, though its market has changed over the course of 40 years. The Land Cruiser shares with the Land Rover the images of driving through the desert or tromping through the jungle. Both vehicles were limited in use and distribution in the United States. While the Land Cruiser was relatively inexpensive for years, both it and the Land Rover have gone up in price since the boom in sales.

It is unsurprising that the SUV did not take off during this period. While sales of the CJ and Suburban were steady, they were also unspectacular compared to the overall sale of cars. The CJ did not change much in terms of style from its parent, the GP. The "styling" of the GP and CJ was purely utilitarian. This did not fit the ethos of car production in the late 40s to the 1950s, the height of styling with fins and other "stream-lined" accessories. Styling had become associated in popular culture with technological progress. The more fins and gadgets, the better since this was a sign we could compete

with the Soviet Block. For as much as the Jeep had become a sign of American triumph, it looked like a step back towards the Model T. It would take several more decades before the form of the CJ (now the Jeep Wrangler) would be a common sight in mass culture. (Gartman, 1994: 137-140)

The 1960s and the first SUVs

At the start of the 60s, there were only a handful of SUVs. These included the CJ, Land Rover, and Land Cruiser. In late 1960, International Harvester introduced the Scout line. These vehicles followed the styling of the CJ and the Land Cruiser. They were large, bulky and boxy. In 1961 Nissan brought out its entry, the Patrol. Not including the Suburban, there were 5 models of off-road vehicles. Because of their military heritage, the CJ and Land Rover were both designed from the ground up. The remaining three were modeled on trucks, though significantly modified.

In 1963 Jeep introduced the Wagoneer. This marked a turning point, albeit a small one, in automotive history. As Car and Driver reflected thirty years later:

the first of a new breed- a utility vehicle that wasn't descended from a truck. In those days, men were men, sheep were nervous, and sport-utility vehicles were big, bad, and ugly. Few people would brag about owning these road crushers, which were relegated mostly to winter duty when more respectable types were stuck at home playing canasta. Back then, sport-utility trucks didn't have to be attractive, or refined, or even particularly well-made. (C/D, 1994:78)

The Wagoneer was designed to handle off-road driving, while still relatively comfortable. This second point is what differentiates the Wagoneer from trucks of this period. Trucks served as purely utilitarian vehicles for transport. The goal of the Wagoneer was to reconcile these utilitarian concerns with a sense of style.

While being able to go off-road, it should be comfortable and fun to drive. It has been commented that the CJ was fun to drive, but it was far too spartan to operate as a family vehicle. The Suburban had the utility part down, but was a chore to drive (it has only been in the last few years that this has been improved). While in some sense Car and Driver is correct that the early SUVs were ugly, the Wagoneer did make gestures towards the slimmed down aesthetic of the 60s. Also, greater care was taken with the style of the Wagoneer than the other SUVs of the era. For example, in 1966 one of the model changes on the Wagoneer was “a wider variety of interior colors and materials which harmonize with body finishes.” (Anon., 1965b: 9)

Three years later Ford introduced the Bronco. This vehicle was not quite as elegant as the Wagoneer, but it did fit the rugged image of an SUV. While the Wagoneer was designed for an upscale audience, the Bronco was much more spartan. The Bronco had the power to go anywhere and many of the automobile pundits were clearly impressed with its performance. Ford did not spend as much time on styling the Bronco as Jeep did with the Wagoneer. In this respect, Ford’s entry to this field was closer to the utilitarian CJ. The target audience appears to have been sportsmen, rural high school students and farmers. This was not meant to be a first (i.e., family) car. The aim of the Bronco was to get onto the rough roads and do things in less “civilized” environments. Hence, the lack of amenities. In terms of flash, its external appearance seemed to be enough, at least for men. On commentator noted

One of our wives unkindly compared our *sports* package to a “squashed up dump truck,” but these sentiments were not shared by the amazing number of Jeep, Toyota, Land Cruiser, etc. owners who, spotting the parked Bronco stopped short for an impromptu inspection. (MacDonald, 1966: 50. Emphasis added)

This commentator goes on to note that there was apparently much camaraderie between drivers of these vehicles. They regretted informing the “impromptu inspectors” that the Bronco was not theirs.

Ford had hoped to break into this growing market. Newsweek reported in 1965 that:

what the Bronco is designed to do best is penetrate the “utility market”... The market has burgeoned from 11,000 cars sold in 1960 to 40,000 last year, and Ford thinks it can be fattened to 70,000 in the 1966 model year. Ford plans to produce 18,000 Broncos by the end of December, and predicts sales of 40,000 next fall. (Anon., 1965a: 62)

Up until 1982, this market had steady growth. As will be seen below, even though the oil crisis of the early 70s did shake up the industry some, they were able to bounce back with only a minor dent in sales. This is a clue into part of who the consumers of these vehicles were. I think it is safe to say that a large number of the owners were people for whom these vehicles were a necessity so that high gas prices must be endured or relatively affluent, so that increased gas prices were not a concern.

It should be noted that there was no clear term for these vehicles. In the popular magazines of the day, they are referred to as “utility vehicles,” “four-wheel drive, off-road vehicles,” “sports utility vehicles” or “ruggeds.” (Anon., 1965a: 62; Schmidt, 1969: 32; MacDonald, 1966: 48; Norbye, 1965a: 46) The most bizarre, yet almost most sensible, is “a ‘cruk’ - a cross between a car and a truck.” (Anon., 1965a: 62) What is important to keep in mind though, is that when a term like “SUV” appears in the literature during this time it stands for “sports utility vehicle.” There is a subtle difference in meaning here. A “sports utility vehicle” seems to imply a vehicle that is used for sports and recreation, in addition to its pragmatic value. A “sport/utility vehicle” seems to attach itself to a term like “sport car,” where the

implication is that this vehicle is “fun to drive,” but also useful. This change in terminology seems to take place somewhere around the start of the 1980s.

In reaction to the Ford Bronco, GM brought out the Chevy Blazer in 1969 and GMC Jimmy in 1970. Like the Bronco, the Blazer/Jimmy was ascetically designed compared to the Wagoneer. With the Blazer, only the driver’s seat came standard. Motor Trend describes it in the following terms: “most important is its basic, adequate utility. There’s a front driver’s seat and a heater. Period. Stop. Even the dash is simple - speedometer and fuel gauges, with the rest of the information handled by the idiot lights.” (Schmidt, 1969: 33) This seriously impressed the reviewer. The sheer simplicity of the Blazer was impressive. The Blazer was designed to be adjusted from the ground up. One could add such comforts like a front passenger seat, but these were options. The Jimmy was designed and sold in a similar manner.⁴

As was seen in the remark from MacDonald, there seemed to be a bond between owners of these early SUVs. No doubt, most of these vehicles were purchased strictly for work purposes, like farming and such. For consumers like these, they might well be the only car owned. For other consumers, this was likely the second vehicle they owned. From the clues given in the texts, it appears that these owners used them for escaping the world of the 9 to 5 job. It was used for going camping, hunting, fishing and other outdoors activities. (Norbye, 1965a; Norbye, 1965b)

The SUV field had slow but steady growth over the next decade. One minor shift did occur for Jeep in 1970. Kaiser sold the Jeep division to the American Motors Corporation (AMC). One of AMC’s first moves was to

⁴The passenger seat did not become standard on the Blazer until 1979. It became standard on the Jimmy in 1980. (Ackerson, 1995:74, 318-319)

separate civilian production from military. The military division became American Motors General Corporation (AMG). It was AMG that developed the Hummer for the Army after completely separating itself from AMC.

The entire automobile industry did suffer a large set back in 1973 with the onset of the oil crisis. With the sharp rise in gas prices and long wait for gas, drivers began to reconsider their dependence on the automobile. The response from the auto industry was an increased focus on small, fuel-efficient cars. This was reinforced in 1975 by the U.S. Congress with the Corporate Average Fuel Economy (CAFE) requirements. This required that auto makers achieve an average fuel economy of 27.5 by 1985. Few SUVs on the market at that time were close to being fuel-efficient. In the wake of the oil crisis, most people were not interested in large, gas guzzling dinosaurs.



Figure 2.1
Chevy Suburban before the latest round of styling.

In the midst of this upheaval, there were some changes in the market. A redesigned Suburban was unveiled in 1973. This new Suburban was targeted at the SUV audience. It was designed for off-road use, with a large

carrying capacity. At this point “it started to attract sportsmen, travelers and especially the type of people it was named for: suburbanites. It could hold a Little League team and all of its equipment.” (Wolff, 1997:56) Also, Jeep introduces the Cherokee in 1974. This was a two door version of its Wagoneer. Although the Wagoneer was widely considered to be the best vehicle in its class, it was consistently outsold by the Bronco and the Blazer/Jimmy. The Cherokee attempted to compete in the two-door SUV market of the Broncos and Blazers.

Up until the SUV boom in the 1980s and 90s, ownership of these vehicles was relatively limited. Part of the appeal they had was the spartan, rugged look. For example, Volkswagen had an SUV in the 70s called the Thing. The Thing was a competitor of the Jeep CJ for several years. One reason that people chose the Thing over the CJ was it’s style. A typical comment about it was “I saw the Thing and thought it was so ugly it was cute. I do own a 1969 CJ5, but the Thing is a lot uglier and cheaper.” (Quoted in Lamm, 1974:128) The Thing was ugly and its owners reveled in this fact. This seems to be a common theme among many SUV owners during this time. With most of the SUVs point was to look ugly, at least in a I-can-take-this-thing-anywhere way. The one exception being the Cherokee and Wagoneer, which did have a certain elegance. As one reviewer noted:

the Wagoneer somehow projected a softness in appearance, elicited the feeling that it was an “estate wagon” sort of car primarily designed to appeal to retirees, aggressive corporate veeps who wanted something to go fishing with, or dilettante suburbanites who wanted to dress up their wives in something that looks like old money. (Given, 1973: 106)

The Wagoneer and the Cherokee seem to be exceptions to what was the sports utility field. The goal of these vehicles was to have form follow function and I believe they succeeded in this. Even the more stylish Wagoneers and

Cherokees performed well off-road. The early SUVs were generally ugly, but good vehicles if your concern was off-roading and such. This was about to change.

Proliferation/Explosion

The market for SUVs began to explode in the early 80s. This marks a profound shift in the audience for SUVs and in their construction. Whereas the older SUVs had been aimed at the sportsman, the SUVs of the 80s and 90s were targeted at a wider group. SUVs became much more style-conscious and refined.

The opening gambit

The two vehicles which got much of this going were the Chevy Blazer S-10 and the GMC Jimmy S-15, which are basically the same. These were smaller, “sportier” versions of the larger Blazers and Jimmys. Both went on the market in late 1982. Within a year, both of the “S” models outsold their larger cousins. Both of the new models were more fuel-efficient, “fun to drive” and comfortable than the larger models. This marked a significant shift in the SUV market. Although styling was important for Jeep’s Cherokee and Wagoneer, the bulk of the market was dominated by GM and Ford which were much less subtle in their rugged look. The new “S” models had a serious sense of refinement which the older ones did not. As Popular Science notes in a comparison test of the Bronco II, Jeep CJ7, and the Blazer: “there’s no question that Blazer is the most refined of the current four-wheelers--almost to a fault: It may be *too pretty to take into the bush*. But I’d still like to have it in my driveway.” (Dunne and Keebler, 1983:26. Emphasis added) Another example is from a Motor Trend review of the Jimmy. “Strangely, the cargo area is carpeted.” (Frank, 1983: 69) With the rise of compact SUVs, style became important for almost every model.



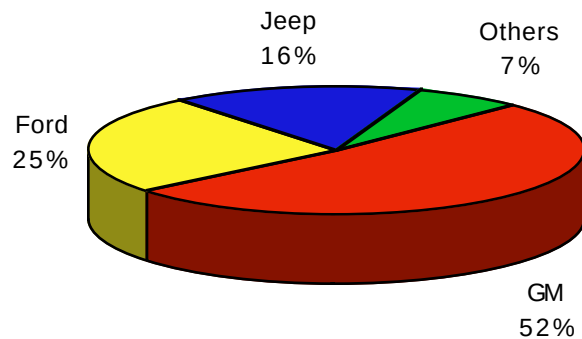
Figure 2.2
Late model Ford Bronco

Ford quickly retooled its only sport utility and in 1983 released the Bronco II. Although it did not sell quite as well as the GM compact SUVs, it did hold its own. The Bronco II still had a boxy exterior that lacked the aesthetic appeal of GM compact SUVs.



Figure 2.3
Late model Ford Bronco II

It is in 1983 that the SUV market underwent its first serious explosion in sales. In '82, the combined sales of SUVs was about 185,000. By the end of 1983, close to 420,000 were sold; over a two-fold increase. The market segmentation breaks down in the following way:



**Figure 2.4 SUV market segmentation in 1983
(Derived from Ward's, 1984)**

It is clear that GM, between the Chevy and GMC divisions, controlled the lion's share of the market. GM continued to dominate for several years, but the increased popularity of the Jeep Cherokee, and the rise of foreign SUVs caused its market share to shrink to about 30% by 1990.

1984 produced a flurry of activity from both domestic and foreign auto makers. Jeep redesigned its Cherokee and Wagoneer to fit the changing market. While these two Jeeps had always been the most style conscious of the older generation of SUVs, they needed to be updated to for the new SUV consumers. This meant abandoning the "old-money" look for something more contemporary, at least partially. The Cherokee adopted a more up-to-date form, while the "basic" and Grand Wagoneer kept a more retro-60s look. It was not till 1993, the year before it was discontinued, that the Grand Wagoneer abandoned this look.



Figure 2.5
Recent example of the 4Runner. Notice how it has lost much of the truck style.

Two new SUVs came from Japan. The first was the Toyota 4Runner. This came in two models: the more truck like and the SR-5. The latter was clearly designed to fit into the compact SUV market. This being said, it still looked like a hastily redesigned truck. The 4Runner was essentially a pickup truck with a hood permanently affixed to the body. The SR-5 also lacked the feel of many of the compact SUVs. It did not have the sporty drive that had attracted consumers to the Blazer/Jimmy and Bronco II.

Also, Isuzu introduced the Trooper to the United States. Following the example of the Mitsubishi Montero (introduced to this country in 1983, though its annual sales did not break 10,000 until 1987), the Trooper had a much more boxy look. Though it was boxy, it did have more luxurious appearance than the Ford Bronco II. It seems clear that Isuzu was aiming at a more affluent audience. One reason for the boxy appearance of the Trooper was to give a more “commanding” view of the road. It succeeded in this, but the narrow wheel base and the height made the Trooper prone to tipping

over. This is a problem for many of the post-Blazer-S SUVs which is finally being dealt with. Isuzu eliminated this “design flaw” around 1995.



Figure 2.6
Isuzu Trooper

Sales continued to rise in 1985, though only one new vehicle entered the market. This was the Suzuki Samurai. This was one of the earliest “mini-sport/utes” (mSUV). Compared to even the Blazer “S” the Samurai was tiny. In terms of size, they measure up around the CJ/Wrangler, though they shy away from the GP heritage of Jeep and the nostalgia that is associated with that heritage. The Samurai, and the mSUVs that followed in its path, were more like sport cars with four-wheel drive. They tended to be 2-door convertibles, though there were hard-top models. Many of the mSUVs were designed to be “first cars” for new buys. The Samurai does have a “youthful” look to it, which is combined with a heavily stylized interpretation of what it means to be rugged. With many of the mSUVs, with the exception of the

CJ/Wrangler, their performance off-road tends to be less than spectacular. (Gregory, 1996: 72-85)

In addition to still rising sales in 1986, the American consumer saw two new things on the market. The first was the freshly redesigned Jeep CJ, now called the “Wrangler.” This was a more “up-to-date” look for the oldest Jeep. The changes were not major, though designers still fretted if they were too much. The corners became less rounded and the front grill was reshaped. The interior did change somewhat more extensively, taking into account ergonomical factors. There was a wider range of colours available for the Wrangler. It is clear that Jeep wanted to minimize the amount of modifications to the CJ/Wrangler, while trying to stay in the styling currents.



Figure 2.7
Jeep Wrangler

The new addition to the larger SUV market was the Nissan Pathfinder. The Pathfinder did not sell well in 80s, at least compared to the American designed SUVs (the total Pathfinder sales from 1986 to 1990 was less than the Blazer alone in 1984). This point aside, the Pathfinder was an important SUV

for the time. It was originally designed from a truck, but these vestiges were quickly eliminated. By 1989, the Pathfinder had broken with the truck-like-image of the many larger SUVs. It was the first “high fashion” sport utility vehicle. In describing a later model, Patrick Bedard asks us to “Imagine a hiking boot by Gucci.” (Bedard, 1996: 109) Nissan produced an SUV that reconciled issues of performance with the concern for sporty look. This upped the ante for the high-end SUVs, and the price. Although its sales did not boom early on, the Pathfinder did break new ground.

Production and sales of SUVs continued to rise in 1987 and 1988. In terms of models, only the mSUV class grew. Suzuki began importing its new Sidekick, which superseded the then discontinued Samurai. Sensing profit to be made in the mSUV market, Suzuki and Chevrolet began releasing the Geo Tracker.



Figure 2.8
Geo Tracker, parked next to a Jeep Wrangler

The Tracker is a restyled version of the 2-door Samurai. Another important event in 1987 was Chrysler’s acquisition of AMC.

Canny Chrysler chairman Lee Iacocca was the one who insisted on buying AMC, making no secret that his main motive was to acquire jeep. He wanted the name. He wanted the product. He wanted the market. Iacocca's strategy was to take the jeep further upscale, which he did with the more expensive Cherokee Limited. It may not have been as technologically sophisticated as the Range Rover--which went on sale in the U.S. in 1987 and quickly established a new level of both status and price--but it offered much of the luxury for less. (Hazleton, 1993: 60)

This acquisition would save Chrysler trouble when the market picked up after 1991. Instead of having to design a new SUV and convert factories to produce them, they had the facilities in hand.



Figure 2.9
Early Isuzu Amigo, typically thought of as a “gillie ute.” (Berg, 1998: 67)

1989 marked a slight decline in SUV sales, dropping by 2%. This year also marked Isuzu's entry with into the mSUV market with its Amigo. This mSUV followed the trend of many of the others in the class of having a young, though “rugged” image. From the start of 1989 till the end of 1991, overall SUV sales continued to slide down, though not nearly as much as the

overall market for cars (see Figure 2.3). The total slide was about 5%, compared to the 23% drop in car sales over the same time. The SUV market seemed to have found its niche.

Sloanism with a vengeance

Two important events happened in 1990 that would influence the further development of the SUV market. First was the introduction of the Oldsmobile Bravada. Although the market was slumping slightly, GM decided to introduce a rebadged and restyled Blazer "S." The Bravada was only slightly modified, with more trim and flash and a few devices to enhance performance. Over the next few years sales fluctuated, with the lowest point coming in 1995. With SUV sales skyrocketing, the Bravada's sales dropped by over 50% from the previous year to only 3,946 units. Despite this example, the luxury divisions of many SUV manufacturers began a similar practice of marginally restyling and then rebadging.

The other important event was the introduction of the Explorer by Ford. This vehicle met with a very warm public reception. While many SUVs sales dropped slightly in 1990-1, the orders for Explorers outran the number that Ford could make. "With no rebates and only normal dealer discounts, the Ford Explorer has been selling so well that workers at the Louisville, Kentucky, assembly plant routinely work overtime... [M]ore than 30 percent of purchasers choosing the top-line Eddie Bauer version with a sticker price of up to \$25,000." (Keller, 1992:114) The Explorer quickly captured 27% of the SUV market and has continued to be the best-selling SUV. Part of its appeal comes from its off-road capability and other useful features. I believe a large part of its success can be accounted for through its styling though. It walks a fine line between the brutish styling of the Bronco II, which it superseded, and having a look of class like the more high-end

SUVs. The Explorer followed in the footsteps of the 1963 Wagoneer by being designed from the ground-up. This allowed styling considerations to play a significant role. By starting with a truck chassis, one has a limited set of styling options. By designing the Explorer from scratch, Ford could be more style conscious.



Figure 2.10
1996 Ford Explorer. Notice that the front has been restyled to resemble Ford's Expedition

The success of the Explorer is impressive since it hit right in the midst of the 1991 recession. The other major “spectacle” of 1990-1 was the Gulf War. Among other things involved with this war, once ground fighting broke out, AMG had 24-hour-a-day unpaid advertising for its Hummer. Shortly after the Gulf War, the Hummer became available on the commercial market. The first civilian owner was Arnold Schwarzenegger. The Hummer was the replacement for the military GP. I also believe that the Hummer took on a

similar cultural role as the Jeep CJ did after World War II. I will explore this point a little more in Chapter 3. (Hazleton, 1993: 59-60; Liddy, 1995)

1992 turned out to be a land mark year for the SUV. This was the first year sales broke 1,000,000 vehicles. From 1992 on, sales continued to climb at a surprising rate. This can be seen in the Figure 2.2.

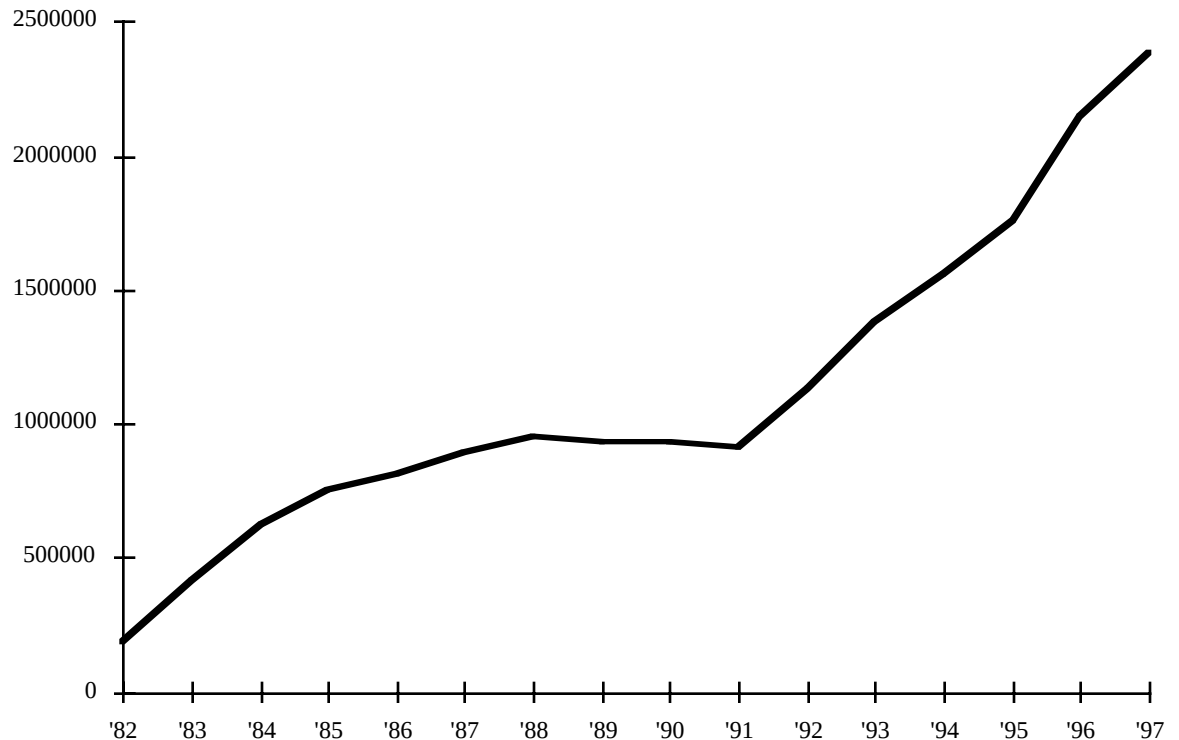


Figure 2.11: SUV sale from 1982 to 1997
(Derived from Ward's, 1984-1997 and Automotive News, 1998)

There was some shifting going on in the market. Jeep began to phase out the Wagoneer series, in favor of the more impressive and expensive Grand Cherokee.



Figure 2.12
Jeep Grand Cherokee

Isuzu entered the middle size market with the Rodeo. Also, GM began renaming some of their SUVs. The first was the GMC division, which dropped the “S” from the Jimmy S-10 and renamed the full-size Jimmy, the “Yukon.” In 1994, Chevrolet followed suit and dropped the “S” from the Blazer and christening the older, larger Blazer the Tahoe.



Figure 2.13
Chevrolet Tahoe.

Virtually every SUV sold well at this point. Also, more entered the fray. In 1993 Honda made a deal with Isuzu to rebadge the Rodeo under the name Passport. Isuzu introduced the Rodeo in 1990 and began selling well immediately. There were some small changes with the new vehicle, but the basic body, engine, transmission and other systems remained the same. Honda did this again with its Acura SLX, which is a rebadged Isuzu Trooper. As did Mazda with a rebadged Ford Explorer called the Navajo, which was produced from 1990 to 1995.

In addition to the proliferation of models, there was an increase in two other areas. First were the “hybrids.” These are vehicles that have taken some aspects of the sport utility trend and fused them with other forms. No doubt the most obscure of these is the Suzuki X-90. It lies somewhere between an mSUV and a sports car. (Bedard, 1995: 54-55) The more popular hybrid is the Subaru Outback series. Since 1995 Subaru has started making 4-wheel drive standard on many of its cars. This allows them to function much

like an SUV, but without the bulk or the commanding view of the road. The Outbacks present a solid alternative for a “contrarian” who wants the power of an SUV without driving one. (Berg, 1994: 168-169; Berg, 1995b: 75-79; Markus, 1998b: 168)

The other trend of late is the use of SUVs in new fields. Chevrolet has begun packaging their Tahoe for police use. (Smith, 1996: 105-107; Smith, 1998: 113-121) This is not entirely new. Jeeps (especially the CJ/Wrangler) have been used by the U.S. Forestry service for many years, but this trend is now moving out from the rural wilderness and into the urban. Many cities have begun purchasing other SUVs especially for police use. Also, several security groups have begun purchasing the “Raptor” from a group called Specialty Vehicles International (SVI). The Raptor is essentially a modified Suburban, but these modifications include armor plating and a retractable machine gun mount in the roof. (Phillips, 1996, 126-131)



Figure 2.14
Ford Expedition

Returning to the recent trends, proliferation has been growing in all directions. Ford began phasing out the Bronco in 1995 to introduce the new Expedition. The Expedition went on the market in late 1996 and has sold well since. Based on the frame of the F-150 Series trucks, the Expedition is enormous. The venerable Suburban is the only SUV that is larger. The styling on the Expedition emphasizes its size in a way the Suburban does not. It is also more rounded and less boxy than other SUVs. The next year, Chrysler's Dodge division premiered the Durango. This was the first SUV from Chrysler not made by Jeep in a decade. While smaller than the Expedition, the Durango also attempts to emphasis its size through styling.



Figure 2.15
Dodge Durango

In terms of the number of models, the luxury market has expanded the most. As noted above, the Oldsmobile Bravada was the first SUV “developed” specifically by the luxury division of any auto maker. It was not until 1996 that other luxury divisions began a similar practice. Within a year, the number of luxury SUVs went from one model to five. The first on the

scene was the Acura SLX. This SUV is a rebadged version of the latest Isuzu Trooper. Toyota's luxury division, Lexus, and Nissan's luxury division, Infinity, soon followed up with higher-priced versions of the Land Cruiser and the Pathfinder. In the same year, Ford's Mercury division released the Mountaineer (the Explorer), and the Lincoln division unveiled the Navigator (Expedition) the following year. These were naked attempts by these luxury divisions to make money from a growing market. For example, the Mercury Mountaineer does not given that many new features which typify these luxury models. "[T]here's a different, finer-toothed chrome grill and a new luggage rack. The addition of two red reflectors makes for what Mercury calls a European-style rear bumper, and there's a reworked front bumper, too. That's about it." (Schroeder, 1996a: 161) These remarks are typical for the rebadged luxury SUVs.

September 1997 marked Mercedes-Benz's entrance into the SUV melee with the M-Class. This SUV marks a somewhat significant change for the luxury auto makers. Mercedes did not have a low-end SUV to base a luxury model on (like the Oldsmobile Bravada, which is based on the Chevy Blazer); nor did they seek out the help of another to put one on the market, like the deals between Honda/Acura and Isuzu. Also, the M-Class was not developed around a truck chassis. Instead, Mercedes built the M-Class completely from scratch, using the latest marketing research to determine what consumers wanted. This inspired Lexus to do similar studies in producing their RX300. "Lexus took a look at the reasons why people choose *not* to buy sport-utes, and discovered dissatisfaction in the following areas: comfort, refinement, stability, fuel consumption, and sophistication." (Winfield, 1998c: 63) These discoveries influenced Lexus's design of the RX300. (Schroeder, 1998b: 92-99) This move to design luxury SUVs from scratch seems to have become a new

trends, as BMW and the alliance between Porches and VW have started designing and building their own SUVs.



Figure 2.16
Toyota RAV4

In addition to the growth at the top of SUV chain, there were several new additions to the smaller end. Kia introduced the Sportage in 1995 and Toyota entered the mSUV field with the RAV4. Honda followed suit with the CR-V. All three of these entries were larger than the Tracker and Wrangler. In terms of size, they fit in between the Wrangler and the 2-door medium sized SUVs. Towards the end of 1995, Isuzu discontinued the Amigo, since it had a very poor sales record for years. The redesigned Amigo was introduced into the SUV market in 1998, but it remains to be seen whether the changes Isuzu made will make it more popular.



Figure 2.17
Honda CR-V

Conclusions

At the end of 1997, there were a total of 38 different models of SUVs. This is up from 12 in 1981. While the sales of cars have been diminishing of late, trucks, which include most of the SUVs explored here, have been rising rapidly.

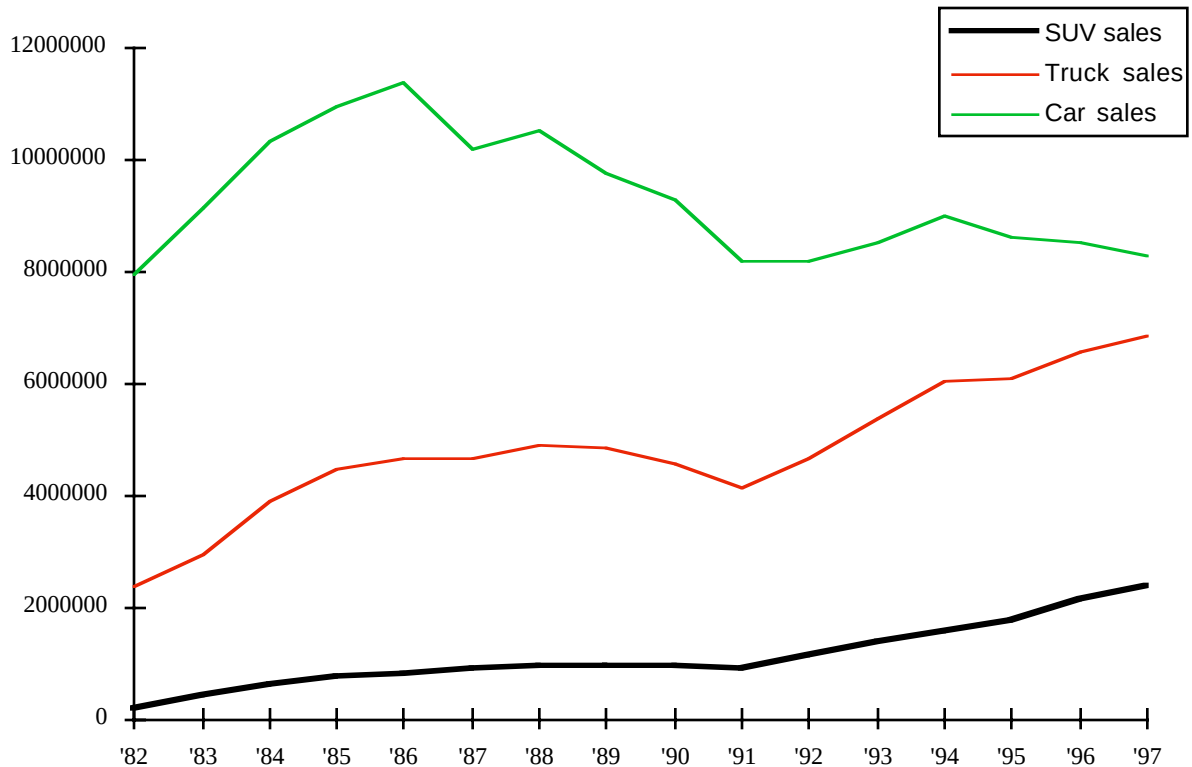


Figure 2.17 Car, Truck and SUV sales from 1982 to 1997
 (Derived from Ward's, 1984-1997 and Automotive News, 1998)

Part of the recent rise in sale of trucks has been due to the ever growing popularity of SUVs. The wider truck market has begun to cut into the car market.

To take advantage of this, several auto makers are planning on introducing more SUVs. The plans of the luxury divisions were discussed above. There are other plans in the works though. Each of the Big Three intended to release mSUVs shortly. This is the smallest segment of domestic SUV production and the Big Three want to profit from it. Also, Suzuki plans to release its own interpretation of the luxury SUV.

As the SUV becomes increasingly popular and visible, criticisms have grown more intense. For years, safety experts have questioned if the security these vehicles project is real and insurance companies have begun to listen as

more SUVs are purchased. Environmentalists bemoan the damage SUVs produce, both to the rural wilderness and through emissions. This has led to the founding of group called “Tread Lightly!” by makers of these vehicles. Tread Lightly! intends to teach good habits for using SUVs in rural wilderness without damaging those environments. Their guidelines begin with “Use common sense and stay on existing roads and trails.” (Jeep, 1997: Back cover) This almost begs the question of why one buys such a vehicle in the first place.

Other criticisms are more mundane. One writer from Los Angeles fears that the SUV will kill a California tradition, the sports car. (Birnbaum, 1996) A writer for Time Magazine wonders if these vehicles are really as “macho” as they appear. (Ferguson, 1997: 76) It has even become a target for one of this decades most astute social commentators, The Simpsons. They have a parody of an SUV commercial that refers to the Suburban/Expedition size competition. In this short piece they manage to get most of the appeal of these vehicles and demonstrate its absurdity.

SUVs have gone through a number of significant changes in since World War II. They have gone from ugly, bulky road crushers to highly stylized urban assault vehicles. There is a discontinuity around 1980 where this shift occurs. With the exception of the Jeep Wagoneer, sports/utility vehicles were meant to be ugly and brutish. This follows from the utilitarian military design ethic that gave rise to this industry. Now, sport/utility vehicles are as style conscious as sports cars. This change marks a major shift in the approach to the SUV, both from owners and the corporations. More will be said about this in the following chapter.

Chapter 3:

Urban assault vehicles and portable civilizations

I began this essay with the question “is there a transactional and transformative relationship between cars and drivers?” I am now in a position to address this directly. In Chapter 1 I outlined a semiotic perspective on the self and on technologies of the self. The following chapter charted the growth of sport utility vehicles over the last fifty years. It is now time to weave these two strands together into a coherent account of the relationship between SUV and driver.

The purpose of this chapter is to explore the current “tribe” of the SUV. I will show how the SUV has become a technology of the self and also why they have become so popular in the past few years. These how and why questions are closely linked for two reasons. First, the self is formed historically. The location of the self≈sign in a given point will inform its possible meanings. Since the self≈sign is bound up with history, the technologies used to transform that self will also vary from context to context. This should also be clear from Pitt’s model, since it is necessary for us to understand the context of the technology to see how the first- and second-order transformers and feedback mechanisms operate. For these reasons, it is important to explore why the SUV has become a technology of the self in addition to exploring how.

I begin with a detailed overview of the current SUV market. This includes looking at the names of these vehicles, the distribution of models and their respective sales. I also make a first pass at understanding some of the images involved. I then turn to an example to illustrate my concern with the relationships discussed above. This gives a detailed account of the

mechanisms involved with using an SUV as a technology of the self. After this, I go on to look at the context of the current tribe. I then return to the current market and develop an explanation of why these vehicles have become so popular as technologies of the self.

Before diving into the rest of this chapter, let me explain a bit of terminology. Throughout this chapter I refer to the owners of the SUV as a “tribe.” As we saw in the previous chapter, there have been two principal groups of owners: those from the 1960s and 70s and then the group that coalesced in the 1980s and has continued to grow. These form two different “tribes.” The reason “tribe” has been chosen is to escape the idealized, rational subject of modernist social theory. This goes along with the critique of the Cartesian philosophy of mind that ran throughout Chapter 1. Although there are exceptions, many social theorists tend to portray actors as being reflective and rational in a Cartesian sense. Which seems to mean that they have a perfect view of the situation and chose the best option. By appropriating this non-modern term, I hope to escape from these disembodied rational actors.¹ This term also goes along with my analysis of the recent boom of the SUV. As will be seen below, the rise of the SUV is tied to some of the wider economic and cultural changes referred to as “postmodern.” This non-modern term finds a home in some aspects of postmodern discourse.

Signs of wealth, adventure and the untamed West

Let me begin with a brief exercise. This involves a short analysis of the names that corporations have given to their SUVs. These names are significant, since they portray a specific set of images. I will limit my

¹What I seek to abandon here is a traditional discourse on rationality. The account implicitly used here follows the lines of Pitt’s work on rationality. See Pitt, 1988 and Pitt, Forthcoming: 25-34.

discussion to those in current production, though most of those that have been discontinued follow these same themes.² There are three groups of names: those that use model numbers and letters, those that make reference to some exciting activity or persona, and those that make reference to the western part of North America. There are also a few left over that require special consideration.

The first set includes the Honda CR-V, the Toyota RAV4, the Lexus LX450, the Suzuki X-90, the Mercedes-Benz M-Class, the Acura SLX and the Infinity QX4. These follow the European trend of naming models by a numbers and a few letters, though not words. This practice is a bit strange for the Toyota, Honda, and Suzuki, since they do not strictly practice this otherwise. It makes more sense for the luxury cars (SLX, QX4, LX450, and M-Class) though, since European cars tend to be associated with the upper class. In this way there is a referent, though more obscured than a name like “Explorer.” I can only guess at the reason the smaller, low-end mSUVs have this sort of name. One conjecture might be that these mSUVs are also heavily marketed and sold in Japan. The market for larger vehicles is much smaller in Japan. So, these mSUVs would fit well into the Japanese market and these companies have not decided to rename them.³

The second group includes Expedition, Explorer, Blazer, Passport, Pathfinder, 4Runner, Mountaineer, Tracker, Navigator, Defender, Discovery, and Trooper. Each of these names, in one way or another, imply some sort of adventure or excitement. Explorer, Trooper, and Defender are all excellent examples. Each has a thrilling sound. As does the rest of the list. The Honda

²Consider the International Harvester “Scout,” the Mazda “Navaho,” and the Ford “Bronco.”

³Another possibility is that since these, in part, are vehicles to draw first-time buyers into the SUV market, these names attempt to convey a sense of the higher-end without being so expensive. As if to say “while you can only afford a RAV4 (?), this name will make it seem like a ‘better’ vehicle.”

could be your *Passport* to brave new worlds. Who would not want to be trail-*Blazer*?⁴ One could go through the whole list. With several, there is a sense getting away from what is normal: 4Runner, Pathfinder, Mountaineer. All of these imply a sense of dynamism, of adventuring into the unknown. I list Kia's Sportage here, since it tries to have a similar sense of adventure. It does not make a reference to some specific activity or person, but it does try to imitate this theme. Although lacking the finesse of the other names, the Range Rover and the Land Cruiser also fit here. These names do not quite have the same rush that the others possess, but they operate in a similar vein. Though unsubstantiated, these two probably served as inspiration for the rest in this group since they both date from the late 1950s.

The last group includes Durango, Tahoe, Yukon, Amigo, Sidekick, Cherokee, Wrangler and Rodeo. Let me analyze these a bit more closely. Durango, Tahoe and Yukon are all names of places in the North American West. Popular culture has immortalized this region in the Wild West movies. Especially Durango and Tahoe draw on the geography of the American West: untamed, strange, rugged. These are vehicles for navigating through such terrain. The Yukon is in the "barren wastes" of Northwestern Canada. The GMC Yukon is the perfect SUV for surviving in this snow-swept wilderness. Following this "Wild West" strand, we have the Rodeo, the Amigo, the Wrangler, and the Sidekick. All of these words have some association with this idealized image of the West and give these SUVs legitimacy as rugged vehicles. Even names like Amigo and Sidekick are not surprising, since these are at the small-end of the SUV. Who would dislike an Amigo? Sidekicks are always trustworthy. The Cherokee is the only

⁴Of course, this name seems to have been chosen because it's thrilling. "Blazer" also means an informal sports jacket.

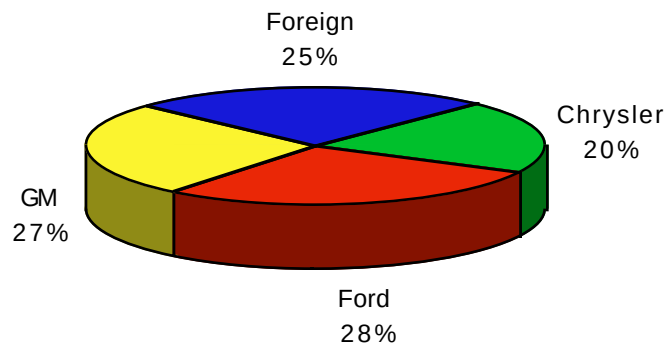
model that sticks out here with the Western motif. The Cherokee were an Native American tribe from North Carolina and northern Georgia, who were “relocated” to Oklahoma. So, the term Cherokee only marginally, at best, refers to a Western theme. I am unsure how much this matters to the mind of a marketing executive. While many people may or may not know the exact history of the Cherokee, most know enough to know it is an Indian name. At this point the idea of “the noble savage” and all comes to mind. This term appears to play on these stereotypes.

This leaves only four stragglers: the Montero, Bravada, Jimmy and Suburban. “Montero” is a word, originally Spanish, for huntsman or the cap that a huntsman would wear. This manages to draw in both the second and third themes. Bravada is slightly stranger. This is the Spanish word for “bravado,” which means false heroism in English. This seems a bit too ironic for an auto maker, but it does pull in the Western motif again. The Jimmy, while not really fitting into the previous two groups, still projects a similar image. There are at least two ways to read “Jimmy.” First, we can read it as a nickname for James. In this sense, Jimmy is a comfortable name. Someone we know well. The implication might be that “Jimmy” is reliable and a good friend. The second reading of “Jimmy” is as a small crowbar or the use of a small crowbar to pry things open. As a vehicle that was designed to go off-road and into “nature,” this name makes sense. This is a vehicle to “jimmy” open nature. The name “Suburban” I believe is a hold over from when it was first introduced in the mid-1930s. As noted in the previous chapter, it was used principally as a commercial vehicle. It probably acquired its name through being used to deliver goods out to the suburbs, hence the name.

The significance of these names will become clear below. The images captured in the second and third groups have become an important aspect of how the SUV is viewed.

The market in the late 1990s

Let me now turn to a brief overview of the SUV market at the start of 1998. At the start of the year, there were 36 different models in production. As noted in the Chapter 2, several more SUVs should be out within a year. In terms of sales, the bulk is being produced by the Big Three (GM, Chrysler, Ford), which controls 75% of the SUV.



**Figure 3.1: Market Share of SUV sales, 1997 Calendar Year
(derived from Automotive News 1998 Market Data Book)**

Ford has the largest market share, principally because of the continued booming sales of the Explorer and Expedition. Of the Big Three Chrysler has the smallest share. This is understandable though since they own Jeep, which will most likely continue to be profitable. Chrysler's Dodge division is attempting to get into "the game" with its Durango. As of this writing, only Dodge and Jeep are producing SUVs for Chrysler and there are no further plans to introduce many more.

In terms of models, there are more different kinds being produced by foreign companies (21 models produced by non-American companies as

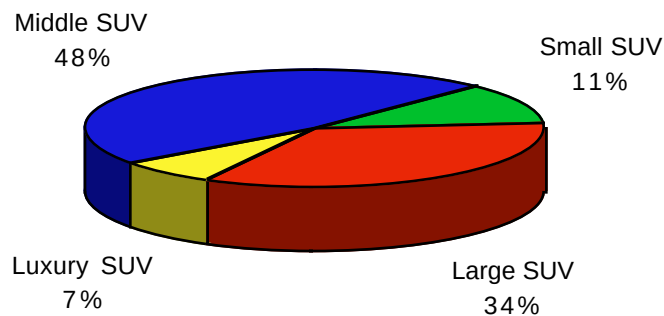
compared to 15 from the Big Three).⁵ We can further refine this list by breaking down the market by size. As seen in the previous chapter there are three major sizes of SUVs, though these sizes blend into each other. In the chart below, I have categorized the Model year 1998 SUVs. I have also included the “luxury market.” By “luxury” I mean one of two things. First, those produced by the luxury divisions of the auto manufactures, i.e. Lincoln, Oldsmobile, and Lexus. I have also included Mercedes-Benz and Land Rover as luxury vehicles, principally due to the intended consumer and the price involved.

	Small SUV	Middle SUV	Large SUV	Luxury SUV
Domestic	Wrangler	Blazer	Yukon	Mountaineer
	Tracker	Jimmy	Tahoe	Navigator
		Explorer	Suburban (GM and Chevy)	Bravada
		Cherokee	Expedition	
			Grand Cherokee	
			Durango	
<i>Total Domestic</i>	<i>2 (6%)</i>	<i>4 (11%)</i>	<i>6 (17%)</i>	<i>3 (8%)</i>
Foreign	Amigo	Passport	Land Cruiser	QX4
	Sportage	Rodeo	Trooper	M Class
	Sidekick	Montero Sport	Montero	SLX
	X-90	Pathfinder		LX450
	RAV4	4Runner		Defender
	CR-V			Discover
				Range Rover
<i>Total Foreign</i>	<i>6 (17%)</i>	<i>5 (14%)</i>	<i>3 (8%)</i>	<i>7 (19%)</i>
Total	8 (23%)	9 (25%)	9 (25%)	10 (26%)

**Table 3.1 Distribution of SUV models based on size
(derived from Automotive News 1998 Market Data Book)**

This chart only reflects the number and percentage of the types of models in production. It does not show what percentage each class makes up in terms of sales. This is reflected in the graph below:

⁵This does not include the Outback “hybrids” from Subaru, but does include the Suzuki X-90.



**Figure 3.2 SUV Market segmentation 1997 calendar year
(derived from Automotive News 1998 Market Data Book)**

The reason I have brought up these distinctions arises from the different markets each segment attracts. Clearly, the luxury market is aimed at those who have a great deal of money. The small SUV market generally aims at younger audience (about 18 to 30 or so). The middle and large SUV market, 82% of the sales, target the established middle class who have settled down and started families. This requires a bit more elucidation. I will deal with these in ascending order of size and price.

The small SUVs aim to draw young consumers into this market. This is reflected principally in the base prices, which start around \$14,000 and go up to about \$23,000. Such a price, especially when leased or paid through installments, is within reach of college graduates who are preparing to enter the middle class. As Steve Kerho, Isuzu's national brand manager, explains: "Seventy percent of Generation Xers would like a sport-ute, but they can't afford \$25,000." (Quoted in Berg, 1998: 67) This is why the new Amigo is priced starting at \$15,440. In a similar vein, discussing the RAV4, "one Toyota spokesman called this 'an entry-level sport-ute,' which suggests a price below the big guys." (Bedard, 1995:57) These vehicles are, by definition, small. They

are two or four seaters. They are not specifically designed for families, due to the size and the arrangement of the seats. These also are priced lower than the others. The commercials and brochures for the small SUVs portray them as vehicles for young adults who seek adventure.

There is split between the vehicles though. The Jeep Wrangler still has a style similar to the original GPV of World War II. The rest of the field is much more sleek and contemporary in their styling. The Wrangler makes up about 30% of the market. Toyota and Honda control about 25% of the market each. The remain 20% is split between Isuzu, Kia, Suzuki, and Geo. The Wrangler has the GPV tradition to draw on. Because of this tradition, it also has a solid audience and reputation. The Toyota RAV4 and Honda CR-V are two of the largest in this class, almost bordering on the middle SUV group. This makes them a little more appealing for families. As with many of the larger and more expensive models, these also have a number of extras. For example, there are outlets so one can power a computer or cellular phone.

As we saw in Figure 3.2, the combined medium and large SUV market is the largest segment. The medium market accounts for almost 50% of the new SUV sales in 1997. At first glance, these two markets seem very similar; the main differences being price and size. To some degree this is true, but there are some subtle differences between these two classes. Since these vehicles make up so much of the SUV market, I offer a more detailed analysis.

The most popular vehicle in the middle SUV class is Ford Explorer, making up 33% of this particular market. I will go into a more extended discussion of an Explorer below, but I will make a few comments here. The success of the Explorer is a bit strange. “The Ford Explorer has been a teeth knasher for auto critics. Year after year, they grumble about the Explorer’s

vague handling, loud V-6 engines, and boxy styling. And year after year, Ford can't build them fast enough." (Schroeder, 1996, 161) As I noted in the previous chapter, I think part of the success comes from the balance it creates between being large and brutish and having a look along the lines of the higher-priced SUVs. Part of the Explorers' success no doubt arises from this style being well timed. It was not until 1995 that GM began to do serious restyling on its SUVs. When the market it picked up in 1991, the Jimmy and Blazer were "too dated." Another factor in its success is the relatively low price for an Explorer, though this can only be pushed so far as an explanation. This is because many consumers tend to buy the "Eddie Bauer" option which is the most expensive version. (Keller, 1992, 114) This establishes a link between the Explorer and the middle-class outdoor clothing outfitter.

The rest of the domestic mid-sized SUV field is made up by the GMC Jimmy, the Chevy Blazer and Jeep Cherokee. All three have been enshrined as classics. This has gone so far as to see Jeep release a more retro-styled Cherokee called "the Classic." These three vehicles have all sold well in the 1990s, though still running behind the Explorer. They now all have the creature comforts that SUVs are known for. They can function as family cars (i.e., station wagons), since the non-Sport versions have a large amount of cargo space. (Csere, 1993) All three also have "Sport" versions which are slightly shorter, generally two-door, and a more powerful engine. Although all three have been "updated" in terms of style, they still have remnants of the box-on-wheels look (as does the Explorer).

The foreign mid-sized SUVs have a more sporty look. The best example of this is the Rodeo/Passport. This ends up being less threatening and hulking. The body is sleek, with more curves than the domestics in this class. There has been an increased homogenization of these models in the

last few years. With two exceptions, they have been moving towards a more similar look. The interior is as well-equipped as the domestics, if not more so.

The prices on the vehicles in this class range from \$20,000 to over \$30,000. It should be noted that for each model there are a number of variants. On average, there are about three different “editions.” We saw the Explorer “Eddie Bauer” edition and the “Sport” versions. With each of these editions, there a different set of options to fit the model. As a rule, an “S” model is the sport version (which might include a more powerful engine and two doors) and an “L” model is the luxury version (a few of the niceties that the auto makers stick on their luxury versions, but at a lower price). There is no standard way of denoting the base model.

Now we come to the large SUV class. Among the domestics, there are two groups. The first comes from GM. These are the Yukon, Tahoe and Suburban. The Yukon and Tahoe are large. The Suburban is monstrous. These have a large amount of carrying capacity and decent off-road capability. The second group includes the Ford Expedition, the Jeep Grand Cherokee, and the Dodge Durango. The Grand Cherokee is the smallest of the second group. It actually sits lower to the ground than the Cherokee, but is wider and longer. Next is Durango, which is fits in somewhere between the Expedition and Grand Cherokee. Lastly is the colossal Expedition, though the Suburban is still larger.

I separate this second group from the first because of their styling. There is little doubt that GM’s large SUVs are just that, but they do not emphasize this point. The size comes off as utilitarian. They are designed to have a large carry capacity. The other three members of the domestic field attempt to emphasize their magnitude. Through the design of the front end

(especially the grill), the arrangement of the windows, the height and the width of the SUV, they create a feeling of being enormous. These three are the full-bore urban assault vehicles.⁶ They look intimidating. Feeling threatened, GM felt it necessary to run a commercial after the debut of the Expedition reminding consumers that the Suburban is still larger.

The three foreign large SUVs appeal to a different image. The Land Cruiser has been around since the 1950s and has a reputation for being used for exploration in jungles, deserts, and tundra. In marketing the Land Cruiser, Toyota has decided to use this extensively. Its motto is now “the true measure of a sport utility vehicle is not where it can go. But rather, where it has been.” (Toyota, 1998a: back cover) The Land Cruiser has abandoned the rough and tumble look of those that have appeared in countless nature television shows. It has adopted a style that fits more closely to the contemporary market, though Toyota constantly seeks to remind the consumer of the original. The look of the current Land Cruiser has moved towards the urban assault vehicle model, though a kinder, gentler one. It is impressive, but not quite as threatening as Expedition.

The Trooper and Montero have undergone some relatively significant shifts in styling. In the 1980s, they both had a very boxy exterior. Both have moved towards the more conventional look in the last few years, principally because of safety concerns. As discussed in the last chapter, the high, thin, boxy body made them prone to turning over. This flaw has been corrected. The older style of both these came off as an idealized interpretation of the

⁶It is at this point we most clearly see the reentry of the military heritage. The idea of the SUV as a vehicle to go into the city and conquer, which will be discussed below, comes out of this heritage. While SUVs have become more refined over the years, there is still connections between the present form and its predecessors. At the level of symbols, the auto makers have continued to preserve this military descent. The common portrayal of the SUV as being tank-like attests to this.

“classical” SUVs. They had the same rectangular body as the 60s Land Cruiser and Land Rover, but it was refined in such a way to make reference to the older ones while trying to still look fashionable. Both of these have lost much of that look. There are still hints, but they have moved closer to the “SUV main-stream.”

Lastly we come to the luxury SUV (or LSUV) class. The basic idea behind most of these is simple. The various auto makers take a successful design, add some refinements, make options standard, add even more options, then have their luxury division sell it at an inflated price. The exceptions in this class come from Mercedes and Land Rover, for reasons mentioned above. Noting these two exceptions, we find very little originality in these vehicles. The Mercury Mountaineer is simply a more “refined” version of the Ford Explorer and the Lincoln Navigator is a more posh Expedition (a hard thing to do). The Oldsmobile Bravada does the same for the Blazer/Jimmy from GM. The Japanese badged LSUVs are not much better.⁷ The Acura SLX, Honda’s entry into the LSUV market, is simply an improved version of the latest Isuzu Trooper. The Lexus LX450 is an even-more-expensive version of Toyota’s Land Cruiser. The QX4 is the Nissan Pathfinder all over again. Of those listed here, only the Mercedes M-Class was designed from scratch. As discussed in the last chapter, this seems to be the latest trend for the luxury manufacturers.

Of the luxury class, only Land Rover produced SUVs before the 1990s. All the Land Rovers were much like most of the early SUVs. They were designed for off-road use and had a minimum of luxuries. This has changed

⁷Though in the defense of Toyota/Lexus, the recently debuted RX300 was designed from the ground up. See my discussion of the RX in Chapter 2. Since it went on the market in 1998 as a 1999 model, I have not dealt with it here. Also, the RX will be somewhat cheaper than many of the LSUVs.

a great deal. All three of their SUVs, the Defender, the Range Rover and the Discovery, have been redesigned to be as refined as possible. The Defender is closest to the older models and still has a Jeep-like look. Even though it does resemble the GVP and the CJ, certain refinements and the “Land Rover” name and heritage lead the Defender to be regarded more highly. As Phil Berg, a writer for Car and Driver, describes it:

I’m driving this Defender at 70 on a Detroit freeway. But I don’t feel like a commuter during rush hour. Right now I feel like Dr. Richard Leakey driving back through the Rift Valley on his way from Lake Rudolf in Kenya after having just unearthed another Pliocene hominid skull. Last night I felt like I was delivering the serum to the orphanage in Nome during a blizzard. Are these feelings worth \$30K? Put it this way: In a similarly basic Jeep Wrangler I would feel like a California high school student cruising for a place to hide from the park ranger. (Quoted in Csere 1994, 84)

All of the Land Rovers try to cultivate a similar image. Though many commuters might not know exactly what they are looking at, the Land Rover has become associated with images like Berg describes. These sorts of images come at price though. The base price of the Defender 90 is around \$30,000. The Discovery is \$35,000 and the Range Rover starts about \$50,000. The Land Rover series has made the transition from the back country to the country club.

It should not be surprising that there is a wide range of “different” SUVs. Automobility began as something principally for the upper-class. Before mass production, cars were enormously expensive and were signs of wealth. Even after the advent of the Model T, the rich still had a wider range of options for expressing themselves through automobility. Although there has been change in the sort of vehicle the bourgeoisie chooses, the fact that many use automobility as an expression of individuality has not. Due to this history, auto makers have tended to offer a number of different luxury

models, so that the rich can individuate themselves and demonstrate their superiority over those of a lower economic status.

What is a sport/utility vehicle?

Now that we have seen the current structure of the SUV market, I turn to an analysis of the relationship between an SUV and a driver. This will help to elucidate the overall concerns of this chapter. With an in-depth understanding of this relationship, we can begin to see the larger themes which I will explore below.

Following from the discussion of Peirce's semiotics, we find that any SUV is an amalgamation of Signs. The indices forming the material base of the object, while icons form its associated qualities. For example, consider a black Ford Explorer Sport.



Figure 3.3
Ford Explorer Sport

The body of the Explorer is an index. More properly put, our thought of the body of the Explorer is an index, since all thoughts are signs. Bound up the body as index is the colour of the body, which functions as an icon. A more comprehensive list can be generated for the rest of the Explorer. The various parts, such as the engine, seats, steering wheel, and tires, can be broken down in a similar manner.⁸

In addition to the indices and icons associated with the Explorer, there are symbols. The symbols subsume the icons and indices under it. This operates in much the same way that the arguments of the self≈sign subsume the icons and indices associated with the subject. Whereas the icons and indices are manifestations of the physical constitution of the Explorer, the symbols exist only in virtue of our use of it. Embedded within the symbols associated with the Explorer are the meanings, the actions, that we use based on it.

In a manner similar to the proposal in Chapter 1 that we should think of the self as an argument, I now propose that an Explorer can be thought of in the same way. If we view each part of the SUV Sign as terms and propositions, then the total of these terms and propositions will be an argument. The Explorer's chassis, doors, mirrors, transmission each constitute terms. as these systems build up, they become propositions. The sum total of these Sign-systems become the argument that forms the Explorer we use. For the time being, I will refer to this as the "Explorer≈sign."

In addition to just the Explorer≈sign as determined from its physical manifestation, the Explorer also draws upon the symbols associated with the

⁸Throughout the remainder of this Chapter, I fluctuate between talking about Signs and about "things." These two are almost equivalent. All "things" are Signs. If it is an "artifact," it is composed of icons, indices and the associated symbols. While the Sign-ness of a "thing" might not be brought completely forward in the following discussions, it should be kept in mind.

class of sport/utility vehicles. This operates in a similar way to the distinction in Chapter 1 between the self≈sign and the man≈sign, where the self≈sign is a particular and the man≈sign is a general. The horizon of the self≈sign is, in part, determined by the structure of the man≈sign. What we can conceive ourselves to be will be limited by the meanings associated with being human (the man≈sign). But this is not the limit of what being human means, since agents can challenge the meanings of the man≈sign. Such challenging can, and usually does, reshape the meaning of the man≈sign. This arises out of the reciprocal interaction between agents and Signs, where we expand the meaning of a symbol and that expansion then changes who we are. To account for this distinction between SUV-as-particular and SUV-as-general (or SUV-as-singular-sign and SUV-as-genuine-symbol), I will refer to the former as “suv≈sign” and the latter as “SUV≈sign.”

There are a number of places from which the suv≈sign receives meaning. I will continue with the example of the Explorer and only review a few of those that I find most important. The first is from the arrangement of the icons and indices of the Explorer. This arrangement makes up its physical form. Certain interpretants develop around these icons and indices. The increased height of the Explorer≈sign is linked to the abstract symbol of “command.” This symbol is abstract inasmuch as it is only a character. The exterior styling is associated with the abstract symbol of “a threat.” In a similar manner, the interior icons and indices have become connected with the abstract symbol “comfort.” With each of these abstract symbols, there is no necessary connection with the icons and indices. Instead, these abstract symbols have attached themselves to the Explorer≈sign because of its position in the Sign-systems associated with automobility.

Other meanings/actions will be arise from the Explorer being made by Ford. The Ford Company has a certain history and reputation which probably influenced the driver's choice of this SUV over another. There is also the name of the vehicle. As noted above, "Explorer" has certain connotations. It has a sense of adventure, daring, going where no one has gone before. The name calls to mind Christopher Columbus, Lewis and Clark, or Richard Byrd. In a subtle way, this influences the meaning of the *suv*≈sign. While it is questionable as to whether the Explorer being discussed might be used in the traditional sense of exploration, the name implies that it could. The name opens up the possibility for certain meanings to be derived.

Lastly, the *suv*≈sign will accrue meaning from the *SUV*≈sign. The *SUV*≈sign has several layers. First, there is the manifestation of it through the individual *suv*≈signs. As individual SUVs are used, changed and possibly refined, this will impact our understanding of the *SUV*≈sign. Our use of the meanings associated with the *suv*≈sign will change the meaning of the general class. If more of these vehicles are used in less rural environments, the general class might be seen as less rugged. This in turn influences two things. First, how the SUV is used will change based on these wider cultural forms. Second, later *suv*≈signs will be produced with these meanings in mind.

This relationship between the *suv*≈sign and the *SUV*≈sign is reciprocal, though the relevant parties are not entirely equal. In determining the meanings of the *SUV*≈sign we must include individual SUVs, the owners, other drivers, and the organizations surrounding these sign-systems. By organizations, I specifically mean auto makers, insurance companies, government bodies, and voluntary groups (like the Classic Bronco club). All those systems which automobility is embedded in and was discussed in the

Introduction. Arguably, auto makers play the largest role in this, since they produce, assemble, markets and sell the *suv*≈sign.⁹ Due to their role in the production of the *suv*≈sign, the auto makers control much of the meaning of the *SUV*≈sign. This being said, their control is not complete since drivers do have some say in the meaning through consumption. I will return to this discussion below.

So far I have sketched out the structure of the *suv*≈sign and the *SUV*≈sign, but have said little about the role of the *self*≈sign in all this. There are two cases involving the *self*≈sign that I want to discuss. The first concerns the user who is driving the Explorer. The second involves the continued relationship between the *self*≈sign and the *suv*≈sign when the Explorer is not being driven.

When the Explorer we have been discussing is in use a new Sign appears. It is the *me-as-suv*≈sign or *suv-as-me*≈sign. As we will see, these two Signs are interchangeable. On the physical level, the person is now in the SUV driving. The Explorer and the driver function as one Sign system. The Explorer becomes an extension of the driver, though mediated through metal, brakes, wheels, engines, steering wheels, etc. The driver can be seen as part of the Explorer or the Explorer as part of the driver. From the perspective of the former, the driver is contained within the SUV. The Explorer can only function as a mode of transportation with someone in the driver's seat. The driver completes the system necessary to have an operational SUV (at least in one sense). In this manner, we can say that the driver is part of the Explorer. In the other case, if the driver wants to accomplish certain ends, then the Explorer might be necessary. More precisely, the Explorer might be *seen* as necessary. Depending on the location of the owner in various

⁹The auto makers produce the physical object and propose interpretants for the *suv*≈sign.

social/political/economic networks, the Explorer can be viewed as a requirement, be it for transportation, fashion, or “self-defense.” In this way, the Explorer becomes part of the driver.

This last point goes further. While in the case of the first perspective we see the self≈sign meshing with the suv≈sign, this is principally on the level of icons and indices. The driver’s self≈sign becomes part of the system of indices and icons that the Explorer is made of. This seems to miss a deeper interaction between the suv≈sign and the self≈sign. At the level of symbols, there is interaction, exchange and transformations between the suv≈sign and the self≈sign. While a new Sign develops when the Explorer is in use, we can still separate out the icons and indices of the SUV from those of the driver. The bodies or physical objects, broadly speaking, remain separate. This is not the case on the level of symbols.

The Explorer as a technology of the self

Let me back-track for a moment to reintroduce some distinctions from Chapter 1. In that chapter I proposed that the self≈sign is composed of a constellation of me≈signs. The me≈signs are the habitulized interpretants used by the “I” in various situations. From here, I went on to define a technology of the self as the deliberate attempt by the “I” to restructure the me≈signs to transform the overall operation of the self≈sign. This restructuring involves the development of practices and habits that will transform the self≈sign.

To understand how the Explorer in question is used as a technology of the self, we must look to the interactions between the symbols of the suv≈sign and the self≈sign. When the Explorer is being driven, the “I” begins to use a certain set of interpretants. These interpretants form part of what I referred to above as the me-as-suv≈sign or suv-as-me≈sign. These

interpretants are derived in part from the totality of the icons and indices of the $\text{su}\approx\text{v}\approx\text{sign}$ and the $\text{self}\approx\text{sign}$. These icons and indices form the physical manifestation of the $\text{me-as-su}\approx\text{v}\approx\text{sign}$.

There is a fusion of the $\text{su}\approx\text{v}\approx\text{sign}$ and the $\text{self}\approx\text{sign}$ at the level of symbols. Using the Explorer as an extension of the $\text{self}\approx\text{sign}$ requires a formation of a new $\text{me}\approx\text{sign}$ or the “reactivation” of an older $\text{me}\approx\text{sign}$. This new $\text{me}\approx\text{sign}$ draws in the meanings from the $\text{su}\approx\text{v}\approx\text{sign}$. The symbols of mobility, strength, youth, and safety become essential aspects of the $\text{me}\approx\text{sign}$. In this sense, the symbol dimension $\text{su}\approx\text{v}\approx\text{sign}$ becomes fused with the $\text{me}\approx\text{sign}$. When everything works well, the $\text{su}\approx\text{v}\approx\text{sign}$ and the $\text{me}\approx\text{sign}$ are indistinguishable. The actions of the “I” are mediated through the Explorer and the Explorer creates a new way to project the $\text{self}\approx\text{sign}$. For this reason, I propose that the $\text{me-as-su}\approx\text{v}\approx\text{sign}$ and the $\text{su}\approx\text{v-as-me}\approx\text{sign}$ are interchangeable. The fusion of the $\text{su}\approx\text{v}\approx\text{sign}$ and the $\text{self}\approx\text{sign}$ becomes so complete that the symbolic lines between the two cease to exist. The Explorer and the driver function as one. Hence, to say me-as-SUV becomes equivalent to saying SUV-as-me .

This is the first part in understanding how the Explorer operates as a technology of the self. When the Explorer is being driven, the symbols of the Explorer become part of the driver. These abstract symbols like “command,” “comfort” and “threat” become part of the $\text{me}\approx\text{sign}$. These symbols are put into action when the $\text{Explorer}\approx\text{sign}$ is driven. The abstract symbol of “command” will be manifested through the habits of the driver. Although the Explorer in question is a “Sport” model, it still has the imposing figure. It clearly is larger than most cars. This, in conjunction with its height, gives the driver a sense of power over them. As many auto pundits note, it doesn’t take Newton to figure out who is going to win a crash between an SUV and a

more traditional car. (Robinson, 1998: 1) The styling of the Explorer≈sign was designed to be fashionable regardless of where it was. As Ford's marketing division reminds the potential buyer "active people on the go love Ford Explorer because it's so stylish and versatile... Whether you're out for a night on the town or in search of some off-road adventure..." (Ford, 1997:17) These Signs of fashion also become extensions of the self≈sign. Whenever he or she is behind the wheel, they believe that people will interpret them (me-as-suv≈sign) as fashionable. These symbols empower the driver, or at least creates a symbol of empowerment. These projections of the self≈sign through the Explorer≈sign, transform the self≈sign. Though this transformation appears limited to when the Explorer is being driven.

The sports/utility life

This has all been relatively straight forward. The more difficult case to unravel is when the SUV is not being driven. I have chosen these words carefully. The suv≈sign still has meaning when not being driven. There is still some connection between the suv≈sign and the self≈sign. But what is this connection?

In an attempt to answer this, I want to look briefly at the users of the older SUVs. As seen in Chapter 2, the kinds of owners of SUVs has changed since World War II. The market for SUVs came into its own in the mid-60s. It changed markedly around 1982 with the introduction of the GM "S" series. When this, styling and comfort became much more important than it was previously. With this shift, the tribes associated with the SUV change remarkable between the 1960s and the early 80s.

The SUVs of the 60s and 70s were designed for off-road use and had a minimum of frills. These vehicles saw limited use, principally sporting and other outdoor activities. One of the differences between the present

ownership (“tribe”) and the earlier group is that these SUVs were seen as a means to an end and not an end in itself. These vehicles were used to take the user into rural environments, where other activities would follow. This is not to say that these SUVs did not function as technologies of the self. The rugged, often ugly, appeal of these vehicles did project a certain image of the driver. For middle-class owners, this image was of someone adventurous and daring. The driver might work a 9 to 5 job during the week, but when the weekend came he was out in the woods hunting, fishing, or camping. These SUVs were not family cars, with the possible exception of the Jeep Wagoneer. They were built to get one into the wilderness, with a minimum of hassle, and they looked the part.

These SUVs were part of a technology of the self, but not the only part. For those who used SUVs like the CJ, Blazer, Jimmy, or Bronco (especially those for whom it was not a necessity), it was part of a series of practices that involved going into “the uncivilized wilderness” and “getting back to nature and maybe killing something there.” For this reason I stated above that the SUV was not an end, but a means. It was used as a part of these wider practices and attained meaning through these. These SUVs were part of that rugged image, but the life of the sportsman/adventurer did not rely exclusively on the SUV. All of these practices were a way to transform the self. While the work-a-day might have been tedious, these people could rely on their Bronco or Blazer to take them away. Though, it is important to keep mind that these SUVs were only one aspect of a larger set of practices.

The current “tribe” surrounding the SUV has changed substantially. There can be no doubt that some of the older tribe has survived in some form or another. But this seems to be a minority now. Based upon the articles written on the older SUVs and the tribe surrounding them, it seems that

many of these SUVs were used for their “intended” purpose, off-roading. (Norbye, 1965a; Norbye, 1965b; MacDonald, 1966; Schmidt, 1969) Though not directly reported, one might guess that some bought these vehicles to simply look impressive and not go into rural environments. Unlike presently, if such people were around, they were in the minority. As we saw in Chapter 2, there were support mechanisms for these SUVs in the 60s and 70s, like off-roading groups. In 1965, many SUV owners belonged to such groups. (Norbye, 1965b: 48) Such groups have persisted, though their size relative to the number of SUV owners is significantly smaller. For instance, there is an annual gathering of “Classic Bronco Owners,” in Vermont there is the Rover North Off-Road Inc. which teaches good off-road techniques, and the annual Jeep Jamboree. (Morr, 1996; **C/D**, 1994; Fetherston, 1995: 94-111; Jeep, 1997) These organizations exist to support the older tribe, either by sustaining that tribe or bringing new members in. Also, those who follow in the footsteps of the older tribe do so in part for contrarian reasons. They appropriate some of the Signs from mass culture, but spin them in such a way to buck these trends. The most popular way to engage in this behavior is to acquire an older model SUV and outfit it in a rugged manner.

The sport/utility life

I have already discussed at length the “active” role of the SUV for the contemporary tribe. The issue now at hand is how, if at all, does the *suvsign* function as a technology of the self when it is not being driven? When parked on the street or driveway, the *suvsign* still operates in much the same way for observers as it does when the driver is behind the wheel. To return to the example used above, when the Explorer is parked in front of the owner’s house, it projects an image. This image is similar to the one discussed above. The *suvsign* still communicates that the person living

here is rugged, yet stylish and safe, yet aggressive. This message becomes more obscured when the Explorer is stashed away in a large parking lot and one cannot make such immediate connections. The most a different observer can say is “this owner wants to project such and such image.”

The more interesting case is the meaning of the SUV≈sign for the owner when not driving. The immediate reaction might be to say that the Explorer is inconsequential when not being driven. For the older tribe this might be the case. That when the SUV is not being driven, other practices take over in identity formation. This seems to be reasonable since the SUV was part of a larger technology of the self. This has faded into the distance since 1982.

Any generalizations of these sorts will need to be tentative, though I believe that we can make some broad statements. I think for many owners in this new tribe the SUV≈sign is significant to them, even when not being driven. For example, the sense of safety and power might endure for the self≈sign. Despite the given situation, the owner can rely on the Explorer to shelter him or her from the problem at hand. They might feel, rightly or wrongly, the strength felt while driving the Explorer carries over. Part of the reason this could be the case is that the use of the vehicle is much more prevalent now. Among the older tribe, the SUV mainly got used on weekends. These vehicles now see daily use. Because of this, the bond formed between the relevant symbols of the me-as-SUV≈sign continues on with the self≈sign. The image of strength, security and power is internalized by the driver and is reinforced when on the road. This peculiar bond might not have been quite as prevalent among the older tribe since their were other practices associated with the SUV. Being an adventurer-type tends to lead to a stronger individual, whereas the current tribe is not so physically demanding.

This proposition that there is a continued link between the self≈sign and the SUV≈sign is strengthened by the rise of two trends. The first is the Eddie Bauer options on Ford's SUVs. This option mainly consists of a more refined interior, a few extra lines painted on the exterior, and the name "Eddie Bauer" stamped in a few places. Eddie Bauer is a mail-order catalog that sells casual outdoor gear. The Eddie Bauer edition creates a link between the SUV≈sign and the self≈sign through clothes worn. This is another way of continuing the bond between the self≈sign and the SUV≈sign. The second follows a similar vein. Both Land Rover and Jeep have begun producing lines of accessories to fit the SUV lifestyle, mainly clothing. The shirts all have the companies name embroidered above the heart. There are also official Land Rover or Jeep backpacks, briefcases and musical instruments (all "primitive" instruments, like drums, xylophones and shakers). (Jeep, 1998; Land Rover, 1997b; Land Rover, 1998)

The socio-political context of the (post)modern SUV Tribe

To fill this point in, it is necessary to analyze the context surrounding this newer tribe. I want to briefly go over some of the relevant trends that impact many of these owners. The first is the move away from Fordism/Sloanism in the economic sphere. The second is end of the Cold War. Lastly, there the phenomenon that some commentators have referred to as the "end of nature." I will outline each of these and then follow out the connections between them and the rise of the postmodern SUV tribe.

Flexible accumulation

In The Condition of Postmodernity David Harvey proposes that a major shift in the world economy begins around 1973 with a world recession and the Oil Crisis. This recession and the subsequent economic

transformation arose out of the inability of a Fordist economy to reconcile the inherent contradictions of capitalism. As Harvey explains:

There were problems with the rigidity of long-term and large scale fixed capital investments in mass-production systems that precluded much flexibility of design and presumed stable growth in invariant consumer markets... Behind all these specific rigidities lay a rather unwieldy and seemingly fixed configuration of political power and reciprocal relations that bound big labour, big capital, and big government into what increasingly appeared as a dysfunctional embrace of such narrowly defined vested interests as to undermine rather than secure accumulation. (Harvey, 1990: 141-142)

The late 60s saw the Fordist system of production and accumulation breaking down. There was rising inflation and labour strikes. The government regulation (both fiscal and social) that helped to preserve the system was coming under increased attack.

The first transitions to a new regime began in the mid-1970s with a series restructurings in industry. The goal of this restructuring was to bring flexibility into Fordism. Because of this, Harvey refers to the new regime as “flexible accumulation.” This restructuring involved moving away from economies of scale and towards economies of scope. The classic example of an economy of scale is the Model T; ever increasing production at a decreasing price. The goal is to flood the market with the same basic product. In an economy of scope, industry attempts to offer something for everyone. Economies of scope also involve “just-in-time” production. Instead of having a large amount of stock always ready, many industries produce just enough to fill demand. This explains the recent trend by auto makers of encouraging consumers to design their own automobiles, instead of limiting them to just what is in stock.

Another key component of flexible accumulation has been the rise of out-sourcing and “down-sizing.” Downsizing involves eliminating jobs that

can be sent outside the company. Instead of producing materials within the company, they make contracts with outside organizations so that the work can be done at a lower cost. In this way, management becomes much more fluid. The hierarchy can be reshaped quickly to meet the demands of a changing market. One of the side effects of this is that many formerly secure workers are now in flux. The companies are coming to care less about long-term workers, since they can be easily replaced. Only those employees at the very core have something close to a guarantee of stability. (Harvey, 1990: 141-172)

Ronald Reagan, who took office in 1981, completed this transition to flexible accumulation. After job security, the social safety net established by the New Deal was next to go. His administration attempted to totally dismantle social security, welfare benefits, and such. Reagan's radical deregulation and strong anti-union stance enabled many companies to restructure themselves without fear of government intervention. This restructuring was not complete. The "comprise" reached by the Reagan era Congress did some to preserve this safety net, but did change it substantially. The changes that social programs have undergone since 1981, especially under the 104th Congress has reshaped these programs to mesh with flexible accumulation.

While Sloanism attempted, and succeeded for several decades, to bring flexibility into Fordism, it still held to the a certain set of labour relations, governmental regulations, and politics. Sloanism still operated under the banner of the populist-democratic model that was at the core of Fordism. As such, Sloanism should be read as a minor modification of Fordism and not a

full scale shift.¹⁰ Flexible accumulation should be regarded as something new. No longer is stable uniform growth assumed. Economies shift and this new rubbery structure of companies is designed to respond quickly. Uncertainty and fragmentation becomes the something that must be accepted.

The decline of an external enemy

Next we have the decline of the Cold War. For over 40 years, the United States was involved in a conflict with the Soviet Block. Starting in 1989, the Soviet Block began to crumble. This meant the end of an external enemy/other. In large part, the U.S. had defined itself against this other. In comparing ourselves to the Soviets, we created an identity. When the Soviet Block fell to pieces and the free market and democracy began to be a part of these countries, we lost that thing we had defined ourselves against. This began a cultural search for a new enemy, which is still not resolved.

But with the decline of this external other, we also began to look towards ourselves. Since 1989 there appears to be a rising tide of class antagonisms, especially between the middle and upper classes and the lower classes. In part, the Cold War bond that brought Americans together has disintegrated. When we awoke from the slumber of the Reagan years, it became clear how damaged the middle-class had become. This has led to various attempts to resurrect some form of a middle-class ethic recently. Examples of this abound. We witness the rise of gated communities. There are new efforts to eliminate or discipline the unruly or undesirables. Various attempts by both the right and left have sprung up to control language. The list goes on.

¹⁰This can be seen in the recent strike at GM. Many of the auto makers have been slow to move towards the flexible accumulations model. GM has been the slowest. The difficulties GM has been facing arose from their inability to keep up with the general trends in industry since 1973.

Part of the danger the middle-class perceives arises from the rise of flexible accumulation. Under previous regimes of accumulation, the middle-class could rely on steady growth. Now growth is in fits and starts. Once stable work positions have been downsized. Many of those white-collar jobs which have not been eliminated have become factory-like. The white-collar worker has become a replaceable cog in a machine. Uncertainty has become a fact of life for many in the middle-class. As companies restructure to meet the changing demands of the market, virtually every job is in danger. With these economic factors at work, the middle-class feels threatened. This has led to the recent attempts to reassert and reinforce a middle-class ethic on the whole country.

The death of nature/the birth of denature

As has been discussed earlier, there is a coming realization among academics, environmentalists and, less explicitly, in mass culture, that nature, if it ever existed, is gone. In its place there are “environments.” The idea of “nature” as something pristine and untouched by humans has always been a construction; a certain way of organizing the world. But this idea that “nature” is over goes deeper. Timothy Luke describes the situation in the following terms:

the actual eclipse of pure wilderness in the natural environment or the apparent end of sublime depth in nature’s vastness are scientific facts in an era that inventories every square meter of ground with satellite mapping technologies, catalogues the molecular codes of the human genome, or zones land masses for bureaucratically defined ‘wilderness use.’ (Luke, 1997: 1374)

We no longer have “nature” as something independent of humans, if that ever existed. We have managed environments. This point follows the one regarding the Cold War. As we face ourselves anew, we reconceptualize

environments. The city and the desert both become environments and both become subject to technological interventions and manipulations.

Welcome to the postmodern abyss

All three of these themes have become part of the amorphous blob called postmodernism. Jeremy Bernstein appears to be on the right track in referring to postmodernism as a “*Stimmung*” or mood. “I think it is best to use the expression ‘modern/postmodern’ to signify what Heidegger calls a *Stimmung*, a mood- one which is amorphous, protean, and shifting but which nevertheless exerts a powerful influence on the ways we think, act, and experience.” (Bernstein, 1992: 11) This *Stimmung* influences contemporary culture and the SUV. There is still a modernist horizon to our ways of thinking and acting, but this is shifting. Let me explore this modern/postmodern *Stimmung* a bit further.

One of the most prevalent themes in postmodernist writing is the collapse of Enlightenment/modernist meta-narratives. These meta-narratives are attempts to justify knowledge, justice, and the like in something outside local practice. These meta-narratives include grand stories “such as the dialectics of Spirit, the hermeneutics of meaning, the emancipation of the rational or working subject, or the creation of wealth.” (Lyotard, 1979: xxiii) If there is a central theme in postmodernism, it is the unrelenting attempt to undermine these Enlightenment/modernist meta-narratives. (Lyotard, 1979) The degree to which this theme plays out, and the spin put on it, varies from author to author, but this does appear to be a central issue. It arises in the work of Foucault, Baudrillard, Rorty, and Derrida.¹¹ Most see this collapse as liberating, though there are others who

¹¹For a Pragmatic reading of these authors and others, see Bernstein, 1992.

find it disturbing, for example David Harvey and other Marxists, or cause for nostalgia, like Lyotard at points.

This distrust of Enlightenment/modernist meta-narratives manifests itself on many levels. Style begins to triumph over substance, since we can never be sure of anything beneath the surface image. The classic example and founding moment of this trend was the presidency of Ronald Reagan. This ex-actor was elected through the careful crafting of an image and a bizarre and simplistic economic program. He was re-elected in 1984 through similar image-crafting, though many voters fundamentally disagreed with his smoke and mirrors, voodoo economic policies. (Harvey, 1990: 329-335)

Also, the collapse of these meta-narratives leads to a fragmentation of culture. No longer is there assumed to be one rational and progressive culture. Now, we can participate in many (commodified) cultures. We might listen to Tibetan chant before going to eat Brazilian food and seeing an exhibition of French Impressionist painting. This involves the sense of fragmentation described above. Everything now appears to be “up-for-grabs” and subject to commodification.¹²

I remain ambivalent about the normative content of these writings, but at a descriptive level I believe they do reveal interesting trends regarding the SUV. These modern/postmodern themes materialize in the SUV and the relevant Signs.

¹²In some respects I believe what should be learned from postmodernism is what Latour draws out. That we have never been modern. Modernity has obscured aspects of our culture and, in part, postmodernists seem almost giddy in realizing this. Most, if not all, of these themes were prevalent before 1991, 1980, 1973, or even 1963 (my choice for when postmodernism “starts”). Yet the “dominate” (i.e., modernist) perspective seems to have obscured this until recently. Harvey goes on to argue the reason these have become visible arises from the shift to flexible accumulation. (Harvey, 1990: 325-359)

Imagine yourself in an SUV now

In keeping with this postmodern *ethos*, I want to return to the four classes of SUVs and look at the advertising images involved with them. As I noted above, these images play an important role in forming the meaning of the SUV≈sign. It is at this point where we begin to see the postmodern themes explored above. I will begin by focusing on the middle and large size SUVs. I will address the mSUVs and lSUVs later, since the images involved seem parasitic on these others.

The call of the wild

Many of the brochures, commercials and magazine advertisements involve showing the SUV in question in some rugged terrain. The clear implication is that this is a “go-anywhere” kind of vehicle. The importance of these images is not that these SUVs can go off-road. I say this since very few of them are ever used on rugged terrain, unless you mean a gravel driveway. Though the figures vary from 5% to a18%, the implication is clear. Only a fraction of these are used for their “intended” purpose.

What seems more important is that these vehicles present an image that one could go off-road if one wanted to. SUVs have the possibility of going anywhere, regardless if they ever do. This becomes a symbol of power for the owner. The owner is capable of doing these things. This creates a feeling for the owner of being unbound by social conventions and being able to escape the constraints of “civilization” at any moment. This is a hold-over from the older tribe, but without the need to actually go into the rural wilderness. For all of the rhetoric of leaving the suburbs, almost all of the middle and large SUVs now come equipped (standard I might add) with extra outlets so one can conveniently run cellular phones and lap-top computers. These vehicles give the owner/driver the feeling that they can get away, if

they so choose. This *possibility* is important, since it gives one hope that one can get away at the time that more and more white-collar workers must put more into their work.

One jungle to another

Another, more distressing trend with these images is the juxtaposition of the “city” versus “nature.” Several television commercials have exploited this. One, for the Toyota 4Runner, begins with the SUV roaming through the wilderness. The narrator explains its versatility in “one jungle to another,” at which point the forest “morphs” into a busy downtown. More blatant is one from Isuzu. We start by seeing a cabin in the wilderness. We hear a discussion between a couple (based on the voices, one assumes that they are white and middle-class). The husband is distressed by his wife’s desire to travel. He says “It’s dangerous out there.” Her response is “this is something I have to do.” The images shift and we find her driving through highly stylized, but rundown and deserted city streets. The implication, I assume, is that with this Isuzu one is totally safe anywhere. We see similar images in the brochures from the auto makers.

These images seem to imply a low-grade geopolitical warfare. This pits the middle-class suburbanites against both the rural environments and those living in urban areas. Both territories are seen as wilderness that must be conquered. The SUV is portrayed as the only vehicle that can navigate through these regions.¹³ These Signs tacitly acknowledge the demise of nature and the emergence of denature. The SUV is a vehicle for exploring or re-exploring any environment.

This set of geopolitical images operates as a cover for class conflict, since it is mostly the poor that live in the urban “wilderness.” These SUVs

¹³This also seems to be what differentiates SUV advertising from other truck advertising.

are a way of protecting and preserving their middle-class owners against the dangers that exist in “uncontrolled” environments. As the position of the middle-class has become more and more uncertain, these images have proliferated. With the waves of downsizing, especially since 1991, the middle-class is coming to more and more resemble the proletariat than the bourgeoisie. The images use this anxiety and offer the SUV as a panacea.

Following from this, it comes as no surprise that the comfort of these vehicles is typically highlighted. In the brochures, much space is devoted to toting the ergonomic design of the cabin. From the seats, to the dashboard, to the cup holders, everything has been refined to be as comfortable as possible. The message is that one goes in to rugged terrain, do it in style. As Toyota reminds the potential owner “4Runner’s sheltering instincts provide a civilized environment, even in uncharted territory.” (Toyota, 1997: 11) These new SUVs continually refer to their civilized nature. Clearly, this is the civilization of the American, white, middle-class where comfort is equivalent to freedom.

Another important aspect of the advertising is the focus on safety. The medium and large SUVs are imposing. Depending on the nature of the crash, they protect the passengers quite well. This has become a big selling point for these vehicles. Their more than vague military styling gives the driver a feeling of invincibility. A typical comment by owners is “I feel like I’m driving a tank.” The advertisements for the SUV use these Signs to draw consumers in. For example, in describing the Yukon, GMC states:

Almost invincible- that’s how Yukon makes you feel behind the wheel. While no vehicle can promise invincibility, Yukon has the power and strength to do just about anything. And with Yukon, you can do it all in great comfort. (GMC, 1997: 6)

This description captures much of the appeal of the SUV: invincibility, strength, comfort. Many of the brochures and commercials play on these themes extensively.

From Paris to your neck of the woods

Let me briefly turn to LSUVs. These play on the same images, but the rhetoric is more intense. The “civilized” character is highlighted much more severely. More time is spent discussing going “out on the town.” While the middle and large SUVs usually discuss how they fit in well both in rural territories and the suburbs, the LSUVs up the ante. With reference to the LX470, Lexus states “Damn the rain. Damn the ice. Damn the snow. (That quaint little wine shop closes at six!).” (Lexus, 1998a:7) In the same brochure, there are also notes on how to “heli-ski,” drive in the Sahara desert, and avoid shark attacks. (Lexus, 1998a) Exotic places tend to be mentioned more often. Acura notes “tough enough for the trek from Paris to Dakar. An elegant enough for those who’d rather just stay in Paris.” (Acura, 1997:4)

Often times, the horizon of class conflict is less subtle. One such image is from the Lexus brochure discussed above. The image juxtaposes the Lexus parked out front of a large, luxurious tent, while in the side bar, you see three men dressed in stereotypical Arab fashion. They are holding parasols over classy folding chairs. (Lexus, 1998a, 11-12) While this is one of the most blatant images of class conflict, it is quite telling. The implication seems to be that, if you drive the LX, then people will wait on you hand and foot. Virtually everyone shown driving or connected to the LSUV in the brochures is clearly well-off. They almost all look like stereotypes of corporate executives. When an owner is shown in the wilderness outside the LSUV, they are dressed perfectly for the occasion. In the rural wilderness, they wear expensive looking flannel and such. (Lincoln, 1997: 11-12; Lexus, 1998a) Suit

and tie is required for the downtown scene. (Lincoln, 1997: 9-10) Also, while many of the homes in the other SUV ads are clearly refined, the few shown in LSUV brochures (since many of the images involve tearing through various environments) are palatial.

The mSUVs are more complicated. As noted previously, the target audience tends to be younger. Kia's supplies a brochure explaining how their models have passed more tests than most college graduates. Many of the drivers and passengers in the advertisements tend to be at least 10 years younger than the other SUV drivers. The fun side of these vehicles is played up more. There is a more daring character to the use. The class conflict tends to be less visible, since the audience is on the edge of being middle-class. Another constituent of the mSUVs are those who want to appear middle-class. This explains part of the niche that the CR-V and RAV4 have found, since they can double as slightly cramped family cars.

All of these images play an important role in the SUV-sign. When the driver uses the SUV, all of these images become part of the self-sign. The sense of authority, power, strength, and superiority are all conveyed to the driver. In the current tribe of the SUV the mere possibility of going off-road takes precedence over actually going there. As we have begun to find enemies within our own borders, this vehicle has become from protecting the middle-class against ones who might "threaten" their lifestyle. As the middle-class comes to see America as an increasingly dangerous place, the SUV becomes a portable civilization.¹⁴

¹⁴One irony of the SUV boom is the name of the Mercedes SUV: the M-Class. In the Star Trek series, the crew was always in search of M-class planets, since these were pleasantly habitable. While I doubt when Mercedes was naming their SUV this entered their minds, it is amusing to think that owners can now take their M-Class planet with them.

In conclusion...

Let me now recast this discussion in terms of the question that I first considered: “is there a transactional and transformative relationship between car and driver?” I believe it is safe to say “yes” at this point. Let me review what I have shown.

In this chapter I offered a detailed analysis of the contemporary tribe of the sport/utility vehicle. I demonstrated the ways in which the SUV and its driver have changed since the mid-1960s. Through an examination of a Ford Explorer I was able to show how the use of this vehicle transformed the owner. I also analyzed the advertising Signs associated with this vehicles and how these images impacted how members of this new tribe use the SUV to transform themselves.

The sport/utility vehicle is a technology of the self. We witnessed this in with the original tribe. This tribe used it as a way into rural environments for adventuring. The earlier tribe was in many respects anti-modern. There were Romantic notions of communing with Nature and had an elitist side, which is typical of anti-modernist discourse.

The recent tribe has developed in response to the postmodern abyss I described above. The SUV is interpreted as strong and invincible, yet civilized. As the middle-class becomes increasingly scared of the inner city, the SUV becomes an urban assault vehicle. The driver is a trooper in an increasingly dangerous world. The SUV transforms the driver into a soldier, going into combat. This is why the Hummer is important. It is the “mother of all SUVs.” The security felt when driving the SUV continues on when not being driven. The abstract symbols discussed above become an important part of the self≈sign. As the world is perceived to be increasingly threatening, these symbols offer a way to safeguard the self≈sign. Also, as the middle-class

perceives its way of life in danger, the SUV becomes a way of carrying that lifestyle into any wilderness.

The SUV has an appeal all its own. The Signs attached to the SUV≈sign are quite distinct, because of the association with the older tribe. The rugged, outdoors man character has lingered on, although that tribe has diminished. Among both men and women, this symbol makes the SUV more appealing than the minivan. The minivan became a highly feminized vehicle in the 1980s. The SUV is more androgynous to masculine. Because of this, it is appealing to working men and women who do not want to appear like “soccer moms.” (Ferguson, 1997) The SUV has made a serious dent in the sale of minivans, as seen in Figure 3.4.

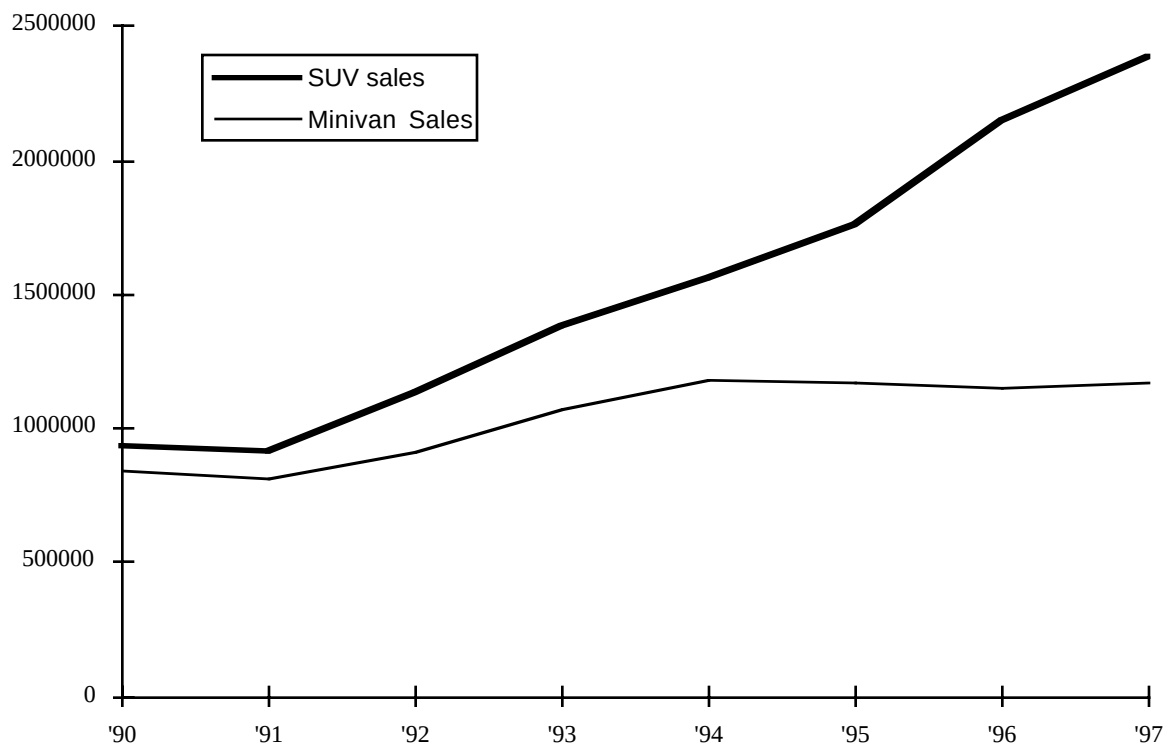


Figure 3.4 Comparison of SUV and Minivan Sales
(Derived from Ward's, 1992-1997 and Automotive News, 1998)

This just shows one side of these transactional and transformative relationships. As I noted in the introduction, these relationships go both ways. They transform the driver and the car itself. We have witnessed this with the changing meanings of the SUV. I explored how the new use of these vehicles has transformed what is being produced by the auto makers.

What we are now just beginning to see is the wider transformations that the SUV is causing. The increased numbers have environmentalists in an up-roar. This is for two reasons. First, with the exception of the mSUVs, all these are gas-guzzlers. Second, they can cause a lot of damage to the earth when taken off-road. Insurance companies are raising rates on SUV owners since they have a nasty habit of totaling other cars in crash and killing the other driver. One commentator anticipates a battle for the tallest SUV, since there are so many SUVs on the road that the height advantage is no longer as meaningful. (Antoine, 1995: 138)

There are other transformations that are coming about. The SUV is causing us to rethink the gender associated with cars. The older tribe was principally masculine. The new tribe blends together some masculine and feminine qualities. There is the rugged quality, which is masculine, but there is also the issue of safety and security, which has been commonly associated with femininity. Many of the LSUVs are aimed explicitly at women, which transforms the images associated with these SUVs. The gender of this new tribe is in question, which raises issues about gender roles outside of the tribe. The SUV establishes a new sort of relationship between classes. Since many of the lower classes tend to have smaller cars, the lower classes tend to die in crashes with these urban assault vehicles. Also, SUVs are reinforcing divides between urban and suburban areas. Their presence in urban areas intensifies

the divide between these environments. SUVs also transform the rural environments and make those regions subject to further control.

Sites for further research

Following from the work presented in this essay, there are several places for further research. Let me break these down by chapter. Chapter 1 offered an analysis of technology and identity, brought together through semiotics. While the presentation was adequate for purposes of this essay, much more should be said on the subject. Viewing technology as Sign-systems offers a rich perspective. There is also the issue of attempting to integrate Foucault and the Pragmatists, specifically Peirce. This essay opened up one site, but there are others. Specifically, attempting to draw together Peirce's semiotics with Foucault's notions of power. Foucault's micro-analyses of power is an invention that post-dates Peirce, so one could not expect Peirce to have dealt with it. This being said, it would be fascinating to integrate these two subjects into a coherent system. This would probably focus in on how power fixes interpretants, while the vagueness of Signs can undermine power formations. Lastly, there is the matter of a "world without within." This was only a proposition in the context of this essay. In order for further research to commence along these line, it is necessary for me to articulate a defense of this concept. This is the most ambitious project coming out of Chapter 1, since it involves overthrowing the foundations of Cartesian philosophy. Not much of an agenda.

From Chapter 2, there are two projects I can see following up on. The first is a more extensive history of the SUV. Again, though the history I presented here was adequate, there are many details that got left out. To do such a complete history, it would be important to look into the archives of the auto makers to see the design process. In particular, the memos

surrounding GM's decision to produce the "S" series in 1982 should be fascinating. The other project from Chapter 2 is a comprehensive history of the truck. As we saw, the truck does impinge on the history of the SUV at several places and the SUV is still categorized as a truck. Unfortunately, there have been few articles or books on the truck's history, scholarly or otherwise (there have been some engineering texts, but these do not help). In order to give a well rounded history of the SUV, one would need to look to a good history of the truck. Neither has yet to be done.

There are also several projects arising from Chapter 3. The first is a more detailed look at these relationships between driver and SUV. Principally, this involves extensive interviews with SUV owners/drivers from across the country. Something I did not have time to do. The second project would involve an analysis of the what the mass production of selfhood means. Since these SUVs are mass produced self-images, what does this do to the structure of the self-sign? I do not know, but this is a fascinating question.

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Philosophy 1204 (Knowledge and Reality), Virginia Tech (1997-8)
Philosophy 1504 (Language and Logic), Virginia Tech (1996-7)

Employment

Beloit College Library, Serials Department, Technical Services Assistant (1994-96)

Editorships and Other Journal Experience

Managing Editor (Techne: Newsletter of the Society for Philosophy and Technology)
Referee (Studies in Philosophy and Education)

Awards and Honors

Oral Comprehensive Exam in Physics: Honors
Participant in 19th Annual Student Symposium, Beloit College (The Mathematization of Nature in Physics)
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Other Experience

Video Producer (Hey Sailor!) Beloit Access Television (1995-6)