

The XXX Test

Glen Fuller

“Pontiac GTO. A device for shrinking time and distance.”
- Pontiac sales brochure, 1964.

Rob Cohen’s film *xXx* (2002) is a reworking of the classic James Bond-style spy flick. *xXx* is hard core; *everything* in the film has been modified to the *extreme*.¹ The main character *xXx*, a.k.a. Xander Cage (played by Vin Diesel), drives a 1967 Pontiac GTO. The Pontiac GTO is a *muscle car* and within enthusiast circles the early model GTO is known as the ‘Goat’. The use of the Goat in the film situates both the film and the car at the intersection between popular culture and the automotive industry. I am calling this the ‘automotive cultural industry.’ The automotive cultural industry is the specific constellation of commodity producers and immaterial labourers operating within the cultural economy that emerges in the overlap of the automotive industry and popular culture.² Filmic product placement, such as in *xXx*, is a primary example of the way the automotive cultural industry produces the car as a cultural commodity. In addition to film, motorsport is a key cultural institution in the circulation of images that constitutes the automotive cultural economy. Drag racing and circuit racing are the two obvious examples of where the image of the car is sometimes more important than who actually wins races.³ Automotive manufacturers and the cultural industries work together to produce cars and related auto-paraphernalia as cultural commodities.

The Pontiac ‘Goat’ GTO has an attraction for enthusiasts because it is regarded as the first example of a ‘muscle car’. The ‘muscle car’ is an interesting cultural phenomenon for it is the first post-Fordist *cultural* commodity of the automotive cultural industry. The ‘Goat’ is associated with the three cultural categories that define a ‘muscle car’ – age (youthfulness), gender (masculine) and ethnicity (US ‘domestic’). The 1967 Goat GTO works in the film *xXx* because of the homologous relation between the muscular character of *xXx* and these three intersecting cultural categories. The use of the Goat in *xXx* is telling in light of the recent failure of GM Pontiac to market the Australian-designed GM Holden Monaro under the resurrected Pontiac GTO name.⁴ Would the *new* 2004 model GTO have worked in the film *xXx* as the main character’s car? As I shall argue, the simple answer is, “No.”

To begin unravelling why the new Pontiac GTO fails the *xXx* muscle car test it is necessary to interrogate how the 2004 GTO has been produced as a cultural commodity within the automotive cultural industry. I shall first interrogate the history of the Pontiac GTO, a.k.a. the 'Goat,' and its status as a muscle car icon; this will enable me to set up a brief introduction to the new GTO. The comparative locations of the old GTO and the new GTO in the automotive cultural economy can be mapped according to their respective involvements in motorsport and product placement or use in films. The director of *xXx*, Rob Cohen, seems to have an uncanny ability to mediate between the automotive industry and popular culture, and has thus emerged as a central figure in the automotive cultural industry. This is signalled by the popularity of a series of films he has been involved in and which include *The Fast and the Furious* franchise, *xXx* and the made-for-television *The Last Ride* (2004). I shall use his films to situate the new and old GTO. Both the old and new models of the GTO have been used extensively in motorsport. It is the motorsport involvement of the new GTO versus that of the old GTO that clearly demonstrates the failure of Pontiac in constructing a coherent image of the GTO that is acceptable to enthusiasts and the markets they represent. As such, my last act shall involve outlining exactly what Pontiac got wrong in attempting to produce and 'sell' the *image* of the new GTO to two very different enthusiast markets – the 'classic muscle car' market and the 'import' market.

Muscle, Grunt, and the Goat

Judith Roof, in a recent essay on James Bond, writes that "Bond's most potent accessory is usually his car." Bond's car is not so much a phallic extension (pace pop-Freudian accounts) than an "extension of his stylistic mastery."⁵ Bond's sophistication involves a double relation to style; he is a master of style – the tuxedo, the drink, the way of talking, the 'Bondisms' – and his way of being in the world demands a stylistic mastery over the dramatic ecologies of adventure that populate the now-clichéd Bond narrative. On the other hand, the character of *xXx* has an equally effective, but different stylistic mastery. *xXx*'s negotiation of the dangerous circumstances in which he finds himself draws on an affirmative machismo organised around an extreme disregard for normative conceptions of risk. Bond deals with problems in a graceful performance of quick thinking rationality and masculine physical prowess; *xXx* deals with problems through an extremely muscular performance of grace. This is also expressed through *xXx*'s most potent accessory, his car, which must enable him to perform his 'extremely muscular' stylistic mastery.⁶ In the director's commentary on the DVD version of the film, Cohen introduces the car and its relationship to the character of *xXx* thus:

Here is one of the stars of the picture – the '67 Pontiac GTO. [...] It is a hell of a car for a hell of a man. Xander [xXx] does not belong in a rice rocket. He deserves to be in a muscle car.

(I shall return to the difference between the category of 'muscle car' and the derogatory 'rice rocket' below.) The Pontiac GTO has an important place within the mythopoiea of US car culture. The Goat is regarded as the first 'muscle car' and has accumulated mythological status over the last 40 years because it is the first example of a cultural archetype or 'model' that it established. 'Model' has a delicious ambiguity in this context. It refers not only to the Goat as an automobile or design-based technological model, but also as a cultural model with particular attributes that are romanticised in sedimented discursive formations continually invoked and rehearsed by enthusiasts.⁷

On a superficial design-based technological level, a large V8 motor driving the rear wheels in a relatively small body became *the* model for the muscle car. However, the GTO was closely associated with youth and the masculinities of 'grunt'. To *be* a 'muscle' car, subsequent cars had to repeat this association with youth and 'grunt'. Or, in other words, the muscle car was *singular* within the automotive marketplace. As David Gartman writes:

What was new about the muscle car was not just its horsepower but its individuality – it was a new category of car that advertised its difference from run-of-the-mill models. Not social superiority but being a bit different – just like everyone else – was the appeal.⁸

Gartman is describing the process of transition from the mass-standard of Fordism to the standard *variation* of post-Fordism that occurred in the auto industry throughout the 1950s and into the 1970s. The muscle car was one of the first of a new type of mass-produced post-Fordist commodities where the sole thing shared is a *difference* from each other. Initially, the muscle car could be regarded as different from 'run-of-the-mill' models; however the general automobile market underwent a transformation where various sub-markets of discerning consumers were created. These sub-markets were not (only) differentiated on a vertical hierarchy of distinction (which existed in the early markets for the first custom-built cars; that is, well before mass-produced cars existed), but a horizontal distribution of differences *across* the market. These horizontal differences were produced through the immaterial labour of marketers and advertisers.⁹

An important part of the shift from Fordism is the inverted relation of production to exchange where a commodity is 'sold' before it is produced. Muscle cars were sold twice. Firstly, in the 'public imagination'; this produced the pre-

personal, but individually experienced subjectivity of the ‘enthusiast’. In this case, the sociality of the enthusiast is organised around leisure-time activities determined by an enthusiasm for ‘muscle cars’.¹⁰ The immaterial labour of advertisers and marketers attempted to drive the production, or at least *cultivation*, of enthusiast subjectivities. Secondly, the muscle car was actually sold to the enthusiast during the moment of exchange at automotive dealerships. The enthusiast selected whichever ‘tick-box’ options rendered their new muscle car purchase as *individual*. The individuality of the muscle car was therefore produced and purchased before the actual car was.

The ‘individuality’ encouraged by makers of muscle cars places the ‘muscle car’ at the vanguard of post-Fordism; for ‘difference’ becomes a central concern within post-Fordist modes of production. The muscle car captured a difference; not *from* something, but difference in itself. In the 1960s, the ‘muscle car’ is an expression of a singular difference culturally organised around an affiliation with the raucous rebelliousness of youth and the masculine ‘grunt’ of technological performance represented by the drag racing motorsport. In this regard, as an expression of difference, the ‘muscle car’ is singular.¹¹

The driving force behind the development of the Goat was Pontiac Head Engineer, John DeLorean.¹² DeLorean appropriated the Italian phrase ‘Gran Turismo Omologato’ from Ferrari, which translates roughly into ‘Grand Touring Homologated’. ‘Homologated’ is a term long used by manufacturers to describe a purpose built race car that has been modified for the street and general consumption. Ferrari did not respond to GM using the three letter ‘GTO’ acronym for its muscle car, maybe because it was obvious to both enthusiasts and the general public that there was a clear distinction between a European-built sports car and the US version of ‘performance’ in the form of the muscle car. Although Pontiac and Ferrari both had automobile models named the ‘GTO’ which existed within the same basic discursive logic of automobile performance technologies, they pertained to radically different discursive *models* of ‘performance’. This difference between the muscular performance of the US-based muscle car and the sophisticated performance of the non-US sports car is important in understanding the failure of the new GTO.

The introduction of the GTO ‘Goat’ option, followed by a stand-alone model shortly after, would shift the ‘horsepower war’ between the big three Detroit manufacturers (Ford, GM, Chrysler) to a new level. Until the arrival of the Goat, the horsepower war had been fought amongst the ‘full size’ vehicles. From the mid-1960s through to the start of the 1970s car yards were flooded with factory-built muscle cars from the ‘big three’. These massively overpowered monsters of

automobility could be driven straight from the showroom floor to the drag strip. The 'Goat' signalled the beginning of the factory-produced muscle car era.¹³

The Goat's mythological status is linked to its success in drag racing circles. The link between the auto industry, production models and motorsport is crucial and is best represented by the old saying, 'Win on Sunday, sell on Monday'. Some automotive pundits believe that successful motorsport ventures reflect well on an automotive brand within certain markets and thus help shift vehicles off the showroom floor. As Robert Post notes, there is an ambiguity around the word 'performance' when it comes to drag racing. He likens the technological performance of dragsters to the theatrical performance.¹⁴ Yet, there is another *performative* role of early drag racing at the intersection of engineering and entertainment. The winning performances of certain cars at the track connected the ostensibly technical details of a car's technological performance to the image of the desirable muscle car. Horsepower figures and the technology that produced such figures ceased to be esoteric technical facts and became the basic discursive and symbolic material of 'muscle car' enthusiast culture.¹⁵

There are two parts to the Goat's association with drag racing. Firstly, it dominated the 'stock racing classes' of drag racing, sanctioned by the National Hot Rod Association (NHRA).¹⁶ Arguably more important is the Goat's popularity within the unofficial cultural institution of street drag racing. It is rumoured that DeLorean and Jim Wangers from Pontiac's advertising division took prototypes of the Goat to Detroit's legendary Woodward Avenue to test the vehicles in street races. In fact, Woodward Avenue gained national notoriety in the US after Wangers featured the Goat cruising Woodward Avenue in one of the car's print campaigns. In general, Pontiac ran a youth-oriented promotional campaign that even included a 'manufactured' hit record, "Little GTO."¹⁷

Drag racing is a sport based around maximum acceleration, traction and timing - it is all about maximising useable 'grunt.' More 'grunt' is signified by lower elapsed times - that is, the time taken to complete a quarter mile race. Of course, 'grunt' has heavy masculine overtones. The connection between 'grunt' and masculinity is represented by the popularity of the V8 motor in hot rodding, customising and street machining subcultures for more than 70 years. The V8 is a cultural artefact that links masculinity to automobility through the sometimes-violent throb of the V8's affectivities.¹⁸ From the loping idle of a 'cammed' V8 to the high pitched wail of a 'supercharged' V8, the V8 is not just a technology, but an instrument for cultural expression. Drag racing is a cultural institution for the expression of 'grunt' and the V8 has by far been the favoured motor for powering drag racing cars.

Drifting, 'Rice' and the New GTO

There were never any 'copies' of the Pontiac GTO, only other examples of the muscle car singularity either along the GTO genealogy or across the marketplace. Here 'copy' is meant as a neo-Platonic representation of the essence of a transcendental 'muscle car-ness'.¹⁹ For example, if a particular car was said to be a copy, then the car would be close representation of the original. However, the major car manufacturers did not copy the GTO in this sense; they offered further differential iterations of the muscle car singularity. To produce a muscle car in the 1960s or 1970s, as various manufacturers did, was to differentially repeat the muscle car singularity defined by three elements: a captured difference or variation, youthfulness, and masculinist 'grunt'. Without these attributes a car is *not* a muscle car.

For years rumours of a new version of the Goat being secretly designed by GM engineers circulated. Eventually, the GTO name returned 40 years after the original Goat was produced. Under the guidance of GM Vice-Chairman and product development chief, Bob Lutz, GM sought to bring back the GTO name in the new millennium. Lutz turned to Australia, citing the overwhelming success of GM Holden's Monaro and plucked the model from Australian shores. Like the Pontiac GTO, the Holden Monaro is a 1960s marque reborn in the late 1990s and can be understood as an example of the Australian equivalent of the US-based muscle car. Even though the V8-powered, front-engine and rear-drive layout had all but died out in the US, the design layout has lived on in Australia with both GM Holden producing the Commodore (and its derivatives, including the Monaro) and Ford producing the Falcon. The Monaro already used a US-sourced driveline based around the LS1 V8 engine that had been used by GM in the US to power the Corvette and Firebird, however the Monaro did require a few changes to make it suitable for the US market.²⁰ The overwhelming popularity of the Monaro in Australia did not translate into success for the GTO in the United States. For all intents and purposes the new 2004 GTO has been a flop.

If the new GTO is referenced against the design-based *technological* model of the muscle car there is no obvious reason for such poor sales. It is a relatively small car with a large V8 engine that drives the rear wheels. In the words of the 1964 GTO sales brochure, the 2004 GTO is the most successful 'time and distance shrinking device' ever to wear the Pontiac GTO moniker. Yet, there is something else missing. The new 2004 GTO fails the xXx muscle car test. What is 'wrong' with the new GTO?

All commentators (from 'official' motoring media to comments posted on online Pontiac enthusiast forums) have noted that the principle failing of the new

GTO is in its *styling*. Even though the new GTO has a high level of technological performance and would certainly be able to beat the original Goat in any test of technological performance, it is not a *muscle* car. In some ways the difference between the old Goat and the new GTO is akin to the difference between the old Goat and the Ferrari GTO from which DeLorean took the acronym 'GTO'. The original GTO was engineered inspired by the 'street' and the hot rod engineering of the street racers of the 1960s. On the other hand, the 'new' GTO is a purpose built sports car; it has too much finesse and design-based poise. To explore this difference it is useful to place the old and new versions of the GTO in their respective motorsport contexts. Organised and street-based drag racing has an all-American institutional heritage and the Goat certainly serves as a mythological, American muscle car icon of the sport. But Pontiac did not go drag racing with the new GTO – they went *drifting*.²¹

Similar to the emergence of drag racing in the United States, drifting developed in Japan from street racing activities. It was called *touge*, and emerged in the Japanese mountainsides sometime in the 1960s (the exact date being unclear). The racers (called 'rolling *zoku*') were intent on covering the distance between two points in the shortest possible time. To do so, they adapted some of the driving techniques from rally drivers. The techniques started to appear in official racing circles almost 30 years ago. In its current form – as an official organised motorsport – drifting is practiced in most countries and its popularity has grown exponentially over the last 5 or 6 years. Drifting is a form of competitive motorsport unlike any other. Unlike its legitimate and street racing origins, and for that matter almost all others forms of motorsport, drifting does not necessarily involve racing directly against competitors, or against the clock. Described as 'the art of sideways,' it is based on style. Unlike drag racing, where than maximum useable *grunt* could be regarded as the determining factor in winning competitions, successful drifting stems from the skill of the driver to hold his or her car in a series of high-speed sideways slides around a relatively tight track. Drift cars are set up for driving *poise*, not brute horsepower, and competitions are not won or lost against an opponent according to elapsed times, but *judged* in a method akin to that of figure skating or platform diving.²²

In the United States, drifting is considered as the motorsport of *imports*. In this context, 'import' signifies a car's non-US place of origin, that is, anything not originally built for the United States domestic market. Until the new GTO appeared, this term was mainly used to describe cars originally built for the Japanese or European domestic markets. This is clearly evidenced by the derogatory ethnocentric term used by enthusiasts of traditional muscle cars and street machines and given to imports and their owners, *ricers*. In the earlier quote

from Rob Cohen he suggested that Xander Cage ‘does not belong in a rice rocket’. In the commentary Cohen goes on to note that Vin Diesel drove a Dodge Charger in his *The Fast and the Furious* (2001). The distinction Cohen makes between ‘rice rockets’ and the cars driven by Vin Diesel in films is interesting in the context of *The Fast and the Furious* because the film was a massive box-office hit amongst the new generation of import-centric modified-car enthusiasts.²³

Getting it Wrong

The exemplary text that dramatises how *wrong* GM Pontiac got it when they attempted to rearticulate the 1960s ‘muscle car’ for the post-millennium generation of ‘import’ enthusiasts is the made-for-television movie, *The Last Ride* (2004).²⁴ The film serves as an intersection between muscle car and import generations of car enthusiasts and the cultural economy overlap between the automotive industry and popular culture. It is the next iteration of ‘product placement’ where the new GTO and GM products are not merely filmic window dressing, but are essential to the structure of the storyline. The basic plot of the film involves Ronnie Purcell (Dennis Hopper), chasing after evidence hidden in his 1969 Pontiac ‘Judge’ GTO that he can use to gain revenge against the man, Daryll Kurtz (Fred Ward), who killed his wife. Along the way he gets assistance from his grandson, Matthew Purcell (Chris Carmack). To retrieve the GTO Matthew and Ronnie go to a GM-sponsored classic car show. While at the car show Matthew has to make a quick getaway and steals a new 2004 GTO at the very moment it is being unveiled to the crowd of classic car enthusiasts.

The classic car show scene serves as a metonym for the role of *The Last Ride*’s in the automotive cultural economy. The old ‘Goat’ GTO serves as a ‘star’ of *The Last Ride* so as to ‘introduce’ the new GTO. The logic of the car show is homologous to the logic of *The Last Ride*: the relevant enthusiast market is introduced to the new 2004 GTO by the watching/attending *The Last Ride*/classic car show. *The Last Ride* is a more elaborate development of the logic and function to the “Little GTO” pop song released concurrently with the original 1960s Goat. In the 1960s, fans of “The Little GTO” were introduced to the car through the song. However, rather than merely advertising the new GTO to a demographic that might think it was desirable, in the case of *The Last Ride* Pontiac now had the slightly trickier proposition of marketing the new GTO to a demographic that thought the *old* GTO was cool.

Interestingly, Rob Cohen again surfaces as an important figure in the intersection of the automotive industry and popular culture. Cohen is given story and producer credits for *The Last Ride*. There are also strong parallels between the film and *The Fast and the Furious* franchise – particularly the street racing scene

following the opening credits as it is a carbon copy of scenes from both *The Fast and the Furious* and its sequel. *The Last Ride* is rich in interesting moments in the overlap space between popular culture and the automotive industry. There is one scene that perfectly captures the generational divide between enthusiasts of the muscle car era and the more recent import-based enthusiasms. In this scene, Matthew Purcell is picking up his grandfather, Ronnie Purcell, from prison:

Ronnie Purcell: Are you telling me a grandson of mine drives an import?
[pause] What is this rice-burner? A four banger?
Matthew Purcell: It's a six.
Ronnie: You kids today don't know how to handle a V8?
Matthew: We don't need it. This one's got quarter-inch lines, Hotshot
4-2-1 headers, Tenzo intake and a NX NOS system.
Ronnie: Well my Judge would kick your ass. [pause] A 400-cube
Ram Air 4, with a quick-shift package, hood tach, man.
Matthew: You're speaking a dead language, man.
[...]
Ronnie: The first thing we gotta do is find the Judge.
Matthew: Your old GTO? It's a relic.
Ronnie: You just help me find it, and along the way maybe you'll
learn something about real cars.
Matthew: Oh yeah?
Ronnie: Yeah.
Matthew: Fire this rice-burner up.²⁵

GM's error of judgement was to imagine they could tap into the burgeoning 'import' demographic by creating a market that was something of an overlap between the 'muscle car' and 'import' cultures. Why Pontiac would make a movie that was obviously derisory towards the ethnic-coding of the import scene ('rice-burners') when at the same time making the investment of a factory Pontiac GTO drift team is difficult to imagine.

The relationship between the GTO and drifting is problematic, because the new 2004 GTO is *itself considered an import*. The paradox is that the GTO was not imported from Japan or from the European markets, but was built according to Australian design trends, which, in turn, are heavily influenced by trends in the United States. The influence of the US on Australia in the example of the GTO/Monaro can be seen in the choice of the US-designed LS1 V8 engine to power what was originally an Australian designed car. However, the V8 engine of the GTO/Monaro becomes a problem if the GTO is understood as an 'import' because enthusiasts of the import scene champion so-called 'hi-tech' automobile technologies, such as multiple overhead camshafts and turbochargers, as it is these technologies that primarily differentiate 'imports' from other forms of enthusiast car culture. The near-vintage technology of the pushrod activated camshaft of the LS1 engine that powers the GTO/Monaro means that it will and has been snubbed

by 'proper' enthusiasts of the import scene. In other words, the GTO fails in both enthusiast markets. The irony is that Cohen, at least, is apparently aware of the importance of perceived enthusiast sentiment in marketplace reception of the GTO. As I have outlined above, in *The Last Ride* the new GTO is 'unveiled' at a classic car show. People who attend such car shows are nearly all enthusiasts...

The new Pontiac GTO has failed because the Pontiac marketers did not fully appreciate that 'muscle' does not simply signify a car's technological performance capacity, but is a *hypostatic* cultural category. *Muscle will never change*. Muscle cars are brutish technologies built with the 'grunt' required for the task of drag racing, which is the exact antithesis of the 'sports car' poise demanded in motorsports such as drifting and historically associated with marques such as Ferrari. To produce a cultural commodity that attempts to exist and appeal to both enthusiasms is to underestimate the power that enthusiasm (or 'desire') has in determining the market. The drift scene in the US and elsewhere around the world is certainly considered 'youthful', but the youthfulness of drifting does not include the 'grunt' of drag racing and actually invites marginalisation through distasteful ethnocentric discourse. The intersection of 'youth and 'grunt' lays at the heart of a different generation of enthusiasts as represented in the above cross-generational exchange from *The Last Ride*.²⁶ 'Muscle' is locked into a localised historico-cultural model and any car that is constructed (or expected) to wear the 'muscle car' tag must signify a fidelity to this era. To repeat 'muscle' in the new millennium is to differentially repeat a cultural model organised around age ('youthfulness'), gender ('grunt'), and a third category that has only recently become relevant: *ethnicity* ('domestic', i.e. 'non-import'). Cohen's understanding of this relation is clearly demonstrated by his use of the Charger and GTO in his films with hyper-masculine Diesel and the narrative interplay between the muscle car and import cultures in *The Last Ride*. Cohen could *not* have produced the same effect or even the same film if he had used a new 2004 GTO in *xXx*. By invoking the mythologised cultural model of the original GTO – the Goat – through use of the 'GTO' automobile model name, enthusiasts did *not* expect GM to produce a car that had poise and which could go drifting with 'imports', but expected a certain kind of youthful, all-American, hyper-masculine automobile known as the *muscle car*.

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¹ Rob Cohen, *xXx* (USA: Revolution Studios, 2002), DVD. For example, the aggressive façade of the film's eponymous character xXx's heavily tattooed, heavily muscled body is a 'modified' version of Bond's svelte tuxedo-wearing masculine worldliness.

² Part of what I am doing in this paper is continuing the work of others to open up a critical cultural dialogue that engages with the automobile as a form of cultural production. As Rudy Koshar argues, "The automobile deserves at least as much attention as do other topics recently favoured in cultural studies scholarship, such as cinema or popular music, cultural productions that also have deep social resonance in modernity" (145). Rudy Koshar, "On the History of the Automobile in Everyday Life," *Contemporary European History* 10.1 (2001): 143-154.

³ In drag racing and circuit racing there has been a strong drive to maintain the illusion of 'stock-bodied' race cars. For example, the development of 'funny cars' in drag racing was linked to Chrysler and Ford's respective factory-sponsored drag racing teams building cars with elongated wheelbases to shift the weight balance rearward for better traction. The resultant cars looked like stock versions, but a 'little bit funny.' See, Robert Post, *High Performance: The Culture and Technology of Drag Racing, 1950-2000* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 133-142.

⁴ GM Holden has recently announced the cancellation of the Holden Monaro and hence the Pontiac GTO. The continued production of the Monaro was dependent on the sale of the GTO in North America. There have been roughly 10,000 sales in Australia and 40,000 to North America and Europe. The failure of the GTO in US-based markets has led to the production of the Monaro being discontinued. Pontiac and Holden are both subsidiaries of General Motors (GM).

⁵ Judith Roof, "Living the James Bond Lifestyle," in *Ian Fleming & James Bond: The Cultural Politics of 007*, E. P. Comentale, S. Watt and S. Willman, eds. (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2005), 81.

⁶ This is taken to the absurd limit in the sequel to *xXx*, entitled *xXx: State of the Union* and directed by Lee Tamahori (USA: Columbia Tristar, 2005, DVD; released in Australia as *xXx: The Next Level*). The 'new' xXx (Ice Cube) has a veritable 'war machine' SUV as his vehicle. To contextualize the close relation between super-hero type characters and their vehicles it may be useful to think about the changing nature of Batman's vehicle across the half-century history of the *Batman* franchise. The television Batman had a George Barris-designed vehicle. Barris was described by Tom Wolfe in his famous "Kandy Koloored Tangerine-Flaked Streamline Baby" essay as the 'king of the kustomisers'. Customising emerged in the 1960s as a baroque, artistic form of car modification. In the latest incarnation of the Batman franchise, the film *Batman Returns* (2005), Batman has a 'sports tank'. The film's production designer drew inspiration from tanks and 'supercar' Lamborghinis. See Tom Wolfe, *Kandy Koloored Tangerine-Flaked Streamline Baby* (New York: Bantam Books, 1965); Eric Mayne, "Batman returns in rugged ride," *Detroit News* (June 13, 2005 [accessed 7 October 2005]), available from <http://www.detroitnews.com/2005/autosinsider/0506/14/A01-213652.htm>.

⁷ The GTO also has an important place in Australian modified-car culture. A GTO graced the cover of the first issue of the iconic Australian modified-car culture magazine, *Street Machine* (1981).

⁸ David Gartman. *Auto Opium: A Social History of American Automobile Design* (London; New York: Routledge, 1994), 196.

⁹ On 'immaterial labour' see Paulo Virno, *A Grammar of the Multitude: For an Analysis of Contemporary Forms of Life* (Cambridge, Mass; London: Semiotext(e), 2003); Maurizio Lazzarato, "Immaterial Labour," in *Radical Thought in Italy: A Potential Politics*, Michael Hardt & Paolo Virno, eds. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 133-147. Part of the shift to post-Fordism involved a movement towards what has been termed 'Toyotism'. Investment in material accumulation to just-in-time logistics is an important dimension of this shift.

¹⁰ On the relation between enthusiasm (in general) and leisure-time activities see Paul Hoggett and Jeff Bishop, *Organizing Around Enthusiasms: Patterns of Mutual Aid in Leisure* (London: Comedia Publishing Group, 1986). On the relation between enthusiasm and modified-car culture (hot rodding) see Herbert Moorhouse, *Driving Ambitions: An Analysis of the American Hot Rod Enthusiasm* (New York: Manchester University Press, 1991).

¹¹ The post-Fordist self-referentiality of the muscle car's difference - what enthusiasts call its *individuality* - is an expression of its singularity or, more specifically, the series of singularities invariably expressed as the 'muscle car'. Every self-ordered social system is organised according patterns (attractors) and thresholds (bifurcations); singularities are useful for 'mapping' (or what Felix Guattari has called 'diagrammatizing') the self-organizing capacity of social systems. The post-Fordist nature of the 'muscle car' is derived from the fact that its self-referential difference was part of the muscle car's *identity* as a cultural commodity. This is different from the hierarchised dialectical difference of *distinction*. Once the entire automobile market becomes determined by such self-referential difference, its relative importance compared to other cultural differences is lessened. Segments of the automobile market escape subsumption to the self-referential logic of difference, such as fleet purchases for government, business and taxi companies. It is unlikely that such self-referential difference has become a hypostatic cultural category as exemplified by the relative success of the 'new' retro-styled 2004 Ford Mustang. On 'Singularity' see Mark Bonta and John Protevi, *Deleuze and Geophilosophy: A Guide and Glossary* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004), 143. The distinction between the GTO and the muscle car is comparable to the distinction between the "bare repetition" and the "singular subject" of repetition in Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 23-25, 84.

¹² In March 1963, at GM's Milford proving grounds, DeLorean presented a Pontiac Tempest with a 389 cubic-inch V8 to Jim Wangers from Pontiac's advertising department. Engineers at Pontiac developed

the \$300 GTO Pontiac Tempest option of a 389 cubic-inch V8 motor from the larger Bonneville model into the Tempest's 'intermediate frame'.

¹³ The original GTO went through only one comprehensive model change before dying out in the mid-1970s. From as early as 1966, just two years after the introduction of the Goat, Pontiac engineers were under pressure from 'head office' due to concerns about the unsafe nature of the vehicle and public safety. Eventually this pressure included explicit directives to pull out from all organised motorsport, which included 'street based' drag racing. The pressure continued to build in response to the 1973 oil supply/price scare orchestrated by the Arab oil producing nations in response to Western European and US support of Israel in the Arab-Israeli War. Muscle cars often had big block V8 engines that demanded much more fuel than what was required for everyday transport.

¹⁴ Post writes: "Some conceive of performance in the context of engineering; for others the crucial referent is entertainment. The show can be as scrubby as a small-time carnival, or it can be the stuff of high drama." Post, xviii.

¹⁵ A genealogy of car enthusiasm discourse, in the sense I am discussing it here, would have to be traced back to the 1920s and 1930s and the salt lake racers of Southern California. In fact, the entire 'muscle car' cultural formation can be understood as a commodified rearticulation of the early hot rodding culture.

¹⁶ The stock racing classes were organised according to reported factory power figures and it has been suggested that part of the Goat's success was due to the way Pontiac engineers quoted its power figures. Most other manufacturers relied on 'brake horse power' (BHP) figures, measuring the performance of an engine running on high octane fuel without any ancillaries such as alternators, air-conditioning compressors and so on. This does not give a very good indication of how the car performs in real world conditions. By contrast, Pontiac reported power figures for the car measured in real world conditions, resulting in a lower quoted figure for an equivalent power output. Thus, the Goat was able to dominate against less powerful vehicles.

¹⁷ 'Little GTO' was an unabashed attempt at using the popular music form to advertise the then new Pontiac GTO. It exists at the intersection of the automotive industry and popular culture and its lyrics are constructed from the language of enthusiasts of the time. 'Little GTO' reached number 4 in the charts in 1964. See further discussion below.

¹⁸ The term 'grunt' is a concept I am using to capture the way the affects belonging to the 'machinic phylum' of automobility are segmented by enthusiasts. In the terminology of Deleuze and Guattari, 'grunt' is an *affect* of automobile technology. Like the 'sharpness' of a blade or 'hardness' of a metal, 'grunt' is on the leading edge between technology and human users in assemblages. The importance of 'grunt' cannot be understated and relates to the masculine drive for technological mastery. Instead of the human user becoming a subsumed part of the system of automobility's 'immune' or 'reproductive' system (what Deleuze and Guattari call 'machinic enslavement'), the hierarchy of human domination over technology is reasserted at the very moment the human body can be affected by technology in a non-technological manner. I call this the 'kickstart my heart' effect. Recognition and appreciation of 'grunt' is one of the primary signifiers of the pre-personal 'enthusiast' subjectivity. On the 'Machinic Phylum' see Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 406-410.

¹⁹ See Paul Patton, *Deleuze and the Political* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 32-35.

²⁰ The steering hand to be changed from right to left-hand drive, the position of the fuel tank had to be shifted to conform to US design rules, and lastly there were a few minor cosmetic changes to the front and rear of the vehicle. The second iteration of the Monaro-based Series II GTO had more extensive cosmetic changes, but by this stage the ill will of enthusiasts had already set in and infiltrated the market.

²¹ The new GTO has been very successful in US-based drifting competitions. At the time of writing, Rhys Millen in his race-prepped Pontiac GTO is currently leading the 2005 Formula Drift competition. See the GTO Drift team's website: <http://www.gtodrift.com/index.html> [accessed 7 October 2005].

²² On the subjective nature of drift judging see the online article "Judging a Drift Event," <http://www.drifting.com/article.php?threadid=3866&goto=newpost&show>Title=> [accessed 7 October 2005].

²³ Rob Cohen, *The Fast and the Furious* (USA: Universal Studios, 2003 [2001]), DVD. Although the general consensus amongst modified-car enthusiasts is that *The Fast and the Furious* is a film about the 'import scene' or 'ricers', it did not exclusively feature imports, nor did its sequel, *Too Fast Too Furious*, directed by John Singleton (USA: Universal Studios, 2005 [2003], DVD). In the first film, Dominic Toretto (Diesel) chases down the 'baddies' in the final scene driving the aforementioned Dodge Charger. The Charger is the only car in the film that could be understood as being realistically built for drag racing. In reality the other cars in the film would be lucky to run 10 second elapsed times in a quarter mile drag race (the rough time suggested in the film that they could run). Beyond the technological reality of the cars, the Charger also has similar styling cues to two of the greatest filmic street-machines of all time. Firstly, Mad Max's V8 Interceptor with which it shares a 'blower' mounted on top of the engine and sticking out of the bonnet (see George Miller, *Mad Max* (Australia: Village Roadshow, 2005 [1979]), DVD). Secondly, it also has the 'big and littles' combination of wide racing tyres on the rear and skinny 'front runners' of the primer-grey '55 Chevy from Monte Hellman's *Two Lane Blacktop* (USA: Anchor Bay Entertainment, 2002 [1971], DVD). The Charger is explained in *The Fast and the Furious* as belonging to Toretto's father, thus underpinning the generational divide between contemporary enthusiasts belonging to the import scene and the previous generation of enthusiasts of the muscle car era. The GTO also appeared in the cult film classic *Two Lane Blacktop*. It was the car driven by the character also known as GTO and played by Warren Oates. It was the competition to the

'55 Chevy driven by 'The Driver' (James Taylor) and 'The Mechanic' (Dennis Wilson). Dennis Wilson was a founding member of the Beach Boys. The Beach Boys did a cover of "Little GTO."

²⁴ Cuy Norman Bee, *The Last Ride* (USA: Universal Studios, 2004), DVD.

²⁵ The false note struck by Matthew's assertion that his car 'is a six', i.e. a six cylinder powered car, when he then says it has 'Hotshot 4-2-1' headers, which indicates he has a four cylinder motor, would cause enthusiasts to wince at the blatant artifice.

²⁶ Another line of inquiry not engaged here would be to examine the dominance of the 'baby boomer' generation definition of 'youth' as a perpetual 'youthfulness'. Drifting is associated with an actual contemporary generation of 'youth'; yet the 'muscle' of 'muscle car' is associated with an everlasting 'youthfulness' of the 1960s era. The shift in actual youth and contemporary constructions of 'youthful' cultural commodities amongst car enthusiasts is represented by Matthew describing the language of his grandfather (and hence the immaterial labour of the cultural industry which dealt in the language of enthusiasts) as 'dead'. On the relation between car enthusiasts, the cultural category of 'youthfulness' and the actual social category of 'youth', see Ben Chappell, "What Youth Culture? Race, Rubric, and Identified Performance," *Politics and Culture* 2:2. (2003). Available from <http://aspen.conncoll.edu/politicsandculture/page.cfm?key=225> [accessed 7 October 2005].