

# Enthusiasm, Community & Cars: Geographies of the Modified VW Culture

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April 2018

## Thesis Summary

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### Summary:

This thesis explores the ways in which participation in the modified VW community can be understood as enthusiasm, as defined in recent human geography. The research focuses on the relations between the community and individual scale, the emotional experiences of enthusiasm and the roles played by spaces of enthusiasm. The empirical data which led this research inquiry was gathered using a mix-methods approach contextualised by autoethnographic fieldwork during 2014-15. The research finds particular importance in the collective community network of enthusiastic individuals; their social interactions and the role of these in exchanging knowledge, norms and social capital. The co-present interactions which afford the exchange of such knowledges take place in spaces across the culture. These spaces and the consequent norms therein unveil the behaviours and etiquettes of enthusiasts as evidenced in their experiences, performances and practices. This research shows that for enthusiasts the modified car can be understood as a socio-technical project; with connections shown between participating in enthusiast labour and strengthening community cohesion. In terms of automobility research; driving is found to be both an embodied experience and a performed display. This display is key to the transmission of norms and spatial inscription of certain spaces and motorscapes which enthusiast cars pass through. The implications of research findings make an original contribution to knowledge within the recent geographies of enthusiasm corpus by illustrating the importance of approaching enthusiast communities with a sensitivity to the collective scale community as influencing individual behaviours, practices and experiences. The main conceptual contribution of this research is the recommendation of a critical use of social capital theory alongside emotional geography to open up new avenues of research when working with communities within the geographies of enthusiasm.

## **Abstract**

This thesis explores the ways in which participation in the modified VW community can be understood as enthusiasm, as defined in recent human geography. The research focuses on the relations between the community and individual scale, the emotional experiences of enthusiasm and the roles played by spaces of enthusiasm. The empirical data which led this research inquiry was gathered using a mix-methods approach contextualised by autoethnographic fieldwork during 2014-15. The research finds particular importance in the collective community network of enthusiastic individuals; their social interactions and the role of these in exchanging knowledge, norms and social capital. The co-present interactions which afford the exchange of such knowledges take place in spaces across the culture. These spaces and the consequent norms therein unveil the behaviours and etiquettes of enthusiasts as evidenced in their experiences, performances and practices. This research shows that for enthusiasts the modified car can be understood as a socio-technical project; with connections shown between participating in enthusiast labour and strengthening community cohesion. In terms of automobility research; driving is found to be both an embodied experience and a performed display. This display is key to the transmission of norms and spatial inscription of certain spaces and motorscapes which enthusiast cars pass through. The implications of research findings make an original contribution to knowledge within the recent geographies of enthusiasm corpus by illustrating the importance of approaching enthusiast communities with a sensitivity to the collective scale community as influencing individual behaviours, practices and experiences. The main conceptual contribution of this research is the recommendation of a critical use of social capital theory alongside emotional geography to open up new avenues of research when working with communities within the geographies of enthusiasm.

## **Acknowledgments**

I would like to express my gratitude to my supervisors Professor Peter Merriman and Dr Jesse Heley for their continued support and advice throughout the stages of this research process. Their expert knowledge and guidance both conceptually and with regards to the practical elements of PhD writing have helped me to develop as a human geography researcher. I want to express my gratitude to the Department of Earth Sciences at Aberystwyth University for academic support and awarding of my Doctoral Career Development Scholarship, without which I would not have been able to pursue this research at all. I would also like to thank Dr Hilary Geoghegan at the University of Reading for her advice regarding the fit of my research project within recent work on the geographies of enthusiasm.

I also want to thank my friends across the PhD cohort within the Department of Geography & Earth Sciences. Our many discussions of each other's research have provided us all with support with a PhD work life balance and with an insight into the broad range of geographical research. Finally I am indebted to my Mum and Dad for their support and unwavering belief in my ability, which often surpassed my own.

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# 1 Introduction

“Volkswagen owners are a special breed. They’re passionate, connected, and united. Their love of German engineering goes beyond the road and into the every day.” (Volkswagen DriverGear, 2015).

I open with the above quote from Volkswagen DriverGear<sup>1</sup> (2015) because it offers a succinct contextual background to VW enthusiasm and my own positionality<sup>2</sup>. My passion for Volkswagen (hereafter VW) cars goes far beyond the road and into everyday life as a human geographer and beyond. Throughout my university education in human geography I have been a VW owner and an active member of a wide enthusiast community. DeLyser (2001: 442) notes that, “some researchers find topics close to home, or close to our hearts- so compelling- we can’t leave them alone”, and I count myself within this number. Volkswagen enthusiasts are one of many communities to whom, “cars are meaningful...[and] which organise their ethos and rituals around this totemic material object.” (Lumsden, 2015: 38). In this way and above all else the car and the uniting interest in the car are key to modified VW enthusiasm.

## 1.1 Research Aims

Initially it was my positionality which inspired me to turn a geographical lens towards the modified VW culture, to explore why enthusiasts such as myself spend time, money and emotional investment modifying cars. However with preliminary research and reflexive thinking about my experiences as enthusiast<sup>3</sup> I noted that the act of modifying did not occur in isolation, rather the experiences of enthusiasm went much wider into aspects of

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<sup>1</sup> DriverGear are the official accessory making subsidiary of Volkswagen group; their products range from branded clothing to model cars.

<sup>2</sup> My positionality as researcher and enthusiast is explored in more detail in Chapter 3.

<sup>3</sup> As detailed in Chapter 3, reflexive thinking is key to the methodological direction of this research.

community, labour, events and driving as addressed in Chapters 4-9. As such I utilise the overarching research question 'In what ways can participation in the modified VW community be understood as enthusiasm'. This question positions the research within the current work regarding the geographies of enthusiasm (Geoghegan, 2013) and affords an exploration of the extent to which the experiences of the modified VW culture can be defined as enthusiasm. This also allows for discussion of what enthusiasm is and how it can be studied within human geography. This overarching question aims towards a conclusion which can detail the ways in which participation in the modified VW community and culture can be described as enthusiasm and afford discussion of the characteristics of the case study culture which enable it to be conceptually approached as an enthusiast community. Thus the main conceptual aim of this research is to make an original contribution to debates surrounding geographies of enthusiasm and in particular to help broaden ways in which enthusiasm can be approached, mobilised and analysed in human geography research. Epistemologically I wanted to illustrate that geographies of enthusiasm can benefit from a sensitivity to the interactions between enthusiasts within a community both at an individual and collective scale. It was for this reason that the overarching research question is concerned with the culture and community and not just the individual. For the purposes of research design this overarching research question was then broken down into the three more specific research questions, detailed below.

### **1.1.2 Research Questions**

The three specific research questions designed to explore the broader research aims are detailed below.

**1.) In what ways is there a relationship between the community and individual enthusiast experiences, behaviours and practices?**

This question sought to investigate the ways in which the wider community structure affects the behaviours, practices and experiences of individual enthusiasts participating within it. The question directs the investigation towards the importance of different scales of enthusiasm and presents the opportunity to unveil connections between these scales. In particular it affords investigation of norms and knowledge which may be policed and maintained by the community and which could influence behaviours, practices and emotional experiences of the participants. In this way the study can explore the ways in which knowledge moves down from the collective scale to the individual experiential scale and the community values thus affect the values and practices of the individuals which constitute it. Conceptually this question presents an opportunity to think about the potential similarities and working connections between emotions as experienced by individuals and dynamics which exist at a collective community scale and may be explained by a social capital based approach. By exploring the collective community dynamics and directing research towards shared community norms it is also possible to investigate the sites and spaces at which these norms are unveiled through practices, experiences and behaviours. In this way this first research question can be connected to the second and third questions below, regarding emotional experience and spaces of enthusiasm respectively.

**2. In what ways can modified car enthusiasm be understood as emotionally experienced?**

This research question was positioned in order to further elaborate on the overarching research question regarding the ways in which participation in the modified VW community

can be understood as a form of enthusiasm. With recent work regarding enthusiasm in human geography having grown out of emotional geography research (e.g. Geoghegan, 2013), I want to explore how well such an emotional understanding can be applied to the modified VW community. This question also aims to afford patterns which could build on the observations that the modified car can be understood as an emotio-material object (Balkmar & Joelsson, 2010: 41) and a socio-technical project (Fuller, 2007: 92) and is thus more redolent with meaning and emotion than it may at first appear. In this way the question will make it possible to explore the motivations, experiences and practices of enthusiasts within a framework of emotion. Additionally this affords investigation of emotional investment in projects and friendships and as a way to understand the emotive feelings which enthusiasm conjures within individuals. This question is positioned in such a way that it directs exploration of individual experiences which can be understood in relation to wider community understandings about behaviour and knowledge.

### **3.) How are spaces influenced and experienced by modified VW enthusiasts?**

This research question is concerned with the actual spaces and sites of enthusiasm where behaviours and practices are experienced. By exploring these experiences with reference to the spaces in which they occur it will be possible to see what role space plays in experience of enthusiasm. This question can also be seen in the context of the first research question above, directing the research towards exploration of the role played by the community in defining behaviours in certain spaces. A second reason for posing this question was to afford exploration of display and performance within the culture, this was based on the fact that modified cars are altered in order to appear more attractive (Balkmar, 2014: 166) which points towards the role of certain spaces of display. This question also affords conceptual

discussion of the extent to which spaces of enthusiasm are spatio-temporally specific and socio-spatially situated (Bondi et al., 2005; Geoghegan, 2013). Furthermore such an appreciation of space is particularly important with the modified VW culture because of the *automobile* nature of its participants. The very fact that cars move means that they can carry meanings inscribed within in them into and through a number of spaces which may not be traditionally associated with the modified car. This also presents an opportunity to build on research about driving, driving spaces and automobility in geography (e.g. Merriman, 2009; Pearce, 2016) to show the ways in which motorscapes can become inscribed with meaning.

## **1.2 Modified VW Community Studied in its Own Terms**

As I have briefly mentioned above this research project aims to represent the modified VW community on its own terms in a way legible to those within. Similarly Ben Chappell (2012: 14) notes that lowrider car culture has rarely been studied in its own terms, he explains that this refers not just to terminology but also to the practices and experiences involved. Being a modified car enthusiast is something which is often perceived negatively by those looking in without the privilege of context. Yarwood and Shaw (2010: 431) make a similar observation with model railway enthusiasts that, the diversity, passion and skill is often perceived as, “men playing with toy trains”. Similarly modified car enthusiasts with the same level of interest are dismissed as boy racers (Lumsden, 2013). Modified car culture research has often come at the community through the rubric of antisocial behaviour, masculinity and deviance (Lumsden, 2009; Bengry-Howell & Griffin, 2007; Hatton, 2007) or in terms of regulating deviance (Lumsden, 2013; Falconer & Kingham, 2007). In this thesis I gather, present and analyse the stories of modified car enthusiasm as they are lived by enthusiasts, paying credence to individual experience and practice to understand what it means to enthusiasts to be a part of the modified VW community and culture.

### **1.3 A Caveat on Terminology**

Throughout this thesis I refer to the participant enthusiasts within the modified VW community in a number of ways and so a caveat on the distinctions is important here. Firstly the term VW culture as I use it is interchangeable with the term VAG culture, VAG refers to the Volkswagen-Audi group parent company which includes several car manufacturers but mainly VW, Audi, Skoda and Seat. Enthusiasts themselves often refer to this whole group as being within the VW community, however interesting distinctions are sometimes made within debates about car show space as presented in chapter 7.3. Furthermore this community is now often seen to include other German marques such as BMW and Mercedes-Benz and increasingly these are grouped together with actual VAG marques at car shows and in the cultural media. For the most part I refer to the participants as modified VW enthusiasts or simply enthusiasts, as this is closest to the way in which enthusiasts refer to themselves and other participants in the community.

## 2 Literature Review

### 2.1 Introduction

This chapter addresses the existing literature and theoretical debates in three broad conceptual areas which this thesis draws upon and contributes to. Firstly I review recent work on enthusiasm in human geography, noting key methodological and conceptual patterns across studies. I undertake a critical discussion of Geoghegan's (2013) approach to enthusiasm which this thesis draws upon, in particular addressing its constituent approaches from emotional geography. I conclude with suggestions for the ways in which the interactions, key to an emotional geography reading of enthusiasm may be developed further by approaches to social capital. Building on this conclusion I turn in section 2.5 of this review to literature on social capital and community from human geography and sociology providing critical discussion of social capital in human geography (Holt et al., 2008; Mohan & Mohan, 2002) and suggest the importance of such a reading taken alongside an understanding of co-present encounters and mutual attentiveness (Urry, 2003). This understanding suggests the importance of social interaction and community for enthusiasts and makes connections with the earlier section regarding the sociability of emotion. Thirdly the review turns to literature on driving and mobility with particular reference to similar studies regarding modified car culture and other relatively specific driving cultures. I begin this final section with a brief definition of car culture as used throughout the thesis, in particular to distinguish it from similar studies which address subculture. In this section I critically discuss human geography literature both on driving as an embodied practice and as performed, as well as looking at how car cultures are conceptually approached in the discipline. In this way enthusiasm and emotional affiliation towards the car and the practice of driving are treated separately,



although conclusions are made which unite the two approaches and lay foundation for further discussion in Chapter 9.

## **2.2 Enthusiasm Research**

In the last two decades there has been an increase in research in human geography committed to exploring the consumption patterns, activities and communities of people who spend their leisure time<sup>4</sup> buying, collecting and creating material objects (e.g. Geoghegan, 2009, 2013, 2014; DeLyser, 2015; DeLyser et al., 2004; Mann, 2015; Miller, 2017; Yarwood, 2015; Yarwood and Shaw, 2010;). In human geography Hilary Geoghegan (2013) refers to this work as being a study of geographies of enthusiasm, a term which I utilise throughout the thesis to describe the corpus of work to which it contributes. Whilst not all studies cited here use the specific terminology of enthusiasm I will critically argue that there are key patterns which can be seen across similar cases studies. The structure of this section is as follows; firstly I discuss a range of research studies with enthusiast and similar communities across human geography, by defining patterns in these findings I work to define an interdisciplinary definition of enthusiasm. Secondly I discuss the role played by emotional geography as the conceptual basis for recent work on enthusiasm in human geography (Geoghegan, 2013). I will also detail the potential connections posited between the ‘sociability of emotion’ approach to collective enthusiasm (Geoghegan, 2013) which emphasises social interaction and the use of a social capital approach which also focuses on these encounters.

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<sup>4</sup> Enthusiasm sometimes stems beyond leisure time activities into the workplace, as is shown in Chapter 6.6 with reference to enthusiastic garages and mechanics.

### **2.2.1 Conceptual Patterns & Debates in Existing Enthusiasm Literature**

In order to construct a definition of what enthusiasm is and what a geography of enthusiasm might consist of I review current literatures and order these around recurring conceptual themes and their empirical patterns. Whilst this literature review is mostly concerned with the work in human geography I do recognise the interdisciplinary nature of understandings of enthusiasm and include these where applicable. The key elements of the following discussion stem from a workshop event on geographies of enthusiasm titled, *Enthusiasm Futures*<sup>5</sup>, held at the University of Reading in September 2015. One part of this event was a discussion amongst researchers of enthusiasm or similar behaviours, not just in based in human geography, which sought to define enthusiasm based on its use and potential use in research (Andrews & Geoghegan, 2015). The following sections are each focused around a key theme of enthusiasm research based on a conceptual or empirical shared pattern observed across the literature.

### **2.2.2 Personal Investment & Patterns of Participative Research Methods**

One of the strongest patterns across research with enthusiast groups is a methodological one; many researchers working with enthusiasts do so by working in collaboration with a community (Craggs et al., 2014; Geoghegan, 2014, 2013, 2009; Garrett, 2013; DeLyser, 2001). As discussed in Chapter 3 this emphasis on active participation to attempt understanding of enthusiasts' situated knowledge can be seen as a key element of feminist geographical thought post cultural turn (e.g. DeLyser, 2001; England, 1994). This is no coincidence; geographies of enthusiasm, as defined by Hilary Geoghegan (2013) have their conceptual basis in emotional geography, itself inextricably linked to the same body of thought. It is also

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<sup>5</sup> *Enthusiasm Futures* was a workshop co-organised by myself and Hilary Geoghegan and took place on 18<sup>th</sup> September 2015. It afforded a discussion of enthusiasm in human geography to date, a discussion of how work in the area could develop and the potential ways in which a concept or set of concepts could be mobilised in future research.

symptomatic of a more general move towards autoethnographical and autobiographical accounts of experience in cultural geography (e.g. Garrett, 2013; DeLyser & Greenstein, 2015). Discussion amongst enthusiast researchers during the Enthusiasm Futures workshop led to an agreement that above all else research of this nature requires patience. Collaborative, participatory research involves the building of trust, understandings and involvement in personal or private spaces (Geoghegan, 2014; DeLyser, 2001). For example in Lumsden's (2013) research with modified car enthusiasts, the importance of patience in her ethnographic research allowed her to build relationships of trust with participants. As such much of the research regarding enthusiasts and their communities requires extended periods of fieldwork, for example Glen Fuller (2007) and Ben Chappell's (2012) research with modified car enthusiasts consisted of years of autoethnographic experience within their participant communities. The confluence of research of this nature and the influence of traditional anthropology is discussed in detail in Chapter 3. However in order to afford long periods in the field enthusiasm research is often conducted by a researcher either already in a community or seeking to work closely with its members in order to understand their enthusiasm *on their terms*. One recent example of geographical research conducted in this way is Bradley Garrett's (2013) work as an urban explorer within a group of enthusiasts of abandoned spaces. However Luke Bennett's (2011) work with a similar urban exploration community was conducted based on analysis of secondary sources and no contact with participants. This suggests that it may be possible to learn to read an enthusiast group's experiences by immersing yourself in their world but without collaborating with them.

Herein lies a contested debate regarding levels of participation within an enthusiast community. Bennett (2013: 504) explains enthusiast activities are as much a part of their

representation in cultural texts as they are about the experience of participating within them. Therefore by reading cultural texts such as online reports about exploration trips it is possible to understand the motivations and experiences of those who wrote them. However as detailed in Chapter 3 with regards to the widening of ethnographic techniques, Garrett (2011) gave a critical response to Bennett's (2011) research arguing that embodied activity can not be fully understood from its representation in cultural discourse alone. This debate shows that when working with communities whose hobby or enthusiasm involves an embodied activity it is important to be attentive to experiential data. In Garrett's (2011) argument this means getting involved in the actual urban exploration activity in order to gain a richer understanding of the embodied experience. Similarly Stephen Saville (2008) details the embodied physicality and emotions of parkour enthusiasts by interrogating his own autobiographical accounts of parkour activity. In Saville's (2008) study his own experiential data provides the context in which to understand the activity and the motivations to participate. A similar understanding can be seen in Yarwood and Shaw's (2010: 426) argument that definitions of fun or leisure should not be externally defined because experiences are relationally understood by enthusiasts actively participating in their community. Glen Fuller (2007) focuses his understanding of modified car enthusiasm in Australia on his own narrativised experiences as an enthusiast, in particular illustrating the importance of such an approach to understanding driving behaviour. Furthermore geographical research about driving behaviour beyond enthusiasm geography has also seen a recent focus on personal experience due to the embodied nature of driving (Laurier, 2011; Merriman, 2009; Pearce, 2016)<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>6</sup> This literature is discussed in section 2.6 of this review.

### **2.2.3 The Prevalence of Narratives**

One key epistemological pattern which can be seen across enthusiasm research and in particular recent contributions in human geography is the importance of narratives within studies or participant accounts. This is evidenced to some extent by the previous discussion and the potential usefulness of recording personal narratives as a form of autoethnography (Butz & Besio, 2009; Fuller, 2007). This point stems from the temporal nature of enthusiasm. Enthusiasts often posit their experiences, behaviours, purchases and so on within a narrative of enthusiasm, either personal to them or a wider community historical narrative as outlined earlier. DeLyser and Greenstein's (2015) narrative of their enthusiastic journey whilst restoring a classic Tatra car is one example of this. Furthermore Chappell's (2012) research with lowrider enthusiasts found that they framed their journey of modifying a car from standard vehicle to culturally defined lowrider within the terms of a narrative. This may be specific to enthusiasm cultures where making or modifying is a central practice. This is because it affords personal identification of a timeline. In particular, discussion in chapter 4 highlights the importance of reflection and personal narrative to participants when identifying themselves as enthusiasts.

### **2.2.4 Relational Feelings of Enthusiasm: All-Encompassing & Momentary**

Across different research studies feelings of enthusiasm can range from being all-encompassing and constant to fleeting and momentary. For many people their enthusiasm is something which they only feel, experience or enact momentarily in specific or appropriate circumstances. Yarwood and Shaw (2010) draw on the work of Gregson (2007) and Mansvelt (2009) to suggest that leisure, and perhaps here also enthusiasm, is experienced differently by different people and is impacted by socio-spatial influences (Geoghegan, 2013: 41). For example both Yarwood and Shaw (2012) and Geoghegan (2013) talk about specific events

where the community can gather and in both cases these are seen as relative safe spaces in which their enthusiastic interest and knowledge can be enacted without ridicule. Whilst it may be that like the lowrider enthusiasts of Chappell's (2012) research these individuals' enthusiasm is a part of everyday life, they learn to express and suppress their enthusiasm where appropriate (Geoghegan, 2013: 42). Similarly Noble (2009) notes that different identities are enacted and performed in different times, spaces and company when appropriate. However for some participants their feelings of enthusiasm are momentary due to the specific nature of their interest. For example because the buildings which enthuse and interest urban explorers (Garrett, 2013) and architectural enthusiasts (Craggs et al., 2015) their feelings of enthusiasm are temporally limited to periods when they are present at the sites of said buildings. In this way it is possible to see how fixed spaces can foster recall of emotions of enthusiasm, which in turn engender familiarity and sense of belonging (Brown & Pickerill, 2009: 28). Thus enthusiasm may be felt as an all-encompassing feeling which requires careful policing in certain times and spaces but for others it may be something which is only triggered in the presence of certain objects, spaces or communities.

### **2.2.5 Creative Processes of Enthusiasm**

Where an enthusiasm is clearly based around a material object it is important to recognise that the enthusiasm can be for one thing or many things. The emotional attachment to a particular model train (Yarwood & Shaw, 2010) or building (Craggs et al., 2015) can be understood through the emotional geography based notion of object-love (Geoghegan & Hess, 2015). However for car modifiers these objects are rarely used alone and their form is often changed and modified. A number of ideas are key to this notion; firstly enthusiasm activities and hobbies such as modifying a car (Chappell, 2012), creating a model railway (Yarwood & Shaw, 2010) or crafting ceramic art (Miller, 2017) involve a number of different

materials. Car enthusiasts do not just have an interest in the car itself but rather also the parts and enthusiast labour (Fuller, 2007: 91) which help to assemble it. Herein lies the notion that enthusiasm may not be just for one material thing or indeed for an assembly of material things but rather for the act of assembling itself. Yarwood and Shaw (2010) talk about the way in which the actual creative process of designing a model railway, buying constituent parts and assembling them is as much a part of the enthusiasm as the 'finished' rail layout is<sup>7</sup>. However an enthusiasm for practice does not necessarily have to be tied to a creative process such as modelling or modifying, it can also be seen in research on recreational running (Cook, 2016), cycling (Brown & Spinney, 2010) and parkour (Saville, 2008) and car driving (Fuller, 2007) amongst others.

For some enthusiasts there are key creative processes which form a large part of the actions of their community and thus which form their enthusiasm. Many enthusiasts gather together materials in order to create and modify their objects of enthusiasm, as with car restorers and modifiers (DeLyser & Greenstein, 2015; Chappell, 2012; Tam-Scott, 2009) and other examples such as model railway enthusiasts (Yarwood & Shaw, 2010) and knitters (Mann, 2015). Campbell (2005: 24) argues for a theorisation of this creative consumption in a way which casts the participant enthusiast as a "postmodern identity seeker".

"[A postmodern identity seeker is]...a self-conscious manipulator of the symbolic meanings that are attached to products...who selects goods with the specific intention of using them to create or maintain a given impression, lifestyle or identity" (Featherstone, 1991 quoted in Campbell, 2005: 24).

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<sup>7</sup> Yarwood and Shaw (2010: 428) note that a finished product is rarely achieved as the motivation to continually create and adapt the layout is more of a driver than producing a finalised object.

This characterisation of a consumer was intended to accompany the dualism of the hero and the dupe; defined as the rational thinking consumer and the passive consumer manipulated by market forces (Slater, 1997). However Campbell (2005: 24) argues for another understanding of a group of consumers who are perhaps rationally active but who are not only interested in expressing a certain identity or lifestyle. These people consume, “principally out of a desire to engage in creative acts of self-expression” (ibid). Furthermore the consumer agency afforded by Campbell (2005) shows the multifaceted motivations for why people choose to participate in groups of enthusiasm. In this way craft consumers want to engage in creative processes of enthusiasm in order to express their own identity or their sense of belonging within a certain community. As Yarwood and Shaw (2010) have shown, the idea of craft consumption is a particularly useful approach to understanding material hobby cultures or enthusiast groups as studied in human geography. This is because it affords exploration of the processes of making and modifying as an element within a multifaceted approach to consumption. This becomes particularly important in Chapter 6.4 where I address empirics showing that a car built by its enthusiastic owner is given more value by the community than a project where someone else is paid to carry out the work. This discussion of the amount of effort or labour which an enthusiast invests in their created, modified or restored object has also been discussed by Geoghegan (2013), Chappell (2012) and Yarwood and Shaw (2010). This dynamic which results in individuals owning modified cars without their own inputs of “enthusiastic labour” (Fuller, 2007) leads to sometimes vicious contestation within the community. Similarly Geoghegan (2013) found that for some of the telecommunications heritage enthusiasts in her study it was the practice of working with and restoring the technology which informed their passionate interest in it.



With an enthusiasm for a practice comes some implication of the motivation to participate in said practice, perhaps affording an interrogation of how individuals become enthused. For example in Geoghegan's (2013) research some telecommunications enthusiasts were interested in a singular piece of equipment which a close relative had once worked with, they were still a telecommunications enthusiasts but with a specific enthusiasm for one 'thing'. Similarly DeLyser and Greenstein's (2015) restoration of a classic car shows the way in which an enthusiasm develops for a specific project or object within a wider enthusiasm. An enthusiasm for many 'things', within this study, allows for both a wider level interest in all modified VW's or all cars but also for collections of 'things', such as with DeLyser and others' (2004) article about collecting. Dydia DeLyser and others (2004) have discussed collecting as a type of passionate enthusiasm. For material-based enthusiasms such as cars, model railways, telecommunications equipment and so on, part of the enthusiastic behaviour is played out through collecting things. It is clear across research with car enthusiasts, no matter how conceptually varied (e.g. Dannefer, 1980; Chappell, 2012; Lumsden, 2013; DeLyser & Greenstein, 2015), that collecting parts and even whole cars is a common practice. This may be the gathering of parts in order to complete a project, or because they might be swapped with other enthusiast collections and or used in a future project (Chappell, 2012: 140). This trading relationship can occur because such second hand parts hold different value to different parties (Lumsden, 2015: 48). It may also be the collecting of rare or antique car parts or classic cars themselves for historical posterity (e.g. DeLyser & Greenstein, 2015). One example of this was raised in a recent issue of Hayburner magazine, whereby Scott (2016) interviewed an enthusiast who had a large collection of aircooled VW parts and several vehicles, laid out across different units as if in a museum however the collection was private and for the individuals own use. Throughout this research process in my experience as a

modified car enthusiast and some-time collector of parts I have realised that there is little sense demarcating between a collection of parts in a garage and the same collection once fitted to a car. As such modifying and restoring a car, for example in the way in which Dydia DeLyser and Paul Greenstein (2015) did, by collecting and gathering together a vast network of parts from around the world can instead be viewed as building a collection. Furthermore due to the networked communities of enthusiasm it may be useful to imagine the modified car as a co-produced object. Yarwood (2015: 660-661) notes that for wargaming enthusiasts their models mark a collaborative confluence of commercial manufacturers, historians, clubs, cultural media and key figures within the network. In this way a modified car can be seen as a collection not just of material parts but also of the stories and knowledge which intersect with the creative process of modifying or restoring it, gathered together in the finished<sup>8</sup> product.

Related to this is the way in which enthusiasts are loyal to their understandings or objects of their enthusiasm, sometimes making lifestyle changes for the cause of belonging to a particular community (e.g. Hodkinson, 2002). In certain communities of enthusiasts, hobbyists or craft consumers this can materialise as forms of brand loyalty, particularly evident in this thesis with regards to the Volkswagen brand. Brand loyalty within enthusiast communities has been discussed specifically in the terminology of brand subculture with reference to MG car enthusiasts (Leigh et al., 2006) within Marketing and Consumer studies. However the pattern itself stems far beyond this, for example demarcations can be made

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<sup>8</sup> To describe a modified car as a 'finished product' is problematic as enthusiasts often describe the process of modifying as a never-ending process of development, always with new ways to modify or parts to change. This was also found by Yarwood and Shaw (2010) with enthusiasts who constructed model rail layouts. This may be more appropriate for classic car restorers and related enthusiasts (DeLyser & Greenstein, 2015; Tam-Scott, 2009; Dannefer, 1980) where a fully restored car can not be further modified or added to and is thus a 'finished' product of the restoration process.

within railway modelling communities based on the brands which an enthusiast owns or desires (Yarwood and Shaw, 2010). One of the key elements of modified VW enthusiasm as explored in this thesis are the quite specific relationships of brand loyalty. Whilst other subgroups may exist such as enthusiasts of classic cars more generally (Tam-Scott, 2009) the enthusiasts in this research are specifically interested in cars manufactured by or similar to<sup>9</sup> the Volkswagen-Audi Group. However modified VW enthusiasts sit at a confluence between the importance of brand loyalty and brand-defined norms and the necessary modification and altering of the brand's cars in order to meet their community-defined norms. Yarwood and Shaw (2010: 432) note that rail modellers have a similar complex relationship with manufacturers of their objects of enthusiasm; manipulating or modifying commercially available products in order to meet their own designs and applications. However Yarwood and Shaw (ibid) also note that rail modellers still use the lexicon of said products as important reference points even though they may have altered or modified their form, as will be discussed in Chapter 6 with reference to the enthusiast wheel brand Rotiform.

Whilst enthusiasm can be understood as being an emotional affiliation to objects, practices or to the community itself, for an emotional reading of enthusiasm it is key to think about an enthusiasm for moods or feelings. Geoghegan's (2013) research also found that telecommunications enthusiasts often have emotional motivations behind their enthusiasm. Similarly Fuller (2007) describes the way in which the positive mood created by enjoying driving modified cars with other likeminded enthusiasms creates momentary feelings of enthusiasm. Relatedly it is important to note that the emotional responses involved in enthusiasm are not always positive. Perhaps due to the emphasis on enthusiast activities as

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<sup>9</sup> Whilst modified VW enthusiasts often have interests in other manufacturers these are almost always German; with BMW and Mercedes gaining popularity at VW shows in recent years.

occurring in leisure time (Yarwood & Shaw, 2010) and as a positive alternative to the stresses of work (Pantzar & Shove, 2004) enthusiast activity is often framed as inherently positive. Geoghegan (2013: 44) calls for a more nuanced definition of enthusiasm which should recognise the ways in which being enthusiastically involved with an activity or a social network can bring with it feelings of stress, anger and shame (Fuller, 2007: 63; Yarwood & Shaw, 2010: 432). Many of the negative emotions related to enthusiasm stem from derogatory misunderstandings of their behaviour by those who do not understand the nuances of their interests (ibid). It is important to recognise that some of the negative emotions associated with enthusiast groups stem from the perceptions of people who do not share the special interest of the group. For example those with specialist knowledge within fan culture research have often been stereotyped as geeks by those beyond such groups (Hills, 2002; Geoghegan, 2013: 44)<sup>10</sup>. For modified car enthusiasts in this study and across other cultures (e.g. Lumsden, 2013; Fuller, 2007) these stereotyped misunderstandings can be conflated with criminality (Lumsden, 2010) and a publicly imagined 'boy racer' image (Lumsden, 2009). As Fuller (2007: 63) explains this can lead to feelings of shame as a result of enthusiastic participation in a modified car culture.

### **2.2.6 Collective Experiences of Enthusiasm**

Across all studies of enthusiasm and similar areas in other disciplines there is evidence both of individual feelings and the interactive dynamics of a larger collective group or community. One discussion which arose through the Enthusiasm Futures workshop was with regards to whether an enthusiast can exist in a vacuum. Whilst many researchers working with enthusiasts describe their practices and ideas as existing within a larger community (e.g.

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<sup>10</sup> Although in fan cultures research certain terms such as geek have been re-appropriated by those who had been given such labels (e.g. Busse, 2013).

Bennett, 2013; Fuller, 2007; Garrett, 2013; Yarwood & Shaw, 2010) it is important to think about how these affect enthusiasm at the individual scale. If an enthusiast works in a relatively removed environment for example exploring an abandoned building alone or building a model railway in the privacy of their own home, they are still influenced by the wider enthusiast community or culture. For modified car enthusiasts whilst the wider collective and social gathering is important, as with the model railway convention for Yarwood and Shaw (2010) there is also an emphasis on individual expression of identity (Chappell, 2012). Similarly there is also an emphasis on the individual driving experience (Fuller, 2007). As a result I argue that individual enthusiasts are relationally influenced by the wider context of their community when enacting their enthusiastic behaviours.

Yarwood and Shaw (2010: 425) also note that relationships exist between individual enthusiasts and their wider networks of practices and enthusiasm and that these relationships do not necessarily require social interaction with other individuals in the community. Yet the network and its “rules of coherence” (ibid) influence individual enthusiasts across a community. Whilst these networks and their often unwritten rules are not always visible they can become exposed at certain junctures. For example the way in which a lone urban explorer knows how to format and self-publish an exploration report in a community online forum (Bennett, 2011) or the way in which a model railway enthusiast knows about how to interact through their rail layout when other enthusiasts are present (Yarwood and Shaw, 2010: 426). These community networks can also be understood as networks redolent with skills and knowledge. Groups of enthusiasts such as railway modellers (Yarwood and Shaw, 2010) or fans of anime (Lamerichs, 2014) share both this detailed knowledge but also the desire to learn about the subject, including minutiae seen to be of

little use to those outside the community. For example DeLyser and Greenstein (2015) in restoring their classic car, were able to learn information and access rare car parts by negotiating specific networks of enthusiasm and context specific knowledges of other participants therein. Furthermore it has been suggested that shared enthusiasm conjures a mutual closeness which brings exclusivity of shared knowledge and subsequent sociability amongst participants (Geoghegan, 2013: 45). Craggs and others (2013) highlight this fact that enthusiasm is often felt and experienced collectively and they further argue that enthusiasm circulates within and between groups of enthusiasts. This suggests that the cohesiveness of an enthusiast community may be based on the closeness of likeminded individuals and a sociability of enthusiasm. In particular this notion of sociability of emotion and enthusiasm as posited by Geoghegan (2013: 41) is discussed in the following section.

### **2.2.7 Enthusiasm & Emotional Geographies**

Geoghegan's (2013) article about a community of telecoms heritage enthusiasts on which my approach to enthusiasm is partly based sets out a clearly defined approach to the topic as built on the foundations of emotional and affective geographies. Whilst I will discuss this article in detail throughout the section I want to first contextualise Geoghegan's approach by outlining the conceptual underpinnings of emotional geography. The geographies of emotion and emotional experience have their foundations within and consequently contribute to feminist geographies (Davidson & Bondi, 2004; Horton & Kraftl, 2014). Enthusiasm research is clearly interested in experiential data and emotion has been argued to, "colour our experiential world such that we interpret and value aspects of it in certain ways" (Smith et al., 2009: 7). Furthermore Geoghegan (2013: 41) draws on emotion and this experiential world as something which is socio-spatially influenced (Bondi et al., 2005: 3). The reflexive nature of feminist methodology (England, 1994) and its development post cultural-turn afforded a

discussion of the potential emotional experiences encountered within qualitative research (Bondi, 2003). Feminist geography sought among other things to recognise the context and situatedness of experiences and knowledges<sup>11</sup>. Social science research, traditionally following a more positivist and inherently masculine model of knowledge production, had shied away from recognition of 'irrational' elements of data such as emotions (Horton & Kraftl, 2014: 222; Sharp, 2008: 2). This binary situation between positivist masculine research and feminist research about emotion ensured that the latter was still rare in the late 1990s (Anderson & Smith, 2001: 7). Anderson (2009a: 188) notes that one thematic concern of emotional geography is the desire to understand and present emotions as, "intractable aspects of life and thus potentially a constitutive part of geographies", as the discussions which follow will detail.

### **2.2.8 Emotion & Enthusiasm as Socially Constructed**

For Geoghegan (2013) the emotional responses of her participants are context specific to their community and its spaces, building on the emotional geography understanding of emotions as socially constructed (Horton & Kraftl, 2014: 225). This categorisation depends on the context in which the emotions are situated, experienced and understood. Geoghegan (2013: 43) explains that certain enthusiastic emotions are understood to be positive by the telecoms enthusiasts in her study, however the same emotional attachments observed from those who do not share their interest can be categorised as negative traits such as obsession. Therefore the ways in which emotions are understood and represented by enthusiasts is based on their situated knowledge within the community and the context of their

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<sup>11</sup> This idea is explored in more detail with regards to methodology in Chapter 3.

experiences, thus an understanding of emotion as situated and socially constructed (Horton & Kraftl, 2014: 225) is key.

### **2.2.9 What is Emotion & What can it do?**

One critique of emotional geography, made by non-representational theorists, calls for more critical reflection and definition of emotions or what they consist of (Anderson & Harrison, 2006). For non-representational theorists emotions can be understood as cognitive intensities and sensations. Such an approach, as Fuller (2007) has shown, may be useful in explaining the dynamics of larger scale collective enthusiasm, such as with modified car enthusiasts at car shows. Emotion for non-representational theory (hereafter, NRT) scholars is something which defies the use of language in order to describe or indeed represent it. Horton and Kraftl (2014: 228) note that cultural geographers now recognise a distinction between cultural representation of emotion and the unsayable physicality of felt emotion. Following on from such an understanding of emotions it is possible to suggest a foundational distinction between felt emotions and affects. Emotion as used here in a reading of enthusiasm can be understood as referring to the cultural representation of the physically felt emotion. This is the result of a “socio-linguistic fixing of intensity” (Anderson, 2009b: 9). Anderson’s use of the word ‘intensity’, often utilised in discussion of affect, is telling here. Horton and Kraftl (2014: 228) suggest that emotion better explains the fixing of felt intensities into representative language whereas affect better explains the more-than-representational intensities themselves. This is important because, if emotions are socially constructed and context-specific they may reveal more about the dynamics of said context. Similarly Thien (2005: 453) argues that an emotional subject is co-produced in cultural discourses of emotion, “...we are only autonomous vis-à-vis our relationships”. Thus our emotional experiences come from the world around us and its cultural discourses, not as distanced and inexpressible intensities



which defy representation (Anderson, 2009b). As Thien (2005) notes, in this context, our felt emotions are not the result of autonomous behaviour but are in part representations of the community in which we interact. So enthusiasts discussing their emotional experience of attachment to a community or set of material things do so by fixing their felt emotions within cultural discourse.

Affect as experienced by enthusiasts (e.g. Fuller, 2007: 63) however is harder to pin down and is rarely referenced specifically by participants. Furthermore Rose (2004: 559), an emotional geographer, has warned that emotions should not be equated with the “inexpressible; some feelings may be hard to express, but others are not”, this highlights the contention between emotional geography which sees emotion as expressible and affect which is utilised to explain the inexpressible. However Williams (2000: viii) observes that, “...we are never devoid...of an emotional stance on the world”, in that human bodies always ‘feel’ something, even if it may seem difficult to fix into language. In this research study much of the qualitative data which forms enthusiasts’ personal experiences in the field is bound by emotional discourse; this is the cultural discourse which fixes their felt emotion. In this regard it is more in line with this study’s aim to study the community in its own terms, to focus on an emotional geography reading of their enthusiastic experiences.

However one area in which emotional and affective geographies become much more closely aligned in this research is with regards to large scale community feelings; such as those felt or sensed at social gathering such as car shows. There is an important methodological point to make here with regards to affect and emotion as recorded and represented in data. Emotional data can be read from interviews and discussions with participants (e.g. Geoghegan, 2009, 2013, 2014) through the above understanding that emotions are defined

by fixing them in language or discourse. However in order to record the less tangible intensities of affective experience it is necessary to do as Fuller (2007) did and use my own body as research tool, in order to understand the “affective experience of enthusiasm” (Geoghegan, 2013: 41). I argue that such an approach may be useful alongside an emotional geography understanding because it is difficult to discuss the dynamics of large scale gatherings or events through the terms of emotion. For Fuller (2007) enthusiasm and the emotions felt by a large group in close proximity can be explained as individuals gathered together by a shared affective state. If affects are felt within the body but also circulate beyond and around the individual (Fuller, 2007) then it is important to remain open to the ways in which the complex inscription of affects on the body may be shared across a group of likeminded enthusiasts sharing the same affective experience of enthusiasm (Geoghegan, 2013: 41). This suggests a similarity to Ahmed’s (2004) notion that collective emotional experiences shape our identities. In this way both affective and emotional approaches are talking about similar experiences and for enthusiasm geographies both are framed by a desire to connect collective scale experience or felt intensity with a sense of community identity. Fuller (2007) takes this affective state argument further utilising Kant’s notion of ‘enthusiasm’ to explain that the feeling of becoming enthused, “arises from the fusion of affect, idea and imagination, and can serve as a spur to action” (Caygill 1995: 176 quoted in Fuller, 2007: 35). Thus the experiences of an enthusiast, for Fuller are inextricable from the presence of affects. In light of this it’s important to note that Fuller talks about named affects such as ‘excitement’. However to an emotional geographer, a named emotion such as this would suggest that the ‘feeling’ has been fixed with the definition of excitement by the specific modified car community in which it was experienced. This further shows the line between affective and emotional geography standpoints and the difficulty of reading either account through the

others' conceptual lens, showing that the two can not be productively used together. However whilst the affective state argument suggests that circulating affects inscribe and shape our identities (Fuller, 2007) an emotional geography approach (Thien, 2005) suggests that these inscriptions are represented in language as emotions by enthusiasts. Therefore a more nuanced understanding of what these inscriptions actually mean to enthusiasts may be read through an emotional geography approach.

Furthermore emotional geographer Sara Ahmed (2004: 10) argues that, "emotions are not 'in' either the individual or the social, but produce the very surfaces and boundaries that allow the individual and the social to become delineated as objects". Geoghegan (2013: 41) uses the above quote to explain the ways in which being close to other individual with a shared interest produces the boundaries from which participants define themselves as members of that enthusiast community. This argues then for an understanding of the "collective sociability of emotion" (ibid), drawing on Ahmed (2008: 10) proximity to individuals who share and interest can be seen to "move" individuals; to engender emotions of sociability. With reference to groups such as car clubs Ahmed (ibid) states that, "The...club or hobby group make explicit what is implicit about social life: that we tend to like those who like the same things that we like". This suggests that participants make a choice motivated by the desire for collective sociability situated around a shared interest, by choosing to participate they are also further reinforcing the values or norms of that group (ibid). In this way modified VW enthusiasts who share an interest and who socialise with each other produce emotions which foster and delineate emotional attachments which help others to identify as enthusiasts. Emotion can be understood as something which is socially constructed and shows the marks of its production within a certain community, furthermore emotion can foster a form of

sociability which strengthens a community. Enthusiasm then, read through emotional geography, is both the shared interest and also the glue which holds a community together (Geoghegan, 2013: 42).

### **2.3 Communities of Enthusiasm & the Sociability of Emotion**

One of the key ways in which Geoghegan (2013) utilises the above developments in emotional and affective geographies to inform her position is to position enthusiasm at the scale of the community. For Geoghegan (2013: 41) and for this research thesis, one of the key elements of a geography of enthusiasm is that it influences the ways in which people interact with each other within their community. Interestingly Ahmed (2008) notes that by choosing to participate an individual is choosing to uphold and reinforce community norms and values. Joining a group is an act of conformation to a set of often unwritten rules which place value of etiquette and appropriate behaviour (Geoghegan, 2013: 42). Hills (2002: 3) suggests that enthusiast communities or fandom cultures have an 'imagined subjectivity' which defines and rewards proper behaviour whilst also demarcating inappropriate behaviours. Similarly Yarwood and Shaw (2010: 425) suggests "rules of coherence" as defined by the community with regards to its participants' behaviours. This is similar to the understanding of social capital as being exchanged and accumulated only when conventions of social interaction for that community are adhered to (Putnam, 2000). Social capital is discussed in the next section of this literature review. The policing of appropriate behaviour leads to those who transgress norms to be ridiculed or ejected from the group (e.g. Bennett, 2013; Geoghegan, 2013: 43). However what is interesting about the notion of collective sociability is that Geoghegan's (2013) participants claim that their formally regimented club could cease to exist and they would remain an enthusiast community. In this way their sociability transgresses the boundaries of formal organisation. Chappell (2012) observes that car clubs come and go but

the groups of friends which they create remain, indeed one participant in this study mentioned several times that over time events such as car shows become less about cars and more about socialising (John Interview). Geoghegan (2013) utilises Ahmed's (2008) notion of a 'sociability of emotion' which focuses on the social interactions between participant enthusiasts, to define enthusiasm as something which necessitates a community and which influences individuals' behaviour and interactions therein. In the following section I discuss the ways in which this sociability may be tied to shared enthusiast practices such as the creative processes of modifying cars.

### **2.3.1 Sociability & Creative Processes of Enthusiasm**

Fuller (2007: 92) suggests that due to the combination of interactions in a sociable community and the creative processes of modifying that creating a modified car is a "socio-technical project". That is to say it is as much the product of social networks and collective sociability focused on a shared interest as it is on the actual technical and physical elements of the process. This is an argument discussed within the geographies of making and crafts, whereby the practice is recognised as both creative process and also a way of connecting people in complex ways (Miller, 2017: 249). In both Fuller's (2007) and Chappell's (2012) studies with car modifiers it is clear that socialising and resultant altruistic behaviours support the creative process of modifying cars by fostering the exchange of knowledge, skills and trust. As I argue in the following literature review section, one way to understand the exchange of skills, knowledge and trust within these networks of sociability is through an understanding of social capital theory. However there is little attendance to emotion within current geographical understandings of social capital (Holt, 2008)<sup>12</sup>. For example Geoghegan (2013: 44) observes,

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<sup>12</sup> I recognise that this is not necessarily a shortcoming of social capital theory as social capital and emotional geography have clearly different conceptual and epistemological underpinnings, however they can both be used to understand similar behaviours of social interaction.

as Yarwood and Shaw (2010) have, that humour and banter are an important part of community social interactions between likeminded individuals. However social capital theory does not include appreciation of dynamics such as humour and banter and the role of sociability in exchange of capitals. Heley and Jones (2013: 280) have noted that the notion that participants in communities interact in order to accumulate social capital, leaves little room for motivations such as enjoyment or the desire for personal fulfilment. Yarwood and Shaw (2010: 426) note that enthusiasts build model railways layouts for the sense of personal achievement and Geoghegan (2013: 43) finds that people join a telecommunications enthusiast group to fulfil personal dreams<sup>13</sup>. There is therefore partiality of a social capital reading which may miss participation motivations such as personal fulfilment (Heley and Jones, 2013: 280). This can be redressed by utilising an emotionally grounded approach from the enthusiasm geographies literature to explain why people become modified VW enthusiasts. I argue that by combining the notion of ‘sociability of emotion’ with the social interactions which form the basis of social capital exchange it is possible to gain a more nuanced and sensitive understanding of enthusiast community dynamics<sup>14</sup>.

## **2.4 Enthusiasm Literature Review Conclusions**

As a result of the above discussion a broad definition of enthusiasm can be made which is drawn upon critically throughout this research. It is important to note that as a researcher informed by feminist geography and postmodern thought this definition is not treated as bounded or final; due to the multitude of variances in enthusiasm experience, community and objects of enthusiasm it would be detrimental and limiting to give a definition with clearly

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<sup>13</sup> It is interesting to note that both the Yarwood and Shaw (2010) and Geoghegan (2013) examples are talking about personal motivations but within the context of communities.

<sup>14</sup> This combination will be discussed in more detail in the concluding section of the social capital literature review which follows; see section 2.5.5.

demarcated boundaries. Instead what follows is a guiding definition; suggesting elements which geographical enthusiasm research should be attentive too and ways in which, as a researcher, I should engage with these.

“...the round of activities that typify the social world of old cars are sustained by a genuine and intense subjective attraction [to cars] that can accurately be described as passionate”  
(Dannefer, 1980: 392).

Above all else this literature review has shown, as Dale Dannefer outlines above there is a commonality to experiences of enthusiasm, in all cases there can be seen a clear social world, furthermore this social world embodies and engenders feelings of enthusiasm for objects, practices and the ties of community themselves. The notion of passion is key to an understanding of enthusiasm in geography, as Geoghegan (2009) concludes enthusiastic cultures share at their core the pleasure and joy involved in doing things. However, as detailed above, the breadth of what these things or experiences may be and the motivations and impacts of these makes for a multifaceted understanding of enthusiasm. Enthusiasm according to Glen Fuller (2007: 63) is, “further complicated by ‘feelings’ (the idea that we have of how we are affected)”, this highlights both the importance of emotion in a definition of enthusiasm and also the discussed contention between affective and emotional understandings of felt intensities.

It is clear that in light of this discussion both affective (Fuller, 2007) and emotional geography (Geoghegan, 2009) readings of enthusiasm are able to analyse experiential data and provide rich understandings of experience at a ‘felt’ level. However this thesis proceeds with an emotional geography stance on enthusiasm based on the understanding that as participants talk about their experiences in emotional terms they are unavoidably fixing their feelings

within a cultural discourse. Whilst the remainder of this study explores enthusiasm through an emotional geography lens. As will be discussed in the literature review which follows it may be possible to approach the social interactions within a collective sociability of enthusiasm through understandings of capital (Bourdieu, 1986; Holt, 2008; Mohan & Mohan, 2002; Putnam, 2000) and social networks and co-present encounters (Urry, 2003).

Collective sociability of emotion implies a seemingly “transformative potential” of enthusiasm (Geoghegan, 2013: 44), this is the notion that enthusiasts are united by a common interest initially but that over time and repeated interactions they create new emotional affiliations to each other. Thus in some cases their enthusiasm has led to affiliations which go beyond the club or shared-interest which united them in the first place. If enthusiasm and collective sociability can transcend a community but still foster social interactions this may imply the role played by social capital, stocks of which can be understood to extend beyond the community of their production (Putnam, 2000). Geoghegan (2013: 41) also notes that the co-presence of enthusiasts can occur in a range of spaces such as events, online forums and newsletters; however all require a network of sorts. This further evidences her use of Bondi and other’s (2005: 3) understanding of emotion as socio-spatially manifested and constructed. Community both as a collective of enthusiasts and as a networked entity is clearly of great importance not just to enthusiast experience but also to their practices, emotions and consequent discourses (Geoghegan, 2013; Yarwood & Shaw, 2010). Furthermore there are clear socio-spatial elements to enthusiasm (Geoghegan, 2013: 41). Yarwood and Shaw’s (2010) approach would understand the modified car as co-produced by a range of media and collaborators through many different spaces and processes add to these creative processes. For example the creative practice of modifying can be seen as



participating in a “socio-technical project” (Fuller, 2007: 91-2) in which shared passion, knowledge and skills influence social identities (Yarwood & Shaw, 2010) and through which people socialise and connect with each other (Miller, 2017).

## 2.5 Community & Capitals

In this section I want to discuss notions of community and capital as utilised in human geography and beyond in order to define the use of these terms in my research. By reviewing literature regarding social capital, social interactions and networks (Coleman, 1988; Holt, 2008; Mohan & Mohan, 2002; Portes, 1998; Putnam, 1993, 2000; Urry, 2003) I suggest a way of understanding knowledge and skills exchange and trust creation as important dynamics within a collective community. In particular this is mobilised by seeing social capital as something which is generated, maintained and drawn upon at a community level (e.g. Falk & Kilpatrick, 2000), it shows how individual enthusiasts and their social interactions improve community in terms of solidarity and reinforcing norms.

As highlighted in the previous section regarding emotion and the geographies of enthusiasm it is clear that the social interaction and cohesiveness which a sociability of emotion argument suggests (Geoghegan, 2013; Ahmed, 2008) needs to be explored in more detail. The review which follows turns to a different approach to social interactions; primarily one based around notions of social capital (e.g. Bourdieu, 1984, Holt, 2008; Mohan & Mohan, 2002; Putnam, 2000) in order to suggest ways in which these interactions can foster collective sociability and a sense of community. As noted in the previous review I am cautiously aware of the epistemological differences between the two approaches. The following review begins with a

discussion of social capital theories and their use in human geography, this is followed by a discussion of human capital as a way to understand the exchange of knowledge and skills. Finally I turn to Urry's (2003) notion of physical co-presence and discussion of interactions as occurring along degrees of 'meetingness' which give strength to the community as network operating in similar ways to social capital production (Sander & Lowney, 2006).

### **2.5.1 Social Capital & Its Use in Human Geography**

Much of the recent geographical work regarding social capital in relation to communities has been conducted within economic geography research regarding climate change resilience (e.g. Adger, 2003) and trust building in economic spaces (e.g. Murphy, 2006). Holt (2008: 228) argues that social capital has become a tool within policy-making at large scales, for example by the World Bank (e.g. Dasgupta & Serageldin, 2001). Rural geographers have also utilised the concept in a number of ways but in particular with reference to the geographies of volunteering and discussions of community cohesion (Falk & Kilpatrick, 2000; Jones & Heley, 2016; Heley & Jones, 2013; Yarwood, 2011) and children's geographies (e.g. Holt, 2010, 2008). Arguably the most popular approach to social capital in geography is that proposed by Robert Putnam (2000) within political economy research (Holt et al., 2008; Mohan & Mohan, 2002: 194). Holt (2008: 228) argues that Putnam's (2000) approach to social capital has had the most utilisation within both policy-contexts and conceptual debates in human geography regarding the approach. Much of the critique of social capital as used in recent human geography is a critique of its operationalisation for policy-making (Holt, 2008; Mohan & Mohan, 2002), with particular issues regarding difficulties in measuring amounts of social capital and understandings of how it can be harnessed for good, if at all (Holt, 2008).

The outcome of social capital as presented by Putnam (2000) is the ability of a community of people, to work together through enhanced communication, cooperation and collective practice (Hoye et al., 2015: 4), although many contend that he is not clear on how social capital is actually produced (Mohan & Mohan, 2002: 194; Holt et al. 2008).

Robert Putnam's (1995) approach has been described as a 'conceptual triad' of networks, norms and sanctions (Mohan & Mohan, 2002: 195) in which the community can be seen as a network and the purposes of social capital accumulation can be seen to support and develop community norms. Putnam (1995: 664-5, my emphasis), observes that, "features of social life – networks, norms and trust- ...enable participants to act *together* more effectively to pursue shared objectives". Where these norms are upheld in social interaction the community and individual are rewarded with strengthened stocks of social capital, for example in the form of increased trust (Falk & Kilpatrick, 2000). However transgression of these norms leads to sanctions such as exclusion from the community, this may explain the example Geoghegan (2013) gives of enthusiasts who were removed from clubs because they did not follow the unwritten rules or norms of the group. Key to Putnam's (1995) approach to social capital is the way in which context affords the social interactions and relationships needed to develop and circulate social capital. In terms of trust development, relationships are forged through the exchange of knowledge about trustworthiness of individuals and past successes. As these successes are repeated they engender a particular template of behaviour which marks some enthusiasts out as trustworthy but also increases the risks to those who do not stick to the templated norms of social interaction. Thus social capital does not just provide stocks of trust but also the contextual norms and networks which members of the community can draw on to solve problems (Falk & Kilpatrick, 2000; Sander & Lowney, 2006). Norms are both the result

of social capital exchange and prescribe the correct behaviour for that community. Individuals who draw on social or human capital in 'correct' ways are seen as competent members of the group (Wenger, 2011). Ahmed (2008: 11) describes an emotional understanding of a similar dynamic, "We become alienated- out of line with an affective community- when we do not experience pleasure from proximity to objects that are attributed as being good". This competent use of knowledge is seen by Falk and Kirkpatrick (2000: 103) as the simultaneous use and building of social capital.

One agreement which is made across uses of social capital is that trust between community participants can stand for a measure of the stocks of social capital. Furthermore as repeated interactions build up stocks of social capital (Portes, 1998: 7) then repeated interactions must be key to development of trust within the community. For example Coleman (1988) gives the example of wholesale diamond merchants who give sample examination batches, worth thousands of pounds to traders without formal regulation. This exchange is based on trust resulting from years of face-to-face interactions which have shaped expectant norms about their behaviour with clear social and business impacts if these are ignored. In chapter 6<sup>15</sup> an example of a business transaction between enthusiasts shows a similar trusting exercise with regards to money and valuable items which would not be afforded had the two parties not been socially acquainted within the modified VW community. Key to this production of trust through social interactions is an understanding of embodied relationships of reciprocity. For Putnam (1995) these relationships understood as embodying 'generalized reciprocity' explain why individuals interact with other members of the community. Putnam argues that by participating in a community social network individuals build an expectation that given

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<sup>15</sup> See section 6.6.1

favours will be reciprocated. Thus face-to-face interactions embody past successes between participants and provide a template for future cooperation (Sander & Lowney, 2006). Implicit in Putnam's (1995, 2000) approach is a suggestion that individuals adhere to these norms for the collective good of their community; community solidarity is therefore seen as a measure of social capital (Portes, 1998). Falk and Kilpatrick (2000: 104) also observed the way in which individual social capital exchange bolsters community strength as they found that members of a community learn to share certain values and to develop trust in order to achieve common goals. Putnam's (1993) argument suggests that the reason people participate in a given community or association is in order to improve the collective experience; thus generalised reciprocity can be understood as engendering a sort of generalised altruism where participation benefits the whole group. Putnam (1993) referred to such participation as "associational behaviour" although it has been argued that not all associational behaviour has the social capital outcomes that Putnam (1993) suggests (Mohan and Mohan, 2002: 195).

One key critique of Putnam's approach, important within the context of this research is that it appears to lack sensitivity to wider historical-political and material processes (Holt, 2008). Conversely for Bourdieu (1984) the co-construction of a number of variables; social, economic and cultural capital reproduces context as it produces capitals. This can also be seen in the work of Falk and Kilpatrick (2000: 104) who argue that social capital is situated and reflects historicity and futuricity (ibid: 106). They take the example of trust, a popular measure of social capital and suggest that it, "is only understandable in its socio-cultural situation" (ibid: 104), this suggests a reading of community social capital more in line with feminist geography methodology and the recognition of situated knowledges. This shows the importance of past experience and personal narrative, as discussed within enthusiasm research above (e.g.

Geoghegan, 2013), as important to learning and the transmission of social capital in the form of knowledge, skills and trust.

### **2.5.2 Bourdieu & Social Capital**

Bourdieu's (1984: 114) approach to capitals, including social capital, were presented within what he referred to as a model of "three dimensional space", made up of social, economic and cultural capitals. According to Bourdieu social capital is produced and accumulated relationally in line with stocks of and access to economic and cultural capital. It is important to contextualise all three understandings by turning to Bourdieu's definition of capital itself as, "...the set of actual resources and powers- economic capital, cultural capital and also social capital" (Bourdieu, 1984: 114). Whilst it has been noted that social capital is one of Bourdieu's less empirically developed arguments, Lizardo (2005) argues that the concept was implicit in the background his work on capitals. Bourdieu (1986: 249-50) defined social capital as being, "the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to the possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance or recognition." Bourdieu meant that membership in a group, provides its members with a backing of collectively owned capital which they can utilise for credit. Interestingly in his explanation of how social capital could be measured, suggests that, "the volume of the social capital possessed by a given agent...depends on the size of the network of connections he can effectively mobilise and on the volume of the capital possessed in his own right by each of those who is connected" (ibid). Bourdieu (1986) suggests that each new member brings value because they increase the size of the network which can be effectively mobilised for the exchange of social capital. One reason why I utilise only social capital<sup>16</sup>, opposed to cultural

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<sup>16</sup> However this may be symptomatic of a human geography approach to social capital more in line with Putnam's treatment of social capital in isolation of other capitals as outlined by Holt (2008) and Mohan and Mohan (2002).

capital, within this exploration of community because it can be argued that cultural capital is possessed at the individual scale (Mohan and Mohan, 2002: 192). Whilst I am interested in the individual experiences of enthusiasts I draw upon a capitals approach in order to explore community scale dynamics and social interactions therein. Social capital operates beyond the individual scale because it "...is first and foremost an asset held and created by people *together*, and the benefits are shared as such" (Heley & Jones, 2013: 279, original emphasis).

### **2.5.3 Social Interactions, Meetingness & Social Networks**

In this section of the review I want to turn to the potential notion of discussing the enthusiast community as a network or set of networks. I take this notion of a social network from the work of Urry (2003) in order to contextualise his approach towards social interactions as particularly important in producing values such as trust which may benefit the whole network or community. Putnam (1995) also used the discourse of network in his discussion of communities within social life stating that, "the core idea of social capital theory is that social networks have value" (Putnam, 2000: 18-19). Urry's approach draws on the same notion that both social networks and the individual interactions within them give value to the community. In order to understand Urry's (2003: 161) notion of a social network I turn first to his approach to social interaction with reference to 'meetingness'. 'Meetingness' is the degree of face-to-face interaction and that social life is increasingly networked and that these networks depend upon intermittent meetings between community participants (ibid: 156). Urry (ibid) describes interactions as "moments of physical co-presence", he argues that life is networked and involves many "co-present encounters" which are context-specific to the time and spaces which they occur in. For modified VW enthusiasts, their meetings with likeminded friends, work in the automotive sector, attending car shows all offer spaces for co-present interaction.

To return to Putnam (2000) and Mohan and Mohan (2002) these are the spaces of face-to-face interaction in which social capital are accumulated.

Urry (2003: 161) defines meetingness as varying based on how often the participants within the network meet up. The frequency of interaction is seen as a key factor in social capital production too (Mohan & Mohan, 2002). In both concepts then, there is strength in the repetition of their occurrence following context-specific frameworks. Perhaps unsurprisingly, Urry's (2003: 161) explanation also turns to the co-production of trust as a result of these meetings because as shown above trust is seen as a key indicator of social capital levels (e.g. Murphy, 2006). The co-present interactions which Urry (2003: 162) describes may be for the exchange of information or for gossip and more informal pleasure however these meetings produce outcomes such as trust between participants. Key to an understanding of the modified VW community and its intermittent interactions at car shows and other events show evidence of what Urry (ibid: 163) refers to as 'social obligations'. In this case the obligations prescribed by shared enthusiasm and of community membership. One of the norms which is prevalent across social communities, he argues, deems that these obligations carry expectations of attention and presence; thus they must be achieved by face-to-face interactions. Importantly he explains that these co-present encounters are necessary in order to develop trust needed for long periods when the participants are geographically distant or periods of solitude (ibid). This may explain the ways in which the modified VW community and its stocks of human and social capital, including trustworthiness are maintained over time. Car shows and meets offer relatively intermittent meeting spaces in which trust can be engendered and knowledge exchanged but because these meetings occur face-to-face they develop trust and stocks which will last beyond the context of their creation. This may also



offer an explanation for the lack of trust and relative break-down of community norms within the modified VW community, in that whilst interactions are much more common they do not afford a physical co-presence. This will be discussed later with regards to the online VW community in chapter 5.4.

Furthermore by utilising a social network approach to understand the enthusiast community it is possible to see the benefits both of increased participation and solidarity across participants. As Gladwell (2000: 272-3) explains with the example of technologically mediated networks; each mobile phone is much more valuable if there are others within its network; thus enabling new connections to be formed and extended<sup>17</sup>. Interestingly Bourdieu (1986: 250) similarly notes that the volume of social capital each individual holds depends on the size of the network in which they interact. This shows the underlying importance of a network understanding to social interactions at the community scale, as it is utilised by both Urry (2003) and Bourdieu (1986) to explain similar dynamics with distinct approaches.

#### **2.5.4 Understanding Social Interactions**

With the above discussion of social capital, human capital and the importance of viewing the modified VW community as a social network all pivoting on social interaction it is important to think about what actually occurs in these interactions. Fleshing out this context can be seen as a response to the critique of Putnam (2000) that whilst social capital dynamics are explained the actual production of capital from face-to-face interaction is less clear (Holt, 2008). Here I want to turn in detail to a discussion the face-to-face interactions or co-present physical encounters between enthusiasts.

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<sup>17</sup> Urry (2003: 162) repeats Gladwell's (2000: 272-3) argument with reference to ethernet networks and their growing value as more and more people participate.

Important to an understanding of social interactions between enthusiasts is their disposition to one another's input, in a social capital approach these can be explained as the expectation of reciprocity. These normative values or rules of interaction are built up over time and could be understood within what Urry (2003: 167) calls mutual attentiveness. Urry (2003) also suggests the importance of co-presence in physical space, the context of which is based on shared understandings of the present parties. In a social capital explanation, the repetition of social interactions lays out these normative values (e.g. Coleman, 1988); these norms encourage behaviour such as the mutual attentiveness of Urry's (2003) concept. Furthermore a social capital approach also states that perils await those who break these normative rules in their face-to-face interactions; the perils being the erosion of social capital, for example mobilised as a lack of trust.

Urry (2003) also states the importance of the context of these interactions, he draws on Goffman (1963: 84-5) to explain that two people in a specific location known to them, embody an expectation of mutual attentiveness because of their shared experience. With the example of a location such as an enthusiast-run garage (e.g. Chappell, 2012: 136-7) those who are present expect to interact with each other in mutually attentive ways which draw on their sources of shared experience and enthusiasm. For Falk and Kilpatrick (2000: 104) within an understanding of social capital, trust is visible at the conversational level by the mutual expectation for reciprocity in each interaction. Thus Urry's (2003) mutual attentiveness can be seen as similar to notions of expected reciprocity in social capital approaches<sup>18</sup> (Falk & Kilpatrick, 2000; Holt, 2008; Mohan & Mohan, 2002; Portes, 1998; Putnam, 2000).

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<sup>18</sup> In particular Bourdieu (1986: 249-50) uses similar discourse to Urry's "mutual attentiveness" when he states that social capital requires a network of, "...relationships of mutual acquaintance of recognition".

Social interactions between enthusiasts or any community where two or more participants share an interest can be understood as, “ritual affairs, tribal gathering in which the faithful reaffirm solidarity” (Boden, 1994: 81). Urry (2003: 164-5) utilises this reading to explain that social interactions are complex encounters, they are intermittently rich and multi-layered. Furthermore he argues they are not just verbal but they draw on a range of factors such as shared history and anticipated conversation topics. This also shows that these interactions occur in specific collective contexts, for example a discussion at a car show draws on expected topics based on the enthusiasts’ situated knowledge; thus these interactions can be seen as ritual affairs. The repetitive notion of the ritual also fits with Urry’s (2003) ‘meetingness’ and a social capital understanding of face-to-face interactions are both thought to foster stronger relationships of reciprocity and trust (Mohan & Mohan, 2002; Urry, 2003: 164; Wittell, 2001: 67-8).

### **2.5.5 Community & Capital Literature Review Conclusions**

The actions of participants can be understood as co-present encounters (Urry, 2003) or social interactions (Mohan & Mohan, 2002) which help to produce social capital and benefit the community network. Consequently it is clear that social capital is not the only outcome of social interactions between enthusiasts within their community. Furthermore by using John Urry’s (2003) understanding of the community as a social network which is supported by the intermittent encounters of its participants it is possible to show a link with a social capital approach and to explore a further notion of network capital. Although not always clear in discussions which focus on social interactions between individual parties, social capital is produced at a community level. People with high stocks of cultural capital mobilise it in order to consume artefacts and cultural experiences in such a way which distinguishes them against those with less cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1984).

Key to this understanding is an appreciation of scale; cultural capital refers to the individual; accumulated and possessed for personal gain (Mohan & Mohan, 2002: 192). However as this research shows the modified VW enthusiasts are bound to act in ways which are relational to or contextualised by the wider enthusiast community. Social capital conversely is produced at a community level and the benefits are shared accordingly (e.g. Heley & Jones, 2013: 279). Consequently this research draws largely on the production, transfer and mobilisation of social capital. It is important to note though that the two variables should not be seen as opposing one another, Bourdieu (1984) theorised social, economic and cultural capital as being relational to one another and that all operate simultaneously. I note this here to show that whilst this research focuses on the importance of community level dynamics as partially explained by social capital, this is an understanding which Bourdieu (1984: 114) proposed in light of economic and cultural capital as well. Lizardo (2005) notes that other studies on social capital often treat it in isolation without recognition of its potential relationality to these other variables<sup>19</sup>. In terms of methodological conclusions this review shows that in order to understand the experiences of enthusiasts, it is vital that the researcher is able to be co-present with the enthusiast in the field. Therefore in my position as researcher-enthusiast I can potentially experience Urry's (2003: 170) understanding of co-presence in network sociality and the importance of face-to-face interaction in social capital and trust creation (Mohan & Mohan, 2002) first hand.

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<sup>19</sup> It is important to note that this is only a fair critique of approaches to social capital which draw explicitly on Bourdieu's work.

## 2.6 Literature on Car Cultures & Driving

### 2.6.1 Defining Car Culture

In this opening section I want to briefly justify my use of the term culture to refer to the modified VW enthusiast community throughout this thesis. My use of the term culture is in line with that of the Car Cultures in Dan Miller's (2001) edited volume of the same name. Miller brings together a selection of different communities which share a focus on cars or driving. Miller (2001: 17) refers to the, "intimate relationship between cars and people" as a foundational factor in defining a car culture. However it is important to make a distinction of scale here because there are differences between the wider globalised, nationalised and the highly localised or specialised cultures of automobility (Merriman, 2009: 594). Car cultures as described in Miller's (2001) edited collection and indeed in my own research are relatively micro-scale communities, whose behaviours are not reflected by the wider car culture. It is important to note that whilst examples such as O'Dell's (2001) of the youth culture raggare are connected to national or geographically located scales the modified VW community is less easy to pin down. To make a distinction between this larger car culture which covers whole car-centric societies and the smaller scale of what might be thought of as special interest car cultures it is necessary to define the former as, "societies of automobility" (Sheller & Urry, 2000; Merriman, 2009). It is also important to note here that the car is not necessarily the most important thing to automobility but rather the system of "fluid interconnections" created by being *automobile* (Urry, 2004: 26). This implies the importance of the embodied experiences of driving to automobility rather than a focus on the car alone. Thus the modified VW community makes up a car culture with distinct intimate relationships between people and cars (Miller, 2001) which exists within but not necessarily in line with a wider society of automobility (Sheller & Urry, 2000). As a term, 'car cultures' brings forward, "the diverse,

unexpected...contradictory humanity of cars; the taken-for-granted mundane that hides the extraordinary found in this material expression of cultural life” (Miller, 2001: 2). Furthermore Husband and others (2014: 153) argue that the car is, “a potent symbol that both flattens and homogenises identity...and laces identity with very specific levels of nuance and individuality”. Whilst the first part of this quote may pertain to a wider homogenising society of automobility the second part describes the more nuanced understandings of the car within car cultures.

However by referring to a specialised culture which exists within the shadow of a wider culture there are clear similarities to subcultural theory. In the research of sociologists Hatton (2007) and Lumsden (2013) with so-called boy racers a subcultural theory approach is utilised but the communities are referred to as car cultures not subcultures. Below I justify my own use of the above car culture terminology and not the notion of subculture which brings with it potentially problematic conceptual baggage. Firstly there are clear similarities, by describing a car culture which exists within a wider society of automobility (Sheller & Urry, 2000) to the relationships between subcultures and their ‘parent cultures’ (Hebdige, 1977). However a key critique of the subcultural approach more widely was that the Birmingham School<sup>20</sup> and in particular Hebdige’s (1977) approach focused too strongly on the acts of resistance between subculture and parent culture<sup>21</sup>. For example punks were understood to consent to their subordination by the wider parent culture and thus their youth subculture and style were seen to be active and politically motivated revolts against this (Hall & Jefferson, 1976; Muggleton & Weinzerl, 2003: 4; Valentine et al, 1998: 13). However there is little active or

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<sup>20</sup> The Birmingham Centre of Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) and its scholars in the 1960s and 1970s pioneered subcultural theory approach (Redhead, 2012: 75), as detailed most famously by Dick Hebdige (1977).

<sup>21</sup> It is important to contextualise Hebdige’s (1977) work as neo-Marxist within an academic community focused on class distinction and fractures (Jenks, 2004; Valentine et al., 1998: 12; Turner, 1990).

intended resistance of the wider culture of automobility (Merriman, 2009) amongst participants in the modified VW community. Whilst cars which are altered in appearance are resistant to wider car culture trends to some extent this is not a key motivator for participation as argued in a traditional subculture approach (Hebdige, 1977). As such throughout this thesis I refer to collective modified VW enthusiasts as either a community or as a car culture in line Miller<sup>22</sup> (2001) but not as a subculture.

### **2.6.2 Driving & Emotion & Embodied Experience**

One key tenet of enthusiasm research, as discussed above, is the affordance for emotional geography and a study of personal embodied narratives. The more recent move in mobility studies and human geography to look at the embodied knowledges and senses of drivers is a move away from more traditional notions of the car as first and foremost a mode of transport (Waitt et al., 2015: 3). Most work which engages with automotive culture discusses emotion in some way from the specific discussion of automotive emotions by Mimi Sheller (2004) and the 'emotio-material' dimension of vehicle use by Dag Balkmar and Tanja Joelsson (2010). Furthermore it is important to note that the car is not reducible to envelopes of detachment from everyday interaction (Lumsden, 2015). Driving is an embodied experience which includes both personal emotions and the spatiality of the car and driver as relational assemblages (Merriman, 2004: 157-8). Indeed Sheller's (2004: 222) call for a more in-depth understanding of the intense emotions, passions and embodied experiences of driving and vehicle interaction has been particularly important in this. Similarly Tim Dant (2004: 61) refers to this hybrid as the driver-car; a temporary assemblage of driver and car, whilst Deborah

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<sup>22</sup> And those authors who contribute to his edited volume.

Lupton (1999) refers to it as a cyborg and Balkmar and Joelsson (2012: 41) refer to the car as offering a symbiotic fusion of man and machine.

The embodied experiences of driving for many people can be understood through what Jack Katz (1999: 33) describes as both the “humanised car” and the “automobilised person”. Whilst Katz presented these two phrases as interchangeable I think it is worth briefly noting the differences as they show the breadth of such an approach to understanding the embodiment and emotions of driving. The automobilised human refers to a human who has access to automobile afforded mobility and who can become automobile by driving in a vehicle, it refers rather to the embodied relationship from the body’s perspective. However the converse of this is that the car becomes more humanised, as our actions adapt in our development as *automobile* so too do our recognitions of things such as the steering wheel as extensions of our body. Driving then can be understood as an intermixing of both of these elements and recent work on driving and the car place particular importance on the ways in which humans become automobilised or experience thought processes and embodiment specific to driving (Pearce, 2016). In particular as driving becomes habitual, road conditions and vibrations become a felt part of the embodiment (Dant, 2004 quoted in Lumsden, 2013: 17) showing the way in which the humanised car feeds back to the automobilised human in a symbiotic relationship of sorts. This has also been described as, “the complex sensuous ‘relationality’ between the means of travel and the traveller” (Hannam et al., 2006: 15). Thus driving the car can be understood as both an embodied and experienced mobility (Cresswell, 2006: 3), a “practical embodied performance of the choreographies of the road” (Sheller, 2007: 180).



In this way any user of a car can be understood as temporarily becoming an assemblage of car and driver (Dant, 2004) a hybrid or even taking on a cyborg materiality (Lupton, 1999). However Dant (2014: 369-70) argues that using terms such as hybrid downplay the human capacities, he states that the human's intentionality and actions ultimately bring about movements of the car, even if today the cars do, "most of the work". Either way as Bull (2001: 186) observes, it is now commonplace to suggest that the car is a technological extension of the driver. More recently the geographers Waitt and others (2015: 2) unite a number of geographical approaches to this, referring to it as the, "synergistic relationship between driver and vehicle" (Husband et al., 2014: 150; Sheller & Urry, 2003; Thrift, 2004; Urry, 2006). There is an agreement then across recent human geography and social sciences that the car and the driver must be understood in related terms, I argue that the case study of modified VW enthusiasts affords a more nuanced look at how these relationships and automotive emotions (Sheller, 2004) play out.

The enthusiast experience of driving the car is a balance between the importance of the car as driven machine, which is the object of enthusiasm and the driver as enthusiast, who understand their driving differently as a result. In many ways this is not that dissimilar to Katz (1999) approach discussed above. It is the humanised car which stands as the modified VW enthusiasts' object of enthusiasm whilst it is their automobilisation as a human which gives an extra layer to the experience of actually driving the car<sup>23</sup>. As such it is important to build on the "car system" reading of driving as outlined above with a more nuanced understanding of the way our minds are influenced by driving as much as our bodies (Pearce, 2016: viii). Modified VW enthusiasm is as much about thinking, language and representation as it is

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<sup>23</sup> This stems beyond driving and in fact understanding the emotional affiliation with the object of enthusiasm could in some ways be understood as a humanising project.

about the embodied practices such as working on and driving the car, as discussed in chapters 6 and 8 respectively. It is then important to understand the experience of driving a car as what Pearce (ibid) terms a 'driving event', this is an idea which I will define below and has informed my approach to my own autoethnographic reflections on driving my modified car.

### **2.6.3 Automotive Consciousness & The Driving Event**

Lynne Pearce's (2016) recent book goes beyond embodied practice alone and delves into an understanding of the driver's mind as much as of their body; exploring automotive consciousness. Her theorisation is based to some extent on a mind and body split when approaching the idea of the driven car. As she notes, this marks a move away from other scholars in the field such as Urry (2004) to whom the driver's mind is not treated separately to their body in terms of embodied experience. However there has been less attention directed towards the way in which cars are both spaces of private, embodied driving practices whilst also participating in a public arena (Waite et al., 2015: 2) where they are seen by other people. Pearce's (2016) approach to the mind and body as separate, means that it may be possible to offer more clarification about driving as both an embodied and simultaneously performed practice, a pair of themes key to the discussion in chapter 8.

One of the key factors of Pearce's (2016) approach is her understanding of driving and embodied experience as being part of a context-specific 'driving event'. This is important because it affords the developmental importance of an individual driven journey, rather than all commutes being understood as the same driving experience for example, this allows each journey to be explored in more detail (Pearce, 2016: 24). As I have detailed in my autoethnographic field diary, with regards to both my own driving and that of other enthusiasts, the journeys to different shows in particular are often each very different in

terms of driving event and enthusiast experience. Pearce uses the term driving-event, to define the context specificity of a given driving experience, where external and subjective factors mean that the experience and result of each journey's thought-space is different. These thoughts are habitual and unique, varied and not necessarily positive or pleasurable but also often retrospectively consolidated so that one journey is associated with a particular thought process or decision.

## **2.7 Introducing Modified Car Culture Research**

Research on modified car cultures and communities can be seen to fit broadly into two camps. The first follows an approach more akin to human geography which focuses on understanding identity, community, behaviours and meaning making processes. Whilst the second, stemming from a disciplinary foundation in Sociology focuses more on the ways in which the behaviours of modified car enthusiasts fit into themes of antisocial behaviour, deviancy and criminality with some focus on understanding these in order to position policy responses. There is some crossover, for example in their 'Geography of Boy Racers' article, Ryan Falconer and Simon Kingham (2007) investigate the criminal behaviours of modified car drivers in Christchurch, New Zealand positioned within a policy-making background.

### **2.7.1 Modified Car Cultures: Identity, Community & Meaning Making**

Existing exploration of modified car cultures by geographers or within themes akin to human geography utilise varied case studies, not always focused as specifically on modified cars as those given below with reference to deviance and other sociological themes. Within these examples there is another more subtle division between those who focus on driving as the main cultural expression and those who focus on the modifying or the modified car itself. For example, Tom O'Dell (2001) talks about the Swedish automotive culture of raggare within Dan Miller's edited volume Car Cultures. The raggare was a culture whereby young Swedish

men would rebel against the “shyness” of mainstream Swedish modernity (ibid: 106), choosing to cruise around in American cars from the 1950s and 60s, famed for their superfluous use of chrome and aerodynamic fins (ibid: 110). A number of interesting points arise from this; first and foremost is the obvious transmission and transgression of an existing car culture, the American hot rod scene can be seen reflected here on the roads of Sweden, indeed the clothing fashion accompanying this scene is reminiscent of the earlier hot-rodding community (O’Dell, 2001: 122). The second important point about O’Dell’s piece is that it places importance of the role of cruising, the act of driving around and performing the car, as key to the way in which the culture grew and is organised. As with Chappell’s (2012) study of lowriders, there is an important politics of display at work, the driving around and performing values which the car embodied are important to these enthusiasts, in terms of cultural rebellion for the raggare and cultural identity with the Chicano lowriders. The notion of cruising as central to car cultures has been noted by geographers Virgile Collin-Lange and Karl Benediktsson (2011; Collin-Lange, 2014) who observed that in Norway, the uptake of driving by young people led to particular car based social behaviours; namely cruising around towns and meeting up at focal points such as petrol stations. For Collin-Lange (2012) this shows the ways in which spatial cruising behaviour and the social wants of young people with access to cars reinforces their positioning within regimes of automobility. This suggests that young people’s access to automobility may be what causes a sometimes subsequent interest in driving and cars, followed by modifying said cars, an idea developed later in chapter 4.

Car culture and in particular modification of cars has been explored through the more political lenses of national and racial identity as well. Lowriders are a community of car enthusiasts in North America traditionally made up of Chicano and Latino young men, the cars embody

other elements of their national identity such as use of language and religious iconography painted on cars. Furthermore there is a spatial connection to cruising and lowrider meets typically occur within Chicano neighbourhoods or spaces which are important to the wider culture. For example in Chappell's (2012) research there are car meets held at Austin's Chicano Park; a celebrated cultural centre far beyond that of the lowriding community. Beyond an expression of national identity, Paul Gilroy (2001) suggests that for young black men at least, driving a modified car with expensive aftermarket wheels and a loud stereo is motivated by a compensatory-prestige as a response to racist understandings of their wealth and class. For Gilroy as with Chappell there is importance in being seen and heard when cruising in a modified car which is unique to the enthusiast who owns it, suggesting the creativity involved in the modifying process.

Glen Fuller's (2007) research of modified car culture in Australia is the only such study completed by a human geographer who specifically uses the term enthusiasm to describe the participant community. Fuller approaches enthusiasm as being focused around specific event and spaces, whilst giving importance to the experiences of driving and emotion in modified car enthusiasm; much of this understanding is built upon in this thesis. Fuller theorises that enthusiasm and the experience of spaces of enthusiasm are the result of affects and affective contagion. Similarly Derek Tam-Scott (2013) approaches classic car culture as an enthusiasm, in particular attending to the understandings of cars and motivation to own, drive and work on more specialist vehicles which may be usually seen as irrational. This connects well to notions of enthusiasm which can be explained in emotional terms but which make little sense to those without the knowledge or connection to the community and culture.

### **2.7.2 Modified Car Culture: Youth, Masculinity & Gender**

There has been an approach to modified car culture arising in Sociology as a part of a wider movement to understand antisocial behaviour and youth deviance in the late 2000s. This body of work largely stems from the media's creation of the 'boy racer' terminology in the late 1990s and the need to explore modified car culture as something more than antisocial behaviour for its own sake. As a result academics have explored the ways in which certain modified car practices can be understood as deviant, class or age based and masculine in nature (Bengry-Howell & Griffin, 2007; Hatton, 2007; Lumsden, 2013). It is important to note that for the most part these studies still include in-depth investigations of culture as with those outlined above.

Lumsden's (2009, 2010, 2013, 2015) plethora of work on boy racer culture details contestations regarding different spaces by modified car drivers and those who seen their behaviour therein as antisocial. The basis of her research comes from the earlier sociological tradition of the moral panic in society stemming from the understandings of behaviours of a perceived folk devil. Lumsden (2013) explains in particular how the transgression of spaces and contexts into those of contestation as comes with holding large gatherings of modified cars near residential buildings, leads to the boy racer stereotype as antisocial and criminal. Her work shows the ways in which perceptions beyond that of enthusiasm can easily misunderstand or oversimplify modified car culture and the recommendations for policing are largely based on a more nuanced understanding of the enthusiasts' motivations.

Lumsden (2010) refers to the modified car culture as being male dominated and thus creating gendered performances for female enthusiasts, interestingly this is one of the few studies which acknowledges the presence of female enthusiasts as more than partners of male

enthusiasts<sup>24</sup>. Hatton (2007) found that young male car enthusiasts from working class backgrounds utilised their ownership of modified cars as a medium for identity, status and to appropriate masculine identity. Furthermore Hatton argues that this is the reward of social capital collected through driving and car-related practices, these driving related practices include observations of antisocial driving celebrated within the community. Similarly Bengry-Howell and Griffin's (2007: 440) work not to "approach car modification as a collective cultural phenomenon", as I do in this research, but rather to examine young men's relationship with cars in terms of identity and cultural production.

A further interesting example of masculinity within wider car culture can be seen in the contribution made by Russell Belk (2004) within consumer research. Belk suggests that the enthusiasm for modified cars, using the example of a fascination with American made cars, is reflective of fetishizing and sacralising cars, a practice predominantly carried out by men. In his unpublished PhD thesis Michael Juan Chavez (2013) describes the same auto-eroticisation as Belk but within the backdrop of the aforementioned lowrider culture, he too observes particularly masculine performances of the car and understandings of the car as fetishized. For Chavez this is a particular Chicano expression of masculinity which intermixes the national identity and cultural heritage arguments of Chappell (2012) with notions of cultural masculinity. Interestingly he draws on the term 'Rasquachismo' which has an origin in describing the class-based underdog and refers to 'making do with whatever you have' (ibid: 48). This posits lowriding as similar in motivation to Gilroy's (2001) compensatory prestige and also marks a difference between a lower class cultural expression through cars and the

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<sup>24</sup> Although Lumsden (2010) notes that this was often the case as well.

celebration of more superfluous notions of the car as afforded by the relative ease of access to cars as for the Raggare drivers (O'Dell, 2004).

Gender is a key issue with regards to any study of car culture and masculinity in particular has been linked to modified car enthusiast groups before (Bengry-Howell & Griffin, 2007; Hatton, 2007; Lumsden, 2010). Whilst this research shows that a not insignificant minority<sup>25</sup> of enthusiasts were women, the community has traditionally been predominantly male oriented and whilst landmark changes have occurred<sup>26</sup> these values continue to permeate the modified car culture. This is not a study which specifically investigates gender however as a critical geographer and a male researcher I am aware of these debates and the limitations of my positionality with regards gender.

In order to review literature regarding gender in car cultures research it is important to offer some historical context of the modified car culture, at least in the UK. The culture had in the UK, prior to widespread internet use, been supported primarily by magazines and by the 2000s these had taken the form of other male-oriented magazines, including softcore pornographic content characteristic of the 'lads mags' but unrelated to cars. In particular magazines such as Fast Car and Max Power were clearly aimed at a heterosexual male audience. Max Power in particular embodied the late 1990s and 2000s modified car culture, with a focus on highly customised hot hatchback cars<sup>27</sup>, antisocial driving and dated gender stereotypes. By the late 2000s magazine circulation had dropped in general, Fast Car and the other surviving specialist titles such as Performance VW made the decision to proverbially clean up their content. Max Power continued to include pornographic content and fell in

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<sup>25</sup> 17% of 58 online questionnaire respondents identified as female.

<sup>26</sup> For example the wholesale move by modified car magazines in the late 2000s to move away from including images of sexualised female models as it was problematized as sexist and not reflective of modern enthusiasts.

<sup>27</sup> The style of cars on the cover of Lumsden's (2013) were typical of this era.



popularity to the point that in 2007 the decision was made to cease publication. In this research and my wider experiences as an enthusiast Max Power has become a byword for both the attitudes of enthusiasts and style of cars and driving popularised by that publication. Modified car magazines published in the UK no longer carry such obviously sexualised content although a cursory glance shows that some advertisers continue to do so. With this change in content and attitudes in mind it is possible to contextualise some of the masculinised attitudes to gender and performative driving behaviours noted by researchers as Lumsden (2009), Bengry-Howell and Griffin (2007), Hatton (2007).

## **2.8 Driving & Car Culture Literature Review Conclusions**

The above discussion of driving and car culture literature posits this research within a wider understanding modified car culture and shows how this thesis is positioned in terms of gender debates and understandings of the embodied experience of driving cars. In terms of literature on car culture and modified cars in particular it is possible to lay this thesis on the foundations of recent work on investigating modified car cultures such as work by Hatton (2007) and Lumsden (2013). By building on the varied case studies and relatively similar findings of research on modified car culture it is possible to frame this research in terms of a specific exploration of enthusiasm, community and knowledge exchange, factors which are less discussed in the existing literature which focuses more on class, gender and deviance. Additionally by presenting recent work on car culture and modifying by geographers I will be able to highlight the originality of my contributions and difference in conceptual approach where applicable to previous geographical investigations (e.g. Falconer & Kingham, 2007; Fuller, 2007). In terms of enthusiasm research on cars, this existing body of work shows the importance of understanding the wider community and events at which it gathers as well as more personal embodied experiences such as driving (Fuller, 2007). It also provides support

for an emotional geography reading of enthusiasm to help explain motivations for owning, modifying and driving specialised cars which may otherwise be seen as lunacy by the mainstream automobile culture (Tam-Scott, 2009).

## **2.9 Literature Review Conclusions**

This review of existing literatures and subsequent definitions of enthusiasm and community posits the following research thesis on a foundation of furthering enthusiasm research in human geography through sensitivity to the importance of community and community interaction. Additionally this review illustrates the fit of the research questions and ultimately the findings within a large and varied body of work on car cultures and modified car enthusiasm, providing context and similar case study examples to fieldwork examples discussed throughout. The combination of an enthusiasm and community reading as highlighted and existing work on modified car culture and driving affords this thesis a position to make a unique contribution to enthusiasm of the modified VW whilst making obvious connections to wider automotive enthusiasm literature.

# 3 Research Design & Methodology

## 3.1 Research Design

“We must recognize and take account of our own position, as well as that of our research participants, and *write this into our research practice*” (McDowell, 1992: 409).

A researcher, “can not conveniently tuck away the personal behind the professional, because fieldwork is personal”. (England, 1994: 84-85).

The methods used in this research were selected due to being closely related to practices which occur at field sites in the modified car culture, as such they are non-invasive and the findings are led by the understandings of the culture from those within. These decisions are based on my personal experience of this field but also based on the methods used in similar studies of enthusiasm and of similar car culture case studies. The choice to utilise primarily qualitative data was taken due to the potential richness of this data particularly for exploring lived experience (DeLyser, 2010) as does this study and all those in similar fields discussed below. My mixed-methods approach has its grounding in ethnography and the other methods utilised stem from experiences and observation in the case study community prior to the research and during pilot fieldwork in the summer of 2014. This approach whereby research design is led by field experiences and is due to the fact that as explained in Chapter 1 this is research which explores the experiences of enthusiasts in their own terms.

It is important in enthusiasm research to work collaboratively with and alongside the community because this can be particularly beneficial in creating a rich record and

understanding of their practices and understandings (Geoghegan, 2014: 106). As noted in Chapter 1 I understand my own positionality to be that of a researcher-enthusiast<sup>28</sup> and as such the above quote from Linda McDowell (1992) is especially pertinent when discussing the methods I utilised in this research. As a researcher I hold the somewhat privileged position within the research process, as it is I who decide which questions to ask, direct the flow of discourse interpret material and where and in what form to present my conclusions (McLafferty, 1995: 437). Furthermore as an enthusiast I broaden my positionality to include understandings specific to this case study. I bring prior knowledge and an understanding of the enthusiast community's contextual know-how, appropriate conduct and shared knowledge resources (Laurier, 2010: 119). As such I am able to draw on these shared resources which have become a tool in my enthusiast practices (Wenger, 2011) and as such inform my research approach. It is for this reason that I approached the decision to use each method detailed below as an enthusiast first and researcher second<sup>29</sup>, in that I reflexively used my prior understandings to focus on the most contextually appropriate methods<sup>30</sup>. As such this research uses a mixed-methods approach to triangulate enthusiast understandings and experiences from a number of bases in line with my research questions<sup>31</sup>. Furthermore I draw on a range of other documentary sources which are available to enthusiasts within the culture to support my primary data, including magazine interviews, automotive blogs and forum contributions; which I will discuss in more detail below.

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<sup>29</sup> My 'self' extends beyond these two identities alone, Noble (2009) observes that we are only in touch with certain identities in certain times or spaces.

<sup>30</sup> With the exception of online research methods all of those utilised here have been shown to be useful in enthusiasm research and to a lesser extent car enthusiasm research (see Chappell, 2012; Fuller, 2007; Geoghegan, 2013; Lumsden, 2013).

<sup>31</sup> As stated in the Introduction chapter.

It is important to note here that I did not make these decisions unreflexively; indeed it was this attendance to my positionality which I drew on the most in designing the research. The shared resources I speak of above are based on my personal experiences and thus the knowledge is contextually situated (Haraway, 1990: 189-90). Muncey (2010: 8) contends that subjectivity does not negatively impact research but rather enhances it. As researcher-enthusiast I necessarily see and understand the field in a partial way (Rose, 1997; Valentine, 2005: 111). Furthermore Muncey (2010: 33) observes that different readings of the same context from differing positionalities can perhaps produce perhaps contradictory interpretations. I also recognise that in particular my field observations can only be a narration of what took place and thus issues of representation arise (Maalki, 1995: 107) which require reflexive interpretation. In summary my knowledge as enthusiast does not afford the power to make generalised comments about the culture but rather gives me the tools and understanding to tell specific kinds of stories (Hyndman, 2001: 262) which address my research questions. By thinking reflexively about my conduct in the field I am able to recognise, “the invisible hands of geographical enquiry” (Geoghegan, 2014: 105) and enhance the credibility of enthusiast practices (Craggs et al., 2015) and knowledges.

### **3.1.1 Research approaches of similar studies**

In this section I outline the methods utilised by researchers in two similar areas of research; enthusiast communities and specific car culture and driving. From the discussion which follows a clear pattern emerges with reference to methods used, even across different disciplinary approaches to similar case studies. This pattern shows that ethnographic and in particular autoethnographic research are the most commonly utilised approaches when looking at modified car cultures. The reasons for the use of reflective and ethnographic methods varies between studies as will be critically discussed below and in most cases it

provides a foundational methodology and understanding of the field from which a mixed-methods approach can be designed.

### **3.1.2 Enthusiasm in Research: Interviews, Ethnography & Mixed-Methods Approaches**

The collection of studies deemed similar to this thesis are made up of other research with enthusiast groups, hobbyists and fans. Hilary Geoghegan's (2013) research with telecommunications enthusiasts utilises in-depth interviews, which in particular focus on gaining a narrative understanding of their interests. One reason for choosing interviews was that whilst they can provide in-depth, often narrative information about a participant's experiences they do not require the same level of access to the field which ethnography commands. Therefore for a researcher with little prior knowledge of an enthusiast group, interviews are a rewarding method, furthermore almost all of the discussed enthusiasm studies which use ethnography combine this with interviews in some form. Two examples of interviews utilised alongside more participative approaches are Yarwood and Shaw's (2010: 426) study of model railway enthusiasts and Geoghegan's (2009) earlier research with architectural enthusiasts. Yarwood and Shaw (2010) conducted their interviews at model railway conventions, by doing so in the situ of enthusiasm they afforded their participants richer elaboration of enthusiasm through props such as their model rail layouts. It is also arguably easier for participants to explain the dynamics of a convention when they are at one. In particular these two reasons which add a rich level to enthusiast interviews aided my research design in recording informal discussions at car shows, where participants could make use of props such as the modified cars which surrounded them.

Geoghegan's (2009) study of enthusiasts of industrial architecture built upon ethnographic observations, interviews and textual analysis of cultural sources. This approach shows the

ways in which ethnography can form a methodological and contextual basis for a mixed-methods approach. In particular it shows how ethnography can equip a researcher with the intertextuality needed to read cultural texts in the context of the enthusiast community. Through observation of enthusiast behaviour Geoghegan (2009) was able to understand the context of textual sources. This is also the case for Fuller (2007: vi) where the analysis of magazines as cultural texts was possible within the context of observations made through his (auto)ethnographic study. Lumsden (2013: 50) formulates her argument about the stereotyping based on perceptions of modified car enthusiasts in the mainstream media. The ethnographic work conducted, which facilitated included in-depth field interviews similar to those of Yarwood and Shaw (2010), presented Lumsden (ibid) with the intertextuality between ethnographic observation and third party observations published in media texts. In my research I place great importance on my prior knowledge of the modified VW community and observations I made during the autoethnographic fieldwork as providing me with an understanding of this intertextuality. By using autoethnography as a foundation for a mixed-methods approach, as the researchers discussed above did, I learned a way to read the texts of enthusiast cultural industries (Fuller, 2007: vi) such as from magazine articles and online blog posts.

Ethnography then, can include a range of different methods under a methodological approach which aims to understand a community primarily by observing or participating in its activities (Cloke et al., 2004: 169). However caution is required in utilising ethnography as a wider mixed-methods approach which reaches beyond the method of ethnography. For example Garrett (2011) suggests that there has been a recent methodological trend whereby archival research, both online and physical, is cast as ethnography. To illustrate his argument

regarding a misappropriated ethnographic methodology Garrett (2011) turns to the recent work of fellow urban exploration researcher Luke Bennett. Bennett (2013: 504) explores the ways in which urban explorers, specifically 'bunkerologists' explore and represent bunkers, based on published information in books and other offline media. Bennett (2011) has also conducted similar research regarding representations of urban exploration and bunkers in online spaces. Bennett (2011: 421) refers to his research as 'ethnographic study' and later as 'document-based ethnography' (ibid: 425). Whilst this can be seen as a widening of ethnographic methodology to include sources authored by members of the participant community it requires a level of caution. As Garrett (2011) notes Bennett's research does not actually include active participation with urban exploration enthusiasts or interviews with them. To contextualise Garrett's (2011) argument it is necessary to note that ethnography in human geography can utilise an array of mixed-methods, however at its core there is a necessity for participant observation (Hart, 2009: 218; Cloke et al., 2004). For example archival research, particularly in historical geography has shown that lived experience and embodied practices can be read through archived texts (e.g. Merriman, 2012: 77). This work is not positioned as being ethnographic due to the historical nature of the archive as a repository of memory from which past experience can be constructed (Ogborn, 2010: 92).

However if the community is currently active an issue arises regarding whether reading it's produced texts can be presented as ethnography. Archival research can afford understandings of certain elements of a community's behaviour and where rich accounts of embodiment exist, as with Merriman's (2012) reading of Autocar magazine, conclusions can be posited about lived experience. However ethnography can further situate such data and with reference to current communities it could be utilised to better understand the context



of the textual sources produced by or about its participants. Garrett's (2011) concludes his critique of Bennett's (2011) methodology by stating that the latter, "skates over the surface of a very large, diverse and multifaceted community". This suggests that without active participation in a community any conclusions drawn based on texts alone will necessarily be partial and may lack context. Within the modified VW community, cultural resources published online and offline carry valuable information, but this content alone affords a partial view which may miss wider trends or non-representational only understandable through experience. Finally Garrett (2011) makes a point which I would argue unites online resources of enthusiast communities; "Online representations in the community say almost nothing about the...experience of the embodied activity". In particular in Chapter 7 I explore examples of videos which show what appears at face value to be antisocial driving behaviour at car shows. However having experienced the context in which they were performed these acts can be understood as appropriate within the given space, time and company of said car shows.

It is important to note that whilst many researchers are not enthusiasts or fans within the communities they research, this is not to say that they will not develop an interest throughout the research process. Indeed this in itself shows a converse side of having a sensitivity to positionality. This is that whilst the researcher can be seen to affect the field and the data collection process (England, 1994: 84) the field can be seen to affect the researcher (DeLyser, 2001; Rose, 1997: 305). For example as Chappell (2012) began research with lowriders as somebody who was not an enthusiast, but as he learned about the community and took an active role within it, the field helped him to develop into a lowrider enthusiast.

### **3.1.3 Car Culture Methods**

In this section I want to discuss the ways in which research has been conducted, beyond enthusiasm studies, specifically with reference to car culture and driving research. In this section particular attention is turned to the ways in which the different conceptual approaches to the car and driving between human geography and sociology affect approaches to the field. In recent years and in particular since the marked rise of mobilities research in human geography and related disciplines there has been an increased focus on the car and driving. There are a myriad of ways in which the car and driving can be understood and perceived in terms of research and thus there are many different approaches to gathering data. For example in cultural geography and literary theory the car can be understood as a space which is inhabited and which affects our perception and embodied experience of surrounding spaces (Laurier et al., 2008; Merriman, 2009: 586; Pearce, 2016). However as noted in the literature review, for a sociologist the car could be approached as a site of youth deviance, antisocial behaviour and performed masculinity (Bengry-Howell & Griffin, 2007; Chavez, 2012; Lumsden, 2009, 2010, 2013; Hatton, 2007). Perhaps the most common method or methodological approach to car culture research is ethnography, this is a pattern shared across all case study examples below to some extent. One example of the primacy of ethnography and car culture comes in the form of Dan Miller's (2001) aforementioned edited volume *Car Cultures*, which can be seen as a collection of studies into automobile culture united by amongst other things, ethnography (Hatton, 2007: 33).

One of the most similar examples of modified car culture research to my own is that of Glen Fuller (2007) and his study *Australian Ford enthusiasts*. Fuller uses a reflexive form of autoethnography which includes passages of narrative about fieldwork experiences interspersed with analysis of behaviours observed during said experiences. This approach to

autoethnography is known as personal experience narrative (Butz & Besio, 2009), whereby the researcher utilises a dual identity of across academic and personal life to produce and interrogate autobiographical stories of experience (Ellis & Bochner, 2000: 740). Fuller's (2007) access and approach to the field is very similar to my own and it shows one of the ways in which an ethnographer can turn the critical analysis of cultural practices onto those which he or she is embedded within (Young & Meneley, 2005: 2). He utilises personal experience narrative and the, "fine-grained focus on the researcher-self and its method of blurring the distinctions among emotion, [and] experience..." (Besio & Butz, 2009: 1666) to produce a rich account enthusiast experience. Similarly Kwon (2004) explores the import car culture and its events in North America although without prior knowledge of the community. Kwon opts for ethnography and personal accounts of experiences at car show events, this also leads to interviews with identified gatekeepers. These examples show the importance and potential usefulness of autoethnography not just for automotive enthusiast groups but for enthusiast cultures generally.

However research conducted by Chavez (2012) within the Chicano lowrider community in California is based upon his own positionality within the community. As an active lowrider enthusiast with fifteen years of experience of the community Chavez has a level of access which makes ethnography an obvious choice for data collection (Chavez, 2012: 64-65). Interestingly Chappell's (2012) research with Hispanic lowriders in Texas is also based upon an autoethnographic approach, however Chappell entered the community for the purpose of research and became an active member within it as a result. This further illustrates the popularity of ethnography and reflective approaches in studying car and enthusiast cultures. Both Chappell (ibid) and Chavez (2012) utilise forms of autoethnography and the interviews

or informal discussions which this affords in order to gather data about the experiences of enthusiasts. Chappell's (2012) research focuses around an autoethnography and access to community participants for interviews are often negotiated as a result. Chavez (2012: 19) also uses a mixed-methods approach grounded in ethnography; drawing on participatory observations, interviews and archival research. Interestingly Chappell's (2012), Fuller's (2007) and Tam-Scott's (2009) explorations of specific car enthusiast cultures also include an archival element in order to provide context to observations and subsequent conclusions.

Derek Tam-Scott's (2009) research was aimed at understanding the enthusiasm, motivations and social interactions of classic car enthusiasts in North America. Tam-Scott (2009: 107) draws upon his role as participant observer but also from his identity as a lifelong car enthusiast. With reference to the notion of learned intertextuality through participation in a community, as discussed above, he suggests that he is equipped to understand and analyse the community due to knowledge learned from cultural texts, anecdotes and personal experience (ibid). This is the same argument presented by Chavez (2012: 18) with regards to his specialist knowledge and access to social networks based on his life as a member of the community. Perhaps unsurprisingly Tam-Scott's data is presented similarly to that of Fuller (2007) and Chappell (2012), Tam-Scott (2009: 112-113) gives accounts which detail the embodied experience of driving and attending events, including the sounds, feelings and smells which influence those experiences.

However not all research on car cultures has or requires the level of access discussed above, for example research across criminology (e.g. Lumsden, 2009) and sociology (e.g. Hatton, 2007) is often concerned with antisocial behaviour and not personal experience of enthusiasm. This is also the case in other areas of geography, for example with Falconer and

Kingham's (2007) study of modified car drivers, antisocial behaviour and policy impacts. Hatton (2007: 96) explains that in order to conduct a deep ethnography within a community with people she did not know and importantly where she was not known was an issue. Thus for ethnography to be able to gather the rich and meaningful data which it potentially affords, the researcher must gain access and be accepted by the group (ibid).

Access to the field also plays an important role in the types of methods used for car culture research, the examples of deep ethnography given above (Chappell, 2012; Chavez, 2012; Fuller, 2007; Tam-Scott, 2009) all make use of established access to the field by way of participant enthusiasts. However for Karen Lumsden's (2013) research on the potential antisocial ramifications of modified car drivers' behaviour access to the field came through the Grampian Police which affected the behaviours observed. This is illustrative of the context of studies which explore potentially illegal behaviours, researchers are not able to become members of the community in the way that Fuller (2007) or Chappell (2012) did. Vaaranen and Wieloch (2002) studied Finnish street-racing culture and so like Karen Lumsden (2013) they had to utilise approaches to the field which minimised risk to themselves and their participants. Interestingly Vaaranen and Wieloch (2002: 44) note that their decision to focus on participant observation as the main method was a response to the difficulty securing interviews with young people to talk about their illegal driving behaviours. Hatton's (2007: 69) ethnographic work with young male modified car enthusiasts in Cornwall also ran into similar issues regarding the boundaries of the ethnographic field and illegal driving behaviour. This was less of a concern within the community of modified car enthusiasts in my research although I was reflexively aware of the need to be cautious in spaces or situations where these driving behaviours may occur, as discussed in Chapter 8.

Bengry-Howell and Griffin (2007) conducted research with young male car modifiers across the Midlands and North Wales, working with a similar demographic to Lumsden's (2013) research in Aberdeen and Hatton's (2007) in Cornwall. Bengry-Howell and Griffin (2007: 445) argue that the use of an ethnographic methodology is important when looking at modifiers, as the cultural significance of modified cars and practices can be explored within their cultural settings. They utilised this as a basis from which to employ participant observation, field photography and interviews. Furthermore and symptomatic of their psychology disciplinary backgrounds they attest to the importance of ethnography in allowing observation of 'natural' settings of the modifiers as opposed to an artificially controlled context (ibid: 444). Falconer & Kingham (2007: 184) utilised a mixed-methods approach to explore the behaviours of modified car drivers in New Zealand. Whilst their approach utilised interviews, focus-groups and analysis of cultural discourse, an ethnographic approach was used to contextualise data and develop methods. For example interviews were arranged by way of snowballing or identifying key contacts during participant observation, furthermore these observations led to identifying focal points and spaces used by enthusiasts (ibid). Thus their ethnographic approach, whilst provided an understanding of the meaning of social actions and organisations also afforded them access to information which led to further development of their mixed-methods approach.

### **3.1.4 Driving in Research**

I turn to methods utilised in the driving literature, separately due to the fact that whilst most car culture research includes an assessment of driving there are studies, particularly from mobilities studies and geography, which focus purely on driving. Driving within this literature can be understood as being a personal and emotional experience (Pearce, 2016; Katz, 1999). Lynne Pearce (2016) working from the perspective of literary theory within a mobilities

studies context, approaches driving as a personal and important psychological experience. Thus in terms of method she draws upon autoethnographic accounts of personal driving experiences and combines these with analysis of existing narratives from twentieth century literature. Similarly Peter Merriman (2009) approaches driving by analysing texts which record experiences of driving. In both examples the methods are utilised to understand personal experience and embodied practice, both as personal lived experience and from recordings of lived experience. Eric Laurier and others (2008) showed how this mode of recording personal driving experience could be utilised as a research method. He recorded driver and passenger behaviour, utilising a pair of cameras, one pointing into the car to capture conversation and behaviour and one pointing out to capture the participants' view of the road. When combined with the studies discussed above which combine car culture and driving, it is further highlighted that a focus on personal experience and embodied practice, as afforded by ethnography, is key. However these examples which focus on driving specifically also show that the ways of recording this behaviour can be taken beyond traditional methods and that the experience analysed does not have to be that of the researcher.

To conclude, all of the discussed examples above both from car culture and wider enthusiasm research utilise ethnography or a participative approach to exploring their community of interest. Most noticeably such an approach forms the basis of a mixed-methods research design, whereby observations made during ethnography feed into the planning and siting of interviews and the analysis of textual sources within the community. Ethnography then is clearly a foundational approach to a mixed-methods approach in research on enthusiasm, car culture and driving. Ethnography offers a deep insight into social relations, interactions and

cultural behaviours by way of participatory observation. However these observations prove to be transformative in terms of research design, as detailed above, providing contextual knowledge for textual analysis or gatekeeper access for interviews. In my research I chose to use an approach grounded in ethnography for these reasons, to afford a wider exploration of the culture but by way of research methods that were appropriate to the enthusiast participants. As such by utilising a participatory approach to an ethnography I was able to develop my fieldwork and research methods accordingly with my recorded field experiences (Geoghegan, 2014: 107). The ethnographic approach which I take then utilises a range of different methods which are characterised by ethnography as a style of research and which are pragmatic and adaptable (Hatton, 2007: 67).

### **3.2 Feminist Methodology & the Insider-Outsider Binary**

“...fieldwork is intensely personal....the....positionality of the researcher plays a central role in the research process, both in the field and in the final text” (England, 1994: 87).

“...all knowledge is produced in specific circumstances and...those circumstances shape it in some way” (Rose, 1997: 305).

My positionality as researcher-enthusiast could be read as an example of insider status in research. However in this section I want to critically discuss the methodological issues of an inside-outside binary and to argue that researcher-enthusiast positionality is more fluid than such an approach can afford. Many researchers with prior knowledge or personal experience of the field and existing relationships with its members refer to themselves to as being equipped with an ‘insider’ status (e.g. Chavez, 2008; DeLyser, 2001). Butz and Besio (2009: 1669) explain that for geographers and other researcher using ethnography, their



“insiderness” is treated as a methodological and interpretive tool. Focusing on an inside implicitly suggests an outside to the participant community, which in itself suggests that the community is bounded in a somewhat distinct way.

In order to frame a critique of the notion of being an ‘insider’ it is important to understand how ethnographic research has developed, both traditionally and as used at present. As explained with regards to emotional geography in Chapter 2 I draw upon the feminist geography approach to data or knowledge as being situated and subjectively represented by research (Taylor, 2011: 3). In light of this the idea that one can be outside or inside the field points towards an underlying positivist attitude to data collection. For example to observe a community as an ‘outsider’ suggests that the research is objectively detached from the community or space in which they are observing. Furthermore it suggests that the participants or even material within that space is not affected, altered or rearranged by the presence of the research or by the subsequent representation within written research. Ethnography as an approach has its basis in traditional anthropology, this early approach has been oft-critiqued for its colonial overtones and the assumed objective stance of the researcher (Hart, 2009: 218). Feminist geography then amongst other disciplines issued a call for reflexive sensitivity in the kind of research which may be described as utilising an ‘insider’ positionality. Feminist geographers show that there are a number of different voices and identities active in any community (England, 1994: 86), indeed this critique of ‘insiderness’ is not new. Naples (1996: 140) noted that there are no static or bounded positions of insider and outsider, rather there are different spaces which are fluid and permeable and experienced and expressed differently from one community member to the next. Indeed as Mullings (1999) notes, if reconciling this fluidity in the terms of an insider-outsider binary, it is possible

for a researcher to be both simultaneously. The second key tenet of feminist geography in this context then is the understanding of knowledge as being situated and the importance of understanding researcher positionality in experiencing and expressing context-specific knowledges (Haraway, 1988). England (1994: 86) argues that we do not research on the participants but rather on, “the field *between* ourselves and the researcher”. In my research this focus on reflexivity has been key to my autoethnographic data collection and has highlighted experiential understandings of enthusiast practice.

A feminist methodology both opens the door to more subjective understandings of the voices within a community whilst also warning against the understanding of these voices as belonging to fixed and bounded identities, which the researcher can possess. Both the former and latter are united by the call for reflexivity in research (England, 1994; Haraway, 1988; McDowell, 1992; Nast, 1994; Staeheli & Lawson, 1994; Rose, 1997) which feminists present in order to challenge power relations hidden within the creation of knowledge (Haraway, 1988: 577). To be outsider or insider is to privilege certain voices over others, these voices are ultimately chosen by the researcher, as it is not possible to be an impartial researcher (Butler, 1990). As already noted I refer to my positionality as that of a researcher-enthusiast, a term which denotes my fluid positionality between my academic and participant identities. As Rubin (2012: 304) notes, as researchers we often draw upon a multiplicity of simultaneous and consecutive identities from differing backgrounds. Butler (1990) famously argues that identity does not pre-exist performance and so identity is relational within mutually constitutive social relations. Subsequently identities are particularly unstable and with reference to positionality participant and researcher identity can be constitutive of each other. To quote Rose (1997: 316), “...researcher, researched and research make each other;

research and selves are interactive texts". As I explain throughout this thesis my own identity and understanding of myself as both researcher-enthusiast and its constituent parts I experienced my identity being made and remade throughout the research process. This process of making and remaking identity as a result of field experiences has received particular note in feminist geographies (Valentine, 1998: 306).

Furthermore identity is not a finished product, instead individuals move along a path of their own understanding of self, it is thus important to consider that participants are moving along such a path and do not present themselves as a 'finished' essentialised product (Cook & Crang, 1996: 6). This is specifically relevant to modified car culture, as Smith (2010: 4) notes with modifying of spaces in the home, the representation captured during a field visit only captures the current presentation. This is true when talking to people about their modified cars, many cars develop from show to show. As such knowing my participants beforehand means that our shared memories and collaborative reflections add depth; connecting the past with the present and even the future (ibid). Even members of a community do not identify as such at all times (Narayan, 1993: 676; Geoghegan, 2013), as Noble (2009: 880) argues we identify ourselves differently in different contexts, drawing on different sets of cultural resources as necessary. This shows the potentially confusing nature of an insider-outsider binary in practice. Individuals draw on different identities and knowledges at different times and in different spaces, to assume that you are 'inside' the community is to assume that everyone in the community understand their identity in a certain way and that this is not open to change. This understanding of identity fits with a reading of enthusiasm as something which is often engaged with at certain times and in certain spaces (Geoghegan, 2013). This also illustrates the fact that ethnography does not necessarily have to be the traditional long term

isolated study people imagine but can instead take place with spatially dispersed communities of which many are occasional or intermittent (Cook & Crang, 1996: 23).

Furthermore I do not and can not share all of those identities with the participants, it is important then as Haraway (1988) argues that we not only recognise our knowledge as situated in context but our reading of the world as partial. It is not possible to fully know either the research context or my self-identity (Rose, 1997: 311). Whilst it is important to recognise that identity is multi-faceted and fluid, to suggest some way of understanding all facets, risks a return to an objective researcher who is able to observe all factors from outside. It is important to note that for some scholars who use the terminology of 'insider' research, they are in fact talking about being an insider by sharing some aspects of positionality with participants but not all (Mullings, 1999: 345). This use of the term 'insider' does not evoke the boundary between insider and outsider research because it recognises the multi-faced and fluid elements which make up positionality and identity.

As a researcher I have my own positionality which means that I necessarily read and present my lived experience in certain ways. Traditionally, in positivist geographical research, such a partial view would be seen to weaken the data or the essentialism of the findings, however as England (1994: 87) argues it is more important to think reflexively and to be honest about the partial nature of researched knowledge. As researcher we are authors and our own narrative biographies influence both field experiences and presentation or analysis of those experiences. I am a researcher and modified VW enthusiasts, my own biography as an enthusiast means that I read certain behaviours in certain ways. Whilst I strive to include a range of perspectives in this research I am honest about my situated knowledge, positionality and the limits of my partial reading of this community, to not be honest about this would be

to suggest an objective view of the culture from the outside. If I were to talk about my experiences as being 'inside' or 'outside' the community I would be talking about necessarily subjective experiences in objective terms; not only suggesting the existence of a barrier between 'inside' and 'outside' in the field but actually creating that barrier in my written research. Mullings (1999: 340) explains that a positivist approach to viewing a culture from 'outside' suggest a boundary which is "in reality...not only highly unstable but also...ignores the dynamism of positionalities in time and through space" (Mullings, 1999: 340). Furthermore without reflexivity, the power relations between the researcher and the participants suggested by an insider-outsider barrier are hidden by the supposed objective view the researcher assumes (Haraway, 1988: 577).

### **3.3 Positional Encounters**

My presence in the enthusiast culture and participation therein before this research led to certain encounters which were unavoidable. My car is already known to many people and as discussed later people are usually known by the car they drive rather than personally. For example one online questionnaire response was, "I also like stanced cars like yours because of its looks, but I don't think I'd ever drive one" (Questionnaire, Q4), which highlights my relative exposure, by the research process, to a culture I am already a participant in. In terms of the researcher-enthusiast positionality this meant it was necessary to maintain a thick skin at times, as I went looking for opinions and perspectives I would have shied away from as an enthusiast but followed up on for the good of the research process.

Another key constituent of my positionality which must be addressed here is my gender. As noted above attentiveness to gender has been important to understandings of behaviours within modified car culture research (e.g. Bengry-Howell & Griffin, 2007; Hatton, 2007;

Lumsden, 2013). In particular research on modified car culture conducted by sociologists such as Hatton (2007) and Lumsden (2013) does so through a discourse of masculinity. This was not an approach utilised in this research, whilst 17% of questionnaire respondents were female it was beyond the aims of this research to investigate and interpret gender roles. However I am aware that my positionality as a young male researcher will have necessarily gendered my experiences in the field; I also recognise that investigation of gender roles within enthusiast car cultures is an important avenue for future research.

### **3.4 Autoethnography: Understandings & Practice**

*“An ‘enthusiast’ is characterised by the affects of capacities for action that must be felt as much as ‘read’ (Fuller, 2007: 28).*

*“Careful consideration...is required of one’s own assumptions about the field...”  
(Hyndman, 2001: 262)*

The main approach to data collection in this research was autoethnographic fieldwork. The importance of this for understanding enthusiasts’ communities as highlighted by the former quote above, the latter implies the cautious balance of reflexivity and experience needed for this method to produce fruitful data, as previously detailed in the opening section. Autoethnography was selected because enthusiasm is often personal, it is emotionally, practically and affectively experience and to conduct research with an enthusiasm group from the outside in may lead to certain nuances being missed. In this section I outline how and why I used an autoethnographic approach and detail the practicalities experienced in terms of access, trust and exiting the field.

The use of this approach combines a number of different mobilisations, the first and main being autoethnography when attending car shows; recording embodied experiences and informal discussions in the field and thinking reflexively about what these meant. As a part of this I took photographs at car shows and other events, this was of twofold importance; on the one hand as a record of what I saw although the images are treated as subjectively created. However on the other hand photography is a normalised hobby which is often observed en masse at car shows and so this allowed a way of recording which did not affect normal behaviours in the field. Secondly I conducted an autoethnography of the daily life of a modified VW enthusiast, this included thinking about everyday driving practices and preparation for events as well as being involved in the social community of enthusiasts. This also facilitated recognition of certain patterns and routines of my enthusiast experience which might not have otherwise become apparent (Latham, 2010: 190). Thirdly and relatedly I undertook a version of what DeLyser (2014) refers to as an 'archival autoethnography'. Here my car, its parts and the practices involved in modifying and in calculating value were recorded with particular reflexive attention given to the materiality of these items and processes. This is, "collecting and contributing to the archive ourselves, [whilst] critically engaging with those practices" (ibid: 209), I extended the same understanding to the cars owned by enthusiasts too, as was clear in the interviews.

### **3.4.1 Autoethnography in Practice**

In practice there are a number of challenges and associated critiques of 'autoethnographic sensibilities' (Butz, 2010), it is important to briefly discuss these so as to avoid such pitfalls in the field<sup>32</sup>. One critique explained by Chang (2007: 214) is the overemphasis on narration

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<sup>32</sup> For a more detailed assessment of these critiques see Besio & Butz (2009) and Chang (2007).

rather than analysis or interpretation which may occur, an issue unique to a 'personal experience narrative' (hereafter PEN) or narrative ethnography approach to autoethnography (Besio & Butz, 2009). This is something which I have experienced when making field notes; it is easy to slip into a narrative account focussing on my own experiences and those of others but without any reflection or preliminary interpretation. However writing these notes up after each event in my field diary facilitated a chance to interpret and reflexively analyse these narratives in more depth. As a caveat, whilst I build on a rich wealth of similar accounts where the researcher's experiences are key elements of the data set<sup>33</sup> when utilising my own accounts I gave careful attention to not overemphasise the narration (Chang, 2007).

I recorded my observations and reflections in the field using the memo function on my mobile phone, phone use is appropriate conduct within the context of car shows and so this afforded not-taking without making any participants uncomfortable. I wrote out longer sections in private, usually in my car or tent, Laurier (2010: 121-2) notes that this is important to keep researcher status relatively low key. I then wrote out my field notes in a long hand field diary once I had returned home after each show. This field diary also included preliminary interpretations and more chance for reflection. The sections of my field diary which pertain to driving were not based on notes taken at the time, for safety reasons. However it is important to note that as Pearce (2016) has noted, we have a tendency to retrospectively group thoughts experienced whilst driving so that each journey can be seen to have had an overall theme rather than the collection of un-narrativised thoughts it may have been. This is something Pearce (2016) notes in her own autoethnographic reflections on driving and as an organising theme common in other texts on the subject however it is important to be aware

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<sup>33</sup> Glen Fuller's (2007) unpublished PhD thesis shows extended and detailed examples of this form of experiential data collection.



that this retrospective ordering will reflect elements of my situated knowledge. Not only is my actual driving experience engendered by being a modified car enthusiast driving a modified car but also my own understanding of that experience and my subsequent recollection of it, is engendered too.

One of the most important methodological patterns I noted across my field diary was that of my perspective to the show and culture afforded by the positional viewpoint of a club member participant. For nearly all of the shows I attended throughout the fieldwork I did so with one of two clubs which I have been a member of for five years. This changes the dynamic of attending shows, in particular it meant when I began the fieldwork I was able to access the somewhat complex social hierarchy of car clubs and their performance at shows relatively easily. In comparison when Ben Chappell (2012) explains that when he began his research with lowriders, access to the group took a considerable amount of work, this was work I had already completed as an enthusiast over 4 years before the research process. For other similar studies on modified car enthusiasm the researcher made friends during the process (Chappell, 2012; Fuller, 2007; Lumsden, 2013) although were not active members of the community beforehand. DeLyser (2001: 442) describes this as the difference between starting out as outside a culture and 'going native' (Tedlock, 2000). Those who study their own communities who are already 'natives' before the research begins. Studying my own community then is distinctly different from becoming deeply involved with a community after the start of research, for reasons of fieldwork or otherwise.

Exiting the field from the point of view of researcher-enthusiast is a difficult and not always desirable prospect. As Narayan (1993: 677), "with ongoing relationships there is never a question of doing 'hit-and-run' fieldwork. There are the infamous cautionary and clichéd tales

about 'going native' (Fuller, 1999: 221) and there are those whose research comes to a clear end but for whom the friendships of the field continue. I largely fit into this latter group however due to changes made to my car and the practice which was referred to as one participant as 'un-modifying'<sup>34</sup> I was able to take a step back which may not have otherwise be possible. I have noted above about how I modified the car whilst researching my PhD, however with the possibility of a fourth and unfunded year I began to see my car and its modifications less as 'autoethnographic archive'<sup>35</sup> and more as collection of financial assets. In this way the car was no longer an enjoyable materiality but rather a financially loaded object which could be split apart in order to sell its constituent parts<sup>36</sup>.

### **3.5 Interview Design**

The interviews conducted for this research were all approximately an hour length, they allowed in depth exploration and explanation by those actually involved in the culture. It gave a chance for them to speak about their motivations, desires and experiences within the modified VW and wider modified car culture in the UK and beyond. During the pilot phase of my autoethnographic fieldwork I identified a number of key areas which related to my research questions and which I wanted to explore further by verifying them with other enthusiasts. As such I selected four enthusiasts with whom to conduct semi-structured interviews. The interviews were designed as semi-structured to allow for easy elaboration of points and to afford extra anecdotal information (Longhurst, 2010: 103) about past experiences, to keep things similar to informal discussions I had in the field.

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<sup>34</sup> Whilst at a car meet in September 2015, a friend stated he had never known somebody to 'unmodify' a car rather than just sell it, I have used the term here as it hints at the power of the process of modifying as moving in one direction only.

<sup>35</sup> DeLyser (2015) uses this to refer to collecting kitsch items as contributing to a personal archive and analysis of this practice.

<sup>36</sup> The most valuable parts were the air ride suspension and the wheels, following a broken airbag in the suspension at the end of the 2015 show season I decided to 'un-modify' the car and sell the parts.

Due to being friends with the participants in the interview process I was often asked after the fact if they could add to their insight on any things and at times we have had informal discussions to further elaborate on interviews. The fact that interviewees were not overly concerned with changing any statements they made but rather elaborating on or adding to them to explain things in more detail shows the element of trust in research of this kind. Although only one participant mentioned this explicitly, the consensus was that as I am an enthusiast too the story we are trying to tell is similar and I am thus unlikely to take their words out of context. This research study has always been about recording and discussing the enthusiast community on their terms and to validate and prioritise their knowledge about the community and the enthusiasm. A further issue though can arise due to the friendship dynamic which I had with some participants, is that participants may be giving information in such a way to say, 'this is what you should write about me' as noted in the field by Taylor (2011: 17).

More informal discussions, were recorded with consent using a memo function on a mobile telephone are quoted to support examples. The decision to record data in this way was in part due to limitations of being in the field and because some things were only mentioned in passing. However it also afforded a 'go-along' interview approach in some ways, with participants able to point out cars or behaviours that they were talking about in situ (Kusenbach, 2003). This empirical evidence was recorded in situations where it was not culturally appropriate or within the everyday experiences of the participants or myself to be recording conversations with a Dictaphone. Four modified car enthusiasts were interviewed, this sample of enthusiasts was compiled based on brief discussions carried out in pilot fieldwork in the summer and winter of 2014 and through snowballing from similar discussions

at car shows throughout 2015. As noted above, I knew all of the participants before the research period, these pre-existing friendships included relationships of trust. However Steve, who lived in Aberystwyth, mentioned how coming to the university to be interviewed and signing an ethics form made it feel formal. As a result of this I endeavoured to offer a range of location options to ensure that the other interviews remained informal in atmosphere. The other three chose to be interviewed by Skype, with one citing it as being more comfortable than face to face. The reasons for interviewing each enthusiast are detailed below.

One particularly salient issue with interviewing people known to me or whom I considered friends was the assumption that I already knew some of the answers to my own questions, as noted by Porteous (1988: 76) and DeLyser (2001: 444). At times this led the informal conversational style interviews (Valentine, 2005) to become formalised as I had to check for clarification of points. This also occurred in the field because of the prior knowledge that I shared with the other enthusiasts (Laurier, 2010: 119). As DeLyser explains and as I saw in action in my interview with Luke, often interview answers tend to be brief and implying. Furthermore the usual elaboration prompts may serve to aggravate or confuse the participant because they think you should know what they are implying (ibid). The brief exchange below from the interview with Luke is good evidence of this issue in practice.

“W: ... do you identify yourself as a modified car enthusiast?

Luke: yes

W: Why?

Luke: Why?

W: Well I mean in what ways do you think of yourself as an enthusiast?

Luke: ...just a passion”

(Luke Interview).

Here Luke misread my line of questioning and because we already know each other well he assumed I would understand the point he was implying, making the follow up question seem awkward and not particularly helpful. In Nicola Smith's (2010: 1) research with relatives and close family friends of hers she notes that we have to document what is known and relevant but which is not verbalised (ibid: 8), we have a, "heightened sensitivity to the gestures, intonations....and biographies of the people we know". Subsequently at times I had to rely on articulating my own knowledge to help the elaboration of implied points. This reinforces the importance in these interviews and throughout the research to remain attentive to how my own identity and behaviours will shape my interaction with others (Valentine, 2005: 111).

### **3.6 Questionnaire Design & Online Distribution**

In this section I will briefly outline the justification for utilising questionnaires and distributing them online, in particular detailing decisions about format sampling and points of distribution. The questionnaires utilised in this research were designed and distributed using the Qualtrics software platform, this also afforded a downloadable preliminary report which presented the data for interpretation (see Questionnaire, Appendix III). As illustrated by the above discussion of other car cultures studies the use of questionnaires and surveys as a method of data collection is not typical. However one element which is common is the development of research design into a mixed-methods approach based on ethnographic findings (e.g. Falconer & Kingham, 2007: 184). Furthermore questionnaires are often selected as a way of gaining further information for context within a human geography based mixed-methods approach (Elwood, 2010; McGuirk & O'Neill, 2016: 246). In my research the autoethnographic fieldwork and preliminary coding of the interview transcripts showed two important patterns which influenced developments in my research design. Firstly the large scale of the modified VW community and in particular the geographical spread of enthusiasts

across the country and beyond, this was particularly evident in discussions and observations made at car shows. Questionnaires and particularly those distributed online afford data collection at much larger scales than can be afforded by a single researcher (McLafferty, 2010: 87). Secondly, I noted the importance of the internet and online spaces such as forums and social networking pages played a larger role in communication of knowledge and enthusiasm than I had first realised. Whilst interviewees suggested the existence of wider patterns in behaviour, experience and opinion across the community by utilising a questionnaire survey I could ask a wider group of enthusiasts to see whether such findings would be confirmed. Combined with the realisation of the role played by the internet it was clear that forums and online spaces acted as in situ networks of communication which would afford distribution of questionnaires along channels already used by my participants. As stated in Chapter 1 I recognise the importance of studying the modified VW community on its own terms, this includes non-disruptive data collection methods which reflect normal behaviours for those within the community.

Interestingly several enthusiasts whom I approached about interview stated that they would rather write their answers and asked for a questionnaire style approach instead, their reasons ranging from confidence in speaking to wanting time to think about their responses. This illustrates the fact that questionnaires offer an anonymising power which can make participants feel more confident to elaborate on their opinions or observations. Vaaranen and Wieloch (2002: 44) found that some young people were uncomfortable being interviewed in person about their car cruising behaviour. Similarly Beckett and Clegg (2007) found that questionnaire completion assisted by a researcher introduced stress of judgement and thus stories being altered to align with the supposed opinions of the researcher. Additionally, in

an online research context Van Selm and Jankowski (2006) noted that respondents were cautious to include opinions in their responses to a questionnaire distributed by email, due to the potential for identification. This shows the importance both of questionnaires' anonymising power when it comes to data collection but also the need to reinforce this when distributing questionnaires. This was something which I made particular reference to in the information which accompanied the link to the questionnaire at the point of distribution.

In terms of format the questionnaire was designed to be relatively short, as best practice suggests fifteen questions or less for an online questionnaire (Madge, 2010: 175). I began the questions with simple and easy to answer queries (Dillman & Bowker, 2001) requesting age category and gender, leaving questions requiring more reflexive responses until later on as advised by McGuirk and O'Neill (2016). These later questions took an open-ended format both to get detailed answers about experience and not fixed responses but also to afford unanticipated answers and opinions (Bryman, 2012: 250). In this way the qualitative data collected from the questionnaires could include rich reflexive accounts similar to those recorded in the interviews. However by utilising purposive sampling and the data I had already gathered from interviews and autoethnography it was possible to word questions about cultural experiences in ways which would be understood by participants. I took this into account in phrasing questions so that participants would feel they had the knowledge to answer and that this was within the limits of their cultural experience of modified VW enthusiasm (Madge, 2007).

As such I was able to translate these key themes into variables of participant experience then asked questions which evoke opinions regarding these variables (McGuirk & O'Neill, 2016). For example, from my autoethnographic and interview data I knew the 'built not bought'

debate, outlined in Chapter 6, would be an area which participants would have experienced and or have strong opinions about. I posed this debate in two questions as it is made up of two opposing variables or opinions; that enthusiasts should be involved in modifying their own cars or that this should be left to professionals. As such I translated this theme first into a question which asked, "Is it important to you to be involved with building your own car? If so, why?" followed by the question, "Do you think it's important to use companies run by enthusiasts? If so, why?". Whilst the first question invited enthusiasts to give their opinion on enthusiast labour (Fuller, 2007) it recognises that common opinions on this topic come within the context of the 'built not bought' debate. Additionally the second question has two roles to play, it invited information about enthusiasts who turn their hobby into a business but in light of the previous question it does so within the context of the 'built not bought' debate. Thus participants may be more critical or supportive of enthusiast businesses depending on what their thoughts are on working on your own car, as per the previous question. By asking two questions focused on similar and related answers it was also possible to check the consistency of participant's responses (McLafferty, 2010: 81).

The choice to distribute the questionnaire online was based upon the nature of enthusiast groupings to gather in self-organised shared interest groups such as forums (e.g. Banaji & Buckingham, 2010). As such a purposive sampling strategy could be utilised because members of modified VW enthusiast forums and Facebook pages have an obvious shared interest specific to the research questions. In this way pre-existing social channels within the community could be harnessed for more efficient distribution of the questionnaire (McGuirk & O'Neill, 2016). In terms of specific online channels, I selected forums and social network pages of enthusiast groups utilised by myself during my Master's research and my previous



enthusiast experiences. By choosing groups I was already recognised and active within and where I had the permission of any moderators I avoided the potential intrusion of a researcher within a private web group. By posting a link to the questionnaire accompanied by a brief covering description of my research on forums and Facebook pages of enthusiast groups, it would be their choice to opt into the research and there would be no way to trace their identity directly . However whilst every opportunity was taken to anonymise respondents, due to the nature of car culture and discussing points relating to specific vehicles known throughout the community some enthusiasts identified themselves<sup>37</sup>. In these cases an ethical decision was made to use pseudonyms where necessary to protect participants who had perhaps unknowingly identified themselves after agreeing to participate only because they of their assured anonymity. To conclude questionnaires distributed online across existing enthusiast networks afforded rich data to contextualise findings interpreted from the interviews and autoethnographic research.

### **3.7 Research Design Concluding Remarks**

The methods and methodological discussion above serves to explain and justify the importance of the data collection techniques in presenting rich and fruitful data about experiences of the modified VW community and culture. The decision to use a mixed-methods approach was informed by my participation in the modified VW culture as researcher-enthusiast, with each method selected to help represent a different facet of enthusiast experience. To conclude my understandings of the practices and knowledges of this community gave me the tools and understanding (Hyndman, 2001: 262) to be informed by the participants and lived enthusiast experience throughout the research design.

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<sup>37</sup> This was also true of data recorded from the interviews.

# 4 Becoming Enthusiast

## 4.1 Introduction

This chapter builds on the previous discussion of literature and key themes across enthusiasm research, in order to give a conceptual and empirical account of the ways in which individuals become enthusiastic about modified VW cars. This chapter focuses at first on the individual personal scale and then shows how these individual identities are the socially constructed products of the larger collective community. Exploring the ways in which enthusiasts become enthusiastic for modified cars in the first place gives an explanation both of how and why they identify as enthusiasts. It is important to note as well that not everyone I met, spoke to or observed over the two years of fieldwork would identify themselves as modified VW enthusiasts. For many individuals they are car enthusiasts first and foremost with modified VW's being one of several car cultures they participate within. In particular the empirics shows the importance of a personal narrative, shared experiences and prior knowledge as important stocks which enthusiasts draw upon within their communities.

## 4.2 Family & Inheriting Enthusiasm

I want to begin with an empirically supported pattern which I will refer to as inherited enthusiasm. This is the notion that a parent passes on their interest to their children that this sparks their journey into enthusiasm. Plotting a personal narrative and learning about the area of enthusiasm can be important motivators for people, in particular the way in which their broader personal narrative perhaps as a member of a family interested in cars plays into their becoming enthusiastic. Geoghegan (2013) found that one of her participants became a telecommunications enthusiast as a chance to make a link with a deceased relative who had worked in the industry. Similarly and with reference to car enthusiasm specifically Hatton (2007) observed that young modifiers often follow their fathers into the motor trade. Indeed

the participants in the online questionnaire variously listed a family member as being their inspiration for getting into modified VWs. Of these participants, 11% stated their father's interest in modified VW's or wider automotive cultures, whilst 7% stated 'parents' and 5% 'family' (Questionnaire Q3). This shows the way in which enthusiasm in everyday life can be transferred across networks unrelated to cars, such as those of family; inspiring and transferring enthusiasm. One respondent explained that their enthusiasm for modified VW's resulted from, "[My] family has always been into it & owned modified cars, I've loved it from being young, so got into it myself" (Questionnaire Q3). This summarises the pattern that a combination of family interest and exposure since childhood are key to the ways in which some participants become enthusiasts. Similarly one of Lumsden's (2015: 43) participants explained her understanding of how some peoples' enthusiasm for modified cars grew as, "a love for cars and engines and most people have grown up with this in their blood, watching their dads or uncles working on cars and so they have an interest in it". Ben Chappell (2012) found that because of the close ties between the lowrider car culture he explored and wider cultural and historical Chicano identities the enthusiasm for cars often became embedded and intertwined in other networks such as those connected by family. This is interesting as a context for the empirics which follow, as it too points towards a common theme of inheriting enthusiasm from a family member.

In this study Dan immediately embedded his identification as enthusiast within a narrative stemming from his early life as the passenger in his Dad's supercharged Ford Capri. When asked if he identified himself as a modified car enthusiast he replied simply, "Yeah course I do I mean I got a modified car...always been into cars since I was...a little kid...I've always had the Dad who's had the stupidly powerful car...an old Ford Capri...2.8 [litre engine] he had it

supercharged and it was just a monster” (Dan Interview). As Dan regaled his experience of being a passenger in this car it was clear that this was a happy memory and that this sparked his interest in cars which persists to this day. Furthermore the fact that this Capri was supercharged<sup>38</sup>, shows an involvement with modified cars from an early age. This shows the way in which early exposure to his Dad’s enthusiasm and the consequent modified Ford Capri was now, almost fifteen years later, a key part of Dan’s own enthusiasm narrative. Similarly Steve explained that his enthusiasm began with, “...probably toy cars and being a passenger in my Dad’s car...a [Ford] Sierra...he used to drive it pretty quickly”(Steve Interview). Steve then elaborated on this account and talked about the feelings he associated with these experiences of his Dad’s car and driving. It became clear that Steve plotted these experiences as the early sparks to his later enthusiast flame and interest in cars. He stated, “...we used to go on drives from like Mach[Machynlleth] coz his Mum used to live in Mach...[we] always used to fly back listening to like trance and stuff on [BBC] Radio 1...it was a good feeling” (Steve Interview). It is clear from the language Steve uses that he places importance on the embodied experience of being a passenger in a fast car, driven by his Dad who was particularly interested in cars. Interestingly, of the interviewees, Steve was the participant most interested in modified cars in terms of fast driving and the feelings of speed, perhaps showing a clear link back to his becoming enthusiast. Steve’s memory of being a passenger as associated with trance music makes for an interesting link between soundscapes within the car and the embodied experience of driving or passengering as being able to conjure the, “good feeling” he recalls.

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<sup>38</sup> Adding a supercharger is a modification which enhances the performance of the standard 2.8 litre engine.

Furthermore both Dan and Steve's memories of their Dad's cars suggest the importance placed on particular cars, a further example of this came from a questionnaire response, "My dad had multiple modified cars when I was younger; the most iconic was a Mk1 Golf GTi with a 2 litre engine conversion" (Questionnaire Q3). This suggests that besides the enthusiasm for cars or driving in general there may be the beginnings of an interest in a particular car or manufacturer. I will return to this notion again below but with reference to Dan's interest in modified VW Polo's as a result of a car which his Mum owned, suggesting some variance to the gendered norms of inherited enthusiasm within this community. Six of the questionnaire respondents stated that they first got into modified VW's and Audis because of their Dad specifically, with a further six stating that it was due to their parents or family (Questionnaire Q3). For the most part this research is based on the empirical evidence of young men, however one female respondent explained that her enthusiasm for modified cars also came from experiences with her Dad. "My Dad was involved in motorsport all his life and I got into it from a very young age, from then on I became interested in classic Volkswagens..." (Questionnaire, Q3). In support of this pattern of inherited enthusiasm but in contradiction to the majority gendered pattern of the rest of the data Dan talks about how a car that his Mum owned ultimately influenced the car he had at the time of the interview. Whilst he had already described his Dad's supercharged Ford Capri mentioned above he then went on to explain his enthusiasm for VW Polo's<sup>39</sup>.

"where it all comes from, that's why she likes the Polo and it's how I got mine sort of thing and even [the mk1 Polo] sat next to the Capri, even though it was a 1 litre...it was beautiful...absolutely beautiful (laughs) and it was just you know" (Dan Interview).

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<sup>39</sup> Dan and I know each other through a club for VW Polo owners.

This suggests that the familial element of inherited enthusiasm is important beyond the gender of the parent to some extent, below Dan elaborates on this car story further.

“W: How did you decide to get a Polo?

Dan: I didn’t really decide I mean my Mum had the Mk1 [Polo] we’d had a bit of financial problems so we always went through with shit cars ...and then Mum got a load of money and she went ‘right I’m gonna buy another Polo’, straight down to Volkswagen and bought the Polo that I’ve got now” (Dan Interview).

This further elaboration is interesting both because of the way the car was literally passed on and for the way that the meaning attached to the VW brand was also inherited. Here we see that it is not just an interest in cars as passed on by Dan’s Dad but also a brand loyalty to VW passed onto him by his Mum<sup>40</sup>. Throughout my time in the field and particularly at aircooled VW shows I was regaled with stories of how people bought cars, in particular VW Beetles, because of those that their parents had owned. Interestingly there was some distinction made between the first time an enthusiast had become interested in cars and the first time they had become interested in modified cars. For example the above explanation by Steve about an interest in cars stemming from drives with his Dad was his way of explaining how he first got interested in car enthusiasm at the wider scale, however his interest in modified cars came at a later stage in his lifecourse. He talks about a sort of progression stating that, “being into cars...you obviously get into race-cars” (Steve Interview). This generalisation implies the transition that car enthusiasts have between seeing the car as *automobile* object towards something more, in this case a component of motorsport. It has been noted elsewhere that the presence of motorsport car racing in popular culture affects the way in which people relate to the car and may influence decisions to replicate fast driving behaviours (Fuller, 2007;

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<sup>40</sup> Following this fieldwork period Dan sold his VW Polo and replaced it with a newer VW Polo which he continues to own and modify, further evidencing his brand and model loyalty.

Lumsden, 2015; Redshaw, 2007). It is important to note that of the enthusiasts interviewed Steve is perhaps the one who would most identify with being a motorsport fan as well as a modified car enthusiast, he is the only interviewee who regularly takes his car to a track.

Steve talks about his first real interest in the modified car culture as stemming from the magazine media, “the whole like show car modified thing...started probably when my mate gave me a copy of Max Power<sup>41</sup>, can’t remember how old I was, probably 15...”(Steve Interview). My own experience is very similar; it was upon picking up a copy of Fast Car<sup>42</sup> that I first saw modified cars in detail. I look back on this now as a moment when the whole culture was unveiled before me as a connected culture. Prior to this I had seen modified cars around my home town and being already interested in cars these had attracted my attention. However this magazine showed to me that it was more than a few isolated modified cars and that it was underlain by a large and varied culture, stretching beyond the cars themselves. However for other enthusiasts the interest in cars may become apparent at a different point in the life-course; when asked how long he had been into Volkswagens John stated that it was since he had his first car when he was 17 (John Interview). This shows that the interest in modifying a car or being a car enthusiast may not arise until an individual first becomes *automobile* or owns their own car. In a later discussion at a car show John explained that he already had an interest in cars when he chose a 1968 Volkswagen Beetle as his first car, a decision he explained, with humour, that only an enthusiast would make<sup>43</sup>. Similarly Luke linked his interest in cars to this first real freedom of automobility stating that he had been

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<sup>41</sup> As discussed in Section 2.7 of the car culture literature review.

<sup>42</sup> Fast Car, first published in 1987 was Max power’s rival as a magazine for all types of modified car, ultimately outlasting Max Power and still exists today.

<sup>43</sup> This was an allusion to the fact that Beetle’s require more maintenance to keep on the road than the average first car.

interested in Volkswagens “since I was about 16...just about to get my license” (Luke Interview). This suggests that the demographic of modified car enthusiasts as being young and inexperienced drivers which is often perceived<sup>44</sup> may be based in the fact that to some it is the car itself which brings an interest in modifying.

It is important to note here that whilst this research supports the notion that the majority of modifiers are young; with 80% of the questionnaire respondents being aged 17-25, the remaining 20%<sup>45</sup> (Questionnaire Q2) shows more variance than wider notions of modified car enthusiasm as youth culture (e.g. Lumsden, 2013). The examples of enthusiasm as a result of becoming automobile given Luke and John suggest a different way into modified car enthusiasm than by inheritance. In these instances it was the owning of a car and the freedom of automobility which it brought which led to an interest in the car beyond its automobility. A sort of fetishisation of the car, as something which brings many young people a freedom and range of mobility they did not have before, as a result driving becomes a key activity beyond the necessity to travel to destinations and with more time spent in the car for leisure the chance of wanting to modify it. Collin-Lange and Karl Benediktsson (2011), as noted in the literature review, suggest that an interest in cars, cruising and associated social gatherings amongst young people in Norway stem from their love of the afforded automobility with which the car provides them. One way of explaining this draw into modified car culture for those who have just passed their test comes from the legal structures of age in the United Kingdom, when you are 17 you can drive a car but you can not participate in legal alcohol consumption and subsequent socialising until you are 18 years of age. Karen Lumsden (2013:

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<sup>44</sup> As explained in detail by Lumsden (2013) with reference to stereotyping and perceptions of young modified car owners.

<sup>45</sup> This percentage along with the fact that 17% of respondents were female forms a potential challenge to the gendered and aged stereotype of the boy racer.



139) found that modified car enthusiasts found it easier to go out and socialise in their cars than to risk going into town, being asked for age verifying identification that they did not have and being turned away.

### **4.3 Narrative Identity & Routes into Enthusiasm**

One other widely followed path is through participation in modifying practices and interaction with existing enthusiasts in the community. This is in part true for inherited enthusiasm too as young people interact with their enthusiastic parents. The ways in which enthusiasts position themselves within narratives of enthusiasm is an important signifier of their experiences of the culture. I started each interview with the question, “Do you identify yourself as a modified car enthusiast?” (e.g. Luke Interview). Following this up with a prompt to elaborate on why this was the case. Steve answered this question by tying his identity as enthusiast to the car itself and the material processes of modifying with the resulting modified car being something which reflects part of his own identity. This is the perhaps more commonly assumed understanding of modified car enthusiasm as driven by a desire to personalise a car which is the same as everyone else’s. “I think...that when you get a car it’s just like a blank slate and it’s better to just put your own touch on it, it’s like instead of driving round with a blank bit of paper you have something with your own personal touch on it” (Steve Interview). This suggests both that Steve wants the car to be personalised to better suit him but also to differentiate it from other road user’s vehicles, this latter notion implies a certain performative aspect to the modified car, the idea that to some extent a car is modified to achieve attention. This is a notion which is discussed in more detail in the Chapter 8, when I turn to the juxtaposition between driving a modified car as at once personal experience and performance. For John, it was the sociability afforded by existing interactions with community participants which led him to identify himself as an enthusiast. “I attend car

shows and I quite enjoy looking at modified cars and the process of car modification” (John Interview). John later states that he likes going to car shows as it gives opportunity to socialise with friends<sup>46</sup>; showing the importance of community and socialising as foundations for enthusiasm. For John it is the participation in a social interaction afforded by physical co-presence with likeminded enthusiasts which helps to form relationships of trust (Urry, 2003). By building this trust and through the sharing of the sociability of emotion and enthusiasm (Ahmed, 2008; Geoghegan, 2013) enthusiasts such as John become inducted into the community.

#### **4.4 Enthusiasts as Hobbyists**

Enthusiasts often identify their enthusiasm as a hobby (e.g. Hills, 2002; Yarwood & Shaw, 2010) or define their interests in comparison to hobbies. For several participants the issue of defining their enthusiasm was made easier by making comparisons to more well-known examples of passion for activities or objects. For example when asked why he modified his car Steve replied, with relative ambiguity, “It’s like why do people get tattoos? It’s like that” (Steve Interview), Steve is suggesting similarities in time, effort and money within a different creative enthusiasm. Similarly when Karen Lumsden (2015: 43) asked one of her participants Debbie why her modified car was important to her she replied, “I could answer that by asking ‘Well why is granny’s knitting important to her?...or meeting for a cup of tea?’ It’s important because it’s a hobby”. I think both Steve in my research and Debbie in Lumsden’s are implying the same point, people engage in car modification and all that goes with that for the same reasons that other people engage with their hobbies. In both cases this shows that due to the emotional and personal attachment to the car, its modification and all that goes with that, it

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<sup>46</sup> See Chapter 7.2 about car shows as social gatherings.

can be difficult to put into words. This reflects the notion discussed in section 2.2.9 whereby emotions can not always be simply represented through socio-linguistic fixing, evidencing the nature of emotion within enthusiasm. It is therefore much easier to invoke examples of similarly involved enthusiasts as a way of explaining how they feel. When interviewing Luke about his modified car, once I had learned that he identified himself as an enthusiast I asked in what ways he thought of himself as one to which he answered, “Just a passion”. Several of the questionnaire respondents spoke of their love and passion for their enthusiasm and modified VW’s, with one stating that they became interested in the cars, “For the love” (Questionnaire Q3.16). Furthermore in an informal discussion at a car meet, one enthusiast told me that modifying was, “...a passion, is in the blood isn’t it” (Field Diary, 8/11/16). This shows the emotional intensity of enthusiasts’ attachment to modifying and cars as a love or passion, something which is often characterised as inescapable. The notion of passion and modifying is discussed further in Chapter 6.6.1 with regards to enthusiasts choosing to take their cars to enthusiast-run businesses because they are seen to embody a shared passion for modifying.

#### **4.5 Enthusiasm, Dedication & Longevity**

Here I use two passages from my field diary, one from the first show I attended for fieldwork and one from the last, both contain detailed reflective accounts of my feelings and emotions of enthusiasm as prompted by their respective stages in the fieldwork process.

“...it reminded me very clearly of a similar drive last year; it was a drive to a different show but likewise the first camping one I attended that season. With the sun shining, windows down and the sounds of wind rushing into the car and ‘summer’ anthem style music playing loudly I was relaxed and at once excited.” (Field Diary, 17/5/14).

In this quote I am referring to the drive to a show in June 2013, before the start of this research. By looking back reflectively at this passage two things can be noted, the first is the way in which current emotions are influenced by emotionally charged memories of similar experiences or practices. The second comes when this passage is compared with the one below, in which I am reflecting on entering the final show of the season and of my fieldwork and shows the passionate dedication but also the longevity of feelings of enthusiasm.

“As I drive into a car show the sounds of music from my own stereo and from the sounds around me seep into my consciousness, as I look around I see that I’m surrounded by modified cars, smiling faces, tents. The resulting feeling is difficult to describe, I have goosebumps, the hairs on my neck stand on end, I have an uncontrollable grin” (Field Diary, 11/9/15).

The embodied responses described above show the level of emotional connection to enthusiasm and event to certain events. The passage above describes my thoughts and feelings as I drove into the camping area of the Edition38 show, as the last big camping show of the season this was both a culmination of the year’s enthusiast events and of my fieldwork period. In particular my observations of the role played by sounds in creating intense emotional responses can be seen as a similar to the relationship Steve inscribes between listening to trance music in his Dad’s Sierra and the consequent “good feeling” discussed earlier<sup>47</sup>. In comparison to the first excerpt above, over a year previously it is clear to see that enthusiasm can retain its intensity over longer periods or that it can be refreshed by context; in this case particularly by sounds. In terms of narrative and dedication, it is relatively rare that enthusiasts cease to be enthusiastic for modified VW cars, as noted earlier in this chapter,

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<sup>47</sup> See section 4.2

enthusiasm is described as being in the blood suggesting its inescapable nature and consequent longevity.

#### **4.6 My Enthusiast Identity Over Time**

I turn now to the developmental changes in my own experiences and identity as a modified VW enthusiast have changed over the years and in particular have evolved through the course of this research, as discussed critically in the Chapter 3. Below I discuss this at a wider scale, extending before and ultimately after the fieldwork. However the sense of narrative was particularly sharp over the fieldwork period because I had a record of two years' worth of field diary entries, which read as a map of my changing attitudes to enthusiasm. When I first got into modified cars I identified as an enthusiast in part for the way a modified car could be performed, I liked having a car which was different and which gained attention; from other enthusiasts and beyond. However with this attention came a new group of friends and a new community in which to perform, over time my enthusiasm became less about the car and how it was perceived and more about the people I met along the way. This in turn changed the way in which I understood the modified VW culture and altered my motivations; I attended shows because it was a chance to socialise with likeminded friends and to catch up with them (e.g. Field Diary, 9/3/14). When I first started going to VW shows regularly in 2012 I was going to look at cars because I was interest to see what others were doing and to get inspiration regarding modifications for my own car. Over time I developed more friendships and became socially active within the community, largely by going to car meets in the years before this research study. My membership and participation in car clubs and interactions at shows throughout my PhD research meant that my experiences as a car enthusiast were often as much about the social aspects as the material cars themselves. It was a common theme raised by participants in the field that for outsiders looking in modified car enthusiasts look

as if they are only interested in their cars, whilst this is the key interest which binds the community together it is much more about the people involved. It is for this reason, as discussed in Chapter 6, that Glen Fuller (2007: 92) interprets modified cars as socio-technical projects, as much a product of the social interaction between enthusiasts as they are collections of material parts.

The temporal scale of enthusiasm is important, often people present themselves as being enthusiasts because they have been coming to events and shows for a certain amount of years. For example at Bug Jam in 2015 I noted that one enthusiast who we camped with had kept and collected the allocated club camping signs from each Bug Jam show he had attended, these went back over 15 years. This shows the particular importance of car shows as events of collective enthusiasm but also as annually repeated signposts within one's own narrative of enthusiasm. There are different scales at play here, at the widest scale enthusiasts often remain dedicated to their enthusiasm over long periods of time. However this is not a constant identification, the other scale then, much more minute, is that of the weekend event. For some their enthusiasm is only enacted, performed and experienced for two weekends a year at their favourite shows, as with one person I spoke to in the field. He explained that he had been coming to these two shows for almost twenty years as such he identified himself as a VW enthusiast.

Whilst the final show season came to an end in November of 2015 I added two later Epilogue sections, in December 2015 and December 2016 respectively, the latter detailed marked changes in my understanding of and in some ways my passion for modified VW enthusiasm. The culmination of two events led to a change in my outlook as an enthusiast. The first occurred in November 2016 when my Polo suffered a timing chain fault causing engine

damage which ultimately would cost more than the car's value to fix. "It was with a heavy heart that I chose to end this particular car journey here" (Field Diary Epilogue, Dec 2016). However I had already begun to develop a new enthusiasm specifically for aircooled VW's and thinking critically and reflexively this was in part due to what I had learned about the watercooled VW community as a result of this fieldwork.

"One thing which struck me throughout all of the research I completed was that the politics of the scene and the competitive and sometimes negative behaviour within the culture appeared to be limited to the watercooled community. The aircooled community always seemed more laid back and focussed on cars and community more than who had the coolest car or the best wheels. I do not yet know whether this is just a 'grass looking greener on the other side' effect"(Field Diary Epilogue).

This feeling had been developing for a while and following BugJam 30, a key aircooled VW show, in the summer of 2016 I decided to purchase an aircooled VW from Shelvey. With this car in my ownership and my change in understanding of the modified VW communities outlined above I feel like I am beginning the journey into modified VW enthusiasm again but this time within a slightly different community. This also serves to reinforce the relative situated knowledge of my research within this thesis and the fluid and diverse understandings of different modified VW enthusiasts over time.

#### **4.7 Becoming Enthusiast Conclusions**

This empirical chapter has aimed to provide an introductory context explaining the ways in which enthusiasts become enthused, begin to identify as enthusiasts and how they relate to these identities in their own terms. It has also detailed my own contextual positionality and the development of personal understandings of enthusiasm over the autoethnographic fieldwork period. This chapter provides an introductory context of becoming enthused which can then be positioned within the wider collective experiences and context of enthusiasm in

the following chapters. There are three key patterns identified within this chapter, each detail a different aspect of the multifaceted journey into becoming enthusiast. Firstly there is the observed pattern of inherited enthusiasm, this shows that a passion for modified cars, described above as existing, “in the blood” ” (Field Diary, 8/11/14) often results from interaction with existing participants in the community. In the case of inherited enthusiasm these participants are family members, interaction and the relationship with them leads to enthusiasm being transferred via family networks. However as John explains above interaction with friends who are already participants can also lead to similar introductions to modified VW enthusiasm. This notion of interaction between enthusiastic participants is explored in further detail in the following chapter, especially with reference to producing and maintaining a larger community structure. Furthermore these interactions, when occurring at car shows, as noted by John above, are explored with reference to these events as important social spaces of enthusiasm in chapter 7.

Secondly there are connections made between youth and automobility and the way in which becoming *automobile* can set the context for an interest in cars and modifying. Furthermore the data presented supports the observations made elsewhere that the majority of modified car enthusiasts are young men (Hatton, 2007; Lumsden, 2013) but also shows some variance in terms of patterns of age and gender. Thirdly it is clear that enthusiasts see their emotional involvement and investment in car ownership, modifying and social interaction as being constituent of a passion. The passionate involvement observed above can also be observed as dedication and evidence for the longevity of enthusiasm and shows the clear emotional element of enthusiasm as outlined by Geoghegan (2009; 2013). For many people once enthused, their enthusiasm lasts for the rest of their life. In particular I presented evidence in



this chapter of this from my own experiences of enthusiasm in the field, showing that whilst my enthusiasm for modified cars remained the same, there were changes to the ways in which I identified myself as enthusiast over time.

In summary this chapter has shown how particular social interactions with friends and family, particular cars, car shows and engagement with cultural media such as magazines all form a cultural context. Whilst the experiences detailed here describe individual journeys into enthusiasm they are set within experiences of a wider context of community participation and understandings from across the modified VW culture. Exploration of this cultural context and its impacts on individual and collective practices, experiences and performances of VW enthusiasm runs through the remainder of the empirical chapters in the thesis. The examples of passionate dedication and emotional investment in modified VWs will be further discussed in chapter 6 with reference to working on the modified car whilst discussion driving and enthusiasm, as noted by Steve above, is explored in chapter 8. The importance of social interactions between community members are highlighted in chapter 5 and again with reference to working on the modified car in chapter 6, whilst the sociability of attending car shows with other enthusiasts is discussed in chapter 7. The importance of the community, community norms and knowledge exchange which underlies almost all of this cultural context is discussed in detail in the following chapter, and referenced throughout the thesis.

# 5 Community & Clubs

## 5.1 Introduction

“...there are plenty of friendly, helpful VW groups that always help you with what could be wrong [with your car]....it is kind of like a big family” (Questionnaire, Q14).

“...living the low lifestyle we all know and love...the lifestyle that isn't just about driving around in a lowered car...The one that's about...the community ...the one we've all become a part of” (Terry, 2010).

The two quotes above from a questionnaire respondent and a commentator in a modified VW magazine (Terry, 2010) highlight the importance of the modified VW culture as a community. That is both as somewhere that knowledge can be transferred and skills can be learnt but also as a collective community or network across which this knowledge moves. This is a context where, as a result of shared enthusiasm, the community has been able to build stocks of social capital and create established and recognised norms of interaction (Murphy, 2006: 431). This chapter discusses the modified VW community both as a large scale community of the modified VW culture as a whole and also at the micro-scale of community evident in car clubs. I particularly draw on the social capital literature because social capital can be understood as being the beneficial outcome of group membership (Bourdieu, 1986: 250; Portes, 1998: 7). Furthermore the community scale is something which Geoghegan (2013) observes as being important to a geography of enthusiasm and so this chapter aims to further an understanding of the role played by the community within enthusiast experience. I also discuss the role played by social interactions between community participants as playing a key role in maintaining norms and behaviours. In the latter half of this chapter I turn to look at the online spaces and sites which the modified VW community utilises and argue that the

empirical evidence further highlights the articulation of social capital, knowledge transfer and norms of interaction. In particular I discuss whether the lack of face-to-face interactions and or physical co-presence between parties (Urry, 2003).

## **5.2 Community Interactions, Capital & Knowledge Exchange**

The process by which one becomes enthused builds up as they gather community resources such as knowledge which is specific to the context of enthusiasm, in a similar research context Belk (2004: 275) refers to this context specific information as “special knowledge”. I observed the articulation of special knowledge in the field when participants who were new to the community began to gain access by way of drawing on stocks of community resources. This also provided an insight into the ways in which knowledge exchange, social interactions and social capital access mediate access to the modified VW community. For example I attended the local All Types show in North Wales in May 2014 and for one of the young men; Martin, it was the first time he had attended a VW show (Field Diary, 18/5/14). I noted that Martin was already well equipped with the knowledge and access to social capital, by way of his past experience both of modifying and of owning Volkswagens, which gave him community specific special knowledge (Belk, 2004: 275) resources to draw on. Thus this eased his access to the community (Field Diary, 18/5/14). Furthermore Martin was working as an apprentice at one of the most well-known garages within our social circle at the time. He was working alongside Shelvey who was already an accepted member of the group<sup>48</sup>. Consequently they had already developed a social relationship through professional and social interactions which meant that Martin was trusted both as a mechanic and a competent enthusiast. In this way Martin was both a relative stranger to the immediate community in which he was

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<sup>48</sup> I discuss Shelvey’s role running an enthusiast business and the role of trust further in Chapter 6.6

participating but also held stocks of relevant human and social capital from the wider modified VW community. In the field this meant that Martin was able to articulate views which matched up with the accepted norms of the community; norms which he had likely learnt through repeated interactions with Shelvey and others in his workplace.

Martin was able to articulate his specialist knowledge by way of social interactions with other existing members of the community, this often informal exchange of knowledge amongst car enthusiasts has been described as 'car talk' (Lumsden, 2013). Car talk primarily consists of discussing each other's cars, planned modifications, popular or noteworthy cars in the scene at the moment and past anecdotes about cars and driving. In the field I noted that, "It is clear that 'car talk' helps to cultivate what is generally accepted as 'cool' in terms of modifications and behaviour" (Field Diary, 7/6/14). Talk or conversation is a key element of the social interactions which are observed in collective sociability of enthusiasts (Geoghegan, 2013), co-present encounters (Urry, 2003) and in social capital exchange and use (Mohan & Mohan, 2002). The content of this talk is inherently sociable, it does not function as an exchange of technical expertise but rather of opinions and experiences in order to foster sociability amongst participants (Geoghegan, 2013: 45). The actual face-to-face interaction does not have to be formalised or even specifically aimed at knowledge exchange. Urry (2003: 162) explains that whilst repeated social interaction is important for the production of trust between the parties, the content itself can range from information exchange to informal gossip. This illustrates the ways in which car talk exchanges can occur all the time within the community, not necessarily serving a purpose of knowledge exchange and yet still reinforce community stocks of trust. Urry (2003) is of course not talking about social capital theory, however Portes (1998: 7) similarly notes that the repetition of such interactions. For example

between Martin and other enthusiasts present, over time instils understandings of the correct contexts for future interactions and to build up stocks of social capital by way of increasing trust for future exchanges.

Martin was not only able to articulate context-specific knowledge he was also able to correctly identify when and where to draw on this. Borhek (1989: 98, my emphasis) notes that one of the key elements of knowledge exchange within the modified car culture contains information on how and when to draw on that information. He states that, in the hot-rod community he studied, “There are things you *do* and there are things you *don’t do*”. This refers to an understanding of community defined guidelines for a range of behaviours; not just contexts for social interaction but also information about how a car should be modified, this will be discussed in detail below. Afforded by his work as a mechanic and the cars he owned Martin already had some of this special knowledge and was thus accepted as a trusted member of the community very quickly. This opening example highlights the fact that understanding or learning to understand community specific knowledge and the contexts in which to utilise it is key to community relations as will be shown throughout the chapter.

A similar example from a car show involves the interviewee Dan and his experience of attending a VW show for the first time. Dan had explained to us that it was his first show season, myself and one other enthusiast then used the show to point out to him the particular trends in modifying. On reflection I realised we were helping Dan to amass special knowledge and access community stocks of social capital on how and when to articulate it. In an understanding of social capital, interactions enable participants to exchange knowledge but also to learn norms of interaction for future exchanges (Mohan & Mohan, 2002: 195). This means that in future Dan would be able to engage in more and varied social interactions with

enthusiasts thus improving his access to and use of social capital. This is because one of the outcomes of strong stocks of social capital is the ability to interact through enhanced communication and cooperation (Hoye et al., 2015: 4). For Urry (2003: 167) the learned normative values and rules of interaction which afford Dan and Martin the ability to access knowledge and trust can be understood as learning to be mutually attentive. As noted<sup>49</sup> Urry (ibid) builds on Goffman's (1963: 84-5) to argue that two people conversing in a context known to them embody this mutual attentiveness to each other because of their shared experiences. This is particularly true of enthusiasts who have a broad stock of shared experiences already; as evidenced with Martin's access to the community detailed above. Furthermore Urry argues that this mutual attentiveness requires both parties to be physically co-present in this mutually known context, this is problematized later with reference to online enthusiast interactions. It is important that both parties have learned about the context of their interactions because as Falk and Kilpatrick (2000: 104) argue mobilised social capital, such as trust, can only be understood in its socio-cultural context. In both Urry's approach and social capital theory breaching these rules can lead to erosion of trust and future exchanges. Furthermore with reference to emotional geography Geoghegan (2013: 45) notes that shared enthusiasm, which includes sharing likeminded knowledge, leads to feelings of mutual closeness, the exchanges which foster mutual attentiveness then are likely to result in these feelings of enthusiast belonging.

Whilst new members may want to join the community because of their shared enthusiasm with existing members there is also a motivation for existing members to induct new participants in this way. This drive stems from a dynamic whereby existing members of the

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<sup>49</sup> In section 2.5.3 of the literature review.

community become more valuable with each new member of a club or participant in the community. This is because new connections can be formed and the community network can be extended in new ways (Gladwell, 2000: 272-3). Furthermore and with reference to social capital Bourdieu (1986: 250) states that the level of social capital which individuals are able to access depends on the size of the network<sup>50</sup>; therefore it is in the community interest to grow this network.

I compare these examples of Martin and Dan's experiences to my own experiences of entering a car club several years before the start of fieldwork, I had only recently purchased a Volkswagen and had no real experience of the modified car culture, for me it was a process of attending car meets and shows, engaging in car talk and informal social interactions and utilising my own project car as a talking point. This use of a personal car as a talking point to build trust and rapport with car enthusiasts was noted by Chappell (2012) with his lowrider car and Fuller (2007) with his modified Ford Falcon. In both cases the researchers gained access to their respective communities by way of sharing their modified project cars and exchanging information about how best to work on them, which events to attend and which modifications were accepted within the community. Over a period of several months I was able to become more involved in the modified VW community, from following the club's activities online to attending shows with them and helping to arrange events. In retrospect when I first began to go to events and to engage with the club's online forum I had relatively low access to stocks of social capital because I had little to no interaction with other participants (Bourdieu, 1986: 250; Portes, 1998: 7). As such and like Martin, I was able to learn both the norms of interaction and the correct contexts in which to draw on community

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<sup>50</sup> These points were introduced in section 2.5.3 of the literature review.

knowledge, before learning the knowledge itself. The more I engaged with the club and had face-to-face interactions with its members (Mohan & Mohan, 2002) the more social capital I was able to accumulate as a member of the club. Thus over time I became more and more trusted as a member of the club and its social network (Murphy, 2006: 434). This transition can clearly be seen with the two previous examples of Dan and Martin as participants whose participation within the community or club grew as they interacted more with its members in physically co-present contexts (Urry, 2003)<sup>51</sup>. In both cases the enthusiasts built upon knowledge of community context and the norms of interaction and encounter (Urry, *ibid*), thus having the foundations on which to exchange knowledge and to know what to do with it.

One example “things *you do*” (Borhek, 1989: 98, my emphasis), or accepted behaviours, within the modified VW community can be seen in the way that a general modified VW aesthetic style has spread across the culture. In terms of the actual aesthetic style modified Volkswagens tend to have lowered suspension, have bodywork which is left largely standard<sup>52</sup>. This style can be seen as a set of norms, the appropriate use of which is in ‘creating’ a modified VW and shows somebody to be a competent member of the enthusiast community because they can draw on the rules in the correct ways (Wenger, 2011). Many VW enthusiasts accept that VW’s were good looking cars from the factory and see their task more as enhancing this than completely overhauling and modifying every part as is the case for hot-rod enthusiasts (Borhek, 1989). This is known at all shows and in car clubs across the

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<sup>51</sup> As will be discussed at the end of this chapter, online interactions of the community and of clubs problematizes this notion because it removes the face-to-face (Mohan & Mohan, 2002) or physically co-present aspect (Urry, 2003) and yet continues to function as a network of social capital to some extent.

<sup>52</sup> Variations on this may include changing the paint colour of the car, although even in this case VAG or German manufacturer colours are preferred.



country and indeed the Anglophone world, however and it is testament to the unwritten nature of such community knowledge I have struggled to find written reference to these styles being preferred. It would seem that being competent does not require a written formula to become widespread across an enthusiast community. The digitally mediated transmission of these unwritten rules will be discussed in detail in section 5.5 and the latter half of this chapter. Rules about the dominant aesthetic styles as generally never recorded anywhere was also observed by Borhek (1989: 98) with regards to Hot Rod enthusiast communities. Much of the physical evidence of these guidelines is alluded to or referenced on online forums and social networking pages, these have become relative hotbeds of what is accepted and what is not.

There are two key dynamics at work here with reference to knowledge and social capital exchange. Firstly there is the exchange of actual knowledge with regards to elements of the modified car culture such as opinions about car shows or practical information about modifying techniques. Secondly there is an implicit direction to utilise that knowledge appropriately within the norms of the community. These norms are the result of repeated interactions between community participants and are one way in which social capital becomes visible (Putnam, 2000). In this context social capital can be understood as the result of repeated interactions which teach participants about the expected norms of their behaviours (Mohan and Mohan, 2002).

Whilst this explains where some of the enthusiast knowledge assets come from it is necessary to go into more detail about how this knowledge is accessed and used by other community participants. This notion of learning competence and community norms is described by Portes (1998: 5) as the result of reciprocity expectation and group enforcement of norms,

mechanisms which create social capital. The former suggests that people input knowledge or help into exchanges by way of social interaction and that they do so because they expect something in return. The latter, group enforcement of norms refers to the way in which certain unwritten rules about behaviour and in this case the styles of modification are policed and maintained by established community members. A consequence of gaining this social capital can be seen as gaining “privileged access to information” (ibid), which I propose here is the information with which to act competently. For a modified VW enthusiast this would be illustrated by the sharing of knowledge when building a car and the dissemination of norms about how it should be modified and using what styles.

Wenger (2011: 229), in his work with social capital theory, refers to the utilisation of social capital in ways prescribed by the community and in line with unwritten rules as ‘being competent’. This is where modified VW enthusiasts have the ability to rearticulate the resources which come with social capital (Falk & Kilpatrick, 2000). For example and as discussed in Chapter 2.5, trust is an important measure of social capital which spans different approaches (Mohan & Mohan, 2002; Sander & Lowney, 2006). However Wenger’s (2011: 229) notion of competency argues that this trust is only valuable when used in correct ways or contexts. As Wenger (2011: 229) outlines, a person can gain access to a shared repertoire of communal resources but to use these competently is to be able to use this repertoire appropriately within this community.

In my own experience once I had been an active community member for some time and had had repeated interactions with other community interactions discussing ideas for my car and current trends I became more competent in utilising community knowledge resources at my disposal. For example I was able to learn that whilst the general style of modification was to

have a car with lowered suspension and aftermarket wheels, there is a wealth of special knowledge (Belk, 2004: 275) regarding which wheel designs and fitment<sup>53</sup>. This means that whilst I learnt through repeated social interactions with other enthusiasts that lowering my car would meet community norms doing this alone may in fact fall short of said norms. For example I noted in the field that a Vauxhall Corsa which appeared to meet these general rules; lowered suspension with aftermarket wheels, was turned away from a car show field<sup>54</sup> due to its style and not being a Volkswagen (Field Diary, 24/8/14). This highlights the fact that it is not just a case of drawing on the knowledge elements of community resources but that access to social capital regarding the competent use of these resources is also necessary (Wenger, 2011). This also illustrates the strength of social capital stocks within the community as Portes (1998: 15) has noted that it is the same connections which bring a community benefits such as trust which also enable it to, “bar others from access”. This shows that a strong and cohesive community with good stocks of social capital can become exclusive when policing its boundaries; this is an inevitable consequence of enforcing community defined norms. In some ways this appears counterintuitive as outlined below with reference to the online enthusiast culture whereby strong stocks of social capital may actually lead to a breakdown in social interactions which are needed to maintain said stocks. Geoghegan (2013: 43) also noted this behaviour whereby members were ejected from the group because they did not follow shared community norms. She observed that the group of enthusiasts in her study had clear rules of etiquette and appropriate behaviour for certain contexts. Whilst her argument is clearly not grounded in social capital theory, I argue that we are describing the same

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<sup>53</sup> Fitment is a term used in the modified VW culture to refer to the way in which a car’s wheels sit in the wheel arches, generally the better fitment has the least amount of clearance between the wheel and the body.

<sup>54</sup> The space at shows in which cars are displayed.

dynamic and that such an approach can be used to understand the ways in which a community of enthusiasm and its norms are policed and governed.

One particular way in which stocks of social capital are bolstered is through discussion of prior experiences within the community. Falk and Kilpatrick (2000: 106) explain that in order to learn, a community needs to reconcile past learning with the present, “within the context of the knowledge and identity resource of a future gaze or “vision” ”. For example community members will continually cite historical instances into present meaning-making processes thus bringing together the past, present and future and helping to give the community a strong narrative. Furthermore, as mentioned above, they argue that this learning process is necessary because social capital is only understandable within its community defined context (ibid).

Interestingly Falk and Kilpatrick (2000: 106) also note that which draws on past experiences within a community is rarely identified as having a chronological element by members of that community. However this chronology is important to modified car enthusiasts because the show calendar splits up each year into a timeline. Thus it becomes easy to compare to previous years accomplishments or experiences on a year by year basis. As previously discussed in Chapter 4, past events and plotting experiences of these within a personal narrative are important to the understanding of identity for some enthusiasts. In the field I noted that, “...discussions often turn to relaying anecdotes of similar shows or the same show in previous years, in this way the atmosphere of the club experience is built up on the foundations of expectation and memory of previous experience” (Field Diary, 7/6/14). In this instance the show I was attending was very wet and these notes were made whilst sheltering in a gazebo, the discussion of all present was about previous shows presumably to lighten the

mood about the one we were at. As evidenced above, the way that the past learning was reconciled with the present gave us this foundation of expectation or vision of what future events should be like. In this instance it was about reinforcing the enjoyment that should be experienced at a show but the same dynamics could reinforce the ideas about how a car should be modified. Past experience is drawn upon as a resource by the modified VW community which shows one way in which past knowledges reinforce social capital with regards to how to be competent (Falk & Kilpatrick, 2000). Furthermore this is evident in Urry's (2003) mutual attentiveness idea whereby the context of future interactions is learned through repeated exchanges, with the same being true for repeated exchanges of social capital. Thus these past experiences facilitate future exchanges and competent future use of learned community knowledge.

### **5.3 Car Clubs & Community**

Car clubs are perhaps the most visible element of the modified VW car culture<sup>55</sup>, they are groups of people already united by their shared enthusiasm, brought together with a more specific connection, usually relating to location or car model. During the fieldwork period and beyond I have been a member of several clubs brought together by location; both in at home in Shropshire and at university in Aberystwyth, I have also been an active member of a model specific VW Polo club. The clubs discussed in this study and generally within the culture do not require paid membership and largely focus around attending social gatherings or car meets together usually on a regular monthly or fortnightly basis.

Car clubs are important not just to the direct experience of enthusiasm by members but also for the maintenance of cultural values and knowledge which they enact. The wider modified

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<sup>55</sup> Or indeed of any automotive culture.

VW community can be seen as a network who share cultural practices which reflect their collective learning (Wenger, 2011: 229). However this can also be seen reflected at the smaller scale of the car club. This community also decides on what constitutes competency within a certain context; for car enthusiasts this may be an actual mechanical skill or a more abstract understanding of what modifications are popular or undesirable at any one time. Competency in this regard is understanding the collective community well enough to contribute to it, to engage with the community and be trusted as a partner in the subsequent interactions. For example Yarwood and Shaw (2010: 432) note the importance of clubs in the complex relationship that rail modellers have between manipulating commercial products to help their creative vision for a rail layout whilst also using those commercial products as reference points for their particular style or boundaries. They also note (ibid: 425) that within this community there are, “rules of coherence” with regards to how model railways should be built. One example of this in this study would be the VW Votex bodykit<sup>56</sup> which Dan refers to several times (Dan Interview) and which I mention variously in the field diary. This bodykit is a rare collection of parts for the VW Polo 9n model<sup>57</sup>, through the growth of a Polo club called Club9n/3 the knowledge about this kit and therefore its desirability as a rare item grew. Yarwood and Shaw (2010: 427) observed that, “Far from eroding individuality, mass produced items used in craft projects can contribute to a shared identity among enthusiasts” as can be seen with the mass produced Votex bodykit and its importance within some enthusiasts’ modified VW Polo projects.

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<sup>56</sup> VW Votex make optional extra bodykits and spoilers for most VW cars, they were usually only available as options whilst that car was current meaning that they quickly become rare and desirable.

<sup>57</sup> The Polo 9n was produced from early 2002 until early 2005 when it was replaced with the facelifted 9n3 model.

Both Chappell (2012) and Lumsden (2012) place particular importance on car clubs and their associated gatherings within their research narratives because for them the acceptance into a club marked access to the field and to a number of participants. Clubs and club participation played a similar role in my research as well and much of the access which I had prior to the research was afforded by clubs or the people I had met through clubs. The way in which seemingly sporadic networks of car clubs know of each other or who have members in several clubs is particularly obvious with regards to snowballing within the research process. For example I would meet up with a friend from Club9n/3 at a show and he would introduce me to his local club and thus I would have a new set of contacts with which to discuss enthusiasm or ask about car stuff.

Sections of the modified VW community and in particular car clubs are often described as being like families in terms of the dynamics and relationships of reciprocity involved (Putnam, 1993; Sander & Lowney, 2006). For example automotive journalist Elliot Roberts (2015), writing in *Performance VW Magazine* states that, “We often refer to the VW scene as being like one big family”. A similar use of the same discourse was made by a participant in this study who noted that, “There are plenty of friendly helpful VW groups that always help you...it is kind of like a big family” (Questionnaire, Q14). These two quotes also suggest the strength of community at different scales, whilst Roberts (2015) is talking about the VW scene as a whole, the participant is talking about smaller VW groups, which may also refer to clubs and online forums. I want to turn now to the publicised example<sup>58</sup> of community as family which the Roberts (ibid) quote above originally introduced, a story of collective resources pooled together to support an enthusiast in a way which extended beyond helping to finish his

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<sup>58</sup> Publicised within the modified VW community.

modified car. The reason for doing this is to present the ways in which the sociability of the modified VW enthusiast community works to maintain its own solidarity. I present this here as an illustration of the strength of community spirit and the nature in which the VW community often pulls together in times of need to support members in a way that highlights community as more akin to being part of a family.

This example, comes from the June 2015 issue of PVW and an article aptly titled, 'Family First' (Roberts, 2015), the first double spread of which is reproduced in Figure 1. below. It detailed the story of Jason Fay an enthusiast in the North American club Club.Broke.Status. His Mk2 VW Golf was his family car and was a beloved but long term project, his partner became very ill and the article describes how understandably the car became the last thing on his mind. His partner was eventually given the all clear however shortly after Jay himself has to spend some time in hospital, by this point his Golf had fallen into disrepair and was far from finished. As such the car community to which he had contributed over the years, headed by Jeffrey Bynum banded together and decided to build Jason's dream Mk2 from scratch and present it to him as a gift. Not only did this evidence the tight-knit community spirit of the Volkswagen scene but also the family aspect in that, the build became a 'money no object' project and many small enthusiast-run businesses donated parts including a whole rolling shell, an engine and everything else needed to create the finished car seen below.





Figure 1. Family First article in Performance VW Magazine (Roberts, 2015)

This shared community project carried out by the car club can be seen as clear examples of the community altruism<sup>59</sup> evidencing social capital (Portes, 1998: 7). Furthermore as Bourdieu (1986: 249) states social capital is in effect “the profits which accrue from membership in a group”. In this case these profits are the pulling together of community; showing the ways in which good social relations between enthusiasts improve community strength and solidarity. Furthermore Bourdieu (ibid) argues that these profits,” are the basis of the solidarity which makes them possible”. Thus the club’s strong levels of social capital which leads it to be supportive of its members is self-sustaining, altruism in this case leads to future expectations of reciprocity. These altruistic expectations are also evident in mutual attentiveness, highlighting the fact that such altruism and expected reciprocity in club communities is learned over time with repeated club interactions. Furthermore this shared context unites likeminded enthusiasts by way of collective sociability (Geoghegan, 2013: 54). In section 5.3.2

<sup>59</sup> The notion of enthusiast labour and sociability is discussed in Chapter 6.3.

the car meet is discussed as a space which facilitates these interactions. These community dynamics which bring to mind the relationships of a large family like network can often be seen most evidently in organised car clubs, it is important now to turn to how enthusiasm and community are experienced within these specific structures.

### **5.3.1 Clubs & Maintenance of Community Boundaries**

Clubs often have their own unwritten or explicit guidelines about the make and model of cars which members can bring to events or meets, whilst most of the clubs I experienced during this fieldwork did not enforce model specific boundaries, there were clear rules about the style of modifications which a car had to have. These rules were almost never written down, however they do reflect wider modified VW culture aesthetics and styles. This section will illustrate the fact that clubs act as micro-scale enforcers of community wide boundaries and rules of coherence; most evident with reference to modification styles

“club membership is not really membership as such as anyone could say they wanted to join the club for the purpose of camping at a show and it would be accepted although this offer is often not extended to cars which are modified in ways not seen as ‘cool’, or cars which are seen as ‘badly’ modified” (Field Diary, 1/6/14).

It is important here to return to the Lumsden’s (2013) notion of car talk. As discussed an attendance to car talk and social interaction is crucial to understanding how knowledge and capitals are exchanged. As such an attendance to such interactions can help explain the ways in which the community norms and the rules of coherence as noted elsewhere (e.g. Fuller, 2007: 370; Yarwood & Shaw, 2010: 425) are maintained and policed. Not only does a club police its participants based on what is subjectively thought to be good but by engaging in this policing activity the club helps to maintain wider boundaries. These boundaries are

spread through social interactions such as car talk which mean that knowledges and social capital are disseminated and persist throughout the community.

### **5.3.2 The Roles of Club Car Meets**

Turning the lens to car club gatherings or meets specifically affords a way of understanding how enthusiasts learn to be competent and how they learn to use stocks of social capital and knowledges. This is because car meets are often expose the dynamics which occur within club networks and these exposures give the most visible examples of social capital within the community<sup>60</sup>. One of the main roles of the car meet is to provide a space where participants within a car club, many of whom have talked via online forums, can meet each other; affording physically co-present encounters with other enthusiasts (Urry, 2003)<sup>61</sup>. Meets are important because they act as socio-spatially influenced sites of enthusiasm in which the collective sociability and community pools of knowledge can be brought together a spatial location (Bondi et al., 2005: 3; Geoghegan, 2013: 41)<sup>62</sup>. Lumsden (2012: 107) notes that meets are often spaces used by enthusiasts to talk about their cars and exchange ideas. As a result people often bring questions about new modifications or issues with their car to these meets and these can be discussed between whoever is present; often including people who work in the motor trade. In my fieldwork experience these locations ranged from beach carparks to pub carparks, for Fuller (2007) there were diner carparks and for Chappell (2012) the carparks of retail outlets. As well as fixing problems with cars this knowledge also constructs the right way to modify a car depending on the club or wider car grouping. It is the discussions and feedback at these smaller scale gatherings which define aesthetic rules and competent use of

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<sup>60</sup> This is also true of social interactions online, as discussed in section 5.5 of this chapter.

<sup>61</sup> In section 5.5 I will argue that online spaces do not afford the same co-present encounters (Urry, 2003) as in physical spaces such as at car meets.

<sup>62</sup> The importance of socio-spatial sites is discussed in more detail with reference to car shows and the ways in which they spread beyond their spatial bounds in chapter 7.

styles at the wider level. This discussion about who is doing what with their projects and what new styles are preferred can be seen as evidence of Lumsden's (2009: 200) 'car talk', something which occurred at all gatherings of enthusiasts. Similarly Plascencia (1985) found that lowriders talked about special knowledge which circulated amongst 'true believers', this points towards the potentially exclusive nature of some car clubs or groups. This can be seen to be true in VW culture both with purists restoring cars to be standard but also those who modify cars but within defined and unwritten rules. Owners of cars without this special knowledge or whose cars transgress these rules are often ridiculed both at car shows and increasingly on social networking websites and enthusiast forums.

Attending meets for many people was about socialising, this is clear in the interviews, for example when asked why he attended car meets Steve stated that it was because they are, "... social, [and you can] see what other people are doing [to their cars]..." (Steve Interview). Steve also recounts his own experiences helping to run a club and utilising car meets as a space where members can come together to share ideas and look at each other's cars. Similarly questionnaire respondents referred to meets as being, "more social", "meets have a more intimate atmosphere", are good for, "chatting, having a laugh and relaxing a bit" and "to meet up with friends" (Questionnaire, Q9). Whereas another talks of a meet which was stopped and as such, "I don't know where to go if it's not with my closest friends" (Questionnaire, Q9). These quotes show that car meets are as much about the social aspect as they are about the cars, with most people not even referencing the cars specifically in their answers. These patterns are reinforced by Chappell's (2012: 32) similar observations at car meets in North America as being, "a scene for socialising, catching up on the latest word on the street, making plans for upcoming car shows, asking for and giving mechanical advice".

However the regular temporality of club car meets; usually occurring monthly or fortnightly may mean that beyond the socialising factors the actual display of modified VW cars becomes stagnated. As one participant noted in, "...at meets you see all the same" (Questionnaire, Q9). For the most part this is seen as positive because it means a regular opportunity to socialise with friends to discuss their cars but this quote shows that for some members of a club the lack of new cars to see makes for a negative experience. This suggests more than one motivation to attend car meets, in my experience in the field club meets are primarily based on a regular social gathering with the cars almost becoming secondary. However larger car meets which are not exclusive to one club are more like car shows and are as such seen as spaces of display, going to a meet such as this and seeing the same cars on every occasion would be negative, as suggested in the previous quote. In the literature meets are described as the locations of performative spaces near to the neighbourhood (Bengry-Howell & Griffin, 2007), similarly for Ben Chappell (2014) there are locations in which enthusiasts meet to discuss and show off their cars. In both examples the spaces of car meets were often those which the club could access outside of working hours and which would allow cars to be parked together; usually leading them to retail outlet carparks. This is true of meets both in the UK (Bengry-Howell & Griffin, 2007) and in North America (Chappell, 2012). In my research and with the two clubs whose meets I regularly attended they were held at pubs and thus pub carparks were the spaces largely used, as seen in Figure 2. It is important to note that these meets were of a particular scale; the largest gathering around 15 cars, conversely there are much larger car meets, sometimes referred to as cruises (Lumsden, 2013) which occur across the UK. Cruise culture is open to all modified car enthusiasts regardless of marque but also takes on more of a show atmosphere with clubs from different areas coming together to display their cars, it is also cruises which have been more readily associated with practices

such as street racing (e.g. Hatton, 2007; Lumsden, 2013), a cruise event can be seen in Figure 3 below. Club car meets then are less about performance and more about socialising with likeminded enthusiasts.



*Figure 2. Dubshire meet at a rural pub, Shropshire (Author's Photograph)*



*Figure 3. Scene Daily Cruise, Shrewsbury (Author's Photograph)*

My first experiences of a car club meet came through an online forum for a local VW club called Dubshire<sup>63</sup>. Online forums and Facebook have become important spaces not just for club knowledge exchange but also for organisation at and before a range of events. For example posts were started on the forum ahead of any shows which the club would be attending so that a list of attendees could be gathered and so that a convoy location could be decided upon and distributed. Similarly Lumsden (2013: 124) recorded one participant explaining that forums were used by car enthusiasts for organising and finding out about events, sharing information and socialising with friends.

“There was a core of perhaps 10 regular [members] and then a changing group...of a similar number who would supplement numbers at each meet, making the forum the main place for everyone to get together at the same time.”(Field Diary, 1/6/15).

The excerpt above was taken from a reflective passage in the field diary in which I am talking about my experience of car forums during my Master’s research with two local car clubs in Shropshire; two of which I continued to socialise with throughout much of this research too. The club forum provided a space which was accessible at all times and allowed a coming together of enthusiasts in a way that was problematic at meets and events. However this meant that conversely club meets often served the purpose of introducing people who had already met online, suggesting that the forum could be understood to be of as much socio-spatial importance as a site of enthusiasm as the car meet (Geoghegan, 2013: 41). Furthermore Urry (2003: 170) argues that with dispersed networked communities such as modified VW enthusiasts using an online forum, there remains a requirement for face-to-face meetings. Even though these meetings may be intermittent he argues that they are necessary

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<sup>63</sup> I signed up to the Dubshire forum in 2012, Figure 2 shows a Dubshire meet in 2013.

to establish and sustain trust between participants across the community network. This is interesting because it suggests that a lack of this face-to-face interaction as afforded online may lead to breakdowns in social capital use, as will be discussed in the following section.

#### **5.4 The Online Community**

This section turns to the online presence of modified VW enthusiasts and serves two purposes within the thesis. Firstly it provides an investigation of the multifaceted motivations for enthusiasts to take their enthusiasm online which shows the importance of the role which online spaces and social media play in participation in the modified VW community. Secondly this section looks at how enthusiasts see their internet use as sustaining the nature of the community through social interactivity and unwritten rules. This maintenance of community values can be seen throughout this research and runs through the community network at almost all levels. Mott and Roberts (2014: 1) observe that, “Enthusiasts are linked through numerous online forums” and other research on enthusiast forums has shown how an integral part of participation therein is to share photographs and written texts which represent experiences (Bennett, 2013; Garrett, 2013; Saville, 2008: 893). The scale of online networks brings with it new problems for a notion of a community of likeminded enthusiasts who follow unwritten rules for the good of the culture. With the almost unrestricted<sup>64</sup> access to shared images and texts online comes a vulnerability to the opinions of others. As will be explained, these opinions often remain silent in face-to-face interactions due to checks such as norms of social interaction (Urry, 2003: 165) however these do not occur online.

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<sup>64</sup> Most forums require membership but the requirements for an account are usually limited to a valid email address. Whilst most forums can be publicly viewed without registering a member, some forums do not allow non-members to view content posted within the forum.



Across the data gathered in this research there were four clear motivations for enthusiasts to utilise forums; for knowledge exchange, including asking and answering questions and seeking inspiration for their modified VW projects, staying connected to other enthusiasts, affording organisation and planning of events such as car shows and finally to display their modified car to this connected network (see Questionnaire & Interviews). The remainder of this chapter will address each of these patterns in turn. However the latter motivation in particular has led to contention within the modified VW community, between a desire to share and gain inspiring images of modified VWs and the creation of modified cars on the sole motivation of becoming internet famous<sup>65</sup>.

#### **5.4.1 Motivations for Forum Participation**

The reason some enthusiasts choose to use forums is to compile a build thread to present their car or project to an audience of other forum participants. A thread, is a post made on a forum and the succession of replies which add to and elongate the thread. Accordingly a build thread is a series of updates about a project car as new modifications are added or changes are made. One participant, Steve, explained that, "Build threads are... like a log of all the modifications you've done to your car and the project that you're doing in this continued thread and you post up your progress...." (Steve Interview). Subsequently these threads are often added to by other enthusiasts; to answer the original poster's (OP's<sup>66</sup>) questions, to ask questions of the OP or to offer their opinions, whether these are asked for or not. Steve later explains that using a forum affords enthusiasts to share and ask for advice about particular practices of modification; such as fitting an exhaust or with regards to more subjective

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<sup>65</sup> A number of participants refer to this using different terms such as e-fame, Instagram famous, insta-fame and internet famous, see Questionnaire, Appendix III.

<sup>66</sup> OP is an acronym often used as shorthand on forums for 'Original Poster'; i.e. the user who began the build thread.

information; such as which exhausts sound or look best. Another participant similarly stated that forums allow the asking of, “Questions, [receiving] answers and to see what everyone else is doing [to their cars]” (Questionnaire, Q6). However the build thread is not necessarily intended to be an interactive space but rather a way of creating an online record detailing certain modifications which may be used as a resources by other users in the future. Steve goes on to illustrate how these two dynamics interplay, “you post up pictures of things you’ve done. So say you’ve bought a new exhaust, take a photo, show people what you’ve done...get it bolted onto your car and...maybe post a little video of it revving up so you can see what it sounds like ...[and] show people how you’ve done it” (Steve Interview). This example shows that in Steve’s experience, posting on a build thread is a combination of, “ [helping] people if they need to do the same thing” (ibid) and showing off the exhaust to other enthusiasts; this latter motivation is one of the reasons why opinions are often given by other forum users in these threads. This can be seen to reflect the mutual attentiveness and somewhat altruistic nature of modifiers in face-to-face interactions as noted in section 5.2 with regards to the family like relationships of the community. This also shows evidence of a sociability of enthusiasm, particularly when working on the modified car, as such the car can be seen as a socio-technical project (Fuller, 2007), an idea supported further in chapter 6.

The unique characteristics of online spaces mean that behaviours regarding social interaction do not always mirror those experienced in physically co-present face-to-face encounters, such as at car meets or shows. As noted earlier with regards to face-to-face interactions Urry (2003: 165) cites Goffman’s (1963: 15) detailed observations about the ‘sensed experience’ of physically co-present communication. Urry argues that the embodied nature of interaction affords understanding of required feedback and turn-taking from each interacting participant.

Thinking reflexively about the informal discussions which I participated in in the field and which I observed between others I note that there are subtle recognitions of social requirements such as turn-taking and sensitivity to the person speaking. Furthermore as Urry (2003: 170) argues this mutual attentiveness helps to produce and sustain trust, indeed this can be seen in the empirical examples regarding trust in enthusiast-run businesses<sup>67</sup>. I argue here that whilst trust-producing interactions no doubt occur on online forums they are not able to follow these same processes. For one enthusiast this lack of mutual attentiveness was framed by the less personal nature of interacting from behind a computer screen, “I think [the internet is] less personal so the insults get thrown around and there's no recourse for that ...insulting other peoples' cars and modifications online seems to be quite a popular thing to do” (John Interview). Whilst this initially seems a pessimistic description of enthusiast behaviour online this is taken as a given element of online community by many enthusiasts. For example one participant summarised current online behaviour in the community, “now it's so easy to upload photos of your car and what you have done to it and get compliments (or abuse!) on it. This can help by giving other people around the world ideas for theirs and then it's possible for that trend to catch on” (Questionnaire, Q7).

Furthermore an example from the cultural media in the form of an interview with a business owner in Performance VW Magazine notes that, “There used to be a great buzz about seeing a car in the flesh that you had only heard rumours about or glimpsed photos of. It seems everyone knows what everyone has done to each other's cars via build-threads and Instagram, Facebook etc. and therefore don't really talk face-to-face” (PVW, 2015: 120). This statement makes two key observations, firstly that by seeing build-threads online it is possible

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<sup>67</sup> See Chapter 6.6.1

to know everything about a modified car before it is unveiled at a show or event. Marcus articulates that this reduces the “great buzz [of]...seeing a car in the flesh” (ibid), thus an increasingly internet-mediated culture may be affecting the experiences of enthusiasts at events where cars are displayed for appreciation, “in the flesh”. Similarly one questionnaire respondent stated that they attended car shows to, “see winter builds<sup>68</sup> in the flesh” (Questionnaire, Q8). Secondly his statement illustrates both a similarity to John’s observation that using online forums to socialise makes for a less personal experience and suggests a downside of this (John Interview). In that because social interactions occur online, albeit in a less personal way, they occur less when participants attend shows. This supports Urry’s (2003: 165) argument that face-to-face social interaction is a key experience within the development of a community. Without physical co-presence then there may be a break down in inter-participant trust as suggested by Urry (ibid).

The above lack of mutual attentiveness which face-to-face interaction requires is one factor which affords these negative comments, however there are two other factors which underlie comments of this nature on online forums. These are the relative anonymity<sup>69</sup> which online forums afford their posters, the second is the potential geographical distance between forum users. As such a user on an online forum can post negative comments about a person’s car directly to this person but without the immediate feedback they would receive in a face-to-face situation. As John notes above, “there’s no recourse” (John Interview) as the person to whom the comments are aimed is not physically co-present (Urry, 2003). The face-to-face interactions I observed in the field required a mutual attentiveness; enthusiasts who are

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<sup>68</sup> This refers to cars built over the winter period, which precedes the show season.

<sup>69</sup> In many cases enthusiasts are not truly anonymous online as any link made to their car online makes them easy to identify at shows and events.

physically co-present recognise the importance to be sensitive to the person they are interacting with. It would therefore not be possible to say negative things about their car without having to defend these criticisms immediately. This is a recognised pattern across the enthusiast community online, as one participant stated, “With social media playing a large of [in] the scene, I feel hate can be an issue” (Questionnaire, Q5).

For some enthusiasts online there is still a clear desire to stand out from the crowd, despite the risk of said “hate”. One participant stated that because the size of the community has made it, “...almost impossible for...me to stand out...this gives...drive and ambition to try and achieve greater things” (Questionnaire, Q5). However it is also noted that, “everyone does the same sort of thing [in terms of modifying style]” and “There’s a lot of the same [modifications to cars] but that’s just how it is at the moment” (Questionnaire, Q5). There is a desire then to stand out and build a car which goes against the increasingly homogenous modified VW styles. Therefore enthusiasts who have a desire to modify a VW in ‘original’ ways or which ‘stand out’ want to evidence this by “upload[ing] photos [of their cars] giving people around the world ideas for theirs” (Questionnaire, Q7). However there are quite strict but subjective boundaries about the ways in which a car stands out, one participant states that, “Unfortunately there are a lot of people very quick to put someone else’s pride and joy down” (Questionnaire, Q5). Another describes the internet’s role within the modified VW community as a network which, “...gets things known to people but...it causes a lot of negativity and hate on what people some people do [to their cars]” (Questionnaire, Q7).

Portes (1998: 15) notes that social capital can often be mistaken for only producing positive experiences in a community, his more nuanced argument helps to explain why those acting with the enthusiast community in mind actually make online forums a battleground at times.

These negative interactions can also have a limiting factor on social capital within the community (Sibai et al., 2014). This was a common theme amongst questionnaire respondents who explained a breakdown of community social order online for example one participant stated that, "I've seen on Facebook there's lots of hate and backstabbing" (Questionnaire, Q5). Ahmed's (2008: 12) sociability of emotion argument is applicable here to advance an explanation of what motivates enthusiasts to post online and why they care what fellow enthusiasts think. The above discussion of norm reinforcement suggests that they do care but emotional geography may be able to explain why they do. Ahmed argues that happiness can be understood as affirmation of values. She notes that individuals can become alienated from a given community if they do experience pleasure from things which are defined, by the community, as being pleasurable. In this case if an enthusiast were to post a photograph of their car on an online forum but be told that it did not match up to these community defined norms then they may feel excluded or alienated.

Within the modified VW culture if you have posted a photograph of your car online, the more positive reinforcement of your modification choices the better. Many enthusiasts post online to display their car but appreciation only arises for cars which the community deems as good. Thus somebody posting pictures of a community-defined 'good' modified car would receive positive affirmation of their chosen style. In this way the community polices itself in an attempt to keep within the confines of a business-as-usual preferred style. Ahmed (2008: 12) explains that, "Happiness involves comfort of repetition or following lines that have already been given". This is interesting because of the similarity it bears to a social capital exchange approach and Urry's (2003) explanation of trust building through interactions; both of which require repetition of interactions. Therefore the cementing of certain styles as good is tied to

the repeated conjuring of these styles in conversation both online and offline which establish cultural norms. By establishing such norms any cars which are modified in a way which is truly innovative and does not match this repeated and reaffirmed style will lead to criticism; described by participants as hate.

Importantly this criticism would be very unlikely to occur if the two individuals met face to face at a car meet, which calls into question the way in which social capital resulting from interactions is altered in a context of anonymity and geographical distance afforded by the web. Thus online forums show the importance of affirmation and shared community values or styles and a general desire of participants to position their cars within these parameters. This produces a culture of modifying where many cars are similar, with one participant noting that cars are modified to look, “mostly the same...air ride, rare wheels and a leather retrim but every so often you see something completely different” (Questionnaire, Q5). It is likely that the community defined parameters of style as exercised online are one of the main reasons why “something completely different” is a relatively rare sight. Another participant when further characterising this trend as a sign that, “Individuality is fading away slowly” (Questionnaire, Q5). This shows that whilst enthusiasts largely want to modify their cars in ways accepted by the wider community there is some link between their creative vision<sup>70</sup> and a desire for originality, even though the former restricts the latter. Individuals who are enthusiasts want to be happy and may choose for example to change their wheels in order to seek validation and affirmation from other community members (ibid: 12). However this desire to meet community norms of modification style may can lead to large scale homogenisation; with a lack of diversity in aesthetic styles.

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<sup>70</sup> As discussed with regards to modifying cars in Chapter 6.

It is clear that online forums and community internet networks provide spaces of enthusiasm which occupy a double-edged sword. On one side is the ability to share images of cars and ideas with a growing community of likeminded enthusiasts but on the other there is the exposure to unexpected and often anonymised feedback, as discussed in the following section. The internet provides a space in which unwritten rules become written and repeated in forum posts, thus the subtle notions of the community's boundaries are writ large and so those who breach these are more obviously visible. As Portes (1998: 15) explains with regards to communities with strong social capital stocks, it is those, "same strong ties [which] bring benefits to members of a group [which] commonly enable it to bar others from access". Modifying a car is can be seen as the negotiation and alteration the automobile in relation to design and performance in order to make them more attractive in the eyes of an enthusiast (Balkmar, 2014: 166). In a community with a range of perspectives it is not surprising that style cues and choices are readily laden with meaning and value. By understanding the complex dynamics at work it is possible to unravel the reasons why an impractically lowered Volkswagen is seen as cooler and more valuable within the culture than a standard height and more usable car (Questionnaire, Q4). This knowledge is often discrete; shared by many, spoken often but almost always unwritten, subject to change and difficult to learn without experiencing it.

#### **5.4.2 Popularity & Community Belonging Online**

"In recent years people have been building cars that *people want to see*...In my opinion 80% of the cars on the scene currently are built without any imagination" (Questionnaire, Q5).

As discussed above cars which are seen as fitting in with accepted norms of modification style will receive positive affirmation from other enthusiasts online. However there is a growing



contention that was evident throughout my fieldwork that this had led some enthusiasts to build cars in order to become “internet famous” (Questionnaire, Q7) as noted in the opening quote above. Furthermore when asked what role the internet plays in the modified VAG culture one participant responded simply, “People trying to get famous” (Questionnaire, Q7). In a Performance VW magazine interview with enthusiast and business owner Marcus Webb he noted that, “Too many people are interested in becoming famous rather than just building nice cars” (PVW, 2015: 51). This example from this widely circulated modified VW magazine further cements these ways in which the internet has affected the community.

The internet has facilitated, “...people trying to get famous by building dangerous builds” and may have fuelled the motivations of, “...kids who like to do stupid and dangerous mods to their cars with stupid camber just to become Instagram famous” (Questionnaire, Q5). This latter quote is referencing the trend of negative camber on wheels, which appears as the top section of a wheel being closer to the bodywork than the bottom, thus giving a tilted appearance. Thus another questionnaire respondent states that people are, “cambering, slamming [lowering suspension] more and more just so they can have [and be seen to have] the most camber/lows...it becomes less about style and more about bragging rights” (Questionnaire, Q3). These cars which become incredibly popular due to the reach and connections of the modified VW networks online ultimately afford their owners ‘bragging rights’, fame or notoriety. One participant summarised the dynamic of collective community validation of a particular car online stating that, “Everybody’s too interested in becoming ‘insta-famous’ & how many likes their car can get” (Questionnaire, Q5). This participant is referring to the process by which photos posted on Instagram are ‘liked’ by other users; a

post with many likes is usually particularly popular within a certain community and thus the car owner becomes what this participant refers to as “insta-famous”.

Related to the above discussion of internet fame are the divisions which certain factions of the community knowingly or otherwise enforce; the boundaries of which usually rest on particular modifying styles or aftermarket brands. One participant described this behaviour as being that of, “...the elitist, the person that knows all, or at least pretends to, they will only be friends with people who will benefit them or [who] have a car worthy” (Questionnaire, Q5). Firstly this further supports the notion of sets of unwritten guidelines, subjectively demarcating cars which are “worthy”. Within the wider context of this participants’ response the first half of this quote regarding “the person who knows all”, can be seen to reference online forums. Another participant further explained this negative element of inviting advice or feedback online, “The keyboard warriors<sup>71</sup>...I read it on a forum so [I] know best...regardless of what they drive it’s better than yours” (Questionnaire, Q5). Furthermore this effects the community sociability as one enthusiast explained, “...there is a lot of hate about cars and people...its like different ‘groups’ of people can’t mix and you only talk to who you know” (Questionnaire, Q5). One participant summarised this current pattern in the modified VW culture, stating that it is “...awful at the moment due to certain people thinking they’re better...we’re all humans and should respect each other’s cars” (Questionnaire, Q5). This goes back to Urry’s (2003: 170) suggestion that in order to foster trust, social interactions must occur in a face-to-face physically co-present context, even if these interactions occur intermittently. Whilst both social capital theorists and Urry note that trust is produced through repeated social interactions it is unclear whether interactions in the online

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<sup>71</sup> Keyboard warriors are individuals who post in a more aggressive way than they would in a face-to-face context because they are safely anonymised behind their keyboard.

community would produce the same outcomes. The lack of mutual attentiveness and reciprocity relationships online may be caused by social interactions in which the interacting parties are not physically co-present<sup>72</sup>.

## **5.5 Community & Clubs Conclusions**

This chapter shows the centrality of the community; its functions, dynamics and networks within the modified VW culture. This chapter has shown that community is key as a structure of interactions across which enthusiastic ideas, norms and knowledges flow. It has also shown that community is policed and maintained and that this produces clear community defined norms, knowledges evident in their stocks of social capital. This notion of context specific knowledges and norms being policed within the community is evident throughout the remaining empirical chapters. In particular it has shown the importance of social interactions for knowledge exchange, learning of norms and increasing community stocks of social capital. The nature of these social interactions has been discussed and in particular the role of talk or conversation is seen to be key, in particular referred to as car talk (Lumsden, 2013). The contexts for car talk to be exchanged necessarily afford the collective sociability of enthusiasm (Geoghegan, 2012) and necessitate co-present encounters (Urry, 2003), which are also of importance in social capital exchange and production (Mohan & Mohan, 2002). Furthermore interactions facilitate mutual attentiveness between interacting parties and the ability to draw upon stocks of social capital such as trust in future interactions. This chapter has shown that such interaction, both online and offline is key to the; exchange, maintenance and policing of community norms. It is clear that physical co-presence is a necessary element of social interactions if they are to produce and maintain stocks of trust (Urry, 2003) and

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<sup>72</sup> There may be other online communities and enthusiast communities where this does not hold, however it seems likely that digitally mediated social interactions lose some of the trust-building capacity of face-to-face meetings.

inform participants on how to behave competently in future interactions (Mohan & Mohan, 2002). These interactions also ensure the exchange of knowledge, trust and unwritten community rules about behaviour toward one another and modifying styles. By approaching enthusiasm in this chapter at the scale of the wider community I have shown the collective nature of the enthusiast culture. The roles played by smaller groups within the community have also been explored and it is clear that car clubs reflect and enforce the unwritten rules redolent within wider community stocks of knowledge. In particular car club meets evidence the importance of physical co-presence for interactions. At all scales there is evidence that not only do good levels of social capital enable knowledge exchange and trust but also provide the context for correct and competent use of said knowledge. This also reinforces the notion that relationships of reciprocity and altruism exist whereby enthusiasts share knowledge with the understanding that they can withdraw similar knowledge from the community in the future themselves a signifier of a strong community (Mohan & Mohan, 2002; Portes, 1998: 6).

The latter half of this chapter turned to the online sites of the modified VW community and has shown how enthusiasts utilise digitally mediated networks to exchange knowledge, share photographs and to stay connected in the absence of being physically co-present. Online enthusiast sites such as Facebook pages and internet forums are first and foremost spaces for joint discussion, image and knowledge sharing and ultimately serve networks of sociality physically separated by geographical distance. This discussion of empirics regarding online forum use also supports Urry's (2003: 164) argument that social interactions are much richer when they happen in person than when technologically mediated. For modified VW enthusiasts there is a need to meet up in physical spaces at certain times, this is evidenced by

club car meets in section 5.4.2 and later in with regards to car shows in chapter 72. Urry (2003: 156) argues that social relations which occur 'at-a-distance' such as on online forums must be sustained by intermittent but physical co-presence with other enthusiasts. For example online forum interactions would need to be supported by interactions in at club car meets or at car shows as discussed later in chapter 7.

Discussion of social capital exchange and policing of norms revealed dynamics which problematize the positive outcomes of social capital suggested by theorists such as Putnam (1995). If the need to conform to norms becomes so great that social interactions which foster mutual attentiveness become rare then the processes needed to supplement and maintain stocks of capital such as trust cease to be possible. Whilst evidence in this chapter shows that norms and trust are important factors to social life and strength of community (Putnam, 1995: 664-5), an overemphasis on norms may become antisocial in nature. Rather than strong social capital stocks being self-maintaining they become self-destructive; actually damaging the community solidarity. Portes (1998: 15) observed that connecting ties of community which bring benefits to its members, as a result of social capital, also enable that community to raise barriers to participation for others. This acts as evidence to support one criticism of Putnam discussed in section 2.5.1 of the literature review that "associational behaviour" does not always have the positive social outcomes suggested by his work (Mohan & Mohan, 2002: 195), indeed if the "associational behaviour" argument were used here it would show that strong levels of this behaviour can have negative community outcomes.

The relationships of reciprocity and altruism in community interactions as discussed in section 2.5.1 appears to be partially absent within the enthusiast culture. This idea of community altruism is key to understandings of what motivates people to participate in communities.

Therefore this supports the argument that a lack of physical co-presence online may lead to a breakdown in social capital explaining the lack of evidence of relationships of reciprocity in enthusiast interactions at online sites. However it was noted that these relationships are not completely absent. The empirics regarding the use of forums, such as Steve's explanation of build threads the online community (Steve Interview) show that enthusiasts post online in order gain advice about modifying their cars and as such there must be some level of expected reciprocity relationships. This in turn further evidences the mutual attentiveness within the enthusiast community even though these expectations may be met with negative feedback if community norms are breached. In the following chapter I turn to the actual creative processes of modifying cars, this enthusiast labour is often conducted in the presence of or with the input of enthusiastic friends. As such an argument is made that the modified car as a "socio-technical project" (Fuller, 2007: 92) and that it is this shared process of labour which illustrates the relationships of reciprocity which are present in the community but seemingly absent at the larger community scale.

One reason for this lack of mutual attentiveness online stems from the obvious lack of physically co-present encounters (Urry, 2003) and their subsequent checks on behaviour. In part due to the anonymity afford online, enthusiasts can critique others' cars in ways which they could not do in face-to-face interactions. During physically co-present interactions they would have to draw on their knowledge of appropriate behaviour for that context (Mohan & Mohan, 2002). Furthermore it has been noted that failure to follow etiquettes for appropriate interactions can lead to issues such as a lack of trust (ibid). However online enthusiasts can pass judgement on others' cars in a negative way without the same risks of doing so co-present encounter (Urry, 2003). This affords critique of other enthusiasts' cars in a context

where the support of the community is held in high regard by enthusiasts seeking affirmation of their modified VW car. I utilise Ahmed's (2008) notion of collective sociability to show that some enthusiasts post their cars online in part to seek collective positive affirmation of their modification choices from their peers. The sense of belonging that meeting these community goals of affirmation creates can also be understood as the competent use of social capital and negotiation of community knowledge resources (Wenger, 2011). However one pattern reported by participants was that as cars are posted online by enthusiasts seeking community affirmation. There is a possibility that an enthusiast whose car becomes affirmed by the community because it conforms to aesthetic norms can become famous within the community. The participants suggested that this may prove to be a motivation for some enthusiasts to modify their cars in their first place. In this way enthusiasts who post their cars online may be seen as modifying for online display. This has led to questions of authenticity in the practice of modifying, as are addressed in the following chapter. Whilst there is clear evidence that enthusiasts think that this is the case (Questionnaire, Q7) it is important to address this critically and note that no participants admitted to being motivated to modify their car or share images of it for these reasons. However the idea that cars are displayed or performed in certain physical spaces in order to become famous within the community, including online, is discussed in chapter 7.

This chapter puts forward an argument for the importance of social interactions and relationships within the community which produce and maintain community dynamics such as trust whilst also establishing norms for said interactions (Mohan & Mohan, 2002). It has also been noted that enthusiasm generates, "exclusivity of knowledge"<sup>73</sup> and sociability

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<sup>73</sup> An idea explored further in the previous chapter.

amongst participants” (Geoghegan, 2013: 45), as discussed further in chapter 6.3. Conceptually these interactions are approached through an understanding of social capital and trust (Mohan and Mohan, 2002; Murphy, 2006) and the presence of mutual attentiveness (Urry, 2003). The notion of exclusivity of knowledge can refer both to the actual knowledge or expertise itself and to the knowledge about how and when to articulate it in certain interactions; as dictated by accumulated social capital (Mohan & Mohan, 2002; Portes, 1998; Putnam, 2000). It is clear then that not only is the “exclusivity of knowledge” important within the enthusiast community but the means by which it circulates, “[the] sociability amongst participants” (Geoghegan, 2013: 45) is also key. Urry’s (2003) notion of interactions within social networks is key here to explain the way in which sociability is related to the production and circulation of social and human capital. This chapter also suggests a way in which a reading of social capital can be bolstered with understandings of personal motivations for community participation. Heley and Jones (2013: 280) observe that social capital can present a somewhat partial reading of a community, explaining community altruism for the good of the community but struggling to explain the motivations to do so, such as for fulfilment. Here the utilisation of Ahmed’s (2008) approach to happiness could further explain why community members choose to act in ways which support the community. Whilst I am not attempting to conceptually couple these two distinct approaches I do argue that they can be utilised side by side to give a multi-faceted understanding of what motivates participation in this enthusiast community.



# 6 Enthusiast Labour: Working Together & Sociability

## 6.1 Introduction

In this chapter I move on to the actual processes of modifying the VW car, I want to move beyond processes of knowledge exchange and regulation to look at how practices of modifying affect the experiences of enthusiasm. Modifying a car is can be seen as the negotiation and alteration the automobile in relation to design and performance in order to make them more attractive (Balkmar, 2014: 166) in the eyes of an enthusiast. As enthusiasts conduct work on projects, their shared enthusiasm generates a mutual closeness (Geoghegan, 2013: 45) and by drawing on shared resources of social capital they help to maintain cohesive relationships (Heley & Jones, 2013; Portes, 1998: 7-8). This section will support Fuller's (2007: 91) observation that the creative labour undertaken by car enthusiasts when modifying should be addressed as "enthusiast labour" and that because project cars are often the result of community input they should be understood as , "socio-technical project[s]" (ibid: 92). This will also outline the ways in which enthusiast labour is often run through with the social interactions discussed in chapter 5. As Chappell (2012) has noted with lowrider enthusiasts, many of the social interactions of a more informal nature take part during or with reference to the practice of working on cars.

I will then partially problematize this by turning to those enthusiasts who do not work on their own cars but rather pay businesses to carry out their creative visions. As with those enthusiasts building cars for fame in the preceding chapter these individuals are often judged by other elements of the community, although differences in respect here are much more explicit. This further reinforces the arguments previously made with regards to community

defined norms and competent behaviour, although it also shows different perspectives on labour and authenticity and consequent contestations within the culture. In part this contestation comes from the idea that some of the passion and love associated with enthusiast identity (Geoghegan, 2013), noted in chapter 4, is not present in those who do not work on their own car. Belk (2004: 275) similarly noted that for enthusiasts, "...work on cars is done for the love or passion of the cars..." a sentiment described by other car culture researchers and explored further below (e.g. Chappell, 2012; Chavez, 2013).

The observation that interaction with fellow enthusiasts is of similar importance to the interaction with the VW car is something which develops over time. I observed in the field, enthusiasts who are solely interested in the car and go to shows to see cars and not to meet up with friends are usually those who are new to the modified VW community. I noted that, "some people might attend a show on the Sunday [only], to see the latest trends whereas others go to camp with their friends and talk about their shared interest" (Field Diary, 5/7/14). This further strengthens the idea that enthusiasts gain access to the community and its groups, by learning the community's unwritten rules and norms over time. Geoghegan (2013: 44) recorded one participant saying that their enthusiast club could close tomorrow and it would not matter because the friendships built up by repeated club interactions are stronger than the structured organisation. In particular the club Dubshire which I utilised examples from in chapter 5 was key to my own experiences as an enthusiast during the fieldwork, however by 2015 several members had moved away from Shropshire and the club ceased to operate in an organised way. The online forum became rarely used and the meets became poorly attended, however the friendships which had been fostered by working together on cars and sharing enthusiast experiences meant that the club still intermittently gathered to

attend shows together. Furthermore individuals would often get together to help each other with their ongoing project cars, even though the official structure of the club which brought them together had fallen away.

As discussed in chapter 5 enthusiasts often experience motivations to act altruistically so as to further solidify the community itself as the foundation for future interactions and learning. Many car enthusiasts only have skills in certain areas and so pooling this knowledge is essential for the strength of the community, this pooling of knowledge can be understood as the transfer of social capital through social interactions.

“I’m always willing to lend a hand although I’m not very...mechanically minded but if there’s anything I’ve had wrong with my car and somebody goes ‘[my] cars starting to misfire’, oh yeah it’s this or...know what I mean... it’s always nice to I mean lend a hand because you never know when you’re gonna need it yourself” (Dan Interview).

Here Dan explains that he puts his own knowledge into the community so that at a later date he may draw on somebody else’s. This can be seen as an example of the way in which social capital exchanges occur when the donor offers up their knowledge without any immediate reward (Portes, 1998: 6). Dan does this in order to feed into the community’s social capital reserves, by maintaining them he hopes that in the future he will be able to withdraw them from other community participant when he needs help. In terms of community stocks of capital this can be seen as a reciprocity exchange (Portes 1998: 8), as discussed in chapter 5. Here it is based on Dan’s expectation that if he offers his skills and enthusiast labour to other likeminded individuals in the community he can later withdraw in kind.

## **6.2 Enthusiast Labour**

The very practice of working on the car is integral to many car cultures and communities (Graham & White, 2007). Chappell’s (2012) autoethnography in a lowrider community gives

particular attention to this process as something which is important to both enthusiast identity and the strength of the community. I argue that a study of the modified VW community must include an appreciation for the work done on cars as this is where many of the community's unwritten rules are exposed. As noted above Glen Fuller (2007: 91) refers to this, "work done on cars" as "enthusiast labour", a term I borrow for the chapter title and draw upon throughout this chapter.

I mobilise enthusiast labour as a term which moves beyond physical labour alone to include the personal and emotional investments which enthusiasts put into their creations and projects. In DeLyser and Greenstein's (2015) narrative of car restoration it is clear that being enthusiastic about a socio-technical car project necessarily involves working on your own vehicle. Within this the value is placed on the personal investment involved in enthusiast. This can be seen within Yarwood and Shaw (2010) study of railway modellers, they draw on Campbell's (2005) idea of consumption which allows for human agency and re-appropriation of a product beyond the point of sale. Yarwood and Shaw (2010: 425) summarise Campbell's argument to argue that the modeller exercises control of the whole process of creating their own finished product. The enthusiast has a hand in designing, choosing the materials and making the final product by, "invest[ing] his or her personality or self into the object produced" (Campbell, 2005: 17). This is very similar to the way in which enthusiast labour can explain the investments put into the modified car as socio-technical project. This notion of personal investment into an object of enthusiasm can also be seen in terms of an emotional affiliation to both objects and bodies (Craggs et al., 2013). This affiliation can be understood as underlain by the, "communication and circulation of *collective* passions" (ibid: 879, my emphasis). The strong stocks of shared knowledge and capital which exist at the community

scale, as shown in chapter 5, facilitate this communication and circulation of shared passions. The collective nature of these passions suggests that the personal investment or emotional affiliation to cars is shared with other members of the community.

In this chapter I want to argue that in some spaces the articulation of these shared skills can generate “a mutual ‘closeness’, exclusivity of knowledgeability and sociability among the participants” (Geoghegan, 2013: 45). As such I mobilise an argument that working on the car; enthusiast labour is necessarily done in the presence of or drawing on the resources of other enthusiasts. In the previous chapter it was clear that such shared knowledges can be utilised in exclusionary ways, however here I want to explain how shared knowledge and passion can bring participants together. This is a further reason for my use of Fuller’s (2007: 92) description of modified VW project cars as being socio-technical in nature. Cars which enthusiasts work on and modify are therefore the result of physical labour and articulated skills, with particular emphasis on the role of sociability and knowledge exchange with regards to the latter. In particular I discuss the way that expectation of reciprocity (Portes, 1998) act as a motivator for collective and shared tackling of enthusiast labour challenges, as outlined in the quote from Dan in the previous section. This interaction between enthusiasts and their project cars draws on a shared resource bed of knowledge and collective sociability. This is itself a signifier of social capital stocks at the community scale. As shown in chapter 5 there are norms of enthusiasm for modified VW culture which are shared across the community; in this chapter I will highlight that enthusiast labour and the socio-technical nature of modifying is another of these shared behaviours or understandings. Thus as in chapter 5, this chapter utilises the emotional geographies of enthusiastic passion alongside a social capital reading in order to understand multi-faceted motivations for of enthusiast participation.

One interesting summary of the emotional and personal investment involved in the car as socio-technical project, was made by a questionnaire respondent, “[A good modified VW/Audi is the result of] Time, effort, blood, sweat and tears gone into it.” (Questionnaire, Q4). This quote explains the level of passionate dedication and personal investment which enthusiasts put into their project cars, this shows the levels of passion in enthusiasm observed in chapter 4. Furthermore it shows how this passion when shared between likeminded individuals can create a sense of closeness and foster connections between enthusiasts that become friendships (Geoghegan, 2013: 45; Miller, 2017: 249). This also explains the way in which the relationships which foster social interactions and further strengthen, maintain and transmit social capital across the community can be formed through shared practices of enthusiast labour.

Whilst this outlines the importance of investment into emotional labour it says little of the motivation to conduct this labour in the first place, one such example of this is given below.

“...if there’s stuff I can do, I’ll do it myself...and learn stuff like that...there’s a nice sense of achievement as well...I fitted those coilovers<sup>74</sup> or I fitted those wheels” (Steve Interview).

There are two key strands underlying this quote, firstly the desire to learn both skills and practices but also to learn some of the discrete knowledge which is bound up in the modified VW culture. Secondly there is the sense of pride or achievement, something which was a recurring theme in the data, for example as noted by one enthusiast, “If...you have done it yourself then you’ve got something to be proud of” (Questionnaire, Q13). Interestingly much of the support for this view came from questionnaire data regarding what makes a good

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<sup>74</sup> Coilover suspension can be lowered, thus lowering the ride height of the car and improving handling.

modified VW or Audi. Here I was initially interested in the technical and material elements of the car; to find out if there were strong patterns to support the aesthetic frameworks of the culture. However almost all of the responses to this question were concerned with the doing of modifying rather than the parts themselves (Questionnaire, Q4), this highlighted the importance of the practice and labour itself above the end result that it would produce.

### **6.3 Building Cars as Building Friendships**

Key to evidencing the solidarity and supportive nature of the community is the data presented in this section which shows that the social learning aspect of the modified car as 'socio-technical project' comes from the support of like-minded enthusiasts. The maintenance and building of social capital is cyclical and thus as enthusiasts meet with their friends and work on their cars, exchanging skills, knowledge and expertise their socio-technical project becomes as much about building cars as building friendships. The quote below is in the context of an enthusiast talking about why it's important to be involved in building your own modified car.

“...it's a labour of love that you are sharing with the world. It's a connection of friendship” (QR, 13.12).

This propinquity of enthusiasts working together because of their friendship and their aim of helping to finish a modified car project is something familiar within other car enthusiast research. Miller (2017: 249) has observed that in the geographies of making, labour and craft practice is recognised as both creative process and also a way of connecting likeminded people in complex ways. Chappell (2012: 136-7) gives an account of an evening session working on one enthusiast's lowrider car; he describes how this acts as a social meeting of

friends as well as a productive session in terms of enthusiast labour because of the sociable exchange of knowledge.

“I don’t come from a mechanical background and *I want to learn* and also its way more fun having a couple [of] beers on a sunny day, chilling on the driveway with close friends, working on cars” (Questionnaire, Q11, my emphasis).

This quote shows the importance of a community of friends who share access to collective resources of knowledge, skills and competent use of these (Wenger, 2011). Furthermore this highlights that the socio-technical element of labour does not involve just sharing the labour itself but also sharing knowledge. This enthusiast also notes that they are particularly inclined to learn this knowledge, this further highlights the argument made in the previous chapter that participants can learn from the community and that their enthusiasm drives them to do so. Besides the physical labour and knowledge elements of the modified car as a socio-technical project there is the other factor in enthusiast labour, personal investment, as discussed in the introduction.

“The project has brought friends together to help each other” (Questionnaire, Q4).

In both of these examples there is a suggested link between the emotional investment or articulation of skills involved in the car as a socio-technical project and the way in which this unites friends. This shows the way in which as Geoghegan (2013: 45) suggests, a mutual closeness emerges between enthusiasts due to an exclusivity of their shared knowledge and an associated element of sociability. This also suggests that the emotional affiliation to objects and bodies, suggested by Ruth Craggs and others (2013), are in fact linked by the presence of multiple bodies working on objects. In other words, with several enthusiast friends, “chilling on the driveway...working on cars” (Questionnaire, Q11), as noted above, the shared and



exchanged knowledges foster an emotional affiliation between them. Another participant made a similar point, suggesting that the personal investment of labour is something which necessarily involves close friends who share that passion. The participant observes that, “If you self-build [the car] you tend to do it with your close friends I’ve found this...and spending time with your friends doing something you both love, what’s better than that?” (Questionnaire, Q11). This connection between spending time with friends and completing work which is loved reinforces the suggested connection between emotional affiliation to objects and to bodies (Craggs et al., 2013). There is also an implication here of the importance of “self-building”, the notion of working on your own car, this exists in a context of fierce debate with regards to enthusiasts who pay others to do this work, as explored in detail in the following section.

Furthermore this practice of working together is necessarily focused on a shared emotional affiliation to and personal investment in the modified car. There are also clear links here to the altruistic nature of friendships related to the socio-technical project, as outlined by Terry (2010) below with reference to a specific enthusiast.

“[He is] one of those guys you’re with every weekend...either wrenching<sup>75</sup> or at a show with...he’s the kind of guy that’s gonna look out for you in a bunch of ways. He will bust your balls<sup>76</sup> when something looks off on your car, and be there to find a solution” (Terry, 2010).

This shows that whilst some enthusiasts have a desire to learn, as noted above, to supplement their lack of modifying knowledge, other enthusiasts have the desire to teach and share their knowledge. The understanding that knowledge and skills can be offered when needed and as

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<sup>75</sup> Engaging in mechanical or modifying work on cars.

<sup>76</sup> A colloquialism referring to making fun of somebody or jovially telling them that their choices are incorrect.

Dan notes earlier that these can later be exchanged in kind suggests a shared knowledge of interaction expectations. The fact that such a context of exchange and interaction is understood and even expected by enthusiasts shows evidence of the way in which repeated interactions foster future contexts of mutual attentiveness (Urry, 2003). As enthusiasts meet with friends to ask for help and to offer advice they produce understandings of how to behave and interact in similar future situations, highlighting community shared resources about enthusiast labour and working with friends.

By tapping into these community stocks of knowledge and skill enthusiasts can draw on the shared resources of their likeminded friends and in this way the collective sociable element of the community helps the enthusiast within it to learn new skills. Within a social capital approach to community, it has been suggested that community connections afforded by a similar goal or shared interest help to foster and facilitate learning, as shown here (Sander & Lowney, 2006; Wenger, 2011). Terry (2010) explains that a friend who is a car enthusiast will criticise modifications which look “off” or not cool within the bounds of community styles however they will follow these up with a solution. This solution may take the form of the skills, knowledge or ideas needed to choose a modification that is deemed acceptable or good within the community. This skill and knowledge transfer exists at different scales too; there is the scale of the participant who described the group of friends chilling on a driveway<sup>77</sup> but also the wider pool of knowledges at the community’s disposal by way of collective knowledge resource access at car shows, gatherings and on online forums.

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<sup>77</sup> See Questionnaire, Q11.

## 6.4 The Contention of Built not Bought Cars

It is important now to turn to how 'enthusiast labour', is perceived by the community as a key part not just of socio-technical projects but of authentic enthusiasm. As suggested in the quote in section 6.3 there is a contention that, "If you self-build [the car] you tend to do it with your close friends" (Questionnaire, Q11). The context of this participant's choice to phrase their labour as "self-building" comes from the community understanding that being involved with building the car brings respect from other enthusiasts<sup>78</sup>. In the community this is referred to as the 'built not bought' debate, with the contention being that cars which are worked on by their owners make them more authentic enthusiasts than those who pay a garage to complete the work. This often means that so called bought not built cars which are shown off by the owner but where the 'enthusiast labour' (Fuller, 2007) was not completed by them deserve less respect from community participants. I noted in the field that one of the main patterns of hate online as described in chapter 5 was concerned with this personal investment or lack thereof.

Yarwood and Shaw (2010: 427) noted model railways built from scratch rather than from pre-made parts were seen as confirming a sense of ownership and skill. Similarly Ben Chappell (2012: 81) argues that cars which are known to be the result of hard work deserve more respect both directed towards the car and the owner. This is summarised by the following quote from a participant who stated that they preferred, "Built not bought all the way. I love to be able to tell people what I have done to my car and that it was my hard work to make it the way it is" (Questionnaire, Q11). Here emphasis is placed on the level of personal investment and the consequent sense of pride that comes with taking ownership of hard work

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<sup>78</sup> As Chapter 5.4 illustrated this sharing and exchange of opinions and feedback most often happens in response to display of the car online.

and thus of the finished product. This notion of ownership as afforded by the emotional affiliation to the object and personal involvement in the enthusiast labour is questioned with regards to those who take their cars to professionals to conduct the work. Chappell (2012: 81) notes that these owners who employ professionals to undertake the enthusiast labour, become “directors of an adhoc team of professionals” (ibid). It is an important part of this argument to note that the owner who becomes this director is less involved as opposed to uninvolved.

With reference to my own positionality as an enthusiast who lacks mechanical skill which limits my physical labour in the socio-technical project I noted that, “I keep running into the 'built not bought' rhetoric in my field work and have started to question my authenticity as a modified car enthusiast as a result” (Field Diary, 13/3/15). This actually drove me to become more involved with the process as the fieldwork went on, in order to experience the positive experience noted by the participant above, the ability to take ownership for elements of the project. Furthermore I was driven by the sense of pride and achievement noted by Steve above, which brings a further connection between enthusiast and car<sup>79</sup>. However despite this community norm which holds personal investment in high regard one participant notes that, “At the moment the majority seem to be... more bought not built.” (Questionnaire, Q5). This may be a similar contention to that outlined in Chapter 5 with regards to building cars for internet fame whereby a vast number of people need to do it in order for the remainder to have formed an opinion about it. In other words whilst bought not built is seen in a bad light in terms of community norms about labour it is by no means unpopular. Below I discuss the more practical elements of car owners passing this labour over to professionals whilst

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<sup>79</sup> Steve addresses this further in Chapter 8 with regards to the embodied experiences of driving a car that he has a hand in building.

remaining attached and invested in the project through their creative vision. Tam-Scott (2009: 120) observes that for modifying cars the notion of a creative vision often means that the enthusiast has an idea of how they want the finished car to look; this can act as guidance on modification decisions made throughout the project. As such the personal investment could be in terms of this creative vision, directing the labour of professionals.

The difference in opinion underlying built not bought debates hinges on the role of the owner, for the most part taking your car to someone else to modify is seen as a form of detachment from the socio-technical project. However Chappell's (2012: 81) observation that such an owner can be understood as a director of a team affords a more nuanced explanation. This suggests that the owner has a vision yet lacks the skills to do the work themselves. However it may be that the owner has no vision and by taking their car to a garage run by enthusiasts and direct them in realising said vision. It is this somewhat artistic vision of how the final car should look and feel<sup>80</sup> that when missing leads to a lack of respect. This notion of vision taken from the interview with John, quoted below, suggests that an enthusiast has ownership over their vision and thus has ownership over the socio-technical project and its product; the modified car, regardless of whether they inputted their own enthusiast labour into this process. John argues, "For me I don't think it's that important as long as you've got the vision, then it's your vision, it doesn't matter who builds it I don't think...whether you get a garage to do it or whether you do it yourself it's not as important as it being your car" (John Interview). This problematizes the above discussion of enthusiast labour to some extent however it does offer justification for the pattern of so called bought not built cars observed by participants in this study. The emotional attachment (Craggs et al., 2013) is still there but

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<sup>80</sup> Here I mean both to drive and the emotional experience of using and seeing the car on a daily basis.

rather than attached to an object it is connected to an investment in the process; suggesting that an enthusiast can still foster emotional attachment to the car through their involvement in the project, without actually having to do the physical labour.

To clarify with patterns taken from across the autoethnographic fieldwork (see Field Diary) there are perhaps three very general groups of enthusiasts which illustrate the above argument<sup>81</sup>. The first is the enthusiast who works on their own car, or works on it with a group of friends; however both the enthusiast labour and the vision can be said to be their own. Secondly there is the enthusiast who wishes to modify their car and have an idea of how they want it to look and feel but due perhaps time or skillset constraints, take it to a professional instead. These garages are often run by individuals who would fit in this first group who have turned their passion and enthusiast labour into a business as discussed in section 6.6 below. Thirdly there are those who lack some of the vision but can afford to take their cars to the best names in the business and thus the resultant car will be celebrated at shows and online as a result but without much of their own input in terms of labour or vision. This third category can be clearly aligned to the contention that some enthusiasts are only interested in building cars in order to become internet or community famous. Although in a key similarity to that contention there is little evidence of this third group of enthusiasts beyond the opinions of other community members; whilst these bought not built cars with no ownership of creative vision are chastised it is difficult to find enthusiasts who admit to approaching their projects in such a way. One further dynamic which arises from the built not bought debate is that modified cars are often sold in their modified form; thus affording another enthusiast to buy the car the project complete with its reputation and associated community respect which

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<sup>81</sup> As will become clear I am very cautious of making such an essentialist assumption and the categories are referred to in order to show how enthusiasts view each other.

results from the original owner's enthusiast labour. This is a situation not lost on modified car enthusiasts, as explored in the section below regarding legacies of enthusiast labour.

### **6.5 Legacies of Enthusiast Labour**

I want to turn now to an example which shows the importance of enthusiast labour as connected to ownership of a project and thus the way this is interpreted when it passes on to a new owner. This is a fairly common occurrence as many enthusiasts build cars to meet a certain creative vision. Once achieved they will show the car for a season and then sell it to fund a new project, an observation made by Tam-Scott (2009: 116-7) with classic car enthusiasts as well. The example given below describes the situation whereby an enthusiast might buy somebody else's modified car, where the enthusiast labour has already been invested and the car displayed at shows and online.

"I was half tempted to go and buy Andrew Finch's VW Golf coz he's trying to sell it. I stopped myself and thought it's not your car then is it mate, you've just bought it and then you're carrying on the legacy." (Dan Interview).

This echoes the notion that a modified car is something of a personalising project, something, as discussed in chapter 4 Steve stated that, "instead of driving round with a blank bit of paper you have something with your own personal touch on it" (Steve Interview). The Golf which Dan is thinking of buying then already has this personal touch of its previous owner and attached to this personalisation is a sense of legacy. Ultimately Dan decides against buying the VW Golf. He states, "But I do think, it's gotta be you've gotta do it yourself" (Dan Interview) further highlighting the value placed on personal involvement discussed throughout this chapter.

As noted in chapters 5 and 8 car shows and social media fame are a big part of VW enthusiasm, as such cars become very well-known and thus have something of a public legacy attached to them within the car community. To buy a car ready-built is thus seen as an inauthentic way to achieve this level of recognition, something evident across car cultures, as Chappell noted with lowrider enthusiasts in North America who said, “it’s not your car...a lowrider you have to build from the ground up” (Chappell, 2012: 143). Furthermore Chappell (2013: 14) states, “...few would ascribe prestige to purchasing a lowrider already entirely customised” later elaborating on this stating that such cars, “lacked the prestige granted to one known to be the product of legitimate hard work” (ibid: 141). Interestingly Yarwood and Shaw (2010: 427) talk about railway layouts which are sold on once completed, as with Dan’s quote above, this is seen to represent a short cut as the purchaser is not the original creator. However they also note that their participant in this example is planning his own additions and improvements, something which is a key unwritten rule if an enthusiast does buy an already well known modified car. This is usually achieved by changing the wheels, as an aside wheels are perhaps one of the most important signifiers of ownership of a project (Fuller, 2007: 33). In fact Paul Gilroy cites a modified car magazine to explain that, “Rims [wheels] are what separates the motorist from the enthusiast” (The Source, 1999: 144, quoted in Gilroy, 2001: 98). Similarly Chappell (2012: 17) notes that aftermarket wheels are the minimum modification needed for a car to be seen as customised. Therefore one way in which enthusiasts can take ownership of a car which embodies the previous owner’s enthusiast labour and identity is to change the wheels.

## **6.6 Enthusiasm & Employment: The Garage Business**

Throughout the chapter I have discussed the importance held by enthusiasts of working on their own VW’s, however it is also clear that this is not an option for everyone, myself



included. This section turns to those businesses and garages which fill that gap and which also provide more specialised services. The main garage which I used during the fieldwork stage describes itself as having been formed by, "...a group of car enthusiasts" (Strada Auto website, 2016), something which is true of many such businesses across the modified VW community. They continue, "At Strada we live and breathe cars...Strada's passion for perfection will rub off on every car that passes through our doors<sup>82</sup>". I observed this first hand several times with mechanics at the business clearly taking pride in their work (Field Diary, 19/5/14).

Furthermore modified car garages can be seen as different to mainstream garages in purpose and space most garage work is usually routine and does not need to involve much in the way of 'tinkering' (Dant & Bowles, 2003: 1). Furthermore the marketing material for Strada Auto explains that, "The kind of workshop developed to work on vehicles you wouldn't take to a normal garage or bodyshop..." (Strada Auto website, 2016). Whereas examples of garages for modified cars often reveal the importance of thinking and acting creatively and innovating to solve a range of problems in modifying a car in a certain way. The distinction made between normal garages and modified car specialists also reveals the existence of a network of sites where enthusiasts can take their cars for work of this nature. When I first began to modify my VW Polo, years before this study, I took it to a so-called normal garage for them to fit my coilover suspension so that the car could be lowered. They refused to do the work stating that they did not work on modified cars although they recommended several specialists who would complete the work; one of which I have used ever since. A further example of this network of trusted garages was evidenced by Dan who explained that, "through the car scene I've met a few you know a few trusted garages you know what I mean". This shows that one

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<sup>82</sup> They also note that their workshop welcomes non-specialist vehicles and jobs as well.

of the functions of shared knowledge resources is concerned with who can be trusted to work on a modified car, in particular Dan notes that he uses a freelance mechanic who is also a friend of his due to the level of trust between them (Dan Interview).

The discussion earlier in the chapter with regards to the built not bought debate paints a picture of distinction between those who work on their own cars and those who choose to have some or all of the work completed by a garage. In many ways this paints the garages and businesses of the modified VW community in a bad light, however as noted above, most are run by enthusiasts. Garages and places where labour is performed in order to modify cars are perhaps the most explicit site in terms of shared community knowledge being exposed. This is because the knowledge is actively used to build a car in a certain way or to achieve a certain style. This knowledge draws on the community's reserves of shared knowledge about the best ways to modify a VW car. These businesses provide a framework to understand what happens when a leisure activity becomes an activity of paid employment. The enthusiast business also relies on important tenets of the community structure and access to certain community resources; the main one being trust.

In the field, over two years I observed a broad pattern<sup>83</sup> whereby groups and enthusiast clubs contained a high proportion of individuals employed in or training in the motor trade. Work on enthusiasm in human geography has generally focused on leisure as freedom from waged work (Crang, 2009). Yarwood and Shaw (2010: 425) observe this puts practices which are work for some and leisure for others as hard to position within these binaries. It is, in part through the examples which follow that I would like to echo Yarwood and Shaw's (2009: 425) notion that leisure and indeed enthusiasm should go beyond binaries such as amateur or

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<sup>83</sup> This is a wider pattern but not a rule by any means, as many enthusiasts do not work in the motor trade.

professional. They argue that leisure, and I extend this to include enthusiasm, is a 'state of mind' which is experienced differently by different people (ibid; Gregson, 2007; Mansvelt, 2009). This diversity of leisure experience explains the empirical pattern whereby an enthusiast's passion can straddles both work and leisure time and this is not a novel observation in human geography research. Both Geoghegan (2013: 43) and Yarwood and Shaw (2010: 429) observed that some of the enthusiasts in their studies were participating precisely because of a background of employment in a related sector.

### **6.6.1 Enthusiast-run Businesses: Passion, Shared Resources & Trust**

“...[enthusiast-run businesses]...do it for the passion not for the money”  
(Questionnaire, Q12).

The quote above, suggests the passionate motivations of enthusiasts who run modified VW businesses and garages, this passion is both for the cars on which they work on and for the wider community which makes up its client base. This shows the interesting interchange between enthusiasm and passion as related to leisure and then how this is translates into paid labour and business. This runs converse to some Marxist understandings of leisure or enthusiasm activities as being non-productive work or an escape from wage labour (Pantzar & Shove, 2005: 1). However for some enthusiasts their passion either becomes or grows out of their wage labour working with cars.

One enthusiast, similar to the opening quote, stated that it is important to support enthusiast-run businesses because, “You want somebody who [is] working on your car to love what’s being done just as much as you do” (Questionnaire, Q12). This has been the case for me when taking my VW to an enthusiast-run garage many times, with my project being treated as if it

were their own. Secondly though the opening quote could apply to a passion for the community, as explained earlier in the reference to family in chapter 5 whereby enthusiast businesses donated parts and labour to a community project. Some of this altruistic nature of supporting enthusiast run businesses is not well explained by a social capital approach alone. As noted above when sharing skills with other enthusiasts by way of social capital and knowledge exchange there is no immediate reward for the donor, however the reward is the continued solidarity of the community and the maintenance of its social capital resources. Furthermore as outlined above this does not take into account the role of emotion in enthusiast behaviour. It is important then to turn to emotional geography to better explain why enthusiasts choose businesses for reasons such as their passion, as the questionnaire response below illustrates.

“...they are where they are because they love what they do. That should always be supported.” (Questionnaire, Q12).

The question answered above was ‘Do you think it’s important to use companies run by other enthusiasts? If so, why?’, interestingly of the thirty responses, four separate responses mentioned workers’ passion or love for the creative processes of modifying and the car which they worked on. In this context of enthusiasts working on their cars because of a passion this made for an interesting example; in many cases enthusiasts had chosen to work in the industry to further their love of cars or to turn it into a business. Two of the questionnaire responses stated that they first got interested in modified VW/Audi cars as a result of their employment. One explicitly describes this as being “through work & passion” (Questionnaire, Q3), implying the relationship between a passion for modified cars and the importance of being employed in a job which supports that passion. There is also clear crossover here with

the sociable nature of car modifying as one respondent stated that it's important to use enthusiast businesses because, "it's always nice to support friends' businesses" (Questionnaire, Q12).

Conversely Portes (1998: 16) notes that as community members gain social resources and the knowledge about how to competently use them there are less opportunities for entrepreneurial accumulation. The preference of many to work on their modified VW's themselves and to share the information about how to do so for free is then, at odds with supporting the businesses run by enthusiasts. However 33% of responses to the above question<sup>84</sup> regarding the choice to use enthusiast-run businesses stated that they did so for reasons such as, "...to support them with the same interest" and "[cars] built by enthusiasts for enthusiasts. Perfect recipe...because they know the market better than anyone" (Questionnaire, Q12). Furthermore this latter quote was actually in the tagline of one the businesses I took my Polo to for most of the fieldwork period; "A.....Vehicle Bodyshop Created by Enthusiasts for Enthusiasts" (Strada Auto website, 2015). The shared knowledge and enthusiasm shows the importance of garage workers drawing on the same reserves of social capital as key to their acceptance and popularity within the community. One respondent stated, "...they are able to meet my needs better than "simple" [non-enthusiast] mechanics because they know how I think about everything" (Questionnaire, Q12). This seemingly extreme example serves to highlight how the idea of creative vision outlined earlier in the section comes out of an understanding of community norms and learning how to use these competently. Thus by employing the services of an enthusiast the customer knows that their vision is shared because so too is the social capital and knowledge repertoire of the

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<sup>84</sup> 33% of responses to Question 5 included reference to either shared understanding, interest or enthusiasm.

community. Furthermore enthusiasts identify that garages run in this way are likely to share and respect the passion and emotional attachment to the car which is so important to the modified project car.

One example of this from my autoethnographic fieldwork was when I took my car to the aforementioned Strada Auto, in order to employ the services of a mechanic called Shelvey<sup>85</sup>. I had chosen this garage to fit my air ride suspension because I knew that Shelvey had successfully fitted it to his own car and had also completed installations on other customer's cars to a high standard. In particular when he asked me how I would like the air ride system displayed in the boot<sup>86</sup>, I stated that I wanted it to be subtle. I did not give any more detail because I understood that we both drew upon the same knowledge resources and that a subtle install meant the same thing to both of us (Paraphrased from Field Diary, 19/5/14). This example also illustrates the importance of trust, something which is key to social capital (Murphy, 2006), I trusted Shelvey to carry out work in a way we both understood. When I picked up the finished car several weeks later it was the evening before a weekend camping show. As such Shelvey was busy preparing other cars and asked that I take the car and pay him when I attended the show the following day, this was not an insignificant amount of money and yet he trusted me to honour the payment (Field Diary, 30/5/14). This is similar to the example earlier from Dan's interview earlier in the chapter where by offering his knowledge now he hopes to draw on the community's social capital reserves himself at a later date. As with Dan and his freelance mechanic friend noted above Shelvey and I had a relationship of trust. This relationship was based on repeated social interactions and business transitions in the past in which we had both proved ourselves to be competent (Wenger, 2011). As shown in chapter

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<sup>85</sup> Shelvey is one of the most well-known modified VAG mechanic in Shropshire.

<sup>86</sup> The compressor and air tank for air ride suspension usually go in the boot or spare wheel well.

Trust is an important result of repeated competent social interactions between enthusiasts and is also a good measure of social capital within a community (Mohan & Mohan, 2002). This highlights the importance of garages as sites where particular social interactions take place which engender trust and support community norms. This shows that whilst labour on cars is obviously done in exchange for money there are motivators of enthusiasm and a desire to support the community which also underlie this labour.

Another example of this trust which was raised numerous times during the fieldwork was the practice of pricing labour costs with 'mates' rates'. This is the largely self-explanatory practice of discounting labour costs in line with friendships, this is sometimes seen in a more organised way with club discounts offered on products ranging from insurance to suspension. Similarly an account by Ben Chappell (2013: 136-7) describes work being done at a lowrider garage in exchange for a favour. Mate's rates show another way in which members of the community donate to others for no reward other than to improve the solidarity of the community and to maintain reserves of social capital (Portes, 1998). Furthermore Portes (1998: 9) introduces the notion of trust enforceable by the community, explaining that if a community member extends a favour to a fellow member such as above, there is an expectation of both guaranteed repayment and group approval.

### **6.6.2 Enthusiast-run Businesses as Policing & Maintaining Community Norms**

It is important now to turn to the relative amount of power that enthusiast businesses have in prescribing and reinforcing modifying norms styles. Garages built cars may follow the letter of the customer's vision or where more creative license is ascribed to the workers they invoke their own stylistic choices. This means that they can influence and materially alter many cars which go on to exhibit a particular style or trend. These garages operate based on certain

knowledges, both in the form of formal training and from more informal enthusiast experiences and interactions. Subsequently much of the knowledge about style is developed over time and is relatively discrete until called into question.<sup>87</sup>

Interestingly the three questionnaire responses cited below state that using enthusiast businesses helps to support and drive the car scene and contribute to the culture as a whole. For example one participant noted that, “it’s nice to be involved with other enthusiasts [businesses] to spread the word of the VAG scene” (Questionnaire, Q12) with another similarly stating that “[It’s important to use companies run by enthusiasts] to keep the scene going strong” (Questionnaire, Q12). This relates back to the argument made earlier in the chapter that there is a level of altruism in relationships between enthusiasts, in that knowledge is openly exchanged for the good of socio-technical project cars. Furthermore by exchanging and drawing upon their stocks of community knowledge enthusiast businesses maintain the collective norms discussed in the previous chapter. This is because “[enthusiast run companies] support the scene and keep it running” (Questionnaire, Q12). This shows the strength of these institutions as agents of social capital; maintaining and policing community norms but also in a position to innovate and make new styles popular across the culture.

### **6.6.3 Enthusiast-run Businesses & Bought not Built: A Caveat**

This chapter has in part illustrated a feeling within the community of disdain for those who do not work on their own cars. In immediately preceding sections however I have presented enthusiast-run businesses and explained why these can be understood as an important institution within the community which maintains the community’s social capital reserves. It may already be obvious though, that there is disagreement about the importance of such

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<sup>87</sup> Most historical examples of modified car cultures; for example hot-rods and lowriders can be traced specifically back to the influences and innovations of particular garages and groups of businesses.



businesses in the context of the built not bought debate. There is a contention then between the idea that, “If you lack the mechanical skills then...it’s good to support local business” (Questionnaire, Q12) and the notion that having a garage conduct the labour leads to a lack of ownership of the project.

For example in an informal discussion with an enthusiast a car was discussed which had been mostly modified by Shelvey at his garage business, “...it’s not Charlie’s car. Its Shelvey’s car really...” (Field Diary, 12/6/16<sup>88</sup>). This car is a very good example of one where the owner is a keen enthusiast and has some vision of how he wants the final car to look, however he always takes the car to a certain garage where the enthusiast labour is carried out. This led one enthusiast to make the statement above, suggesting that because the enthusiast labour had been carried out by Shelvey, the car was more in his ownership than that of its actual owner. However the contention made by the participant here was that the personal investment and pride which go with this labour as discussed earlier in the chapter, mean that ownership of the socio-technical project rest with Shelvey. This chimes with the debate outlined above and in particular shows the distinction within the community between this view and the contradicting one outlined by John earlier in the chapter, “...whether you get a garage to do it or whether you do it yourself it’s not as important as it being your car...”. When I told the same mechanic I intended to sell my VW Polo at the end of the car season in 2015 he insisted that I should think twice about the decision because he had pride in the car as attached to his own enthusiast labour over the past three years actualizing my vision (Field Diary, 16/6/15). This further highlights the fact that enthusiast labour and the emotional attachment that is normalised between an enthusiast and their car is problematized by using

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<sup>88</sup> This actually came after the official period of autoethnography fieldwork had ended, however as discussed in the Methodology chapter my status as researcher-enthusiast has meant never really leaving the field.

enthusiast-run businesses. This research offers no resolution to this contestation but rather I highlight it here to illustrate the strength of understandings of enthusiast labour, personal investment and community understandings of ownership of the modified VW car.

### **6.7 Enthusiast Brands, Big Business & Contentions of Individuality**

As noted in chapter 5.4.1, there are concerns about community wide trends, homogenisation and loss of individuality amongst modified VW's, with concerns as noted that, "Individuality is fading away slowly" (Questionnaire, Q5). It is therefore unsurprising that criticisms of this nature are levelled at enthusiast businesses, in particular global brands for propagating these. Here I turn to one business in particular; Rotiform, an aftermarket wheel manufacturer. As has been noted wheels are a key identifying component of the modified car. One participant however summarised their views on the current VW scene as, "Financed air[bag suspension], financed Rotiform wheels, sadly." (Questionnaire, Q5)<sup>89</sup>. In this way Rotiform as a global brand has become a by-word for homogenisation of style in the modified VW community, As noted by McGrath (2016) on the enthusiast website SpeedHunters, " 'It's all just bags and Rotiforms' how many times have we read or heard that description when it comes to describing the current VW scene?"(McGrath, 2016). Although however they are perceived, as McGrath notes, they are industry leaders who only started making wheels in the last decade. I want now to move beyond concerns of homogenisation of style and show that meanings are attached in a way which affect the perceived identity of those who choose to use a certain brand, as mentioned above this is not new within material enthusiasm groups (e.g. Yarwood & Shaw, 2010: 432). It is helpful here to make a comparison to Yarwood and Shaw (2010:

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<sup>89</sup> The reference to finance packages is not discussed here but is situated within the context of the built not bought debate and has similar negative perceptions regarding modified cars which are bought and not built, as highlighted in section 6.4 of this chapter.

432) who noted that<sup>90</sup>, “...the semiotics of commercial manufacturing provides a reference point for [enthusiasts] modellers”. The previous chapter showed that by policing which modifications are deemed to be acceptable within the community, boundaries are raised to the spread of individuality.

Rotiform base their designs on famous wheels from the past, with an emphasis on making them more accessible. This often means reproducing replica like versions of classic wheels in new bigger sizes and to largely VAG cars. To many enthusiasts this opens up the market allowing them to run a style of wheel previously unavailable to them. McGrath (2016) goes onto say, “not only has Rotiform dominated an industry, it has practically reinvented it”. Yarwood and Shaw (2010: 432) note that modellers refer to certain brands of model trains in order to align with different enthusiast identities. As such they argue that enthusiasts’ use of branded items in creative projects does not erode individuality in the way that might be expected of a global brand selling homogenising products. As figures 4 and 5<sup>91</sup> below show the same model of VW with Rotiform wheels can retain individuality. Similarly Rotiform was mentioned numerous times across the fieldwork by enthusiasts looking to align themselves with a certain community-defined notion of style.

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<sup>90</sup> With reference to railway modellers but in a way which fits this case study appropriately.

<sup>91</sup> Both cars shown also have air suspension.



*Figure 4. Rotiform's BLQ wheel on a Mk6 VW Golf R (Rotiform, 2017)*



*Figure 5. Rotiform's NUE wheel on a Mk5 Golf (Author's Photograph)*

Brands such as Rotiform which have a global enthusiast market have other powers over how trends become propagated, with the rise of the internet and the online community this is increasingly the product of company's marketing budgets<sup>92</sup>. Therefore the marketing campaigns and cultural media reporting of aftermarket companies and the trends they invoke are incredibly important to the prescription and maintenance of modification trends within

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<sup>92</sup> In the USA the aftermarket parts industry was worth \$238.4Bn in 2013 and so highly visible marketing strategies are key (Auto Car Association, 2014; CapGemini Consulting, 2010).

the modified VW community<sup>93</sup>. In the section below I turn to one such marketing campaign which shows the way in which global businesses in this sector harness both enthusiasm and understandings of the online community and its power over trends.

### **6.8 Enthusiast Businesses: Harnessing the Enthusiast Community**

In the summer of 2016 an online trend began to sweep across automotive communities, enthusiasts would message big brands and proposition them; free goods in exchange for free viral marketing. The offer would be that if a post about the brand could reach a set number of comments, shares and likes on Facebook, often in the tens of thousands then would the company send them some free products. This further illustrates the context of the internet famous cars in the previous chapter. One example in particular from this movement which became well-known across the community was that of airbag suspension manufacturer Airlift (Clifford & McNally, 2016). This involved an enthusiast named Carl sharing his Facebook post to the company and gaining the prerequisite number of likes, shares and comments and thus affording the brand unrivalled marketing via existing community networks to which Carl had access. By reaching this target the company then rewarded Carl with airbag suspension for his car, a package worth over four thousand pounds<sup>94</sup>. Following this an unrelated company C-Auto offered to fit the suspension free of charge, at the time I had just purchased a car from a mechanic at C-Auto and so had chance to discuss this with the company's owner. He explained that the viral marketing afforded by Airlift's publicity had presented a snowball effect whereby the media coverage would continue onto whoever fitted the kit. In this way both businesses were able to harness the strength and structure of existing community

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<sup>93</sup> As the figures are for the wider automotive aftermarket industry this can be argued to be true of all car enthusiast communities.

<sup>94</sup> Understood within the context of the built not bought debate and contentions of internet fame it is not hard to understand why this was not particularly well received by the community at large.

networks in order to better market themselves as supporting the scene and culture. As noted this notion of businesses supporting the scene is understood as key by enthusiasts. Notions of harnessing enthusiasm and existing community networks have been discussed before by Geoghegan and others (2016) with reference to citizen science and collecting so-called big data with regards to the environment. However the harnessing of enthusiasm by businesses which operate within the community of enthusiasm have been less well explored in enthusiasm geography.

## **6.9 Enthusiast Labour Conclusions**

This chapter has shown the importance of enthusiast labour (Fuller, 2007: 91) and the desire which enthusiasts have to make personal investments both physical and creative into the modified car project. This personal investment takes the form of emotional affiliation to the objects of enthusiasm (Craggs et al., 2013: 879) but also the utilisation of shared community resources such as knowledge and trust. This investment both of labour and creative vision reinforces the suggestion, by Campbell (2005: 17) of a form of craft consumption whereby the creator invests something of their self into the product. Furthermore the empirics have shown that enthusiast labour can be seen as the mobilisation of a particular passionate dedication to modifying but is also driven by a sense of pride and achievement and a consequent feeling of connection<sup>95</sup> and ownership over the project. However this chapter has also shown that this importance placed on enthusiast labour and personal input of labour leads to contestation when an enthusiast does not or can not complete the work themselves.

The modified car project can be seen to be both a project of physical alteration and labour performed on the car but also a sociable project which brings enthusiasts together. Thus this

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<sup>95</sup> In chapter 8 I address the how these connections influence the embodied experience of driving a car you have worked on.

study supports Fuller's (2007: 92) idea of the modified car project as a socio-technical one. By drawing on shared resources of knowledge and skills whilst working together the emotional affiliation which enthusiasts have towards objects can be seen to spread to bodies (Craggs et al., 2013). In this way building and maintaining cars with friends leads to building and maintaining friendships and community structures. By sharing the practice of enthusiast labour and sharing the required knowledge with likeminded individuals, enthusiasts can foster friendships and thus strengthen community cohesiveness (Geoghegan, 2013: 45; Miller, 2017: 249). Geoghegan (2013: 44) suggests that this is a transformative potential of enthusiasm, with many participants in this research referring to their friendships made or maintained by way of a shared passion for modified VW's. As such sharing each other's skills, knowledge and personal investment leads to social structures which may outlast the enthusiasm; as with the example of the club Dubshire early in the chapter.

This sharing of resources and using them competently in the correct contexts, alongside other users of the same knowledge can also be understood as strengthening community cohesiveness from a social capital standpoint (Falkirk & Kilpatrick, 2000; Wenger, 2011). As noted in chapter 5 repeated social interactions, such as those presented by working on cars with friends and other enthusiasts; increase community stocks of social capital. Relatedly there is further clear evidence in this chapter that knowledge exchange and the reciprocal altruism (Portes, 1998: 6) noted in chapter 5 is also present in the learning of new skills regarding the modified car. This chapter has shown both that enthusiasts have a desire to learn, so as to enable their own enthusiast labour but also that enthusiasts are often open to help each other by sharing knowledge and labour. In this way the socio-technical project can be seen as a platform for social learning (Wenger, 2011), working together to achieve a shared

goal strengthens relationships. Further to this, with increased sharing of knowledge and the willingness to share, teach and learn, the stocks of social capital within the community as a whole increase. The profits of this can be seen as increasing community solidarity in that its stocks can be drawn upon in future to solve other enthusiasts' problems. This was noted in particular by Dan who was willing to share his enthusiast labour with others in order that he might have the favour returned by another community member when needed. This chapter has once again shown the potential for a social capital informed understanding of community structure and dynamics alongside readings of personal investment, friendship and passion informed by emotional geography to give a deeper understanding of experiences of enthusiasm.

The widespread contention of the built not bought debate illustrated in this chapter, has shown further evidence of the community networks across which norms and values are transmitted and policed, as noted in chapter 5. It also shows that the levels of pride and achievement tied to the modified car project are also tied to the personal investment within them, as noted by Campbell (2005: 17) with reference to craft consumption. There is an understood difference within the community between the enthusiast who invests their own physical labour into the car and those who lack these skills and who choose to employ others to carry out the work. This chapter has also shown that whilst some enthusiasts see this as a lack of involvement in the process and even question the ownership of the project which these people can claim, for others the investment of their creative vision is enough. For these latter enthusiasts their creative vision is the input of enthusiast labour. However the physical element of this labour is conducted by professionals and in this way the enthusiast becomes a "director of an ad-hoc team of professionals" (Chappell, 2012: 81). Similarly this chapter



explains that a project car becomes inscribed with its owner's enthusiast labour; be that physical or as an embodiment of their creative vision. Thus when that car is sold there is an understanding within the community that it would not be right to buy such a car and to profit from the legacy of the previous owners labour. The profits in this instance are usually the online popularity or community reputation of the car, which can become transferred to the new owner. Thus the contention is that this reputation is undeserved if the project was the result of someone else's creative vision and enthusiast labour. As noted many enthusiasts will endeavour to make changes to a car such as this as soon as possible, in order to make it individual to them and to sever ties to its original creator.

The chapter then turned to the enthusiast-run businesses of the modified VW community, which occupy an interesting position within the above outlined context of built not bought and the importance of working on one's own car. The mechanics and workers in these businesses are often enthusiasts who have turned their passion into employment or who conversely became enthusiasts as a result of their work. For those enthusiasts who do not subscribe to the built not bought contention, such as John, these businesses are necessary to carry out the creative vision of a car's owner. As such the work is still completed by an enthusiast and somebody who draws on, maintains and can create community shared knowledge. They are able to access the same shared knowledge and skills resources as the groups of friends working on a car in their driveway as discussed above. However the enthusiast who uses such a business remains invested creatively but can be understood to become a director or labour rather than the practitioner.

One aspect which has been shown to be particularly important in enthusiast-run businesses is that of trust, as in the previous chapter trust can be seen as the result of repeated

competent social interactions. In the case of enthusiast-run businesses this means that past interactions and transactions pave the way for future relations of trust. As enthusiast business owners draw on the same shared resources as their clientele their increasing trustworthiness can be seen as an important signifier of community cohesiveness and strong social capital stocks (Portes, 1998; Sander & Lowney, 2006). Furthermore as such businesses are key sites at which new styles emerge which can then spread across community networks and become widely popular, they are able to influence community norms of style. In particular bigger scale businesses such as Airlift and Rotiform which are able to harness community networks, for example online, can rapidly introduce new norms and as shown Rotiform is thus related to the perceived growing homogeneity of cars (Questionnaire, Q5).

As explained in the chapter, in my experience utilising such businesses, it is clear that those who work there are also members of the community, they too understand their investment in the car as personal. Although they are wage labourers they are active members of the community and so the cars they work on are still approached as socio-technical. This has been shown to be a key factor in the choice of such businesses by enthusiasts; the knowledge that they too share community norms of style, behaviour and a passion for modified VW's. However as noted above this can lead to the same questions of ownership by way of personal investment or lack thereof, as in the built not bought debate. In particular the same sense of pride, achievement and involvement in a project is felt by mechanics and enthusiast business workers. As such these cars may be viewed as in the ownership of the "ad-hoc team of professionals" (Chappell, 2012: 81) rather than actually belonging to their owners. This discussion of enthusiast-run businesses afforded an exploration of the larger scale global businesses and recent developments within the community with regards to these. The two

key themes here were the notion that individuality in modifying VW's is being eroded by globally homogenous aftermarket parts companies such as Rotiform and that businesses of scale are able to harness existing community networks as with Airlift. As discussed, Rotiform is associated by many enthusiasts with the erosion of individuality noted in chapter 5. However in line with the observations of Yarwood and Shaw (2010: 432) I noted that in the field the use of brand name modifications such as Rotiform wheels or Airlift suspension were used as a signifiers of personal identity and investment in the modified car project. As such these brands do not always have the homogenising effect expected by some enthusiasts. The Airlift example of viral marketing evidences the ways in which enthusiasm can be harnessed (Geoghegan et al., 2016) and in particular it shows one important contribution of this study, in order to harness enthusiastic participation an in-depth understanding of community dynamics and existing networks is needed.

# 7 Car Shows & Sites of Enthusiasm

## 7.1 Introduction

This chapter takes the thesis in a slightly different direction by turning to the relationship between enthusiast experience and practice afforded by car show events. Shows bring together enthusiasts in a specific space and time in order for them to share their collective sociability and shared appreciation of modified VWs. In the first half of this chapter I critically explore the ways in which car shows are experienced by enthusiasts and how these experiences affect their behaviours, knowledge and the afore-mentioned community norms. The car show can be seen as an event which has similarities with festivals (Jackson, 2014), sporting events (Brown et al., 2008; Gratton & Preuss, 2008; Terry et al., 2016) and enthusiast conventions and events (Fuller, 2007; Lamerichs, 2014; Yarwood & Shaw, 2010). These other event literatures stem both from within and beyond geography and in a range of research contexts, as such I am cautious to keep this chapter within the realms of enthusiast experience, practice and performance in show spaces and the impacts on those spaces. Whereas the literature on eventscapes (e.g. Brown et al., 2008) is concerned with the organiser's approach to events in order to inform policy in this area. However the notion of an eventscape does afford a rhetoric for the spatially distributed sites which make up the wider landscape of some events, as discussed with reference to the Wörthersee and VW Days events below.

The structure of this chapter first turns to the importance of the car show event as a sociable space and it then explores the nuanced community dynamics which become visible in these spaces, in particular looking at competitive forms of display. By approaching car shows with an attentiveness to their spatio-temporal context and audience this chapter also turns to a

discussion of potentially antisocial behaviours. The chapter then turns to a discussion of one of the key ways in which the event is spatially spread over a wider scale, referred to here as the mobile display of 'show traffic'. The second half of this chapter<sup>96</sup> looks at one particular car show; GTi Treffen, which takes in towns and villages around Lake Wörthersee in Austria<sup>97</sup>. This event is explored in terms of the way in which it has been inscribed as a cultural mecca, this shows the spatio-temporal nature of the enthusiasm; as inscribed in certain locations and at certain times by experiences, practices and performances.

## 7.2 The Car Show as Social Gathering

“W: what do you go to shows for?

[John:] It's to relax, to see some new cars and get away from work and the stresses of life really

W: And to meet up with friends too?

[John:] That's it yeah, it's very social the VW modifying scene”  
(John Interview).

Geoghegan (2012: 41) argues that there is a spatial mediation and articulation for the emotional attachment which brings those with a common interest together. In the modified VW culture, the car show is perhaps the most common spatial context in which this collective sociability and its influences can be observed. In the quote above John refers to the sociability of the car show as a distinct spatial formation which is separate from time-spaces of paid employment. This is interesting as recent research concerning music festival spaces (Jackson, 2014) found clear links between a removal of everyday responsibilities and a perhaps consequent sense of *communitas* and sociability. Jackson (2014: 103) found that participants

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<sup>96</sup> From section 7.6 onwards.

<sup>97</sup> GTi Treffen translates as GTi Meeting; whilst this is the official event title it is more often referred to by enthusiasts in the UK as Wörthersee Treffen or simply Wörthersee.

often felt that they could “switch off” in festival spaces as they were relatively removed spatio-temporally from what John refers to as “the stresses of life”. As John explains the car show also offers a space to meet up with enthusiast friends; it acts as a spatial site for the co-present physical encounters (Urry, 2003) discussed in chapter 5. The way in which the car show brings together friends and enthusiasts makes these sites feel special. In the field I noted that arriving at a show carries, “a real buzz feeling...the culmination of things that you’re just on the cusp of, showing off a car you’ve worked hard at..., meeting with friends...you only see at shows, going round seeing...who has done what to their car...”(Field Diary, 9/3/14).

Car shows can also be seen as removing the boundaries of everyday work in other ways. For example Geoghegan (2013: 44) noted that enthusiast activities undertaken by groups of participants afford a levelling of identities from beyond the bounds of enthusiasm. In her research different levels of employment in the telecoms industry were smoothed out by the shared enthusiasm for telecoms equipment. Similarly Petterson and Getz (2009: 313) argued that festival spaces afford normal socio-cultural differences to be abandoned; with everyone participating in various rituals as equals. This reinforces the notion observed by John above that the bounds of the everyday are removed within the spatio-temporal context of the car show. Car shows also expose the sheer scale of the community’s networks, in my fieldwork even relatively small shows would attract several hundred enthusiasts, meaning there was always a mass presence of enthusiasts and modified cars. Scale and collective experience are important both to experience and impact of the event, as will be explored in detail later in the chapter. With reference to this scale of like-minded individuals united in space Lamerichs (2014: 263) observed that, “Here, in the flesh, I met like-minded individuals, for the first time, en masse” when attending a cosplay event. Car shows afford spaces where likeminded

enthusiasts can interact, as Lamerichs states, in the flesh; that is without the digital mediation of the internet or online networks. However online and digital mediatisation of community interactions also affects physical experiences in car show spaces. In some cases these online interactions fore-run those co-physical ones which occur at car shows. For example Dan noted that the first show he attended was as the result of participation in an online VW Polo club, where he was told, "...you have to be there for this show, there's no excuses..." (Dan Interview). He went on to explain that this offered him a chance to meet up with other enthusiasts in real life, as opposed to online and to discuss cars in a mutually attentive way which is not possible with non-enthusiasts (Dan Interview).

In this way some of the exchanges of community knowledge and maintenance of norms can be seen unveiled in car show spaces. It is important to note here, that enthusiasts rarely attend car shows alone, by either attending with friends or clubs there is some level of predestined sociability to these gatherings. However as detailed with reference to Dan and Martin's experiences in Chapter 5 many enthusiasts utilise car show space and the sociability therein to make new friends and learn more about their shared interests. As such there is a sense of camaraderie in events which bring together participants for a common purpose (Jackson, 2014: 120). It has been noted elsewhere that car shows and enthusiast conventions often foster new co-present interactions and friendships by way of sharing esoteric knowledge with other enthusiasts (Belk, 2004: 275; Tam-Scott, 2009: 119; Yarwood & Shaw, 2010: 427). These interactions in show spaces are the same as the car talk which Lumsden (2013) observed in her research, as discussed in Chapter 5 and show further importance of conversational face-to-face interactions for knowledge and trust exchange (Murphy, 2006; Urry, 2003). Furthermore Leigh and others (2006: 483) observed that car shows bring people

together to foster such interactions and knowledge sharing which result in stronger social bonds across the community.

Dan implied this interactional nature regarding the discussion of particular car knowledges at shows by comparing it to the everyday interactions in which others are not interested in modified cars. He stated, with reference to exchanging esoteric knowledge and the mutual attentiveness of such interactions, “Nobody’s eyes glaze over, it just doesn’t happen its great” (Dan Interview). This shows how the shared knowledge and love of the car which an enthusiast community already has (Belk, 2004: 275) affords trust and social capital building interactions between participants unknown to each other before the car show event. It is the strength of community cohesion and social capital which affords these interactions in car show contexts. Thus participants brought together spatially, but with no prior relationship are able to experience this comradeship (Jackson, 2014: 120) as afforded by the event itself. This also shows evidence of car talk as facilitating the collective sociability of enthusiasm that Geoghegan (2012) presents, as noted in Chapter 5, which is similar to the cohesion produced by social capital exchange (Mohan & Mohan, 2002; Holt, 2008). As noted previously the strength of such interactions in reinforcing community norms and maintaining social capital stems from their repetition. Particular events such as the one noted by Dan above usually occur once a year, as part of the show season. This repetition of social interactions has been noted to develop stocks of community social capital in other similar contexts such as at regularly occurring music festivals (Arcodia & Whitford, 2006). This also shows evidence of the combination between knowledge and skills exchange and sociability illustrated in chapter 6.



This sociable and community oriented nature of the car show provides the context for much of the discussion to come, in particular it influences enthusiasts understandings of context, audience and consequently appropriate behaviours (Edensor, 2001: 60). Geographer Graham Brown and others (2008) describes this notion of the value added to an event by its participants, context and other factors as producing an eventscape. The eventscape literature also affords a discussion of the impacts and lasting legacies of events, as caused by event organisers, this is more often concerned with policy impacts and event planning (ibid; Gratton & Preuss, 2008). However by drawing on this literature below and in particular in the latter half of this chapter, it is possible to read the legacies of events which enthusiasts themselves influence, often beyond the intentions of the organisers.

### **7.3 The Car Show as a Space of Display**

Whilst the show acts as a key social space for many enthusiasts, it also has another main role; the display of modified VW cars to crowds of enthusiasts. Figure 6 below shows the meeting of these two factors as enthusiast socialise within a space which displays modified cars for their appreciation. There are, broadly speaking, two types of car show in the VW community. These are usually referred to as 'show' or 'go' events; literally pertaining to the central tenet of the show as being display or driving. The former are usually held in large spaces such as indoor arenas or country house estates however the latter are usually held at driving centred sites such as racing circuits or drag strips and usually involve racing or driving activities on the track. The majority of shows explored in this research were of the variety concerned with display, this was influenced by my positionality. Whilst most enthusiasts are interested in cars modified both for driving and display, as outlined in chapter 8, with the amount of shows on the annual calendar they choose whether to attend show or go orientated events. In my case my car is modified for the former; built for display rather than driving, as such many of the

social connections I already had in the field were with people interested in display. Display at the car show is usually organised around a main show field, see Figure 7 below. This is usually literally a field as these events are usually held in large outdoor spaces such as country estates or racecourses, with accommodation on site in the form of camping. This camping element increases the similarities in experience to those which Jackson (2014) notes about music festivals. The show field will often be divided spatially into a show and shine competition area and an area for club displays or club-stands.



*Figure 6. Edition 38 2015, Socialising Enthusiasts in the Show Field (Photograph Author's own).*



*Figure 7. Show field layout, Dubsmania 2014 (Author's Photograph)*

The spatial organisation of the show and shine competition unveils some of the community norms regarding which makes and models of cars are allowed within the modified VW-Audi culture. Due to the fact that the show and shine field is divided up by car make and model certain rules are usually enforced so that other cars are not displayed, as the quote below taken from the VW Days show website illustrates. As the quote and Figure 8 below show perhaps the most obvious time at which unwritten community guidelines are in fact written down is with reference to spatial organisation at car shows. In this way shows can be seen as physical and spatial representations of norms which circulate within the community but which are rarely written down.

“The vehicles of Volkswagen AG & Porsche SE group are all accepted. Other brand vehicles are not allowed, they will be systematically parked on a secure ‘visitor’ area” (VW Days, 2015).

The quote, explains the access rules for the show and whilst barring certain manufacturers it also shows the spread of VW enthusiasm into that of its parent company Porsche<sup>98</sup>. Similarly the figure below shows a sign at the show Edition 38 in England; it designates the show and shine area as only for Volkswagen-Audi Group<sup>99</sup> (VAG) made cars. These examples show community norms and knowledges about the type of cars which are included in the community writ large in the form of spatial organisation.



*Figure 8. Edition 38 Show & Shine signage, excluding non-VAG cars from display (Author's Photograph)*

The shows which are focused on display are usually organised around a show and shine competition. This competition sees cars parked up in rows, in their designated make and model categories and judged according to certain parameters. These competitions are not exclusive to the modified VW community with many car enthusiast studies from a range of literatures noting this behaviour (e.g. Belk, 2004: 273; Kwon, 2004: 1; Leigh et al., 2006: 485;

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<sup>98</sup> Volkswagen AG is actually the parent company of Porsche AG but the former is majority owned by Porsche Automobil Holding SE.

<sup>99</sup> This is usually used to refer to Porsche, VW, Audi, Seat and Skoda although the latter two are less popular at VW shows.

Tam-Scott, 2009). Furthermore comparisons can be made to other kinds of events which have a particular focus on competitions based on display which may have impacts on participants' understandings of norms such as agricultural shows (Yarwood et al., 2010) and cosplay conventions (Lamerichs, 2007). There is also a connection here with other enthusiast events where creatively produced items are displayed for the appreciation of others who understand those creative processes (e.g. Yarwood & Shaw, 2010: 432). For many it is these competitions which motivate their creative visions and enthusiast labour discussed in chapter 6. In this way the show and shine can be seen as one element which leads to temporal and spatial stretching of the show onto driveways and into garages and the minds of enthusiasts preparing their cars for display at a certain show. In this way the show also influences other states of display such as the online build thread, with cars often being built with a specific show as the deadline for unveiling<sup>100</sup>.

Within the competition and this judgement there lies the community aesthetic norms previously discussed in chapter 6, however the subjective nature of the judging leads to a related cultural politics as well. As discussed in chapter's 5 and 6 there is clear evidence of the existence of community knowledge as widely distributed and transferred through social learning systems across the community (Wenger, 2011). Knowledge about community trends in modifying arises in part from the articulation of this knowledge and subsequent judging in the show field. As such car shows can be seen as sites at which this knowledge is exposed and where modifiers who do not follow community norms may be highlighted by not winning show and shine awards. Fuller (2007: 370) also noted this stating that car shows are, "the

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<sup>100</sup> Enthusiasts talk of unveiling cars at a car show after a long period of enthusiast labour and modification, however many of these have already posted images in build threads or on social networking websites so there is often little to actually unveil.

primary conduits of institutional valorisation in the [modified car] scene". As such the judges decisions, discussed below can both maintain and produce existing community norms regarding modified VW aesthetics. Furthermore Leigh and others (2006: 485) suggests that the subjective nature of car show judging can influence which styles and modifications can be seen as appropriate or authentic within the given car culture. This is also arguably an influence of the event which goes beyond the intention of its organisers.

During my fieldwork (Field Diary, 1/6/14 & 6/6/14) I was able to informally discuss show and shine competitions with a participant who is a judge for show and shine competitions at a range of VW shows across the UK. He explained that each area of a car; interior, exterior, wheels, paint and many more were ranked out of ten. If these were not modified they were given a score out of ten in terms of how close to being unmodified they were. As such it is better to have a fully modified interior than one which is mostly standard. Whilst this system clearly allows for numerical scoring the ranking itself is affected by the judge's use of the shared community repertoire of knowledge. This is generally reflected as cars which may have been in fashion ten years ago now rarely win trophies even though on paper they have the same modifications. Similar to my own experiences, Chappell (2012) notes that in his research with lowriders there was clear evidence of aesthetic styles and fashions as developing and changing over time. As discussed in chapter 6 key businesses can also have a hand in which styles become known as fashionable and the judging of show and shine competitions can reinforce and institutionalise these by picking certain cars to win trophies. This shows one of the ways in which event organisers can influence the experience of those attending (Gratton and Preuss, 2008) however in the following section I turn to the ways in which enthusiasts can behave at car shows which go beyond these intentions. In this way it is possible to see

the eventscape as much the construction of attending enthusiasts as it is of the organising parties.

#### **7.4 Performance at the Car Show**

As the above section has illustrated the spatial organisation of the car show can have quite clear rules, however there are other forms of display at events which are less easy to control. As will be shown below a key example of these are the performative driving behaviours, enacted for enthusiast audiences which often stem from the feelings of being beyond everyday responsibilities as noted (Jackson, 2014). In this section I turn to the performances of the car<sup>101</sup> enacted by their drivers within car show sites as a form of mobile display. Whilst these activities may be understood normally as antisocial for some groups of enthusiasts at car shows they become sociable behaviours.

“It was just... the way everybody... it was just the first place I’ve ever been to in my car where they didn’t mind me playing loud music and just smiled and cheered me on for doing stupid shit like wheel spinning<sup>102</sup> on the grass and it was like yeah cool I like this...I’ll do this more often” (Dan Interview).

Here Dan explains how certain behaviours which are deemed antisocial or illegal, on the road and in other spaces, become acceptable forms of performance within certain car shows spaces. I state this with caution as at the majority of shows wheel spinning would still be viewed negatively however Dan is referring to Edition38 which, due to its position as one of the last big camping shows of the season, often has more of a collective party atmosphere.

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<sup>101</sup> A further discussion of the motivations and community norms for performing the modified car in certain ways and contexts is presented in chapter 8.2

<sup>102</sup> This behaviour is also often referred to as performing a burnout which involves spinning the driven wheels of the car whilst accelerating with the car stationary, usually held in place with the handbrake. This results in rubber from the tyres being burned onto the road or grass, as can be seen in Figure 10.

However their presence here afforded an exploration of the ways in which the show space can be understood as having its own rules, according to the audience present.

Edition38 has in recent years become well known for this type of behaviour, even leading many enthusiasts to stop attending due to wider connotations of antisocial driving and boy racer stereotypes associated with performing burnouts (Lumsden, 2013: 57). It is the collective social gathering of enthusiasts en masse at an event like this which leads to the space temporarily having its own unwritten rules. One explanation could be that as enthusiasts understand the show as a context in which to shed everyday responsibilities (Jackson, 2014: 103) driving behaviours normally deemed inappropriate are accepted. A similar argument has been made about risky riding practices amongst motorcycle enthusiasts. Murphy and Patterson (2011: 1337) argue that the motorcyclists who ride at considerable speed whilst at the Isle of Mann TT event do so to experience an “escaping [of] the drudgery of [the] day-to-day”. As such behaviours that would be dangerous or antisocial in other contexts, are appropriate within the specific spatio-temporal setting and importantly in front of a receptive enthusiast audience. For example in 2015 whilst attending the Edition38 show, as shown in a still from a video uploaded on YouTube in Figure 9, I observed enthusiasts gathering, on foot, around certain ‘roadways’ within the Overstone Park site. These roadways; mostly mud or gravel sections criss-crossing the camping fields became the stages for performance and display. I noted in the field that, “People line the dirt roads of the site and cheer passing drivers to rev their engines and perform burnouts on the wet grass” (Field Diary, 11/9/15). As discussed later with reference to driving practices in chapter 8, Ben Chappell (2012: 23) argues that mobile modified cars carry with them temporary spatial fields which affect the landscape around them. In this case the landscape is the space of the event and the



surrounding eventscape. Chappell (ibid: 25) further notes that the car can tap into imaginaries of what it represents and that this changes with spatial context and audience. As such the modified VW may be viewed as a potential performance by enthusiasts gathered together in show spaces. Enthusiasts learn the etiquettes and performances allowed in these spaces; this learning is exposed in behaviours such as those show in Figures 9 and 10 below.



*Figure 9. Still from a video showing burnout performances at Edition 38 (mark turner).*

In the following section I turn to a discussion of what occurs when these behaviours are performed in spaces which carry the same context and audience as the show but which exist outside its spatial bounds. In this way the event spaces are spatio-temporally stretched by enthusiasts, as will be discussed, however this can mean bringing potentially antisocial behaviours into public motorscapes. Gratton and Preuss (2008) note that an eventscape can have positive or negative effects for the organisers. At events of significant scale, such as discussed in the following section, these effects are ultimately left in the hands of the attending enthusiasts. The example which follows has the added factor of being abroad and

for many attended as part of a holiday, as such I will also mobilise appropriate literatures from tourism geography.

#### **7.4.1 Performances at Wörthersee**

At Edition38 this performing behaviour is generally welcomed by the enthusiasts in attendance, this is due to the fact that as John explained that shows are spaces in which to get, “away from...the stresses of life” (John Interview), a release from normal daily contexts (Jackson, 2014). However when an event spills over into a wider geographical landscape these daily contexts are again encountered. However as the event leaches into its surrounding landscape, real and imagined, it brings with it the sense of liberation and freedom from everyday responsibilities which attending an enthusiast event can afford (Jackson, 2014: 103). The practice of performing burnouts for a crowd as seen in Figure 9 occurs at sites of enthusiasm where many of the spaces of display are public motorscapes. One of the most well documented events where this occurs is GTi Treffen<sup>103</sup>, in Wörthersee, Austria. As will be detailed in section 7.6 the Wörthersee event occurs in the small lakeside town of Reifnitz, the official event occurs for one weekend in May however due to its popularity it has grown significantly both spatially and temporally. For example in 2014 Wörthersee attracted 200,000 enthusiasts over four weeks (Schmidhuber, 2014).

Figure 10 shows a VW Scirocco driver performing a burnout on a public road, the car behind has stopped in order to perform a burnout in the opposite direction. The black lines along the road show the marks of repeated burnouts performed by enthusiasts brought together for the Wörthersee event. Enthusiasts line the roads as if they were watching more organised performances such as those at legal drag racing events. This shows the way in which an

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<sup>103</sup> Treffen translates from German to ‘Meeting’.

audience of enthusiasts transforms the space of an otherwise mundane road into a performance space which is renowned across Europe due to online networks. Whilst planning my fieldwork trip to Wörthersee in 2015 there were a list of spaces I was told to visit and which I read about in magazines, on blogs and video sharing websites.



*Figure 10. A VW Scirocco Performing a Burnout for Crowds near the GTi Treffen event, Wörthersee*

One such space was that shown in Figure 10 above, described purely as ‘Tankstelle’, an otherwise unremarkable petrol station which becomes a key space known to be where the most powerful modified VW’s from across Europe come to perform for several weeks each May. A number of enthusiast-run businesses actually utilise this space as a way to market their performance car parts; videos of their cars driving at high speed or performing burnouts spread quickly online and act to market their goods widely. Before travelling to Wörthersee for the show in 2015 I had become aware through conversations with friends and videos made popular on enthusiast social networking pages of a company called Donkey Tec. Donkey Tec modify mk2 Golfs into high performance road cars, which are then driven fast around Lake Wörthersee and end up being recorded in videos which become shared across the modified VW community (e.g. Roosendal, 2014). This shows a connection between the reach of online networks and their influence on physical space by showing certain spaces to be particularly

visible to the community. Ben Chappell (2012: 32) notes that enthusiasts desire to display their cars in such spaces, as such the online networks discussed in chapter 5 have the ability to influence enthusiast performance and mobility in physical spaces.

The driving practice illustrated in Figure 10 shows the ways in which enthusiasts can enact their own boundaries on driving behaviour which would not normally be acceptable or worth the risk in other spatio-temporal contexts. This further illustrates the way in which car show experiences become as much the property of the enthusiasts as the event organisers. Antisocial driving behaviour becomes so associated with an eventscape that it actually supersedes the show event itself, as in Wörthersee and shows how eventscape impacts can be unplanned. Terry and others (2015: 628) noted that at the Isle of Mann TT event motorcycle riders performed in ways specific to the spatio-temporal context of the event. These enthusiasts took part in, “particular assemblages of place, event and [their] individual identity performances that occur each year at the Isle of Mann TT” (ibid). Drivers at Wörthersee then can be seen as making up an assemblage of which the eventscape is one part and their performed identity by way of driving behaviour is the other. This provides a way of understanding the specific driving etiquettes of the event as spatio-temporally tied to it. Just as the drivers in Figure 10 would not perform burnouts outside a normal petrol station, the TT motorcycle riders would ride slower if not at the event (ibid). Show organisers can only plan the extent of the event itself, the eventscape and as such an important part of this assemblage is in the hands of the community of participants who attend, discuss and publicise it (Gratton & Preuss, 2008). In the following section I turn to another factor in the spreading of eventscape and associated context into the wider motorscapes around a show. As noted the modified car can be understood to carry its own spatio-temporal field with it, thus at a

show with many thousands of mobile cars in relatively small geographical areas this field can transform public roads into spaces of display.

As for the motivation to enact driving performances such as these in event spaces it is clear to see Jackson's (2014: 103) sense of liberation at collective festival events played out as driving performances which would be unacceptable in normal everyday life. Furthermore the fact that, as will be shown in 7.5.2, many of the attending enthusiasts have travelled a considerable distance. As such enthusiasts at shows such as Wörthersee are also tourists, Edensor (2007: 199) explains that tourists are temporarily present in contexts different to their normal experiences; as such they may transgress boundaries on certain behaviours. He also argues that these temporary spatio-temporal contexts, like car shows, afford performances which are rarely enacted at home. The organisation and experience of car shows can be seen as this different context which affords performances such as displaying the car in show and shine competitions or performing burnouts. Similarly Lamerich's (2007) experiences at cosplay conventions show behaviours, particularly identity performances, which would not be enacted in spaces outside of the event. These behaviours then are in part made to seem acceptable because they are occurring in distinct enthusiast defined spaces with a context and audience which welcomes them.

### **7.5 Show Traffic**

In this section I use the term show traffic to describe the mobilised performance of traffic made up of modified cars which grows in extent in the immediate vicinity of a car show event. This mobile display of modified cars brought together by a particular event has the effect of spreading the display from the show field into the surrounding towns and streetscapes. Throughout my fieldwork I noted the emotional intensities of this, it acted as a starting point

to the wider building intensity I felt as I approached each show both in space and time. Chappell (2012: 23) draws on the emotional geographies of Stewart (2005: 1015) to suggest that modified cars, carrying with them their own spatial fields, cause the fluid everyday motorscapes to momentarily “snap into place” as a condensed structures of feeling.

“...the drive to Ultimate Dubs in particular as its all on sections of the motorway that most cars going to the show have to travel down it increases the chances of seeing ‘show traffic’. I always find this quite exciting, like a rolling preview of what the show will bring, it is also nice, as odd as it sounds to see show cars being driven on the road. The closer I get to the show the more modified VW’s I see, and this helps the excitement to build.” (Field Diary, 9/3/14).

In this way the surrounding motorscape of the Ultimate Dubs show caused traffic heading towards the show to build up; this “rolling preview of...the show” was inscribed with the same excitement I felt when attending the show. Similarly Steve noted that being in the general locale of a car show is, “...just a buzz [W: The town is like part of the show?] Yes” (Steve Interview). The presence of 'show traffic' transfers a space from normal arterial roads of a small town to a sort of mobile show, indeed many photographers take pictures of cars in these queues. (Field Diary, 13/6/14). Derek Tam-Scott (2009: 104) similarly noted that at a car show where official sites are geographically spread out, “driving from event to event is as exciting as the event itself”. The way in which driving spaces beyond the event become inscribed by enthusiast cars occurs because motorscapes are not neutral spaces. As Merriman (2004: 157-8) argues they gain their meaning from the historicity and spatiality of their relational assemblages including the cars which drive through them. Furthermore the modified cars which move through them can be understood to embody their own personal histories and narrative of enthusiasm and labour (Chappell, 2012: 29).

The collective mobile presence of modified cars forming show traffic can be seen as affecting an influence on how the motorscapes moved through are perceived. Furthermore eventscapes can be both real and imagined (Gratton & Preuss, 2008) so the understandings of behaviour allowed at cars shows may be brought into new spaces along with the sight and presence of these cars. As noted Chappell (2012: 23) argues that modified lowrider cars do influence the motorscapes or streetscapes<sup>104</sup> they move through by producing a temporary spatial field around themselves. Thus bringing their context as modified cars along with them as they move through space. In this way the context in which modified cars perform in a certain ways because can be seen as reinforced by the mobile temporary spatial contexts which the car brings along as it moves through motorscapes.



*Figure 11. Modified Cars driving past Velden Casino (Author's Photograph)*

Thus as modified cars drive through space then they enact a certain performance in everyday streetscapes (Chappell, 2013: 13). This performance appears in a way very similar to the one produced by cars displayed at a car show, except that it stretches the car show event into the

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<sup>104</sup> Streetscapes is the term used by Ben Chappell (2012: 13).

surrounding motorscape. This means that enthusiasts experience large gatherings of modified cars in spaces beyond the event site; in this way the eventscape itself leaks out into other spaces producing consequences which can be unintended by the event organisers (Gratton & Preusse, 2008). In Figure 11 the streetscape which passes between two bars belonging to Velden Casino, within the Wörthersee eventscape, is utilised as a space for mobile performance<sup>105</sup>. As noted Terry and others (2015: 628) describe a notion similar to that of a spreading eventscape by suggesting that an event is a, “particular assemblage of place, event and individual identity performances<sup>106</sup>”. Furthermore the car can be understood as a form of participation in representations of identity operating in a public arena (Waitt et al., 2015: 3) as with cars being paraded for their celebrity (Lumsden, 2013: 144). This latter point is particularly evident in Figure 12, a photograph taken at the Wörthersee event which shows that queues of modified cars have to pass through streetscapes in which they will be seen by enthusiasts. As such this can be seen as extending the experience of the show and its eventscape well beyond the spatial bounds of the event, so that the locality hosting it became a part of the event itself.

This spreading of the event out into the surrounding landscape was noted by Nicole Lamerichs (2014: 263) at an anime convention where she notes that, “...these fans stood out from the local citizens and their space of play was infiltrating everyday life”. This shows a similar example of the extended space of display and play which helps to explain why the motorscapes appear transformed into sites of enthusiasm in the same way that shows are. Lamerichs also (2014: 263) describes the way that people who are attending the event

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<sup>105</sup> Figure 20. below shows a Porsche being driven for this purpose of display within a recognised space of performance at Wörthersee.

<sup>106</sup> Terry, Maddrell, Gale & Arlidge’s (2015) research is situated in the event of the Isle of Mann Tourist Trophy (TT) races.



continue to wear their outfits whilst out in public and not at the convention itself do so because it was, “a visible sign of anticipation and belonging”. As discussed in chapter 8 driving the modified car can be understood similarly as an individual identity performance (Terry et al., 2015: 628; Waitt et al., 2015: 3) which marks enthusiasts out as part of a wider community.



Figure 12. Show Traffic in Velden am Wörthersee, 2015 (Author's Photograph)



Figure 13. Aerial photograph of Lake Wörthersee showing the extent of the show traffic

### 7.5.1 Show Traffic, Car-Spotting & Community Celebrities

One way in which show traffic adds value to an event is by way of a sort of spotting exercise, similar to birdwatching. I found an intense excitement in spotting cars in the wild which I had previously only read about in magazines or blogs. Similarly Tam-Scott (2009: 104) observed that one enjoyable aspect of driving around the locale near a car show was, “Cars that are most frequently in the pages of magazines...are all over the road, filled with people and luggage”. On the way to the French show VW Days I noted a very similar experience whereby seeing a well-known car added value to the event we were travelling towards; we were travelling through the eventscape.

“...We overtook one car which I recognised immediately, it was recently featured in Performance VW (PVW) magazine and I have a poster of it by my desk in Aberystwyth. This was a somewhat surreal moment, the cars featured in magazines often taken on a certain idolised status, they seem to be fixed in place however here was one being driven by someone who looked the same age as me, full of camping gear.” (Field Diary, 13/6/14).

My example above and Tam-Scott’s (2009: 104) similar experience suggests that some element of the enjoyment of a car show comes from physically seeing cars which are usually confined to online spaces or magazine pages. Like Tam-Scott I noted the presence of luggage in the car I saw, I later noted that this seemed like getting backstage (Field Diary, 14/6/14) by seeing cars out of their usual sanitised display form in show and shine competitions or in magazines. I had a similar experience once we had arrived for the VW Days event. Ahead of this show I had read about a pair of BMW Art-Car inspired 3 series’ on the blog SpeedHunters, then on our first evening in France I spotted one of them in the carpark behind our hotel, as the excerpt from my field diary below details. Following this quote Figure 14 below shows a screenshot of the blog article about the car, Figure 15 is my photograph of it in the hotel carpark.

“I saw a car in one of the hotel car parks which I had previously read about and admired online, a car built to drive to Wörthersee show by a UK company, it was one of a pair, the other of which is now in the USA. To see this car in the metal was a surprise and I was very happy to have the chance to photograph it in person, I likened this to seeing a celebrity, when talking to a friend and he agreed. These cars are often internet famous and treated as celebrities propagated by various blogs and online forums sites as well as magazine features. (Field Diary, 14/6/14).



Figure 14. Screenshot of SpeedHunters Blog Post about Player’s UK’s BMW Art Cars (Musselwhite, 2014).



Figure 15. Photograph of Player’s BMW art car at VW Days (Author’s Photograph).

Interestingly Lumsden (2013: 144) notes that by driving past crowds of enthusiasts drivers utilise motorscapes for public display and celebrity, suggesting that cars which are famous

already in the community utilise these performance spaces for further publicity and appreciation. I also noted that some of the excitement herein was in seeing the cars in the metal. Also the way this particular car has become famous due to its online presence further illustrates the discussion of fame and cars built for fame, as discussed in chapter 5. This example also shows the ways in which different shows are utilised as spaces of display, I knew about the car in Figure 14 and 15 because it had been built to drive to the Wörthersee event and yet here I was observing it months later at the VW Days event. One key element of shows particularly at large scale events such as Edition38, Wörthersee and VW Days is the attendance of international visitors, discussed below.

### **7.5.2 VW Days & International Interactions at Events**

Due to the fact VW Days in France is internationally attended the spaces which surround the event, such as hotel carparks, became spaces of international enthusiast sociability. The enthusiasts in attendance had mostly come from France, Germany and Belgium, Holland and the UK but I also saw Swiss and Italian cars in smaller groups. As a result the eventscape also embodied the scale of the modified VW community; illustrating its international reach, in France I noted that, "...we stopped in a small village where a number of French and Dutch VW's were being cleaned in the main square..." (Field Diary, 14/6/14). This had the effect of turning a small rural French town into an international space of enthusiasm. Furthermore social interactions were afforded based on enthusiasm, for example I noted that, "We spent much of the night talking to several Dutch people staying in our hotel, they spoke about making a similar journey to Wörthersee show in Austria earlier in the year." (Field Diary, 13/6/14). Several of the cars belonging to these enthusiasts can be seen parked in our hotel carpark in Figure 16 below, reinforcing the notion that unintended spaces become international sites of enthusiasm.



*Figure 16. Dutch Modified VWs in hotel our hotel carpark (Author's Photograph).*

One particularly noteworthy product of these internationally attended events was the cross-cultural social interactions afforded amongst enthusiasts usually separated by geographical distance. Geoghegan (2013: 44) noted that the shared feelings of belonging and affiliation act as “great leveller”, this can be seen here extended social interactions with enthusiasts from other countries. Similarly as noted above Petterson & Getz (2009: 313) argue that festivals afford participants from various backgrounds to enact rituals as equals; united by said rituals themselves, in this case the modification and display of VW cars. As noted above the car parks around our hotel were full of modified VW’s and Audis from different nations across continental Europe. I had been taking photographs of various cars and as a result, “We got talking to a man from Belgium who was cleaning his car in one of the hotel car parks...He explained that this was his 3rd year coming to VW Days and he enjoyed the way it attracted people from all over Europe” (Field Diary, 13/6/14). Whilst our Flemish was non-existent and he was not fluent in English we were able to hold a conversation utilising

enthusiasm reference points. By naming certain events such as this one and Wörthersee we were able to briefly discuss the idea of travelling across different countries to shows. Figure 17 shows the photograph I took which prompted the conversation with the Belgian owner of this Golf mk2.



*Figure 17. Belgian Mk2 Golf GTi and owner outside French hotel (Author's Photograph).*



*Figure 18. Cars belonging to the French friends of the Belgian driver in Figure 17 (Author's Photograph).*

Following this encounter the Belgian man's French friends arrived in a convoy, he explained that he knew them via car forums on the internet. This united the idea of the extended show space as well as the international reach of the show. Whilst we were separated by culture and

language we were united by our enthusiasm which exists beyond national borders. This also further highlights the power of online spaces in connecting enthusiasts across geographical distance, as can be seen in the fact that Wörthersee is attended by enthusiasts from over ten different nations (see Figure 19). The collective and ever expanding nature of the enthusiast network or community was portrayed in this experience with the Belgian enthusiast who shortly thereafter introduced us to his French friends who were just arriving (see Figure 18). Interestingly they all spoke of Wörthersee as being a key event which enthusiasts of VW's from across Europe should endeavour to attend. This shows the way in which wide community networks of knowledge are used to share and create ideas of certain events as particularly special. Accordingly the following section turns to the ways in which Wörthersee has become enshrined as a cultural mecca of modified VW enthusiasts.

## **7.6 Wörthersee as Enthusiast Cultural Mecca**

In this latter half of the chapter I turn specifically to the Wörthersee event in order to explore the ways in which it has become enshrined as a cultural mecca. This affords discussion of enthusiasts' motivations to attend the event and the community-defined importance of the driven pilgrimage to get there. In 1981 in the small town of Reifnitz on the banks of Lake Wörthersee a group of VW Golf GTi enthusiasts gathered. The gathering was a social event set up by a local group of enthusiasts as a place to meet up with likeminded individuals and appreciate others' cars and show off their own and to discuss the latest trends and styles across the modified VW community. Fast forward thirty four years and as noted above Wörthersee Treffen is a huge event which regularly attracts over 200,000 enthusiasts (Schmidhuber, 2014). This has caused the event to expand both temporally and spatially. For four weeks before the show event the towns all around Lake Wörthersee are overrun with modified VAG and German manufacturer cars.

Interestingly these four weeks in May are those before the event itself, this leads many people to travel to Austria for this pre-event period and return before the show itself occurs. This is one very powerful example of how the eventscape has become the property of the enthusiasts, affording informal spaces of the event based around a selection of car meets around the lake. This has seen Wörthersee described as, “the car show that isn’t a car show” (McGrath, 2015a) and “the happening which acts as a prelude to the official event” (McGrath, 2015b). The bizarre nature of this often long distance drive to experience a happening prior to an event and then leaving before the official show is not lost on enthusiasts. Indeed McGrath (2015a) states, “You would think that driving 1000 miles across Europe to attend a not-a-car-show is an awful idea...its actually not the worst idea in the world...”. People leave before the official show weekend because the spaces around the event become so busy that it’s no longer enjoyable. This behaviour of leaving before the show begins and the fact that the sheer size of the event that causes this evidences the unforeseen consequences of events (Gratton & Preuss, 2008). In a section of coverage on the SpeedHunters blog Paddy McGrath (2015b) states that, “I would like to think that there’s one thing that unites us all as car people...This thing is *joy*....You see it the joy that makes Wörthersee so special”, he goes on to elaborate, “It’s the basic emotion of happiness that you can find everywhere you look in any of the small towns that are dotted around Wörthersee. I think it’s partly the reason why Wörthersee as an event and happening has become so popular”.

As referenced in the above discussion, Figure 19 below shows a collage of my own photographs showing the variety of internationally registered cars driven to Wörthersee in order to partake in the event. In the figure there numberplates from eleven different nations across Europe, as Bryn Mussewhite (2014b) of the SpeedHunters blog notes “...a large part of



the world [is represented] when it comes to the people who make the trip here”. This shows the same international connection and levelling afforded by enthusiasm and enacted within these event spaces as discussed earlier with regards to VW Days.



Figure 19. Collage of Author's Photographs showing Eleven European Numberplates at Wörthersee

Due to the scale and reach of the Wörthersee eventscape it even has an influence on the VW community in North America. In 2013 the owner of Rotiform; Brian Henderson shipped his car from California to the UK in order to join a convoy on its way to the event (see Figure 20). In 2016 Jamie Orr, the owner of Orchid Euro<sup>107</sup> shipped his VW Golf Harlequin from Philadelphia to the event in Austria (see Figure 21). In both cases this can be seen as an opportunity not only to experience a cultural mecca but to further enshrine it as somewhere that enthusiasts across the globe wish to visit. In particular Orr described his choice to attend as being due to Wörthersee being “...the mecca for VW cars...It’s a dream for me, it’s a dream for thousands of people. I hope it inspires other people to try to do the same” (Jamie Orr quoted in SourKrauts, 2016).

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<sup>107</sup> Orchid Euro is a company based in the UK and North America which specialises in shipping rare UK VW parts to the USA and vice versa, the parts are often only rare and thus valuable in the markets they are shipped to.



Figure 20. Brian Henderson's Californian Porsche 964 in Reifnitz, Wörthersee (Chandler & McGrath, 2013b).



Figure 21. Jamie Orr's Philadelphia registered VW Golf Harlequin at Lake Wörthersee, Austria (Gray, 2016).

### 7.6.1 Secular Pilgrimage & Sacred Language

With the clear interest in visiting this show from across the globe it is perhaps not surprising that a rhetoric of pilgrimage and mecca is used by enthusiasts themselves to describe the desire to undertake such journeys. Importantly this rhetoric comes directly from the literature and media within the modified VW culture and it is this which first led me to the pilgrimage literature in Geography. When asked to explain the desire to travel to Wörthersee one enthusiast stated that, "...it's like the Hajj where everyone meets in one place and meets up and see what everyone else has done its interesting" (John Interview). This evoking of the Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca as an explanation for the desire to visit Wörthersee shows the importance and status of this experience for the modified VW community. Similarly in his study of car enthusiasts in North America Russell Belk (2004: 276) quotes one enthusiast as

saying that car shows are like “heavens”. This reinforces the idea that car enthusiast communities use the rhetoric of religious to describe their involvement and appreciation with the culture and ultimately the cars.

Interestingly many secular groups who are united by a common enthusiasm have certain spaces which take on this sacred status as Maddrell and others (2015) have noted about the Isle of Mann and motorcycle enthusiasts. Furthermore this sacred lexicon is clear across the coverage of the Wörthersee events in magazines and on blogs read widely by enthusiasts in the modified VAG culture. For example Voll (2015, my emphasis) writing a show report for enthusiast website StanceNation says, ‘...Wörthersee GTI Treffen has become a sort of *mecca* for euro car fanatics’ and then in a disambiguation refers to the event as, “car lovers from all corners of Europe have *pilgrimmed* to that famous lake surrounded by the Alps”. Similarly SpeedHunters writers Ben Chandler and Paddy McGrath (2016) describe Wörthersee as becoming a mecca for car enthusiasts.

It may seem an obvious observation that car enthusiasts feel that the pilgrimage to a car show must be an *automobile* one but it is something held in high regard by the community as being part of the Wörthersee experience. Austria and Lake Wörthersee in particular can easily be reached from the UK and the rest of Europe by air, for many this would be the cheapest and perhaps easiest method of visiting other European nations. However in my experiences at Wörthersee and in the modified VW literature there is this repeated rhetoric of the need to drive to the event in a modified VW which hints at a desire for the authentic enthusiast experience. ‘Flights are cheap. But to do it *right*, you really have to make the effort and drive down to Austria. It’s definitely worth the extra effort.’ (Chandler & McGrath, 2013a, my emphasis).

This quote comes from the popular automotive blog SpeedHunters and their coverage of Wörthersee Treffen and the surrounding experiences in 2013. The use of the term, “to do it *right*” (ibid), suggests a rhetoric of authenticity, an ideal experience which other car enthusiasts should strive for. Furthermore it hints at the idea of an enthusiast narrative, the idea that in order to position oneself within the proper narrative of a VW enthusiast visiting Wörthersee, a narrative which others in the community will respect, then you should drive there. Interestingly in a SpeedHunters article reporting on this year’s event McGrath (2015b, my emphasis) explains that he was not able to drive due to other commitments, “...I had to *cheat* and fly instead”. The use of the word “cheat” again suggests this rhetoric of authenticity, that travelling by air is to not experience the pilgrimage in the correct way as defined by the community media. In a different segment of his report he states that, “...the drive is part of what makes the pilgrimage so special” (McGrath, 2015a). This special feeling can be seen in the earlier example of the Rotiform Porsche and Brian Henderson having this car shipped not from the USA to Austria but rather to the UK. The reasoning for this was to join a convoy of other enthusiasts in the UK and thus to make the pilgrimage to Wörthersee together. The particular experiences of driving in enthusiast convoys will be explored in chapter 8. These examples taken from the modified VW culture’s media help to elevate this small town in Austria in the minds of enthusiasts as somewhere that they should visit, in the next section I will explore this enshrining of Wörthersee as cultural mecca in more detail.

### **7.6.2 Enshrining Cultural Mecca: The Role of the Internet**

Tussyadiah and Fesenmaier (2009) explain that in recent years the tourist experience has become increasingly mediatised. This digital evolution of the tourist gaze is beyond the scope of this thesis, however the community sharing of experiential data which it affords is crucial to building up an imagined eventscape in the minds of enthusiasts. In particular I propose that

the sharing of such digital content is helped by the previously discussed networks of enthusiast knowledge which exist online. To put it in Tussyadiah and Fesenmaier's (2009: 24) own words, 'Online shared videos [of tourist experiences] can provide mental pleasure to viewers by stimulating fantasies and daydreams, as well as bringing back past travel memories'. Kruse (2003: 158) has similarly noted that cultural meccas are enshrined when places gain special meaning as connected to both real and imagined experiences. As such these videos both show real experiences but they also stimulate enthusiast fantasies about the event. Such videos of Wörthersee are often shared across online networks for weeks after the event and in the months leading up to it<sup>108</sup>. The role they play is one of inspiration, to stimulate enthusiast fantasies and daydreams based on an imagining of the Wörthersee event. When talking about this John explained that "[Wörthersee affords] a lot of semi-professionally made car videos that people have made of the journey and what goes on...and social media is increasing the desire to go" (John Interview). Here the link is clear between the representation of the Wörthersee experience on film and its communication via social media in order to reach and inspire a wider audience.

When asked to explain how he had come to hear about Wörthersee Dan stated that, 'It's gotta be with the sort of the after-movies as well, from YouTube' (Dan Interview). Upon searching the video sharing website YouTube with the term 'Wörthersee' I was presented with over 100,000 results, the first ten pages of which was made up of the "after-movies" and other shorter video clips of enthusiast experiences at Wörthersee. These include footage from various meets held by different groups and clubs around Lake Wörthersee. This shows the way in which the imagined, anticipated eventscape of Wörthersee has as much to do with its

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<sup>108</sup> Much of my knowledge about spaces to visit during my fieldwork visit to Wörthersee came via such videos, like the one shown in Figure 10.

digital mediations shared online as it does with physically present first-hand experiences. Edensor (2001: 68) also observes that mediatised spaces, such as those recorded in videos, present and propagate certain locations as being within specific contexts. These contexts could be that spaces around Lake Wörthersee in May are seen as specifically designated for modified VW enthusiasm. Although they could also present spaces such as the Tankstelle in Figure 10 as spaces within a context of particular driven performances such as burnouts. This also shows a way in which digital mediation of experience brings a new meaning to the notion that as Maddrell (2015: 71) and others argue, "Practice serves to sacralise space". However in this case an extra step is utilised in order to share first hand experiences of these practices digitally and across enthusiast networks with the community at large. As an increasing number of videos are posted online more people are able to watch them, talk about them and share them across online community networks. As such new community norms are produced and maintained about the importance of visiting large scale overseas shows such as Wörthersee. The role played by these videos is bolstered by reports about experiences at the show which further enshrine it, as seen in McGrath's (2015b) rhetoric in the previous section. As such the fantasies and daydreams which Tussyadiah and Fessenmaier (2009: 24) observe as resulting from shared videos of enthusiast experience can be seen to further construct the imagined eventscape (Gratton & Preuss, 2008) of Wörthersee in the minds of enthusiasts. Whilst these feelings are taken away in the minds of enthusiasts as marks left by the event there are also more physical marks left on the landscape which continue to propagate the legacy of the Wörthersee event, an example of one such mark is discussed in the following section.

### **7.6.3 Event Legacies & Leaving Marks of Enthusiasm on the Landscape**

Events do not cease to exist when the spatio-temporal specificity of the show ends, this in part due to the cultural enshrining of the event in the minds of enthusiasts but also because “...festivals are ephemeral...some better established events may leave a mark on the landscape but most leave only their name and memories” (Waterman, 1998: 58). Whilst the event legacies literature addresses these marks left on the landscape, these often focus on examples of improved infrastructure and facilities following mega-events (Minnaert, 2012). However in this section I want to turn to an example of a physical mark left on the landscape which allows the Wörthersee eventscape to endure far beyond the relative ephemerality of its spatio-temporal bounds.

In 1987 the then CEO of Volkswagen-Audi Group presented a granite statue of a life size Golf GTi to the town of Reifnitz, called Granit-Golf, which remains in place to this day. Whilst the statue stands alone for much of the year, the VAG company uses it as the centrepiece for its own stage during the GTi Treffen event (see Figure 22 below). This can be understood in two conceptual ways, firstly as way of physically enshrining the landscape as a cultural mecca for VW enthusiasts and secondly an official way of leaving a mark on the landscape; to transform the intangible impacts of the eventscape into a tangible legacy (Preuss, 2007). The latter being a key challenge for event organisers and managers who want to further concretise the legacy of a particular event, this in turn helps to position this as a show which holds special significance in narrative of VW enthusiasm. This also includes a tourism legacy for the area as many enthusiasts include a trip to the statue within tours of more official VAG tourism sites such as the Wolfsburg VW and Ingolstadt Audi centres, both in Germany.

In terms of cultural mecca this status both shows the recognition of the event's importance by the manufacturer whose cars inspired it and also it expands the sacralisation of place as the statue stays in place year round. This example is well reported across the modified car culture, the bizarre nature of this act is not lost on enthusiasts but at the same time it acts to quite literally concretise the link between enthusiasts and the Austrian town of Reifnitz. This official link with the town is something that VAG puts a lot of time and money into, its support of the press even extends to ensuring that journalists flying in have access to the latest Golf GTI in order to cover the event (McGrath, 2015a).



*Figure 22. Granit-Golf surrounded by VW staging during GTi Treffen 2015 (Author's Photograph).*

## **7.7 Events & Gatherings Conclusions**

This chapter has illustrated the ways in which particular spaces of enthusiasm influence practices, experiences and performances of enthusiasm. The discussions above have also shown the similarities to festivals (Jackson, 2014), enthusiast conventions (Lamerichs, 2007; 2014; Yarwood & Shaw, 2010) and to spaces of tourism (Edensor, 2001; 2007). Furthermore



in this chapter these spaces were often referred to using the rhetoric of the eventscape (Brown et al., 2008), to allow a discussion of geographically separate spaces temporarily united by a broader event. By exploring the car show event as something similar to a spatio-temporal festival, tourism experience or eventscape it has been possible to provide a more nuanced understanding. As such it is possible to understand how audience, context and understandings of the purpose of the event come together to affect spatio-temporally specific experiences. Both a festival and tourism geography understanding afford the idea that show spaces can be seen as liberations from everyday stresses, responsibilities and behaviours pertaining to cars and motorscapes (Edensor, 2001; 2007: 199; Jackson, 2014: 103). The purpose of the event then can be understood as stemming from three motivations to attend car shows. These are; a desire to experience spaces of sociability and enthusiasm based on the mutual appreciation of modified VWs, the desire to display, perform and be when driving the modified car and relatedly the desire to participate in the appreciative audience and see such performances.

This experience of sociability can be seen in the social interactions which car shows afford, relatedly they also reveal the spaces in which community norms and knowledges can be circulated and negotiated. Car shows are made up of spaces where repeated and mutually attentive interactions can occur, where enthusiasts who have never met before can socialise by way of a shared esoteric car talk of knowledge and language (Belk, 2004: 275; Lumsden, 2013). By sharing this knowledge social capital and community cohesion increases, Jackson (2014: 103) noted that the shared collective experience of festivals leads to feelings of camaraderie. This illustrates social capital at work as repeated interactions in festival spaces strengthen social capital and lay the ground for future mutually attentive interactions

(Arcodia & Whitford, 2006; Holt, 2008; Urry, 2003). The knowledge exchanged in show spaces and the importance of sociability within this social learning context (Wenger, 2011) can also be seen in chapter 6 with regards to the sociability of enthusiast labour. Furthermore the strength of the community knowledge stocks and social capital mean that these interactions can even afford inter-national conversations. As noted in section 7.5.2, points of reference taken from community held knowledges were utilised to experience car talk despite language barriers. This camaraderie then shows enthusiasm's potential as a socio-cultural leveller and the abandonment of related differences in show spaces when socialising (Geoghegan, 2013: 44; Petterson & Getz, 2009: 313).

The car show can also clearly be seen as a set of spaces arranged for the purposes of performance and display to an appreciative enthusiast audience. These displays or performances can be understood as both intended and unintended by the organisers (Gratton & Preuss, 2008); the latter becoming the property of the attending enthusiastic audience instead. Intended spaces such as the show and shine competition unveil the unwritten guidelines of modifying noted in chapters 5 and 6. The competitive element of these displays, with cars winning based on relatively subjective aesthetic norms, is both symptomatic of and contributes to the importance of display, feedback and community affirmation observed in chapter 5. The rules of this space show wider understandings across the community for example about which makes of car should be included within VAG culture or which modifications need to be done to assure the owners wins a show and shine trophy. This physical display provides feedback from an audience who can understand the car's creation and thus can appreciate it more as a completed project (Yarwood & Shaw, 2010: 432). This plays into notions of creative vision and planning the socio-technical projects discussed in

chapter 6. In this way and as noted above, car show spaces are what Fuller (2007: 370) refers to as the, “primary conduits for institutional valorisation” in the culture. In other words the decisions made here about what to display and what wins the show and shine competition help to produce, maintain and reinforce community norms about what makes a good modified VW car. This can be seen as an unintended consequence of the event which occurs due to the practices of knowledge exchange which will follow it across community networks.

This chapter has also shown how the physical traffic which builds up around the geographical locations of car show eventsapes affords a mass mobile display which brings with it feelings of event experience. Show traffic, as it is referred to, mobilises the same display as the show and shine competition but as a result of the almost incidental automobility of these modified cars. These cars have to move through everyday motorscapes anyway but when they are brought together near to spaces of the event they cause spatial stretching of the eventscape. As such the excitement at seeing a rolling display of show cars spreads out into surrounding towns and motorscapes as with VW Days and Wörthersee. With this comes the desire of enthusiasts to be seen driving in these spaces where they will draw attention from appreciative others (O’Dell, 2001). As Lumsden (2013: 144) enthusiasts drive through certain spaces such as outside the casino or the Tankstelle noted above for this attention and to bolster their related community-defined celebrity status.

There is however another type of display at the car show which is more deliberately performed by the driven car, which may come as a result of the spreading of the eventscape beyond the bounds of the event. This chapter has shown that often antisocial or illegal driving behaviours are deemed appropriate within the contexts of certain enthusiast motorscapes. This makes for an interesting dynamic combining the notion of the modified car as carrying

its own temporary spatial field as it moves through space (Chappell, 2012: 23) with the idea that this transfers certain imaginings of the car onto said spaces. As such these spaces become inscribed as spaces in which burnouts and other behaviours are appropriate etiquette. This can also be seen as the stretching of notions of liberation at festivals and in holiday spaces (Edensor, 2007; Jackson, 2014). This can be seen as a knowledge of appropriate behaviours to be conducted in certain contexts (Borhek, 1989) as mobilised, in the Wörthersee example, by a two hundred thousand strong audience of enthusiasts in public motorscapes. As discussed in chapter 8 the driven car can be seen as temporarily inscribing the spatiality of the motorscape it moves through (Merriman, 2004: 157-8). Thus a combination of imagined perceptions of the modified car which are attached to it as it moves through space (Chappell, 2012) become combined with understandings of the space as one of liberation from everyday driving responsibilities (Jackson, 2014). These spaces of enthusiasm both across the eventscape and within the car shows spatial bounds become assemblages of enthusiast experience. This assemblage is made up of the temporary spatial field of the driven car as performed or displayed (Chappell, 2012: 23), the spaces or motorscapes themselves and the wider understanding of the event (Terry et al., 2015: 628).

This chapter also illustrated the ways in which the aforementioned online community networks help to enshrine certain events as cultural mecca. The empirics showed that this is the result of enthusiast experiences shared with the rest of the community, via cultural media such as in videos or blog posts. This also illustrated the fact that mecca and pilgrimage ideas come from the rhetoric of the enthusiasts themselves, as noted in chapter 1 I place particular importance on exploring enthusiast experience in their own terms. In particular the cultural media could be seen as helping to propagate the performances and etiquette outlined above,

for example by sharing images and videos of burnouts which enshrine spaces such as the Tankstelle as being spatio-temporally available for that purpose alone. This includes a promotion of the importance of *automobile* pilgrimage to the event, evidencing the power of these blogs to affect enthusiast practice. Videos also play an important role and afford enthusiasts the chance to build up their own imaginings of eventscapes such as Wörthersee (Gratton & Preuss, 2008; Tussyadiah and Fesenmaier, 2009). These imagined geographies of the eventscape then afford special meanings to be attached to particular spaces, further motivating the desire to visit them (Kruse, 2003: 158). This also reinforces the notion that practice sacralises space leading to desires for secular pilgrimage (Maddrell et al., 2015: 71). However in this chapter an extra stage is highlighted; these practices are digitally recorded and shared online, furthering their reach across the modified VW community. Whilst this explains the lasting legacies of events in enthusiasts' minds this chapter has also shown more lasting physical legacies. The example of Granit-Golf shows how enthusiast experience can be concretised, physically tying the eventscape of Wörthersee well beyond the relatively ephemeral spatio-temporal context of the GTi Treffen event (Waterman, 1998: 58). This also shows a translation of the imagined legacies noted above into a tangible legacy (Preuss, 2008) providing a tourism space in its own right.

## 8 Driving As Embodied & Performed

“[There are] Two types of car person, those who own them for the looks and those who enjoy the driving experience.” (Questionnaire, Q13).

“I’d rather have a slow great looking car than a powerful car that doesn’t look the way I want it to” (Questionnaire, Q13).

As noted in the previous chapter there is a terminology which differentiates between events and indeed cars which are modified for display and those modified to be driven fast; referred to as show or go. The first quote above illustrates this difference<sup>109</sup> between an enthusiasm for driving modified VW cars and an enthusiasm for showing them off or performing them. As a caveat it is important to note that enthusiasts enact and perform different identities in different company, spaces and subsequently in different contexts (Noble, 2009). The second quote suggests a more nuanced reading of the relationship between an enthusiast driver and their car, arguing that they would rather drive a car which looked the way they wanted than a powerful car which did not. I include this second quote so as to not fall into a trap, it is often thought that driving experience and the connection between driving body and driven car is felt as somewhat exclusive to faster modified cars. I want to argue that the embodied connection which an enthusiast feels when driving their modified car is not limited to driving fast cars, this is nicely summarised in the quote below.

“... if I wanted performance and thrill then I’d buy something fast....Not that driving my car doesn’t put a massive smile on my face though” (Questionnaire, Q13).

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<sup>109</sup> This is not to say that cars can not be modified in both ways, indeed many are, although enthusiasts tend to group themselves within one of these two groups.

However 68% of questionnaire respondents (Questionnaire, Q13) stated that they preferred both looks and a cars performance with a typical responses sharing the sentiments that, “... a good car is both quick and looks good” and that “[I prefer] mostly the drive, but it has to be eye-catching” (Questionnaire, Q13). Interestingly one enthusiast made a link between levels of effort, enthusiast labour and making a choice with regards to show or go, stating that, “If you do go for both spectrums in one, you have to put a lot more time and effort in to get the result you want” (Questionnaire, Q13). This final point is discussed in more detail in section 8.1.3 with reference to enthusiasts who drive cars they have worked on themselves. In order to explore the twin factors of embodied experience and performed display, in this chapter I look at enthusiast’s embodied experiences of driving, in section 8.1 and also explore the idea of driving as performance to an enthusiast audience in section 8.2.

## **8.1 The Embodied Driving Experience**

### **8.1.1 Embodied Driving Experience: Motion & Emotion**

This section of the chapter explores the ways in which enthusiasts understand themselves as constituent parts in the driver-car assemblage (Dant, 2004: 62), in particular it looks at how they identify as automobilised humans (Katz, 1999). However I argue that enthusiasts experience a higher level of involvement (Tam-Scott, 2009: 113<sup>110</sup>) in this assemblage than non-enthusiast drivers or those driving standard cars. Recent work by Pearce (2016) suggests that another strand of driving experience which can help to enrich that of embodied experience is to think about the role played by the mind as somewhat separate to the body. One way of thinking about the mind within experiences of driving modified cars could be to think about the mental experience of driving at speed, for example Arlynda Lee Boyer’s (2009)

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<sup>110</sup> Derek Tam-Scott’s (2009) study is with enthusiasts of old and classic cars but his observations about the levels of involvement enthusiasts need to drive these cars also holds for modified cars and their drivers.

book<sup>111</sup> compares similarities between the in-the-moment experiences of NASCAR driving at 200mph to Buddhist teachings of existing in the moment. A brief discussion of the embodied experience of driving fast is key to understanding modified car enthusiast driving practices. The importance of mechanically tuned cars and the desire to drive fast is in part a reflection of the influence which motorsport has on modified VW culture. It also illustrates an example of the way in which driving fast is presented as a positive experience in popular culture (Redshaw, 2007). Balkmar and Joelsson (2012: 44) explain that, "...the need for speed is culturally salient", within societies of automobility. They also argue (ibid: 46) that speeding has a positive emotional reinforcement for young men. One questionnaire response in particular dealt with these embodied feelings of driving fast, "I love speed and acceleration...the [VW] Polo GTi range...offers a vast opportunity to modify and create a flying machine" (Questionnaire, Q4). In this quote the connection between passion and the embodied feeling of accelerating are inextricably linked to performance VW's and the desire to drive them fast, hence the metaphorical flying. From their research with motorcyclists Murphy and Patterson (2011: 1337<sup>112</sup>) argue that the requirements on the body for speed and control of such a, "flying machine" facilitated a transcendence which affords an escape from everyday banal experiences and a brief chance to live in the moment<sup>113</sup>.

Whilst there is little work which translates these ideas directly in road driving or driving cars these ideas illustrate the involved nature of the enthusiast driver. The experiences presented below show that modified VW enthusiasts are required to be more involved in the driving

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<sup>111</sup> It is important to note that Lee Boyer's work is not an academic work however he does provide rich accounts of driving experience and embodiment.

<sup>112</sup> Murphy and Patterson's research is with motorcyclists and not car drivers but the argument remains salient.

<sup>113</sup> This argument was reproduced above as a possible explanation why drivers feel they can perform risky or dangerous driving behaviours in car show spaces which are themselves seen as an escape from everyday stress or banality.



experience both due to their enthusiasm and the requirements of the cars (Tam-Scott, 2009: 113). Pearce (2016) has also observed that not only are there emotional connections and thought processes linked to embodied driving experiences but that these are sometimes recognised and analysed by the driver. Below Steve reveals this reflexive and analytical behaviour applied to his driving experience, it shows how driving is understood as more than a journey from A to B (Waitt et al., 2015: 3), rather it is an embodied rollercoaster worthy of recount and interpretation as a driving event (Pearce, 2016).

“...[driving a modified car is] a lot stiffer<sup>114</sup> and you can feel every bump in the road...you can feel...what the cars doing and it’s just...it makes it more...its makes it way more exciting...you can go round a corner at 60mph...like a little basic corner at 60mph in a standard car...and it’ll just be a corner...go round a corner at 60mph in a modified car and it’ll be like driving a race-car...it’s just a rush” (Steve Interview).

This above quote is strikingly similar to Katz’s (1999) description of the driving body as, “swaying around curves as if shifting of his or her weight will make a difference in the car’s trajectory” (Katz, 1999: 33). This also shows how the stiffer suspension associated with lowered VW’s can increase the normal feelings of road vibrations and other sensed feedback of habitual driving (Dant, 2004). Steve’s description though gives a more raw account of this, describing the way in which being a part of the car hybrid allows him to feel every bump in the road, not as being transferred by way of tyres and suspension but as felt by his body, of which the car is an extension. Furthermore Steve’s experience shows that driving is as much about feeling and embodied reaction, in this case to bumps in the road, as it is to embodied actions such as steering round corners. The modified suspension of Steve’s car affords him to feel the road more completely and thus he experiences a heightened connection between

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<sup>114</sup> This refers to upgraded or lowered suspension.

the car and the road. Derek Tam-Scott (2009: 113) in his research with enthusiasts of classic cars suggests that the extra level of involvement and skill needed to drive specialised cars, such as Steve's modified VW, requires special knowledge. He argues that for the enthusiasts in his study and I would argue for those here too, that driving is satisfying both for the pleasure but also because it distinguishes enthusiasts as members of a community with skills different to those of normal road-users (ibid).

Steve then compares his connected, involved drive in his modified car with his experience driving a much newer and standard car for work, "... I drove a new [standard] Toyota Avensis [taxi] in work and it just didn't feel connected at all, I just felt all over the place" (Steve Interview). Steve is reflecting on his driving experience of the taxi to suggest that because he is not able to feel the bumps in the road react accordingly he feels less in control of the car. Similarly I noted the difference between driving my modified VW Polo and a standard Polo lent to me by a family member, "...in terms of embodied experience the ride was much more comfortable and in many ways I felt a bit disconnected from the road...I felt like a lot of stimuli were removed from the mix in order to improve comfort and practicality... could not feel bumps or changes in the road as well as in my [modified] car with its firm suspension..." (Field Diary, 30/5/2015). In terms of experience I noted that it was, "definitely a less stressful experience, the actual driving element was much easier in terms of settling into the cyborg..." (Field Diary, 30/5/2015). Tam-Scott (2009: 113) explains that the sensory experience of these specialised cars are more physiologically stimulating and thus provide a richer more connected embodied experience of driving than newer or standard cars. This is clearly the case for Steve, who by feeling every bump in the road is more in receipt of more physiological stimulus than in his standard work car which, "felt all over the place" (Steve Interview).

Similarly Glen Fuller (2007: 56) gives an autoethnographic account of driving to and around Australia's Bathurst Racetrack which is similar both to Steve's quote above and to Jack Katz's, "negotiating the Dipper can also produce a startling affective experience of terror similar to a fun park ride". In all three quotes there is an implication that the felt or sensed ride is as experiential as the drive itself, they all suggest that driving the car is a balance of human interaction, feeling and negotiation of the car and the road. Steve is having to think and actively control the car and thus feels an emotional response to those conscious decisions but he then also feels the adrenaline, the "rush" of his body being forced to experience the movements as a result of those decisions. As Fuller (2007: 56) explains he actively negotiates the road but that the road impacts his bodily experience too, which as he states was, "similar to a fun park ride"<sup>115</sup>. The driver's body experiences the physiological stimulus of the drive, driven by enthusiasm, "the complex sensuous 'relationality' between the means of travel and the traveller" (Hannam et al., 2006: 15).

### **8.1.2 Sounds in Embodied Driving Experience**

Beyond enthusiasm the car can be understood as a 'personal mobile space', which is often utilised in a similar way to the home space (Bijsterveld et al., 2014: 37) and in which "...sound/music is an integral part of how bodies and cars are synched." (Waitt et al., 2015: 1). Turning to modified car enthusiasts and driving Fuller (2007: 57-8) gives an account of the ways in which the sounds a car makes add to a particular driving event. He notes that due to a modified exhaust, "the exhaust echoed between the concrete barriers that amplified the noise...my 'blipping' of the accelerator sounded much louder and the close proximity of the

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<sup>115</sup> The terror element of Fuller's (2007) experience is perhaps more linked to the fact he is driving on a racetrack, however I think his use of the term serves to show the way that the 'rush' or adrenaline kicks in when driving a modified car at speed.

concrete barriers accentuated the sense of speed at which we were travelling". In this way not only is the modified car or enthusiast-driver-car not a 'sonic envelope' (Bull, 2004: 247) which insulates the driver from its noises (Pinch & Reimer, 2012: 443) but it is this audio which adds to driving as an embodied cultural practice. Driving should instead be understood as drawing on, "kinaesthetic, proprioceptive, haptic, spatial and visual sensibilities" (Merriman, 2012: 63) with an appreciation of sonic geographies which shows the car to be a mobile performance which moves in and out of different spaces in which it may or may not be understood as appropriate by the audience therein.

For Fuller (2007: 57-8) these sounds made by the car add a sonic sensory element to his embodied experience and practice of driving. As Derek Tam-Scott (2009: 112) notes the sounds which a car's engine makes can, "for an enthusiast...make the hairs on the back of their neck stand up". It is this sensory experience which explains the importance of sounds, not just from the engine or exhaust, in embodied driving experiences. Another set of noises unique to the experience of driving a modified VW are those produced by it scraping the ground due to lowered suspension, these are more in line with the noises which Tam-Scott (2009) describes as specific to individual cars and which an enthusiasts learns about as they learn their way around a car. Dan describes this as the, "odd...exhaust scrape off the floor" (Dan Interview) and I referred to this in my field diary as, "...the noise and feel of scraping has become a constant worry" (Field Diary, 16/5/14). This feeling and the accompanying noise can be quite jarring, during the fieldwork I lived in a flat which required crossing a speedbump almost daily, the feeling as the car grinds at the tarmac can be unsettling but as discussed the noise which it produces acts as a signifier of how low a car is.

Beyond these noises which the driven car makes as a result of being driven there are those noises which the driver has more control over; the music played on the stereo. Bull (2004: 246) has noted that mediated sound coming through the stereo has become so integral to driving experience that it can be understood as part of driving practice. Furthermore he suggests that the soundscape of the car can be attached to certain moods or in this case enthusiast experiences (ibid: 248). I noted that certain emotive experiences of my enthusiasm were connected to music playing at the time. For example I recorded that, “[I was driving to a show] with the sun shining, windows down and the sounds of wind rushing into the car and ‘summer’ anthem style music playing loudly I was relaxed and at once excited” (Field Diary, 17/5/14). In this field diary excerpt I reflect on the way in which music in the car, as Waitt and others (2015: 1) suggest, is integral to how cars and bodies are synched. This can also be read within the experience Steve recalled in chapter 4, in which he accompanied his Dad on drives his car, in which they listened to trance music” (Dan Interview). This illustrates the importance of music played in the car as affecting the experience of driving, or in Steve’s case passengering. This synchronisation (Waitt et al, 2015: 1) is even more important in the context of an enthusiastic experience, the relatively emotive response I describe suggests the ways in which context and surroundings can lead to momentary feelings of enthusiasm. However music in particular often seeps out into the public arena (Gilroy, 2001: 96-7); the performative aspect of this and other car sounds are addressed in section 8.2 of this chapter.

### **8.1.3 Driving & Connections of Enthusiast Labour**

In chapter 6 the context of a community which prizes enthusiast labour was introduced and discussed. It is perhaps not surprising that enthusiasts have particular opinions regarding driving cars which they have worked on themselves. For example Steve explains this driver-car relationship with the added connection of labour as, “[making] the car more...you feel

involved with it” (Steve Interview). This embodied sense of involvement can be intrinsically linked to driving for those enthusiasts who do work on their own cars. This connection between car and body is particularly important to the modified car enthusiasts because of their special connection to the car. For enthusiasts, driving can be seen as a further extension of the connection made when working on the modified car. Furthermore by driving a car which he has contributed to Steve inscribes himself within the enthusiasm narrative both of his car itself and of the embodied relationship between him and the object of his enthusiasm; the car. This connection between driving and labour can be seen by drawing together the work of Balkmar and Joelsson (2010) on driving and Fuller (2007) and chapter 6 on enthusiast labour. As discussed the modified VW project can be read as a socio-technical project; involving both the community and material. Balkmar and Joelsson (2010: 41) explain that the driven car has an emotio-material dimension. This shows that when driving the car an enthusiast experiences both the materiality of the car and their own emotions, just as they experience their emotions and community sociability alongside the materiality when negotiating socio-technical project cars. However the important element in the modified driving experience stems not from the connection between the car and the road but rather between the multi-sensory and embodied connection between the car and driver (Tam-Scott, 2009: 113-4). As Steve goes onto explain, this connection affords the enthusiast access to specialist knowledge about their specific car.

“[Being involved with the process of working on my car is] Definitely [important]...coz then you get to know your car, if something goes [breaks] you know what’s gone...you know where to start looking for the problems” (Steve Interview).

Here Steve describes the way in which working on the car and driving the car leads to “knowing your car”; an understanding of its potential faults and idiosyncrasies. Similarly with

reference to motorbikes Ilmonen (2004) suggests that in order to embody the skills to ride successfully time must be taken to get to know the mechanics of the bike. In my experience at the times when something went wrong with my car there was this sort of disconnection. A feeling which temporarily opened up jarring the connected feeling of the driving experience because I did not have the specialist knowledge about my vehicle gained by working on it. This shows a further dynamic of the connection between enthusiast and socio-technical project as outlined in chapter 6. Tam-Scott (2009) explains that each car may require slightly different skills or understandings of its mechanical parts. This can be seen as the special knowledge which Belk (2004) refers to and which distinguishes modified car enthusiasts who have worked on their own cars from other non-enthusiast road users (Tam-Scott, 2009: 113). These examples also reinforce Belk's (2004: 275) notion that it is important for enthusiasts, to drive the cars which they have worked on; to perform their enthusiast labour.

#### **8.1.4 Driving, Speedbumps & Stress**

Driving a modified car and the consequent physiological stimulus (Tam-Scott, 2009) is not always a pleasurable experience, the logistics of driving car with very low ride heights, leads to new embodied challenges. In the field I noted that, "...I have to remain constantly alert, this is particularly true for driving very low cars" (Field Diary, 30/5/15)<sup>116</sup>. As such when driving my modified VW Polo I was constantly needing to scan the road ahead, not just for cars and hazards as usual but the road surface itself in order to check for any debris which may catch the underside of the car. Previous experiences of this have either led to crossing into the oncoming lane to avoid rocks or bits of tyre. However when this is not safely possible I have

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<sup>116</sup> This requires the caveat that whilst I am always alert when driving, the modified car brings with it a host of other potential issues which can occur more commonly and much quicker than a driver of a standard car need allow for.

caught the underside of the car on debris, leading a jarring noise and a felt sensation which comes as a grinding vibration through the chassis or whatever has caught on the ground.

However a problem arises; as discussed with reference to community norms of modifying in chapter 5, having a lowered modified VW is an important part of a modified VW aesthetic. Thus a desire to meet these norms coupled with the practical difficulties and barriers to free automobility which lowered suspension can pose leads to stress when driving. This stress and anticipation alone means that I am constantly on edge, knowing that if something does appear in the road, there's a good chance I may damage my car. Geoghegan (2013: 44) argues that enthusiast experiences are not always direct feelings of passion or joy, in this case the stress of dedication driving a low car as per community norms leads to negative emotions of enthusiasm.

Beyond the less controllable debris of the road, driving a low modified car is also an issue when it comes to speedbumps, these material forms of driving regulation (Dant, 2006: 297-8) have unintended consequences for lowered cars. These regulations do not just act to reduce speed but in some cases to stop cars dead, as happened on one occasion when my VW Polo became beached on a speedbump at the university. At times this even led me to alter my planned mobility; having to use Google StreetView to plan journeys to car show sites in order to see if any speedbumps or roadworks would be encountered (Field Diary, 1/11/14). This is a well-recognised issue within the community and the subsequent scraping and dragging of the car's underside is seen as a badge of honour by many. Dan described this in his interview as, "...exhaust scrapes on the floor...static low problems yo...", here referring to the way in which static, as opposed to the airbag suspension discussed below, leads to a scraping of metal on tarmac which reverberates through the driving body. As Dan explains



below, the level of involvement required to drive a lowered modified car increases in response to new physiological stimulus such as the feeling of hitting pot holes or ripping off the car's splitter<sup>117</sup>.

“...you’ve gotta think a bit more. You’ve definitely got to think a bit more when you drive it, especially if you’ve lowered it because...pot holes are the bane of my life at the moment...I’ve (laughs) I’m actually that low I’ve ripped off my splitter... more exciting yeah...”(Dan Interview).

To the non-enthusiast motorist the risk of damaging a car's splitter by choosing to drive a car which has millimetres of clearance from the road seems bizarre and stupid, however Dan's final explanation that driving a modified car is “more exciting” shows that this extra risk may actually contribute to the experience rather than detract from it (Murphy & Patterson, 2011; Saville, 2008). However a further problem is encountered with regards to the aforementioned aesthetic norm of the community whereby modified VWs have to be low. Whereby, “...to raise it [the lowered car] is seen as a weakness or giving up on the ‘lowered lifestyle’.” (Field Diary, 19/5/14). The lowered lifestyle is a term used online and at social gatherings to refer to the dedication and involvement in driving required by being a member of a community which favours low cars. When somebody chooses to raise their lowered car for whatever reason they are seen as abandoning the enthusiastic dedication needed to run a low car, a dedication referred to as the lowered lifestyle. However the briefly mentioned addition of air-suspension to a modified VW affords the driver the ability to change the ride height of the vehicle whilst driving, this however leads to community wide debate about embodiment, dedication and practicality as discussed in the following section. Driving the modified car raises elements of dedication to enthusiasm beyond what some may see as reasonable

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<sup>117</sup> A piece of bodywork fitted to the lower section of the front bumper, sometimes also referred to as a lower spoiler or valance.

barriers. Although as has been noted enthusiasts often take their passionate dedication to a particular object or practice of enthusiasm to extremes which can be perceived as abnormal by those outside the community (Geoghegan, 2013: 44). In particular the driving of very low cars is celebrated within the modified VAG culture and yet this in itself brings with it a specific and not always positive embodied driving experience but yet still motivated by enthusiasm. One solution to this problem, increasingly chosen by enthusiasts is to swap their lowered static suspension for an airbag suspension system as will be explained in the following section.

### **8.1.5 Bags vs Static: Embodiment, Dedication & Practicality**

The debate regarding the use of air-suspension as noted above is referred to within the community as being about 'Bags vs Static'. This refers to the suspension type of the car in question and ties into the observations above about raising the car being seen as abandoning a key element of modified VW enthusiasm. Coilover suspension is a modification which replaces the car's standard suspension and can be adjusted in terms of ride height<sup>118</sup> by winding them up or down. However this lowering process requires all four wheels being removed, as such the chosen ride height can not be changed whilst driving, hence the car's suspension is static whilst the car is moving. However airbag suspension replaces each spring with an airbag, using a compressor and air tank, usually mounted in the boot of a car, air flow to these can be controlled to inflate and raise the car or deflate and lower the car (see Figure 23). The air flow can either be controlled manually with switches which open the valves or can be controlled via digital management. With a digital controller a number of presets can

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<sup>118</sup> Depending on the level of adjustment required you can also purchase coilovers with adjustable dampening and other factors, although these are usually favoured by performance oriented cars.

be saved, for example drive height, fully lowered and fully raised, these can then be selected at the touch of a button whilst the car is moving.



*Figure 23. From left to right, my VW Polo with its air suspension in the highest setting, drive height & fully lowered (Author's Photographs).*

The obvious result of airbag suspension is that the car becomes much more practical, it can easily be raised to clear obstacles such as speedbumps but at the same time it allows the car to be lowered, usually when parked. The ultimate goal for many bagged cars is to have the chassis touch the floor, referred to as 'laying frame'. However the competitive element of the modified car culture means that increasingly there are static cars which are as low as bagged ones, during my fieldwork I often witnessed static cars which would constantly scrape on the road surface when being driven. Below I turn to my own embodied experiences of driving a car fitted with airbag suspension and the changes in the stresses encountered which affected the driving experience significantly.

“[I am driving] the car on its first long journey on airbags...I particularly note the lack of anxiety at seeing roadworks signs, previously this meant dragging the car up and down ramps...I realise that airbags have changed my embodied experience of driving” (Field Diary, 11/6/14).

The instant stress and worry I had felt previously when driving the car was now somewhat alleviated, I felt less involved in a similar way to that of driving a standard car, as noted above

although in this context the lack of involvement was relaxing. Safe in the knowledge that the car met community norms of ride height but that if I came to roadworks I could easily raise it and have enough clearance to get over any obstacles in the road. However I was still consciously and reluctantly reflecting on the fact that for many enthusiasts this would be seen as lacking dedication to the aforementioned 'lowered lifestyle'. It seems then that in terms of embodiment, a balance is needed between stress and worry in the mind, bodily practices of driving the car in a practical way but crucially, doing so in a way which continues to render the car as cool within the community. The field diary excerpt below shows how even with failsafe's in place the negative emotions of enthusiasm can still arise (Geoghegan, 2013: 43). I was driving my Polo on its first long journey on airbag suspension when it developed a serious fault, showing how driving a modified car has inherent risks if said modifications fail or break. In turn this has an effect on the driver and their need to remain alert, perhaps to a higher level than if driving a standard car.

“...on the return journey I become aware that one of the airbags is leaking, causing that corner of the car to lower itself to the extent that the wheel arch is sitting on the tyre whilst the car is moving....I stop several times to let the tyre cool down as the arch is melting it...I begin to panic [and] I am reminded of the stressful and potentially costly side to modified cars” (Field Diary, 11/6/14).

The appearance of emotion in this passage shows how problems which the car develops can instantly become very stressful. In a similar example below, Steve explains how this stress can turn to anger. The connection felt with the car is somehow severed and he becomes angry at the car, highlighting the connection between personal investments of enthusiast labour and embodied driving experience.

“I’ve been so close to just breaking the windows...kicking them through sometimes when I’ve broken down...You remember the time my wheel came off on...roundabout?...that was fun” (Steve Interview).

To further show the ways in which emotions play into this relationship between driver and car as Steve was retelling this anecdote he became visibly frustrated and his final sarcastic comment about it being fun was said with venom. At this point I changed the direction of the interview slightly so as not to be overly negative, this alone shows how emotionally attached enthusiasts are to their cars, recalling experiences and conjuring the related emotions. Geoghegan (2013: 44) has noted being a member of an enthusiast community can be about conforming, as suggested earlier this comes with the competent use of appropriate etiquette and norms. Geoghegan (ibid) also notes that the all-encompassing nature of enthusiasm means that when it moves into everyday life it can present barriers and limitations on behaviours which would otherwise be stress free. These examples of the stresses of driving modified VW cars come mostly from a desire to meet community norms which may present barriers to the practicality of normal automobility.

### **8.1.6 Daily Drivers**

Another issue which arises in the context of driving and dedication to enthusiasm is concerns how the car is actually used by the enthusiast owner. Whilst the car is clearly the enabler of automobility (Featherstone, 2004) it may not necessarily be the only mode of transport at its owner’s disposal. As such one interesting debate which arose during this research was the contention surrounding whether an enthusiasts’ car was driven on a daily basis as their primary source of mobility, referred to as a ‘daily’ or as a show vehicle, only driven to shows and events. More value is placed on cars which are driven daily as the requisite negotiation of the road and involved nature of driving a modified car on a regular basis is seen as a symbol

of dedication to the enthusiasm. In terms of my own positionality I have been in the fortunate situation of living close enough to the university to be able to walk to my office, I also lived in a small town where car use was often not necessary. As such my car got most use when attending shows or car meets. The field diary excerpt below is a reflection about what this meant in terms of my identity as enthusiast and is an example of reluctant reflexivity.

“...I have been criticised by several members [of Club 9n/3] for not using my car on a daily basis...if a car is daily driven and show-worthy then drivers are often given more respect”  
(Field Diary, 31/10/14).

Furthermore like with the built not bought debate there are a number of ways in which this ‘daily’ contention is represented, one humorous example comes in the style of a Dogs’ Trust sticker, shown below in Figure 24. The slogan ‘A Volkswagen is for life, not just for show season’ (Volkswagen Stickers, no date), summarises this debate perfectly, the daily driver is a car used by an enthusiast for his or her everyday life opposed to those cars which only appear during the show season.



Figure 24. ‘A Volkswagen is for life...’ sticker. (Volkswagen Stickers website, no date).

Dan explains below, that whilst driving his modified car daily is important, it is also a necessity. Subsequently those who do not use their car daily, myself included, may do so as a result of having this choice and not just because they want to protect their show cars.

“...it’s important to me as a daily [driver] in the sense that when I need it...I need it for work...It gets me from A to B, in like a car car<sup>119</sup> sense. I sound like somebody that’s never touched a modified car before...” (Dan Interview).

Dan also implies here that for car users who are not enthusiasts, the car is seen as an enabler to get from A to B and in so doing also suggests that for somebody that had ‘touched a modified car before’ this would be different. This suggests the connection between the enthusiast and their car which makes driving more than just getting from one location to another. John however has the choice of two vehicles and as he explains below he does not use his VW Campervan, which he takes to shows, on a daily basis.

“I don’t drive it [my car] every day but I’ve got a car that I use regularly to commute...it’s important for me to have something that’s usable as well as somethings that’s err that you can drive anywhere you like.” (John Interview).

John further explains that often the way in which cars are modified affects whether or not they can be driven comfortably every day, this chimes with the discussion above about the stress of driving a lowered car.

“I quite like a practical car I’ve got to say ...so while I do enjoy low cars I couldn’t live with one all the time coz you have to like swerve for drain covers and that doesn’t appeal to me” (John Interview).

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<sup>119</sup> Dan says “car car” to refer to a normal automobile vehicle as opposed to the car as an object of enthusiasm.

There is an agreement then across the community of the importance of driving a modified car on a daily or regular basis, it also reveals the modified VW as not only an object of enthusiasm but as the practical mode of automobility for many enthusiasts. It can be argued that this repeated interaction of driving the car is a necessary part of articulated enthusiasm (e.g. Fuller, 2007: 56). However the importance of driving the modified car within community understandings of enthusiasm and the motivation to drive may have more to do with the mobile display and performance which driving affords (Chappell, 2012: 13; Maddrell et al, 2015).

### **8.1.7 Driving in Convoy & Mobile Display**

In this section I turn to the ways in which individual driving behaviours are brought together when enthusiasts drive in convoy. In order for a car club to drive to and arrive at a show together a convoy is necessary. In this way it is possible to see the driven convoy as a combination of club dynamics and within the extended eventspace of the car show event<sup>120</sup>.

“The convoy and the convoy meeting place is a key dynamic to club attendance at car shows, it unites the car meet aspect with the potential excitement of the weekend to come.” (Field Diary, 15/6/14).

This usually means that a location near to a main road or motorway is chosen and the time along with a list of attendees is circulated on social media or a club forum, as noted above. It is in part the culmination of many different convoys which leads to the show traffic discussed in chapter 7. Interestingly the convoy itself shows some of the altruism and community of the club relationship as moderation of driving is needed to keep the group together within traffic and to ensure that everyone finds their way together. I use the term ‘*carmaraderie*’ here to

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<sup>120</sup> In this way the notion of club convoys ties into the discussion of car clubs in Chapter 5 and of car shows and driven pilgrimage in Chapter 7.



invoke this understanding of community and camaraderie which is specific to enthusiasts driving together, this automobile collective can be a driving force in performing the car to an audience of enthusiasts and friends. In the field I noted that, "There are driving practices specific to convoys, a general rule is to not go faster than your slowest car" (Field Diary, 31/5/14). It is important that the club moves along together and so keeping to the speed of the slowest cars stops club members from losing each other. However I also noted during the fieldwork that it was sometimes better to let them get ahead as the slower cars also held up normal traffic. "Both our cars are low and slow...it meant we could crawl along in the slow lane not holding up others like in longer convoys" (Field Diary, 24/8/14).

I also noted in the field that this meant altering driving practices at other times, "club members alter their driving choices in order to keep the convoy together, for example waiting at roundabouts for a gap for the whole group to take" (Field Diary, 31/5/14). This was a tactic I later utilised myself when leading a club convoy to the car show Ultimate Dubs in 2015, "As I pull off a roundabout I glance in my rear view mirror, half to check all the cars took the right exit...I spy one latecomer driving towards us, a flash of the headlights from me and one in return from them and I slow right to a crawl so that the whole convoy can wait whilst he uses the last roundabout to get behind us" (Field Diary, 9/3/14). This altering of normal driving practice so as to keep a club convoy together on the road shows *camaraderie* at work. This also shows the strength of social capital stocks within car clubs and the altruistic behaviours of enthusiasts. With the example of the convoy, the mobile club is kept together by the acts of those within the driving group. Interestingly Chappell (2012) noted that for lowrider clubs almost all of the journeys taken together were done in organised convoy. He also observed that the cars in front would often turn on their hazard warning lights as they drove (ibid: 61),

to allow those further back to keep up, this is similar behaviour to the flashing of headlights and driving slowly to keep the convoy together as noted above. This shows further evidence of the specific driving practices and choreographies of the road which enthusiasts must learn from other club participants in order to be collectively mobile in convoys.

In my experience, driving to a car show in a club convoy can form a type of the eventscape stretching noted in chapter 7. A convoy begins with a meet of sorts<sup>121</sup>, a meeting point is arranged and I arrive and we socialise a bit, talking about the cars and in particular talking about the show, in this way anticipation builds, often based on recollections of the same show in previous years. Then we begin to move out, this initial feeling is perhaps one of the strongest, as I drive we snake out of the truck stop or pub car-park or motorway services and as we get out onto the road we form a solid line of modified VW's, our cars united by their driver's common goals and interests. As this line of cars moves I feel a sense of involvement and belonging to a collective identity, I have always reflected on this as a feeling of enjoying driving and my own experience coupled with an awareness of making up something much larger than myself. This feeling of belonging comes from the spatial collection of the individual identity performances of driving in the public arena (Terry et al., 2015: 628; Waitt et al., 2015: 3). This is a personal embodied experience, shared with other bodies in the club however it is also shared in a more performative way, similar to the way in which a convoy can form show traffic when viewed by an enthusiast. When a convoy passes through a small town or snakes its way through motorway traffic it is often actively noticed and commented upon by the public. Noticing the reactions of this audience adds to the feeling of belonging and of being a part of a larger group which evokes the attention of those surrounding us. As Tam-Scott

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<sup>121</sup> Here I am paraphrasing from several different experiences noted in my field diary with regards to meeting up with club members and then driving to various shows in convoy.

(2009: 114) notes that the feelings of satisfaction given from driving specialised cars or those that the driver has worked on stems from a distinction with ordinary road-users who do not have access to community skills and knowledge. Below Dan describes in the detail the way in which being a part of a larger group of enthusiasts combines both feelings of personal joy from a driving point of view but also the performative aspect of thirty modified cars driving together.

“I think I was one of three Volkswagens out of a thirty car convoy<sup>122</sup> the amount of attention we got was *stupid*, absolutely stupid. Driving through like the centre of Sheffield past the Hallam University and seeing like all these kids at the bus top and other university students. Just the amount of attention we got... yeah it feels, it does feel quite good”. (John Interview).

Dan also highlights here the fact that many of those watching are not the intended audience, in that they may not fully appreciate the work that has gone into the cars they see. However for Dan it is the being seen which matters. This is very similar to the O’Dell (2001: 15, original emphasis) quote where he notes that for raggare drivers, “...the goal for these youths was to be *seen* driving in style”<sup>123</sup>.

“the convoys and cars that the show attracted created a spectacle in unintended spaces and for unintended audiences; the convoy particularly provided a sort of mobile display which drew attention of pedestrians during most of the journey” (Field Diary, 15/6/14).

Whilst the above discussion details the experiences of enthusiasts driving within an organised convoy of people they know it is not uncommon to find oneself caught up in often larger ad-hoc convoys. This is another way in which the show traffic of chapter 7 builds up; as noted

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<sup>122</sup> Here Dan is describing a multi-marque car meet, thus not everyone is driving a modified VW.

<sup>123</sup> This quote is discussed again and in more detail in Section 9.2 with regards to driving the modified car as a form of performance.

certain areas around the locations of shows create geographical bottlenecks in the motorscape. This often reaches fever pitch when almost all of the cars on the roads are modified cars, as shown in Figures 11 and 12 in chapter 7. Thus to be a driver within show traffic the enthusiast is more a participant in an ad-hoc convoy, a group of enthusiasts united by common interest, not club, convoying their way to a car show or event.

“...I’ve driven in a few convoys and obviously when you get to a show and you’ve got modified cars zipping in and out of the show and all around the surrounding areas it’s just like ‘ooh spot the modified car’, we’re getting excited, we’re getting close” (Steve Interview).

Here Steve explains the culmination of entering the spaces of an event a car show with the feeling of excitement that goes with driving together with other enthusiasts in a convoy. Here the emotional responses to anticipation and excitement about the event overtake any feelings of stress or trepidation about driving the modified car. This also shows that the spatial stretching of the eventscape has as much effect on the drivers who make it up as their audiences. This can be understood as a kind of unintended display which takes on the form of a rolling spectacle, for those in the convoy they begin to feel a part of the eventscape although they are not yet at the event. This combination of personal embodied driving experience as discussed above and the more outward facing performance on the modified car as a spectacle (Chappell, 2012: 13; Terry et al., 2015: 628), intended or otherwise is explored in more detail in the following latter section of this chapter.

## **8.2 Driving as Performance & Display**

The driven modified car occupies an interesting position, as noted in the previous section it can be understood as part of an enthusiast driver-car assemblage (Dant, 2004: 61), as a machine which requires physical involvement (Tam-Scott, 2009: 113) and produces personal

embodied experiences. Many of the most publicly facing elements of modified car driving practices relate not to personal driving enthusiasms but to enthusiasts choosing to perform their cars in certain ways. As Chappell (2012: 13) notes, driving the modified car can be seen as, “a kind of performance on the stage of the everyday streetscape”, meaning that the performance may also go beyond enthusiastic audiences, as discussed below. Furthermore these performances can be seen as specialised and culturally bound procedures (Edensor, 2004: 112) of the practical embodied performance of the choreographies of the road (Sheller, 2007: 180).

“...If your car looks good, the driving experience is better. If your car looks good, you know people are looking. It’s basically a form of showing off” (Questionnaire, Q13).

The quote above implies the importance to this enthusiast of the mobile spectacle which the modified VW affords. Similarly as noted earlier Tom O’Dell (2001: 15, original emphasis) describes the motivation for drivers in the Swedish *raggare* car culture, “The cars were...thought to *look good* and the goal for these youths was to be *seen* driving in style”<sup>124</sup>. Furthermore they enacted this by, “cruising slowly and provocatively around town” (Friman et al., 1991 in O’Dell, 2001). As noted in chapter 7 with the ways in which driven modified cars extend car show eventscapes, the driven modified car can be understood as a performance of enthusiast identity (Chappell, 2012: 13). Furthermore Chappell (ibid: 23) argues that as modified cars move through space they bring with them their own spatio-temporal field, which temporarily inscribes the spatiality of the motorscape it moves through (Merriman, 2004: 157-8).

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<sup>124</sup> See section 2.7.1 of the Literature Review.

This pattern of driving as performing, as noted by the questionnaire response above, is one which I have experienced myself. During one period when my car was off the road during 2014 I noted in my field diary that, "...it is not so much the mobility that I miss, it is the display and performative aspect" (Field Diary, 18/8/14).

"...I think that drivers sometimes drive in a way that boosts their own embodied experience. However the metal cage in which they sit as they do so, can transform their personal driving actions into a spectacle for those watching, whether they are the intended audience or not". (Field Diary, 12/4/15).

Through my reflexive thinking about this performance, highlighted in the field diary excerpt above, it became clear that whilst performance and spatiality were key it was also important to think about who was seeing the car drive past. As such I turn now to a critical discussion of the context and potential audiences; enthusiast and otherwise, of these driving performances (Chappell, 2012: 13; Terry et al., 2015: 628). This consideration of context can also explain why certain behaviours are deemed as antisocial or without consideration to the public because they are exposed to an unintended and uninitiated audience who perceives their behaviour through wider contexts of the motorscape. For example the burnouts performed at the Wörthersee event, seen through an enthusiast driving context may be perceived as acts of performance. However for members of the public, outside the enthusiast community these performances are antisocial, according to the expected norms of those driving spaces. Furthermore there are of course a majority of enthusiasts who think that such behaviours are antisocial as well, but for those who do not, the motorscape is read as a performance space. Whilst the enthusiasts may want to hear a powerful modified car drive through their town centre it is unlikely that residents of the town centre share their interest. This is the main undercurrent contention of Karen Lumsden's (2013) book; that the spaces of performance

are often only read as streetscape stages for performance (Chappell, 2012: 13) by other enthusiasts. In Lumsden's research for those whose houses border these streetscapes they are sites of residential living, where loud modified cars are matter out of place (Cresswell, 2004). Below I turn to the ways in which modified VW's by their very mobility are constantly putting on a performance in everyday streetscapes, beyond their intended stages (Chappell, 2012: 13). Here I want to move forward from the understandings of what it means to see these cars in show traffic<sup>125</sup> and explore the relationship between audience and driver, to investigate what this unintended performance means to each of them.

In this way one element of the performance of the car; as individual identity performance in the public arena (Terry et al., 2015: 628; Waitt et al., 2015: 3), is the appreciation of this spectacle by non-enthusiast members of the public. As noted above, Chappell's (2012: 23) temporary spatial field which moves with the modified car reaches out and affects everyone it passes, as such the car performs to unintended audiences. Luke explains how the unintentional performance of driving a modified car is viewed by enthusiasts who might be curious about the car they see,

“...when you're driving down the road and you see someone at the side of the road and they look over...they take another glance and are like...'bloody hell that looks good...I wonder what they've done to that'” (Luke Interview).

Similarly he stated than when he is the audience member, “I look at it [a passing modified car] with pretty decent respect”, this combination of respect and “wonder[ing] what they've done to that” suggests a respect for enthusiast labour and a mutual appreciation of modified cars. Dan explained that when you see a modified car drive past, “...you always look. I mean you

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<sup>125</sup> As discussed in chapter 7.5

can't help it, you've gotta appreciate what somebody else has done...if it's done nicely then you stop and stare for a minute" (Dan Interview). Interestingly Chappell (2012: 29) argues that a lowrider car, when seen on the street, manifests the personal narrative of work put into it in a material form, this also explains the pride felt when other people appreciate the car as Steve explains. He notes that, "...I *do* notice quite a lot of people...turning their heads when I go down the street...it is a really nice feeling" (Steve Interview). Steve also gave a specific example of this reaction to his car, "...I was driving through town the other day and I was in some traffic...and some kids were like "Woah nice car man!" and I was just like this massive grin appeared on my face like uncontrollable grin like thanks!" (Steve Interview). This was clearly an emotive episode as the uncontrollable grin which Steve alludes to crept across his face as he told the story during the interview. These examples show the ways in which the modified car can be understood as carrying its own temporary spatial field (Chappell, 2012: 23) which inscribes the surrounding motorscapes (Merriman, 2004: 157-8) even extending to the pavements. The examples from Luke and Dan also show some of the appreciative ways in which this performance is received by those in the public arena. This shows the relational appreciation of modified cars by enthusiasts who show a mutual interest in different cars as they drive past even in unintended performances in everyday streetscapes (Chappell, 2012: 13), resulting in respect from the audience and feelings of pride for the driver.

### **8.2.1 Sonic Performances**

One way in which the modified car driver can be seen as performing is through her or his use of sound. With the example of the car stereo the car, acting as it does as a mobile space can both keep sound in and perform sounds to a wider audience. Thus the sounds made by the car are intertwined with those of its surroundings and specific to the time, space and



community in which they are made. Whilst the car has already been discussed above as a space in which music can be played for the benefit of the driver I turn now to what happens when noises such as this music stray beyond the car itself. On the one hand the car is a soundscape (Smith, 1994) which is personal, “[the] ideal acoustic listening chamber” (Bull, 2004: 247), a “sonic envelope” (ibid) which insulates and desensitizes the driver from the road, traffic and complexities of speed (Pinch & Reimer, 2012: 443). However on the other hand the car’s stereo has the ability to make a shouting statement into public space (Gilroy, 2001: 96-7). This can be understood as a sonic element to the temporary spatial field which moves with the cruising modified car (Chappell, 2012: 23); a multisensory performance and inscription upon the streetscape or motorscape which the car moves through (ibid: 13; Merriman, 2004: 157-8).

The use of stereos in modified car culture, in particular the playing of bass-heavy music at loud volumes heard beyond the car has been noted by several researchers (Bengry-Howell & Griffin, 2007: 445; Chappell, 2012: 10; ; Hatton, 2007: 15; Lumsden, 2012: 37). In-car entertainment and music have been discussed before, with Bull (2004: 247) noting that the automobile becomes the “ideal acoustic listening chamber”, however for modified car enthusiasts it becomes as much a private listening space as a space from which to project those sounds. As Gilroy notes (2001: 97) for customised SUV’s there is a need for car stereos which are so loud they can heard from several streets away, indeed he argues that, “...the power to be heard seems to exist quite separately from the prestige or horsepower of the vehicles involved”. Similarly when Dan (Dan Interview) was explaining why people turned to look at his car as he drove past that it was, “...mostly... because of the bass”. He later elaborates the way this experience in semi-private ‘listening chamber’ is stretched into

personal chambers of other automobiles and beyond, whether they want it to or not, “[I] turn my music up and the sound waves will echo into the next car so they instantly look anyway”. This is not uncommon behaviour for modified car enthusiasts in general and as with most of the more performative aspects of the culture it is often read as deliberate antisocial behaviour. Whilst it is unmistakably antisocial that is not necessarily the motivation to do it, as Dan outlines it can be about attracting attention or just enjoying the soundscape (Smith, 1994) of the car (Bull, 2004) albeit taken to the extremes. Furthermore it brings about some of the attention which Luke and Steve talk of in the previous section. As Dan’s “sound waves echo into the next car” (Dan Interview) he is using his stereo to shout into the public arena (Gilroy, 2001: 96-7) and is essentially announcing himself to other present enthusiasts by way of amplified sound a behaviour noted by Chappell (2012: 10) at lowrider car meets.

Exhaust and engine noises, noted above with regards to embodied practices of driving also take on important performative aspects for modified car enthusiasts. This performance is often attached to an understanding that loud cars are fast, which to some extent they are (Tam-Scott, 2009: 112). Indeed the earlier description of Fuller (2007: 57-8) blipping the accelerator of his car to improve his embodied experience of driving by making it feel faster shows a connection between cars perceived as loud and those perceived as fast. The examples below show that often a car is revved or driven in a manner which makes the exhaust louder as a way to perform the engine performance of their car, conversely when this performance comes from a less capable<sup>126</sup> car as with Dan’s description of a Corsa below, it is viewed as negative and unnecessary. Interestingly these performances are even taken into the online spaces as enthusiasts, “...post a little video of it [their exhaust] revving up so you

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<sup>126</sup> Less capable here refers to a car which is not fast or does not have a powerful engine.

can see what the sounds like” (Steve Interview). Again reiterating the importance of what a car sounds like to an enthusiast<sup>127</sup>. Furthermore this shows how behaviours which may be deemed antisocial (e.g. Lumsden, 2013) can become dispersed across the community and thus reinforced as behavioural norms by way of online networks. This relationship can be seen as true of the videos of burnouts at Wörthersee discussed in chapter 7.

“There’s a lad in Hull with a gold [Nissan] 350Z...and it’s the three litre V6 so every time you hear it it’s “Bwaaarr” with the de-cat<sup>128</sup>you hear it a mile off and then obviously you’ve got your [Vauxhall] Corsas with the cherry bombs<sup>129</sup> some when you look at them you think ‘Ermm should you have really done that?’ and you think, ‘No’...(Dan Interview).

Here Dan illustrates these unwritten rules of sound within the modified car community, it is interesting to note that this could be personal preference as neither car is even German. However he states that the Corsa is more out of place and has gone against the exhaust that it ‘should’ have, however the Nissan which is clearly very loud is held in higher regards exactly because it makes so much noise. The general consensus is that if a car is fast or high performance then a loud exhaust is acceptable because it is deemed as necessary, however as Dan points out a Corsa, which is usually a slower hatchback, has less need for a sports exhaust. Dan also offers an interesting caveat, in that he states a recognition that this behaviour is antisocial. This is perhaps the most common contention in the literature and indeed popular culture about modified car enthusiasts, with media illustrations of modified car enthusiasm often linked to antisocial noise (Lumsden, 2013: 49-70). Indeed Karen Lumsden (ibid) explains this as being part of the fuel behind the stereotyping and perceptions

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<sup>127</sup> The recent movement of supercars driving at speed around central London has been helped by the noise which these cars produce, videos recorded of this noise often attract hundreds of thousands of views on YouTube.

<sup>128</sup> Removal of the catalytic converter to improve brake-horse-power.

<sup>129</sup> Style of exhaust renowned for making a lot of noise and often fitted to slower hatchback cars.

of enthusiasts as necessarily antisocial. Interestingly in Dan's experience he recognises that the behaviour is antisocial and so it follows that he recognises spatio-temporal motorscapes where this noise may be permissible.

The example below introduces the soundscapes of convoys<sup>130</sup>, here enthusiasm and collective camaraderie can overcome the parameters of antisocial behaviour. In a group of friends, heading to a car show, as shown in the field diary excerpt below. Doug, whose car has a loud exhaust begins to rev loudly in a show of performance to the other enthusiasts. He knows that this is antisocial in that time and place but a combination of his enthusiasm and excitement means that he does it anyway.

“...a friend of mine; Doug, who is several cars in front began to rev his new Golf R32 loudly. This added noise added to the excitement of the fact that I was on a journey to a car show. The sound of the car bouncing off the limiter put a big smile on my face although I was wondering how other road users might perceive it as antisocial” (Field Diary, 17/5/14).

Doug revs his car for two reasons, in order to hear and revel in his own loud exhaust noise and secondly so that the others in the convoy may do the same. I spoke with the others when we arrived at that particular show and it was evident that we all knew how antisocial that was, but the justification given by nearly everyone was, “that noise though!”. This relates to the physiological and emotive response which Tam-Scott (2009: 112) which enthusiasts have to the noise of loud car engines. This makes for an interesting connection between performance and embodied experience, Doug's performance affected my embodied experience of driving. It made me smile and become more excited about driving towards a show and yet it was not even my car making the noise. This shows a similar dynamic as that

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<sup>130</sup> Although to some extent Dan's earlier experience of a thirty car convoy invokes the levels of noise involved in some convoys.

raised above between the stereo as personal listening device and amplified sound projector. The car's engine and exhaust noises can also transgress from one of these categories into the other. Another example of how the noise of car exhausts can stray from personal driver experience into wider enthusiast experience is within the eventscape, in Wörthersee Ben referred to this noise cacophony as like being in heaven<sup>131</sup>.

“We began to hear the echoing roars that could only be from VW-Audi V6's, the noises bounced off the hills surrounding, every so often another roar or pop in the distance. Ben said it was like heaven (Field Diary, 2/5/15).

This observation and Ben's input shows the way in which performances by enthusiasts can help to foster multisensory landscapes or eventscapes of enthusiasm. Tam-Scott (2009: 112) notes that enthusiasts can often recognise the sounds produced by particular engines, most performance VW and Audi cars, until recently had V6 engines thus we were able to identify them. However Tam-Scott (ibid) also notes that “...for an enthusiast, the sound of engine can quite literally make the hairs on the back of the neck stand up”. Whilst normally this is confined to one or two cars near an event, the scale of the Wörthersee eventscape meant that these noises almost became a background sound, with another roar or pop resounding around the valley every few minutes. This experiences had the effect which Tam-Scott (2009: 112) suggests and it illustrated the way in which performance, and in particular as part of an eventscape, can produce embodied reactions in enthusiastic audiences.

Another example from Wörthersee helps to illustrate the importance of spatio-temporal context on the motorscape chosen for performance. Along with two friends I visited a well-known section of road, near Lake Wörthersee referred to in the modified car community

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<sup>131</sup> As noted in chapter 7 Belk (2004: 276) observed enthusiasts referring to car shows as being like heavens.

online as 'Turbokurve'. Turbokurve is sweeping bend flowing into a long straight which headed out of Faak am See town into a steep sided valley (Field Diary, 2/5/15), it is so-called because the curve of the road allows for the performance and noise of turbochargers to be appreciated by the gathered audience of enthusiasts. As with the examples of Wörthersee given in chapter 7, the streetscapes were lined with enthusiasts in chairs watching the roads as they would a motorsport track. We spent one day sitting with the other spectators watching but also listening to the sounds of tuned VW's and Audi's which would slow down almost to a crawl on the corner and then accelerate hard, spinning the wheels and making a cacophony of exhaust notes and tyre squeal<sup>132</sup>. This audio-visual spectacle occurs for large parts of the day and several weeks in this one location, however if a similar performance and the accompanying noises were performed on a similarly public road in the UK it may be seen as dangerous antisocial behaviour. However it is clear here and from the discussion of driving behaviour in eventscapes in the previous chapter that audience and context of the performance stages of streetscapes (Chappell, 2012: 13) or motorscapes (Merriman, 2004: 157-8) play important roles in signifying which driving behaviours are acceptable.

#### **8.4 Chapter Conclusions**

This chapter has empirically illustrated the importance of the car within the enthusiast community as both the space in which embodied experiences of driving occur and as the object which can be performed to wider audiences. As such the modified VW car may be both Dant's (2004: 62) driver-car but also the projector of enthusiast identity into the driving spaces which it encounters. The examples given also show that enthusiasts such as Steve enjoy driving for the embodied pleasure of being able to, "feel every bump in the road" (Steve

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<sup>132</sup> As discussed with reference to online video footage of such behaviours in chapter 7.

Interview) but also the act of driving as a form of public display (Lumsden, 2013: 144; Terry et al., 2015: 628). In particular Steve and Luke both explained that this display is often picked up upon by enthusiasts beyond the car in that given motorscape. Luke explained that part of this attention is given over to “wonder[ing] what they’ve done to that” (Luke Interview), relatedly Steve in particular talked about the positive emotions of his car being noticed (Steve Interview). This shows an interest and appreciation in enthusiast labour and the related sense of pride which follows the modified car around. This can in part be understood as a result of the temporary spatial field which moves through streetscapes with modified cars affecting all who see it (Chappell, 2012: 13). Furthermore the car can be seen as a material embodiment of the personal narrative of enthusiast labour which has created it (ibid: 29) this too is caught up in the mobile spatial field. This spatial field of the car can be understood as an inscriber of the historicity and spatiality of motorscapes which are inscribed by the vehicles which move through them (Merriman, 2004: 157-8). These performances are bound with contexts of the culture in the same way as driving practices are bounded by national culture (Edensor, 2004: 112). The context and audience of these motorscapes mean that certain driving behaviours are acceptable within certain spatio-temporal contexts. However the evidence in chapter 7 and here illustrates the way in which transgressing these contexts can lead to behaviour becoming antisocial. One example from this chapter, was the way in which Dan explained that he played music in his car which could be heard well beyond the car. This is accepted behaviour at a car meet or show but as Lumsden (2013: 57) has shown it becomes antisocial when performed in other contexts; such as residential areas.

The other side of the driven experience then was illustrated with the specific ways in which the car and driver can be understood in terms of a more embodied driver-car (Dant, 2004: 62). This chapter has shown that modified cars require their drivers to drive them in more

involved ways, the physiological stimuli in such cars is clearly higher and more important to the driver than in contemporary driver-car assemblages (ibid). This was particularly evident in Steve's comparison between his modified car and the standard car he drives for work, he noted that the stimuli felt when driving the modified car affords more of an embodied connection with the vehicle and with the road itself. By contrast he noted that the modern standard car felt less connected, an observation which echoed my own comparative experiences. It is also clear to see further importance in the enthusiast labour and personal investment arguments levelled in chapter 6. In order to be able to drive their modified VW in the involved way required (Tam-Scott, 2009: 112) an enthusiast must first learn the mechanics or characteristics of their vehicle (Ilmonen, 2004). Furthermore these skills of driving afford another way in which enthusiasts can differentiate themselves as participants in a community with a set of specific knowledges (Tam-Scott, 2009: 113). This interface of enthusiast labour and driving also further illustrates the emotional and social aspects of the materialities of driving. Balkmar and Joelsson's (2010: 41) reference to the driven car as being emotio-material is of clear similarity to Fuller's (2007) concept of the car as socio-technical project discussed in chapter 6. In this way the driven car can be seen to bring an emotional element into the assemblage and the labour to bring a social element, which as discussed in chapter 6 includes emotion. As such this chapter adds to the findings of chapter 6 and shows the modified car to be something which is both emotionally and socially invested in and pertinent. Furthermore having this extra level of connection with the car means that should anything go wrong the enthusiast is well positioned to solve it, however as Steve noted above this extra investment brings with it higher stakes of emotion. If the car does break then the resulting emotional response can illustrate the negative emotional flipside of the personal emotional investment in the modified car described in chapter 6. As such this chapter makes an



important contribution to recent literature in geography and mobilities studies by giving a detailed case study of a road user with a specific relation to the car and the road. The empirical discussion above suggest that modified car enthusiasts and particularly those who have worked on their own car may experience higher levels of the “complex sensuous relationality between the means of travel [car] and the traveller [driver]”, as suggested by Hannam and others (2006: 15).

The importance of community norms detailed in the previous chapters also play key roles in driving. In particular the community norm which results in most modified VWs having lowered suspension poses practical barriers to automobility. However the examples given above show that to conform to these norms and unwritten rules can lead to stressful driving experiences but which are understood to earn respect by illustration of the driver’s dedication to the lowered lifestyle. These stresses of the modified driver-car illustrate the way in which emotional investment in enthusiasm can lead to negative emotional impacts when that enthusiasm makes experiences more difficult (Geoghegan, 2013: 44). This can include very particular sonic elements within the embodied driving experience such as the jarring noise of the chassis scraping on the ground. Dan explains that one extreme of this trend can even lead to parts of the car becoming detached and damaged such as with his splitter. As such this extra physiological stimulus of driving (Tam-Scott, 2009: 112) leads to specialised negotiations of motorscapes, for example to avoid speedbumps.

This chapter has shown that solutions which may combat this added stress of conforming to impractical norms leads to criticism from the community. For example the use of air suspension to ease the driver-car assemblage or by not driving the car on a daily basis. The former allows an enthusiast to conform to aesthetic norms by having a temporarily lowered

car and also allows it to be driven in a practical way, however to some enthusiasts this is seen as lacking the dedication of driving low on static suspension. The latter solution, driving the car less regularly, highlighted another community contention, whereby if the car is not driven regularly their dedication to the enthusiasm is questioned. These two examples show two patterns which have arisen before in this research; firstly the importance placed on personal and emotional investment in the modified VW car and community as noted in chapter 6 in particular and secondly the culture of display inherent within this community. This culture of display and potential feedback has been evident in display of cars online, at car shows and as informing opinions and norms regarding topics from enthusiast labour in chapter 6 to daily driving in this chapter. The notion of this as a key underlying dynamic of the modified VW community is discussed in the thesis conclusion which follows.

The notion that the car is both space for embodied experience and performed display was also evident with reference to sonic geographies of the modified car and the driving practice of convoying. The convoy is an example of a very, “specialised practical embodied performance of the choreographies of the road” (Sheller, 2007: 180) but which also displays cars collectively in the motorscapes it moves through. This had clear links to the mobile pattern noted in chapter 7 as show traffic, however convoys most often consist of clubs on the move to car shows and events. This club aspect also introduced a notion of camaraderie or ‘carmarderie’ to this collective performance of driving, with particular practices involved such as flashing headlights and staying within the speed of the slowest car adopted to help the whole group. This behaviour was also noted by Chappell (2012: 61) and shows the ways in which individual driving practices can be controlled by learning about how to drive when in a club convoy. The collective scale of convoys leads to a collectivising of the individual identity performances of driving the modified car (Terry et al., 2015: 628; Waitt et al., 2015: 3) which

constitutes a mass version of Chappell's (2012: 13) spatio-temporal mobile performance which stretches out and inscribes the spatiality of the surrounding motorscape (Merriman, 2004: 157-8). However as noted the drivers who make up this spectacle have no control over the audience within that surrounding motorscape, it is this mixing of performance purpose, context and audience which leads certain driving behaviours to become antisocial.

The sonic geographies of the modified car also clearly occupy this dual space of individual experience and performed display projected into the public arena (e.g. Gilroy, 2001: 96-7). Sound in embodied driving practices contributes to the symbiosis between car and driver (Dant, 2004; Waitt et al., 2015) as it constitutes the sonic element of a multisensory driving experience. However noises such as those made by the engine or the exhaust combine personal embodied experience and performance beyond the bounds of the car. Noises which are particularly related to modified VW cars such as loud V6 engines and low cars scraping the ground introduce a sonic element to motorscapes and eventscaes. For example the cacophony of V6 noise heard in Wörthersee understood in terms of Tam-Scott's (2009: 112) observation that engine noise causes the hair on enthusiast's necks to stand on end, shows the importance of sound to enthusiast experience. By mobilising an understanding the importance of soundscape (Smith, 1994) alongside the previous chapter's discussion of event spaces, it is possible to show that these spaces are not only visually experienced. Furthermore as the discussion of sound both in and beyond the car in this chapter has shown, sounds and noise are particularly important elements of modified VW enthusiasm.

## 9 Thesis Conclusion

This research has critically explored the community, spaces, experiences and practices of the modified VW culture and community. Based on the rich empirical evidence collected and interpreted, a number of key conclusions are presented which bring together patterns observed across the preceding chapters. The mixed-methods approach and in particular the contextual grounding of my autoethnographic fieldwork has helped to situate empirical evidence within the terms of the modified VW community. These conclusions are also situated within the areas of human geography encountered throughout the research process in order to show the original contributions made to the discipline by this thesis and to clearly address the research questions posed in chapter 1. This concluding chapter also highlights the clear benefits of approaching this research from a human geography perspective.

The following sections present the conclusions and related interpretations and contributions of the key patterns identified from across the thesis. Firstly I turn to the ways in which patterns running across the preceding chapters can be united by an approach to enthusiasm which foregrounds the scale of a collective community. Following on from this first conclusion I detail in particular the ways in which geographies of enthusiasm, when applied to a community, can be added to using a conceptual approach more usually consulted for such a case study, namely social capital theory. Accordingly I highlight the use of social capital theory to explain behaviours and community dynamics from throughout the thesis, whilst also illustrating the similarities between these explanations and those posed within emotional geography. The geographies of enthusiasm, as utilised in this study, can be seen as conceptually underpinned by emotional geography but an original contribution is made here to suggest the appreciation of other theoretical approaches, where they may contribute to

an understanding of the case study community. Secondly this concluding chapter turns to the spaces of enthusiasm which were both implicitly and explicitly referenced throughout the preceding chapters. Such spaces were clearly important sites at which the community norms of enthusiasm were policed, maintained and experienced. In particular the connections between enthusiast display, space and appreciative audience are discussed with reference to the inscription of meaning onto said sites. Thirdly this conclusion turns a discussion of patterns which arose at the confluence of automobility and personal experiences of enthusiasm, concluding that an appreciation of embodied driving practice is key to an exploration of modified car enthusiasm. Fourthly and finally a series of concluding remarks are presented which summarise the key conclusions discussed in this final chapter, these remarks include the explicit positing of the original contributions which this research study makes to human geography and to the study of enthusiasm therein.

### **9.1 Community, Social Capital & Emotional Geography**

This research concludes, based on the empirical evidence discussed throughout the thesis that the scale created by a large group of individuals is constituent of a wider enthusiast community which has the power to influence the behaviour and knowledge of individual's experiences. Scale is important because participants within the community behave relationally to or are informed by the behaviours of the rest of the community; this also means that almost all behaviour observed is context-specific and socio-spatially located. Therefore interpretation of these behaviours can reveal implicit motivations which underlie them. This makes an important contribution to research regarding the geographies of enthusiasm and shows that such research should include an appreciation of the potential effects of relationships between the scale of individual and community experiences, practices and behaviours. Conceptually this conclusion builds on social capital theory (Mohan & Mohan,

2002; Putnam, 1995) because social capital is produced at the community scale and as this research has shown the benefits of this are potentially shared accordingly across the community network (Heley & Jones, 2013: 279). For example within social capital theory importance is placed on social interactions as the sites at which knowledges are exchanged between individuals. It is these exchanges themselves which help to boost the community's strength and its social capital (Mohan & Mohan, 2002).

One key finding which supports this conclusion and the notions of Urry (2003) and Bourdieu (1986: 250) is that the more members there are in a community network the more value each individual gains from being a member. That is to say that each new member brings experiences, knowledge and social capital which continues to build the strength of the community. In this way each individual is related to the larger collective body, which in turn has an effect on the experiences and behaviours of each individual. This therefore makes a contribution to the current study of geographies of enthusiasm, by showing the importance of the collective scale. In research where enthusiasts make up a larger scale community or culture populated by individuals it is important to think about the relationship between these two scales. As has been illustrated throughout this research the larger community scale can influence experiences, practices and behaviours at the individual by producing, policing and maintaining community norms. This builds on existing enthusiasm research in geography (Fuller, 2007; Geoghegan, 2013) regarding enthusiast clubs or groups and the ways in which they influence individual's understanding of their enthusiasm.

In suggesting that the geographies of enthusiasm include an appreciation for community scale and the impacts of social capital it is important to discuss the conceptual conclusions of utilising these two distinct approaches. The geographies of enthusiasm literature is grounded

in emotional geography and thus one key contribution and conclusion of this study is the critical combination of social capital and emotional geography in understanding the modified VW enthusiast community. There is clear agreement between the emotional geography approach of Ahmed (2008: 11), as used by Geoghegan (2013) and the notions of competent use of social capital (Falk & Kilpatrick, 2000: 103; Wenger, 2011). This potential simultaneous use of both approaches was detailed conceptually in chapter 5 and empirically throughout the thesis. Whilst a social capital approach suggests that by learning to use knowledge competently (Wenger, 2011: 229) enthusiasts are able to help the community grow stronger. Social capital and the social interactions required to exchange it form the basis of learning what the community deems to be good and thus which behaviours the enthusiast should gain pleasure from. In this way social capital theory as used by geographers (e.g. Falk & Kilpatrick, 2000) can explain the dynamics of community inclusion, whereas emotional geography can explain how these dynamics are experienced emotionally by participants (Ahmed, 2008). Similarly the observation by Yarwood and Shaw (2010: 425) of “rules of coherence” which community members learn from each other can be seen as a reflection of learning to be competent and learning to like things defined by the community as good (Ahmed, 2008). This dynamic can be seen as particularly evident within the example of the car club as a network of friends and resource for knowledge, as explained in chapter 5. Many of the norms such as working on your own car, as discussed in chapter 6 or driving a low car regularly, as discussed in chapter 8, gain their strength from the fact that many people enact them. This research has shown that as many people share these ideals they become instated as unwritten community norms to be followed by modified VW enthusiasts. Furthermore it is the responses to these behaviours which further solidifies them, as Ahmed (2008) explains this can be seen as the

role played by the community in affirming the practices of individuals where it fits within community norms.

It is the nature of these ideals as shared and held by many people which fosters and supports a network across which they can be transferred to other enthusiasts. This network can be seen here as the result of a community scale grouping of individuals who are able to transfer their ideas to other individual enthusiasts. For example, in chapter 4, John discusses his first access to the car culture and his interest in modified VWs, stemmed from interactions with his friends who were already active participants within the community. John's participation in social interactions with other enthusiasts affords both a mutual closeness and shared knowledge resources and physical co-presence needed to form relationships of trust and mutual attentiveness (Urry, 2003). By gaining experience of the community, it's specialist knowledges (Belk, 2004) and learning about how to use them competently in context (Wenger, 2011), John is inducted into a community in which he enjoys interacting socially with other enthusiasts. Ahmed (2008: 10) explains that clubs or groups of this type make explicit that which is implicit in daily life; the fact that individuals like to socialise with people who like the same things as them. This dynamic is clearly the case with the modified VW community in this research. This pattern also explains the way in which the community grows, with new members attracted by their interest in modified VW cars and the desire to associate with and learn from people who share their enthusiasm.

Relatedly the findings of this research support Wenger's (2011) notion regarding community learning and in this way the modified VW community shares cultural practices which reflect their collective learning (Wenger, 2011: 229). As such the practices, behaviours and experiences of enthusiasts within the modified VW community are influenced by norms and



knowledge which result from their social interactions and knowledge exchanges with others within the community. Furthermore I later highlight how this notion of collective learning and social interactions can be developed further by using Geoghegan's (2013: 45) notion of collective sociability and exclusivity of knowledgeability. In this way the research conclusions contribute further to geographies of enthusiasm and show the potential simultaneous use of emotional geography and social capital to explain enthusiast community relations.

Throughout the thesis it has become clear that social interactions are important in order to exchange knowledges, ideas and norm and such interactions were found to be rich and multi-layered, similarly to Urry's (2003) ideas. This multi-layered element meant enthusiasts drew on different resources when interacting with others within the community network. One such factor which was commonly shared was a joint or shared history or memory. This is because the shared nature of an enthusiast community coupled with an importance of dedication to being a modified VW enthusiast means that there are necessarily shared histories. For example car shows are attended by hundreds of enthusiasts, over many years, this provides all attendees with similar experiences on which to draw in social interactions. This reinforces the importance of past experience and prior knowledge in influencing community understandings, emotional experiences and enthusiast spatial relations. For several enthusiasts whose experiences are shared in chapter 4 this meant that their experience of cars and working on cars with their parents afforded them a route into their own interest, enthusiasm and into the modified VW community. These examples and others throughout the thesis highlight the importance of a sensitivity to personal narratives within enthusiasm research. These enthusiasm journeys can be seen as an important part of empirical examples of individual's experiences, both in this study and in wider enthusiasm research. For example,

in chapter 4, Dan and Steve talk about their childhood experiences around their Dad's cars and driving and both position these experiences as the start of their own narratives of their journey into car enthusiasm. In chapter 4 it was clear that enthusiasts placed importance on plotting the process of becoming enthusiast within a personal narrative. Additionally each of the interviewed participants utilised their early memories, either of playing with toy cars or as passengers in family members' cars, to lay out a personal narrative of enthusiasm. This focus on narrative and shared history with other enthusiasts was a key pattern throughout the empirical chapters. This was particularly evident in the form of shared histories and experiences drawn on in social capital exchanges, as noted in chapter 7.

Interestingly, as noted in chapter 2, Putnam's approach to social capital was criticised for lacking sensitivity to historicity; he suggested that repeated interactions were important but without noting the importance of shared histories which provide a source for said interactions. The conclusions of this research support Falk and Kilpatrick's (2000: 106) criticism that such prior shared experiences are important to the production of social capital. I conclude that this dynamic is important in building upon existing work which has observed the importance of shared history and personal narrative within creative enthusiast communities (Chappell, 2012; Fuller, 2007; Geoghegan, 2013; Yarwood & Shaw, 2010). By drawing on said resources together and in competent ways enthusiasts are utilising and adding to stocks of social capital and thus increasing the strengthening the community. These repeated interactions breed reciprocity relationships, trust and community strength (Holt, 2008; Mohan & Mohan, 2002; Urry, 2003: 164; Wittel, 2001: 678). This reciprocity suggested underlying community relations, again leading to a conclusion that social capital theory and emotional geographies can be productively utilised side by side to interpret the actions of

enthusiast community participants. Car shows can be seen as physical spaces in which these interactions are repeated, bolstering stocks of social capital regarding competent future interactions. This also further evidences the important sociability and social learning in the shared socio-technical labour of enthusiast labour as discussed in Chapter 6.

In Chapter 6 empirical evidence shows the practical ways in which this community level knowledge is drawn upon and used in the actual creative processes of modifying VW cars. There is also evidence of the socio-spatial importance of the sites at which these processes take place. This thesis has shown that the creative practices of modifying also afford important sociability, interactions and reciprocity relationships for the further transfer of social capital. In particular this thesis supports the understanding that the car is a socio-technical project (Fuller, 2007: 92). The car project is socio-technical and socio-spatial and as discussed in chapter 2, emotion itself can be understood as being socio-spatially experienced (Bondi et al., 2005: 3). The importance of sharing enthusiast labour and working together to achieve common goals, as found in this research, illustrated the importance of relationships of reciprocity. Such relationships ensure that enthusiasts input their knowledge and labour to help other members of the community knowing that they can withdraw in kind at a future point (Portes, 1998). As discussed in chapter 6, Dan states that he shares his skills and knowledge with other members of the community because, “you never when you’re gonna need it yourself” (Dan Interview). Thus reciprocity is related to a sense of community altruism. This is an important conclusion as it shows that the community is not just a collective group which produces and enforces behavioural norms, rather it is also a supportive network, as detailed in chapters 5 and 6. The altruism shown by participants in this study, in sharing knowledge and skills with other enthusiasts, is evidence of strong social capital stocks (Portes,

1998: 7; Holt, 2008). As Bourdieu (1986: 249) explains social capital is made up of, “the profits which accrue from membership to group”, and that these profits, “are the basis of the solidarity which makes them possible”. In the research I have shown that this understanding complements the notion of collective sociability and enthusiasm as the glue of community solidarity of Geoghegan’s (2013: 45). For example the empirical examples of shared labour and a combination of emotional affiliation for cars and bodies; which can be seen in chapters 6 and 8, where the car is presented as a socio-technical project. This builds on the work of Craggs and others (2013: 879, my emphasis) who argue that, “communication and circulation of *collective* passions” underlie communities such as the one in this study. This further illustrates the way in which emotional geography and understandings of social capital can be drawn upon together within the geographies of enthusiasm corpus. It shows that appreciation of community within geographies of enthusiasm research (Craggs et al., 2013) is similar to the community understanding which social capital offers; suggesting that the two can productively be used together to explain the modified VW community. This clearly reflects a key notion of social capital theory that the, “features of social life – networks, norms and trust- ...enable participants to act *together* more effectively to pursue shared objectives” Putnam (1995: 664-5, my emphasis).

This also highlights the importance of investigating the actual processes and context of enthusiast labour (Fuller, 2007) within communities where enthusiastic participation includes some kind of labour or creative aspect. This builds on the recent geographical work regarding creative processes and making to show that in research with enthusiast communities of this type it is important to investigate the role played by enthusiast and shared labour (Geoghegan, 2013; Delyser & Greenstein, 2017; Miller, 2017; Yarwood & Shaw, 2010). Such

sharing of passion and resources can be seen throughout the thesis, for example in the knowledge shared between enthusiast family members in chapter 4, community knowledge learning in chapter 5, shared enthusiast labour and reciprocity exchanges of skills in chapter 6 and the shared use of resources and collective sociability at car shows in chapter 7. Furthermore the sharing of exclusive knowledge through sociability as producing “closeness” (Geoghegan, 2013: 45) can be seen as having clear similarities to drawing on shared community knowledge resources through social interactions which produce social capital. Social capital use and exchange helps to strengthen the modified VW community through social interactions, such as those between friends when working on a car. Emotional geography, as utilised in enthusiasm research presents a further but similar understanding of “mutual ‘closeness’” of Geoghegan’s (2013) which like social capital is understood to be the shared beneficial outcome of participation in community social interactions (Bourdieu, 1986: 250). This shared enthusiastic labour can transform into shared passion and foster friendships (Craggs et al., 2013). Thus by working together to achieve a common goal, friendships are fostered and maintained. This also shows support of geographer Alex Miller’s (2017: 249) findings that creative processes conducted by those with shared interests foster connections in a number of ways.

Thus the exchange of knowledge, skills and trust as forms of social capital together with shared sociable labour strengthens community cohesiveness. Both social capital scholars (e.g. Holt, 2008) and enthusiasm geographers (Geoghegan, 2013: 42) observe this relationship, that sharing an enthusiasm acts as a social adhesive. Emotion as experienced within the modified VW culture should be approached as both important to the shared interest and sociability of the community but also as the actual glue which holds said community together

(Geoghegan, 2013: 42) fostering and supporting collective sociability. In this thesis I have argued that this glue requires additional explanation and that this can be taken from a social capital reading of the empirical evidence. This supports the conclusion made here that one of the strengths of utilising a social capital reading alongside an emotional geography one can be to explain community relations of the enthusiast culture in a more nuanced way. Thus I conclude that the geographies of enthusiasm (e.g. Geoghegan, 2013; Fuller, 2007) can build upon the notions of reciprocity relations and a social capital understanding of community cohesion in order to better understand social relations between enthusiasts, their practices, experiences and altruistic behaviours. This further supports the conclusion and contribution of this research, as illustrated by the empirical data, that emotional geography compliments social capital theory when the two are used simultaneously to explain enthusiast communities. This also contributes to the ways in which geographers can critically draw upon social capital research in order to learn about community dynamics (Mohan & Mohan, 2003; Holt, 2008).

Another strand of this conclusion in which emotional geography and social capital can be seen to complement each other comes with the empirical observation that with strong rules of coherence and norms about enthusiast behaviour comes opportunities both for community inclusion and exclusion. As Portes (1998: 15) notes with reference to social capital theory, these strong stocks of capital which include knowledge about how to behave, which make the community a stronger network, can actually act as barriers to access. This is again similar to Ahmed's (2008: 12) argument that happiness for enthusiasts comes from the knowledge that their values about modifying are shared by the wider modified VW community. Ahmed notes that if participants in the community have an interest in certain objects or practices not

defined as good by the community then this can conversely alienate them from the wider group. For example the negative reactions and hate received online, as described by participants in chapter 5. This can be seen as a different but complementary way of approaching the data using Portes' (1998) social capital approach but drawing on elements of emotional geography, as used in recent enthusiasm research (Geoghegan, 2013). As such these conclusions also build upon the criticism of Putnam's approach to social capital (e.g. Holt, 2008) that it sees social capital as only leading to positive outcomes for the community which possesses it. The more nuanced approach put forward here agrees with the geographical thought regarding social capital and its strength for community cohesion (e.g. Mohan & Mohan, 2002; Holt, 2008) but also adds an emotional geography (Ahmed, 2008) appreciation of the negative effects of said capital.

Similarly I conclude that there are also negative outcomes of enthusiasm, as experienced by participants, which like the negatives of social capital, may be overlooked in enthusiasm research. This thesis contributes to Geoghegan's (2013) argument that enthusiasm is not just about positive emotional experiences. In particular showing that the level of dedication and longevity of enthusiasm discussed in chapter 4 that some enthusiasts feel leads to stress and anger when projects go wrong or when barriers to their enthusiastic dedication arise. For example a combination of community norms regarding the desire to drive a lowered cars on a daily basis and the practical issues of doing so. Thus barriers are raised to enthusiasts' dedication resulting in stressful decisions and requiring a more involved embodied driving practice, as noted in chapter 8. Another example of these negative emotions were highlighted through the connections felt between driving a car and having worked on it and the consequent negative emotions when said car broke down; as noted by Steve and my own

field experiences in chapter 8. The resulting experience is stressful and not enjoyable for the driver but is still driven by a dedication to modified VW enthusiasm. Thus showing that enthusiasm can indeed conjure emotional experiences which extend beyond the positive notions of passion and joy which are more traditionally associated with it (ibid). These negative emotions such as stress, anger and shame have been noted elsewhere in research with enthusiasts (e.g. Fuller, 2007: 63; Yarwood & Shaw, 2010: 432).

## **9.2 Spaces of Enthusiasm**

Another key conclusion arising from the interpretation of empirics in the preceding chapters has shown the often explicit and sometimes implicit role of space in the experiences, practices and behaviours of modified VW enthusiasts. In particular this has highlighted the way in which enthusiasm either influences or is influenced by spaces and spatial factors of enthusiast spaces, motorscapes, eventscapes and beyond. By building on the notions of Chappell (2012) that modified cars carry with them a temporary spatial field which affects those which it passes, I conclude that due to their *automobility* modified cars present a uniquely mobile opportunity to temporarily influence the understanding of certain spaces. Whilst spatial evidence of this comes from chapters 7 and 8, factors which influence these behaviours are discussed in chapters 4, 5 and 6 as well. As noted earlier this connection between emotion and meanings of space was also noted by Hilary Geoghegan (2013: 41) drawing on Bondi and others (2005: 3) when she suggested that emotions and the experiential world are socio-spatially influenced. In this way modified VW enthusiasm can be seen as something which influences and is influenced by enthusiast relations with space and that these relations are often emotionally experienced, contributing to feelings of enthusiasm. With this in mind it is possible to state that emotions as experiences of enthusiasm are both influenced by and influencing of socio-spatial contexts.



This research has built on the understanding of emotion as the, “socio-linguistic fixing of intensity (Anderson, 2009b: 9) which understands emotional responses as socially constructed (Horton & Kraftl, 2014: 225). As such the “emotional subject[ can be understood] as co-produced in [the] cultural discourse of emotion” (Thien, 2005: 453). Furthermore as noted Geoghegan (2013), Sara Ahmed (2004) suggests that collective emotional experiences such as those shared by modified VW enthusiasts help to shape identities and foster belonging. As such this research concludes that an appreciation of space is very important to understand the context in which emotions are situated, experienced and interpreted. In this thesis the emotions of car enthusiasm can be understood as experienced in situ, as such interpretation of these experiences helped to unveil underlying motivations for certain behaviours. Consequently it became apparent from the empirical evidence that the community itself and its behaviours can be understood as spatially situated in ways which draw on community norms. As such the modified VW community can be understood to have important relationships with certain spaces and these spaces can be seen as uncovering socio-spatial relations.

Additionally as noted earlier in this conclusion, experiencing spaces can foster a recall of emotions which are related to past experiences or understandings of said space (Brown & Pickerill, 2009: 28). This both engenders a familiarity with a certain space and behaviours therein. As discussed, emotion, in the context of this research was understood to be socially constructed and socio-spatially situated (Bondi et al., 2005; Horton & Kraftl, 2014) and therefore to be context-specific to the experiences of the modified VW enthusiasts studied. Thus I conclude that with enthusiasm research in general and in particular where this includes a mobile culture, attention should be paid to the roles of space. This conclusion builds on the

argument of Merriman (2004: 157-8) that meanings attached to automobile spaces come from the spatiality and historicity of relational assemblages such as the cars which pass through them. This also suggests the importance of viewing enthusiast space with an appreciation for automobility and the ways in which cars move through spaces in a culture built around a mobile object. For example in Chapter 4 I discuss the motorscapes recalled by enthusiasts that they had travelled through with their parents during childhood, this also links the earlier conclusions regarding personal narrative and shared history, showing that the spatial context of these shared experiences can also be important.

Chappell (2012: 23) draws on geographer Stewart (2005: 1015) to suggest that as cars move through spaces carrying said spatial field they cause motorscapes to temporarily “snap into place” as condensed structures of feeling. This thesis shows that this is especially true for modified cars which already embody meaning and personal narratives of enthusiast labour (Chappell, 2012: 29). As the car passes through such spaces it projects elements of this meaning onto them (Waitt et al., 2005). These motorscapes can become redolent with meaning which can be temporarily read by enthusiasts at certain times. As such it is also key to understandings of enthusiast spatiality and the socio-spatial nature of enthusiastic emotions to appreciate the role played by audiences within said spaces. I conclude that an investigation of enthusiast spaces should focus on practices performed in those spaces, in particular with appreciation for the relationships between the roles of audience, purpose and context of such performances. In this way meanings attached to both the mobile temporary spatial fields of the car and the motoring spaces they interact with can be interpreted.

Additionally I build on this conclusion by arguing that collective events such as festivals foster feelings of liberation and also that such spaces can be read through the geographies of

tourism as exceptional from life at home (Edensor, 2007; Jackson, 2014). This explains why certain behaviours, such as burnouts can be viewed as appropriate in certain spaces because the cars carry meaning (Chappell, 2012: 24) which becomes attributed to certain motorscapes (Merriman, 2004), as at the petrol station in Figure 10. As mentioned above this is due to the ways in which enthusiasts view the car show as a space of liberation from everyday stresses, similar to that of a music festival (Jackson, 2014). This empirically supported notion explains how the positive emotions associated with attending a car show are tied to certain qualities, such as the separation from normal responsibilities, which the space possesses. These qualities are not random, the way that the collective group of enthusiastic individuals utilises show space, discusses it in social interactions and car talk and presents it to others online inscribes that space with certain meanings. In particular it was found that enacted performance and display of the modified car plays a role of spatial inscription of events and to a transmission of behavioural etiquette within certain spaces. This has shown that the meanings which certain cars project when moving through space are tied to the people who are viewing them, furthermore the obvious presence of an appreciative audience may lead to performed driving behaviours deemed antisocial in motorscapes without said audience. In this way assemblages of spatial context, driver performance and audience experience inscribe certain spaces as being appropriate for certain driving behaviours as illustrated by the burnout performed outside a petrol station seen in Figure 10. The influence of community norms understood by driver and audience and the socio-spatial context of these behaviours has shown that this socio-spatial experience of enthusiasm is crucial to this research and to future research within human geography on communities united by a shared enthusiasm. This research has also shown that enthusiasm is emotionally experienced, spatial in nature and that both of these are influenced by the scale of the community network and its shared

knowledge and norms. This also highlights the contribution which this research makes to understandings of automobility and driving as related to enthusiasm and the ways in which meaning can be ascribed to certain motorscapes (e.g. Merriman, 2004; Terry et al., 2015).

Additionally I build on this conclusion by drawing on the empirics discussed in chapters 7 and 8 and the presented understandings of the eventscape (Brown et al., 2008) contextualised within empirical evidence and wider literature on enthusiast conventions, festivals and spaces of tourism (Edensor, 2001, 2007; Jackson, 2014; Lamerichs, 2007; Yarwood & Shaw, 2010). The interpretation of enthusiast show spaces as being linked within an eventscape (Brown et al., 2008) reinforce the importance of a spatial reading of enthusiasm. The eventscape approach affords a way of reading geographically distributed sites, usually within a locale, which are connected by an event and its attendees. For example GTi Treffen within the Wörthersee locality is made up of multiple sites around Lake Wörthersee, united by the event itself and by the interests and socio-spatial performances of those enthusiasts attending it. I conclude that spaces of enthusiast events or car shows can be seen as spatio-temporally specific; as such they carry with them the community norms attached to certain behaviours and spaces which are articulated and negotiated by the enthusiasts therein. As such one of the important factors of these spaces within the research was to unveil the community knowledges, often invisible, within the performance of highly visible practices. For example through the lens of the eventscape the burnout behaviours at Wörthersee can be understood as a combination of a stage set by organisers and of the “(re)producing performances” enacted by enthusiasts (Edensor, 2001: 72). The collective nature of these event experiences further adds to feelings of community cohesion and camaraderie; providing spaces in which passions and knowledge can be shared and in which everyday responsibilities can be

forgotten (Belk, 2004; Jackson, 2014; Lamerichs, 2014). Burnouts for example illustrated that context specific understandings of performance, audience and the eventscape which included understandings about how to perform the car to an appreciative audience outside the bounds of everyday responsibility.

This leads on to another key conclusion based on an empirical pattern which runs throughout this thesis, this can be described as an enthusiast desire to display their modified VW car to an appreciative audience of fellow enthusiasts. This observation stems from the identification of the spatiality of the car as both the embodied experience of driving in a private metal cocoon (Lupton, 1999) and also the driven car which is projected into the public arena which it moves through (Chappell, 2012: 23, Merriman, 2009: 157-8, Waitt et al., 2015: 2). This pattern of the desire to display the car was observed as extending beyond physical motorscapes and into online community spaces as well (Questionnaire, Q6, Q7). I make the conclusion here that enthusiasts share this desire to display their cars, this builds on O'Dell (2001) and Collin-Lange's (2012) observation that drivers within certain car cultures have a desire to be seen by other participants in their communities. Beyond the owners and drivers of such cars the importance of display and feedback can be seen in the audiences of these displays and performances who provide the feedback, be they enthusiasts at the roadside cheering on a wheel spinning car (see Figures 9 and 10) or enthusiasts' online giving praise or critique of chosen modifications. In this way there is a community affirmation of displayed modified cars, either through the "imagined subjectivity" of show and shine competitions (Hills, 2002: 3) or by cheering on burnouts in eventscape spaces. The former is also evident in the way cars are spatially arranged at car shows and meets as shown in figures 2, 3 and 7. This

conclusion builds on similar studies regarding enthusiast events where display is important, for example at cars shows (Fuller, 2007; Kwon, 2004; Tam-Scott, 2009).

Similarly this finding that a desire to perform to an audience supports Lumsden's (2013: 144) conclusions that part of the motivation to be seen driving in certain spaces was to become famous within the community. Furthermore this case study supports other similar studies of events of display, for example car shows (Fuller, 2007; Kwon, 2004; Tam-Scott, 2009) or model railway conventions (Yarwood and Shaw, 2010) by showing the importance of display and appreciation within these spaces. This importance has been shown to be both for community affirmation of creative vision and enthusiast labour but also as a way of achieving the pride and attention which drives enthusiasts to modify their VW cars, as observed in Chapter 7. This also shows a community influence on the creative vision noted in Chapter 6 and suggests a policing of the agency of enthusiast craft consumption suggested by Yarwood and Shaw (2010). Additionally the empirical evidence given by Steve and Luke in chapter 8 regarding driving a modified car past an appreciative audience highlights an important link between the desire to be seen and the enthusiast labour process. In that the car is displayed in order to gain community attention, respect and the sense of achievement for participation in enthusiast labour. This further reinforces the pattern throughout the thesis that a driving force of modifying as a process is to reach an end point of showing off the constituent enthusiast labour to other appreciative enthusiasts. For example Luke stated that observers, "...take another glance and are like... that looks good...I wonder what they've done to that" (Luke Interview). Whilst Dan noted that, "you always look. I mean you can't help it, you've gotta appreciate what somebody else has done" (Dan Interview). This curiosity in the process of enthusiast labour, brought on by seeing the car move through the motorscape, implies one

motivation to be seen by other enthusiasts. Consequently the interest and attention which the car gains leads to a positive emotional experience for the enthusiast who is driving past, which shows that their car has been accepted by members of the community. Steve explains that when he is told that his car looks good whilst driving it, "...it's a really nice feeling...this massive grin appeared on my face like uncontrollable grin like thanks" (Steve Interview). Relatedly in chapter 8 it was clear from the empirical evidence that enthusiasts placed importance not just on the visual impact of modified cars but also the audible impact. This was clearly of importance both within the car but also as projecting out into the public arena, as Dan explains in chapter 8. This builds on other car culture research regarding the desire to be heard, by way of a loud stereo (Gilroy, 2001) and suggests that the impacts which the modified VW car has as it moves through the streetscape or motorscape (Chappell, 2012; Merriman, 2004) extend beyond the visual. I conclude that there are multi-sensory experiences of space associated with modified VW enthusiasm and that a sensitivity to these can create a more nuanced picture of enthusiast experience.

This also shows a further link between emotional experience of enthusiasm, automobility in space and the desire to display or perform the modified car in said spaces which supports the observation of Chappell (2012: 13) that modified cars carry perceptions of their culture into the everyday streetscapes which they move through. Yarwood and Shaw (2010: 432) note that by displaying creations to an audience which understand the context of their creation; other enthusiasts, then appreciation for the effort and creative vision involved is garnered. As can be seen in the interview data reviewed above from interviews with Steve and Luke. This particularly explains the importance of display across the car culture in spaces with enthusiastic audiences; such as car shows, their eventscapes and online. An additional

example of this display can be seen in the example of the automobile club convoy. Described in the thesis as a feeling of *carmaraderie* this automobile assemblage of community cohesion shows that the projection of identity into public spaces by the car (Terry et al., 2015: 628; Waitt et al., 2015: 2) gain impact at the collective scale. I therefore conclude that the embodied driving experience includes emotions related to the attention gained by performing the car in certain spaces. This shows a further important pattern between enthusiast labour as building the car and automobility, space and audience, in showing it off. Display of the modified car is clearly an important element of modified VW enthusiasm as evidenced by the behaviours, experiences and practices discussed throughout the preceding chapters.

In Chapter 6 references were made to the relationships between spaces of enthusiast labour and the motorscapes where this labour is potentially displayed. The collective sociability and the importance of working together on the socio-technical project, as detailed above, is situated socio-spatially within certain spaces and thus those spaces takes on related meanings. For example garages or enthusiast-run businesses are mentioned in various contexts throughout this thesis, these are sites which are spatially situated and which make up a network of spaces across the community. I conclude that it is important to understand the role of these geographically disparate but relationally similar spaces by thinking of them as parts of a community network (Murphy, 2006). The empirical examples show the ways in which digital mediation of existing community social networks (Murphy, 2006: 434) can act as conduits to transfer information about experiences, norms and knowledges over wide geographical areas between spaces such as garages. The garages of enthusiast businesses and driveways of friends working on each other's cars are spaces of enthusiast labour, connected



by a network of community and of shared enthusiasm. As such the social learning discussed earlier in this conclusion can be understood as being spatially located. For example, as discussed in chapter 6 one participant talks about the this specific space as one in which knowledge transfer and sociable learning can occur, stating that, “...*I want to learn* and also its way more fun...chilling on the driveway with close friends, working on cars” (Questionnaire, Q11, my emphasis). In this way the knowledge transfer and learning by way of co-present social interactions as discussed above, is clearly tied to certain spaces in which that knowledge can be shared and utilised. As such driveways, garage businesses and other sites of enthusiast labour can be understood as socio-spatially situated, emotionally experiences and community-defined spaces of the modified VW enthusiast network.

In chapter 4 John identified himself as a car enthusiast because of this sociability and labour shared with friends afforded in particular enthusiast spaces such as the driveway or garage. This is important because it suggests patterns regarding the spatial nature of enthusiasm, as posed in the research questions at the outset of this research. This also shows that car show spaces are key to knowledge exchange because they foster the display of modified cars and the fruits of enthusiast labour and because they afford a space in which to interact with other participants and thus show your ability to draw on community resources in a competent way; they are the spaces of social learning (Wenger, 2011). The spaces of interaction and sharing of esoteric knowledges which Dan noted in Chapter 7 support the findings of Arcodia and Whitford (2006) that sociable events are particularly important sites of social capital production and transfer. In support of this, a similar dynamic, although not referred to in terms of social capital has been noted by other scholars observing knowledge transfer in sociable spaces of the car show (Belk, 2005; Tam-Scott, 2009).

The importance of certain spaces highlighted by this research can also be used to further interpret the role of scale and understand said spaces as networked spaces across the modified VW community. In particular I conclude that a networked understanding of spaces can be mobilised to explain the relationships between certain spaces at the larger community scale. The garage or driveway for example can be understood as a micro-scale space which has links to the larger scale spaces of car show events, with cars being built at enthusiast garages and in home spaces in order to be displayed at shows and in related eventscape spaces. The car show event then can be understood as being spatio-temporally stretched across a network of garages, workspaces and driveways of enthusiasts across the country and via the internet, across the globe. This also adds another layer to the understanding of the spaces of the car show as discussed in chapter 7, the car show is not only spatially arranged but it is also connected to a range of other spaces which are temporally and geographically remote from its location. In this way the car show event is also a collection of spaces of enthusiasm, some brought together in immediate locales within the car show event and some held together by networks across the enthusiast community. This can be seen as a further example of enthusiasm as social adhesive (Geoghegan, 2013) which helps bind the community of individual enthusiasts together, even when they are separated by geographical distance. The identification of an enthusiast network also builds on recent work in human geography regarding the potential of enthusiasts to tap into community networks of knowledge and parts when working on their project cars (Delyser & Greenstein, 2015, 2017).

Another key pattern supporting the conclusion that automobility, space and enthusiast experiences are connected was that of show traffic, as discussed in chapter 7. Show traffic is one key connection between spatial and mobile understandings of modified car enthusiasm.

Furthermore it was also presented as something can be emotionally experienced, as a building of excitement as ordinary motorscapes become increasingly full of modified cars, the nearer you get to an event (Field Diary, 9/3/14). This socio-spatial enactment of car enthusiasm creates an emotional response which Steve referred to as, “a buzz” (Steve Interview), as the surrounding towns are turned into spaces of the car show. In this way it can be seen as a spatial stretching and spreading of the socio-spatial experience of the car show and the recall of related emotions (Brown & Pickerill, 2009: 28) into the immediate wider landscape.

The importance of certain spaces and shared understandings of those spaces also clearly fits with an understanding of social capital production and with Urry’s notion of physical co-presence as necessary for mutual attentiveness and to strengthen the community. In chapter 5, I show that one enthusiast is able to quickly learn about styles and other community specialist knowledge because he is at a car show, which can be understood as “the primary conduit of institutional valorisation in the [modified car] scene” (Fuller, 2007: 370). In this case the knowledges which are presented through displayed cars at the car show act as an invaluable resource of contextual learning for Dan, which enables him to quickly become a competent community participant. This shows that the social interactions which afford such learning require a sensitivity to their situated context, as is detailed below.

Relatedly in Chapter 5 I showed that John Urry (2003), drawing upon the work of Goffman (1963: 84-5), explains that when two people interact in a space which is known to them, an expectation of mutual attentiveness arises because of their shared prior knowledge. Such prior knowledge is spatially situated and thus the future use of that knowledge is particularly cogent if utilised within a related space. For example discussion of prior experiences of car

shows were often discussed and drawn upon in car show spaces, as illustrated in chapter 5.2. Here the expectations for interaction, or mutual attentiveness, were known by the participants and was inscribed into the space in which they were interacting. Besides the car show spaces discussed in chapter 7 this research also shows the importance of car meet spaces as spatial representations of car clubs; themselves micro-scale enthusiast communities. Car meets afford space for car club members to interact with one another and to exchange knowledge. This fits with the findings of Chappell (2012: 32) that spaces of car meets and shows afford, socialising, sharing technical advice and planning for the group attendance of upcoming shows and events. Whilst these interactions can occur anywhere and are inherently spatially situated, they take on more importance when they are situated within spaces related to the topic of the interaction. For example it is easier to discuss work on modified cars in a garage where such cars, tools and knowledgeable people are present, just as it is easier to compare car show practices to other car show experiences if you are situated in the space being discussed. In terms of social capital Falk and Kilpatrick (2000: 108) argue that mobilised capital, such as trust, can only be read in the socio-cultural context of its production, this research makes the same conclusion however that context is also shown to be socio-spatial in nature.

In chapter 5 the community's use of the internet is discussed, showing that these virtual sites can be understood in relation to their offline spatial counterparts. Forums and other enthusiast websites can be understood as online spaces but these are not defined in counter to those in the real world. Additionally this research echoes Fuller's (2007: 369) findings that online forum spaces should be read as an extension of an enthusiast culture; these are further spaces of enthusiasm rather than a separate cultural entity. However the two types of site;

virtual and spatial, do exist relationally to one another and in particular knowledge exchanged online can affect the experience of space offline. This research concludes that online spaces are key sites and networks for the exchange and transfer of knowledge from the collective scale community to the individual behaviour. Online spaces are clearly important to the negotiation and articulation of community by participating enthusiasts. In particular I conclude that social interaction and physically co-present encounters are necessary for community strength and growth. However sites of encounter which do not have the same checks as face-to-face interaction, such as online may lead to a breakdown in social relations and weaken the community and its stocks of social capital as a result. This supports Urry's (2003: 156) observation that social relations which occur at-a-distance must be sustained by intermittent but physically co-present encounters with others. Without these encounters trust is not engendered and community relations break down.

However I also conclude that these online spaces have important influences on their physical counterparts. These digital mediations affect spaces which are important to enthusiasts, as shown in Chapter 7. This builds on the work of Maddrell and others (2015: 71) who noted that within the mobilities of secular pilgrimage and enshrining cultural mecca, "practice serves to sacralise space". I argue that this can also be extended to include the recording and transmission of this practice, which affords it such sacralising power at a community scale. Repeated practices such as the performed burnouts at the Tankstelle in Wörthersee (Figure 10) are recorded on video by enthusiasts and then disseminated across the internet through online enthusiast networks. This supports the conclusions of Tussyadiah and Fesenmaier (2009) that online videos of tourist experiences inspire the audience by stimulating daydreams and conjuring past travel memories. Similarly as noted in chapter7, this work

contributes to literatures which explain the ways in which spaces become inscribed both with real and imagined experiences through mediatised content (Kruse, 2003: 158; Edensor, 2001: 68). This shows that understandings of enthusiast space are often drawn from real and imagined or anticipated experiences of space, as afforded by online digital content. In conclusion virtual sites can inscribe physical spaces with meanings which affect the ways in which enthusiasts behave in real life.

### **9.3 Driving Enthusiasm**

A final set of conclusions drawn from this thesis can be positioned within an investigation of the role played by driving. Whilst earlier sections of this concluding chapter have dealt with driving as a performance or display, I now turn to driving as experienced by the driver.

Throughout the research it became evident that the modified VW car took the dual position of being a mobile object which could be driven through a space and project certain meanings out into it however it could also be experienced as a private cocoon of embodied driving practice and part of the embodied driver-car (Dant, 2004: 62). These two patterns build upon existing area of work in mobilities studies and the geographies of the car and driving (Merriman, 2004, 2009; Pearce, 2016; Waitt et al., 2015). This thesis provides further evidence of the work in mobilities research which shows that cars are both spaces of embodied experience (Dant, 2004) and of performed identity projected into public motorscapes (Waitt et al., 2015: 2). Modified VW cars and their enthusiast drivers provide an interesting case study within this mobilities research area as they show that the embodied experience of driving and of feeling the road and car in various ways is key to an understanding of enthusiasm.

Another contribution which this research makes to the work on automobility is that it suggests a connection between the emotional attachment of enthusiast labour and the importance, as defined by the community of driving a car you have worked on yourself. For example the empirics showed that enthusiasts who had worked on their own cars felt more of a connection as part of the driver-car assemblage when driving their car. This supports observations made in the literature that argue that gaining specialist knowledge about or being involved in the build of a project car improves the embodied connection when driving it (Ilmonem, 2004; Tam-Scott, 2009). Evidence presented in the thesis also showed the role which community norms could have on the relationship between the driver and the car, for example the built not bought debate which suggested that a lack of involvement in the project meant that the participant was less involved as an enthusiast. This also builds on the work of Yarwood and Shaw (2010: 426) and Geoghegan (2013: 43) who noted that a sense of personal achievement and fulfilling personal dreams drove people to participate in the creative processes of their enthusiasm. With automobility and car enthusiasts there is an added layer which comes from using the object which results from this creative process; this use consists of embodied driving experiences.

This contribution also builds particularly on Tam-Scott's (2009) work with enthusiasts of classic cars and contributes to recent work regarding the inputs of the driver within the driver-car assemblage (Merriman, 2012; Pearce, 2016; Waitt et al., 2015). Due to their involvement with the modifying process I conclude that enthusiast drivers have higher levels of what Hannam and others (2006: 15) refer to as the "complex sensuous relationality between the means of travel [the car] and the traveller [driver]". Furthermore this research shows that for modified VW enthusiasts this sensuous relationality can be seen in the

understanding of the car as something which is emotio-material (Balkmar & Joelsson, 2010) and which results from a socio-technical project (Fuller, 2007). This case study then contributes to mobilities research and geographies of the car by illustrating that, for modified VW enthusiasts, the car itself is both a means of travel but more importantly also their object of enthusiasm.

### **9.5 Concluding Remarks**

This thesis makes a number of key conclusions and contributions in line with the research questions regarding community scale, emotional experience of enthusiasm and the roles of space, outlined in chapter 1. Furthermore it presents a concluding argument to answer the overarching research question to detail the ways in which participation in the modified VW community can be understood in terms of enthusiasm as defined in recent human geography research. One of the key aims of this research was to contribute to the existing geographies of enthusiasm corpus, which has its conceptual basis in emotional geography. This was achieved by an appreciation of the scale of the enthusiast community. This collective scale has been presented as an important lens when investigating community dynamics, in particular it helps to show a network of individual enthusiasts across which ideas, norms and knowledges can be transferred. The norms and knowledge propagated at the community scale, such as about the importance of built not bought or driving a low car, thus influence the behaviours of the individuals. Showing the importance of a sensitivity to dynamics which exist beyond the individual when researching enthusiast communities.

A combination of the importance of spaces within the enthusiast culture and this community scale led to an understanding of the former as being linked by a network outlined by the latter. This meant that all the spaces of modified VW enthusiasm discussed throughout the



thesis can be understood as connected across an enthusiast network and this network further evidences the structure of community. As such this research makes an important contribution to the continuing research with enthusiast groups in human geography. By showing the importance of analysing individual behaviours and practices in light of the potential influences upon these by wider community norms, as transferred across networks and through social interactions. This research has also built on the notion which Geoghegan (2013) discusses that enthusiast experiences are socio-culturally defined, furthermore I suggest that a spatial dimension to this definition should also be investigated. The empirics and discussion presented throughout this thesis have shown that enthusiasm is experienced both emotionally and spatially and that these are influenced by the scale of the community network and its shared norms and special knowledges.

With the clear importance of community and social interactions therein evident in the empirical evidence it was important to introduce another theoretical approach used by geographers and normally used to explore community dynamics (e.g. Mohan & Mohan, 2002; Heley & Jones, 2013). By introducing social capital theory it was possible to illustrate community dynamics and the importance of social interactions, furthermore it was possible to show similarities between this approach and emotional geography. However throughout the thesis I have been cautious of any potential coupling of the distinct epistemologies of emotional geography with social capital theory in human geography. As such I conclude here that both theories should be utilised for their own merits when exploring enthusiast communities and the dynamics such as knowledge exchange and social cohesion. The contribution made here shows that the geographies of enthusiasm can be extended in ways which facilitate nuanced understandings of community learning, social cohesion and

collective sociability. It also shows that enthusiasm research should remain aware of a scale beyond the individual and that this collective or community scale can unveil influences on said individuals' behaviours and experiences. This contribution also supports and builds upon the drive to mobilise social capital theory in new but critical ways in human geography research (e.g. Holt, 2008).

This research has also illustrated that the exchange of social capital can be seen to include both the transfer of said knowledges but also the context-specific norms and etiquettes expected by other community participants. In this way the social interactions described throughout the thesis are as much about learning actual knowledge as they are about learning how to use said knowledge competently (Wenger, 2011). This also supports the findings of Urry (2003) that repeated social interactions between members of a community leads the participants to learn how to interact better with one another, because it provides them with a mutual attentiveness towards one another. A key contribution of this research is the suggestion that an approach which utilises Urry's (2003) mutual attentiveness notion and understandings of social capital exchange can be used to further explain how enthusiasts learn from one another in sociable ways. This builds on the study of enthusiast communities in the geographies of enthusiasm literature and suggests the importance of a focus on social interactions.

In terms of spatiality and display this research concludes that enthusiasts illustrate a desire to display their cars, as both a way to become famous within the community and as a way to gain respect for their enthusiast labour. This has been evident at car shows, in motorscapes and on online forums and shows that a large part of the experience of enthusiasm for modified VW enthusiasts is tied up with performance and display of the car. These

performances are both socio-spatially and socio-culturally situated and they further contribute to the meanings which certain spaces hold for enthusiasts. Empirical examples in chapters 7 and 8 in particular showed the way in which meanings and norms attached to certain spaces included understandings about how to perform the car to an appreciative audience. This study builds upon the notion of Chappell (2012) that the modified car carries its own mobile temporary spatial field with it as it moves through space and that this inscribes said space as it goes. In this way the automobile nature of the car means that it carries meanings with it as it is driven. As I have discussed throughout the above conclusions it is clear that spaces of enthusiasm bring a convergence of this automobility, the space itself and an audience of enthusiasts. This trifecta ensures that spaces take on certain meanings at certain times, this also supports the understanding of Lumsden (2013) that antisocial driving behaviours are often the result of different audiences in unintended spaces.

Thus this research contributes both to existing research on the automobility of modified car culture such as conducted by Lumsden (2013) and Chappell (2013) but also to enthusiasm research (Geoghegan, 2013; Yarwood & Shaw, 2010) by showing the importance of an appreciation of space. This research shows that enthusiasm and experiences of the enthusiast community are almost all situated in space. This means that investigation of a particular space and enthusiast behaviours, practices and experiences in that space has shown the underlying meanings and understandings which the community has. This study's appreciation of enthusiast space also makes a contribution to the study of events and tourism in geography and in particular the notions of mecca, pilgrimage and the eventscape (Brown et al., 2008; Maddrell et al., 2015).

Relatedly some sites of enthusiasm are not spatial but rather virtual, these digitally mediated sites which exist online share a similar community network for dissemination and still influence spatial sites. This thesis has shown that any study of a contemporary enthusiast or hobby group, within geography or beyond, should retain a sensitivity to the role of digital media and the internet. The online experiences and interactions of enthusiasts have been shown to have important impacts on offline sites, such as by inscribing them with certain meanings or by promoting certain behaviours such as burnouts. Furthermore there are links made between the spatial sites in which cars are built and performed and the virtual sites where they are displayed, in this way the virtual and spatial sites of enthusiasm can be seen as linked by the enthusiast community network, across which norms, knowledges and etiquettes are transferred. Whilst I conclude, like Fuller (2007), that the online community in this study is not separate to its offline counterpart, it is worthy of investigation and it impacts enthusiast experience in interesting ways as has been shown. In particular this study shows that careful consideration of online behaviours are needed because some of the characteristics of social interactions needed for community strength and to foster mutual attentiveness, such as being physically co-present (Urry, 2003) are not possible online, to the detriment of the community.

This thesis also makes a number of key conclusions about the embodied experiences of driving the modified VW car. In particular it presents a dualism which contributes to understandings of enthusiast communities within studies of automobility and the geographies of the car and driving. This thesis has shown that enthusiast experience consists of two understandings of the car and driving; firstly that the car is a private space of personal embodied practice and emotio-material involvement (Balkmar & Joelsson, 2010; Dant, 2004;

Katz, 1999) and secondly that the driven car is an enacted performance which projects certain meanings onto the spaces it passes through (Chappell, 2012; Merriman, 2004; Waitt et al., 2015). The former contributes to geographical and mobilities research regarding driving and the personal experiences of particular automobile experiences (e.g. Merriman, 2009; Pearce, 2016). Whilst the latter suggests an interesting way of understanding mobile enthusiast communities by seeing the car as more than just the means of travel; but also as the totemic material object of their enthusiasm (Lumsden, 2015: 38). The discussions of driving, particularly in chapter 8, also support the need to approach enthusiast experiences as multi-sensory due to the importance in the empirics of sounds as well as sights of the modified car culture. These sounds were found to be important both for the embodied practice of driving and as part of the displayed performances in certain spaces. This builds on the work of Tam-Scott (2009) and Fuller (2007) respectively to show that car enthusiast cultures are experienced in multi-sensory ways.

In this thesis the car itself is presented as something which, to modified VW enthusiasts, takes on an emotio-material form; as something which is both material and emotionally invested within. This is particularly evident with reference to the socio-technical project and in the examples later from chapter 8 where the driven car is presented as something which is understood as emotio-material (Balkmar & Joelsson, 2010: 41) and which is emotionally invested in by its enthusiast owner. Furthermore the driven car, understood as the site of embodied practice, enables a more detailed understanding of these personal investments of enthusiast labour. The empirical evidence has shown that working on the modified car is an important factor in the relationship between driver and the humanised car (Katz, 1999). Furthermore this dynamic has shown that enthusiast drivers feel more involved when driving

cars they have actually worked on themselves. This builds on the existing research of Derek Tam-Scott (2009) with classic car enthusiasts which states that a driver feels more of a connection when driving a project car they have been involved with. Additionally this shows further evidence of the relation between enthusiast labour, driving the car and being seen by an appreciative audience, as discussed empirically above.

Throughout this thesis the empirics and conceptual arguments have illustrated the ways in which participation in the modified VW community can be understood as enthusiasm. Following the three research questions outlined in chapter 1 I have shown throughout this thesis that the culture can be understood as a community and that the approach to enthusiasm therein draws upon emotional and spatial factors and that these are influenced by the scale of the community network and its shared norms. As such it can be stated that participation in the modified VW community can be understood as an enthusiasm and that the enthusiast experiences, practices and behaviours can be understood as socio-spatially situated, emotionally experienced and due to the community scale, socio-culturally influenced and defined.

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# 11 Appendices

## Appendix I Field Diary 2014

### Thursday 6<sup>th</sup> March 2014

This field diary aims to be a journal of sorts to record my decisions, feelings and emotions planning, reading for and doing research within a culture I am already a part of to some extent. I am particularly keen to think reflexively about the way my position as 'researcher' affects my understanding of myself and the decisions I make as 'enthusiast' or 'research subject'. This has become both an autoethnographic diary of my thoughts and feelings with regards to cars, but also to my friends, clubs and to my PhD thesis and the intertwining of all of these things. As such certain sections are a bit rambling as they are presented as a constant stream of consciousness, rather than being (re)presented as polished academic writing. People named throughout are given pseudonyms; if any passages which contain these are to be utilised in the thesis or research process informed consent will be sought as well as the opportunity to change the pseudonym should they wish.

### Saturday 8<sup>th</sup> March 2014

Today I was preparing the car for Ultimate Dubs 2014 which will take place tomorrow. I have also been organising a clubstand for this event for the club which I co-run; Club 9n/3. This organising process has been quite stressful as it requires the admin team of the club's facebook page to select just 6 cars out of over 2000 members to represent the club at the show. We used a voting system, however some people then pulled out and the place went to the next highest however this led to a lot of internal politics about which cars were 'chosen' for the day. This was interesting as we discussed the pros and cons of both a democratic system and needing to select cars which we felt best advertised/demonstrated what the club has to offer. In this way a clubstand has a dual purpose, both to offer somewhere for a club to meet and show its cars together as a collective unit but also to advertise the club to would-be future members. We have a club banner which will be laid out in front of the cars for this purpose.

I spent Saturday cleaning the inside of the car and polishing the body with wax as well as using wheel sealant on the wheels and tyre shine on the tyres, this was particularly important following a show I attended in February this year; Dubfreeze I was told that the dirty tyres let down the car's appearance in the show. I think this is even the more the case as I have black wheels so tyres that are any other colour that black contrast quite obviously.

### Sunday 9<sup>th</sup> March 2014

As is usual on a show day I was up at 6am in order to get ready and drive up to Telford for 7am to meet the rest of the Club9n/3 convoy. There is a humorous quote/meme that has appeared on car forums over the last few years stating that 5am on a work day is bad but 5am on a show day is the opposite, this illustrates how much people invest in the experience and enjoyment of car shows.

I then drove to Telford, I always like the drive to a show even when, as in this case, it's only around half an hour. It's a real buzz feeling, I think because of the culmination of things that you are just on the cusp of, showing off a car you have worked hard at/ are proud of/ have cleaned, meeting with

friends you haven't seen for a while or whom you only see at shows, the experience of the car show-going round seeing all the cars- who has done what to their car over the winter. This final point is even more the case with Ultimate Dubs as it's often the first major show a car appears at after its winter transformations [see Dan Interview 3/315]. Also the drive to Ultimate Dubs in particular as its all on sections of the motorway that most cars going to the show have to travel down it increases the chances of seeing 'show traffic'. I always find this quite exciting, like a rolling preview of what the show will bring, it is also nice, as odd as it sounds to see show cars being driven on the road. The closer I get to the show the more modified VW's I see, and this helps the excitement to build. I am quite worried about whether the Club9n/3 people will find the meeting point and I also feel responsible for the 6 cars on the clubstand as I have their show passes. However this growing excitement on the drive to the show helps to dull this stress and when I roll into the meeting point carpark I am grinning and thinking more about the show than the organising side of things. Slowly everyone turns up except for the other person helping me organise the stand; LPC. I phone LPC and he tells me he is about 20 minutes away, this angers me as we need to be on site by 7.30am, however he knows where to go to find us so we agree to meet him there.

We drive through the town centre and now the feeling of driving in on the motorway has changed, partly because I am leading a convoy and partly because we are surrounded by modified VW's. Every pull-in and carpark we pass, of which Telford town centre has many, has modified VW's and Audi's parked up or being cleaned at the last minute. As I pull off a roundabout I glance in my rear view mirror, half to check all the cars took the right exit and half to admire the collective presence and spectacle of a line of cars of the same model rolling towards a car show. As we snake our way through the town centres roundabout system we spy one latecomer to the Club9n/3 group driving towards us, a flash of the headlights from me and one in return from us and I slow right to a crawl so that the whole convoy can wait whilst he uses the last roundabout to get behind us. Normally slowing the traffic like this might seem antisocial however at this time there is no traffic on the road that is not obviously going to the show. The downside of this is that some people are driving very fast and the air is thick with the sounds of performance tuned Golf's, with the Police HQ being opposite our meeting point the town centre has a noticeable police presence. Although it is important to note they are on the whole observing, we only see one car pulled over despite the majority of cars we pass and in our own convoy not having front numberplates displayed correctly. This is an interesting style choice, it is generally regarded as providing a cleaner or meaner look to the car's front end, furthermore those people who are running bumpers imported from the USA do not have the space for a numberplate. However this is clearly illegal in the UK and even displaying it on the dashboard, through the windscreen is against the law but a large group of enthusiasts take this risk and it is generally considered as not being a serious thing to do. For example in comparison to speeding or having poor quality/faulty modifications which is frowned upon, not running a front plate is actively encouraged. Below are some images from this year's Ultimate Dubs and from the last two year's prior to my fieldwork.

#### **Friday 16<sup>th</sup> May 2014**

I'm writing this in the evening, tomorrow I will be attending All Types VW show at Bodelyyddan Castle in North Wales. This was a show I was unsure if I was going to attend, however during text correspondence with a good friend and VW specialist garage owner I was persuaded that this would be too nice of a weekend to miss. The weather is forecast to very hot and sunny and as this is the first camping show of the year that the club (Dubshire) will attend it will be a good chance to meet

up with friends I haven't really seen since the end of the last show season. Thinking reflexively part of the reason I changed my mind and decided to attend was for my research; I have attended many shows over the last 3 years but I now know clearly how I want to explore the field and this show will provide a great chance to pilot this autoethnography approach.

In terms of my positionality; shows are to some extent mini-reunions in this respect as all the members originally lived in Shropshire, hence the name, although now we live all over the country and shows act as a chance both to display and show the club but also their social gathering aspects are enhanced. In terms of feelings I am excited, more to have a weekend in the sun with a group of good friends than to see modified VW's on show, this is something which at many shows is regarded as something of a bonus to the festival like club camping areas. However it is important to note that excitement is not the only emotion; I am also nervous- I have never travelled to this show before and am trying to arrange borrowing my Mum's satnav. I am also nervous about the condition of the roads; especially at the show site as with many modified VW's mine is very low to the ground and the noise and feel of scraping has become a constant worry. This is something which is openly discussed on forums and at meets and shows, in fact scraping is often seen as a sort of a badge of honour as getting the car as low as possible is seen to be perhaps the ultimate achievement within the modified VW culture.

I live in Aberystwyth but my tent and other camping equipment was at my Dad's house in Shrewsbury and so the first drive of the weekend was to there. Thinking reflexively I felt particularly happy at the end of my days university work as I was going to be meeting with friends, driving with friends and seeing a large display of modified VAG cars.

#### **Saturday 17<sup>th</sup> May 2014**

As usual on show days I woke early to give the car a wash and polish before I started the journey to the convoy meeting point. This mobility to the show event is something which struck me as particularly interesting; both the dynamics of driving in a convoy and the collective identity it affords you when viewed by other road users.

We met at a truckstop in mid-Shropshire, as it was a sunny weekend the truckstop and associated café was busy with bikers, it appeared as if there was an organised bike meet in one area of the site. Curiously there were very few actual trucks. I was the second person from the club to arrive and recognised my friends T25 campervan which I parked next to. Within the next half an hour other members of the club turned up and it took on a meet sort of atmosphere, interestingly to check that we were all there the list of people who confirmed they were going on the online forum of the club was consulted. This shows the online forum is used to organise mobility in the lived world.

There was much discussion about who should lead the convoy, several people including myself had sat-navs, however several of the cars including the campervan and my car were much slower and might hold up the convoy on dual carriageways. From past experience the more capable cars soon disappear and we usually meet up with them again at the location. The drive itself was interesting as it reminded me very clearly of a similar drive last year; it was a drive to a different show but likewise the first camping one I attended that season. With the sun shining, windows down and the sounds of wind rushing into the car and 'summer' anthem style music playing loudly I was relaxed and at once excited.

In terms of the specific mobility of a convoy of lowered cars; at one point we entered roadworks with a freshly laid gravel section. As we sat waiting to be let through, a friend of mine several cars in front began to rev his car loudly, he had recently bought a new car; a Golf mk5 R32. This added noise added to the excitement of the fact that I was on a journey to a car show. The sound of the car bouncing off the limiter put a big smile on my face although I was wondering how other road users might perceive this as antisocial. Once we got onto the loose gravel it became apparent that those of us with very low cars were going to have to keep to around 5mph, both in case we went onto uneven ground and because we wanted to keep the cars clean for when we arrived at the show. Again this may have been perceived differently by other road users, particularly as it further held them up and they could not see any obvious reason for this. The rest of the journey was uneventful although I remember thinking that the way the convoy stuck together on the dual carriageway was interesting both as a collective dynamic and for the way it was perceived by other road users. Upon arrival at the show I was both relieved that the sat-nav was correct and excited. This excitement stemmed from the field of modified VW's waiting to enter the show which we were faced with- for me this was a feeling both of personal happiness and enthusiasm but also a sort of 'all in the same boat' collective atmosphere.

Once we arrived at the show the first task as usual, was how to arrange the cars within the club camping area. Thinking reflectively about this it is clear that we planned to present the club and cars in a way which made as much visual impact as possible whilst also encircling our tents and gazebo. As such club camping becomes very much a version of club display but rather than being in a show arena it is in the camping area. The second task was the team effort needed to erect the gazebo which was bought by the club, it is understood as rude to not help in this process as it is likely all of us will shelter under it at some point over the weekend. Following this, due to the windy conditions we then re-arranged the cars so that the camper vans flanked the gazebo and reduced wind inside it, this team effort to improve the club experience of the show showed the importance of attending such events in a collective group.

The close-knit aspect of such groups is something I discussed in my Master's thesis, concluding that it can be relatively difficult for newer members to become a part of this. Modified car groups are often described as 'cliquey' in that levels of hierarchy exist to some extent and there are unwritten rules about how to work your way up to being a trusted member of the group. However at All Types this was problematized somewhat as a new member; David was attending his first show with the club. However he is the apprentice of Shelvey- who's garage does much of the work for club member's cars; as such David was quickly accepted into the group as already 'knowing the score'. Furthermore David already owns a modified VW polo and a classic beetle and so he was able to easily join in with the 'car talk' conversations, often lacking this knowledge can alienate new members until they are more a part of the group on a social level. This was more the experience that I had upon joining the group three years ago.

Once at the show I received a call from a friend who is a member of another group the polo club 'Club 9n/3' that I founded with a number of other Polo 9n owners. However he was present with another club and so this meant that already i was able to talk to another collective group of enthusiasts, I noted that this is generally the case, enthusiasts are friendly and if a member of a club introduces a friends they are generally welcomed as well. Particularly in the evening, as is usual at camping shows, the atmosphere is more similar to that at a music festival or night out with friends,

clubs tend to drink and socialise in their club groups and with other clubs. In this way shows are often like re-unions for different clubs and friends within them who might only see each other during the show season. This provides another motivation to attend car shows beyond the modified car themselves and has more to do with social aspects of the modified car culture.

### **Sunday 18<sup>th</sup> May 2014**

All Types- the Sunday was the main show day although as usual with these two day events, it finished at 4pm and many who had attended the day before and camped as we had left earlier than this. We spent much of the Sunday walking around the large show n shine area, in particular the topic of conversation was how many brand new (2013/14) cars there were in the show and the amount of money therein.

This also brought up a familiar concern to modifiers recently; this is that if someone buys a brand new car and a 'preferred' set of wheels (several brands are *the* wheels to have and can cost as much as £500 a corner), and lowers the car on air bag suspension then they are very likely to win prizes. However many others whose cars are to a high standard but do not fit this model may miss out; whilst this is by no means always true it is clear to see a pattern emerging in the last few years. Perhaps the main reason cited by many for disliking this trend is not the monetary issue but the idea that modified cars should be 'built not bought', a phrase which has gathered pace recently and appears on stickers and t-shirts regularly. This is the contention that those who buy brand new cars, also buy their parts and buy the labour, this is seen as them not putting an investment into the car on any level other than financial. This is definitely something I wish to explore further in interviews and have experienced myself as I have always paid to have parts fitted and for other labour to be carried out. On the whole I have not experienced much in the way of not having a 'built not bought' car, although comments have been made, largely people accept that we all have different skills even within the modified car culture. Furthermore it may be accepted in my case as I am not spending the extreme amounts of money that some of the 'show' cars have spent on them; this can increasingly be as much as a new car with around £5k spent. These cars and the people who drive them are often regarded as being 'scene', the idea that they have fully consumed the most popular trends in order to win more trophies and make their cars more well known, which at face value seems fair enough however there is a growing group of 'haters' who dislike 'scene' cars. This is fraught with contradiction and irony though as many people strive to meet these levels of 'authentic' 'scene' modification and yet disparage though who achieve it. There are also similar debates here around buying new cars on finance as opposed to buying cars outright, although it may be put down to jealousy in some respects which I will bear in mind. This is not a straightforward issue and may be beyond the scope of my research but nevertheless it is an important underlying debate within the culture at the moment and must be taken into account at some level.

In the afternoon I received a call from my friend in Club9n/3, he wanted to move his car near one of the main roads within the show and to put the club banner on his car, as I had the banner I suggested that we use both cars. However this was made more awkward as I had to explain to the club that I had come with that I would be moving my car to essentially represent another club; this made me think particularly about the way that loyalty to certain clubs at these events occurs.

One thing I would note upon arriving home was that usually I take my camera and I had not on this occasion. Usually then, when I get home I upload the album to Facebook, tagging who I know and

leaving the other photos to be tagged as whoever they are. In the past this has served as some sort of record of the cars seen that weekend and also as a way to meet new people who then see their car in my photo album and thus tag themselves in the relevant photo. The absence of this process and of taking photos in the field in general felt like I was missing a level of engagement which I usually have and as such I think photography in the field at least needs to be incorporated in my fieldwork; both as part of my experience of the field but more importantly as a tool for interaction both during the field visit and after the event.

### **Monday 19<sup>th</sup> May 2014**

Today I was taking my car to the garage I have used for several years now and which is owned by Shelvey who founded the club I had been camping with at the weekend. This is the preferred garage and he provides a potential contact within the modified motor trade and in particular a VAG car specialist with experience of car shows. As background he has built many cars over the years, one of which was featured in Golf+ magazine about 3 years ago. His work is widely regarded beyond the local Shropshire area and his garage is well known particularly for any work regarding lowering cars or refurbishing three piece wheels. The garage is about 30 minutes from my house, on this occasion my Dad agreed to bring me back but in the past it has not been difficult to get someone to follow me out and bring me back as there is always a new car or something special in Shelvey's garage. I will be picking the car up in 2 weeks time ready for a show on 1st June; Dubs Mania.

It was interesting to visit the garage so soon after a show and we discussed the weekend's events before I explained the work I wanted doing; this made me think about the way in which the economic side of his business is closely intertwined with the social aspects of modified car culture. Furthermore I think the way that companies develop demo cars to display at car show events shows this link; these are businesses which provide customisation of various sorts to meet customers specifications and so they have to both show consumers what they can do and also remain approachable. A lot of these companies are run by modifiers for modifiers, indeed the slogan on Shelvey's website is, "A business for enthusiasts created by enthusiasts". I think this is important to people as garage work and particularly custom work feels a lot more personal than buying products from a large scale retailer, I personally am comforted by the fact that businesses like this, in my experience take a great deal of pride in their work and will not let a car leave until it is perfect.

Having dropped the car off to have air ride suspension I decided to share this with my Facebook friends; the responses I received show the varied nature of understandings of 'authentic' or 'proper' modification of VAG cars. Air ride suspension allows the ride height to be altered from inside the car, a kit like mine allows a number of presets for ride height which can be switched between in a matter of seconds. The main idea is that when running a low car as I had previously rather than damaging the underside on uneven roads or speedbumps I am now able to briefly raise the car to clear these. However this modification is not cheap and as such has become linked to 'scene' cars such as those discussed above. Furthermore there is a somewhat jokey divide between 'static' cars (those on coilover suspension) and 'air' (those with air suspension); static is generally seen as more cool although this is beginning to change as 'air' becomes more affordable. The argument goes that people who drive daily in very low cars and as such have to deal with issues of mobility such as getting over speedbumps and scraping the underside of the car frequently deserve more respect than those who can raise their car at the touch of a button. To an outside observer this seems nonsensical, however I drove a static car that was very low to the ground for two years although

only daily for some of that time. Whilst thinking reflexively I understand that this is seen as more attractive because the car is at that height and achieves a certain aesthetic all the time rather than just for shows, it made driving increasingly a chore. Many people talk of having to plan routes for static cars before taking any journey, so as to avoid speedbumps, this is seen as a badge of honour of sorts, the constant risk of serious damage (splitting the sump) though, meant this was quite stressful.

However had air ride not come up at the right price I would have continued to run the car at that height as to raise it would have been seen as losing respect as well as to some extent becoming excluded. However I have seen this happen multiple times and people are rarely ejected from a group because of it, however the understanding is that a lowered car becomes something of your self identity and to raise it is seen as a weakness or giving up on the 'lowered lifestyle'. In fact another common phrase in VAG and other modified car cultures is, 'low is a lifestyle' or the more humorous 'low standards'; both are often seen as stickers and on t-shirts. However as stated air ride is becoming cheaper and more accepted as the practical solution to such a dilemma, but in terms of thinking reflexively about my positionality I need to beware that certain understandings of a VW enthusiast are attached to cars which have air ride.

#### **Tuesday 20<sup>th</sup> May 2014**

I am one of the admins on a club that a friend and I set up on Facebook; Club 9n/3. We set it up following a lack of information for our particular model of Polo on a more widely known VW forum, within 12 months our club had over 1000 members and now around 18 months on we have in the region of 1600 members. The club is very active throughout the day with members from as far afield as South Africa and Brazil. This year I have been in charge of arranging clubstands for shows. The first of these was at ultimate dubs on March 9<sup>th</sup> 2014, this was a process which I think has given me more of an insight into how much preparation and organisation has to go into putting on a show and catering to peoples interests. In particular the way enthusiasm is presented by these shows and the identity the show has is important as I have found when trying to recruit people for the clubstand at several other shows. The other two I am arranging are for Deva Dubs n Rods on the 6<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> June and for FittedUK on the 20<sup>th</sup> July, from a positionality point of view Deva is held in my hometown; Shrewsbury and so getting this one right is of special importance to me.

Today I have been invited to attend a show in France with the club in late July, however due to the distance and cost involved I will be giving it a miss, the European shows which have become big pulls for UK enthusiasts in recent years are definitely something I would like to explore in my fieldwork next summer though.

#### **Thursday 22<sup>nd</sup> May 2014**

Today I have been trying to balance my literature review, faculty monitoring form and ethics form with the responsibility of organising a clubstand for Club9n/3 at the FittedUK show. The dynamics of organising an 8 car clubstand for a club of 1600 members is proving difficult.

I have also realised today that contacting the show organisers may be a path which I have already begun to go down by way of this clubstand organiser role which I hold. I have had some level of contact with organisers both for Deva and FittedUK and am now going to draft emails to the organisers of these shows telling them about my proposed autoethnographic research at their



events and asking them whether they would be interested in meeting to discuss the ways in which they think enthusiasm is both represented and affected by car shows.

### **Sunday 25<sup>th</sup> May 2014**

Today I spent much of the afternoon clearing a space in the garage of my house in order to safely store my VW polo when it comes out of the garage at the end of the week. This is quite an exciting process and I think here I tap into elements of what makes cleaning and detailing a car so exciting and pleasurable for MCE's. As with much of modifying it was as much about the active 'doing' process as standing back and thinking 'I did that'. This is something which is often talked about within modified car culture as the 'built not bought' terminology attests. This is something which I have to deal with as a part of my positionality in the field, I am not particularly mechanically minded and prefer to take my car to the garage and have a receipt at the end of it than risk trying myself and getting it wrong; as has happened numerous times! The social networks and other dynamics which come with the relationship between enthusiasts and garage owners is something I will discuss later today. Back to my garage; the garage is often seen as a space which is important to the modified car enthusiast; be it as a space for mechanical maintenance, somewhere to polish the car sheltered from the rain or simply as a secure room by way of which your car can be kept 'in the house'.

### **Monday 26<sup>th</sup> May 2014**

Today after numerous requests on the Club9n/3 Facebook page we have begun work on a forum website. As all the other admins also hold full time jobs or are full time students as well balancing the club with work is an interesting and often exciting although also often frustrating challenge. With a forum format it will be much easier for members to post exactly what they want to talk about/find out about etc. in the correct area and keep it there. Whereas on Facebook this is one constantly streaming list which means posts get pushed down the page with each new one. Hopefully the move to a forum will mean a more 'hands off' and lower maintenance approach. I know something about forums and the car scene from other clubs that I have been a member of, such as Dubshire. I am also aware of the small body of methodological literature on online forums research for enthusiasts. Luke Bennett (2011) has written about his experience of what can be described as a 'netnography' (Kozinets, 2010), although Bennet does not use this term he does talk about the ways in which online forums are used in practices of meaning making within groups of urban exploration enthusiasts.

Without going into too much detail here on the dynamics of internet forums and the clear and constantly evolving ethical issues I would like to outline the ways in which this may be advantageous and disadvantageous for my research. In terms of advantages it gives me access to a large body of modified car enthusiasts who due to my position as an admin in the club will likely be interested in sharing their experiences with me. Therein lies a problem; the obvious power relations which may play out as members feeling they have to answer my questions or participate in whatever way is asked of them, I would try to avoid this at all costs and one of the things that has made the clubs so durable is the idea that we are all on one level. This taps into Hilary Geoghagen's findings with telecommunications enthusiasts; whereby regardless of 'real world' authority; enthusiasm levels the playing field.

The power relations herein also makes me think of the work of Kathryn Besio and David Butz (2009) on autoethnography and the idea that participants see autoethnographers in the same way that

they see us. In other words we are both (re)presenting ourselves in certain ways in response to others. This body of writing aims to understand my changing positionality throughout this project but it must take into account the changes in the positionality of my participants and the way that this changes the ways they understand me, my presence in their enthusiasm, my identity and ultimately my research.

#### **Friday 30<sup>th</sup> May 2014**

Today I had planned to accompany a friend (Kieran) to Demon Tweeks, a motorsport shop in Wrexham and then we drove to Strada Auto so I could pick my car up. This was an interesting experience as the relatively long drive gave me chance to bring up the topics of my research and to get feedback from another modified car enthusiast.

This was a good trip and we discussed a number of things, mainly the money involved in modifying a car, good parts; those which offer the best performance or aesthetics are not cheap. Neither I nor Kieran have much in the way of mechanical skills and we discussed the way in which this limits the ways in which you can actively modify your car, in terms of cost it is often the labour charges because of this which carry the most weight. Many of the VW enthusiasts I know work in or around the motor trade. We also talked about the ways in which being a part of a local and friendly VW community had meant that work was often offered to a high standard at so called 'mates rates' (something which I have experienced with the smaller modified car community and a friends garage in Aber). Linked to this Kieran was taking his car to Strada Auto to have his new wheels and springs fitted in time for the show the following day, meanwhile my car was still being finished for the same deadline, when we arrived at Strada Auto it appeared we were not the only ones. The garage is run by a friend of mine and his team consists of a bodywork specialist and an apprentice. Originally the plan had been for Kieran to drop his car off have the work done and then we could both return to Shrewsbury in our cars. However due to the workload for the same deadline Kieran's car would not be finished until the evening, so I was given my finished car back to take Kieran home, however an invoice was not yet ready for my car so Shelvey said to bring the money to the show. This shows the friendly and trusting nature within modified VW communities and this is something which I will bear in mind when observing other similar groups.

#### **Saturday 31<sup>st</sup> May 2014**

In the morning; 10:30am I drove to the preferred Motorway services to meet up with the other members of the club to convoy the relatively short distance to Weston Park. This was my first show with my new air ride suspension and so I paid particular attention to the feelings and emotions. I drove into the carpark and a number of club members were already there including some new people I hadn't met before, as I parked the car, I aired out (lowering the suspension fully), this was exciting and was a performance of some sort as I knew all present had seen and heard it, however I knew there would be some negativity due to understandings of modifiers linked to air ride suspension. I introduced myself to the new people and said hello to the others, some of whom I have not seen since the last show of last year (around 1st Sept 2013). There was some joking about how now I was 'scene' because I had air ride and I would have to stop hanging round with them, but this was all good natured.

The convoy and the convoy meeting place is a key dynamic to club attendance at car shows, it unites the car meet aspect with the potential excitement of the weekend to come. People generally use the

convoy time to catch up with friends, discuss their latest modifications and to relay stories and anecdotes from other shows to increase the level of excitement and expectation for the coming event. As I have briefly mentioned before, driving in convoy with a group of modified cars brings out some interesting mobility issues. There is also a performative aspect of a large group of modified (and different to standard) cars travelling together, in my experience this is often noted by other members of the public. Furthermore there are driving practices specific to convoys, a general rule is to not go faster than your slowest car, although as I described above, this rarely happens when several higher performance cars are present. It is also often the case that club members alter their driving choices in order to keep the convoy together, for example waiting at roundabouts for a gap for the whole group to take.

In terms of an affective experience I think this whole pre-show experience is important, there is the excitement of the weekend ahead, compounded by discussions at the convoy meeting point; there is also the feeling of collective excitement and of inclusion. Whilst driving to the event I often found myself smiling, as an enthusiast this is what it's all about; summer, the sun shining and about to spend a weekend with friend. This was strange in some respects as I realised the actual car show aspect seemed to be of less importance, I was excited to show off my new air ride suspension but at the same time it was going to be a mini holiday with some friends. I wonder to what extent this is true of other clubs, this is also perhaps quite a unique way to understand the car show. For many people a show is a one day event or a family day out but from a club perspective it is more an extended car meet, coupled with a 'night out' as well as the usual car show aspect. This is something I need to remain reflexive about as I have often understood the car show as something of a social gathering but this may not be the case for those who attend car shows for one day or more importantly who attend them alone. It would be interesting to compare the experiences of the car show between these groups and in particular to see whether similar distinctions are recognised by show organisers.

Furthermore I was distinctly comparing today's journey to the show to the same journey last year, I remember this distinctly as it was the first show of the season which I attended in 2013. Similarly it was a sunny day and I remember the particular songs which I had on in the car on the way; whilst this may be a trivial fact it suggests the importance of past experience on show experiences. As stated above, discussion of anecdotes about previous shows often forms the basis for excitement about the weekend's events.

This evening at the show a number of younger members were talking about their jobs and getting to work with cars all the time, I realised that around 70% of the group are employed in automotive related or engineering jobs. One of the main gatekeepers Shelvey raised my research and several jokes were made about how this was leisure time for them but potentially work for me, this also gave me a chance to discuss my research aims and in particular to broach the question of automotive enthusiasm and how its experienced at the car show. From this brief discussion it was clear that there are a variety of different ways in which the show is experienced and these are not united by the 'modified car enthusiasm culture'- this suggests that perhaps I need to change my angle. However talking about my research within the ethnographic setting has helped me to identify potential interviewees; I am thinking that it would be good to interview several people who's businesses rely on modified VAG cars, several people who attend shows regularly, several enthusiasts who do not and then the show organisers themselves. In this way I hope to build up a

nuanced understanding of the car show event and in particular the different drivers for attending or not as the case may be.

### **Sunday 1<sup>st</sup> June 2014**

The main show day of Dubs Mania, here I noticed that many of those who were camping got up and attended the show in the late morning, whereas to people attending just on the Sunday they had arrived for gates opening at 9am, again this made me think about the different experiences of the car show event and made me think reflexively about my own experiences of it. Thinking about this show and others I have attended the Sunday is often a relaxed day following the night before, some people do not even attend the show on the Sunday; as is increasingly the case with large shows in Europe.

For example at Wörthersee in Austria many people attend in the 3 weeks before the show when the town has something of a festival atmosphere and then leave before the event itself as it becomes too busy with people who come 'just' for the show. This is an interesting dynamic and further highlights the fact that the cars on display are perhaps not always the main motivation to attend such events. I would particularly like to study European shows (mainland Europe) if I get the chance, not so much as a cross cultural comparison but more because of the scale difference; thinking about this I suggest that this is because of the relative ease of journey from the Netherlands, France, Austria, Spain to mainland European countries, the crossing to the UK may not be preferable, indeed it is rare to see foreign cars at most UK shows but most European shows have a range of country's cars in attendance. A similar pattern can be seen in the US with many people travelling the width of the country for events such as Southern Wörthersee in Georgia and H2Oi in Maryland.

To return to my experience of DubsMania, it is a medium sized show which somewhat unusually combines its show area with the camping area. Usually at shows clubs camp in a way that displays their cars however this is in a separate area to the main show, members of the public can wander around the camping area but it is less likely. However at DubsMania these club camping displays are enveloped by the show. Indeed in the three previous the years the club I was attending with have won the 'Best Club Display' award. Today was the first time I had begun to think reflexively about the awards and trophies system which operates at shows as there are some interesting power dynamics at work here which can influence enthusiasm and in particular what is considered 'cool' or 'scene'. Trophies are awarded for a number of categories; usually these revolve around a 'show n shine' competition; this concours type event is a judgement of which cars are the cleanest- with very fine details about how this is judged. There are also categories usually divided by make or model of car or age, at VW shows there are often separate watercooled and aircooled categories which can be seen as synonymous with 'old skool' and 'nu skool' categories. There are also a range of other categories such as best wheel, best paint etc. depending on the focus of the show. How these awards are judged is something which I would like to discuss with show organisers in more detail at some point; as styles of car often gain popularity if a certain car has won many trophies. There is also a connection between the negative connotations of 'scene' cars and winning prizes; increasingly certain groups see this as essentially buying prizes, here the 'built not bought' adage can be seen as representing more creativity and effort and therefore these individuals are seen to deserve the prize more.

Some people displaying cars attend separately of a club although this is more an exception than the rule, this was clear to me at this show as being a local event to my hometown I saw many people that I know who drive modified VW's but are not a part of any local clubs. It would be particularly interesting to explore their experiences of the show, as noted most who camp are either in club camping or family camping and so those who attend on their own tend not to camp. Although club membership is not really membership as such as anyone could say they wanted to join the club for the purpose of camping at a show and it would be accepted although this offer is often not extended to cars which are modified in ways not seen as 'cool', or cars which are seen as 'chavvy'/'badly' modified.

#### **Wednesday 4<sup>th</sup> June 2014**

Today I drove back to Aberystwyth for a progression meeting which will take place tomorrow. This was my first long journey with air ride suspension and I was keen to see how the car handled. I was also excited because as noted earlier I thought the car would now be able to get up our steep drive and into the garage. As noted parking the car in the garage has certain significance, particularly amongst enthusiasts as the garage is often seen as a room in the house. As such the car takes on special importance as a part of the 'home' space rather than just being associated with roads.

#### **Thursday 5<sup>th</sup> June 2014**

Today I am in Aber for my monitoring interview, I plan to travel back to Shrewsbury immediately after in order to prepare to attend a 3 day camping show in the town starting tomorrow. I attended the meeting and then drove back to Aber, today I reflected on the way that shows are often on weekends so they can be attended by those who work in the week, although Deva starts at 2pm tomorrow. It will be interesting to see how busy it is on the Friday and whether a significant number of people who are camping arrive on the Saturday instead.

One of the things which I like about summer shows is the light nights, tonight I washed and prepped the car for the show and shine competition the following day. This is an interesting point, as cleaning cars and 'detailing' have become a key part of modified car enthusiasm at least within modified VAG circles. I usually spend several hours washing the car, polishing the paintwork and then a number of other smaller jobs such as polishing the wheels, applying tyre shine, using trim gel on the exterior black plastics and using glass polish on the windows. This is not an extreme level of cleaning for most modified VAG enthusiasts; by many it would be seen as the bare minimum but as I am more interested in the social aspect of the weekend than the competition I remind myself not to overdo it, furthermore there is a storm forecast for tomorrow and Saturday. As such I decide to take some cleaning products with to touch up after the rain. I have been told by a friend (much recommendation comes by word of mouth or online) about 'Quick Detailer' spray; a quick wax applicator so I go to Halfords to get some. This is important to me on a somewhat banal but in context exciting way, Halfords sits in an area of the retail park separated from the rest by three large speedbumps. For the last two years I have had to park at a supermarket nearby and walk to the store; with my air suspension I am now able to make this journey trouble free, I also deliberately park in the middle of the carpark near the open doors of the store and 'air out', the loud noise of air exhausting from the car draws attention and I realise the importance of drawing this attention by way of a performance.

This is one point I wish to develop briefly, people often assume that modified car drivers must be outgoing and choose to modify cars so as to draw attention, and this is only partly true in my experience. I am not naturally an extrovert, for me the modified car and driving it makes me happy in and of itself, however the performance aspect it offers and the attention of others that it brings is something which I choose to indulge in occasionally. Although I have many good friends within the culture who would rather not be actively seen and will not even enter show n shine competitions despite clearly having high calibre cars. On the whole these are people with 'built not bought' cars.

Tomorrow I will be camping with several members of the club I founded with some friends; Club 9n/3, I will be meeting them for the first time and have told them that the relaxed nature of this show would be a perfect time to get to know the club better. However this weekend is also host to two very popular watercooled (approx 1980+) VW shows and so I know that numbers will be small.

### **Friday 6<sup>th</sup> June 2014**

Today I spend much of the morning worrying that the car is not clean enough and I also decide to clean the interior. I realise now that I am quite excited at the prospect of winning a trophy in the show n shine competition. I have recently spoken to one of the show n shine judges on Facebook, he is not judging at Deva this year but will be working at similar events. He explains to me that each aspect of a car is judged out of 10. There are generally two categories; modified or standard- if a cars interior for example is completely factory then it will get 10/10 as a standard interior however if it has an aftermarket steering wheel but nothing else it is now in the modified category but will score lowly. As such if something is going to be modified it has to be done to the highest standard and level of detail or not at all. It is discussion which weighs on my mind this morning; I have always thought the exterior of the car to be more important at shows, my interior is more of a personal space and is never as clean as the exterior. This morning I spend several hours hoovering the inside of the car, I realise that for the frequent car cleaning sessions which I have I have never once properly cleaned the interior or hoovered the car. The level of involvement and dedication to cleaning the car is something I wish to explore; I suspect this does not necessarily correlate to entering show n shine competitions but patterns may become clear.

The show gates opened at 2pm- as my Dad lives in Shrewsbury (where the show is) and due to the many people still being at work I decided there would be no queue this early on, as such I was at the gates just before 2 and got straight in. The show organisers were not sure where my club plot was but were happy that I understood the map better than they did, as it was our plot was a general club camping (rather than reserved) plot in the middle of the main camping field. I was the only car in this field, however a friends club (local to Shrewsbury) was already there and setting up. They came over and suggested that as I was only expecting around 5 cars that I join their pitch. They were expecting around 15 cars and easily had room for 20+. This is another example of the friendly nature of communities within the modified car culture.

This evening on car for Club 9n/3 showed up, another is coming in the morning and a number of others forgot and are attending the afore mentioned popular watercooled shows. Others have cited the weather as a reason although the rain has not appeared yet. Deva is primarily an aircooled event; beetles and campers being the most popular vehicles by far, however it is a show which i really enjoy as it is very laid back. I think this is in part due to it being billed as a 'family show'. A number of people I have spoken to also agreed that it was less 'judgemental' than the 'scene'

watercooled shows, meaning that people would not make negative comments about other people's cars as can happen at other types of shows; Deva is much more inclusive and does not chase a set modified car identity.

### **Saturday 7th June 2014**

This morning there was a thunder storm and heavy rain. The one person who drove down last night for the Club 9n/3 clubstand says he had a good evening but is leaving today due to the weather. He remarks that he and his friend have had a good time and that as they are relatively new to the VW culture they felt welcomed and was good to meet some new people. This reminds me of the cliché that this is what the car shows and modifying is all about- meeting new people and socialising around a shared interest.

Today is also the day of the daily driver show n shine. The site of the show is now very boggy and muddy and the on-site roads have many puddles, I am glad at this point, of the air ride, I raise the car and drive through the puddles to the main arena. I am soon joined by a friend of mine with the same model Polo, his car looks immaculate. Last he won a trophy in this show n shine, this year he tells me I will definitely win the trophy due to more modifications last year and explicitly due to the air ride suspension. However he too now has air suspension. We are friends and although I am not fairly confident I will not win a trophy and that there's a good chance he will we continue to help each other clean the mud of the cars; although as an unspoken rule we do not touch each other's cars. This is one interesting element of the display aspect of show n shine competitions, there is an unwritten rule that the cars must not be touched, some people bring signs to this effect but I trust that no-one will. Although I realise that this in itself shows the importance of having a car which extremely clean has, I wonder if a very clean standard car would be held in higher regard than a dirty modified one; I am fairly sure it would be.

My friend with the polo wins a trophy, this is upsetting after the level of effort I have put in cleaning the car however I feel like he deserved it more as his car is self-built and whereas I have paid for my modifications to be fitted. This throws into sharp relief the fact that I may be seen as driving a bought not built car and this worries me. As such I do not make much fuss about having not won and am quickly reminded that there is much more to shows than competing. Today another member of my club; 'Club 9n/3' arrives; he joins in with the group we are camping in, we spend much of the day socialising and engaged in 'car talk' under a large gazebo, due to the rain. I am further reminded of the social nature of these events and once again it feels more like a festival or a night out with friends than an event with a pure focus on cars and their display. This continued into the evening. 'Car talk' is a term I borrow from Karen Lumsden (2013) and is the general conversation that I have observed at most car shows; primarily it consists of discussing each other's cars, planned modifications, experiences related to the car or driving. It is clear that some of this discussion helps to cultivate what is generally accepted as 'cool' in terms of modifications and behaviour.

Furthermore these discussions often turn to relaying anecdotes of similar shows or the same show in previous years; in this way the affective atmosphere of the club experience is built up on the foundations of expectation and memory of previous experiences. I observed that this was used perhaps unknowingly, as a tactic by many of us when we were sheltering from the rain under the gazebo; by talking about how good the show always is and how people always have a good time at Deva regardless of weather it lessened the negative impact. It would have been easy to pack up and

go home, as all present in that club live locally the Shrewsbury; however it was felt that this was not a good idea, in part because if people leave the show loses some of its atmosphere and presence. This is interesting as it made me realise that whilst you pay to attend and camp at a car show you still feel a certain responsibility to the organisers to help make the show a success, this is something I am more aware this year as I have been helping to organise Club 9n/3 clubstands at a number of shows- I have become increasingly aware of the logistical difficulties of organising a large scale show successfully. For this reason I would like to interview, if possible, some show organisers- it would be best to do this outside of the show season though; approx September-March.

### **Sunday 8th June 2014**

Today was the third day of Deva and the main show day, as noted above today draws in many more people who are attending the show just for the day and I wonder how their experience of it differs from mine. This reminds of the context-specificity of my own positionality and how I see and read the car show. In terms of autoethnography this is also closely connected to those that I socialise with at such shows, as noted if I attended on my own I would likely experience a very different experience than I do as a member of a club in which I know many other people reasonably well.

In terms of an affective atmosphere, there is a clear change today I think. The sun is shining and it is getting very hot; much of the bad weather of the previous day is conveniently forgotten and the show begins to draw in large crowds of people from the nearby town of Shrewsbury. Returning to my observation about different readings of the show; many of these people may not even be car enthusiasts, the sun is shining and this is a large scale family event and so it draws in crowds just for the fact that it offers a fun day out. As such the atmosphere is much more lively today, I can't help but wonder if this has something to do with the rain and dampened spirits of yesterday; everyone is making the most of the weather and affects of excitement can be traced through the crowds. This comes to a peak, I feel, during the announcing of awards for that day's 'show car' show n shine (Saturday's being a daily driver show n shine). Whilst the awards were being announced, due to Shrewsbury's location in relation to RAF Cosford and their air show on the same day, the crowds were treated to the red arrows flying low and in formation over the showground. This moment was hard to describe but everyone looked skyward, the announcer paused and for a few seconds the planes became part of the car show assemblage.

### **Tuesday 10th June 2014**

Several weeks ago I was told that members of the club which I have attended all of the shows detailed here, except Deva, with- were planning a trip to VW Days, a large European show in Seraucourt le Grande in Northern France. I was unsure whether to make the trip for a number of reasons, mainly I have never driven abroad before, also I was unsure how this would fit within my research timetable. However for some time I have been thinking about the importance of possible pilgrimages made to large scale enthusiasm events and for this reason I decided it would be a good show to attend as this is something I would like to develop.

### **Wednesday 11th June 2014**

Today I had to drive back to Aber to get my passport for the weekend. I planned to drive up and back in the same day, all went to plan and I was enjoying the chance to drive the car on its first long journey on airbags. I particularly noted the lack of anxiety at seeing roadworks signs, previously this could mean dragging the car up and down ramps and around other obstacles, I realise that air



suspension has changed my embodied experience of driving. However on the return journey one of the airbags develops a problem leading to it airing out and sitting the rear wheel arch on the tyre, with no phone battery I am forced to drive back to Shrewsbury. I stop several times to let the tyre cool down as the arch is sitting on it and melting it, as I begin to panic I am reminded of the stressful and potentially costly side to modified cars. In particular I am aware that this issue would not have developed on a standard car and that challenges like these are inherent to modified car ownership. Once I get the car home I focus my thoughts on the coming weekend and am surprised that I am no longer worrying about the car at all, I had not planned to drive the polo to France anyway, I send a text to my friend Shelvey who's garage fitted the air suspension just to let him know that I will be paying him a visit after the weekend. Once again I am reminded of the social aspect of the car show and the different ways it can be experienced, I will be attending VW Days as a passenger, whilst my car sits broken at home and yet I am still very excited about the show and spending a weekend with a group of friends who share a common interest. I will think reflexively about how my experience would have differed if I had taken my car, in part because I plan to do this next year.

#### **Thursday 12th June 2014**

Today I spent much of the day going back over the field notes made above and adding to certain key themes made so that I can use this document as a reference of when and how my ideas changed based on experiences in the field or because of the involved nature of my autoethnographic research.

This evening I feel the usual excitement and nerves before a car show with the added thoughts about the early start (5am) and long drive (7 hours) to France.

#### **Friday 13th June 2014**

I am picked up in the morning by a friend; Chris from the Dubshire club, we then go to meet the rest of the club at a motorway service station. On the way we talk about our excitement to be going abroad to a show for the first time, in terms of 'car talk', Chris's Audi is less than a week old and so mostly we discuss the optional extras and the fact that he already has aftermarket alloy wheels on the car. We meet the others at the services, there is a similar atmosphere to a car meet although obviously most are quite tired. It is at this point that we realise that Shelvey has added vinyl decals to his van so that it looks like a Martini Racing support vehicle, he explains that these are just for the trip and are for a bit of a joke; this is interesting as it shows that sometimes modifications are short term and it also shows the less serious nature which underlies most of the culture.

I also get chance to speak to Shelvey about the issue with my air suspension and he says that we'll sort it after the weekend. I had also emailed the only UK supplier of my air-ride (Plush Automotive) they replied asking that if the issue was serious I pass on a photo to them so that they could pass it onto the manufacturer; Air-rex. This shows the level of consumer involvement in the business side even at the large scale as Plush is internationally renowned and Air-rex is a company based in Japan and more popular in the USA. In a strange nod to assemblage theory when I tell Shelvey about this he says he gets all of his air ride parts through Plush Automotive and so the problem will be easily sorted without my input. This is a big relief and further shows the intertwining of social elements and business elements for modified car garages and equipment manufacturers.

The journey itself reminds me of the convoy trips to larger shows in the UK, in particular it reminds me of the convoy to Edition38 the previous year. I realise now that my experience and thoughts are

in part constructed from memories of previous events and so this situated knowledge will necessarily effect my reading of car show events. For the people who attend the car show for one day or even those who camp with a club but for the first time, will likely have a different framework for understanding the car show event. I am particularly interested in how this may come into play for show organisers. The convoy stops at a services North of London and this time the atmosphere is much more like that of a car meet, a number of the drivers 'scene park' which is a practice where cars are parked at diagonal angles and not in spaces- this is generally taken as a bit of a joke in that it draws a lot of attention so therefore it is 'scene' parking. The discussion turned to the size of the show as two people in the convoy had been before, they described it being several times bigger than Edition38 (perhaps the UK's biggest show), which usually attracts around 1000+ cars, this seems unlikely at this stage but it helps to build the excitement in the group. We also use this stop as a chance to make sure everyone is equipped with the necessary accessories for driving in France and the talk turns to driving on the left amongst those who haven't driven abroad before. This is interesting as it introduces an element of nervousness and worry into what is essentially a holiday based around an enthusiast car show. This shows some of the less positive emotions associated with enthusiasm, as Geoghegan (2013) highlights- most people assume enthusiasm to be a purely positive experience. I hope that my research in part shows that this can only produce a partial reading of a dynamic enthusiast culture and is likely true in many other enthusiast settings.

During the drive down myself and Chris talked about the holiday aspect of this trip, we were essentially embarking on what might in other situations be described as a 'lads holiday' (on this occasion all present from the club are men). I am aware from the advertising of this show beforehand that people travel from a range of European countries to attend and that many incorporate the show into a short holiday. This combination of leisure tourism and car show events is something which I have noted before with regards to Wörthersee and other large scale European events, this is something I am interested in exploring. Through discussions with Chris we decided that the reason there was such good international attendance in Europe from other countries was because they share a connected land mass. As such there is a dedicated but small group of Europeans who come to English shows (interesting there aren't many in Wales, Scotland or NI), perhaps put off by the added complication of crossing the channel.

As an aside when we were on the motorway we passed and were passed by several modified VW's, as it was still before rush hour I think these too were heading for Dover. We overtook one car which I recognised immediately, it was recently featured in Performance VW (PVW) magazine and I have a poster of it by my desk in G1. This was a somewhat surreal moment, the cars featured in magazines often taken on a certain idolised status, they seem to be fixed in place however here was one being driven by someone who looked the same age as me, full of camping gear. This in particular made me realise the calibre of this show and both me and Chris discussed how odd it was to be driving alongside a magazine featured car.

As we reached Dover we ran into the familiar 'show traffic' this is something I personally really like about car shows and I raise it with Chris. Often shows are held at venues outside cities and as such the small nearby towns become overrun with modified VAG cars; either using hotels and restaurants or just on their way to the event. Having experienced this at locations I know well, such as in Telford at Ultimate Dubs in March, it makes me feel a part of something much bigger, a sort of movement. The presence of 'show traffic' transfers a space from normal arterial roads of a small town to a sort

of mobile show, indeed many photographers take pictures of cars in these queues. A similar thing happens with local carparks; especially where the location of the show can not accommodate as with at Ultimate Dubs. In Dover we saw many low cars around a car wash and petrol station near the ferry port, they all clearly noticed our convoy and smiles and nods of approval were exchanged. We were also overtaken by another convoy of modified VW's from which somebody with a megaphone was shouting about VW Days, this added to the party atmosphere and the excitement that we were nearly in France. Boarding the ferry was fairly uneventful apart from some mobility issues regarding getting low cars up the loading ramps.

Once in France we regrouped once we were through passport control, so as to maintain the convoy. As we passed through the first tolls we pulled into a layby, there we saw several modified VW's all from the Netherlands (identifiable by their numberplates). A few of the people with our club were interested in one of their cars, a mk2 golf, what followed was an interesting example of car talk focussing on wheel specifications; none of our party speaks Dutch and they did not speak much English. Interestingly this didn't seem to matter, they had a look around our cars and vice versa and compliments and questions were exchanged. (Include the photo of these cars in the layby). Again I got this sense that were a part of something big; the international nature of the modified VAG culture was now clear to see.

I realise that it's not so much about the driven experience of the journey as the fact that we are making such a long journey to this event. I imagine the routes taken by people from all the other countries to this very small French village, not for the first time during this research I begin to wonder about the benefits of an assemblage based reading, not least due to the difficulties with affective geographies at this international scale.

That evening we attended a cross between a party and a car meet, our hotel was amongst a cluster of several and their carparks were now filled with modified VW's and Audis from the UK, France, Netherlands, Germany and Belgium. We spent much of the night talking to several Dutch people staying in our hotel, they spoke about making a similar journey to Wörthersee show in Austria earlier in the year. The discussion also turned to the party atmosphere, and in particular it was amazing how similar our interests were in certain cars and parts, even though we come from different countries. Myself and two friends got talking to a man from Belgium who was cleaning his car in one of the hotel carparks (aside- cleaning car at 11pm having driven from Belgium that day). He explained that this was his 3rd year coming to VW Days and he enjoyed the way it attracted people from all over Europe, he also said that he had tried to gain access to the show that night but had been in show traffic for an hour and a half and had turned back. To add to our excitement about the scale he stated that there were 5000 cars already on the show site, at this stage I put this down to a mistranslation. Following his conversation a number of his friends arrived (French numberplates), they got out and greeted him and then shook the hands of me and my friends and introduced themselves. Again this showed the scale of the social aspects united by a common interest, these were people we had never met before. We briefly spoke about how we had all make friends at shows whom we then only really saw at shows due to living great distance away; although we did not discuss the role of the internet in this.

### **Saturday 14th June 2014**

When driving to the show this morning we were lost and kept seeing 'show traffic' going in both

directions, it was exciting to see this many modified VW's in rural France. Eventually we stopped in a small village where a number of French and Dutch VW's were being cleaned in the main square, here we asked for directions, I was given this task as it was decided I had the best grasp of French. Whilst we were stopped I noticed that elderly residents of the village were looking disapprovingly at the cars and I wondered what they made of the show being held near their village. Although the show is in its 15th year in this format and location.

Today we attended the show, the scale was at least as big as had been described and there were in the region of several thousand cars present. The site of the show was an old airfield (as is not uncommon in the UK for shows), it took us around 2 hours to walk to the main show area. The camping area lined several runways with the main part of the show in the middle. Again the international nature was clear and I was surprised at the number of UK cars present, people who had camped. We discussed whether it would be better for us to camp next year; to experience the show in a more 'authentic' and involved way; the majority feeling was that given the long distance driven a hotel would be preferable, although next year we may camp on the main night (Saturday) and then stay in a hotel on one night either side.

One thing which I observed was the central show stage, here cars were paraded onto a stage and then the owner would join announcers on a sofa, much like a chat show and their car would be discussed. This happens in the UK but I have never seen it on this scale, it is not clear who picks the cars to go up on stage as they have not won any competition. This would be interesting to explore if possible. I took a photo of the staging and of a large screen, the screen was showing videos of specific cars and oddly also footage of other large European shows, people were at the show watching another show on the screen. Although the audio-visual atmosphere this produced helped to build an affective feeling of excitement and directed people towards the stage. Whilst there is a general lack of what Adey (2008: 440) calls 'affective control' at car shows, the stage is often presented in such a way to draw people towards it, often at the bottom of a show field when you walk past all the cars you get to it; the same was true here.

In the evening during discussions about being 'scene' and the large contingent of 'scene' uk cars at the event and more importantly at the three hotels one of the members in our club called me 'scene'. At first I found this quite insulting due to the outlined negative connotations, I had never set out to win trophies or to make myself or the car 'scene famous'. However the comment came due to the fact that I have air ride and that the manufacturer of my kit is the 'scene choice'. We also discussed the 'scene uniform' a humorous observation of the almost matching fashion styles preferred by watercooled VW enthusiasts across the UK and it appears Europe as well; the uniform being T-shirts branded by certain makes, matching lanyard and snapbacks and Nike trainers. Whilst this is perhaps not relevant to my research it shows the importance of bearing in mind appearance when conducting fieldwork due to connotations attached to dressing in certain ways.

As an aside and a link to seeing magazine featured cars mentioned earlier, I saw a car in one of the hotel carparks which I had previously read about and admired online, a car built to drive to Wörthersee show by a UK company, it was one of a pair, the other of which is now in the USA. To see this car in the metal was a surprise and I was very happy to have the chance to photograph it in person, I likened this to seeing a celebrity, when talking to a friend and he agreed. These cars are often internet famous and treated as celebrities propagated by various blogs and online forums sites

as well as magazine features, these cars would be present at UK shows too but here I felt like we getting to go 'backstage' in a way and see the cars as they were used day to day.

It was clear that by far the majority of cars at the three hotels were from the UK, this made me think that those who drove from other mainland European countries were experiencing a different side of the show. As noted earlier, camping at a show gives a particular experience of it and so I was aware that our experience of the show may be limited in some respects. We were also told that there was a large party at the show site from 8pm onwards with DJ's turning the whole area into a sort of festival style gathering. We had discussed attending this but had been told that no-one could enter or leave and re-enter the site after 8pm (probably for drink driving safety). Although a similar party atmosphere to last night was present at the hotels and there were now many more cars, having made the trip down on the Saturday instead.

### **Sunday 15th June 2014**

We attended the show briefly this morning, more to say that we had attended on the main show day. Many of the cars were the same as the night before although interestingly many of the cars around the main stage and in the central show area were the UK cars seen around the hotel the night before. I wonder if UK cars are held in higher regard here? There are banners advertising PVW magazine everywhere, this is a UK based magazine but which is known to be popular across Europe and the USA; it would be interesting to explore the British influence on this wider international modified car culture.

We took a different route back to the hotel today, after the show as one person had left their car there. We got lost and ended up in a small French rural village, I was reminded for the first time since leaving England of the perceptions of others. Particularly as we crowded the narrow streets with our convoy, I am aware that I am in a week old Audi SUV with UK plates, I am aware that both to other people attending the show and to those who live locally that I will be perceived in a certain way.

Interestingly when we left the show today we went through a village where a line of elderly women and their young grandchildren lined the road and waved at the drivers as well as making gestures which one member of our convoy with the R32 took to mean rev your engine; this got a big response from the children clapping and waving. I realised at this point that the convoys and cars that the show attracted created a spectacle in unintended spaces and for unintended audiences; the convoy particularly provided a sort of mobile display which drew attention of pedestrians during most of the journey.

Although we soon had to make our way to the ferry for the return journey. We began to plan next year's trip whilst on the ferry and I spent much of the journey back with Chris discussing the show and how it differed to UK shows or the ones which we were used to.

### **Monday 16th June 2014**

I spoke to Shelvey again, decided to leave car off the road at my Dads until I can afford to have it recovered and fixed, this might affect show attendance in July but hopefully I will be able to attend as a passenger where possible.

### **Tuesday 17th June 2014**

Writing up the weekends field notes in more detail and sorting through photographs taken, most of my field notes were brief observations noted down on my mobile phone's memo taking function. I took many photographs at the event but now wish I had taken a photo to illustrate each point as it would have helped for further analysis and to aid my recall of the event. When showing the photographs taken to a (non-modifier) friend, they asked, "How do you decide which cars to take photographs of?". This was an interesting point and something I am beginning to think reflexively about...

### **Wednesday 18th June 2014**

Travelling back to Aberystwyth by train, which in itself is a bit annoying due to being without a car. Here I reflect on the feelings of the loss of mobility and the way that this affects my understanding of my self identity. Particularly when walking to the university or around town when I see other modified cars I am reminded that I don't have access to mine, thinking reflexively it is not so much the mobility that I miss; it is the display and performative aspect. I realise that I have only had the air suspension for 2 weeks and have only really 'showed it off' at car shows, I would like the chance to play with it more in a day to day setting. Hopefully I will get it fixed soon, in time for some of the shows in July; I am using Dub Fiction (13th July) as an aim. I will also hopefully be attending FittedUK the following weekend.

### **Saturday 21st & Sunday 22nd June 2014**

Not much to report but through Facebook I am aware that there are two large shows this weekend, I had chosen in advance to have this weekend away from the field to go back through my observations so far to try to identify key themes and to map how the research has developed.

On a personal level as a researcher I am beginning to find it difficult to focus on certain elements of the research; I have attended the same show for two years previously and usually the rest of the time in between during the summer has been spent socialising and not doing university work. I realise that thinking reflexively I am now experiencing the car show differently as a result of my research. This is not an issue in itself but I need to think reflexively about how the research changes the way I read events that were previously a part of my leisure time activities.

### **Monday 30th June 2014**

I travelled back to Shrewsbury yesterday by train to oversee my car being recovered from my Dad's house where it has been stored since before I went to VW Days. Due to the nature of the problem with the air ride the car can not be driven and so it had to be recovered by Shelvey using his truck, one thing to note here again is that no cost has been mentioned or discussed in the whole time. I think this is due to the friendship between us and the fact that much of this operates on trust.

Later on today I received a text to say that the issue with the car was the worst possible scenario, meaning more cost than I had planned and more importantly I will be without a car for some time, and likely to miss the final few shows of the season. There are shows in August but I am on holiday and then at the RGS conference throughout that month. However on reflection I have decided to go to the show this weekend; Gti International- as its a major drag racing show for VW enthusiasts and is crucial to my research at this stage; both in terms of ethnography and identifying contacts for interviews. Furthermore this is also a big show for Club 9n/3 particularly as other admin's in the club are keen to show that the club caters for both 'go' and 'show' enthusiasts. As such I am going to get

a train to Stratford-Upon-Avon near Shakespeare County Raceway and I have arranged for a friend and co-founder of Club 9n/3 to pick me up from the station. This will definitely be an interesting experience in terms of a differing perspective; it will be the 2nd show (VW Days being the 1st) that I have attended this year without my car. This is quite difficult to do as walking around a show is usually taken over by getting inspiration from other cars and talking about modifications with friends; this is hard emotionally when I know I won't have the car back for some time. I will think reflexively about how my experience differs without the car and also whether others would still travel to a show without their car- i.e. what are the other motivations to attend?.

### **Saturday 5<sup>th</sup> July 2014**

Today was a very different experience in the run up to a show. Normally I would be spending this time cleaning the car and packing it with camping gear. I also realise now that the car is absent there is quite a lot of stress and worry which is attached to this pre-show period. I am normally worrying that I won't be able to find the location, will the car be clean enough/ will it need re-doing much when I get there, have I packed enough food etc. However in light of attending the show without the car I did not have such worries, this might be closer to the experience of the one day attendee noted above. Attending the show by train had two interesting causes; the first was that like with VW Days I attended the show without a car and as such had a slightly different perspective of proceedings, the second was that I felt it affected my identity as a modified car enthusiast.

Whilst shows are very much about socialising and the cars often do not seem as important, the absence of one here showed that they still play a crucial role in this experience, I think perhaps the obviousness of this fades over time. From my experience this summer with people who are at a show for the first time, including two this weekend (5<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup>), I have observed that the car is much more central to their experience of enthusiasm. However for those who have attended several shows and more importantly know some of the people they are attending with the car become important in presence alone. It is rare that I would go to a show and spend much time admiring my own car or talking with others about it however it is always still present.

I thought reflexively about how I felt once I got off the train and was picked up by a friend in his car. It felt weird to be a passenger going in to a car show which I could have otherwise driven to. I felt like a part of me was missing and this continued all weekend although it made no difference to how I was perceived. I was treated like any other enthusiast and again this made me think about how perhaps at different stages the car is of differing importance at the car show. Maybe it is more important for different perspectives- some people might attend a show on the Sunday to see the latest trends whereas others may go to camp with their friends and talk about their shared interest; cars. Do people attend many shows in a season or is it just one particular one!?

Drag racing- as a spectator aspect of the show it was not the primary attraction it was billed as, many people came and watched a few runs; faster cars bringing bigger crowds. Largely people spectating knew the driver and just came to see his/her time. However an informal discussion with Michael showed that the car-human hybrid is important within this practice. He ran a 13.04s quarter mile as his best time of the day and was genuinely angered at having not got in to the 12's. This shows the emotion which goes with enthusiasm and the desire for the finely tuned human and machine components. Michael spoke about how he felt like his reactions were quicker on one

particular run but it turned out to be a second slower than his personal best. We also discussed the difference between drag racing acceleration and fast road driving which often borders on the illegal.

### **Sunday 6<sup>th</sup> July 2014**

Today was the second show day, I noticed that despite this being a 'go' rather than 'show' natured event it had a large show n shine section as well as the main attraction; the drag strip.

The general 'car talk' discussions today and all weekend were generally around top speeds, car power and quarter mile times, very different to the discussions at other non-drag-racing shows.

A few informal discussions today with others about why my car wasn't present and also spoke to some friends who hadn't brought theirs for various reasons. The most common theme in this was that car shows are about more than just the cars- some even suggested that the cars were peripheral to meeting up with friends, meeting new people and it not really mattering about what you drive or if its present because "we're all united by a common interest" as one person said.

There was a reasonably large show n shine area for a 'go' oriented show (as in 'go' or 'show' cars). There were also noticeably more cars I and my friends had not seen before in other 'show n shines'. This is notable because cars; particularly those 'scene cars' are usually regulars at many shows and do not just attend one; sometimes out of enthusiasm and sometimes out of contracts with sponsors. We briefly discussed this and it was thought that many of the cars present were 'go' cars which were also show cars; with many of the cars in the show n shine also running on the drag strip. These cars are not scene at the more 'show' or display oriented events- are these different kinds of modified car enthusiasm? Is it helpful to categorise!? Be cautious

### **Sunday 24th August 2014**

Today I am washing the car for a show tomorrow on the bank holiday Monday. I am thinking reflexively about the way attending shows can sometimes manifest itself almost as an inconvenience. I landed back from Portugal on Friday and I am attending the RGS conference in London from Tuesday and yet I have decided to attend this show on the Monday. Why? Due to an earlier commitment to attend an INLT writing weekend following the RGS I am not able to attend Edition38 next weekend. This is perhaps the biggest show of the year in part because it is seen by many as marking the end of the show season, particularly for project cars this is seen as a final deadline to show off your work before the winter. The show I have agreed to attend is called the Big Meet and will be at Bruntingthorpe Proving Ground, I am going because I feel like the season is over for me otherwise, I will miss Edition and then it will be the winter off-season. This is a last chance this year to attend a large outdoor show (there are a few others indoors later in the year).

This show was explicitly advertised for German marques; VW-Audi group, BMW (inc Mini) and Mercedes, it was stated that all others would be turned away from the show n shine and would have to park in 'customer' parking. As is becoming fairly usual I had had to apply for the show n shine via email, with pictures of my car and a brief description of the modifications so that it could be vetted. This hints at the more exclusive aspect of the German modified car culture, I am interested to see how this plays out on the day.



As will have become clear by now, attending a show is not, in my experience, a case of jumping in the car on a given morning and driving to the event. Hours of preparation and planning go into cleaning the car so that it looks the best it can. Today is interesting in this regard, it is raining off and on and the weather forecast for the show is heavy rain all day. The social networking presence of the show is large, as unusually but I suspect not for long, this show was organised entirely using a facebook page (showing the use of such a platform for organising en masse). Many people commented to say they would not come because of the weather and others suggested that if you couldn't stand a rainy show you might have a quiet show season in the UK, which is more or less true in my experience. And yet as was evident on the day everyone had still put a lot of effort into cleaning the cars.

### **Monday 24th August 2014**

*(trailing more of a narrative writing approach after the RGS-IBG).*

I am up at 5.30am to drive over to Bruntingthorpe Proving Ground for the Big Meet, it is already starting to rain and it is hard to tell if the sky is grey with rain clouds or if it is still the darkness of night. As I drive to a nearby town to pick up my friend who will be accompanying me the sun rises and the sky is clearly grey. We meet another friend with his car at a nearby motorway services, briefly discuss who is leading the convoy of two cars- it's me because I have a satnav and neither of us have been before. We begin the drive, it is motorway all the way until a few miles before the showground, in this way the drive is reminiscent of my first show this year; All Types back in late May. However that journey was miles of motorway with a large convoy and beating sunshine, this convoy was decidedly more boring. Both our cars are low and slow, both are on air ride, this was nice though as it meant we could crawl along in the slow lane not holding up others like in longer convoys. The rain began as we reached the M6, by the time we stopped at Corley services it was a torrential downpour and not yet 8am. Both our cars had been cleaned extensively the day before, we decided that at least it looked nice to have rain beading of the layer of wax and polish on the cars. We pressed on. The rain was coming down in sheets and most of the rest of the motorway traffic now crawled as slow as we did, eventually the rain eased as we reached our destination, we thought maybe this would be the start of a sunny day after all. Arriving at the disused airfield at around quarter past 8 we drove straight into the show n shine area. Here I saw the first evidence of the exclusivity as a tastefully modified Vauxhall Corsa was turned away for the show area and had to drive back down one of the runways to the customer parking.

We parked up in the ankle height grass and got out to chat about a plan of action for the day, the rain had eased but the main topic was how long did we need to stay. This was interesting, should we stay until we had seen everything? would we still take photographs? If we left early would it seem rude to the organisers? This final point shows the strength of the social community, despite having paid we wanted to be in attendance in part to make it the best show for the organisers, particularly as many people had not turned up due to the weather forecast. We tracked down the obligatory coffee and bacon sandwich and began to walk around the steadily arriving cars, it was very wet both from the grass and the now re-emerging rain clouds. I noted that some people appeared to be drying their cars in between rain showers, this struck me as fighting a losing battle but shows the lengths to which people will go to have a clean looking car even for 5 minute intervals. Furthermore no-one was really stopping to take photographs suggesting that people didn't want their cars to look good for that reason. I reflected again on why I had cleaned my car. I want it to look the best it can, in part to attract attention and compliment but also just from a sort of respect point of view; you

wouldn't go to a posh restaurant in dirty shoes. These shows often take on a sort of en masse presence and that one dirty car can really detract from the overall impact. At this point, as happens often in this fieldwork I reflect on how strange this culture is.

It rained all day, everything got wet; cars, people, trade stalls, even our sandwiches. However the show n shine still seemed to attract and it had around 100 cars in it, showing its potential size in good weather. Whilst this is not a performance based show like Gti International was it does use a space which is surrounded by disused runways, as such many people took to racing or driving at high speed up and down these tarmac expanses. On the whole this was done far away from the show cars, however the noise of engines at full chat punctuated the sound of drizzle every so often all morning. In terms of the specific spaces of the show people took to using the runways for 'rolling shots' of cars and also parked up near the parked aeroplanes as this made for ome interesting backgrounds on photographs. Two of my friends parked under the wings of a Nimrod and another friend parked her Lupo under the belly of an aircraft carrier, I will try and find their photos and get permission to include them in this journal. We stayed until lunchtime, around 1pm we decided that all the cars that would arrive were there, we had seen everything and so it was time to leave. I discussed at length with the friend who accompanied me why someone would attend a show in the rain, he highlighted the fact that not attending because of the rain seemed to be quite a weak excuse and I pressed him as to why. He explained that we attend shows for much more than seeing or showing off cars, it's about camaraderie and a social gathering; a chance to have a laugh with friends brought together by a love of similar cars. He knew immediately that this was interesting for my research and said as much, explaining that this is what shows are really about, at least for those in our position, underlying the shiny cars and modifications is a passion for cars and a group of 'friends' with a shared interest. As such it doesn't matter how much it is raining, you will always have a laugh and a good time with your friends and it will be 'an experience'.

#### **Thursday 3rd September 2014**

Today I have found out via Facebook that a well-known Dutch VW garage suffered a large fire and a number of well-known show cars were lost. Several of the cars were regular attendees at Edition38 making the drive to England every year. This is interesting as the incident has had a wide impact across social media with many garages in the UK offering support through these times; showing the network which exists internationally across the modified car culture and brought together by Facebook and the internet. The support shows how the network is more than just an economic web and shows the social group that forms around a community of knowledge and appreciation of select material objects; modified VW cars. The comments which are in both Dutch and English show the international element. I think this is a nightmare for many car enthusiasts; the total loss of not just a car but years of hard work, experiences and financial and emotional investment. It is only in this time of crisis that the size and power of the online social networks of automotive enthusiast are uncovered explicitly.

#### **Friday 31st October 2014**

Having decided to attend the last show of the season I travelled back to Shrewsbury today to get my car, where it has been in the garage for paint. This is the first time I have seen the car for nearly two months. I am planning to bring the car back to Aberyswyth following this show. Whilst on the train i thought about the freedoms that the car brings, regardless of modified or otherwise the freedom of mobility which a car gives a person, compared to other modes of transport like a train is

considerable, particularly when the place is poorly served and relatively remote, as Aber is. I would like to interview several modifiers from around Aber particularly in terms of the distance driven to shows, as shows in Wales are rare, this may tie in with some of the pilgrimage work I have been doing but also problematise this by adding a national identity element.

The car is at my Dad's house, whilst it has been in for paint I was only remotely involved in this process. I dropped the car at a friend (Shelvey's) garage in mid September with the task to fix some rust and paint it as and when as I am not using the car daily in Aber. I was then notified that the car was finished by text and paid via Paypal. My Dad then collected the car and brought it back to his house. This has in particular made me think about the trust element in the use of garages within the culture. Here the trust that the work would be to a good standard was extended to looking after the car over a period of time. This made me think of a time, (written about above) when the car was at Shelvey's garage to have air suspension fitted. In that instance I did not pay the substantial fee when I picked up the car as Shelvey was not there and I needed the car for a show the next day, in that instance I paid him at the show. I think that this trust element may be a key part of the way that knowledge and modifying practice work and that certain elements of the community would cease to function properly without trust.

I have not had the car in Aber for a period of 6 weeks, I have remained active on online social networks such as Cub9n/3 on Facebook, I have been criticised by several members for not using the car on a daily basis. The daily driver mentality is something which is well known in the community, it essentially revolves around respect, if a car is daily driven and is show-worthy then drivers are often given more respect than cars which are show worthy but which are only for shows and where the owner has a different daily car or simply 'daily'. The idea of a 'trailer queen' is not new- find older reference to this!? One humorous illustration of this is a play on the Dogs Trust slogan, 'A Volkswagen is for life, not just the show season' (find this sticker!). There are cross cutting dynamics here too, for example when I had a static lowered car it was seen as more respectworthy to drive that daily as it would often catch on speedbumps and over obstacles. However once having air ride and thus being able to clear such obstacles the daily drive is much easier and to some this is seen as demanding less respect, as wimping out. There are obviously many who see this as the sensible option and particularly older enthusiasts who perhaps are not as bothered about scraping the road daily in order to garner respect.

It is partly for this reason that I have chosen to bring my car back to Aberystwyth following Sunday's (2nd Nov) show. In previous years I have left the car off the road in Shrewsbury over winter, to avoid the winter weather and salty roads, this has led to criticism by many enthusiast-friends along the lines of what I have explained above, that by not driving the modified car daily or regularly I am only a partial enthusiast. This is an annoying part of enthusiasm, as the consumption of the car plays such a big role so too does the formation of identity as a response to this. Another reason I have not chosen to bring the car to Aber before is that I have not got 'winter wheels'. Many VW enthusiasts with aftermarket alloy wheels will change these for steel or less valuable alloy winter wheels, this is because the salt put onto roads corrodes the finish on many alloy wheels. This year I plan to 'prep' the car for winter by giving it a thorough wash and wax as well as applying sealant to the wheels, although I have new wheels for next season and the current ones are unlikely to fetch much second hand at this stage.

### **Saturday 1<sup>st</sup> November 2014**

Tomorrow I will be attending Ultimate Stance, a show at Telford International Centre which is being hosted for the first time this year following the popularity of Ultimate Dubs in March and to address a broader car culture. I was unsure whether to attend this show but after missing the reputed season finale at Edition38, due to being at the RGS-IBG International Conference, I was excited to go along and have a final catch up in person with some friends and other enthusiasts before the winter.

Today took on the usual form for the day before a one day show, I spent hours washing the car although I did not go to as much effort to clean the interior or polish the bodywork too much as I was aware we would not be parked in the show itself although the cars would hopefully still get attention. It makes me think about how my Dad's neighbours must view the car, whenever they see me I am cleaning it. I wonder if this problematises the boy racer image, it shows the car is a dear possession of mine which I care about and want it look its best. This makes me think of the mentality of specialist insurers who say that if you are going to spend that much time consuming the car and spending time, money and emotional investment on it why would you then drive like an idiot and risk crashing such an important part of your life. This obviously does not apply to all cars, particularly does which are more driver's cars than show cars, the VAG scene unites these nicely, to some a Polo is a car to be modified extensively to achieve a certain authentic aesthetic style whereas to others the Polo GTi is a potential lightweight track-car to be driven hard regardless of how it looks.

I spent much of the evening conversing with people who I had arranged to meet the following morning, I used the Club 9n/3 Facebook page for this as well as briefly checking for roadworks on Google Maps streetview.

### **Sunday 2<sup>nd</sup> November 2014**

I have used the Club 9n/3 Facebook page to arrange to meet the others at 7am at the same pub where we met for the Ultimate Dubs convoy earlier in the year. This meeting point is located less than 5 minutes' drive from the show, but there is so much 'show traffic' about that as the cars I was meeting began to roll in and the on the roads around the air was thick with the sounds of modified cars it began to feel like this too was an extension of the show experience. This meeting time was also a bit like a meet in a lot of respects, people chatted about their latest modifications and what their plans were as well as why they were looking forward to the show. However many of these people including myself and nearly everyone else present, had only ever 'met' before on the Club's Facebook page and yet the social dynamic of the group seemed to pre-exist the physical meeting. Although there were obvious differences to a normal meet as people were not as relaxed around each other as they might have been.

We drove down to the show at 7.15am and into the venue carpark. The venue; Telford International Centre, has a large carpark of its own as well as an outside show area and the main attractions are inside the show halls. The outside show area was used at Ultimate Dubs for clubstands; club cars parked side by side in groups of 6. However for this event this area was used an extension of the show n shine displays inside. From my experiences at Ultimate Dubs earlier this year and previous years I knew that if we arrived early and parked in the venue carpark, whilst separate from the outdoor show area it is still close enough to guarantee a lot of footfall past the cars. We were not the only people to think like this and there were many informal clubstands in the venue carpark

which to most show attendees looked like organised clubstands except the show organiser did not know about them.

Once parked up we began to walk around the show, as a club made up of very geographically spread enthusiasts many of the people I came with also knew other groups who were there and so gradually the group split off and people went their separate ways to talk to friends or to see particular parts of the show. The group I stayed with was made up of three men, who are quite active members of the club online, one of these men; DMc said that it was his first show season and that he had not been to many VW shows before, the rest of us then pointed out particular trends to him. It was interesting to discuss some of the styles with a relative outsider who was clearly in the early stages of getting addicted to modified VW's. I have asked DMc if I could interview at some point before next show season and I hope his reflections will provide a slightly different perspective [Interview with DMc occurred on 3/3/15].

It is important here to explain that Ultimate Stance differs from Ultimate Dubs and other shows I have attended this year in that it is now solely aimed at VW enthusiasts, in fact it is instead aimed at consumers of a similar style of subtly modified cars which has grown hugely in popularity in recent years. Particularly in the United States where low and stanced cars of European and Japanese manufacture are very popular. In the UK Japanese car enthusiasts tend to attend different and specific shows such as Japfest at Santa Pod (!?). However the organisers of Ultimate Stance wanted to bring together enthusiasts united by their love of similar a similar style of cars regardless of manufacturers. All the people I spoke to at the show thought this was a really good idea as many do not feel limited to VAG cars but rather to whatever they think looks good. However the show did attract some critique beforehand by people who argued that VAG cars should only be displayed at manufacturer specific shows, there are varying degrees of this, some say VW Group cars should be on their own, others would widen the net to German car enthusiasts including Mercedes and BMW owners and then there's Ultimate Stance where everyone is welcome. The atmosphere at this show reminded me of the more fun and relaxed atmospheres at some of the larger meets I have been to over the years, these are much less stringent on who can attend and all cars are usually welcome. Whilst I can why there are arguments against Japanese cars at VAG shows it was quite refreshing and inspiring to see how other enthusiasts approach similar styles with products and cars we are not used to seeing modified.

In the evening I attended a meet run by local Telford car club; Defined Ridez. Their meet was titled Ultimate Sunday and they ran a similar event after Ultimate Dubs earlier in the year, the idea is that people staying in the area for the show or who are local can attend and experience a microcosm of the show but with the atmosphere of a meet. However the meet started at 7pm and most of the cars were local with the furthest coming from Wolverhampton and the Black Country. I asked a friend of mine and fellow VW enthusiast; HJS to attend with me [HJS interviewed 7/3/15], this took some persuading because meets of this nature and particularly linked to this club have been connected to antisocial behaviour and modified car styles which some VAG enthusiasts do not want to be associated with for fear of picking up the boy racer stereotype. It is worth noting that I looked into this in my Master's research and attended a meet hosted by Defined Ridez which on the whole was not antisocial, in fact I have never experienced anything negative at one of their meets.

The meet was held at a private pay and display car-park in Telford town centre which had the permission of the car park owner as they were operating the Pay and display machine and barrier on the exit. As I drove in HJS was surprised to see some friends of ours who again I would not normally expect to see at this sort of meet, at first they seemed a bit embarrassed and made excuses but we talked a bit about it and decided we're all car enthusiasts what difference does location or car type make really. We walked around as a group and discussed the cars and which shows we would attend next year. HJS and I are attending Worthersee with another friend BF who was not with us this evening, we mentioned this to our friends and it turns out they too are going for the same week in May. I told them about my research and we briefly discussed the way that Wörthersee has become a place that VAG enthusiasts just have to go to in recent years, I hope to conduct some interviews and brief discussions with them whilst we are in Austria next year.

#### **Monday 3<sup>rd</sup> November 2014**

I briefly spoke to one of the organisers of last night's Defined Ridez meet, he is friends with my friend SW [SW Interview 2/2/15] from Aberystwyth who runs a similar club here. The Defined Ridez organiser said that it had been nice to see my car, as I hadn't attended one of their meets since the summer of 2013 and that I was welcome to come down any time, they hold 'Sunday Service' meets every Sunday in Telford.

#### **Friday 7<sup>th</sup> November 2014**

Today I enquired about the possibility of the local modified car club in Aberystwyth holding a meet in the near future. This was motivated by me having my car here and wanting to show it off. The club, MidWales Modified is open to all marques and so is not VW based, it used to have a thriving internet forum, circa 2011 and occasional meets. My local club in Shrewsbury was much the same, however today both have essentially dead forums or Facebook pages and sparsely organised, poorly attended meets- is this a wider pattern? If so what is causing it? I was told by one of the MWM admins that if I wanted a meet to attend I should organise one and as such I have been made an admin on their Facebook page. For a little background I have been a 'member' of this group or associated with others in it for the last 4 years and so being made an admin was in part based on this prior experience. I hope that there will be some way to combine this power to arrange meets and my research about what meets are for and what they mean to enthusiasts. Although there are obvious questions of positionality here. I have made clear from the outset that I will only organise meets that are legal and which have the landowners and police permission, something which I know a lot about from my MA research. I also think this is very much possible and may open up and give access to important dialogues between enthusiasts and the police, I would like to aim for something of this nature as a form of output which gives back to the community which I am researching within.

#### **Saturday 8<sup>th</sup> November 2014**

Today I had the house to myself and so washed the car thoroughly. It was forecast to rain and so much of the day consisted of drying, re-washing and then waxing each panel of the car in between rain showers. It was not lost on me how close this comes to behaviours such as OCD, with this being a common joke within the culture with phrases like 'OCD-clean' being common place. Whilst the car was still fairly clean from last Sunday it is important to me that the car is not visibly dirty, most important is that the wheels are clean and shiny. Today I waxed the whole car to provide it with a barrier against environmental influences like acid rain and road salt, I needed to seal the wheels too but ran out of daylight. However once the car was waxed I continued to do the detailing such as

bumper gel on black trim and tyre shine, neither of which have a practical purpose for winter. Its almost as if the cleaning is addictive, also when cleaning the car takes several hours it seems a shame to leave some bits untouched. I often follow a clean by taking some photos of the car to share on forums or social networking sites. This part of the research is really making me think critically and reflexively about my own behaviour and in great part the way that this appears to my non-enthusiast friends. It is there curiosity and bewilderment which drives my research in a way and their questions help me to re-evaluate otherwise normalised behaviours and views.

#### **Sunday 9th November 2014**

Today I put sealant on the wheels and tyre shine on the tyres. This made me think about the strange authenticity we have when performing or presenting the modified car, to apply tyre shine is to make dirty tyres black and give a 'factory fresh' wet look shine, however to drive a car on a daily basis to *use* it, necessarily marks tyres. Its almost as if cleaning the car presents it in a snapshot where it is both used but also shows no signs of such use, such is the dichotomy of a commodified show artifact which by its very nature doubles as a regularly used mode of transport. Taken to the extreme some people, moreso with classic cars, have driving shoes which do not leave the car so as to avoid muddying the carpets. The use of the car is very important in terms of respect within the modified car community but if you presented your car at a show, dirty with the excuse that it was a daily driver this would be unlikely to win much praise. Modified car enthusiasts, at least in VAG circles are expected to use the car regularly but also keep it looking as the authentic clean car which somehow clashes with the authentic used car.

## Appendix II Field Diary 2015

### Thursday 12th March 2015

Today I drove to my parents' house in Shrewsbury, as it is easier to get from there to Ultimate Dubs on Sunday, I also plan to visit a friends' in Wolverhampton on Saturday where I will be conducting two interviews. I had teaching in the morning and so after that I left Aber and drove back to Shrewsbury, I planned on washing the car tomorrow and then I don't have to worry about mine too much when I go to Wolverhampton on Saturday. However I spoke to Danny and Lewis on Facebook this evening and they are keen to have a washing and detailing session on the Saturday as well as finish a few bits on their cars; a VW Polo 9n and a Golf MK2. Lewis knows that I would like to own a mk3 golf vr6 at some point and as his one has the vr6 engine swapped into it he is keen to persuade me even further by taking me out in it. A third friend LKN also arranges to meet us as she lives locally and is buying a set of rear lights from Lewis, we all know each other through Club9n/3 on Facebook although only myself, Sleevo and Lewis have met in person before. As such LKN asks if I will meet her and convoy to Sleevo's in Wolverhampton, I agree thinking that this way the whole weekend will be about cars and in a way the focus of the show has extended outward to include tomorrow, bringing us all together to socialise about a common interest.

### Friday 13th March 2015

Today I washed my car at my parent's house in Shrewsbury, as I plan to interview Danny and Lewis and now possibly LKN too it will be better if I don't have to spend time joining in cleaning mine when I meet them in Wolverhampton tomorrow, I have just left a few small jobs like waxing the car. For the last show DubFreeze, it seemed like a shock to the system how long it takes to get the car clean but now staggering it over two days seemed to make a lot more sense and I began to enjoy cleaning the car again. I reflected on the fact that finishing the car even when it wasn't that dirty to start with feels like an achievement. I find myself grinning when the car is shiny and clean and often can't resist taking a few pictures. Today I also realised that the vortex front splitter which I had fitted by a friends garage shortly before Dubfreeze had come unbonded, as a result it was hanging off the bumper and might drag on the road, as it was freshly painted I want to avoid this at all costs. I have found that the attentive encounters of fieldwork have changed my approach to modifying the car, previously I would have resigned to the fact that I probably couldn't fix the bumper but after hearing about peoples' sense of involvement in my interviews I was spurred on to participate myself. I found some bonding agent and set to work to re-attach the splitter, taping it up in place to allow it to set, after this I reflected on how I would have avoided this previously but I keep running into the 'built not bought' rhetoric in my field work and have started to question my authenticity as a modified car enthusiast as a result. This was just one small participation on my part, which was ultimately not that successful, but it made me feel involved with the process of fixing and maintaining the car and therefore I felt more involved with the car than I had previously. I lack mechanical skills however I began to realise, in part again from my interviews, that it is not impossible to learn the basics as an amateur enthusiast, in fact that's how many people learn. Whilst most of the time its better for me to take the car to someone else who has these skills and can provide receipts, in future when opportunities for repair and maintenance arise I will think first about tackling them myself.



This episode made me think back to when I first got my VW Polo, towards the end of 2008, at this time I tried a lot more to be involved with modifying it, even in relatively minor ways like fitting a stereo and wiring in a subwoofer in the boot. I began to reflect on why I might be less confident to do that now, there have been times when I've tried to fix things and ended up having to pay more to have them fixed. I think ultimately the peace of mind of having a qualified professional tackle the job outweighed the sense of involvement and money saving of doing stuff yourself for me. In this regard I realise I am trying to keep up some sort of balancing act, on the one hand to have a car which is modified to a high show-worthy standard and on the other one which I can be involved with where possible without my limited skills detracting from the standard of the modifications or repairs.

Once I had bonded the bumper I removed the tape and unfortunately it had not worked well enough to hold, so I replaced the tape however I was content at having attempted to participate in the process more. I put this motivation down to inspirations from attentive encounters with participants' stories and experiences and my own experiences in the field.

### **Saturday 14th March 2015**

Today I drove my car to Wolverhampton, as mentioned above I first had to drive and meet LKN to convoy on to Sleeve's house. As the show tomorrow is in Telford, travelling so close by meant that I saw a lot of modified VW's and Audi's on the first part of my journey. I saw a number of very low cars holding up traffic coming towards me as well as a number of other modified cars which I took to be going to the show such as a lowered new Nissan GTR and a very low five series BMW. Interestingly the majority of the cars I saw did not have front numberplates, as mentioned previously this is common as a style choice however legally it can result in 3 points on your driving license so it shows the dedication of some enthusiasts to the pursuit of style.

I met LKN and we drove the short journey to Sleeve's house on the outskirts of Wolverhampton. Although there were just two of us in this convoy I was aware that because both my car and hers are the same base model and are both quite low it made something of a spectacle for other road users who turned to look at us as we drove past. In terms of the experience of driving I realised it was quite nice to see a car moving in the same ways as mine, behind me, meaning that when I have to navigate around bumps in the road or potholes usually the cars in front and behind carry on as normal but with the car behind mirroring this I felt like a part of a collective experience of driving the road. As an aside I have noticed this before, almost like a snake like movement, when I've been in the middle of a convoy, the first car avoids a pot hole and in a Mexican wave type action as all the cars do and then this continues as I look in my rear view mirror. Again this adds to the collective experience of driving the modified car, something which on a daily basis can be quite a unique, personal thing and seem like strange behaviour to other road users.

Once at Sleeve's we were met with the sight of his Polo 9n on the driveway alongside Lewis' newly bought Mk2 Golf VR6, Sleeve explains that as the cul de sac is small we will have to re-arrange a few times to get each car on the drive. Sleeve reverses his off the drive and I air up [air ride to the highest setting] to enable me to get up the lip on his drive. Sleeve and LKN park in the turning section of the cul de sac opposite the drive, this is already feeling like a small car meet. I spoke to Lewis and Sleeve about doing the interviews and explained that I had brought the schedule and we could do it either away from the cars or around them. Sleeve's Dad arrived at one point in a modified Ford Focus RS and we all chatted about cars, in particular how low ours were and how my

air ride seemed a good idea to be able to get up on the drive easily. This made me think about how two of my three interviewees so far have cited their Dads or other family members as having inspired them to become car or VW enthusiasts. With regards to the interviewing Sleeveo and Lewis asked how others had done it and I said I had done 2 by Skype, they both agreed it would make more sense to focus on the cars today and discuss various things but complete the interviews after the show via Skype. This turned out to be for the best as shortly after when Lewis was moving his Golf mk2 off the drive he lost all drive having blown a CV boot. This was pretty serious and we had to push the car to one side of the road whilst Lewis called the RAC. He had driven the car from Hull to Wolverhampton having had a similar issued fixed several days before but only having owned the car a week, he had been really looking forward to showing it tomorrow as well as taking us out in it. As a result an hour long interview about car enthusiasm would have been insensitive and counterproductive for all.

We returned to the cars, I was using a rapid detailer spray to quickly apply some extra wax to my car, as I already cleaned it yesterday. Sleeveo was cleaning his car next to mine and LKN was parked next to Lewis' now immobile golf and he was helping her fit and wire the rear lights she had bought off him. Then the RAC arrived and the man joked about seeing four Volkswagens and wanting to turn around wondering if they all needed to be fixed, we reflected on the fact that beyond the reliability of the marque all our cars had developed little issues at some point. The RAC diagnosed the problem and explained that they were not supposed to recover lowered cars, there was some discussion about whether Lewis' car would make it onto the back of a recovery truck, it turned out he could sign a waiver and we set about unscrewing his front splitter to give some more ground clearance. We went back to washing the cars and talking about the tomorrows show, I noticed that a lot of the points made are based on either things seen on social networks, other similar shows in the past or this show last year. In this way we all had a similar frame of reference for discussions. Shortly after an RAC flatbed lorry arrived and we pushed the Golf up the road for it to be winched on. Interestingly Sleeveo's neighbour is also an RAC recovery man and has several modified BMW's, he came out to talk to the recovery driver and to suggest a way to fix the golf, we then got taling about his BMW's, one a 2.5 litre E30 in the garage in behind was particularly noteworthy. Another of his neighbours came round to say he had seen my car at Dubfreeze a few weeks ago and pointed out his VW T4 camper parked up the road. This helped to illustrate the wide range of car enthusiasts and the fact that in some way or another there are more people interested in cars around than people think. I was discussing a similar thing with a friends recently, whenever I am at a conference or speaking to a visiting academic and I explain my research they tell me stories about a family member or friend who had a certain car or Volkswagen. Often people do not show much interest in cars but I think that by their very nature in our everyday experience, everybody has something to say about them and many people have some level of interest in cars beyond a vehicle to get from A to B.

Once Lewis' Golf had been recovered we continued to finish cleaning the cars and Lewis and Sleeveo used a machine polisher to polish out some swirls in Sleeveo's paintwork. Whilst at Sleeveo's I got a message on Facebook from BR about the Club9n/3 stand I am arranging for Ultimate Dubs tomorrow, to say that his car is broken and he can't make it. I gave the space to Sleeveo as he is also an admin on the club, however later that evening BR contacted me to say his car was fixed and asked about having his space back. This element of managing a club before and at a show is quite stressful, we want to give a good image of a club which is helpful and supportive and which has a high standard of cars in it. But also I feel bad for not being able to offer BR a space to show off his

hard work, all the work had been done by himself on a very fast performance VW Polo 9n3 Gti, however I couldn't take it away from Sleeve either. I have been worrying about getting the clubstand organised in the morning and getting everyone to the venue, despite this as the evening has worn on the excitement for the first big show of the season has overtaken any stress and I struggle to sleep.

### **Sunday 15th March 2015**

I get up at 5.45am, knowing that I need to be in Telford, about a 30 minute drive away, by 7am at the latest. I give the car a last minute polish, make sure my splitter is taped up to the car and head to Telford. I need to get to the meeting point near the venue where the other 5 clubstand cars and many other club member's cars are and then lead them down to the venue. I would also need to give their passes so they could get into the clubstand area. When I get on the motorway the stress of organising the clubstand re-emerges but as modified VW's fly past me I am reminded that this is a car show and everyone is here to have a good time and enjoy themselves seeing cars and socialising with friends so what's the worst that can happen. Let me explain, I took the same route as I did last year, helped by the satnav, however I reached a roundabout which I normally go straight over to find that exit is now no-entry. I took the next one and joined a queue, it was being directed into the venue. So I drove in turned round and was going to head back up to the venue when I was stopped and told by the organisers that they were only letting traffic in due to the roadworks and congestion. Now I had to contact the clubstand people, and explain that they needed to make their own way to the venue where I would give them their passes as they got to the gate. This rearrangement went as planned and three of the cars were directed into the clubstand area, the other three including myself were directed into the main carpark for the venue. I had to find a steward and move some barriers but eventually we were all set up. In retrospect this element of most large shows always seems to have some hitch or another and never goes smoothly, I think this is in part due to the sheer scale of such events and often third party hired stewards who have to only allow certain cars into certain areas. Needless to say once the car was in position I was no longer bothered about finishing touches beyond removing my front numberplate and we headed inside as soon as possible.

We were able to get into the main show halls at 8.50am, the show opened properly to the public at 9am, this allowed me to get some clear photographs of the scale of the halls and uninterrupted shots of the cars. Some of these are included below. I also took some footage and will be experimenting with editing it into a video, I hope that I can utilise something like this in my thesis, particularly for my Wörthersee trip in May.

The show itself seemed to have a lot more variety than in previous years, it was generally agreed that this was a result of the same organisers now running the Ultimate Stance show in the autumn. This meant more BMW's and Mercedes than usual, whilst these makes are increasingly common at VW shows there seemed a marked increase here compared to last year. There was also a good mix of performance 'Go' cars and the 'show' cars. One interesting sight at UD is the carpeted room, a room in the venue usually used for conferences which is transformed by having the organiser's pick of the best cars in it. The juxtaposition of cars parked up on carpet is quite strange but adds to the luxury feel of this room and many people feel they have made it if they get accepted to Ultimate Dubs and placed in the 'carpeted room'.

One other thing which seemed to have increased this year is the prevalence of air ride suspension, this may be because I've just got it myself and I'm noticing it more. But my own purchase of it

marked a turn towards more and more second hand kits and a falling economic barrier which previously meant only a few cars at a show were on air. This year easily half if not more were on air ride, which two years ago would have been unheard of. I also reflect on the fact that this may mean there's more money and finance in the scene than there once was, with new air ride still costing several thousand pounds and many of the wheels on display costing the same there are still clear economic barriers to having a car on display.

There is a politics of display too here, for some shows where space is not an issue the 'show n shine' can be entered on the day by anybody whose paid to enter the show, however many indoor shows or those with limited space such as Ultimate Dubs and FiitedUK require an application and vetting process. You have to submit photos of your car and a list of modifications and an unseen panel of judges decides whether it can be displayed, this keeps a certain style of car prevalent, as is clear at Ultimate Dubs. This is interesting though because it shows a double vetting process, not only is the show n shine competition judged and winners chosen but the actual entry of the competition is judged as well. This means that some modified cars are not able to participate because they are deemed not good enough or not following certain styles; this is a bone of contention with shows where there is a clear lack of diversity in makes, models and styles of cars.

#### **Monday 30<sup>th</sup> March 2015**

This morning I took my car for its MOT at Strada Auto. I have decided that if it passes first time I will buy the necessary wheel adaptors for the OZ wheels I bought last summer and get them fitted. I am quite excited by the prospect but am reminded of the financial implications of car modifying, if the car does not pass its MOT than I may not be able to afford to have the new wheels fitted. This shows the balance between having a good working standard car on which to base a project.

This evening I heard that the car passed its MOT with no advisories, which was actually a bit of a surprise however I asked Strada Auto to order in the wheel adaptors and said I would get a lift out to them with the wheels shortly. Here I turned to Facebook and posted asking if anyone was free to take me the 40 mile round trip from Shrewsbury top Bridgnorth and back to drop off the wheels. I received several messages offering me lifts when people finished work or because it was their day off, this reminded me how the car community can pull together to help others out, two people said 'it can be difficult when you're trying to sort new wheels, I remember it was for me so I'll help you out'. I took the first offer up and tomorrow morning I will be taking the wheels to Strada Auto.

#### **Tuesday 31<sup>st</sup> March 2015**

This morning my friend LKN picked me up in her modified VW Polo and we loaded my new wheels into the back of it, noting how the extra weight had brought her back tyres very near to the wheel arch. She joked about the practicalities of using a lowered car as a workhorse. Upon arriving at the garage we unloaded the wheels and as usual there were several modified VWs parked in and around the workshop. Whilst I talked to Shelvey about fitting the wheels LKN looked around the other cars, we noticed that two of the wheels had slight dents but I was assured these could be rectified. After discussing the wheels Shelvey asked a few questions about LKN's modified Polo and they discussed that. This reminded me that although we often don't know the people we meet through the car scene well, we are always united by the cars themselves be that as talking points or as inspiration or something else. It is in some ways like its own language, I realised we were all talking about parts

and wheel specifications in a way I know sounds alien to non-car people as I am often reminded by my friends!

#### **Thursday 2<sup>nd</sup> April 2015**

Today I spoke to Shelvey and he has not been able to find the manufacturer of part I asked for so asks me if I want to order a different one and have it delivered to his garage. I do this but because of the double bank holiday it will not arrive until next Tuesday, Shelvey offers to bring my car back until then but as I am staying with my parents over the Easter break it is not an issue.

#### **Thursday 9<sup>th</sup> April 2015**

I have arranged to pick the car up from Strada Auto today, I am very excited and nervous, it has been two weeks since I last had the car and I can't wait to see what it looks like on the new wheels. When I arrive to pick it up, its parked outside the unit and I do a double take, it looks so different to on the previous wheels and it looks so good. I am really happy as I bought these wheels over a year ago and I have been unsure whether the look will work, I spend the afternoon taking pictures of the car and driving around playing with the air ride and showing off my new wheels. I realise here that the act of performing the modified car or showing off doesn't always require an audience, the happiness and excitement I felt as embodied emotion when driving around with my new wheels and 'showing them off' had little to do with people actually seeing them but rather stemmed from my own enjoyment at driving a car which I felt looked so good and which I had been working towards for some time. This suggests to me a more personal or embodied element to the showing off of driving, this could be seen with racing or other particular forms of driving where a key motivator is the experience and embodied intensities of the driver; perhaps adrenaline. A racing driver could perform the same high speed manoeuvres as a modified VW driver on the road, with the legality to one side, one would be seen as showing off and the other in part pursuing embodied experience. However the modified car driver is not necessarily showing off but chasing and embodying the same emotions as any other fast driver.

#### **Sunday 12<sup>th</sup> April 2015**

This evening was the meet in Aberystwyth I had helped to arrange with other members of the MidWales Modified club, in particular SW who I interviewed a few months ago. I was somewhat nervous about the event because whilst we had warned everyone going via social networking that any illegal or dangerous behaviour would be reported, as it spoils it for all, that you can't stop people from doing so ultimately. As meets generally and in this case do not have permission they can easily be shut down by the police, in my experience if everyone is well behaved the police will not do anything except make their presence known, which is beneficial to all. However quite rightly if dangerous driving behaviours occur then the police must act and often do. Therefore it is in no-ones interest to behave in an antisocial matter, it makes it very difficult to host future events at the same site. I was present at the meet until 10pm and during that time several 'obvious' unmarked police cars were present but inactive however I learned that afterwards at about half past ten several marked vehicles arrived and blocked the car parks entrance and exit so as to run vehicle checks on every car present. This was unfortunate for a number of reasons for the local car community, firstly the people who were showing off and doing handbrake turns or revving their cars had ultimately ruined the experience for all. Secondly the police by utilising more draconian powers damaged the generally good relationship between car enthusiasts and the police. Many people were not involved

but as I was told afterwards in well versed parlance for modified car enthusiasts, “we are all tarred with the same brush” (see Lumsden, 2013 for the exact same quote).

The meet itself was set to start at around 8pm but I suspected that as some people were making long trips they would be present before that time, the interesting thing about meet spaces is that they work best in spaces which are not catering to their intended use and so a meet in the carpark of a shop that is still open never ends well because of the obvious conflict of spatial interests. I met up with two other modified VW owners near my house and drove in with them, when we got ear to the carpark it was evidently quite full already with maybe forty cars already parked up, I recognised a few that belong to friends in Aber and from Camarthen. The meet attracted around eighty cars in total from North Wales and Dyfed and Ceredigion, these distinctions are marked by the names of the regional clubs which attended (e.g. Dyfed Dub Club). There were large groups of people chatting and admiring the cars, people were taking photographs in the last of the day’s light and in many ways it seemed to me more like a small show. Cars continued to roll into the carpark over the next hour and whilst some people did drive fast up and down the emptier parts of the carpark there was very little antisocial behaviour. Several unmarked police cars sat at the far end of the carpark observing, a point which was noted on the MidWales Modified Facebook page, the club who arranged the meet, this helped us literally to police any antisocial behaviour.

Some drivers began to rev their vehicles very loudly, in part we had planned for this by selecting a carpark which has no residential properties in the vicinity, however most of the people I spoke to agreed that it was nonsensical showing off. Myself and a few others began to reflect on the showing off element, I stated that it was strange how one driver went to a quiet end of the carpark some 200 yards from the nearest cars and did handbrake turns, he was alone in the car and no-one was watching. I asked why people performed like this to no audience, one man replied that it’s like any group there are always dickheads who show off, they presume that their skills or actions will be applauded when often they are not. I reflected that with other groups this was perhaps less noted because they were not in charge of a deadly weapon, messing around in cars is ultimately more dangerous. However thinking about this further, after I returned home, I began to draw comparisons with my recent work on the embodied performances and practices of driving the modified car. For the driver performing the handbrake turns it may have been a personal experience, a way of feeling the car and an exciting way of producing adrenaline. This might explain why such actions are enacted when nobody is watching, perhaps not always meant to be spectacles or acts of performance but rather personal experiences. There is something here which I am struggling to understand currently but to draw a comparison with other embodied practices, recent work on jogging has shown that runners run for their own embodied experience, I think that drivers sometimes drive in a way that boosts their own embodied experience, however the metal cage in which they sit as they do so can transform their personal actions into a spectacle for those watching, whether they be an intended audience or not. Another example comes from my interviews, participants say that it is exciting or intriguing to them when they see a modified car drive past, yet the driver does not know this. The driver is personally connected to the car and experiencing it and the road at an embodied level without necessarily thinking about how he/she or the car is being projected into the vision and minds of others. This is an interesting point because it suggests some way of connecting the emotional geographies reading of the car as an involved humanised (Katz, 1999) cyborg (Lupton, 1999) with the more affective non-representational effects of seeing the

modified car drive past as an affective spectacle, something which Ben Chappell (2013) refers to with lowrider cars.

During an informal conversation with one enthusiast who had driven for almost two hours to get to the event he stated that in cases like this it was the drive there or the journey which was a big part of the event. To him the journey in a convoy with his mates was as much an enthusiast event as the meet itself, 'that's half the fun' he said. Later when I was talking about going to Wörthersee Treffen next month several of the others including the enthusiast quoted stated that that would be a lot of fun because of the length of the journey and going with friends would be like a road trip, we then talked about similar convoys that they had been on. One enthusiast suggested that the feeling of being a part of something bigger or a collective group was one attraction of driving in convoy and I admitted that when I had driven into the meet with the two other modified VWs in my party it had felt like we were a part of something bigger.

#### **Thursday 30<sup>th</sup> April 2015**

Tomorrow I will be travelling to Wörthersee, whilst this is Europe's premier and largest VAG show I am not spending the day preparing and cleaning my car as usual on a day before an event. The fact that I am travelling to Austria as a passenger in a friends car means that at this stage it feels more like the night before going on holiday, as it essentially is, and not the lead up to a large car event. Reflecting on how I felt before going to VW Days in France last year, much of my expectation of the journey and experience of attending a show abroad was based on this experience. That had felt like a holiday but with the bonus of seeing modified cars from a range of European countries, thinking about it with the car show removed the experience and expectations were similar to that of foreign holidays I have taken in the past. I have packed two cameras, one of which records video as I hope to put together a video to document the trip both for my research and to share with the online community. Unlike France we are not leaving in the middle of the night, although I still have difficulty sleeping with a mixture of excitement with anticipation and nervousness about a completely new experience.

#### **Friday 1<sup>st</sup> May 2015**

HJS picks me up in Shrewsbury before picking up our other friend BFr who lives nearby. Much of the car journey to Dover is spent engaging in 'car talk', much of this based on what we expect to see and what we would like to see. This is made easier by the constant mentions of the event on social networking sites with images and videos of some of the cars there already circulating, we all have one or two cars we would like to see in the flesh, mine being the Rotiform Audi R8.

During the drive we discussed the differences between going in our own modified VW's and the Daimler, and also the fact that only one of us would be driving. We kept coming back to the idea that in order to experience Wörthersee properly you have to drive there in a modified VW or Audi. It will be interesting to see how true this is when we get there. There is something of the experience of a Wörthersee trip which is the journey itself. When we got to Dover we started to notice early signs of 'show traffic' which reminded me very much of the previous years' trip to France for VW Days. I thought this might continue once in France but it did not, I guess if you want to get to the continent you have only a few options and so they're like pinch points. We saw a few modified cars in Calais but then no more show traffic.

Much of the drive in France was fairly uneventful and I began to think about how the driver, HJS, had become cyborg-like, even after having to adapt to driving on the right, this cyborg only disconnected when we approached roundabouts, which threw into sharp relief how alien it was for us to be driving on the other side of the road. The only stops we made were for fuel and food, we reflected several times in informal discussions on how we hadn't chosen the best car in terms of the former. At one petrol station in France we inadvertently parked behind a classic 1980s Mercedes from the Netherlands and the two cars together drew a bit of attention, this reminded us that our car, whilst not the modified VWs we are used to, was still capable of drawing attention to itself.

The journey itself had a road trip feel to it, whilst I wouldn't describe it as feeling like an intense pilgrimage all of the time it was more of an enthusiast driving holiday. Here I was in a car with my friends, able to engage in 'car talk' for hours on end, we were just three friends having a good time and seeing new places. We also reflected on how much more interesting a journey like this is if you're a car person. We talked about the various models of campervan after passing an LHD T25 model, we talked about classic cars after being parked at the pump in front of a 1980s stack-light Mercedes (see picture). Our mobile surroundings, the driving spaces we passed through, were like mobile motivations to talk and discuss cars, there are very few car enthusiasts who don't want to talk about cars, regardless of their particular niche area of interest. We began to note how you always see interesting cars at service stations, things that are a bit different, cars which if you saw a show would be perhaps not that spectacular but to see them here 'in the wild' (a phrase I later heard repeated with the same meaning by Delyser in Sept 2015) made the experience more special. I thought to myself how we're not that different to birdwatchers really, seeing interesting cars in their natural habitat seemed to excite and interest all of us.

In order to make the most of the show HJS planned to drive the journey in one go, this would take around 18 hours. We had read stories in the cultural media of people doing this and generally advising against it although also talking of the sense of achievement and wonder when you arrive at the lake. Another group of our friends were doing the journey too but had left the day before, they too had planned to do it in one hit, we kept in touch with them but they took an intended (so they claimed) detour through Luxembourg and so there was no chance of our paths crossing. As night fell we realised the headlight deflectors were positioned wrong and so as it got dark and the rain grew harder HJS had to remember which side of the road to be on and to not turn his main beams on. This got very stressful for all involved and we were all tired. We were approaching Strasbourg and decided it would be best to stay in France tonight and I was confident I had the French language skills to sort it. BF booked us into a Formula One hotel on his phone and we eventually found our way to it. As we parked up in the carpark we got the first sign of things to come, most of the cars were French built Peugeots and Citroens, we had a Daimler which took up two spaces. The hotel was the cheapest we could find as we hadn't planned a stop and wanted to get on the road early the next day. We relied on my French to confirm our booking and I joked that once we were in Germany & Austria it was over to Harrison as he speaks some German.

In terms of fieldwork I reflected on the difficulty of recording notes in the field today, I took some short notes on my mobile phone with the plan to elaborate these on my tablet when we stopped for the evening and then continue in this fashion all week. In reality my short notes remained undeveloped until we had settled into the house in Velden on Sunday.



## **Saturday 2nd May 2015**

Today we embarked on the second leg of our journey from Strasbourg in France to Velden in Austria, via Germany. The journey was good, we discussed the relative luxury of being in such a car and how fun the road trip was, we also joked about how much cheaper a more efficient car would be. It became a running joke how often we would have to stop for fuel although the car did better than we thought. It also drew some attention at a few of the service stations, perhaps because it was English and we saw hardly any other UK cars but also because it was essentially a classic car. This was a similar sort of feeling to being in a modified car, to have people pointing and looking at it parked up, this would have been hard to achieve with many standard cars.

We also stopped at what became dubbed as the 'Most beautiful McDonalds in the world', located high in the Alps with mountains all around, their peaks obscured by snow and clouds and the carpark starting to show the signs of a car show nearby. In terms of the expanse of the show we were still around a hundred miles away (check this), however there were a lot of modified cars present. We didn't see any other English cars but we did see a German show car on a trailer, we also saw a Mercedes SLS AMG, which we later saw in Velden.

Once we had settled in we headed into town, we decided to walk as the Air BnB page described it as a 10 minute walk from town, we knew from the drive there that this was not true. As we walked down the hill into town we began to hear the echoing roars that could only be from VAG V6's, the noises bounced off the hills surrounding, every so often another roar or pop in the distance. BF said it was like heaven, we hadn't even seen that many cars yet but I could feel this was going to be pure unadulterated enthusiast experience for the next week. This only intensified as we walked through the town and all joked about 'could we move here?...I wish it was like this year round'.

Almost everyone we passed had a camera or was wearing clothes by brands to do with the car scene. The scale of the event just in the bits of town we saw was staggering. We settled on a bar near a T junction and ordered some beers. In the run up to this trip most of what I read suggested that people sit in bars facing the road and soak up the cars as they roll past. Everyone who was not into cars that I tell this to says it sounds very boring, luckily for me this is what happens and it is anything but. Everyone else in the outdoor bar is facing the road and talking about cars, so far we've seen no English people but I still feel a part of this wider modified car community. Everyone present knows what Wörthersee is about and the atmosphere is amazing. Later on we move to a restaurant again outdoors and sit watching an increasing number of cars drive past, I am also struck by the costs involved in some of these cars. The big money builds seem to be very popular over here although its well known that the best cars are shown here so it isn't a fair representation. We see several modified Audi R8s and a Mercedes C63 AMG, we also see two Nissan GTR's, all of these cars cost between £60-100k when standard. Several of these are probably worth over £100k, we see on Instagram that a Rotiform Audi R8 is on its way from Germany and that a number of Porsche's will be present, including a bagged Porsche Panamera, again a car which once modified will have cost the owner a small fortune. We also see a standard Ferrari but I'm not sure if that is here for the same event or not as we noticed that the area is very affluent and one of the houses we passed on the walk into town had a Rolls Royce on the drive.

After finishing our meal we follow the main thoroughfare through Velden, seeing modified cars parked on the pavements on both sides on pretty much every street we walk down. I took a few

photos of the cars we saw and again this was accepted behaviour as we saw many other people doing the same. We also found that perhaps the main part of the 'Lap Round Town'<sup>133</sup> was a narrow bottleneck of road passing in front of a large Casino with outdoor seating for around a hundred people. Opposite this Casino bar was another bar with a similar outdoor seating arrangement, this meant that road ran past an area where a lot of enthusiasts were sitting and drinking with their friends. This first evening we walked past the casino and noted how the flow of modified cars was constant, twenty or thirty cars would pass before we saw an unmodified one, reinforcing the sheer scale of the event. This meant that the seating was all arranged facing the road, which out of context would be very strange but for us it was like a bar designed for car enthusiasts, as several people noted.

On the walk back from town I saw a modified VW Polo from England, a car which I had seen many times at shows in the UK and who's owner I knew. Although it didn't really sink in until the following morning this was the beginning of my realisation about how this was not only a large scale event but one which brought together enthusiast communities from around Europe, creating a sort a new local; of enthusiasts.

At the house we were reminded of the scale as our elevated position meant we looked down on the valley with Lake Wörthersee in it, we could see snaking car lights all across the town. We also manage to locate the famous Shell garage by its Neon yellow signs and the mass of headlights we can see around it. The Shell garage is perhaps the most well-known site within the Wörthersee eventscape, it is a petrol station and a forecourt extending to car washes and a large carpark which has been the main meeting point for enthusiasts for several years. It is in Velden and located on a main drag, many people sit outside the petrol station in camp chairs and opposite and watch the cars parade past. The site itself is also a focal point because the many high performance cars around the lake go there to get fuel, this is perhaps how it became such a key site. From magazine articles, online images and videos all three of us recognise how the complete Wörthersee experience, if such a thing exists, must include a trip to the Shell garage. We realised once we were out there that even though it is famously known as 'That Shell garage' in car culture it is actually now an ENI branded petrol station, which shows the power of its legacy and made it difficult for us to find! However now being able to see it from our houses' balcony we used the streetlights on the road to work out a route, tomorrow we would go to that Shell garage, we were all very excited at the prospect.

### **Sunday 3rd May 2015**

Today we decided to drive into Velden, armed with camping chairs, water, food and cameras. We got about 5 minutes from the house before we realised we weren't the only people with this plan and we hit traffic which we stayed in across the town. John, who was driving made a joke that this was probably the only time it was exciting to be stuck in traffic. People in other cars were pulling up onto the pavement around popular areas in order to get out and take photos or set up chairs and watch the cars go past.

We head to the Shell Garage, now we know roughly where it is. I had read about this place when writing about Wörthersee before we came. This is perhaps, more than any other, the most well-

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<sup>133</sup> Lap Round Town or LRT is a phrase used in the UK to describe a popular route driven by modified car enthusiasts around a town, usually partly consisting of a high street and areas with parking.

known focal point at Wörthersee, with most videos showing it and most articles referencing it. When we arrived we noted that the area around the side of the petrol station was being used for parking, and looked like a mini show. It was around 11am but we couldn't get parked at the petrol station, the only spaces being for people to fill up. We drove a short distance and found a layby nearby which would mean we could sit and watch cars as they drove past from the petrol station.

The scale of the event is even bigger than I had thought, it was difficult to imagine that 150,000 people could be present in such a small area but the amount of modified cars I have seen today has made me not doubt this figure at all. Not only the amount of cars but the standard of their modification, in the UK maybe one in five cars in most shows are to this standard. Here every car seems to be the best example it could be, literally everywhere I look there are modified cars. I am trying to film and photograph as many as possible. Every time I lower my lens or turn off the camera then several more modified cars roar past.

I clearly need to address financial issues as seen several 100k cars here and many around the 40-50k bracket. Never seen so many RS4's, several people have commented on this. We discussed how in England they're fairly rare even at shows and therefore seeing one on the road is exciting however here every Audi A4 we see is either an S4 or the RS4. As such by the end of day two I am realising that even performance cars have to be of a high standard to stand out or garner attention at Wörthersee.

This evening we went to the Casino bar to meet up with a few other friends from England. I have begun to see the event as making the global enthusiast network local, in that enthusiasts who are a part of usually quite spread out community now sit side by side watching more enthusiasts drive past. Tonight I saw English, Italian, Austrian, French, German, Dutch, Swiss and Polish modified VW's drive past the casino and whilst looking around the cars parked in front of the casino I bumped into a friend; Scott, who I know through Club 9n in the UK. This further highlighted the idea of a locale created by the events of Wörthersee. Scott is from Fife in Scotland and the club he was with Border City VAG was made up of his friends from Carlisle, we chatted for a bit about the show and how mad the scale of it was. I asked about their journey and Scott explained they had taken the ferry from Newcastle to Amsterdam and then driven across from Holland- the networks which converge at Lake Wörthersee spread out across Europe.

### **Monday 4<sup>th</sup> May 2015**

Today marked the beginning of our week in Wörthersee and we all had one site/sight which we wanted to see, the Shell garage. Having worked the location out the night before we made our way across town and joined the traffic of modified cars and enthusiasts queueing to drive past or into the petrol station. Today we were still coming to terms with the scale, near the Shell station is a roundabout with 4 exits, as we approached this we could see brightly coloured modified VW's and other cars backed up along each of these exists, gridlock of modified cars. I had read many sources which said that if Wörthersee was the premier VW event in Europe then this petrol station was the place many people aimed for first. This was the endpoint of pilgrimages from all across continental Europe; the car in front of us was German but we saw French, Austrian and Belgian cars going the other way. As we drove past the Shell it was clear we weren't going to get parked anywhere near, the restaurant next door had a carpark but that was over-spilling into the street with people parking up and getting photographs. We drove further up the road and pulled into the local supermarket to

turn round, here we saw the effects of such an event on a small town, the carpark looked like the show fields at UK shows, every car modified to a high standard. However alongside these local people were trying to park and do their shopping. We turned round and drove back past Shell, finding a spot in a layby nearby next to a modified VW Golf from Germany. We set the camp chairs out in the layby and began to watch the cars that rolled past. It was really exciting to see a few cars I'd read about in magazines, including several from the UK. We also noted a number of clubs driving in convoy, evidenced by club stickers on their cars or windscreens. At the last minute we had added club stickers of our home club to the Daimler and we reflected on how cool the experience would be if we had convoyed over with more of the cars in the club. We also saw some of our friends from near Shrewsbury for the first time, we knew they'd made the trip at around the same time as us but having accidentally set their satnav to avoid tolls it had taken them a long time to cross Europe. Interestingly they had brought two BMW's but these were as accepted as the rest of the German made cars.

### **Tuesday 5<sup>th</sup> May 2015**

Today we had planned to go to the Pyramidenkogel, a hill near the lake with a observation tower which could be seen from all around. We had found this spot yesterday but had heard on social media (via Instagram) that there was going to a meet for UK enthusiasts at the tower's carpark on the Tuesday. The meet was being arranged by Edition 38 a group which hosts a large internet forum and its own very popular UK show at the end of August, which somewhat rarely for UK shows regularly attracts a European contingent. My mobile data was not working on my phone and the house we were renting had no wi-fi, as such at times I felt as if I was blind to events going on all around me and relied on HJS and Ben. I also reflected on the perhaps unintended effects of these events and event being advertised on Instagram or Facebook. These social networks were being used because of convenience and everyone who was present being able to gain access to them, but it also advertised and represented the experience and meets to the many thousands of VW enthusiasts at home and elsewhere. This meant that posts on Facebook were a strange mix of people arranging to meet in towns around the lake at certain times and other people stating how jealous they were of them. It showed at once the immediate local and global reach of social media being utilised simultaneously.

As we drove to the pyramid, a drive of around 20 minutes I filmed some of the traffic from the car window, upon my return I would tell people about how every car was modified and most suggested I was exaggerating however the footage shows otherwise. At several pinchpoints between popular enthusiast spaces we joined queues of up to 30 cars which if you were to see 'in the wild' in the UK would be quite an extraordinary experience for an enthusiast. Over the week it became clear that a lot was going on at different places that we didn't know about. Once at the meet there was a surprisingly low turnout of UK cars, out of the maybe a hundred cars present, about 20 were English and many that we had seen on social media or in the last few days were not there.

Several weeks after our return home I found out that a UK club with a large European following; Dub Fiction, had held a big invite only meet on one of the days. A lot of the best cars from the week were there as were representatives and CEO's of some of the aftermarket brands, this meet garnered a lot of press attention and seemed to represent the event in some ways afterwards- however were there at the time and oblivious, due to not knowing the right people and the often exclusive power of 'social' networking.

Despite the amount of cameras and go-pros and the digital mediatisation, meets and gatherings like this still seemed to be being shared by word of mouth or similar online but private spaces such as Facebook instant-messenger and Whatsapp groups. We missed another meet while we there because of this, our friends found it by mistake. We chatted about this by the pool on the Thursday, if you weren't already in these elite 'scene' groups at home, it was difficult to know about these gatherings. Even though all the enthusiasts were in this area for the same reason there was still actively distinct clubs and communities. Likewise the UK meet we went to on Tuesday at Pyramidenkogel would not have necessarily been picked up on by our German or Austrian counterparts and as such they would have missed some of the cars. The invite only meets were a bone of contention to all though as some were as small as ten cars and meant that if you didn't already know the right people you couldn't gain access which was a bit annoying after travelling 1700km to be here.

The roads up to the pyramidenkogel are twisty alpine roads with good road surfaces, clearly this led to a fair amount of spirited driving, although the fear of a ticket and our sluggish automatic car put paid to any participation on our part. We could hear exhausts and screeching tyres occasionally piercing the silence as we made our way up through the hills. One popular activity as Wörthersee and other larger shows across the world is to arrange camping chairs at the road side and spend the day observing the rolling spectacle, turning unlikely and unofficial spaces into locations and landscapes of enthusiasm. We saw many of these groups in almost every layby and pull-in on the way to Pyramidenkogel with people watching the cars and chatting with their friends, many people were taking photos and filming too. We decided to have a day doing this tomorrow, on the Wednesday. This decision was also based on the poor turnout of UK cars today, we could watch cars go up the hill and subsequently know if it would be worth driving to the carpark at the top.

Also in the afternoon we saw a Mk1 golf pulled over by the police and after observing lengthy discussions and the arrival of backup, the car was eventually picked up by another car towing a trailer. We later found out that due to certain modifications or antisocial behaviour (this bit was unclear as the driver was French and didn't speak much English or German) he had had his numberplates confiscated. At first this made no sense to us, but another English enthusiast who was present at the meet explained that the police can take your plates away effectively making your car illegal on their nation's roads, it is then left up to you to get the car to the border, we didn't find out what happened if you got caught again. However the driver of the mk1 had spare numerplates (not that uncommon as VW enthusiasts often do not run a front one), once the police had gone he replaced his plate and drove off. We had chance to sit at the top of the hill near the observation tower and chat about our trip so far, one of the things we spoke about was the logistical nightmare this event must produce for the police as many of the cars are not from their country. We did hear of many people getting tickets and these seemed to be generic 100 euro fines regardless of the action, although it was not lost on us that these were required to be paid in cash at the roadside and many people pulled over did not understand enough German to know what they were paying for. Our friends from Shifnal had both performed burnouts on a number of occasions over the week, one of which earned the driver one of these 100 euro fines. For the rest of the trip he carried one hundred euros in the glove compartment, as other people talked about doing the same for 'bellend tax'. This was interesting as it rendered the behaviours acceptable in many peoples' eyes, rather than paying a fine for antisocial behaviour it was seen as a tax for misbehaving on the road.

This was often a weird thing to discuss and for other enthusiasts to admit. We spend much of our time talking when talking to non-enthusiasts defending the culture as being distinct from the antisocial driving behaviours of so called 'boy racers'. And indeed for the UK drivers at least, their behaviours on Austrian roads would see them ostricised from the community at home, however here it is actively celebrated. I wonder to what extent this is true of the other nationalities present, although Austrians are doing it too. It was as if the unwritten rules about not revving engines or performing burnouts at home were suspended in this time and space. It is worth noting that the show is in its 35<sup>th</sup> year and since its roots as a GTi club meet it has been renowned for performance modified cars driving and fast and doing burnouts. It just strikes us as interesting that something almost all of us recognise as antisocial and as giving us a bad name is seemingly accepted here. The closest we came to such antics was misunderstanding where the autobahn finished and over the week we were there the police presence grew steadily to the point where HJS would not have risked messing around. By the time we left the police presence was working and we saw very little antisocial behaviour, the show was the following week and part of the reason everyone goes in the weeks before is that the town becomes unbearably busy with people and traffic and the partying culture which accompanies leads to trouble. I had tried to read up on this before going but struggled with my lack of German however the police had clearly stepped things up a gear this year.

### **Wednesday 6<sup>th</sup> May 2015**

Today we had planned to find some good spots to sit and hang out and watch the many cars drive past. It is worth noting that even the scale of this activity was much bigger than we anticipated, the popular sections of road, in particular around the Shell garage, the casino, the roads to the Pyramidenkogel and the Turbokurve were lined with camping chairs and parked cars. In some areas it looked like a festival or concert, with people all seated facing the road. We drove around a bit in the morning to see where the best spots might be, we picked a layby just down from the famous Shell petrol station [now an ENI]. We were the first car in this spot but within a few hours we had been joined by a few others doing the same, as well as in the layby opposite us. At first it felt quite strange and was difficult to relax, partly because were practically in the road and partly because anywhere else sitting and watching traffic would be bizarre. I did some filming and took photos of some of the cars as they slowed down to take the roundabout near us. I estimate that we were passed by about 200 cars in 2 hours, interestingly only one was English. This was a show car which I had seen at Ultimate Dubs in Telford only a month and a half earlier, this reminded me how strange this space is. Car which you would queue up and pay entry to see at home were driving around the streets, as an enthusiast it felt all-encompassing and at time overwhelming.

After a while we decided to pack the chairs into the Daimler and go for a walk up to the Shell garage, on our way we also noticed that the neighbouring retail park was full of modified cars, we took a detour as we needed water. As we came out we saw our friends from home parking their BMW's outside. We chatted for a bit and some people took photos of their cars, this was quite funny as they are nice modified cars but at home it would be quite rare for people to start photographing them outside a shop. We walked around the Shell station and again I took a number of photographs to show the scale, [after returning I found a video of drone footage from the show which gives the clearest representation of scale].

In the afternoon we drove back to the Pyramidenkogel and tried to find an empty layby on the curving roads to its summit in order to watch the flow of cars, the first four laybys were full already

and eventually we found an absent one on the outside of a turn. We set out our chairs and began to make some lunch on the bootlid of the Daimler. Here we watched all manner of modified VWs, Audis, Skodas, Seats, BMWs, Mercedes & Porsches make their way up the mountain. Some drove leisurely whilst over treated the off camber roads and S bends as a racetrack, we would hear the noise of exhausts echoing through the valley for minutes before a car would come racing by. I observed that cars would have to pass probably ten or more laybys full of enthusiasts, giving the car occupants something to see whilst they themselves formed a rolling performance for the layby occupants. We were joined for a bit by some French enthusiasts, apart from a sociable nod though we did not engage in conversation, however when a particularly loud car went past we both reacted with laughter and banter.

The show really only has one official site at Reifnitz yet the Pyramidenkogel, Tankstelle and the Shell garage among many other sites have been transformed by enthusiasts so that they make up a network of Wörthersee sites where enthusiasts can go to consume and perform modified VW cars. The roads and sites in between then become arteries of enthusiasm; flowing with almost constant traffic of modified cars.

That evening we went for food with our friends and then back to their hotel to use the pool. This was interesting in terms of scale and diversity of nationalities too as their hotel carpark was full of modified cars with numberplates from Germany and Belgium. Later on at the pool we realised that the only groups of people around the pool were there for the show and we had some interesting conversations with the Belgians about the cars we'd seen so far and in particular the number of UK cars present. I realised that our enthusiasm stretched across borders and enabled us to have a fruitful conversation with little knowledge of the other parties language, on reflection this had been going on all week, even in the shared grins or nods of appreciation as a particular car roared past, our enthusiasm afforded a common language of sorts.

#### **Thursday 7<sup>th</sup> May 2015**

Today we went to Reifnitz, the town on Lake Wörthersee where the show first began and where the actual show event is still held. Interestingly as the event has grown, the larger town of Velden has become more of a focal point for enthusiasts but Reifnitz is the location of the show and its most obvious marks on the landscape. For almost every year that the show has run, apart from 2006-2011 the VW Group have had an official presence in Reifnitz, in recent years this has meant a spectacular stage and entertainment area which includes the unveiling of new cars. These cars are usually those aimed at the enthusiast market such as the Golf R series or the GTi brand.

In terms of the amount of cars and enthusiasts as opposed to normal traffic and people going about their everyday business Reifnitz is as busy as any other town on the lake that we've been to. One thing which Reifnitz is famous for, although evident in Velden too but not to this extent, is parking on the pavement. Rather than the odd car half on the pavement like you might see in everyday life, here show cars are lined up parked fully on the pavement, this means that just driving around the town you are treated to a constant flow of show cars and the show experience. During our time there we never found out if this was actually legal or not but we did see some cars that had been arranged diagonally around the town squares in Velden get ticketed. Also the cars parked outside the casino were ticketed but as mentioned this has become seen as a necessary price for the exposure a car parked outside the casino gets online and in the magazines. In Reifnitz with much of

the pavement given over to cars the pedestrians are often forced into the road, coupled with the outside dining at most cafes this makes for a festival like atmosphere of cars and people sprawling through the town. In Velden we often saw the crowd egg on drivers to rev their cars or launch and briefly speed through the narrow streets but in Reifnitz all major junctions had police officers waving cars through and so antisocial driving was at a minimum. Conversely we saw a Ferrari driver who was probably not attending the show rev his engine for the crowd and consequently getting pulled over by the police. It seems again then that there are some rules which are unwritten, whilst antisocial and even illegal driving practices are not uncommon around the lake there are general understandings of where these can be performed. For example Turbokurve is a sweeping bend, as the name may suggest where drivers can push their cars to their limits often with squealing tyres and roaring exhausts and little regard for the Faaker See speed limits. However as the week went on this stretch of road was increasingly policed until little behaviour beyond revving engines was tolerated. It seems then that the authorities are willing to allow the fun element of the driving performance up to a point, although as the show gets busier this of course becomes more dangerous.

One of the other things we noticed in Reifnitz which we hadn't seen elsewhere was the stalls and tradestands set up along the towns roads in order to advertise and sell their wares, we even saw a Dodge pick-up emblazoned with a wheel company's logo and with 6 examples of its wheels laid out on a frame in the load bed, this truck was of course parked on the pavement. The trade stands and stalls selling things like Wörthersee stickers, tshirts and making show plates were the same sort of stalls you see at every car show, however these were conspicuous as they lined the walkways of a small town. It was clear here the extent to the flow of the eventscape beyond the relatively small show itself in Reifnitz, onto the streets of that town and then out across the towns around the lake.

In the evening we decided to track down one of the other key performance sites beyond the Turbokurve, known simply as Tankstelle, as noted this literally translates as Petrol Station and so we didn't have much to narrow it down. Instead we looked on social media; Facebook and Instagram to see where pictures and videos were being uploaded from and to try to work out where around the lake it was. Eventually we worked out the road it should be on, some way out of town, and as we rounded a bend we in the distance we could see hundreds of people lining both sides of the road, sitting in campchairs and standing. It was like a party although centred upon and divided by a stretch of road in front of the petrol station. As we drove through the crowd to find a layby to park in the crowd, people took photos of the car, filmed the surroundings or held up signs- the symbols of which showed that they wanted us to do a burnout or to rev the car. HJS our driver was still paranoid about the prospect of fines and so we did neither, however where the two lanes ran parallel to the petrol station forecourt there were lines of rubber all over the road. These markings made by previous cars performing burnouts showed just how popular this spot was, we parked some way away and noted the first police van as we walked back to the Tankstelle. We heard a lot of screeching tyres and as we neared the crowd we could see billowing white smoke coming from a car spinning its tyres (doing a burnout) in the road. Most of the cars just revved their engines or stopped, opening up a gap in the traffic and then launched to show their acceleration. The party atmosphere remained as people drank and music was played and it was much like any festival atmosphere at night except for the focal point was illegal driving behaviour. The police seemed to just keep an eye on proceedings but around midnight several more police vans arrived and began to block the road, a German enthusiast



explained to us that anyone messing around now would be ticketed. Everyone made their way back to their cars and the hundreds of cars filed back into the towns.

**[LATER ADDITION MAY 2017]** It is interesting to note here that this behaviour is commonplace in the reports and media about Wörthersee however in 2017 this behaviour moved into the heart of Velden with burnouts performed in front of the Shell garage. Footage showed that after a number of high performance BMW's and Mercedes performed burnouts which practically blanketed the petrol station in white smoke the police reacted in force. They shut roads in and out of most of Velden town centre, meaning that nobody could parade through the streets as on previous nights, this showed the unspoken but ultimate power of the police and authorities to shut down the Wörthersee behaviours if necessary. It is now not clear how the show will be policed in 2018 and whether these performances may have reached a peak.

### **Friday 8<sup>th</sup> May 2015**

Today we spent most of the morning at the Shell garage knowing that tomorrow is our last full day here. We wanted to see as many cars as possible and were amazed to still be seeing cars we had never seen before. Although Ben noted that we had seen plenty of remarkable cars only once, this highlighted both the scale of the event and the fact that many people come for a week but this spectacle runs for a month so there is a high turnover of cars and people.

In the afternoon we decided we should go and see something that wasn't car related, as we'd come all the way to Austria and suddenly we realised we'd be leaving in a day and all we'd seen were cars and petrol stations. Whilst this was of course the point we wanted to get out and explore, we had heard from some other UK friends who had taken a day to drive up into the Alps to take photos of their cars. We also heard of several groups who took the several hour drive south into Slovenia. However we didn't really have a car worthy of photographing and our cost of fuel put paid to a journey across borders, so we headed to a much smaller lake on the advice of our hostess. The lake Saissensee gave us a glimpse of perhaps the more usual tourists view of the Wörthersee valley, surprisingly the carpark and the lake itself was completely free of people. This further showed that whilst certain sites become very important to enthusiasts others can become completely ignored.

Ben and myself had spent much of the week trying to convince HJS to perform a burnout, he had after all decided to buy a 4 litre engine car for our trip so we felt he needed to do it justice. This in particular showed the role of banter and joking around within the social interactions of enthusiasm, we all trusted each other and it's understood not to push things too far. However eventually on the dirt carpark at the Saissensee HJS managed to get the back wheels spinning as we left the carpark, HJS still came in for ridicule from our other friends for not performing this burnout on the road with people to see. This episode also showed how many enthusiasts observe, recognise and are perhaps even afraid of the rules of the road, however the camaraderie, banter and social interactions among friends often lead to showing off which breaks these rules.

### **Saturday 9<sup>th</sup> May 2015**

Today we cleaned the apartment and packed for our return journey, we had a final walk into town

and observed that although we were leaving the event was still growing in size. We spent most of the afternoon chilling in the apartment, reflecting on our week in paradise, as we all agreed it had been. We planned to leave early on Sunday morning and so we didn't plan to get up to much in the evening. In some ways it felt like the week's excitement had caught up with us and somewhat guiltily due to our amazing surroundings we just hung out in the apartment going through photos and discussing the cars and driving we had seen. Later on in the afternoon we took a final walk down into Velden and had a look around, still seeing cars of high quality that we hadn't seen all week. This just reminded me of how fluid this event is, beyond the fixity of the official show weekend enthusiasts are coming and going all the time, making the experience a varied one for all who visit the lake this month. One thing is for sure we all promise that we will be back, although we also discuss how the budget we had been told to plan for of about 500 euros each was about right and for those who stayed in hotels with pools it was probably double that amount. With this in mind we all make an uncertain promise to return to Wörthersee but in a few years' time.

### **Sunday 10<sup>th</sup> May 2015**

We left Wörthersee at around 6am as we drove out of the town we saw the hotel car parks filled with modified VWs and similar cars and later in Germany we saw a number of modified cars heading in the opposite direction likely headed for Wörthersee. The journey back was spent discussing the show but also our own plans for our cars when we got back, this showed the way in which the experiences of the show had inspired us to modify our cars and to take them to more shows to replicate our experiences. I had just had my new wheels fitted before we came away and had received much banter about not driving the car to Austria, I couldn't wait to get back and take the car out and to go to some more shows. Ben was also inspired to continue with several of his project cars and HJS was mulling over whether to sell the Daimler as planned or to keep it and modify it.

We made good time on the way back stopping only for fuel and food and we reached Calais by early evening, we had a discussion about staying the night and driving the UK leg in the morning. But HJS, who was driving insisted he may as well drive the final leg now and we'd be home for midnight, which we were. Once we were back in the UK the discussion turned to what show we would do next, I said that I thought I would do All Types, as HJS and I had last year but none of us are sure as Wörthersee has been expensive. We also discuss how Wörthersee was a once in a life time experience, but one which we hope to repeat in a few years time. Also as we drove up through England and approached the Midlands we began to talk about how relatively small the continent was, Wörthersee seemed like this distant land but thanks to a relatively modern car and road system we had left Austria and returned to England on the same day. HJS had driven over a thousand miles in 18 hours straight.

### **\*\*\*General Wörthersee Notes**

Every other car we see is a modified VW or enthusiast owned car and all at night are. Town centre increasingly like a show with cars parked everywhere there is space. Cars also parade around town and past two petrol stations [One known as Shell but now an ENI and the other known simply as Tankstelle- German for Petrol Station] and Turbokurve [a well known section of road on a slight bend in Faak am See famed for videos of people launching and accelerating to show off their car's performance which is in some cases due to turbocharged induction hence the name Turbokurve]. Police presence is low but they are keeping an eye, we are told by 'veterans' that the closer it gets to the show the heavier the presence and police action against drivers.

The scale of the event is even bigger than I had thought, it was difficult to imagine that 150,000 people could be present in such a small area but the amount of modified cars I have seen today has made me not doubt this figure at all. Not only the amount of cars but the standard of their modification, in the UK maybe one in five cars in most shows are to this standard. Here every car seems to be the best example it could be, literally everywhere I look there are modified cars. I am trying to film and photograph as many as possible. Every time I lower my lens or turn off the camera then several more modified cars roar past.

I clearly need to address financial issues as seen several 100k cars here and many around the 40-50k bracket. Never seen so many RS4's, several people have commented on this. We discussed how in England they're fairly rare even at shows and therefore seeing one on the road is exciting however here every Audi A4 we see is either an S4 or the RS4. As such by the end of day two I am realising that even performance cars have to be of a high standard to stand out or garner attention at Wörthersee. We all comment on how many RS4s and S4's there are, we joke that probably half the RS population of Europe is here (overstatement but these are relatively rare cars).

### **Sunday 18th May 2015**

Having spent the week before last in Wörthersee I wasn't really planning to attend All Types and my friends who came on the trip had decided against it. However I ultimately decided to attend so that I could compare this year's notes on the show with last year's, rather than expecting major changes I did this to show the relative consistency of the VW scene. In the end a friend (LKN) was driving to the show anyway from near Shrewsbury and so I accompanied her, this meant I would be attending the show without my car. The other marked difference to last year was that I had not camped on the Saturday night.

Once we arrived at the show it was clear that it was busy, ahead of last year's show I had been told it could be quite quiet but had been growing in recent years. But it was definitely as big if not bigger this year than in 2014. There was a large watercooled presence but with more aircooled cars than would be at more widely attended watercooled shows such as Edition38 or Ultimate Dubs. There were also a lot of campervans and the show had clearly attracted a lot of families, as with Dubsmania in June which shares an organising group, All Types is billed as a family show.

We had noticed television cameras and crew around the site throughout the morning, All Types is held at Bodelwyddan Castle and so we thought maybe they were filming in the castle. However we began to overhear other people talking about the BBC3 programme 'Don't Tell the Bride' and it became clear as the afternoon went on that All Types was being used as a wedding venue on the programme. This led to a large crowd of show attendees lining the road down from the Castle as the bride and groom drove past in a modified Mk1 Golf Cabriolet, they then exchanged vows in front of the crowd. This meant that all the enthusiasts present at the show also became wedding guests in a way, I think this is a clear sign of the passion involved in the modified VW community. To situate an important life event at a car show and the way it was treated by the crowd highlights the altruistic and community nature of the VW community.

### **Saturday 30th May 2015**

For the last week I have been borrowing a newer VW Polo which is standard, in part so that I could make the journey to meet some family near Kirkby Stephen without having to stop to inflate the tyre on my own car. This gave me a chance to reflect on the differences between driving a standard car and a modified one, this is a question I ask in my interviews. Over all it was definitely a less stressful experience, the actual driving element was much more easy in terms of settling into the cyborg, sometimes driving a modified car I have to remain constantly alert, this is particularly true for those driving very low cars. However in the times that I did transcend the cyborg and become fully aware that I was driving the car, such as when pulling into a services, I missed some of the attention that my modified VW Polo brings. In terms of the actual embodied experience the ride was much more comfortable and in many ways felt a bit disconnected from the road, the drive felt safe but I felt like a lot of stimuli were removed from the mix in order to improve comfort and practicality. For example I could not feel bumps and changes in the road as well as in my own car with its firm suspension, as such cornering felt much more sedate whereas my lowered suspension makes this quite fun and can often feel like driving a go-kart or racing car.

I noted that in terms of positionality I was deliberately thinking about the differences in driving the two cars, also playing on my mind were two different conversations. One in an interview with SW in which he described a newer standard car as feeling disconnected with the road and one informal discussion with an enthusiast who had bought a standard car as a daily driver over her show car, stating that it was less stressful and took less effort to drive. I noted both things and whilst the stress free element was welcome I yearned to feel the road a bit more particularly once on the lake district's 'driving' roads. The modified car becomes almost connected to the road in the enjoyment that driving it gives, this relative disconnection removed some of that enjoyment for me. However this is not to say that another sportier standard car would have been the same, but in terms of embodied driving experience there are clear differences between different cars and different roads. Whilst the standard Polo was stress free on the motorway where my own modified car would have worried me, once on the country roads it felt a little lacking in terms of enthusiast experience.

### **Monday 1st June 2015**

Today I decided to take the polo to Shelvey to see if he can fix my leaking front wheel whilst I am back in Aber this week, I arrange to pick up the car later in the week but in time for Dubsmania on Saturday. I have been trying to arrange a camping spot for a few friends at this show as in previous years I have attended with Dubshire which Shelvey helped to found, however due to other commitments of many members there are only several people left to go to shows. I mention this to Shelvey and tell him that via Facebook I can get around ten people together if he can get us the spot that Dubshire had had in previous years, he agrees and texted me this evening to say it was sorted. This has made me reflect briefly on the sort of development over time of car clubs, Dubshire was once a thriving community manifest both on an active internet forum and at monthly meets at two local rural pubs. As I mentioned in my MA thesis there was a core of perhaps 10 regulars and then a changing group (depending on who was working when etc) of a similar number who would supplement numbers at each meet, making the forum the main place for everyone to get together at the same time. I think to some extent this has to do with age, many of these regular members are now in their mid twenties and thirties and have sold their modified cars for more practical cars, furthermore several that I have spoken to say that now they no longer want to use all their allotted holidays for weekend shows in the summer. Furthermore the forum is essentially a ghost town now,

the core group stay in touch via text and Facebook, with Shelvey's garage being a grounded focal point to some extent. Whilst there may be a number of specific reasons why the club came to and end I have noted that a number of other once prominent clubs have gone the same way. I spoke to HJS about this recently, we were discussing the difference between having almost no members of Dubshire from which to make a clubstand and my experience of running Club9n/3 where I am inundated with requests for the same thing.

HJS said he had noticed that geographical clubs, e.g. Dubshire being for those from Shropshire, had taken a hit from the specific make and model clubs, e.g. Club9n/3 for VW Polo 9n & 9n3 owners, it seems obvious in some respects that this is down to the internet. However I have been thinking about this critically even further and I think a similar pattern can be noted with forums, a forum ideally needs a large base of regularly active members otherwise it soon withers and dies, as such many forums are huge in terms of membership; with Stanceworks having thousands across the world. In this way Facebook, a social networking website which most people have access to is utilised as the main tool for chatting, swapping and sharing ideas and criticisms and for organising meets and show attendance in the non-virtual world. As such it is not just the internet, but Facebook amongst other sites which have led to more make and model clubs, with a much wider range of access and much bigger numbers of members, it can seem strange to some people to want to remain attached to geographical area clubs. For example, I help to arrange clubstands for Club9n/3, however I am choosing to attend Dubsmania at the weekend with Dubshire (or what's left of it), as such I won't be doing a Club9n/3 stand. When I explained this to some members they essentially asked why bother with a club where the only similarity beyond driving a VW is the county you're from. For me that's always how clubs have worked, perhaps this is gradually changing though.

#### **Thursday 6th June 2015**

Today I travelled back to Shrewsbury to pick up my car from Strada Auto, in the evening I begin some of the cleaning preparation and pre-wash the car. As this is the first camping show of the season i also spend time trying to find all my camping stuff and asking the others if they have a gazebo or sound system the club could use. One member who is from the original core group offered up a gazebo, sound system and fire pit, this was a relief as camping shows such as this often lack much night time entertainment and so they're what you make of them. Previously we had a club gazebo, sound system and generator, however these were owned by various members who have since gone their separate ways and all items proved hard to track down.

#### **Friday 7th May 2015**

Today I washed and prepped the car for Sunday, I'm still unsure if I'll enter the show n shine competition but I can enter easily on the day so I will decide then. However I spend several hours washing and waxing the car as it has become a sort of ritual for the day before a show.

#### **Saturday 6th May 2015**

The convoy meeting point was a service station not far from my Dad's house, the nice thing about Dubsmania is that it is only a 15 minute drive from this meeting point to the show at Weston Park, just across the border into Staffordshire. As noted earlier one of my front wheels keeps losing air and so once at the meeting point I have to inflate mine a bit, which leads to some joking about our cars and how they never seem to just work. Furthermore one person mentions that once the car is running fine there is this lingering suspicion that it can't be long before something else goes wrong,

this is something we all agree with. We all reflect on how silly some of the modifications are really, but that they do look good although it would be more stress free in a standard car, tying into my own thoughts over the last week. With a final check on Facebook messenger to see if anyone was else was supposed to meeting us at this time we decided to take the short drive to the venue in a convoy of 3 cars.

We arrived at the venue around ten minutes after the gates opened, so whilst we didn't see many other modified VW's we did have the experience of rolling into the show, along parkland roads with an extended convoy of show traffic. We told the people on the gate which club we were with and were told we should know the drill by now and that it was our usual pitch. I thought this was quite ironic as our reputation as a club preceded us even though much of the size that created that reputation is now gone. We set up the gazebo and gathered some wood for the fire pit before pitching our tents and having a few drinks waiting for the others to arrive in the evening.

### **Sunday 7th May 2015**

This morning I awoke to find that the show n shine area came right up to around 6 feet from our club camping spot so I decided I may as well join in, entry was free and I drove across and parked where I was directed to. As usual I told myself I would just leave the car and not get carried away cleaning it again but as I looked around everyone was busy polishing or cleaning theirs, mine was clearly covered in dust from being parked in a field over night. So I began to wipe the dust off, then I put tyre shine on the tyres and cleaned the wheels briefly, its easy to get carried away. Thinking about it I knew that the categories for prizes were too large to have a chance, such as 'best watercooled', 'best aircooled', 'best wheels', 'best stance' etc, however its more of a pride thing. I wouldn't feel right showing a dirty car, especially after the extra effort to get it here with the leaky wheel. On that note I speak to Shelvey this afternoon about the wheel and we end up discussing it with some other friends, ultimately we reflect its not surprising since this 'stupid hobby of ours' requires us to put form over function and run tyres too narrow for the wheels. On this point I decide to admit defeat and look into buying wider tyres for the front as a sure fire way to fix the leak, this is somethign I will need to get done before the Cumbria Vag show in two weeks time, as the drive North will be difficult if I have to keep stopping to inflate the tyre.

In terms of the show itself, Dubsmania is an interesting one as it brings together a VW show which welcomes both modified aircooled and watercooled cars as well as a Retromania show for modified and standard classic and retro cars. As such there is always plenty to see, it is also nice to mix the inspiration for my own car and future plans between the VW's and other more different cars that I wouldn't usually get to see. This also reminds me that we are all part of one much larger automotive community, regardless of what style or manufacturer cars are preferred, we can all come together to appreciate the workmanship and shared love of cars. Having said this I do notice that many people who go straight from the customer parking to the Retro area do not then go and look at the modified VW's in the show n shine. Furthermore some of the boundaries between aircooled and watercooled cultures are more clearly erected here with many aircooled owners putting their cars in the Retromania show rather than the VW show n shine which ends up filled with watercooled VW's. It is worth noting as I have several times before that the show n shine these days seems to be the main playground of the stanced and lowered watercooled VW's with aircooled shows having much more relaxed show n shine competitions, for example at Deva which I will be attending next week.

### **Thursday 11th June 2015**

Today I am having the car professionally detailed, it is booked in to have a two stage cut and polish with a DA (dual action) rotating polisher. It seems strange to pay someone else to detail my car, as the car is already clean. This process is just to alleviate any swirl marks or light scratches and to give the car a deep shine. It takes from 9.30-3.30 and I am surprised how much labour goes into the job but I am very pleased with the results, the cars paint looks almost factory fresh. I can't wait to show this off at the show at the weekend.

### **Friday 12th June 2015**

I spend the morning getting together my camping things and then drive to the showground for 1pm, this show is different to others as it is essentially the full weekend, there are only a few others that start on Fridays. It is a family oriented show to some extent and also focused at aircooled owners, many of whom are from a different generation, as such the show is time so that they can come straight from work on Friday night and enjoy an evening of entertainment safe in the knowledge they don't have to drive anywhere for at least 24 hours.

I drive from my Dad's house, across Shrewsbury to the showground, a journey which take about 5 minutes! Once I had arrived at the site I set up my tent and began to chat with friends about what was expected from the show, who else was coming and what to think about the weekend's somewhat wet weather forecast. Throughout the afternoon other groups of friends began to arrive and we walked around the site's camping areas to meet up with friends, both who I had seen last week at Mania and those who I see less often and some only at this show, once a year. In particular the club I am camping with is based in Shrewsbury but I only really see most of them at this show so its a nice chance to catch up and have fun.

### **Saturday 13th June 2015**

After a heavy night of partying and drinking with the group I was camping with I am awoken by the sound of rain hitting the tent. I check the forecast on my phone, it says rain all day. I have to put my car in the show n shine area so I get up and drive it down to the arena area, the showground is primarily for agricultural shows and we watch lots of very low cars struggle to navigate the dirt roads on site. I reflect on how I feel more laid back generally at this show as it's in my hometown, some of the stress about what happens if the car breaks somehow is alleviated. Once the car is parked up and I have filled in a show n shine form detailing my name, phone number and car details I begin to wander around the show field to talk to friends and admire the cars. It is raining constantly and though the ground and cars are very wet the turn out does not seem to be dampened, in part because today is the Daily Drivers show n shine, these cars have not necessarily been brought here especially to show off, as with some of the hotrods that will come tomorrow. We also joke about how the rain acts as a leveller of sorts, all the cars are clean and shiny to some extent but when they're wet they're all the same really. The water beads off most cars' wax and they take on a strange new beauty that they don't have in the dry, I always find pictures of my car in the wet more interesting because the beading water adds another level of aesthetic detail into the mix.

It rains off and on all day and we spend much of it huddled in a friends gazebo with two campers backed up to it for shelter. I am glad I brought my camp chair and we all reflect on how important a gazebo is. Later on I think about how different the show experience is for those who camp in the family/quiet camping area or those who will only attend the show tomorrow. For those entering cars

and only attending tomorrow it seems as if they will miss out on most of what a show 'is', the idea that the show is an event in its entirety and that this extends far beyond showing off and admiring cars. In terms of positionality I am biased in that I mostly attend shows with clubs or groups of friends I have met through clubs and social networking sites, for me the socialising and partying are important tenets of the show event, all of this is founded upon spending time with people who share a common interest. This is something which I have heard again and again recently, people talk about shows as being a sort of escapism from the daily grind or from groups where people are not 'car people', in this way the share common interest is important. In informal discussions people have mentioned to me about feeling that they are free to talk about and enjoy cars at shows in a way that they may have to restrain or ignore elsewhere in more common daily situations.

### **Sunday 14th June 2015**

Today is the main show day, as usual in the morning I moved my car down onto the show field for the show n shine, today's competition is for shows cars so there is little hope of winning but it feels strange to have my car at a show and not show it off, most of the people I am camping with agree and so we park together in the show arena. We then begin to clean the cars again, we all reflect on how silly this really is, we cleaned the cars before we came, yesterday morning and now again this morning. The site for Deva always gets very dusty over night, so I wipe off as much as I can and clean off the mud I have picked up driving into the show field. The roads are always muddy at Deva to some extent but then Shrewsbury Showground is primarily an agricultural showground. This makes me think about the venues for shows, they have to be large open spaces that also facilitate camping, this means that nine times out of ten they are fields. These can then be divided into literally just fields that are hired out, the grounds of National Trust etc homes (e.g. VWNW, Edition38, VW Festival, Dubsmania), agricultural or other showgrounds (e.g. Deva) and campsites (e.g. Polo Show, Cumbria VAG). The few exceptions are shows around specific events or locations such as drag strips (e.g. Santa Pod for Gti International) or race circuits (e.g. Goodwood for Player's Classic).

I have also begun to think about shows which are one day events, Deva is relatively extreme in that it covers 3 days with 2 nights camping however increasingly shows occur on one day and in my experience these therefore feel different.

### **Thursday 18th June 2015**

Today I travelled to Shelvey's Strada Auto garage to have two new tyres fitted. A friend of mine (LKN) was also having new tyres so we arranged to meet at the same time and have a catch up whilst the cars were being done. This shows the social aspect of the car culture, the cars are what unite us and even purely functional spaces such as garages (as opposed to shows or meets) can become social places. We discussed Deva as we had both attended it the weekend before, LKN was also asked about her interior trimming which she did herself and as she explained about this to one of the mechanics I realised that these practices are important links within the cultures. Somebody always knows somebody who can fix this or make that etc. especially in a time of social media, it is important to know what skills different people have as this adds thickness to the networks and helps to boost businesses my word of mouth.

Shelvey had heard off one of the guys who works with him that I was thinking of selling my car at the end of the shows season (late September) I have been thinking about this for a while, I want something newer and I will have less need for it next year without fieldwork to do. However he was



insistent that I should not sell it, because he and the other had worked so hard over the last 3 years to get it to where it is now. This reminded me of the built not bought debate and added a new layer to this issue, whilst it is my car and my vision, someone else realises this vision in terms of actual practice and labour, they have pride in their work and thus are proud to see my car look good. Shelvey explained that even if I get a good Golf mk3 VR6 (my intended next car) I may still have to spend a fair amount of money to get it to a solid, mechanically sound base with which to modify. However the polo is mechanically sound and low mileage and already has the more serious work completed, such as air ride suspension.

Following this he noted that I should buy a beetle as a next car, he and the other guys said they could see me in one because of my beard, an allusion to the amount of people with beards who drive aircooled VW's. There was plenty of food for thought today and now I am back to doubting whether I am ready to let my Polo go.

### **Saturday 20th June 2015**

CumbriaVAG, unlike most shows with a long drive we have arranged to meet relatively late on in the day, at lunchtime. The convoy which I am to join is made of people I know from Club9n/3 and those they introduced me to at Deva last week when I asked them to camp with me and my other friends from a club in Shrewsbury. This is how social groups in the car culture grow, one person from one club moves to another area or via the internet gets involved with another club and so on and so forth. The result is much larger groups of friends without a specific club to unite them but united by a friend or friend of friend etc. Due to our geographic spread (our friendships facilitated by Facebook) we had to join up with different people at different points in the journey. The first meeting point was for me to join those from Birmingham and Wolverhampton, as I was driving from Shrewsbury I would be getting on the M6 higher up so agreed to meet them at the first services I would come to; Poplar 2000, near Warrington. It was raining when I got there, checking the forecast I saw that it was now set to rain all weekend, I hoped someone had packed a gazebo! I met up with two cars at the services, one belonging to a good friend and fellow Club9n/3 admin; Sleeveo. He introduced me to his friend and we got on our way.

I have written about driving in convoy before but these feelings returned as the weather improved and we rolled along the slow lane as a 3 car convoy, I am reminded how much attention 3 lowered VW's bring as they cruise together, this was something which only increased. We met up with two more cars at Preston services, both members of Club 9n/3 although one now driving a Mk2 Golf VR6, we then set off for the final 40 minute run to Crooklands in Cumbria. Once back on the motorway we began to see show traffic, due to the fact that most lowered cars need to drive slowly to lessen the impact of bumps there were several other convoys in the slow lane. This meant at times we joined the tail end of around 5 other modified VW's making us a convoy of ten, this got us a lot of attention and it felt good to be a part of some bigger rolling collective, united by a shared love of modified VW's all heading to the same event for more or less the same reasons. We were somewhat concerned though as I had been told at Preston services about a group including some of our convoy who were pulled over several weeks ago as it is illegal to drive in convoy in the UK. Whilst this is usually a pretty hard thing for the police to prove the distinctive nature of modified cars makes it quite obvious. However as we were driving at a sensible speed and not bunching up or cutting lanes to race (as has been noted with modified car convoys in the past) we were not too worried about this.

The convoy feeling only increased when we left the motorway and got onto the A-roads of Cumbria, now every other car in front of us was a modified VW and many come towards us were, the road snaked around the field where we were headed so there was a sort of parading aspect and we too could see just how many cars were present, around 300. Unlike other shows the camping area was a bit of a free for all, rather than clubs given demarcated spaces as at Deva, Dubsmania and most other mainstream shows here it was a first come first served basis. The field was filled with a jumble of modified cars and tents, we threaded our way through the maze trying to spot familiar cars, eventually we got to our group only to find they were blocked in on all sides, after much debate we got all cars parked. At this point I remembered I had agreed to let three more cars, the owners of which I met two weeks ago at Mania, camp with us; this was going to get tight. However everything was sorted out and we got out and mingled, walking around the site I spoke to both old and new friends and made plans to meet up with everybody later on in the Music tent. It rains off and on all evening, but dries up later on and I dry off the car taking time to clean off the dirt as well as I can, I am aware people will take photos of cars in the camping area and I don't want mine to be dirty.

### **Sunday 21st June 2015**

After a night of partying I reflected on the strange design of two day car shows, whilst music tents or live music and late licensed bars tempt enthusiasts to party the night away everyone still has to drive home during the afternoon of the following day. Most people treat this dilemma sensibly as these cars are our pride and joy but at the same time the social event of the nightlife is an important aspect of the show as an event. On Sunday morning I get up early and as usual drive the car across the showground to the show n shine, where I give it another clean, again we all laugh about how stupid this seems from outside the culture, I cleaned the car last night and dried it, it rained over night and yet here I am again 12 hours later doing it all over again. Some people will continue to dry their car each time it rains but I resign myself to the fact that it was shiny at the beginning of the day, I have better things to do than clean it repeatedly.

I spent much of the rest of the day catching up with people I know from Facebook, both via the Club9n/3 page and elsewhere, as this show is much further North than I usually travel it was nice to meet a lot of Northern and Scottish friends in person that I haven't seen at other shows before. I also spent the day taking photos, I like to document shows both as a record of the cars which I liked and to add to my autoethnographic notes. I also have an interest in photography, I notice that this is quite common across the culture. I have many friends who take photography very seriously and have other studied it or have a related job, in many ways this gives a connection to car culture in a similar way to a mechanic in that the modified car seeps into your everyday working life and beyond. For me photographing cars at shows and then sharing the albums online is one way to be an active member of the modified car culture and to take an interest in the wider community beyond my own car.

We stay until the awards are announced, the standard of cars here is very high with many big money builds present as well as some different non-VAG cars, attracted by the 'Best Non-VAG' category, these include similarly styled Hondas and even a bagged Hillman Imp. The drive home is fairly uneventful except that as on the journey up here I get caught up with two other low cars driving in the slow lane. They are a BMW 1 series and a VW Passat CC, strangely I was parked next to the Passat in the show n shine, both are on airbag suspension but both are being driven very low, I

follow them until their pace falls to around 40mph, I have my suspension up higher than theirs so I feel safe at higher speeds, I overtake them both and notice that it looks like the BMW's front bumper is sitting on the floor, the car also has no front numberplate. As I drive on I think again about how these aesthetic choices i.e. no front numberplate (it was in the windscreen- illegal) and driving very low when you have a several thousand pound air ride system to combat just that shows how dedicated people are to the look of their cars. Air ride is often and sometimes rightly accused of meaning that cars are very low, 'aired out' at shows and then raised to almost factory height to drive, this is why I got air ride, I still drive at a low height but I can raise it if I need too, however increasingly it seems people use it to run even lower than coilover suspension, even when driving. Admittedly this is more often done on the motorway as beyond a certain height the front wheel is 'tucked' in the arch giving very little room to turn the wheels, again a potentially dangerous practice pursued with expensive cars and parts in the pursuit of looking and feeling good.

### **Thursday 16<sup>th</sup> July 2015**

BugJam was the first show I've been to where the event lasts for the full 3 days Fri-Sun, this is achieved by having early access for camping on the Thursday from 2pm. It is based at Santa pod raceway, where I attended GTi international last year, however I am told there is much more of a focus on the drag racing at BugJam with official stages of the VWDRRC held over the weekend of the show. I had also arranged to buy a set of winter wheels and tyres at this show off an enthusiast I knew through the Facebook page for Club9n/3, I was a bit anxious about this as I was told there were no cash points on site, so I would have to carry the cash with me.

BugJam is an aircooled show, as the name suggests it is aimed at Beetle owners, as such I attended with a club which HJS is a member of; Fun Loving Flat Fours (FLF4's). He invited me and said that whilst I hadn't been to any of their meets and don't drive an aircooled car that it would be ok; the more the merrier. The first meet point for the convoy was the Red Lion pub in Wellington, despite being relatively local I used the Satnav as I didn't want to be late and miss the convoy setting off.

I met up with HJS and BFr, who was also in a watercooled car; his Skoda CitiGo. This made me feel better as I was worried that my car would stick out a bit in terms of its style compared to classic campers and beetles. It's worth noting that all the campers on the convoy were the later T25 watercooled vans but which occupy a space in the aircooled scene due to the fact they are campers. This is confusing at times as the watercooled and aircooled labels are used to define different scenes but are not even always accurate.

I am introduced by HJS to one other member of the club who is already there in his T25 camper which has a Subaru engine fitted, a common conversion as these vans tend to be underpowered for their weight especially once converted into campers. It was joked that George would have to stay within the speed limit so that we could all keep up, at the time I thought this was humorous as I had never seen a camper move out of the slow lane before. We were waiting on White, a friend of HJS and George who had organised the club camping for this show, he was bringing the passes. In the mean time we engaged in car talk about campers as HJS was there in his T25 and BFr had previously owned one, I felt a bit left out and was ribbed for not having caught the camper bug yet and the fact I've never owned an older VW. There was also some discussion of the way that mine and BFr's cars differed from HJS's and George's- in particular the fact that they could sleep in their vans whereas once at the show me and BFr would have to sleep in our tents for 3 nights, this doesn't bother me as

multi day shows are always camping shows. Although this would be the first time I attended a show where nearly everybody in the club had a campervan. White arrived and handed out the passes and I found out that they had promised two to me and BFr although they did not have enough, I had a ticket for the full four days but would need a pass to get in, it was decided we could pass the passes back if the worst came to the worst.

We drove from the meet point down the M54, joining the M6 and then pulled off at Corley Services to meet Dan another member of the club who had lived in the Wellington area originally but had since moved away, he too had a T25 camper which I was told used to belong to another friend of mine from a different local club. I reflected on this later with Harrison and BFr, that as the scene is relatively tight knit and that especially with classic VW's there are only so many cars around, the same ones can get passed around. It's not rare at a show to be told that that Golf is so & so's old one, remember it used to be silver or that Beetle used to belong to such & such, remember he had those wheels etc. This is often a nostalgic recollection, in that the car used to look better than it does now 'that new owner ruined it with those wheels I think' etc.

We briefly chat with Dan at the services and then get back on the motorway for the final drive down to Santa Pod raceway. During the drive down I did feel a bit out of place as we were a convoy of 4 T25 campers and then me and BFr in our hatchbacks, several times George hung back and then passed us in the fast lane, it was pretty funny to see a campervan with the aerodynamics of a brick passing us at 70+. Later George explained he would have liked to go quicker but his van still had its standard gearbox and drive train and despite the conversion being ten years old he was worried about how well it handled the power.

As usual we all lost each other getting off the motorway, I knew BFr had been coming to BugJam for around ten years so I stayed following him, as Santa Pod is an old airfield in the middle of a rural area it has a number of access roads. Once we arrived and began to queue I remembered the pricing structure- although we had bought our tickets in advance we had to state whether we would be in a VW or not, with non-VW's paying £10 more for a ticket. BFr has a Skoda, however he had borrowed VW badges from his work and stuck them over the top temporarily. Once he reached the gate a combination of them not taking the rule seriously and the Skoda being new and rare enough for them to ask what it was meant he got in on the VW tariff. We met a number of other FLF4's members and were shown to our designated camping area. The vans formed an arc around one end and BFr and I parked at the other end, with room for all the tents in between. I had been told that BugJam is well known for good weather and it didn't disappoint, we put up our tents, arranged the camp chairs in a circle and began to drink.

Later on somebody suggested we go for a wonder to look at the autojumble stalls. When we reached the first stall I saw a set of wheels I had jokingly wanted for some time, they were TSW Venoms, wheels popular in the late 1990s and early 2000s when body styling was very different and over the top rather than less is more was the key. A friend of mine had played a part in the revival of key parts of that era with his VW Polo, in a time when subtlety is best he had won a lot of attention both good and mostly bad, I recognised the wheels as bigger versions of his. They were very badly kerbed and in a bad state but I stupidly said to the trader "If those wheels are 5x100 [PCD stud pattern] I'll buy them", somewhat unfortunately they were, furthermore the size and spec 17"x8j et30 was perfect for my Polo. By now I was being goaded by my new friends in the FLF4's, BFr and

Harrison were saying if I didn't buy them they would and older club members were saying how they remembered when those wheels were cool and that they were surprised I would even want them. The trader said he wanted £30 for the set, I looked at BFr and HJS. £7.50 a wheel, I could probably weigh them in for more I joked. The next thing I knew I had used some of the cash meant for the other wheels I was to pick up. Some of the FLF4's members helped me carry the wheels back to the camp, once I had stacked them in the car I realised I would not be getting another 4 wheels, tyres and my camping stuff in there. So I sent a grovelling Facebook message to the other seller explaining my impulse buy, surprisingly they took it well and said they looked forward to seeing them on.

We got around the rest of the stalls without anybody buying anything else, once back at the camping area I began to share my new purchase on social media via my phone. I jokingly told a friend he could have them for £50, he seemed ready to pay too, at which point I reflected on the interconnected ways this informal marketplace of car parts occurs. I wanted to keep the wheels but I could in fact have sold them to a profit hours after buying them, this is often true of car parts, especially more rare and unusual items. If you're in the right place at the right time you sometimes get lucky and there is a big enough network of enthusiasts online and by word of mouth that you can soon find an interested party.

#### **Friday 17<sup>th</sup> July 2015**

Today was the first proper day of the show and several more club members planned to arrive this evening, those that couldn't get the Thursday and Friday off work. One thing which struck me today was the sheer scale of Bugjam and the Santa Pod site, as we walked around the others pointed out the distant roadways which we had driven in on the previous day. Driving in round the sprawling roads around both sides of the drag strip it was difficult to get this sense of scale but the site, is huge. There is camping on both side of the strip, as well as a big show n shine area, paddocks for the professional VWDRRC (VW Drag Racing Championship) cars, theres even big top tents which will host music and comedy shows throughout the weekend. Many shows these days bill themselves as festivals but few really come as close as Bugjam does with its sheer size and range of things to do, it strikes me that you could spend a day not even looking at cars but surrounded by likeminded enthusiasts united by the cars all the same.

One of the reasons I've always thought it good to attend shows with mates or a club is that there often isn't that much to do beyond look at cars, most shows don't have a driving element and instead have a static show n shine area. Furthermore many can not afford evening entertainment or don't have the site or space for it, in these cases camping and partying with your friends and talking cars makes up for it. In this way the groups of friends and car clubs often make a show atmosphere what it is, with some events being legendary for their night life which has little to do with the organised entertainment or lack thereof, such as at Edition38. Whereas at Bugjam there is so much else to do, it feels more like being on holiday with my friends at a drag strip, its fair to say that this in part because Bugjam and Santa Pod raceway are well oiled machines, with Bugjam in particular being in its 29<sup>th</sup> year.

This adds an interesting element of historicity and personal narrative, many of the other members of the club which I've attended with were perhaps in their enthusiastic heyday in the 1990s and early 2000s when 'new wave' aircooled VW's were popular, this was the time when shows such as Bugjam and VW Action began to pick up speed and became huge youth festivals with big name

groups performing such as Prodigy in 1994. As such much of the conversation amongst the club was about previous years shows or the ways in which the scene and cars had changed over the years. This was interesting as for many of the members they structured their life narratives with marriages, births, birthdays structured around the year that such and such car was popular or the year a particular incident happened at bugjam. Not only did the shows regularity and the enthusiasm itself structure an enthusiasm timeline or narrative but within the context of the club and this group of friends it provided knowledge of signposts and a narrative which was clear in their everyday lives too. Although I've only been going to shows for a few years I too realise that when with car enthusiast friends I often refer to past life events or occasions by giving reference to a particular show experience or a car we all knew about. This also shows the all-encompassing nature of enthusiasm, which provides a way of understanding each other's past experiences which would be impossible to understand for those not in the culture.

### **Saturday 18<sup>th</sup> July 2015**

Today was almost an identical experience to Friday with time spent watching the drag racing, both professional VWDRC cars and run what ya bring for everyone else. We spend the majority of the day on the grass bank next to the strip, however later on we wandered around the show n shine which has much less emphasis here compared to being the main focus at watercooled shows like Ultimate Dubs or FittedUK. We attend a live comedy performance and watch some bands in the evening before moving onto the big top tents where dance music is being played, here the others reminisce about the earlier Bugjams in the 1990s and the way in which the youthful 'nu wave' VW scene had gone hand in hand with rave culture at that time.

### **Sunday 19<sup>th</sup> July 2015**

We left around lunchtime, by which time I was tired but had had an action packed and very varied weekend, however unlike other shows there was still plenty we hadn't seen by the time we left. BugJam was not like any other show I had been to so far, in part due to the company, the cars and the sheer scale of entertainment. Although this was my first trip to Bugjam I will definitely come back next year, I really enjoyed the combination of things to do and see, sometimes as shows based around a show n shine, once you've seen all the cars there isn't a lot else to do. At Bugjam you have show n shine, music, comedy tents and other festival like attractions as well the obvious fact that it's a drag racing strip so there is the spectacle of drag racing too- both run what ya bring and the VWDRC races. Also as mentioned this is the first time in probably over a year that I've attended a show with an organised club, rather than a group of friends, this has made for a good experience, particularly because this is an aircooled VW show and club and I don't know much about that scene. On the Sunday George's driveshaft failed on the way home reminding me of the fragility of our modified cars and the way that they seem to break down more than unmodified cars. However in light of the weekend just passed it seems like a fair risk to take to enjoy the sights, sounds and experience of modified car enthusiasm.

### **Sunday 26<sup>th</sup> July 2015**

Today I completed what was at the time (and later proved to be) the longest journey I completed in the Polo when it had air ride suspension. I was feeling confident with how the car was behaving, there were no issues with the air ride. I was pleased with how the car looked as a whole and I had sorted my recent issue of leaking front tyres by replacing them with much less stretched ones. I now felt that the car was at it's most practical whilst still being able to look the part when aired out and

with quite aggressively stretched tyres at the rear. It's worth noting that stretched tyres holding air is not usually an issue but that the tyres I had run on the front were a set that had already been on my last set of wheels for over a year, whilst low mileage had kept the tread legal, I wondered if the tyres had been weakened by being stretched onto two different rims in that time.

The drive to FittedUK was a long one for two reasons, firstly and somewhat unusually for a show of this relatively large scale the show was in the North, Wetherby Racecourse to be exact, secondly I got lost. As usual my combination of stress about whether the car would make the journey without some issue arising and my lack of direction beyond an aging satnav meant that I ended up travelling South on the M6 in order to get on the M1 North-bound. Thus although I left Shrewsbury, my friends from Wolverhampton who had more ground to cover were now well in front of me.

However I was not as stressed as I would usually be at having gone out of my way and adding time to the journey, I was not meeting a convoy today as many people had decided it was too far to travel for a one day show (probably correct!). I made the decision to go because I had recently made friends with several people on the organising team at this show; who I met initially at Deva and CumbriaVAG and had got to know via Facebook since. As a result I thought it would be a good fieldwork experience, providing more insight into the processes of show organisation and how a relatively large scale show is run. With regards to this because the show was a one day event I drove for 4 hours to get there to spend around 4 hours at the show, to then drive 4 hours home again, my friends who did attend had mostly chosen to stay in a hotel the night before. If I come to FittedUK in 2016 I will definitely be doing this! (N.B. I did not attend FittedUK in 2016 but the event was in fact moved further towards the Midlands, being held outside Manchester and ultimately being more accessible to enthusiasts from across the country. It was on a whole other scale in 2016 having gone from a relatively large event like The Big Meet to what was a huge indoor show which promises to become a show calendar staple like Ultimate Dubs).

Apart from my navigation skills or lack thereof, the journey was uneventful and stress free (in retrospect –October 2015- this was one of the times I was happiest with the car, both in stress free practicality and in looks). Show traffic was relatively minimal, this was for a number of reasons; the journey was almost all motorway right to the show entrance more or less so there was no bottleneck in which modified cars would mount up. However other shows are like this and show traffic is still relatively heavy- the main reason was it was later in the day (late morning) on a one day show; any cars actually in the show would have had to have been on display by 8am and people attending would have chosen to arrive early to make the most of the show. In comparison Ultimate Dubs is a good example of heavy show traffic, but is a show which I am usually at by 7.30am on the main day, another example would be VW Days; the route to which led heavy show traffic through French rural villages affording a mass of near stationary modified cars. I plan to discuss show traffic within the Shows chapter of the thesis but had not thought about how it was contextual to factors like motoring landscape, time and length of event.

FittedUK was a bigger event that I had thought, perhaps because when promoting a relatively new show (its second year) it's difficult to suggest large scale in the promotional material in case it doesn't turn out to be well attended. There was no queue into the showground as I was arriving later on and the carparking was very full, I parked in the 10<sup>th</sup> row back, of around 40 cars to a row, this was on grass beyond the actual tarmac carpark of the racecourse. [I left the show later than

everyone else and the scale was reinforced as my car sat almost alone at the back of a huge empty field that earlier had been a busy parking area.]

Main observations at the show were the variability of cars in attendance- whilst it had been billed as a big event within the modified VW community it also showed the blurring on boundaries between VW enthusiasm and other marques with similar modifications. In particular there were a number of Japanese cars present with the same modifications which have become standard fare for watercooled VW's. I noted that something similar was clear at the Big Meet although those other marques were not allowed in the show area. With Ultimate Stance coming this Autumn and promising to be a multi-marque version of Ultimate Dubs, it seems that embracing a wider field of manufacturers within the scene may be fast becoming a new trend. Other German marques have begun to appear more frequently in the last 2 years as have Japanese marques following a stylistic trend which is not that different from the fresh clean look of modified VW's. FittedUK was also host to hot-rods, interestingly hot-rods seem to be welcome everywhere, at any show or motorsport event a hot-rod will bring the crowds and ultimately a 1000bhp car set up for drag racing won an award at FittedUK. I was able to discuss this with one of the show's judges who explained that the idea was to be more open minded about the cars on display, rather than reinforcing the same styles and models of car it was important to award all cars which people liked rather than thought they *should* like. This speaks of the growing dissent with exclusivity and authenticity in the modified VW scene, for many it is important that the scene is exclusive to certain styles and brands, even shunning certain wheel and parts manufacturers. However to many other enthusiasts, being a car enthusiast is about loving cars and this is something shared by enthusiasts of all car marques and styles, thus events which bring together a range of different groups of enthusiasts are to be celebrated. Full disclosure, I tend to side with the second camp- I have learnt the community guidelines of what looks good on a modified VW and what is 'appropriate', as will be discussed in the thesis. Having said that, I got into modified cars over a decade ago when I appreciated the cars gracing the pages of Fast Car and Max Power (for instance the cars on the cover of Lumsden's book), cars of various marques and of a style long since reprimanded and shunned.

### **30<sup>th</sup> August 2015**

I attended the Big Meet last year and despite the rain it was a really good turnout. I knew a number of friends were going to this one, however I decided against attending. It is a one day show however this year it has moved to a bigger site and has camping on the Saturday night. The RGS-IBG Conference in Exeter would begin the following Wednesday and I still had work to do for sessions I was organising and to finalise a paper I was to give, I was adamant I wouldn't attend. However the community was beginning to get the better of me and I began to feel it would be regrettable to miss a chance to talk to participants and see friends at a relatively new show and at the height of the show season.

On the Friday I was messaged by a number of friends asking why I wouldn't be there, I didn't really feel like it I explained. Interestingly this is fairly common practice, as I have always attended car shows with clubs if one person does not attend then questions are asked and in my experience some pressure applied to attend. This has never come across negatively and rather highlights the fact that shows are for many people, first and foremost a social gathering which they want to attend *with* their enthusiast friends. On the Saturday morning I was still being indecisive, I did some work ready for the RGS-IBG and ignored messages from friends about show preparations. Early in the afternoon



and thinking it was now too late to attend I looked up the show online and found that the new location was much closer to Shrewsbury than I had thought, only an hour away. I realised I could still get down there, have a good evening camping with my friends and I quickly washed the car loaded it with my camping stuff and headed off to the show.

I met up with my friends and set up a small camp, I was then texted by the friend who contacted me on Friday asking if I had changed my mind yet, I said I had and that I was there. She replied, somewhat surprised that she hadn't even left her house yet and jokes were made about my indecisiveness and yet I had beaten her there, she lives about 20 minutes from the site.

This was a strange show as 2 day events go. Having originally been a one day event there was no planned Saturday night entertainment, we were also told that cars moved into the show area in the evening would have first pick of spots before the others arrived on Sunday. It was late when this was announced and many opted to not move their cars. Laura did however and got a very good spot in the show area, bringing a lot of attention and subsequent photo and video coverage of her car the next day at the show. The show location was Uttoxeter Racecourse, before this summer I had never really considered a racecourse as a show venue but after FittedUK at Wetherby Racecourse last month I had an idea of what to expect. However, the racecourse at Uttoxeter is very near to houses and noise complaints were made, furthermore the site was shared with a caravan club park which was full of campers. Some were happy to chat but most glared as the low cars scraped and growled around the site. My friend Matt took us for a drive around in his bagged VW Jetta, he is well known for his very low 1966 VW Beetle which he had already parked in the show hall earlier that day (he lives nearby and his girlfriend gave him a lift). He drives around the site with the car with 5 people in and aired out, the car basically does not stop touching the ground with one metal component or other, the sound is the satisfying scrape of a lowered car. For me though air ride is about avoiding this scraping and potential damage but for Matt it is a way to drive the car even lower and to engage in this sort of performance as he drags the car around the site. Matt has a sense of humour anyway, the Jetta is his daily and is painted desert camo, nicknamed the Camel.

This is interesting because his main car is a show winning Beetle which is very well modified. Yet his daily driver, a supposed practical car in comparison is also modified. This is not uncommon at all. I know several people who have had to buy dailies for their dailies, everyone says "I'm gonna keep this one standard though...." But it rarely happens, modifying gets under your skin, it's difficult to drive and own a car without thinking about what you could do to change and improve it.

Lots of cars on display, best spots given to cars from last night- caused some tension as much more show worthy cars had to park elsewhere just because they didn't arrive last night. The indoor placement of cars made me reflect on the often bizarre place making practices of the car show. I have seen car shows held in a number of non-purpose built areas but these are usually well adapted. At Uttoxeter Racecourse however a number of cars were display in the bar area, all the seating had been cleared out and there maybe a few feet from the pumps were modified cars. Once the initial surprise was over the spaces began to feel like any other at a car show, the emphasis being on the cars themselves and not on the spaces they are parked in.

My friend BFr was showing his red Skoda CitiGo, this is still a relatively new car and almost the only modified one in the country, with perhaps 3 in total. It just so happened that another red one was there today. BFr went and got chatting to the owner about their cars and the modifications they had

both chosen, this was relayed to me afterwards by BFr. The other CitiGo was clearly on airbags however it had some ropey looking standard wheels on, the story went that the young guy who owned the car had spent all his money on the air ride (around £2500) and could not afford nice wheels to go on the car. BFr however does not have air ride, but coilover suspension and nice aftermarket wheels. We discussed how odd it was that someone would spend all their money on one modification and ultimately achieve a car that did not look anywhere near as good as it should for the money. This made me realise two things- one is that modified cars are a sort of bricolage and that unless completed in the correct way following the correct script they look strange or even out of place. A car on a set of wheels popular to the scene, say BBS RM's but no other modifications and not lowered would be ludicrous. Lowered cars are more generally accepted regardless of other mods as its seen as the first thing you should do, however a car bagged on standard wheels is similarly ludicrous in many ways. The second realisation here was that cars are often in process, I know this myself but this example made it so much more obvious. People don't show their cars until they're finished, for fear that they're not 'up to scratch' yet, to show a car whilst it is still in the process of being modified brings confusion and negative feedback.

I stayed until the end and convoyed back with BFr in his Skoda CitiGo, I'm not sure if two cars counts as a convoy, but I think its more about the feeling than the actual materiality of it.

#### **Friday 11<sup>th</sup> September 2015**

As I drive into a car show the sounds of music from my own stereo and from the sounds around me seep into my consciousness, as I look around I see that I'm surrounded by modified car, smiling faces, tents. This resulting feeling is difficult to describe, I have goosebumps, the hairs on my neck stand on end, I have an uncontrollable grin. Even writing about this now, weeks after the similar experience and field diary entry, I feel its spectre creeping over me, I find myself grinning for no reason whilst sat nowhere near a modified car, staring at a computer screen.

This account occurred shortly after the last car show I visited for my fieldwork, Edition38. I was working on a number of projects not related to the PhD although the key one was related to enthusiasm. I had found myself trying to think through the enthusiasm experience, what made it unique, I essentially began to re-feel it. As if the affective traces of original experience when tied to strong emotions and passions can re-emerge well beyond their original context but when called to mind by the original experienter. I attempted to interrogate this above experience in a similar way to that of Glen Fuller and his own impassioned experiences of driving a modified car (Fuller, 2007). The goosebumps and hair standing up seemed to spread across me slowly as took it all in, as I surveyed my surroundings and began to breathe them in. I am always reminded of the phrase "I am in my element" when in the field and now when talking about it retrospectively. There is something elemental to the affective triggers and emotional embodiment of enthusiasm in certain spaces, these could somewhat messily be described as 'enthusiast elemental spaces'. The spaces in which an enthusiast is in their element, surrounded by people with a similar interest, a sort of collective consciousness brought together to share a positive experience. Car shows are often as much about socialising, drinking and chewing the fat about cars than they are about the display of modified cars, this enveloping experience with people who share your views can be very powerful. True to the 'time flies when you're having fun' adage, this experience is often not picked up on until it is drawing to and end. However there are junctures when you realise just how in your element you are. The account above, driving into a car show was one of them for me.

Other examples for me have arisen throughout the research project, for example whilst sitting at my desk in a shared office in the Department of Geography and Earth Sciences at Aberystwyth University. I was working on a piece about the use of the internet by enthusiasts, I was surrounded by open car magazines, my web browser was a jumbled mix of automotive blogs and journal articles and I had this sort of taking a breath moment. I was in my element. It's not so much about loving what you do, although that is key, it is deeper; embodied and elemental. To quote the Neocortex track 'Elements', "as your body is relieved of your spirit....you'll become a part of the elements".

As usual at Edition we are a grouping of two different clubs, Seven4Three and Dubshire, although the latter is now defunct pretty much. We have a corner plot, we are near the entrance and exit but nicely a bit out of the way of the main drag, in recent years Edition has become known for its on site driving antics and clashes with security. I missed this show last year but I am told things were more relaxed than the almost riot like clashes of 2013. People line the dirt roads of the site and cheer passing drivers to rev their engines and perform burnouts on the wet grass. In 2013 this increased throughout the evening as people drank and by early evening it was clear the security had more or less lost control, they blocked a number of cars and forced open drivers doors to confiscate keys, this did not go down well with the large crowds of spectators. The ugly side of the tight community feelings where everyone shares the same enthusiasm is that when collectively affronted, particularly after most have been drinking and partying with friends, takes on a sort of mob mentality. The ultimate result was one security guard losing his temper and reversing through the crowd knocking a number of people over, as the crowd parted the driver clearly couldn't see and reversed into a modified VW golf. The driver of the golf got out and attempted to open the door of the securities BMW, he locked the doors and the crowd started to rock the BMW, we had backed right away at this point and many of us were discussing how this would give everyone a bad name and may lead to the event being cancelled in future. Ultimately the event continued without a hitch, I wonder how it will go this year.

This evening we had a relatively chilled night, staying up late drinking and talking about project cars and which cars we expected to see tomorrow. As I've noted before three day shows always have a particularly nice feel on the Friday night as you know you don't have to drive anywhere tomorrow and can just do everything at your own pace, surrounded by likeminded enthusiasts and modified cars.

### **Saturday 12<sup>th</sup> September 2015**

As noted before the Saturday's of shows which have a Friday opening are often quite chilled, with Friday night being a big one as people don't have to drive at all the next day. As such we don't do much until lunchtime when we wander around the show n shine field and peruse the autojumble and trade stalls. In previous years I had thought Edition was a big show but this year after Wörthersee but more recently Bugjam I realised that its quite limited. Once we had seen the show n shine cars there wasn't much else to do except hang out with friends and catch up with others that I only see at Edition38; this showed how the sociability element is part of what makes these shows so good. In some ways I don't think many people drive for hours just to stand in a field looking at cars, for most of us its about driving to a show together with your friends or club, hanging out with other likeminded friends and enthusiasts and experiencing a sort of collective togetherness more akin to a music festival. Also the relatively small scale means that we see all the cars today and so there will be nothing really new tomorrow although there always seem to be cars I've missed.

However another key element of attending shows from personal experience has been taking photographs, uploading the huge post-show photo albums to Facebook the next day has become a sort of ritual in itself for me. In this way the show n shine provides all that I need, this may also explain why I didn't take many photos at Bugjam, as there was less focus on parked up cars and more on the experience of being at the show/festival.

### **Sunday 13<sup>th</sup> September 2015**

I eventually decide to leave and can't find the others, by now as is usual for Sunday of a show my phone is dead. I go back to my car, inflate the tyres, 3 of which are quite flat. This annoys me and seems a unnecessary stress of owning a modified car with stretched tyres fitted to achieve a certain look. I also put my numberplate back on the front. To drive around the show arena it is necessary to have my hazard lights on, I drive slowly and am traffic to leave the site for about half an hour, I begin to hear a clicking from the rear wheel which last time turned out to be the wheel bolts working loose, I aim to stop for fuel before I get on the motorway so can check it then. With all the things on my mind and my music quite loud I forget I have my hazards on, once out on the country roads near the site I have several modified cars in front and ahead, the car in front slows and stops, sort of blocking me and the car behind flashes me. I realise and turn my hazards off, we all move off again. I reflect on the true community spirit of this two other enthusiasts who I don't know and who perhaps don't even know each other have reminded me to turn off my hazards.

As usual I get very lost between Northampton and Market Harborough whilst looking for a petrol station. I am in a good mood from the show though and am still in a showing off the car mood so I drive with the air ride nearly fully aired out. On a number of roads the bumps cause the chassis rails to catch the road and spark, this puts a smile on my face, the sign of a truly low car, I also take some pride in seeing people go about their Sunday business grimacing or glaring at me as I roll past. Eventually I find a petrol station and roll in on fumes, the woman in the petrol station comments on how a lot of lowered VW's have been in today, I explain about the show and she shakes her head laughing. As I'm about to pay she asks if 'that's a new style?' pointing at the car. I look confused and turn to look at the forecourt, I have cable tied the number plate on but not cut off the excess leaving what look like big antennae poking about a foot off the front bumper. We laugh and I pay and go outside and cut them off. I reflect on how the excitement of the show and the performance of the car has meant I am clearly not worrying about things associated with the car like I normally would. I almost ritualistically make sure the numberplate is centred and secured properly normally.

Once I have fuel I join the M6 and get off almost straight away at Corley services to get something to eat. As usual on the Sunday after edition the carpark at Corley is probably 40% modified VW's. I notice the show wristbands still on a number of people's wrists as I queue to get food. Whilst I'm waiting several of my friends arrive and we end up eating lunch together and agreeing to convoy back to Shrewsbury. I know one of the guys quite well and have for years but his three friends their girlfriends I know less well, although everyone chats openly about cars and the show and it turns out they know my car. Enthusiasts always know different cars rather than people, like oh you know Kelvin with the red mk5 [Golf] or your HJS with the green camper. Ben Chappell (2012) found a similar thing with lowriders in the USA. As we go outside I jokingly tell Kevin if he doesn't put his front numberplate back on I'm not convoying with them as it will get us all pulled over. He has driven from the show to here he says but then goes and reattaches it. We joke about how many of the cars in the carpark don't have numberplates on the front and how do they risk getting away with

it, one of the guys says his other car, a modified golf hasn't run a front plate in a year and he's never had any problems. This is a risk I've never wanted to take.

We set off back to Shrewsbury, I am very happy. I've had a great weekend with my friends and I feel like much of the embodied experience is still with me as I roll in convoy in a sort of mobile performance along the motorway. All of our cars are clean and shiny as we had cleaned them for the show, two of the cars are on air ride and running quite low, as am I, the fourth an Audi S3 is not but makes up for this with its performance. At one point I decide I am, tongue in cheek, going to overtake the S3, which has over 3 times the power of my car, I can see all the other drivers with us laughing. Shortly after the S3 passes everyone, in the fast lane doing at least 100 and sounding awesome. We regroup and at Telford the S3 and bagged Audi A4 leave us. Myself and Kevin are now rolling together, I notice he more or less airs out, the car now sitting very low, I decide to follow suit but it means we both have to reduce our speed. As the motorway becomes a dual carriageway it is nearly empty and Kevin pulls alongside me, for a few hundred metres we roll side by side. The feeling for me is one of pure enthusiasm. I am driving with my friend, both of our pride and joys, coming back from perhaps one of the best shows of the year. We roll side by side past a big accident on the other carriageway, we realise too late that there are a line of police cars on that side and they all turn to look as we cruise past, rather than fear I feel ever better, our mobile performance clearly looks as good as it feels to drive in. Shortly after I notice my air ride screen showing a leak, shit! This has happened twice before, once it was a blown airbag and cost hundreds to fix, the second time it was a false reading from a sensor. I hoped it was the latter.

Once I got home it was clear that the bag showing the leak was indeed rapidly leaking air, my mood changed. Still happy from the weekends' show I didn't want to let this bother me but I knew I had to be in Abersytwyth for 11am the next day and now I would have to get the train at 7.30am. I left everything in the car from the weekends trip and decided that it was a sign, I have been saying all year that Edition will be my last show and then I'll take the parts of and sell the car. I only changed my mind in the last few shows, maybe it was meant to be. It will cost less to return the car to standard than to fix the blown bag.

### **Friday 30<sup>th</sup> October 2015**

I had originally planned to be in Shrewsbury for Ultimate Stance on Sunday, however I soon realised it would be the morning after Halloween and I had been invited to a party, this put me in an awkward position, do I go to the party and not drink, miss it altogether or miss the show? It's Friday afternoon and I'm still not sure, admittedly the show is only in Telford so I can change my mind at relatively short notice. I am falling out of love with my car, it has been off the road with the leaking air bag since the drive back from Edition nearly 2 months ago. Earlier this week I arranged a lift with a friend to the show, he is on a clubstand though and needs to be there at 7.30am, originally I was quite excited but now I am unsure of my plans tonight so I let him know I won't be needing a lift.

As Telford is only close it would be good to be able to just pop over in the day and sort of dip into the show, see my friends, catch up and leave whenever I like. My Mum offers to insure me on her newer VW Polo over the weekend, I thank her for this and take her up on it, now I will be able to attend the show stress free. Now I have the freedom of mobility of my own car back, I can travel there under my own steam and leave whenever I feel ready to, it will be strange to attend a show in a standard car, especially with the jokes about show cars being paid for by 'bank of mum & dad'.

However I am fed up of the problems with my Polo and I have driven the newer one before, it is so stress free and intuitive, although feels much less involved. I reflect on how my embodied experiences of driving have changed over the time of the fieldwork, I do miss driving a lowered car and the more involved hybrid of it, however I also crave the stress free driving that standard cars offer. In many ways I feel like the fieldwork has changed my feelings towards modified cars and the culture. I am very glad to have met the friends I have and I think the fieldwork has really helped me to engage with the collective social aspects I might have otherwise shied away from. However it has also exposed me to negative elements of the culture and I have thought these through much further than I would as just an enthusiast, in some case I don't like what I've learned. Returning to my car itself, I feel like as I begin the writing up process my relationship with the modified car is shifting along with the research. I feel a need to more completely exit the field and I am fed up of the often tiring experience of driving and owning a modified car. There is a second reason too, much more closely PhD motivated, as I enter the third year, a fourth year looms beyond it. Once my funding stops I will need some way of supporting myself, yet I am driving a car with £1k air and similar value wheels, this doesn't make financial sense to me. This combined with my changing feelings towards the car means I have decided to have these parts removed and sell them. This further shows the close intertwining of the research and my own enthusiasm and the perhaps lasting changes to both.

As such it is with a heavy heart that I decide to have my Polo put back to standard, it is booked in with Shelvey for Monday 2<sup>nd</sup> Nov. He is going to be removing the air ride and wheels, and I will advertise these in the new year when I have a bit more time.

### **Saturday 31<sup>st</sup> October 2015**

A friend of mine who is arranging the clubstand for Ultimate Stance for Club9n/3 texts me, she is at work and wants me to help finalise the arrangements. I deliberately opted out of this task weeks ago as I was fairly sure I wouldn't be going. However I have arranged several clubstands at this venue in the past so I helped where I could, ultimately I have agreed to be at the meet point to help organise tomorrow morning. So much for going out tonight as I will need to be there at 7am, I reflect on how the community feeling and desire to help each other out has changed my mind. Furthermore I reflect on how this has happened before to me and to my friends, almost cyclically, I fall out of love with the car over some issue or other, decide I'm not going to the next show, vehemently deny that I am and then at the last minute realise I would really miss it if I don't go. I jokingly share this thought with a few friends tonight and some tell me they agree, taking it seriously, and will not be attending any shows next year for the same reasons, we'll see!

I also reflect on the chance I will have to enjoy driving a standard car, this stress free driving experience will be something I can get used to. This genuinely feels like a weight of sorts has been lifted, I am sure I will miss driving a modified car but for now its something I feel I have to do.

### **Sunday 1<sup>st</sup> November 2015**

Today is Ultimate Stance in Telford, I set off from Shrewsbury at 6.30am, everywhere is thick with fog. For a second I panic, I'm driving an unfamiliar car and I'm not sure where the fog light switch is, luckily it's the same as my own Polo. I drive very slowly on the motorway, I've never driven in fog this thick before, I don't see one car until it is about 100 feet away because it has no lights on. I am glad I'm in the relative stress free environment of a standard car, I have enough to focus on without the more involved process of driving my modified car. However I still manage to miss my exit, I then

have to drive on A-roads in the thick fog past a number of clearly fog-induced accidents. Eventually I arrive at Telford, I am pleasantly surprised that the towns one way system has become two way in certain parts. One issue of organising the clubstand here in the past has been directing cars around the one way system and everyone getting the wrong exits. There is now effectively a straight road from the pub meeting point to the show site, where there never was before. I relax a little, the stand today is not my responsibility but it's still my club.

When I get to the meet point it's nearly 7.15am, I had told people to be there for 7am to leave at half past. The carpark was already full, at least 15 VW Polo's, I spotted my friends and parked by them. I got out of the car to laughter, I remembered I was the only one not in a modified Polo 9n or 9n3. Ultimately I was asked to lead the convoy across town anyway, I explained that due to my short notice decision to attend I did not have a ticket and wasn't sure I would be allowed on site before it opened to the public at 9am. However this was not a problem at all, we got all cars to the site and got two really good spots to park all the cars.

The show itself was great, a great mix of cars and a chance to see people and chat. I thought I wouldn't get this chance as I had convinced myself Edition would be my final show, perhaps forever. The friends who persuaded me to come were right, I would have regretted missing this.

Ultimate Stance is an interesting and refreshing show in terms of cars on display, as I explained last year, it is a chance for cars of a particular style which is the prevalent style in VAG modifying at the moment to gather together regardless of brand. As I have noted, increasingly VAG show 'n' shine areas are not open to non-VAG or non-German brand cars. This show then is a more relaxed affair where the stance and style of the car is more important, as such it is more accepting atmosphere and I genuinely feel it is quite refreshing to see other types of cars. I don't often go to events which are not VW oriented and the same is true for many of my friends attending today so it makes a welcome change.

### **Monday 2<sup>nd</sup> November 2015**

Today I drive the Polo to Shelvey's, with one leaking airbag its not a particularly enjoyable drive, I constantly try to keep an eye on air pressure in that bag and as it gets low the rear suspension gets increasingly harsh. It's only a short drive but it will be the last time I drive a modified car for the foreseeable future and it seems quite poignant as it comes at the end of my fieldwork too. I drop the car off and explain that I want the air ride off, standard suspension back and the standard wheels (which are actually standard alloys that my car didn't come with) fitting. This shows the difficulty in leaving a car alone completely, I had bought a set of alloy wheels that were optional extras on a polo such as mine as I couldn't bring myself to take the car right back to its standard steel wheels and hubcaps. Furthermore I chose to leave the Vortex bodykit on as this was also an optional extra for this car when new so it didn't really make the car look modified.

### **Tuesday 3<sup>rd</sup> November 2015**

Today I picked up the now standard car with my OZ wheels and air ride suspension laid out across the back seat and boot.

### **LATER ADDITION DECEMBER 2016**

I went on to sell both the OZ wheels and the air ride and ultimately used the money to buy

my VW Squareback in the summer of 2016- this sort of symbiosis where even when one cars gets stripped or broken it funds another project can be seen across modified car culture. In particular Ben Chappell (2012) talks about enthusiasts who sell now unwanted car parts or unfinished projects in order to fund the realisation of the next vision they have.

### **Wednesday 4<sup>th</sup> November 2015**

Today I drive back to Aberystwyth in my VW Polo which is now standard (at least in terms of suspension and wheels) for the first time in 5 years. Having driven a newer Polo recently and being impressed by its practicality its strange to think that my car could have had that all along as well as the journey went without a hitch. However whenever I had to park up I found myself looking back at the car and regretting that it was no longer modified, but in the long run it will be cheaper and less stressful and I am still an enthusiast regardless of my car.

### **Sunday 8<sup>th</sup> November 2015**

Tonight I decide to go to a local car meet in Aberystwyth, the same location and set up as the one I went to before Wörthersee earlier in the year. It's also the first meet I have attended in a standard car in a long time. It was a good night and I had a good chat and a laugh with my friends, it was comforting to be reminded that our enthusiasm runs deeper than the cars and that its just hanging out with your mates to some extent. There were of course comments about my decision and a healthy dose of banter. One friend MT stated that, "I've never known somebody unmodify a car", it was true most people either sell the whole car when they're finished or they strip it because they've written it off, it's rare to strip a car and then keep it afterwards. A lot of people seemed to take my decision personally, I reflect on how the more I publicise the car the more it becomes a sort or publicly appreciated object, something that people will collectively miss. This surprises me, I realise that whilst I no longer liked the car the way it was a lot of people still thought it was a very nice modified car- mixed emotions.

The two exchanges recorded below, at the Aber meet, made me think about the staying power and longevity of enthusiasm for VW's within a person's identity. Over the past 5 years almost all of my social experiences and friends have come as a result of being a modified VW enthusiast.

Me: "I will be back though [get a modified car again]"

MT: " Oh yeah of course, it's a passion it's in the blood isn't it"

P: "I'm getting married with a child and I'm still here in a Halfords carpark on a Sunday night, I'm too old for this shit"

J: "I'll be 30 too soon, definitely old enough to known better"

**LATER ADDITION JUNE 2017** Its now two years later I am still approached by people I barely know but who knew the Polo through Facebook or on forums who tell me I should never have stripped it and that I should still have it, a lot has changed in the meantime but this reminded me of the notion that the car once shared across the community becomes a shared possession to some extent.



## **Epilogue & Life Beyond Fieldwork**

### **December 2015**

I feel like by the end of this fieldwork my own journey as enthusiast has now changed, in part due to the course of my research, particularly as I am now driving a standard VW Polo. This comes at the same time that I have stepped back from the modified car community to begin writing my thesis. I feel like a disconnect could open here and I am reminded that enthusiasm is not always constant in people's lives. Several of my friends have gone away to do different jobs or have moved to a different part of the country, have sold their modified cars but through it all they still identify as VW enthusiasts and in most cases they return to the community eventually in some way.

### **December 2016**

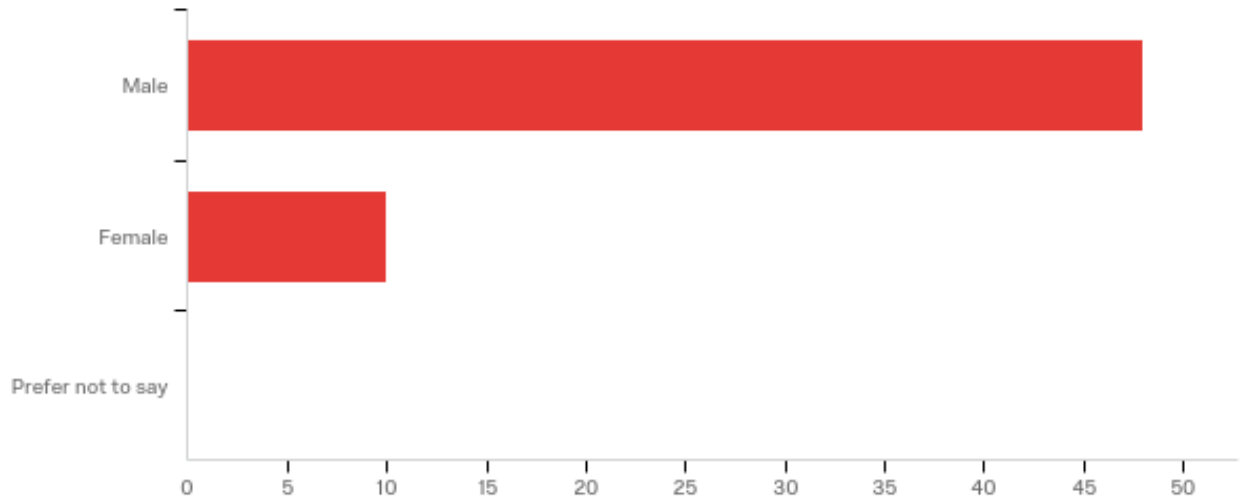
Although the fieldwork in the above diary was completed over a year ago now I think it's important to add a further epilogue to illustrate my concluding reflections from last December. Over the course of this year I have moved away from Aberystwyth, back to Shropshire where many of my original contacts in the VW community stemmed from. Following Bugjam 30 this year I decided to purchase an aircooled VW from Shelvey. It is a 1972 VW Type 3 Squareback, I feel like this begins my journey back into modified VW enthusiasm but from a slightly different angle. One thing which struck me throughout all of the research I completed was that the politics of the scene and the competitive and sometimes negative behaviour within the culture appeared to be limited to the watercooled community. The aircooled community always seemed more laid back and focussed on cars and community more than who had the coolest car or the best wheels. I do not yet know whether this is just a 'grass looking greener on the other side' effect.

In November 2016 my Polo suffered a timing chain fault causing engine damage which would cost more than the car's value to fix. It was with a heavy heart that I chose to end this particular car journey here. A particularly hard element of this decision was that the car I had owned for 8 years and spent thousands of pounds on was now worth £150-200 and even less if it was weighed in for scrap. A friend of a friend who I had met during the fieldwork offered to buy the car for £180 and was very accommodating, knowing my history with the car and based on his own VW ownership. He explained that I could take off any parts I wanted besides those he wanted from the car and that I could always return to him at a later date to get anything else off it. In the end I was able to strip the rare Vortex and Japanese spec bumpers which I had on the car for over double the amount I got for the car. So now I sit at a crossroads, my Polo gave me access to a community and a culture without which this research would never have even been an idea in my mind. In a way it provides a nice closure, the research draws to an end and perhaps the main facilitator of the research is no longer in my possession. However I am at the start of my academic career and I am also entering a VW community new to me, in the form of the aircooled VW culture.



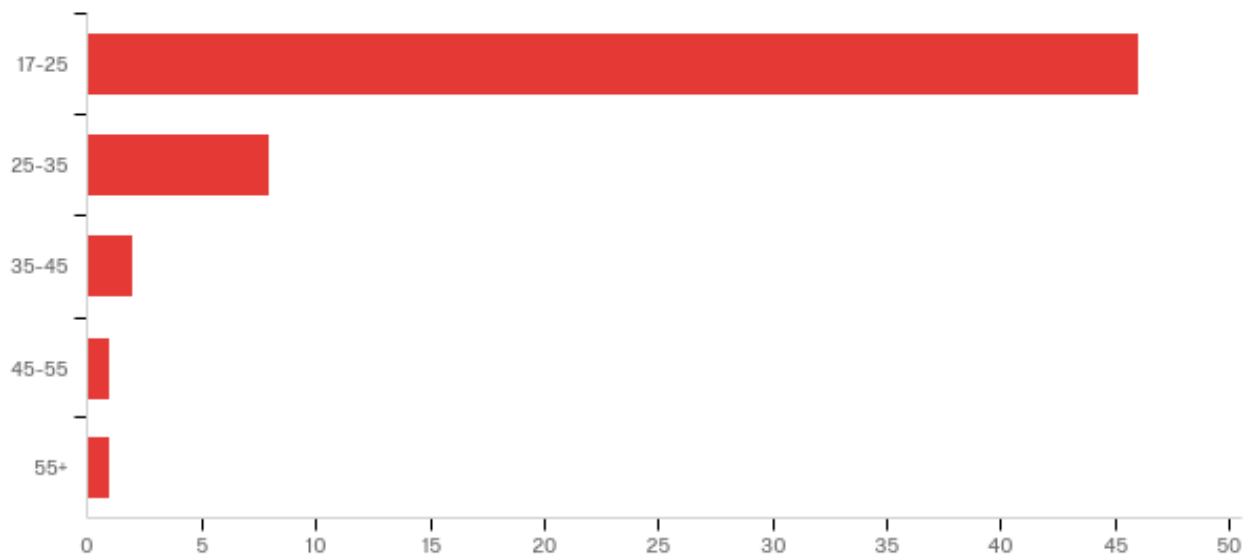
## Appendix III Online Questionnaire Survey Report

### Q1 - Gender? (optional)



#	Answer	%	Count
1	Male	82.76%	48
2	Female	17.24%	10
3	Prefer not to say	0.00%	0
	Total	100%	58

## Q2 - What age range do you fit in?



#	Answer	%	Count
1	17-25	79.31%	46
2	25-35	13.79%	8
3	35-45	3.45%	2
4	45-55	1.72%	1
5	55+	1.72%	1
	Total	100%	58

### Q3 - How did you first get into modified VW/Audi cars?

Bought a 68 Beetle when I was 16 to restore/modify and to learn how to work on cars with.

Vw polo was my first car then bought a second polo modified.

Always modified bikes and motorbikes so got my first car and did the saw

Owned a polo 9n3 and went to bugjam festival!

First car was a vw

Attending vw festival

Always been into cars and a family member is a fellow VW fanatic

Me and my partner are both mechanics. We started playing about by changing bushes etc. Ended up with a lovely modified polo.

Always been a modifying nut, quite liked the "Euro look" in the 90s and went from there

First car was a polo and that's where it began

Friends & family

I like to get the best out of what I have. A car that catches eyes looks so much better and makes you feel good driving that gem. And obviously so that mine is faster than yours. Bragging rights.

Facebook

Started with the old need for speed/max power days then tastes just changed and the types of cars, my vw polo was/is my first car and modifying it to my own personal taste just seemed like a smart thing to do

Attending car shows and meets

For the Love

My dad was always crazy about it so I was taken to shows when I was still in nappies

My dad

I started working at volkswagen

Through work and passion. VAG cars have the best following also.

I've always loved modified cars & my first car was a polo. I spent a lot of time looking at other cars for inspiration & I became more engrossed in the modified VAG scene.

I always like the styling of the cars and how we as a culture seem to be the more friendly and approachable bunch always willing to help support one another I've only ever owned vag cars so I couldn't speak on behalf of others but this is how it comes across

I love my cars! When I got a polo I wanted to modify it so I did, then me and my mate came across the VW/Audi Scene through Facebook and just social networks

Through my dad have multiple modified cars when I was younger the most iconic was a mk1 VW golf GTi with a 2ltr conversion

Just wanted a new car and everything about the VW polo appealed to me. I love the car so much and it's my best one yet.

Friends and photos on the Internet

Run to the sun in Newquay

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Old Need for speed games and Max Power back in the day

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Bought one for my first car and never looked back

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First car being a VW

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Vw performance mag and also a mechanic and love the look and reliability of a vw

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Parents bought a Polo Cross for me as a first car. Then I signed up on the 9n.info forum. I started to follow build threads and then ended up with a cat c/d Polo GTI which I am now building for my needs and how I want it to look

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In my blood. Parents only owned vdubs and not the slow ones

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Friends

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Always liked modified cars but got myself a Polo and started modifying it

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Parents

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Through friends who all owned vw's at the time.

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Owned a vw beetle

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My dad always had vws and I used to attend many shows whilst I was growing up. My first car was a vw beetle and have always had a vw since then.

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Car shows

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I cannot quite remember, I suppose it is a thing you do when you get your first car, all your mates are doing it and its all you ever talk about.

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Through all my friends, and people throughout, with all the love and the peace in what was the car scene, always loved vw and audi's my parents have always owned vag's too.

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After buying my first VW, a mk1 golf cabriolet.

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Owner of a mk5 GT TDI 150

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Always been interested in cars from a young age. Watched Fast and the Furious when I was 12 which lead to buying Max Power magazines. I went to my first VW show at the age of 17 before I was driving, I was hooked. I got my first VW as soon as I could afford to run one once I'd passed my test

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Helping my dad build banger cars so seen alot off VW/Audi cars

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Friends

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Fast car magazine, friends, max power live, my dad

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1.5 years ago

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Always had a love for anything with a engine and have had many cars on to be now

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Family has always been into it and owned modified cars, I've loved it from being young so got into it myself

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allways interested in modified cars but it really happened when I got my first car ( Lupo ) started meeting new people then started going to different shows all around the uk

My dad was involved in Motorsport all his life and I got into it from a very young age from then on I became interested in classic Volkswagens and started going to shows, which then made me see newer modified vag cars and I immediately gained a big interest for it.

Reading magazines as a child and living in Germany as a child in the summer holidays.

Boyfriend brainwashed me.

#### **Q4 - What do you think makes a good modified VW/Audi? Maybe give an example of your favourite car at the moment**

Something clean on the whole, where all the car ties in together. Albeit something old school being brought up to date, or modern cars being made more classy

Sleek lines and nothing mad and can still be driveable, favourite car: polo 6r GTI or mk7 golf R

Doing simple things to make the car stand out better, and being original and different

Polo 6n2

Good performance upgrades and also a lowered with upgraded wheels

Has to be fast, function over Form. Typically turbocharged, fwd, but the best are, in my opinion, 4wd. I would love a B5 S4 with antiwag and I've always had a soft spot for old Air cooled models.

I personally love both stance & performance. Either way I think both need lowered & new wheels. I think the best cars are the ones with unique modifications. One car I love at the moment is sheep sheptones scirocco. The interior really makes the car stand out.

Just the attention to detail we put into them it's the small things that make you stand out and show your love for the culture

Definitely a different look to everyone else at the car shows, if you can make a car look, sound different to all the others that's what catches my attention! There was one at Edition 38! Chrome engine, suspension, brakes everything and I've never seen anything like that before at a show!

I love speed and acceleration but also like small hatches so for me the polo GTI range is perfect and the 1.8 20 valve turbo offers a vast opportunity to modify and create a flying machine

They are just so reliable, user friendly, nice to drive and they are so much more refined than other competitors.

Audi rs line or VW gti in bags with some shiny bbs

Nice wheels, lowered, subtle

me personally, clean paintwork, low as possible, dished wheels, then a few small touches on the insides. it all really depends on the person and their tastes each person is different, my favourite car at the moment is any old MK2 Golf with the above modifications done to it

Different, doesn't necessarily stand out but the more you look the more you see

Something clean, something that appears OEM. Nothing better than subtleness

One that takes time money and hard effort to get right but have 40k spare to spend and have it all done in a week

A nice set of lightweight wheels, decent suspension and lots of power. Like Sam Pearce's GTI. I also like stanced cars like yours because of its looks, but I don't think I'd ever drive one.

I am more interested in the engineering and the fabrication and thought that goes into modifying a car. At the moment I am really into the berg cup style cars.

Sirocco! Something smart

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Speed and outside look

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Different, eye catching, detail

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Subtle touches and a good clean stance whether it be static or on air.

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Uniqueness and the ability make it your own. A good modified vw is something that is different and done to your taste as opposed to following the crowd. I own a slammed vw camper which is modified to my taste and there are a selection of parts that are unique to that vehicle.

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A car that isn't too over modified, not like a crappy corsa, but a VW or Audi that still had the mark of the Germans but a small change in style to suit yourself, if you know what I mean.

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A nice clean example not over done with a subtle colour, nice interior and setup on a nice set of wheels.

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Clean lines and OEM

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Power mods rather than body kit stuff

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Being different. I like seeing cars which have been thought out and outside the box, away from the norm and not something someone has seen before.

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VW golf mark 1 with a 350 turbo charge

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Time, effort, blood sweat and tears gone into it. The project has brought friends together to help each other

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Time and experience. It takes patience to make the car your own without just buying shitty stickers. My first car was a mess but I've slowly developed a love for the different modifications that make a car unique and personal.

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My favourite modified VW at the moment is the Golf R.

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What pleases me the most is something rare/unusually done. Something that breaks away from the current trends at that time and that isn't just a re-hash of the popular all times. I'm a sucker for a bold colour too. Currently really appreciate a clean and sparkly engine bay.

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When the mods are done tastefully and gives the car a clean fresh look

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I think as long as it appeals to the owner of the car it shouldn't matter what others think, everyone will have a difference in taste but personally if you know it's had hard work and love into it it will always stand out

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Not being scared of being different or doing something that know one else has done

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Little details, things you know have taken time and effort to make my favourite car at the moment has to be the mk1 R32,

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Cars with some thought. Not the forced RAT science. No favourite car at the minute. I hate cars covered in crap eBay parts and coloured wheels. I can't stand people who say "because it's different"



## Q5 - What are your views on the current VAG scene? Please give examples

Best atmosphere at any event brilliant cars and people

Everyone does the same sort of thing. But that's due to it working and making each owners cars nice. A lot of people choose to do the same thing. But with alot of people owning VAG cars, that can't be helped

Good cars, bad people sometimes

It all seems to be different wheels and air ride

With social media playing a large part of the scene I feel hate can be a big issue. Also originality is rare, I think this is also because of social media. I love seeing a mad new idea but I don't want everyone then to copy that. I understand there are trends, like in any walk of life but I would like to see more people doing just what pleases them and everyone being okay with that.

I like that the vag scene is open for beginners who have a polo/lupo on budget coilovers to the extreme show cars costing thousands. It's a diverse range of cars & you never know what you might see at a show. Stance seems to be taking over with most cars on coils or air.

The money being poured in to some of the cars make it almost impossible for normal people like myself stand out but this just gives you drive and ambition to try and achieve greater things

I'm loving it at the moment! There's a lot of the same but that's just how it is at the moment. But I do like the fact that there's static, aired, hydroed and also there's a few cars set up for track and I love the track set up cars thats what attracts me.

I think the modified car scene in general has gone off a bit I remember going to car shows when younger and people would talk about boost and horsepower now it's all about "lows" and "fitment"

Laid back chilled out. Mostly the same kind of stuff suchas air ride, rare wheels and a leather re trim but then every so often you see something totally different.

Too many people not doing their own work

Decent

love the scene at the moment, so many clean examples out there on what can be done and gives people ideas, the majority of the time it is the same thing from car to car but its the small things that they have done to make it unique and appeal to their own tastes.

Can be very competitive with people sharing negative comments

Love the vw scene atm but could do with a recognition to people that spend every penny thats been earned on there can and done them selfs rather than sponsors and brands doing it for them and havink a brand mew 15 plate on air ??

Financed air, financed Rotiform wheels, sadly. Individuality is fading away slowly. From what I've read and what, I've seen on Facebook there's lots of hate and backstabbing

At the moment the majority seem to be finance cars wearing finance wheels and on finance air ride. It's more bought not built.

Brilliant

Can be good but mainly full of rich kids splashing money on cars for the attention instead of doing it for the fun

similar to other car scenes.

It's widely varied with a mass of cool cars. Unfortunately there is a lot of people very quick to put somebody else's pride and joy down.

There are too many shows at the moment that result in a number of poorer quality meets. Personally, I am into the older style Vag vehicles but newer models are coming through with people simply buying a new car, lowering it, changing the wheels and saying it's unique which to an extent it is. In my eyes, it's an easy modification which isn't really out there or modified enough.

I haven't seen much of the current VAG scene but from what I know, there are the best of all cars and best.. well most fun to modify.

I think it is awful at the moment due to certain people thinking they're better, when at the end of the day we are all humans, and should respect one another's cars.

Silly stance phase which doesn't interest me a lot.

Not that close a follower

Everybody is interested in becoming "insta-famous" and how many likes their car can get. In recent years people have been building cars that people want to see and too much has been relied on finance work and the "clique" car builders. In my opinion, 80% of the cars on the scene currently are built without any imagination and hard work of the owners themselves

I think it's good

Over popular, Too much advertisement and it's lost its key values

There's 3 types of people and they clash too often. There's the elitist, the person that knows all or at least pretends to, they also will only be friends with people who will benefit them or have a car worthy. The old timer, not necessarily old but in the scene for the right reason, here for the friends, can appreciate time and effort put into a car and doesn't feel the need to knock someone down. The keyboard warriors, these are the new age, I read it on a forum so know best, kind of people regardless of what they drive, it's better than yours. The newbies, the people who are easily led astray, the ones who buy cheap and buy twice because of their mistakes, they are impressionable and normally end up sucking up to elitists or keyboard warriors. The scene is such a mixed bag of people and I love it but it can be one hell of a playground!

Far too much of this air ride bollocks.

There's too much emphasis on stance, to the point where people are stretching, cambering, slamming more and more just so they have the most stretch/camber/lows and so forth. It becomes less about style and more about bragging rights. It's easy to get carried away when modifying a vehicle.

I think the vag scene is one of the best scenes at the moment the standard of cars are second to none

in your personal groups it's great and can always have a laugh but there is a lot of hate about cars and people! It's like different 'groups' of people can't mix and you only talk to who you know

Half of it is full of hate and kids who like to do stupid and dangerous mods to their car with stupid camber just to become Instagram famous. But then the other half of the scene is where randomly you start talking to other enthusiasts about each other's cars and enjoying shows with friends camping. I have some friends that I have met through the shows and have turned into great friends sharing that interest in cars

the vag scene is currently stuck on social competition, it's all about who has the lowest or most expensive car... Not about the time or interest someone has for their car, it's not about pride and joy anymore, it's just about money and who you know.

Air cooled scene has some awesome cars and I believe it to be the harder side of the vag scene to get correct. Water cooled is good but it is spoilt by certain attitudes. To many people trying to be somebody and to many crappy looking cars that aren't show cars.

## Q6 - What do you use forums and social networking sites for?

Hints and tips for my car and to see what other people are doing to there's

Buying car parts and getting opinions

To find out problems and also possible upgrades to my car

Forums for advise on common problems and giving advise to fellow drivers. Social media for following cars from multiple areas for inspiration, and because some cars are awesome!

I mainly use social networking sites to stay up to date with car meets, buy car parts & talk to like minded people.

Checking out who's doing what and keeping up to date with builds etc

Questions, answers and to see what everyone else is doing and also see what's for sale

I use a lot of polo owners clubs and forums get advice on what updated parts work best and to share images and videos of my car and to view other modified VW's

Gathering information about faults.

Keeping up with the latest trends and fashions

Finding out info buying stuff

facebook - keep in touch with friends and family, follow various modified car pages and groups and to meet new people who are into modifying cars

Parts/ ideas

advice,ideas and general awareness of car culture

Parts and advice on stuff that many people need help and undestanding

Polos, Polos, Polos, some other cars and Polos

Find out info, looking at cars, getting ideas.

Advice

Great for useful information

entertainment

Helpful advise regarding my specific model of cars, or to post pictures of mine and my friends cars.

Stance works Canibeat Ssautowerks Division4

Reading build threads and looking for parts

Showing off my car, seeing what others are doing and putting ignorant simple minded people in there place

Talking to people, finding events to go to, car shows

Meeting up, Advice Banter

Friends, finding events and learning new things.

I like to see other people modifying the same car as me to get inspiration

Events info and checking out/posting photos and videos, as well as keeping up to date.

For keeping in touch with clubs and friends

Sharing my ideas and looking at others for inspiration

I never use facebook its only there to see when the next show is and its easier to contact friends. Then I have instagram that is better to see peoples rides and seeing there builds

Seeing updates of builds or show dates

I don't they've died

## **Q7 - What role do you think the internet plays in the modified VAG culture?**

The internet is a great place for sharing tips and ideas.

Makes it easier for people to pass opinion

Sharing other people's cars from all over the world

Massive, I am young and have only been modifying cars for 5 minutes so I find it hard to image a scene just 10 years ago.

I think it plays quite a large role as people can get inspiration, sell parts, give advice if people are struggling to fit any parts. There are lots of companies which get good publicity from car clubs & groups on social networks which can only benefit the scene.

It helps to share your ideas and knowledge on things I wouldn't know half of what I do if it was for the Internet forums and pages

A extremely high roll, I don't think it would be no where near as good without it

I believe the internet plays a massive part in not only the VAG scene but the overall car scene it's easy to share information and mods over Facebook and Instagram is perfect for photo sharing

Let's people know about events easily and share pics/vids of shows etc.

Quite a big part, where most people look for inspiration

Helps everyone come together

an important one! now its so easy to upload photos of your car and what you have done to it and to get compliments (or abuse!) on it this can help by giving other people around the world ideas for theirs and then its possible for that trend to catch on

A huge roll linking all the people that are involved together

a massive part as shows are only in the summer season. So the rest of the time its nice to see what people are up too

Helps with dream creating as you set goals to were your car could look with all the effort you put in to your vag car

A big role, as it makes it possible to interact with other enthusiasts way more often than just at meets

A massive one but that has in my opinion spoilt it really. People post pics tend to post pics of their cars instead of attending local meets and shows. Nothing is a surprise any more sadly.

Huge role, spreads all the information about up coming shows and meets

Yes, shows cars off

It's is a helpful tool for people to get advise on possible issues. However it has also created a vast of Internet bullies and so called "keyboard warriors"

A lot but it can also be a downfall as people can see things certain people have changed on they're own cars etc. is nice to see what changed etc.

Connecting people

As said previous, people build there cliques and concentrate to much on being Internet famous. But, it also offers a wider expanse for people to gain ideas from around the world of what styles are popular and what new ideas people have come up with

I'm not sure

Helps introduce others from all around the country

The scene would survive with or without it, obviously with the Internet, people can show off their pride and joy more so it makes shows a little less exciting but it's not like the Internet is going anywhere so it just needs to be accepted

it allows me to read reviews on all the latest gadgets such as car stereos or new wheel styles

It creates more accessibility on a big scale and also pushes trends onto the fast track.

Fairly big roll as it's easier for everyone to keep in touch and for events to get good publicity

in someways I think it helps get things known to people but in ways it causes a lot of negativity and hate on what some people do

People trying to get famous by building dangerous builds that put a bad name to us enthusiasts. But also good to know when the next event is

A poor roll, it causes conflict and wrong perceptions of people and their cars.

Instagram is great Facebook is good to promote but brings out the keyboard warriors.

## Q8 - Why do you go to car shows?

To see old friends and look at cars

To meet new people and see new cars

To look in detail at cars I like. If I can talk to the owner and ask them questions I (trying to be different when asking them) and just generally talk about motors.

I go to see other modified cars & meet people with similar interests

To have a good time with friends and see the winter builds in the flesh

To meet new people in VAG Scene and also to have a great time with friends

I go to car shows mainly to see some peoples incredible builds I look for fast cars horsepower gets me every time

To see other peoples enthusiasm in their cars, socialise with friends and I always love a bit of racing/drag strip action.

Catch up with friends and look at cars

To look at cars and have a laugh

to see what i could spend my money on if i actually saved it :(, also to see unbelievably clean cars and to get ideas on what i can do to my own and the general attitude at most car shows is great, everyone's extremely friendly its just everyone who love modified cars together in one place

To meet people and have a good time

the friends and the people I meet are the reason i go

Because i love the look and vibe that the sows create no matter what race you are everyone gets allong no matter what

Inspiration for my own car, meeting the guys from the internet

To socialise, show my car and look at other cars.

To get ideas and look at other cars

To look at other cars and ideas

Hobby

For the atmosphere, to meet up with friends I can't see on a day to day basis. Inspiration and to make new friends.

I love the ambience and my friends simple as that.

For the social, to admire the cars

I go to shows to display the car I have built and make new and build on friendships I have made over the years

Because you see different types off modified cars, its an awesome experience

For a fun day out with Mates

See old friends, meet new ones and check out works of art in the flesh

See the question regarding forums

To show off my rides and to see other people's. It's a great source of inspiration and also helps keep your mind out of the box, which I find can happen easily.

Because I enjoy them and like to show my car at them

To have a good time with friends and look at some amazing cars that interest me, seeing how different people have taste in different ways

Its a good vibe, Only time I get to chill with friends and get discount on cleaning products ??

Because I enjoy socialising with people who share my interest and seeing how some of my favourite cars change over the season.

Look at traders, show cars and hand out and have a chat over a beer with mates

## Q9 - Do you go to meets for the same reason? If not how do they differ?

Always always go to vw fest- amazing people and more chilled out

Same reason

Very rarely go to meets since Kleers was stopped, feel I don't know where to go if it's not with my closest friends

I go for the same reason.

Every meet is different English ones are nothing compared to the European ones

I do go to meets but not very often, meets are completely different to shows, I love shows, shows have everything and you meet people and see completely different things but meets you see all the same

Yes and No meets are generally more low key and it's a chance to meet new people who are car enthusiast

Yes

Yeah, bigger variety of cars

Yes

I have not been to a car meet yet due to just how far away they are and time constraints

Same

yes exact same reason

Yeah same reason as above to have a good time show off my car and get more inspiration

Yep, but meets have a more "intimate" atmosphere

same

meets are more social

Yes

no

I do go to meets for the same reason, I wouldn't normally be willing to travel as far for a meet as I would for a show. Not sure why, I guess it's just personal preference.

I do go to meets, I personally feel, More people attend meets as there are a lot more people and different types of 'scenes' when it comes to car shows.

Yes

I don't. I find the attendees aren't interested in the culture and are only there because they have nothing else to do with there evenings

Yes

Yes

I see meets as a way of getting out the house, chatting, having a laugh and relaxing a bit

Socialising with mates

Meets bring a more social aspect into play as I often know a fair few people at the ones I go to. There's often a much more relaxed vibe at meets too, as well as the showing off of car's actual performance too. This can go over the top quickly though, which often ruins that aspect of the meet.

Yes I do and to meet up with friends that you don't get to see on a regular basis

for the same reason although meets are all the same local cars and I prefer shows

Some meets are different but the ones around me like to street race, rev the tits off there corsas and ruins the scene for everyone else. Boy racers you could say! We all like to drive fast but theres a time and a place and its not on a public road where the police are watching. Save it for a trackday!

Yes the same reason

I don't do meets anymore. They get ruined by the wannabe ken blocks in £500 shitters

## **Q10 - Have you ever been to a show abroad? How did it differ from UK shows?**

No

Never been abroad to a show

No, but I am considering going to some in future

I've never went to a shoe abroad.

The quality of car over there is beyond belief

No i haven't unfortunately

I unfortunately haven't

No

No

No

I have not been to a show abroad but would love (and planning to!) go to H2OI next year

No, but I would like to

no

No but want to

I'm from Germany:D

Yes, massively impressive. Totally different standard of cars. Different ideas and of course the weather

Never but one day

no



Yes I have, it was crazy big. Much bigger scale than any show I've been to in the UK. Even though nobody speaks the same language everyone is happy to come over to a car and commend the owner if they like it, and just walk past without bad mouthing if they don't.

I haven't yet but am looking to go H2Oi in America. Along with a few shows in Holland etc.

No

I haven't, I plan on doing it next year

No

Just the language barrier

N/a

No

Not yet

Not yet

no, although I have heard a lot about them and there standard of cars is a lot higher than the UK

Sadly not yet but Im planning on doing dubshed & vw days in 2016

Not as of yet but I will be going in two months time

Not yet

### **Q11 - Is it important to you to be involved with building your car? If so, why?**

100% otherwise it isn't your car

Yes because you can then help others and also others can see all the hard work you have put into the car

Very much so, I think modifying a car is almost always done by someone who is keen about how stuff works and their car isn't a fashion item; it's an extension of themselves and working on your own car is a key part of that connection. I would never attempt body work on my worn as it is a very fine art. As long as at least 55% of any build/ work done on a car has been carried out by the owner, they have my respect. I believe by paying someone else to do work on your car is not better than buying a flashy brand new car. Its not yours!

Yes, I feel proud when I successfully do something to my car. I wouldn't feel that same way if someone else what to do it for me. It also saves money.

If you self build you tend to do it with your close friends I've found this anyways and spending time with your friends doing something you both love what's better than that

Yes I've done everything on my car that has been done it. I like to do it myself so I know it's been done properly also to say it was me who done it all

I believe it is if u work on a budget and it's always good to be familiar of what has gone wrong if anything but if u have money and aren't mechanically sound a trusted mechanic is a great friend to have

Yes I did everything to my car. It's important because then you can actually say it is all of your work.

Yeah, so you can be proud of what you've built

yes, everything on my car has been done by myself, yeah it doesn't look the best or is done amazingly well but its taught me a lot working on it, what works and what doesn't, what to do and what not to do. it gives you a sense of achievement when you build it yourself/modify it and you just think to yourself "yeah iv done that"

Yes there no point having a nice car if you don't know the detail

its nice to contribute but not essential . I know many people without cars that still love being involved

It is very important no one has fun someone else building the car you put blood sweat and tears into your car you respect what people go through to have a mint looking car others go build me this and the sponsors go do it all and bam new car they didnt do anything on

Yep, built not bought all the way. I love to be able to tell people what I have done to my car and that it was my hard work to make it the way it is

Oh yes. Personal satifaction

Yes, due to understand what goes wrong if it does go wrong and being able to say you built that car not someone else

Yes it is. Mainly because I don't come from a mechanical background and I want to learn and also it's way more fun having a couple beers on a sunny day chilling on the driveway with close friends working on cars.

Because it makes your car actually yours and give you a lot more happiness in seeing your own work done and sat there in one piece working. Also brings your friends a lot closer to home. Making the whole group/team.

Much more rewarding feeling when I've built it myself

I thinks it's very important. I have built 90% of my own car myself. I think you can take a lot more pride in displaying your car at shows if you've put blood, sweat, tears, late nights and arguments into it. Only then can you 100% be satisfied with the final result

Yes, because you know what's been put into it so you know there'll be no problems, its like a connection you have with your car its apart off your life

Of course, it's a labour of love that you are sharing with the world. It's a connection in friendship

I wouldn't let someone else touch it. If something is broken and I can't fix it then I learn how to. It's not easy but it's a much bigger sense of pride even when it breaks the following day.

Yes I think it's important for the sense of achievement

Absolutely. Fair enough, some things are best left to a professional like Air Ride, bodywork and certain engine work. Most other things can be tackled if you put your mind to it. One of the best parts of doing things yourself and with other's help is exchanging stories about how you did something and what went wrong, or how easy it actually was etc. You can tell if someone didn't have much first-hand involvement and it just a creates a stale conversation, unless they're not there to talk to.

Yes I think it is so you have a understanding of cars and how they work and more satisfaction knowing you built it rather than someone else's work you can take credit for something you have done your self

Yes, it gives you a different kind of love knowing you built it yourself and not just paying people for your work, although In some respects there is things you can't do and others have to do for you

Yeah but I cant allways work on it sometimes I like to leave it to the professionals

Yes I have done everything to my car myself or with my friends. It makes me feel proud to do it myself

I like to do what I can but I'm a true believer on using a professional to get it right if it's out of your hands.

## **Q12 - Do you think it is important to use companies run by other enthusiasts?**

### **If so, why?**

N/a

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Yes because more people will want to bring there ideas to the market

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Yes I am a fan of these, built by enthusiasts for enthusiasts. Perfect recipe for a great product as they know the market better then anyone

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Yes, I feel that they understand why you want stuff done a certain way & it makes explaining what you want a lot easier.

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You want somebody who am working on your car to love what's being done just as much as you do not somebody who just does it to pay the bills you want pride and care to be taken when completing the work you need carried out

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Yes because some enthusiasts are very good at what they do and make some great stuff for the VAG Scene

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yes you are more likely to get a better service from another enthusiast and more likely to be able to raise a grievance if any

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Yes I do. It's important because they share the enthusiasm and most likely know how you feel about your car and if someone were to damage it.

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Yeah, so to keep the scene going strong

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Sorry i am not sure as to what you mean

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It's nice to be involved with other enthusiasts to spread word of the vag scene and for them to understand no everyone with a modified car is a boy racer

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Yes as it help push the car culture further

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Yeah they understand the struggle to get your car to how you want and they know that every car thats in is set to be diffrent and no one wants a ford experts fixing there vw lets be honest no vw owner want this ;)

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Yes, because they are able to meet my needs better than "simple" mechanics because they know how I think about everything

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Yes supporting local business is extremely important. they also have different contacts etc

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Yes, mainly because they do it for the passion not for the money

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It is, as it supports the scene and keeps it running. And if the company is run by a friend it's always nice to support friends business especially if they are starting out.

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Keep the ambience of it all going really and making sure they keep up the good work that all the people are doing. Can't fault it really?! Stay with your locals, support them and one day they will look after you or be bigger cause of your input.

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If you lack the mechanical skills then yes it is good to support local business

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I think it's important if you use a company that they have an understanding and knowledge of the make of vehicle and the job it's in for, so you know that the job is going to be done properly and not bodged together. I won't let anyone touch my car if they didn't know what they were doing

---

No

Sometimes

100% they are where they are because they love what they do. That should always be supported

No

You have more peace of mind that they will do their best work, as they have a true passion too. It's also much easier to talk things through and get on the same level.

Well it nice to be able to buy something from someone with the same mind set as you rather than a massive company that doesn't really need the money

yea, knowing that they will understand your passion for what you want doing and doing it to the best ability and not a poor job

Of course! They know how to look after them and know cheap parts wont cut it. Only time a non enthusiast touches my car is for an mot

Yes to support them with the same interest

I don't think it's important but it can have its advantages.

### **Q13 - For you, is a modified VW about the car's looks or the driving experience? Or both?**

Both 100%

Driving experience and looks because if it is too low it looks nice but the driving experience is terrible so it is about finding the perfect balance between the two

Definitely both. The VAG scene is so big and varied that there has to be room for both. I personally prefer function/ performance mods over stance/ concorce/ looks modifications. Depending on you're opinion and vehicle you can go different ways. Its very hard on a low budget to get performance but for me that's what I am striving towards. I think it's important to have a goal for a car and to stick to it. Once you "finish" move on. I'm not saying selling but buy another car and experience something new and learn some more.

I think that both are important. Some cars aren't fast so looks are more important.

More so for the looks but a nice drive is always good

For both definitely! Has to look good but has to drive just as good as it looks!

I sway more to the driving experience i love the street sleeper look a car that's go'a like the clappers but doesn't look the part

Both

For me it's the cars looks

Both

its a combination of both, its got to be about the looks, you modify it to make it look like how you want and if you like it that's the main thing, and then its important to have a nice driving experience too

Both looking good and a nice drive/realible daily

Both but i can appreciate cars that are orientated to one or the other

Both the looks are main but if you got both and have done it yourself then you have something to be proud of

The best of both worlds really. not stupidly low but stupidly fast and a very sporty look

Mostly the drive but it still has to be eye catching

Both, definitely both

I purposely brought the gti model so it could be a fun car to drive and also look super cool with a set of choice modifications. So I guess both.

Both really, I drive my cars lower than one on air ride and I can't fault the love all ages have in a nice clean example of a vag car.

Always been a mix of both. Two types of car person, those who own them for the looks and those who enjoy the driving experience

I think both. If your car looks good, the driving experience is better. If your car looks good, you know people are looking. It's basically a form of showing off. But the car has to be practical so you can have fast road driving experiences when your feeling adventurous

Both

All of the above! Different cars for different reasons

Looks all the way, if I wanted performance and thrill then I'd buy something fast. Form over function anyway for me. Not that driving my car doesn't put a massive smile on my face though

Both- a good car is both quick and looks good

I think all of the above. I have a performance VW, which does look nice and I am doing things to bring it up on that side, but I also have a much older VW which is all about the looks. If you do go for both spectrums in one, you have to put a lot more time and effort in to get the results you want.

Both

Personally the look more than the experience, if you enjoy your car that's all that matters. you can't impress everyone. I'd rather have a slow great looking car than a powerful car that doesn't look the way I want it to look

I like my car low and always clean but I have started to think towards buying jap next bigger engine but still keep it low ??

Both

Both area major factors

#### **Q14 - Is there anything you would like to add about your experiences of being a modified VW enthusiast or about the culture generally?**

I think it's fantastic

The culture is at its best it's been I love it

Just meeting pretty cool people I never normally would have

everything that could go wrong will go wrong especially on a VW! but its a learning experience and there are plenty of friendly helpful VW groups that always help you with what could be wrong or what's definitely wrong, it is kind of like a big family.

Just that people into vag tend to be open minded and even the odd bit of banter is not miss understood for anything more good to talk to good for info good for a laugh

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Just need others to reapect what people have i hate seeing someone who dont have enough money to have a show car in a day get the s\*\*t ripped out of them for not having enough money say someone has a brand new vw on air and someone with a banged up polo there is someone alway sly enough to say eww look at that heap of shit next to that gorgeous other car thats all the scene needs is mor respect for others and help others otherwise whats the point in the whole show if all you do is laugh and cus someone one elses pride and joy

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No, but I'd like to wish you all the best for your PhD, Will! Greetings, Manuel

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Too much attention seeking

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Think it's all covered in previous answers!

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Culture needs to lighten up and stop been so serious, just park your cars up grab a cider and chill admiring everyone's work, as one day you will maybe like they're car more than yours..

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Trends change quickly and a few different styles have been popular over the years, not keen on the whole stance scene as its all a bit predictable and in my opinion a car has to have the right balance of functionality and style so as not to hinder the performance.

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After been in the VW scene for 6yrs, I have made a lot of friends, made memories (some good, some bad) had laughs and tears with people I hold very dear. The pulling together and people lending hands when your in a time of need or assistance. There's always one person so you can rely on helping you out and having fun while doing it

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No

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Brings together people I would never of approached in any other sort of social circumstance

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I've met the best friends I could ever ask for and I'm sure it's the same for millions of others

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I prefer the VW scene to other groups such as the Honda scene

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Nothing comes to mind

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It's a good scene to be in everyone well mostly everyone is happy to help with problems and passing tips and all on

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Noo people have there preferences and I wouldn't change or add anything

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Not sure what to say

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I think people need to relax more

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At the moment it attract to many people trying to make money from it and not have a true passion. A certain show in the north of England is generated from bank of dad and not from true car people. To many people setting up Bull Shit names trying to get famous .

## Appendix IV Interview Transcripts

### IV.I Steve Interview Transcript

2/2/2015

49:00

**Before the recording began the interviewee agreed with statements about use and protection of data and gave informed consent verbally and by signing the informed consent form. They were also given time to read the information for participants.**

W: Right so do you identify yourself as a car enthusiast

S: Yep...

W: Why?

S: It's just...I think...that when you get a car it's just like a blank slate and it's better to just put your own touch on it, it's like instead of driving round with a blank bit of paper you have something with your own personal touch on it

W: I see, so it's like personalised to you sort of?

S: Yep, it makes the car more...you feel involved with it

W: How long have you been into cars?

S: (pauses)...Since I was little, I've always had like hotwheels, little toy cars, matchbox, all the stuff like that, Scalextrics...always been into cars

W: So how did it start? Like with the toy cars?..

S: Yeah it was probably toy cars and being a passenger in my Dad's car (laughs)

W: What was it?

S: Ahh he had a [Ford] Sierra

W: Oh did he?

S: Yeah, he used to drive it pretty quickly though

W: Yeah

S: (laughs)

W: The Cosworth one?

S: nah it wasn't the Cossie [Cosworth] it was just a basic, I think 1.8

W: Ah yeah, sounds nice

S: He still...gave it some... we used to go on drives from like Mach coz his Mum used to live in Mach

W: Yeah

S: Always used to fly back listening to like trance and stuff on Radio 1

W: Yeah

S: Yeah it was a good feeling

W: Yeah, definitely. What about like modified cars then? When did you first get into...

S: Erm (pauses) probably when my mate gave me...well I was into race-cars like obviously just being into cars and you obviously get into race-cars but the whole like show car modified thing it started probably when my mate gave me a copy of Max Power, can't remember how old I was, probably 15 something like that, 15 or 16 something like that...

W: What sorta...year was it?

S: (pauses) When was that? Ten, maybe ten, eleven years ago

W: yeah  
S: It was an old copy anyway I think it was 2003 or something  
W: yeah, that's interesting. So how do you decide like what style to choose? Or what to...do or  
S: Originally...I was gonna go for more... well with most of my cars I was always gonna go for a more sort of showy sorta style...with like... I used to have a [Vauxhall] Corsa  
W: yeah  
S: I was gonna go the sorta Euro, sort of Porsche wheels sort of look for it  
W: yeah  
S: But it ended up being more of a track sorta style  
W: Yeah  
S: But the same sorta thing happened with my Beemer [BMW 318] ...I was gonna go low, wide... and sort of a little boot build [explain] in the back  
W: yeah  
S: And sort of keep it quite... sort of...sort of minimalist...well  
W: Yeah, I get you  
S: But it ended up just turning into a drift car  
Interview interrupted....  
W: Sorry about that, carry on man  
S: But then yeah it just..the drift bug took over and it just...grew from there and I got a new job...got more money, spent more on better suspension, new wheels...  
W: Yeah  
S: And just...  
W: yeah, back to the drifting, let's talk more about...how you got into that.  
S: [pauses & laughs] I think...how I originally got into it?  
W: yeah  
S:...was just seeing [video] clips online ... and then eventually, the D1 GP which is the Japanese [Drift] Grand Prix came to the UK, I think it was in 2006  
W: Yeah  
S: It was at Silverstone and it was D1 GP versus the British boys...and the Irish boys and it was the first drift event that I went to and it was amazing  
W: yeah, I bet  
S: And just ever since then, just caught the bug. It was like all the original D1 GP cars, the Ken Nomura was there... Evan Mura!?  
W: Oh yeah, must have been cool to see.  
S: Yeah  
W: Oh right so like... how like... coming to...when you had the Corsa before and coming to the Beemer now...how do you decide what sorta project car you're gonna...go for or how you're...or how do you decide?  
S: Well with the Corsa, I had a Corsa before that it was just a 1.2  
W: Yeah  
S: And I did a few little things [modifications] to that and then I got kinda bored of how slow it was and then my mates was selling a 1.4 Sport...so I bought that off him  
W: Yeah  
S: And it just... I just kinda liked the Coras at the time  
W: yeah yeah



S: So I stuck with that. With the Beemer...I didn't particularly plan on getting that... I planned on getting a [Volkswagen] Polo next to do a Euro project

W: yeah

S: But my mate Dan was selling his Beemer, the one I've got now and I'd already helped him spray the car like a couple of months before so I knew the car was alright...

W: Yeah

S: And then...I just checked on the insurance quote and if I could get insurance cheap enough which I did

W: yeah

S: I bought it...so it was like £700 I think which like really surprised me

W: Yeah that is surprising, definitely. So obviously we both know the answer to this but are you a member of any clubs?

S: Yeah, joined a few clubs. I did run my own club for a while around here...sort of...still sideline

W: yeah yeah...how active you been with that sort of thing like as a member?

S: recently? Not so much anymore I sorta backed away from the whole car scene a little bit...I still, obviously... keep my fingers in the pies as to say but I don't tend to go to meets or shows any more if at all

W: Oh right

S: Coz.. it's sort of...I feel that its lost its way a little bit and it's not as good as it used to be

W: yeah

S: I went to...the first show I went to was in 2009 in Donington Park

W: yeah

S: ISTS [International Styling & Tuning Show] and it was the first show I've been to obviously it was just complete sensory overload in the car sense erm... and since then I've just the shows that I've been to they haven't... the cars haven't been to as good of a standard or as highly modified and it's just...everything sort of...nobody's willing to spend any money on their car anymore in some aspects

W: yeah

S: And there does seem to be a lot of politics involved and sorta bitchiness

W: yeah, I'd like to talk more later about the 'scene', a lot of people when they think about like car enthusiasts they think it's just like looking at cars but lately there's been this trend towards like...

S: yeah

W: I was gonna say, do you think that's like a wider trend?, like it's not just Beemer enthusiasts or...

S: Nah it seems to be a bit of everything...like... the scene kids and businesses...I dunno it's just a bit bitchy...a bit cliquey...

W: So what does the word scene mean to you?, in this sense.

S: (pauses) Bit tongue in cheek...in my... whats the words....how I dissect the words is

W: yeah

S: Is a little bit tongue in cheek

W: yeah that's fine, that's sorta what I'm getting at

S: But it means...erm the sort of the main... the top boys of the style you're into...so...say if you're in the Euro scene you've got the big money [car] builders

W: yeah

S: ...and the ones that are always getting the features in the magazines... the ones that always get their photos taken

W: yeah

S: And they have their own little cliquey club sorta thing  
W: Yeah, do you think like the rise of the internet and clubs has like....  
S: I think the rise of Facebook's had a part to play in how...clubs have slightly...demo...not demolished but...  
W: Yeah  
S: gone downhill  
W: Do you think there's a link like between less meets and social networking or do think that is even a link?  
S: Erm I don't think so particularly... I think it's more just the recession  
W: yeah yeah  
S: Like everyone's tighter with their money  
W: Erm have you made friends like through the car scene?  
S: Yeah definitely made friends through it, a lot of friends from all over...I got mates down in Swansea, mates in Birmingham, just mates all over  
W: So for you it is quite a social thing?..  
S: yeah it definitely very social  
W: it's not just about driving or?  
S: yeah  
W: Yeah, I guess now kinda linked to the scene questions...what makes a good modified car? Like to you personally what makes a good car?...not necessarily following a trend or whatever  
S: To me its....hmmm.... that's a good question....its... the cars... for me the cars gotta look purpose built...its gotta be attention to detail...its gotta be very....well not high but its gotta be there  
W: yeah yeah  
S: And its sometimes the little touches can make the car just that perfect bit better like a little bit of pinstriping on somewhere  
W: yeah  
S: or just...little things ...that for me is like more important than just throwing a chequebook at a car you know and  
W: yeah  
S: Like look at me I've got all this money and I've spent it all on this ridiculous body-kit  
W: Yeah its more about the personalising?  
S: Yeah, it's more about doing what you wanna do, personalised touches...little things  
W: Do you think there's been like a rise of those cheque book cars? Since like the Max Power days [early 2000s]  
S: Erm I don't know...with the way things have gone recently...I don't think so... because a lot of people just tend to be getting features these days for just a drop [lowered suspension] and wheels  
W: that's true  
S: So you're not really needing to spend that much to get a [magazine] feature these days  
W: yeah... How important do you think that is to get a magazine feature?  
S: (laughs)  
W: yeah well say like how you feel and how like others might see it..  
S: How I feel? I don't really care. I don't read the magazines that much anymore...I bought one a few weeks ago just coz I was on a ferry and it was there just something to read erm but I think for a lot of the proper really serious people who go to all the shows it's pretty paramount...  
W: yeah

S: hmmm but I don't think overall it's that important, the car magazines have gone downhill, they've got thinner

W: yeah

S: not as many pages... and they just tend to be not as widely read any more I don't feel

W: that's interesting, do you think *that's* got to do with social networking and forums and that?

S: yeah...possibly I think everything's starting to turn digital...Max Power died, turned into something else and moved digital ...but yeah Fast Car I think they're still doing prints but yeah I don't think they're that widely available anymore... I haven't seen them for a while

W: So well, bit of a tongue in cheek question really...but what changes did like the magazines and the culture in general I guess go through between like what was in them in the early 2000s and what was in them when they sorta came to the end of their days?

S: Erm obviously...early 2000s...Fast & Furious [film] had just come out...big bodykits...big wheels...just as much money as you could throw at a car and as much shiny stuff erm there was obviously that was...they were the big iconic cars anyway. There was obviously the race-car builds going on and stuff as well

W: yeah

S: But recently...there's still race-car builds, track cars, drift cars whatever but the big iconic builds have sort of...dulled down a bit... you don't get the big bodykits anymore...if you're gonna get a bodykit you get... a sort of really subtle or like a race version or a race kit obviously the big players [body kit manufacturers] like Rocket Bunny, Liberty Walk...

W: Sort of like motorsport inspired?

S: yeah they're really motorsport inspired

W: Cool. What's your favourite modified car?

S: yeah...ooh my favourite ever car built? Oooh (laughs)

W: That's a big one isn't it?

S: Its gonna be one of the 2006 D1 GP cars I think...and its either Ken Nomura's [Nissan] Skyline or Youchi Imamura's [Mazda] RX7, the APEX'I RX7?

W: Yeah

S: The white and silver one...that was a beautiful car and obviously I'm a massive [Mazda] RX7 fan...dream car (laughs) so that's got a big part to play

W: What's...maybe not like one single car...but what's the worst modified car you seen

S: (laughs) I've seen a few

W: (laughs) Yeah we all have

S: A very...a lot...erm that's quite hard to say as I've just seen like so many bad ones

W: yeah

S: The...the one that springs to mind is a little black [Citroen] Saxo with white wheels and that devil tail spoiler...remember that [spoiler]?

W: Yeah I remember those. Yeah I guess, like following on from that then, how did you...learn or like pick up what looks good and what doesn't?

S: Hmmm its personal opinion a lot of it, although you are obviously influenced by what other people say, what other people feel...

W: Yeah

S: It's just in like yeah personal opinion

W: I just sorta want to move onto the actual driving of the car... I know like that's quite a big thing for you isn't it?...

S: Yeah

W: Yeah so like how does driving a modified car differ from driving a standard car?

S: It's well it's *a lot* more, well for my car it's a lot more an involved experience...um standard cars they tend to be for comfort and obviously with modified...I've modified the suspension on mine, it's a lot harder, a lot lower...

W: Yeah

S: ...a lot stiffer and you can feel every bump in the road...you can feel...what the cars doing and it's just...it makes it more...its makes it way more exciting...you can go round a corner at 60mph...like a little basic corner at 60mph in a standard car...

W: yeah...

S: ...and it'll just be a corner...go round a corner at 60mph in a modified car and it'll be like driving a race-car...it's just a rush

W: yeah definitely...coz you sometimes feel quite like detached in a standard car like from the road and that like you're in a bubble

S: *Definitely* I drove a new Toyota Avensis in work and it just I didn't feel connected at all I just felt all over the place

W: yeah that's interesting, cool. So like do you think for people on the street and that, does it get more attention than a standard car necessarily or..?

S: It depends what the standard car is

W: Well yeah there is that

S: Obviously if it's a supercar then...

W: yeah

S: yeah I *do* notice quite a lot of people tilt their... turning their heads or whatever when I go down the street

W: yeah

S: It is a really nice feeling (smiles) and I was driving through town the other day and I was in some traffic

W: yeah

S: And some kids they were just like 'Woah, nice car man!' and I was just like this massive grin appeared on my face...like uncontrollable grin like thanks (smiles)

W: Have you ever driven in convoy? Like to a show or anything like that?

S: yeah I've driven in a few convoys, we used to go down to Swansea Cruise [meet], we used to drive down obviously from Aberystwyth... erm pick up a few in Lampeter and then we'd get to the meet point and we'd be driving a massive convoy of say... there'd probably be a hundred cars some times and it is it is a rush

W: Yeah, when you roll through a town?

S: Yeah, I've driven in a few convoys and obviously when you get to a show and you've got modified cars zipping in and out of the show and all about and all around the surrounding areas its just like ooh spot the modified car and it's just like we're getting excited, we're getting close

W: yeah like the whole town is...

S: yeah it's just a buzz

W: The town is like part of the show?

S: yeah

W: Do you drive your car daily?

S: Yep

W: Beyond like the practical element is it important to you that's it's a [car you drive] daily?

S: Yeah it is quite important to me that's it's a daily, as much as it breaks down (laughs)

W: Yeah yeah, rather than it being like a car for weekends?

S: Yeah if it was...its....if I had the money it probably would get turned into a car for weekends I probably would have a little side project runaround that I'd do a few things to but yeah...at the moment it's important that it's a daily to me

W: Yeah that's cool. So when you see your car parked up how does it make you feel? or when you're walking away from it or whatever like we were saying before (referring to a conversation before the interview about my car and not being able to walk away without looking back at it).

S: (laughs) It depends....how it's been behaving

W: Well yeah...that's true

S: But yeah coming home from work and have a nice little brisk drive home from work at 4 o'clock in the morning...puts a smile on my face after a long shift at work...definitely (smiles)

W: And to be honest I think like a lot of people think that being a car enthusiast because you're enthusiastic its always positive but it's not always positive is it?

S: It's *not* always positive (laughs) definitely not....there's a lot of money in it. I can add up five grand like that (snaps fingers) that I've spent on my car over the last five years just and I dread to thin how much I've actually spent, that's just the main few things that I've done

W: But then like also when it breaks down or that its...I don't want to bring you down but there's negative feelings towards the car to isn't there?

S: I've... I've been so close to just breaking the windows and kicking them through sometimes when I've broken down

W: Its infuriating isn't it?

S: You remember the time my wheel came off on Morrison's roundabout? (referring to an incident about 2 years ago caused by a faulty wheel adaptor)

W: Yeah, that was...

S: That was...fun

W: Yeah

S: Or the countless times that I've run my battery flat in the middle of nowhere

W: Yeah, I was saying this when I picked my car up last week, I was talking to the mechanic saying why do we do it? Like the amount of money I've shelled out on those bumpers, why do we do it? What do you think?

S: Well it's like why do we do anything?

W: Coz it's not just the money is it? There's like the emotional investment as well

S: It's like why do people get tattoos? It's the same as that.

W: Yeah. Right, so it's fair to say your car is like a project car isn't it?

S: Yeah

W: And do you do work on it yourself?

S: Erm I try to do as much as I can but obviously at the moment with college and work on the weekends....

W: yeah

S: times pretty pushed...so if I have something wrong I'll try and take it down to my mate's, Adam's [WSA Motors, Mydroilin]

W: yeah

S: And if I can stay down there all day and help him with it, I'll help him

W: yeah

S: And if there's stuff I can do I'll do it myself... and he's cool to let me do that

W: Ah yeah that's cool. And is that important to you? To be involved with the....

S: Definitely

W: ...with the process?

S: Definitely, coz then you get to know your car and if something goes you know what's gone, obviously how much it's gonna set you back (laughs) erm but you know where to start looking for the problems or what's gone wrong and erm solve them quicker maybe

W: yeah

S: or and learn stuff like that

W: Is there that sort of 'built not bought' element there? Like you've done it yourself...

S: yeah and there's a nice sense of achievement as well... I fitted those coilovers or I fitted these wheels and...

W: I suppose garages and that and places like Adam's do you think they're often like people that you're friends with? More than like somewhere you would go just to get a service?

S: Yeah...me and Adam are good mates (laughs). Yeah he's cool, he's definitely a close friend and he like obviously I met him like through the car scene with the club we used to run and it's just sort of grown a friendship as a part of that.

W: Coz yeah I was thinking about this myself, coz I take the car to garages where I know people like to J's [J's Garage, Aberystwyth] or to one at home [Bridgnorth] and I was thinking like would I go to another garage like for the same service and I'm not sure that I would?

S: No no

W: Coz it's not just about that is it?

S: And because you know that they know modified cars as well

W: yeah that's the other thing...a lot of places...

S: A lot of places are just like ohh this bumpers in the way or jack up on the sideskirts or whatever and it's like errr and they try to take care of it but they know what's what and that..

W: So the stuff that you have done yourself then, where did you learn the skills and that?

S: I *did* train to be a mechanic in College, Coleg Ceredigion in Cardigan for two years and it didn't..I did have an apprenticeship for a while after that but it didn't really work out for me

W: yeah no worries

S: yeah a bit... (makes a face)

W: Ah right, never mind then. But do you think live you've learnt stuff off like clubs and meets and through like?..

S: yeah, not so much the technical side of stuff... but definitely other little things...just upkeep of cars and stuff like that

W: Yeah I was gonna say which garages do you use but obviously...

S: WSA Motors, Mydroilin, Pen y Bont. Plug!

W: yeah get a plug in there (laughs)

S: (laughs)

W: Where do you like, and not like from a financial side of things, where do you buy your car parts from?

S: Erm tends to be ebay or I try not to buy the cheap stuff

W: yeah

S: I try to buy from a trusted [web]site like GSF Car parts [a genuine parts dealer] they're good for

like German...German cars, Swedish cars, European cars really or... I ask Adam wheres the best place to get them ask some advice or something

W: So it doesn't necessarily have to be a new part necessarily?

S: Yeah...its and like I can go down the scrapyard or something and hope they've got something there or coz my cars an old car and not a brand new car I don't have to go to the dealer every time and get ripped off with stupid prices

W: When you're buying things like...like aftermarket things...like the wheels or that where would you go for that?

S: Wheels...I'd probably check ebay first and just see whats about and then maybe check some other places...like Driftworks [online forum for drift enthusiasts] or...

W: yeah

S: Just sort of use Google, the internet really

W: yeah

S: If you see something you like you can check out where you can get it from and go for the cheapest price obviously

W: Yeah and do you think like the internet helps like you can see like other cars that run those wheels or whatever?

S: yeah, definitely. There's....on the Rota [aftermarket wheel brand] website?

W: Yeah

S: You can upload a picture of your car, side on and then you can you can like there's a photo gallery...and you can copy and paste the wheels that you want to choose and put them onto your car and size them up obviously

W: To see how it will look?

S: Yeah to see how its gonna look like yeah

W: How do you decide what brand it is? Like obviously not cheap [non-genuine] parts but is it through like asking friends or

S: yeah, I'd rather go with a brand that's trusted, obviously a lot of people don't like Rota, my wheels, saying they're rip-off's, they're copies [several of their designs are similar to classic long since obsolete designs by other brands] but they're used on the BDC [British Drift Championships] used by professional race drivers so they're good enough for me.

W: Erm so moving on now we talked about shows briefly before now I want to talk about shows and about meets and the importance of them or otherwise to the culture or scene?

So do you go to car shows?

S: Erm I used to...I used to go to a few...I think there was about 3 a year, 4 a year something like that and obviously cruises [synonymous with meets but often on a larger scale] and meets as well

W: yeah

S: So I was pretty active I was usually...I was quite active

W: Yeah yeah

S: But I've back off quite a lot now

W: And you go to like...track days and that sorta thing?

S: Erm...I've done a few...when I went to a show at Donnington [Race Circuit], the one that I mentioned earlier, in 2009 [ISTS]...I took my Corsa for a few laps around Donington, there was a track day that you could sign up to do, pay and you'd get allotted time that you could take your car on the track for half an hour or whatever it was...erm it was great fun (laughs)

W: That like adds to the show do you think?

S: Yeah definitely it's just an experience, you get to drive on the track it's a good feeling and also...I think...2011 I went to ISTS in Silverstone and that was just when they'd created the new Stowe Circuit and I got to drive on that as well it was the same sorta deal, I got to drive on that before it had even had the Grand Prix [Formula 1], so I drove on that before Lewis Hamilton (laughs) and I was just like yeah this is a cool feeling

W: Do you go to many VW shows?, I know that's not really your thing but...

S: No I haven't been to any particularly big VW shows

W: that's cool, no worries

W: So I guess, what do you go to shows for? Why go?

S: Just to see what's happening...see what the new trnds gonna be...see friends as well obviously erm just enjoy looking at cars

W: yeah

S: it's like (laughs) Why do people go to art galleries? (laughs)

W: (laughs) yeah its true. And I guess like you said you've got friends sort of spread all over the place do you think the shows then act like a big...

S: yeah brings you all together, like on social networks 'Ahh are you going to this show? Are you going to this show?' then like 'Ah yeah we'll have to meet up' and whatever

W: Do you do much preparation for a show?

S: Erm...wash the car, polish it...drive the car to the place, wash it again...wash all the grime off it

W: yeah

S: But no not really I don't seem to... I didn't really spend days detailing around every little nook and cranny of the car like *some* people do (laughs nodding in my direction)

W: (laughs)

S: Taping it all up on the front to stop stonechips and whatever...

W: yeah some people are really into the cleaning side of it aren't they?

S: yeah definitely

W: Erm...Have you ever experienced things like show 'n' shine competitions?

S: Erm I've seen a few at some of the shows I've been to...I've never really paid much attention though

W: yeah I was gonna say like that the things that win and this might link back to what we were saying about the big cars and that do you think there are any patterns there?

S: Corruption? (laughs) well not so much corruption but it tends to be sort of the people who have already got a bit of a name for themselves I've noticed, I dunno how true that is or like if it's just a popularity thing. It's like, 'Ah yeah yeah ...Rage's car is nice' or whatever he's called or something like that

W: A car that's already known then?

S: *Yeah* its always someone that's in...coz it tends to be like the people that are judging tend to be people who are part of the 'scene' as it were and its [the winner] is always like one of the scene boys its never just some randomer who's just turned up to the show

W: So its probably quite hard to break into that sorta thing?

S: Yeahh...unless you really put your effort into that group... and sort of spend a lot of money and get to really know the people in the... and spend a fair few months getting to know them

W: So it seems like its more who you know? [than what you know]

S: Yeah it does seem that way...I don't know if that's true or not but I do get that vibe



W: I think I probably know the answer to this by now, but what has been your favourite show ever?

S: Favourite show... hmm (laughs)

W: or like doesn't have to be one, I'm gonna ask why...so why are they good?

S: Yeah its...alright the first show [2009 ISTS] that I ever went to its obviously up there...coz its my first show, got to take my car around the track erm met loads of new people who I'm still friends with now... theres another show that I went to in Devon where I got dragged up on stage by some promo girls...the Fuel girls...

W: Yeah

S: And abused in front of three hundred...four hundred people and that was it was embarrassing but it was a complete highlight erm that was definitely a good show. It wasn't the cars...The standard of the cars there wasn't particularly big...it wasn't a massive show but just the night before and with everyone else getting drunk with your friends and the experience, that made it good

W: yeah yeah. And what was your least favourite show?

S: Least favourite show....hmm don't really know, they've all been pretty good so...

W: Ah yeah no worries that's cool then. Next up is a question that I've borrowed from Performance VW Magazine's interview schedule... what are your views on the current car culture or scene?

S: I think...hmm...I think the Liberty Walk and the erm the sort of R... Rocket Bunny kits are obviously the big players in the game at the moment like everyone aspires to be like that, wants them kits. Erm I think...hmm...it's hard to say...hmm... I think...more I think bodykits need to come back, not in the same style that they used to be, big, lairy random just things that don't really suit the car [possibly talking about the early 2000's trend- see front cover of Lumsden (2013)]... but I think...because the whole stance thing [the current prevalent style- see DubFreeze email RE 'stance' vogue], oh you've dropped and lowered your car on a pair of wheels

W: yeah

S: And that's it... 'Ohh that's amazing', No... its you've not done much and its suddenly a feature car and erm but obviously... race-cars are still race-cars, they're still awesome, drift cars are still just crazy...as much power as you can cram out of any engine and stick it into the craziest real wheel drive car...um that's why I like the drift scene...coz it's just bonkers (laughs)

W: yeah

S: there's no restrictions on performance or anything

W: Have you ever been to a show abroad?

S: Hmm...I don't think so no

W: Ah right is there any place that you would like aspire to go to abroad?

S: I wouldn't mind going to the Wörthersee show...erm I definitely wouldn't mind going to Wörthersee just for the setting and the quality of the cars there, yeah and...erm... I wouldn't mind going to some of the drift events in Europe as well...like especially the uphill ones in Poland, they look incredible

W: Do you think like, going back to what you were saying about driving and feeling involved...

S: yeah

W: ... do you think that the drive there would be quite err?

S: (laughs) yeah I've done some driving through Europe and it does get quite monotonous but its all part of the fun

W: And like with driving a modified car that sorta distance?

S: Erm

W: I'm sorta thinking like sometimes Wörthersee and that sorta thing can be seen as a mecca?

S: yeah

W: So like the drive there becomes like...

S: yeah I understand erm....

W: How do you hear about things like Wörthersee and the drifting in Poland and that?

S: Internet.

W: Yeah that's it isn't it

S: Media and stuff like that, Internet.

W: And like it's fair to say there's quite a lot of videos and that of that sort of thing?

S: Yeah definitely ooh and going back to one of your questions?

W: yeah go for it

S: Another show that I really wanna go to is Tokyo Autosalon and SEMA in Las Vegas

W: yeah that would be cool

S: Huge, just a massive show, would love to go to that

W: Right, do you go to meets?

S: Erm...I used to...I used to organise a couple around the local area as well, I just haven't had time recently

W: Yeah, that's cool. So why, why did you organise them? Like what was that for

S: Just to try...like it's a weird...it's a weird feeling with the car scene around Aberystwyth erm it tends to be just loads of boy racers, I tried to just bring it all together and start sort of getting everyone to start putting ideas towards each other, getting everyone to get involved in their cars properly and trying to get them to build decent cars coz...

W: yeah

S: a lot of them were just spraying their standard wheels black and.. (laughs) it was just like 'Come on guys, you can do better than this'

W: yeah

S: Just to bring it all together and up the standard

W: Definitely, so is that the same for you? Is that why you go to meets? Like a social sort of..

S: Yeah they're social, see what other people are doing...it's like a mini show in effect, for a night

W: Yeah, that's what I was gonna say, how do you think that like differs to a show then? Apart from the obvious...is there much of a difference?

S: yeah there is a bit of a difference, it's probably more social because there's just a select few people there that are from the local area, instead of people from all over the country.

W: yeah that's true

S: and its just... obviously all end up going to McDonalds together for a burger or get some food together

W: Do you think...like sometimes with meets you ever have issues with some of the negative stereotypes that there are about car enthusiasts? Or like do you think...what do you think?

S: When I did the biggest meet the one in...hmm 2012 I think, the original Midwales Modified meet...there was a fair few cars, I think there was seventy, seventy...eighty cars in Curry's car park, did, do you remember?

W: yeah I do

S: Yeah and we had a few people like drifting...round the car park and we were just like guys we're trying to keep it low key, we don't want the police coming here...the police did come down, they didn't do anything about it though, they didn't really seem to care. They just came down coz an

alarm went off [on one of the shops on the retail park] and turned it off or logged it or whatever and drove off. They didn't seem to do anything about the meet they didn't really care, which was nice.

W: yeah that's interesting

S: Yeah...it was nice of them (laughs)

W: yeah, coz I don't know if you saw [on Facebook] like erm Dyfed Dub Club, do you know them?

S: Erm yeah I've heard of them

W: they had a meet on...yesterday and I was gonna go down but I couldn't make it and they had a riot van turned up and a traffic Beemer [Traffic Police BMW] and they checked every car

S: Wow!

W: Yeah and they were just parked up apparently...so like I dunno

S: We do seem to get stereotyped and picked on a lot by the police and yeah you do get idiots but then you get idiots with everything...

W: Yeah, like it's not everyone that's involved...

S: yeah. It's like if you spend five grand [five thousand pounds] on your car, you're not gonna wanna go and stick it into a lamppost are you?!

W: No that's it, exactly

S: And you're not gonna want it taken off you by the police you're gonna make sure everything is properly bolted on and everythings properly sorted with the insurance and blah blah blah

W: So the meets that you organised, did that come about as a part of like a club?

S: Yeah I started Midwales Modified after an old club fell apart coz people didn't get on with each other...so I started this new club, I just thought fresh start, let's get other clubs involved with it

W: yeah

S: lets push it, let's try and make it more of a....involved with the national scene rather than just a local scene so we got other clubs to come down for the meet, we got Defined Ridez [a car club] from Telford, we got a few people from Birmingham to come down, we got G-Tech, who are now Kinzuru [Kinzuru Auto Salon- aftermarket car parts business] from Camarthen...

W: I know yeah

S: And the drift boys...they came up from Camarthen

W: That's cool so it like bringing the different...

S: Yeah

W: The different areas together

S: Just show people like because....

W: And like did it [the club] have an online forum?

S: yeah we had a forum Midwales Modified dot...I think it was on forum motion

W: Ah right yeah and do you think that helped with...

S: Yeah, get everyone to log into that... get everyone to share it through Facebook as well, get other people that aren't involved in the forum to get onto the forum or... involved in a meet through Facebook and get them to come onto the forum then and just get everyone together

W: Ok yeah and I guess moving onto more stuff about forums then, what do you think forums purpose are in the culture?

S: Hmmm

W: Like I know there can be a difference in scale, so like start with Midwales Modified like that sorta one?

S: The little one that we had Midwales Modified was just a local thing, just for people to hang out online and chat have a bit of banter, talk about current car trends or whatever

W: yeah

S: erm build threads

W: Just go into a bit more detail, whats a build thread?

S: Build threads are obviously you make like a log of all the modifications you've done to your car and the project that you're doing in this continued thread and you post up your progress....you post up pictures of things you've done. So say you've bought a new exhaust, take a photo, show people what you've done erm get it bolted onto your car and...maybe post a little video of it revving up so you can see what the sounds like erm show people how you've done it just to help people if they need to do the same thing or...and get advice from you or things like that...

W: So people can ask questions then?

S: yeah you can ask questions it's like a big open forum

W: So there's like an exchange of knowledge there?

S: yeah, that's it.

W: Do you think that's the same with some of the bigger [both in amount of members and their geographic spread] forums?

S: With the bigger forums yeah erm it's the same sorta thing happens, it's just more national. Also on the bigger forums you've got people selling products through shop [Trader threads] or special deals for special clubs or whatever

W: And people selling like their own parts?

S: Their own parts, cars, buying cars...like buying and wanted sections

W: Have you got any experience of like international forums, you mentioned Driftworks before, I'm not sure if that has it?

S: Like worldwide forums?

W: yeah

S: Hmm I don't really tend to go on them anymore but yeah Driftworks that's an international forum...that's like it's pretty big. It's hard to keep up sometimes...

W: yeah

S: ..It's really hard to keep up, coz there's just so much going on on them and its...you stay off it for like 5 days or whatever and you come back at the weekend and the thread you were on is like five pages back somewhere

W: yeah

S: Buried

W: yeah, like there's just so much going on...Do you think...its quite a big question actually....How do you think the modified car community and the culture would have happened differently if we didn't have the internet?

S: Hmm

W: it's sort of a way of getting at maybe what the internet has contributed but like if it wasn't there...

S: Erm...

W:...do you think things would be different?

S: I think it would be a lot more individual...I think it *would* be a lot more individual but I think hmmm it wouldn't be as big... coz obviously people can see it online and think 'Ahh I want to do this to my car', if it wasn't for the internet they wouldn't...they would maybe see a modified car now and again on the street or something but and they'd just be like 'Woah that was cool' but then they wouldn't really look into it or they'd be like 'Woah that was nice, he had nice wheels' but then they wouldn't

be able to find out what those wheels were or....

W: Definitely

S:...unless they went out and bought a magazine but they wouldn't know maybe where to look for magazines or...

W: yeah

S: the internet has definitely helped but it's also...got its cons as well

W: Yeah I was gonna ask that, what are the sorta negative of the Internet [to the culture]?

S: Negatives? Hmm...peoples' attitudes, *definitely* peoples' attitudes erm they've just got in the way...and...there's a lot of bitchiness online, 'Oh I don't like your wheels or your car *needs* to be lower' and people always want what *they* want when they see someone else's car it's like, 'Oh I'd do it this way', 'I'd do it *this* way', 'I don't like that coz it's not done how I'd do it'. But yeah...

W: Yeah that's definitely... like going back to what you said about sort of individualism and that sort of thing...

S: Yep

W: Because not everyone who's into modified cars uses internet forums

S: yeah true

W: which is interesting...So is there anything else interesting that you want to add about blogs or forums? The sort of effects on the car culture?

S: erm I don't really know

W: or like do you read like blogs, like the Speedhunters blog?

S: Yeah erm currently I'm drawing a lot of inspiration from car sites like Speedhunters and what is it like Seven Tune [7tune Car Blog]? ...

W: yeah I know...

S:...coz I'm designing a website in college which is a Midlands Modified website

W: ah right yeah

S: erm not sure if I'm gonna put it live or if I'm gonna be *able* to put it live but I've designed it, just done like a little basic website but I've drawn a lot of inspiration, they're good sites and they...its sort of like a amagazine online...you've got the different articles and you can just click on a topic that you like or a picture that you like and it'll...bring up the article on that car or that event or whatever.

W: Do you think and I mean to backtrack a bit, do you think...the idea of 'scene' and some of the politics of it is tied to the online stuff in any way? Do you think it would be there if it wasn't for...like being able to see everyone's cars?

S: I don't think...I think it would be there but it wouldn't be as big coz like obviously with the internet you can interact and like with these the top boys as it were can interact with each other

W: I guess because it isn't face to face they can interact? People can write things they wouldn't say to someone's face at a show or something...

S: yeah definitely...people are lot more brazen on the internet

W: Erm have you ever had a picture in a mag or anything like that?

S: Erm think so...I can't remember ...I think it was a little picture like in the back at...oh what's the big show...Modified Nationals?...I think there was a small picture of my car in that...in like one of the back pages but there was a picture of Adam's [Mazda] MX% before it got sprayed white...

W: yeah

S: erm yeah it was cool (laughs) its like 'Whey my cars in a magazine'..

W: but like you say it's not like a driving force for you?

S: It's a...Its not... I don't really want a feature or anything like that, its just like 'Oh that's cool', yeah

it's just like a nice little surprise not like anything else

W: Right we've covered most of what I had planned out, have you got anything that you want to add or anything that you think might be useful?

S: Yeah stop picking on modified car users to the police...

W: yeah like with stereotyping?

S: yeah... its I dunno it just seems a bit like...we're just trying to enjoy our cars... if the police were to like...if say like I said an art gallery...

W: yeah

S: If the police were to just walk into an art gallery and start ID checking everyone there and be like 'What are you doing?', I'm just looking at some art and that's basically what we're doing

W: Yeah like they can't tell you what to like and what not to like....

S: yeah...this is what we like so why punish us for being into cars?

W: yeah that's really interesting. Right thanks man, thanks very much.

S: Cool beans, thank you.

## **IV.II Luke Interview**

**2/7/2015 Conducted on Skype**

**At several points I changed the order of questions, for example jumping to forums and online stuff earlier on as I knew LPC would talk more about this and clubs to build up a rapport before moving onto other topics.**

W: Hello

L: Hi mate

W: Can you hear me?

L: yes mate, ready when you are

W: Okay yeah, as I said you've signed the document I sent over and are happy with the statements there? Basically these things are in place to protect your identity and knowledge should you wish and give you the right to withdraw from the interview if you want to at any time

L: yep that's all okay

W: So first question then do you identify yourself as a modified car enthusiast?

L: yes

W: Why?

L: Why?  
W: Well I mean in what ways do you think of yourself as an enthusiast?  
L: Erm just a passion  
W: I see, so how long have you been interested in VW's?  
L: Err probably since I was about 16...just about to get my license  
W: Yeah...how did it start?  
L: Mainly, wanting to drive and stuff like that  
W: Yeah so it wasn't specifically those sort of cars it was just cars and driving in general?  
L: yeah that's it  
W: So what cars or projects do you own at the moment?  
L: I just own a [2014] Mini [Liam's first car was a VW Polo]  
W: So like with modifying what do you decide which style to choose?  
L: Whatever's cool to be honest really, I look at other peoples' cars, it doesn't matter if they're from other manufacturers or what not, go low and choose whatever I like  
W: I see yeah, whilst I know the answer to this for the sake of the tape, do you work with cars at all for a living?  
L: yeah I work with them every day as a mechanic  
W: Ah cool what sort of cars  
L: I work on Ferraris  
W: Cool...that is cool. Again this is one I know [because me and Liam founded Club9n/3], are you a member of any clubs?  
L: yeah quite a few car clubs yeah  
W: sort of how active are you as a member of these clubs?  
L: Well I run one of them erm sometimes I just keep [online] on a few of them just to get ideas for modifying cars  
W: Erm do you go to shows with a club?  
L: Sometimes yeah  
W: Would you only go to shows with a club or do you go to some on your own?  
L: No I go to some with my friends and some with my family to be honest  
W: Oh right yeah so your family's into cars as well then?  
L: yeah  
W: So that sort of helps like with getting you into it and that?  
L: Oh yeah definitely  
W: So have you made friends through the car community?  
L: yeah I have definitely  
W: So do you use online forums?  
L: Quite a few of them yeah  
W: What sort of things do you use them for?  
L: Erm sharing my photos of cars...and talking to other members and sometimes, quite often meeting new friends  
W: people that you go on to meet in real life?  
L: yeah  
W: Erm so then this is quite subjective but what makes a good modified car for you?  
L: Err bit of everything really, wheels, power, shiny bits  
W: How do you sort of think you pick up what looks good and what doesn't?

L: Err I think mostly its all pushed upon you, like you get a photo pushed in your face on Facebook, and you think does that look good or not and then you kinda choose like all the aspects of it and that sort of stuff

W: Ah yeah I see...so changing tack a little bit to focus on driving, so if at all how do you think driving a modified car differs to driving a standard car?

L:...erm...it gives you more wow factor coz when you're driving down the road and you see someone at the side of the road and they look over and they take another glance and are like 'bloody hell that looks good'...

W: yeah...

L: I wonder what they've done to that

W: yeah so it draws attention?

L: yeah

W: Do you think does it change the actual experience of driving?

L: Yeah well it depends what sort of modifications you do and that but yeah mainly they do...most simple ones

W: Yeah...how do you feel when you see a modified car drive past?

L: I look at it with pretty decent respect because I've been there, done that I like them

W: Erm do you drive your car daily?

L: yep

W: and it is important to you that modified cars are 'dailys' [driven daily]?

L: erm no not really...working in the brand I work in [Ferrari] if it's got that much power then it shouldn't be used on the road every day or it's that low then its acceptable to want to bring it out once in a while

W: yeah makes sense, so for you personally how important is the driving of the car to you? Like is more show or go? Or both?

L: Bits of both

W: Right, so how do you feel about cars being really low to look good to the point that they're impractical, regardless of comfort, do you think that's good? (laughs)

L: (laughs) yeah sometimes when they're too low it puts me off a bit but when they're just right it makes you think yeah that's pretty cool I wish I could do that

W: So...okay, so would you say that your car is a project car..that you own at the moment?

L: err no

W: Have you had a project car?

L: I haven't really

W: Did you work on the car yourself?

L: yeah

W: Is that important to you? the idea that you sort of put in the work yourself rather than taking it to someone?

L: erm yeah coz you can appreciate it more and its more enjoyable because if you just gave it to someone and said do this to it or put this on it then fair enough driving it might be enjoyable but then you get more 'wow' factor from being able to tell your friends that you've done it and to feel proud

W: yeah so that sort of 'built not bought' thing?

L: yeah

W: so this might not apply as much but where do you learn how to do the stuff you do on the car? Is



it mostly through your qualifications for work or do you sort of learn stuff online and off other people?

L: yeah through work really it helps to learn the basics of it all and then working with a few other people on their own cars you sort of pick up the gist of...and sometimes it does help to go on the internet and look at what other people have done, other ways to get round it [solve problems/fabricate custom parts etc.] and that

W: yeah, I see. So do you take the car to the garage for any work?

L: Erm only if its warranty [work covered by the car's warranty agreement]

W: So where do you buy parts from?

L: Erm internet sources mainly and some OEM [original equipment manufacturer] parts from the car manufacturer

W: Do you think...is it important to you to buy new parts?

L: Erm... no not really sometimes...you can grab a bargain...when you err buy second hand

W: yeah definitely and have you got any experience of sort of rare parts?

L: err not really no, I do like a good bargain though

W: Erm how do you decide what brand of modification to buy? So like what brand of coilovers or something?

L: Erm read reviews and sometimes just stab in the dark, go with the flow sort of thing, dip your toes in the water and just go for it and see what you think

W: Right cool, so now moving on again I just want to talk about shows and meets and things like that, so do you go to car shows?

L: yep

W: And do you go to aircooled [VW shows] and watercooled VW shows then?

L: erm yeah

W: do you think there's any sort of difference in the experience of shows between the two?

L: erm yes I do...I think watercooled is more money and just throw money at the car and make it look good whereas aircooled is more relaxed its almost like a family sort of thing

W: yeah, how many shows do you think you go to a year?

L: Erm....altogether out of the VW scene I'd probably say five to ten

W: yeah ah right and how long have you been going to shows, like since you got a car or before that?

L: yeah went to a few shows before that, mainly more accessible with a car though so once I had a car I can just go wherever I want

W: So what do you go to shows for? Why go?

L: Erm...to be honest its normally the social aspect of it

W: yeah

L: and mainly the enjoyment of it because its actually nice not to just walk around and look at cars, its nice to meet people and discuss what they've done [to their car] etc etc

W: yeah so more than just to look at cars?

L: yeah sometimes you don't really get a kick out of just looking at cars, its nice to be respectful [respectful?] and show off your own car sometimes

W: So whats your sort of preparation in the run up to a show?

L: erm if it's a big show its usually planned a good few months ahead

W: yeah

L: if its not then its usually just roll up...unpack, enjoy

W: yeah do you put much sort of time into cleaning the car? Detailing and that?

L: yeah sometimes...if its worth doing it then...if its just gonna get put in the carpark then there's no reason why I should but when it [the car] is on the show its definitely the main thing that I do

W: Like when you drive to shows, do you drive in convoy?

L: yep

W: Do you think...what's different to that than driving on your own?

L: erm just being surrounded by friends really, its really enjoyable to have a bit of fun with your friends

W: yeah I know yeah...erm what's your experience with show n shine competitions?

L: erm (laughs- think this is a nod to me doing them and him not)

W: (laughs)

L: its not really much but from what I've seen its usually the person with the best build thread which is related to forums

W: oh yeah the best build thread online like?

L: yeah...which is fair enough because they get the appreciation they deserve

W: yeah

L: But then sometimes its just whoever's got the most expensive wheels or the best air-ride kit

W: So it can seem a bit undeserved?

L: yeah

W: That's interesting...right can you describe a typical show if you think such a thing exists?

L: Erm...I'd say...a more typical show...would be a weekly car meet [in that they are more consistently the same] I wouldn't say a show either...the normal typical show doesn't exist any more, yeah you get the same elements of...

W: yeah...

L:...people and same cars and things but the stuff that goes on in the background is different?

W: How do you mean?

L: well sort of different events going like BMX or skateboarding [displays], remote control car drifting [as there was at Ultimate Stance] stuff like that and it all different at some places...and then at others you literally just park your car up and walk away

W: yeah, what's been your *favourite* show and why?

L: erm I'd probably have to say it's a mixture between DC which is Dutch Connection? Or collective? [Deutsch Connection] er 2013 I think it was and last year erm this year's Ultimate Dubs, just because of the fact it was pure...DC was nice because to actually get drunk at a car show and enjoy and it was probably the only time that I've managed to relax at a car show and enjoy properly...and then Ultimate Dubs was because I was taking part in a [club] stand and helping organise it [along with me] and it was pretty good so that was nice

W: so for the sake of the tape do you mean helping to organise a clubstand?

L: yeah

W: and what did you do to help organise that?

L: posting online, identifying who wants to come and sorting some merchandise and helping set it up

W: thanks for explaining I know that's a difficult one because I was involved and I knew the answer...erm so what's been your least favourite show then do you think?

L: erm...ooh...err...I'd say All Dubs first ever show, well the only show they've ever done [which I attended, in 2013?! CHECK]

W: the multistorey one?

L: no it was the one just in a field [in Sutton Coalfield]

W: oh yeah I know

L: it was literally just like a car meet and they classed it as a show and you had to pay to get in, it wasn't very good.

W: yeah, so how would you differentiate a show from a meet then if it wasn't...?

L: A show there's normally actual things on show, so you've got different sections, you've got club stands you've got show n shine stuff like that and then you've got different events going on in the background so you've got car racing [at a drag strip], BMX'ing and that, whereas at a meet you literally just park your car up get out and look around and anyone can just come and have a look

W: So do you go to meets for different reasons than you go to shows then?

L: erm yeah, meets are its definitely more social...

W: Like just go and see who's doing what [modifying their car] and that?

L: yeah and meet different friends from different areas and that and that's it really don't look round the cars much anymore

W: yeah I see, so this next question is taken from PVW, what are your views on the current sort of Volkswagen scene?

L: erm the more you get involved with it, the deeper you go, the worse it gets, in my view.

W: how do you mean worse? I think I know what you mean but...

L:...the deeper you get, the more money you find people are spending and its getting out of hand really the amounts that people spend, like they'll go and get a thirty grand car and spend fifteen grand on ...modifications

W: yeah definitely those sort of figures are not uncommon now

L: yeah that's it

W: do you think there's been any changes in shows in recent years?

L: Yes there's a lot more younger people getting involved with it [later explain as new drivers] and recently there's a lot more older people getting involved with it they're getting rid of their say pride and joy supercar whatever they had and buying something VW and Audi, putting it on air-ride, like a nice [Audi] RS4 or something like that and then showing everybody up

W: Yeah, right this is a bit of a difficult one but what does the word 'scene' mean to you?

L: erm something that is very very overpopulated, 'likes' wise and peoples opinions of it are very high when its not really that...nothing special

W: [didn't elaborate on previous answer because was quite an emotive response] yeah..so the show calendars obviously pretty busy these days how do you decide which shows and meets to go to?

L: erm previous experience, suggested by other friends...erm and mainly just different types of stuff so like this year I've been going to many other manufacturers and stuff like that...its good to get a different variety of shows in

W: yeah so you wouldn't be like a purist to Volkswagen shows then?

L: No...no definitely not, good to see what, good to see what the other side of the bridge is

W: Defintiely yeah, do you ever read like show reports in magazines or that to help you decide or that?

L: erm not really no, I don't really listen to what other people write unless they're friends if you get me?

W: yeah I know what you mean yeah, erm have you ever been to any shows abroad?

L: I haven't, no

W: Erm are there any that you would like to go to particularly?

L: yeah there's a few in...Wörthersee and stuff like that erm and then there is a few in America which

I'd like to go to as well

W: so how do you hear about those then?

L: erm...social media stuff like that, and other reviews of friends that have been there

W: So yeah on social media do you mean like videos or?

L: yeah videos, photos, comments saying how good it is or stuff like that

W: yeah, so why Wörthersee in particular?

L: erm...it just looks massive and the location's great and when everybody talks about it its like constantly everyone's talking about, its just shows, meets on, happening every night...

W: Yeah definitely that's true..so to go back to meets, do you think there's been any changes in meets in recent years?

L: Yes more emphasis on local meets with more people attending them and more young people coming with slightly modified cars as well as these older people with more expensive cars like RS4's

W: Oh right why do you think that is?

L: So people can meet up and socialise and there are thousands of modified cars in the UK so they need a regular way to meet up

W: Do you think the internet is beneficial to the car community?

L: Yes definitely, its important as a place for people to share knowledge, see others cars and see what you want to do to your own. I think without the internet a lot of people wouldn't be able to get into cars or get their parts like Japanese imported parts, like a Japanese spec bumper (like mine!)

W: Do you think there any negatives to an increasingly online car community?

L: Keyboard warriors

W: Can you explain that in a bit more detail?

L: People who would make negative comments, say you post up a picture on a forum or Facebook they'll say oh you need to lower it, you need to put bigger wheels and then if you disagree with them they'll give you abuse and say that they're right. However they wouldn't come up to you at a show and say that, at a show people respect the work that's gone in and compliment it or ask how you did something and what *your* future plans are for the car rather than pushing there's on you

W: So people have more confidence than they do online?

L: Yep definitely

W: Is there anything you'd like to add about the internet/online forums etc?

L: No...well actually there is something, they can be very good places to show off your car and get people to see them, you might not be able to show your car at a show or people might not see it but they can online

W: So its potentially more accessible to more people?

L: Yes

W: Do you ever use forums which are more international say like Stanceworks?

L: No not really, I do now I own a mini as there aren't many mods for them in the UK and there's more going on in the states but I didnt when I had a VW really

W: To go back to what I was saying about the idea of scene as a thing, do you think that is tied into the online or forums and that?

L: Yeah one certain forum in particular and certain people

W: Would you care to elaborate, I will anonymise anything you don't want to be seen, as explained in the Info for participants

L: Ok well on Edition38 there are people who post a lot of pictures of their cars and think that they are particularly special, they are also the ones telling anyone new who posts what to do with their

car

W: So like the keyboard warriors

L: Yeah

W: To go back to what you said about the aircooled scene being more relaxed do you think there is less of this scene politics element?

L: No well its swings and roundabouts really, both have people who spend a lot of money on their cars and things and in the aircooled scene people will still comment on your photos online and say you shouldn't have done that or you should have saved money and bought these parts or whatever so it happens in both I think

W: One final question related to this idea of sharing images and things, do you read modified VW magazines, or other car magazines now you own the mini?

L: Not really well I get them to look at the pictures

W: The same reason as with looking at car pictures online? inspiration?

L: Yeah to see what people have done and to get ideas and if a mate has a feature or a picture in the magazine then to see that.

W: Okay well I think we've covered everything there, thanks very much Liam

L: Thanks bud, bye

## IV.III Dan Interview Transcript

4/3/2015 conducted via Skype

59:00

**Before the recording began the interviewee agreed with statements about use and protection of data and gave informed consent verbally and by signing the informed consent form earlier in the day via email correspondence.**

W: You read the document that I sent over and obviously signed it can you just confirm that?

D: Yep

W: Yep ok that's cool, do you want to use your real name or do you want to anonymise it?

D: Don't care. Completely up to you mate

W: ok well we can discuss it at a later date, all it would be is quotes in the final thesis

D: No I don't mind that all

W: Ok well now that that's covered... and so the interview will be recorded... So do you identify yourself as a car enthusiast?

D: Err yeah... yeah course I do I mean got a modified car, always been into cars since I was... yay big you know what I mean like a little kid...I've always had the dad who's had the stupidly powerful car or something like that...I've been one of those kids who's been chucked into the passenger seat since he was 5 years old and told to hold on and shut up (laughs)

W: So that's where it sort of started for you then?

D: Yeah...my Dad used to have a err (laughs)...an old Ford Capri

W: Oh yeah?

D: two point eight erm he had it supercharged and it was just a monster (laughs)

W: Oh wow yeah, I bet erm so how long have you been interested in cars? I guess it goes quite far back then....

D: Since I was about 6 so ... getting on for 13 years now...making me feel old Will (laughs)

W: (laughs) Ok so how long have you been interested in Volkswagens?

D: Erm probably from day one...obviously like when I was 6 my Dad had this Capri, Mum had a mk1 [Volkswagen] Polo

W: oh cool

D: err where it all comes from, that's why she likes the Polo and its how I got mine sorta thing erm and even [the mk1 Polo] sat next to the Capri, even though it was a 1 litre...it was beautiful...absolutely beautiful (laughs) and it was just you know

W: There was just something about it?

D: Yeah...I mean I went to a...went to a little car meet tonight in Hull because Rolling Crew they do one on the first Wednesday of every month...

W: oh right yeah

D: and err its pretty much everything there was Andrew Finchh from RollHard [car club] I don't know if you know him?

W: Well I know of RollHard yeah

D: He's got a BMW E36, the green one with the Works, on the Work splits [split piece alloy wheels] he comes down and a few of his mates and... even he turned round to me, coz it was like me Joe Marshall and then Oliver Gunn!? All parked near each other

W: yeah

D: and he just said to us...he came over and he said to us look I know mines slammed on its arse but them three looks so cool (laughs)

W: That's what it's all about isn't it! Right now this is obvious to us both but for the sake of the tape what car do you drive now?

D: Erm Polo 9n 2004

W: And why do you choose to modify it? Or drive a modified car rather than a standard one?

D: Erm I think it's gotta be something to do with making it your own. I mean there's a guy...when I first passed my [driving] test one of my friends did as well and me and him near enough have the same car, he's got a 9n3 [facelifted 9n, 2005-09], and I thought you know what I don't wanna, coz he was sat there 'ohh I'm gonna leave it standard' I was like yeah that's cool, I'm gonna save up get myself some coilovers, a nice set of wheels and...you know what I mean make my car look different...and it's just nice I mean, you drive down the street or you park next to someone else in a carpark and it just looks different and people notice..its its quite nice (laughs)

W: yeah do you get that...sort of describe what it's like when you're driving down the street do people like turn and look at your car?

D: yeah they do I mean it's not...you know what I mean...mostly its because of the bass [bass heavy music played in the car] I won't lie (laughs) secondly its obviously coz of the way the car looks and how low it is and the odd...exhaust scrape off the floor...static low problems yo [a tongue in cheek reference to static lowered suspension and not airbag suspension] that's about it...coz I have finally taken the helpers [helper spring sin coliovers] out you know just saying Will (laughs)

W: (laughs) How did you decide to get a Polo?

D: Erm I didn't really decide I mean my Mum had the mk1 we'd had a bit of financial problems so we always went through with shit cars that would only make it to their last MOT you know what I mean or to the next MOT...and then Mum got a load of money and she went right I'm gonna buy another Polo straight down to Volkswagen and bought the Polo that I've got now, Pandora you know as its known

W: Yeah, again whilst I know the answer to this are you a member of any clubs?

D: I am yeah I'm a member of quite a few actually

W: yeah and how active are you as a member?

D: Erm I'd like to say I'm quite active erm I'm always willing to lend a hand although I'm not very...mechanically minded but if theres anything I've had wrong with my car and somebody goes 'errrh cars starting to misfire', oh yeah its this or errm...know what I mean

W: Definitely yeah

D: its always nice to I mean lend a hand because you never know when you're gonna need it yourself

W: And yeah would you say its like that across the community?

D: Its gotta be it doesn't matter what group [car club] you're in, you know if it's a *good* group then you know what I mean then theres always someone willing to lend a hand

W: Yep, have you made friends through modified cars?

D: Yeah course I have I mean I've met the entirety of Club 9n/3 I mean yourself included, and even coming up to Hull [for university], I've only come up to Hull since September and I've got too many friends to even start naming them all...and you go to a car show and you say, 'Oh I'm DMc', oh what do you drive? 'well that polo', ah yeah yeah that's pretty smart mate...I went down to that meet tonight and there was a few lads that just couldn't stop standing round my car

W: It's a good feeling isn't it?

D: It is...its nice...even my car...I dunno if you...you probably haven't seen I'm trying to keep it under covers before Ultimate Dubs [show] but I've got my sub build in the back, I've got my seats in the front they're only half bolted in and they're still like 'Yeah man that's cool' (laughs)

W: Ah right yeah, so erm do you use internet forums or sort of the online side of the car scene?

D: Erm yeah I trawl through Wheel Whores Classifieds [second hand wheel selling website] and I'm on obviously the 9n/3 [Club 9n/3] forum, Club Polo, Performance VW all that sort of stuff, I like to keep sort of up to date with whos doing what if I can....because some of the cars that we see are stunning

W: What do you use forums for then?

D: Erm mostly its being nosey but if not its more sort of ideas and little things that people have done like erm for example like Dexter's got among his show cage, hes got this netting across the back

W: yeah

D: Now obviously at some point I'm gonna take my seats out, my rear seats anyway because I've got some new [front] seats going in and I don't want my sub box falling and hitting me in the head so I'm gonna use that to sort of block it...and its all just little ideas

W: I'd like to return to forums a bit later on if that's alright?

D: Yeah that's cool, that's fine

W: I mean it seems like they're a fairly important part of the car community forums and that?

D: yeah

W: Right then, what makes....this is very subjective but what makes a good modified VW for you?

D: Erm see I...it's a hard question because it sort of tears me I mean I'm...you're standard sort of lad will say, "Yeah I want 3SDM [wheels], you want coilovers and you want some flowers you know what I mean some flowers across the centre mirror [A Hawaiian style lei is hung from the rear view mirror]

W: I know yeah

D: It depends....because over the last year my whole sort of...what makes a perfect VW has changed stupidly, I mean I went to Ultimate Dubs [VW car show] last year [2014] and I saw Billy Earlie's car [check this!?!] and I thought it was the nuts, it was so subtle and it was unbelievable you know what I mean and then I went to...Edition [Edition 38 car show] and I saw Josh Peddeson's [spelling!?!] VW Lupo...now on the outside it was black, Lupo GTi, white banded steels and a 'Why so serious?' sticker in the back window but inside it was shit and it had two fifteen inch subs [subwoofers] and it was just...it was just epic...and you know it all changed [my ideas] and so I can't really answer it if I'm honest with you Will

W: That's fine, that's sort of what I was getting at, the subjectivity. So what were you into before you like those sort of cars?

D: Erm what was I into before I saw those cars? It was more your sort of...Max Power [car magazine, popular in the 2000s], Need for Speed [video game franchise launched in the 2000s] sort of thing, you know....when I was...15, 16 I didn't know about insurance you know it was that sort of thing when you got to 17 your Mum went oh shit you've got insurance to pay for remember so you won't be able to get that [Nissan] Skyline with that dump valve, that spits flames [from its exhaust] that you've drawn on your bedroom wall

W: yeah yeah

D: Erm I wanted an S2000 [Honda S2000] (laughs) and it was, all that time, "I want an S2000 with a supercharger that spitted flames and yeah...just one of em (laughs)

W: I mean, like going back to and its difficult to answer, but how do you learn whats cool and what isn't? and does that even matter?



D: I don't that's important. No, not at all

W: Okay

D: I mean obviously everybody builds cars for themselves I mean if you build a car for someone else then what's the point in doing it? I mean I love my car, I don't care what anyone else thinks. I have to live with it, *not* you. But ...if you build your car and everybody likes it... bonus. You know what I mean because it's your pride and joy . I mean I've...being at uni I've had everything over the spectrum coz everyone at uni has got an opinion which I don't mind but they don't like mine when it comes back you know like when people say, "Oh it's a chav's boy racer car" and I turn round and say at least I don't drive a shed and then they're like "Oooh Mum and Dad paid for my car", I'm like great I don't care

W: Changing tack a bit now then, to the actual driving the car. How do you think driving a modified car differs to driving a standard car?

D: Erm...you've gotta think a bit more. You've definitely got to think a bit more when you drive it, especially if you've lowered it because...pot holes are the bane of my life at the moment. Erm I've (laughs) I'm actually that low I've ripped off my splitter [lower section of front bumper] now which is great because its more votex [splitter] prep (laughs) means I don't have to waste time pulling the splitter off before I put the votex kit on (laughing)

W: Would you say its more exciting or maybe even more nerve racking?

D: Um more exciting yeah... nerve racking, I don't really think so unless you've previously pissed someone off and then you pull up to a set of lights

W: Does it get you more attention then?

D: Yeah, definitely. Of course it does, if I pull up at a set of lights. I mean you'll see it at Ultimate Dubs, turn my music up and the sound waves will echo into the next car so they instantly look anyway.

W: Yeah I bet, erm have you ever driven in convoy?

D: Yes, yeah yeah

W: Do you notice that that sort of gets attention?

D: Yeah very much so, very much so. And we went to...this was late November, we went to...one of the Hull Collective car clubs; 'Modified Genius' we went over to Sheffield for an evening meet, now bear in mind I think I was one of three Volkswagens out of a thirty car convoy the amount of attention we got was *stupid*, absolutely stupid. Driving through like the centre of Sheffield past the Hallam University and seeing like all these kids at the bus top and other university students and theres [Nissan] Skylines blitzing past and popping, [Nissan] 350's blaring and then theres me and you know what I mean. Just the amount of attention we got. And we pulled up at this meet and it was...it must have been nothing before we got there coz we filled the carpark err but yeah

W: And how does that feel?

D: yeah it feels, it does feel quite good I mean you do feel somewhat antisocial but you can't help it I mean you (laughs). You do what you love, I don't care, I really don't care.

W: Right so to turn that the other way around, how do you feel when you see a nice modified car drive past?

D: Erm you always look. I mean you can't help it, you've gotta appreciate what somebody else has done. There's a lad in Hull with a gold [Nissan] 350Z on Bentley wheels on air [suspension] and it's the three litre V6 so every time you hear it it's "Bwaaarr" with the de-cat [catytic converter removed from the exhaust] you hear it a mile off and then obviously you've got your [Vauxhall] Corsas with the cherry bombs [loud exhaust type], some when you look at them you think "Ermm

should you have really done that” and you think, “Noo but” and you look away but if it’s done nicely then you stop and stare for a minute

W: Do you drive your car daily?

D: Daily yeah

W: Beyond the practical element of getting somewhere is it important to you that it’s a daily [driven car]?

D: Erm its important to me as a daily in the sense that when I need it...I need it for work sort of thing erm but apart from that no. It gets me from A to B, in like a car car sense I sound like somebody that’s never touched a modified car before but

W: yeah I know what you mean

D: its one of them

W: In terms of your experience of driving the car..how important is...is it more about the show or the go for you?

D: Erm for me its gotta be more the go I mean the only reason I’m showing with this one is because I can’t afford the insurance [on a more powerful car] but err the second I get a hold of my new car I’ll be buzzing

W: I mean you say like what makes a good looking car to you but has it got to look good for you or for someone else?

D: Erm its gotta look good for me you know I’m not one of these people that does everything because everyone else does it. I mean with the votex kit, you see it yourself on the Club 9n/3 [Facebook] page if anything with a votex [bodykit] comes up you get like 200 comments and 500 likes. I mean I like the Votex kit don’t get me wrong but I wasn’t...ever since Kie’s car come about I’ve always liked the votex kit but I’ve never thrown stupid money at it. I mean I picked my kit up for 270 quid excluding the grille, the grille cost me 80 quid today but erm (laughs)

W: I’ve just seen that, I’m very jealous of that grille!

D: (laughs) its yours for 300 quid mate. A few guys got them off ebay today, two for 48 quid and then one went back up for 80 quid and I thought do I want to complete my kit? Yes (laughs)

W: I wish I had seen that!... erm so like when you see your car parked up how does that make you feel?

D: I think I turn into a 6 year old child. I think anyone that knows me will get that. Especially... although not so much when I’m with my friends, car friends sort of thing because you park it up and like all of them look good so its like yeah they look wicked together. But say for example like me and my mate go to Tesco or something, he drives a Suzuki Swift and its standard and parked up to his mine looks like its near enough touching floor and its just like...yeah it looks wicked

W: And yeah again a good feeling to like see it. Like do you have that difficulty when you’re walking away from the car to stop yourself looking round at it?

D: Oh yeah I always walk about ten feet before locking the car its an excuse to turn round and look at it to lock it...coz I’ve got [remote] central locking, just saying sorry mate (laughs)

W: (laughs) ok thanks mate...so then changing tack a little bit again erm do you do work on the car yourself?

D: erm I didn’t in the *beginning*

W: yeah

D: But as I’ve went along I’ve sort of dabbled a bit

W: yeah

D: Like when the coilovers first got fitted, I didn’t touch them I literally stood at the back of the

garage and watched my mate put them on. But as the helpers have come out and I went down to see Dexter erm I started I mean... doing it myself, he did a side and I did a side and we were to'ing and fro'ing and with my subwoofers I was helping and doing it all that, so as its gone on you know what I've thought to myself it's my car fuck it lets get involved.

W: Yeah I see, that's what I was getting at. Do you think that's important to feel involved?

D: Yeah I mean erm everyone takes the piss with this whole 'built not bought' and all that sort of stuff but that is I do agree with it although I was half tempted to go and buy Andrew Finch's VW Golf coz he's trying to sell it I erm I stopped myself and thought hmm its not your car then is it mate, you've just bought it and then you're carrying on the legacy. But I do think, its gotta be you've gotta do it yourself

W: yeah erm so the bits you have done yourself where did you learn those sort of skills?

D: The bits I've done myself were the subwoofer that was more ...erm sort of like Physics knowledge [D is a Physics undergrad] circuits and stuff like that um the whole sort of mechanics things been Dad and Dexter, and Dexter's 'oh you don't need that' policy with pretty much half the suspension (laughs)

W: So Dexter's someone you've met through the car club?

D: Yeah through a car club yeah and um he's quite a good friend of mine too

W: Erm so have you got like a preferred garage that you take the car too? Or do you just tend to do it yourself or go to a friends?

D: Erm its usually a friends', I mean I've got a friend called Sam who recently went freelance mechanic

W: right yeah

D: And basically if I buy the parts pretty much anything I want done is tenner an hour so its it works out even more and I trust him as far as I can throw him

W: Yeah do you mean you trust him a lot?

D: yeah yeah

W: cool okay, do you think that's the same across the modified car culture, people tend to have garages where they know the people quite well

D: yeah like your local garage, or I mean like even through the car scene I've met a few you know a few trusted garages you know what I mean

W: yep

D: I mean like when I had the accident, that woman reversed into me erm the first thing I did was went on my local car club 'Northamptonshire Dubs' and went, "is there *anywhere* that does good bodywork bearing in mind I'd been quoted two thousand four hundred pound by the insurance

W: yeah

D: and the car was a write-off, and I got a phone call from 'Scuffs and Buffs' in my hometown and he went, "look mate seven hundred pound and you buy yourself a new door" which was sixty quid, "and I'll have your car looking brand new"...and he did, true to his word the car was immaculate he'd taken every single scratch and dent out of that car

W: So you got in contact with him through a club?

D: it was Northamptonshire Dubs yeah I posted up and said can anyone help?

W: Ah yeah so it came from that?

D: Yeah it came straight back

W: Ah that's good then yeah. Erm sort of moving on a little bit to parts and that sort of thing, where do you get your parts from?

D: Erm mostly I won't lie, mostly eBay erm what whatever's going sort of thing...other than that its through friends erm group buys and stuff like that and there are a lot of our friends that are setting up companies obviously Dave B on the polo page, with his new and innovative stuff its quite cool isn't it

W: yeah it is cool, I'd like to speak to Dave B for this research too at some point coz it is interesting how he's set up a business [selling aftermarket VW parts] ... So its not necessarily important to buy the parts new then?

D: It depends what it is...wheels no not really erm you can always get them refurbished, bodykits same thing, nine times out of ten you'll get them in a different colour I know my votex the front and the spoiler are in red [DMc's car is black] and the sides and the rear are still in primer so that's sort of a bonus erm so obviously they'll have to get sanded down and repainted all that sort of stuff...erm apart from that then...yeah I would say it had to be brand new like tyres obviously I like to get a good life out of my tyres, I ran the entirety of last year on one set of tyres and they were still legal

W: (laughs) yeah mine have lasted a long time

D: I bought a set of wheels off Dexter he'd had them on for 6 months, bought them off him in the February ran them through til November, December time and sold them for the same amount of money and same tread and he was in a shock.

W: yeah that's an interesting point actually that buying and selling, is that the same across the culture

D: yeah I mean its certain things that people want I mean the wheels that I had previous to me [owning them] the ones that Dexter had on his car, previous to me they'd been or they were gonna be going through so many people and they all dropped out at the last minute as Dex wanted to hold onto them and I said look I'll give you four hundred quid and come and get them tomorrow and he was like yeah go on then and the next day I was on the lovely three hour drive to Poole [Dorset]

W: That's it yeah. I've had that with things I've bought something and people will say "oohh that used to be on such and such's car or something where its been sold around and particularly with wheels and that

D: Yeah I mean I bought...what was it...trying to think now...I think it was one of my err subwoofers, I thought well there's no point buying a brand new one these GT5's are...well my old one was about eighty pound and that was just for a single one in an enclosure and I found out that used to be in err who was his car one of the lads from RollHard, he drives the Volvo, Volvo estate

W: yeah I know it

D: it used to be in his car and I though 'Wow jesus that gets about a bit doesn't it' (laughs)

W: yeah yeah

D: And there was I was looking on dubfiction wheel emporium there was a set of sixteen by eight and sixteen by nine Rota Grids and we all know who had Rota Grids on a white saloon car [VW Jetta], Joe Cliffe

W: So they were the same set?

D: yeah exactly the same set, with a photo on the car and everything

W: So the next little bit is about meets and shows, I mean I know we've touched on that briefly

D: yeah

W: But I mean well do you go to car shows?

D: yeah I go to car shows, I mean last year was sort of like I scraped my car together if you will for Edition 38 coz everyone on the polo page [Club 9n/3] was like you have to be there for this show, there's no excuses so I thought oh shit you know pull yourself together mate get some coilovers on it

and get over there so I did and I don't regret it at all absolutely not and after that I was hooked I went to everything after that for the rest of the year

W: What was it then that made you addicted to them?

D: It was just the way everybody...I dunno it was just the first place I've ever been to in my car where they didn't mind me playing loud music and just smiled and cheered me on for doing stupid shit like wheelspinning on the grass and it was like yeah cool I like this...I'll do this more often

W: Its nice to be around other car people isn't it, normally when you mention cars to people their eyes glaze over

D: (laughs)

W: Whereas at a show like

D: Nobody's eyes glaze over, it just doesn't happen its great

W: it is great, erm how long have you been going to shows?

D: Erm probably about 9 months now I think...so I am a pretty new guy I'm not gonna lie

W: yeah that's cool

D: I mean what Ultimate Stance when I met you was my fifth show...so

W: yeah

D: so yeah

W: Have you erm I don't know, have you been to any aircooled VW shows?

D: yeah yeah I went to Deva Dubs last year so...coz my one of the Scottish lads Joe I work with in my home town was like "Dan you've got to get up to this," and I was like alright then take me in your car and he was like, "yeah alright" (laughs) and up we went

W: Have you noticed any difference between like the aircooled community and the watercooled?

D: Yeah...there's a sort of...I wouldn't say there's a big difference but they...they do sort of take this mature stance if that makes sense

W: the aircooled people?

D: yeah

W: they do take this higher stance but I can sort of agree with it if that makes sense to you because most of the scene, the scene these days, is [VW] Lupos and...and kids in snapbacks [hats] and Nike trainers and I mean I remember rolling...coz I went to Edition and then all my friends came and I had to go to the gate get in the car and we drive in and tell them where the tent was ...and my Scottish mate Joe he has a mk2 Polo, the coupe?

W: yeah I know the one

D: and it was debadged and had a debadged grille and as we were driving in there were a load of kids, kids in snapbacks and hoodies they went, "Uhuhuh mate you do realise this is for VW's and not Fords" and and my mate Joe just went mad he said, "Are you fucking stupid this is a mk2f coupe"

W: yeah yeah

D: yeah and it was just like ever since then he's never wnet ot any sort of weatercooled shows he sticks to his sort of VW Days [in France] erm and Deva Dubs

W: yeah so do you think with the watercooled [VW enthusiasts] there's negative to that scene?

D: I wouldn't say negatives its just

W: No

D: Its just a case of you know chasing...chasing the same thing

W: yeah

D: I mean...everyone wants a Lupo on air with BBS splits and you know what I mean and a girlfriend that's sat there putting tyre polish on your wheels and its...(laughs) it's always the way I mean...

W: Yeah and I guess we've touched on this a bit before but what do you go to shows *for*?

D: Hmm it's a bit of everything really, I mean I go to shows mainly for the friends, like now anyway, I mean I'm not gonna lie like now I'm looking forward to seeing yours [VW Polo 9n] in the flesh sort of thing coz seeing it at Dubfreeze [seeing pictures online] was it you went to the other week...I hate you, votex [bodykit] is on, it's just it looks the nuts

W: Cheers man...anyway

D: Yeah getting back to the shows I go for the....I'm more to be fair looking forward to the meeting up in the carpark at the pub [Club 9n/3's Ultimate Dubs convoy meeting is at a Harvester] at half past even in the morning and kicking each other tyres and taking the piss before we actually drive down and go around the whole show...still taking the piss (laughs)

W: Yeah its more like a social thing?

D: yeah I mean I'm, this year for Ultimate Dubs I'm bringing my friend from uni Craig, basically he saw my Polo, he drives a Subaru Impreza but it's a two litre GX, his dad gave it him and he drives that and he saw mine [VW Polo] and he says I want to get into modifying..you...I've caught the bug off you mate, so this year he wants to come to every show so that's like great mate, come you're more than welcome

W: Yeah that's it like that's how it spread, between friends and that

D: yeah like he said to me already he says he wants to come to every show this year so I've got him hooked

W: yeah

D: (laughs)

W: Cool no, yeah that's interesting erm have you like ever entered a show n shine or anything like that?

D: Erm no not until recently erm I mean I never thought that my car was up to standard

W: yeah

D: I mean it was sort of half arsed, its coilovers that weren't that low on wheels that I could barely afford but you know...now I think I might start, especially with the Votex on and some new wheels in the pipeline, that are actually gonna be nice erm...I'm hoping...that later on this year, I mean I've got...6<sup>th</sup> of April erm a lads contacted me and said erm because you live in Yorkshire, or for uni I do at least, um would you be willing to come to a show if your car's ready and we like it? And I was like yeah course I am...if you're gonna get me in for nothing know what I mean like on a clubstand then that's not a problem...I don't mind wasting the twenty pound in fuel to have my car on a on a clubstand

W: yeah...so what do you think about sort of yeah your experience with show n shine competitions like patterns emerging with like who's winning or that?

D: Erm there are sort of patterns, I've never seen a...hands down...I've never seen a car that's on coilovers win a show n shine competition...*never*, its always been the car that's on air, that's laying frame that's on stupid wheels with silly camber that he's probably gonna have to take off when he leaves because ... he doesn't wanna scratch em [with camber the wheel lips sit very close to, often touching the wheel arch] coz because he paid more than the cost of the car for them, you know and its just yeah.... I mean I, but then again its all down to taste and um I must admit most of the shows we do go to are the biggest showcases of bank of mummy and daddy but car culture comes from all sorts of levels and I still appreciate it, some of the cars are so cool

W: Yeah I mean that's it isn't it, there's so many different people going all coming together its like

D: yeah

W: yeah, ok...whats your sort of preparation in the run up to a show? Usually

D: Um I mean last year it was literally a case of waxes and wax the car, clean the interior, put a new air freshener in and that was me..I was gone. But this year I think I've gotta, I've got a bit more to do, I mean the 14<sup>th</sup> March [the day before Ultimate Dubs] is gonna kill me I think, I've got to wake up at 4 in the morning to get back to my home town of Corby which is like three hours away, I've then gotta get the car clean, get it washed, get it waxed and all that sort of stuff...I've gotta put the vortex kit on, I've gotta carpet the subs and sort the seats or probably I won't even put the seats, just have the normal polo seats in and...

W: yeah

D: and yeah and then I'll finally be ready with the roof bars on if the roof fairing gets here, and then I'll be ready

W: Yeah its gonna be hectic for me too, I'm gonna go and see Sleevo and Lewis on the Saturday, they're both cleaning and doing last minute bits and I'm hoping to talk to them for this so

D: oh yeah

W: Its always like that with Ultimate Dubs isn't it, I mean it's the first one after the winter

D: Yeah like everyone's sorta coming out of the hibernation I mean I...don't know anyone that's not going to Ultimate Dubs, like anybody from the car scene that's not, I mean my Dad's even coming (laughs) I mean my Dad turned round and said I'll come up in the Golf, I said yeah go for it, he said I'll be there about twelve o'clock though coz I can't be arsed getting there when you do

W: At 7[am]?

D: yeah, I said that's alright come whenever you want mate

W: Do you erm drive to shows in convoy?

D: Err if I can...my sort of car friendship group we live here, there and everywhere I mean I'm in the Midlands, you've got my friend Dexter who's at Poole [Dorset] erm yourself, you're Wales-ish aren't you?

W: Yep

D: and Northern...well you've got Danny [Sleevo] who's Wolverhampton and Lewis who's Hull near enough so the only place we can meet is the show erm but for Ultimate Dubs...I've got a lad with a [Polo] 6n2 that I know quite well hes gonna meet me erm just off the M6 and me and him are gonna roll in, he's gonna sort of hijack the 9n group

W: How does driving in convoy like to shows and when you've been to meets and that compare to driving on your own?

D: Erm its sort of that group feeling do you know what I mean, its everyones here together and you can all park together and... I mean, its nice to get all photos with the cars together, I mean like we've seen with Ultimate Stance that Dexter took...I think we've all used them as our cover photo [on Facebook] once or twice you know because it's got all of the cars in

W: So describe your typical show if such a thing exists?

D: Erm what the standard thing for every show is probably...well for me its more been parking up, seeing what everyone else has done know what I mean, since the last show sort of thing, walking round, having people point at who's ever car that is and I mean like if they know them off the internet or whatever erm going in straight to the photo stand, has my car been snapped on the way in? And if so, how good does it look? (laughs)

W: yeah yeah

D: But no that's got to be the first thing anybody does I think and then its clubstands which clubstands got the best car on it and then standardly stickers...last year I bought at least three

stickers and they were all on the car...so sort of like a memento or a trophy

W: Whats been your favourite show then?

D: Hmm ...favourite show for me, would have had to of been Edition. Purely because it was the perfect mix of cars and being with your mates because obviously with it being a two day event it's not just gonna be cars the whole time, so at Saturday night we were all getting pissed in a rave tent with each other, you know what I mean, it was *great* fun (laughs). Then on the Sunday we sort of got up out of bed whenever we could do and went and sat for the awards sort of thing which was good.

W: Whats been your least favourite show then? If you've had one

D: Erm...probably would have been the Big Meet last year but that's only because of the weather, it absolutely chucked it down erm and but for me I was out and about but everyone else though "Ooh no, lets hibernate back to the cars" erm I mean I know Dexter did but for someone who's drove four and half hours then sat in the car...is not gonna be...I wouldn't have done it you know what I mean...if I'd have spent four and half hours driving the car

W: You want to experience it yeah erm this is a question I've borrowed from PVW [Performance VW magazine] what are your views on the current Volkswagen scene I guess?

D: Erm I guess I mean as far as it goes I think I can relate to it

W: yeah

D: I mean it is mostly either teenagers with their first car or sort of men that have gone back to a car that they loved sort of thing

W: yeah

D: I mean that's the way I see it, I mean my Dad's been banging on for *yeeears* or he was before he got the golf about getting himself another fast Golf and now that the money was there he went and got himself one and he's turned into a six year old child again with it

W: yeah

D: and then I think it's gotta be something to do with an important Volkswagen in your life that just makes you turn into a kid

W: yeah

D: I mean even my granddad when he saw my car when it was lowered and all looking decent he was just like wow that brings me back to the days when I had my beetle you know what I mean and all that sorta stuff...coz he used to be in the army and he had the 517<sup>th</sup> Beetle ever made

W: Wow really?

D: yeah when they used to make them out of peoples' ration money (laughs)

W: What does the word scene, like in the Volkswagen community, mean to you?

D: Erm it's the sort of generic it can't be...I think erm it can't be you know its generic, all these piss-take photos you know come up on forums of you know Volkswagen scene starter pack with coilovers, a set of 3SDM wheels and a snapback but I mean you can be part...you can identify with the scene no matter what you drive its just that obviously the word scene is pinpointed to idiots in Lupos

W: yeah I understand what you're saying, this next one is a bit of fun really, what do you think the next big thing will be for 2015/16 in the Volkswagen culture?

D: Erm...ooh you've got me there coz I had two things sort of going...

W: Yeah that's fine you can have more than one

D: I think it's gotta be neons, gotta be. I think they're on the comeback especially...well I dunno what its like down near you but up here everyones thinking of it, everyones got them or some form of daytime running light, you know what I mean



W: Yeah people seem to be going mad for a lot of 90s stuff at the moment too

D: yeah I think Max Power [a car magazine popular in the 2000s and a subsequent style attributed to it] coming back, I've seen a few Peugeots with flame kits [kits to make exhausts produce flames- big in the early 2000s] on them since Ultimate Stance [November 2014]

W: Erm yeah so have you ever been to any shows abroad?

D: Erm no but I am...so game this year

W: I guess so why drive abroad to a show? Have you got somewhere in mind?

D: Erm I've got Wörthersee in mind if I'm honest with you and Vw Days in France, I mean its not that far I mean I've driven to the coast before so whats the difference between driving to the coast, jumping on a ship getting some kip and driving a couple of hours more?

W: yeah definitely

D: But I think its quite important to go abroad because I mean obviously you see stuff for sale and its amazing to see what matters to people and what doesn't in different countries...I mean you look at the guys over in South Africa I mean they've got everything [car parts and wheels] that we want and everything they want, we've got

W: yeah

D: I mean I want to go over to France and pick myself up any bargains or anything I can sort of bring back here and say hey guys who want what

W: Yeah two years ago a friend of mine went to VW Days and he bought a box of the Wolfsburg indicator blanks

D: Ah yeah yeah

W: The guy in France was like oh they're ten a penny here you can have the whole box for like ten euros came back and put them all on ebay in pairs for like twenty euros each and sold the lot...its amazing

D: yeah

W: its insane like with the US bumpers, we go mad for them and the US go mad for the European bumpers

D: yeah its just the case of somebody that goes over to get them...I'm hoping to go over there with a couple of hundred quid and come back with some stuff that's worth a bit more

W: yeah yeah

D: I mean but even stuff that you can find in the UK that's rare is just silly, since what was it...coz I tried keeping the votex kit on the low but I think a few people opened their gobs [on the Club 9n/3 facebook page] but ever since they have I've had about five or six people say how much did you pay for it and I've been like well I don't really wanna say but two seventy five [£275] and they've been like I'll triple it for the kit...now...its just like mmm no

W: yeah you could make a lot of money for these *rare* parts. Do you think there's a lot of this rare parts trading?

D: Yeah there's gotta be. I mean today I can vouch for it, the forty eight quid votex front grille, everyone went mad for it people getting offered sixty, seventy quid and I seen the last one up on ebay for eighty and I thought you know what fuck it I don't care if I've got no money for the next three weeks (laughs)

W: yeah yeah

D: I want that grille

W: Yeah definitely, to go back a little bit, how do you hear about like Wörthersee and VW Days?

D: Its gotta be with the sort of the after-movies as well from YouTube and from yourself about going

in the Daimler that you were going on about at Ultimate Stance (laughs)

W: yeah

D: but yeah I think its gotta be done because as well as the whole rare parts thing that I was going on about earlier its nice to see what they're doing over the pond, I mean you see...all these videos of Russian saloon on steel wheels that can't even get over a *tiny* speedbump coz they're just that stupidly low

W: yeah

D: But it is nice to go over and be like ohh yeah so that's what you're doing with your cars over here then cool that's why I like the whole South African thing on our polo page [Club 9n/3 on Facebook has a number of active members from South Africa] the stuff they do, its sort of inspiring in a way I mean I know there's a chap on there with some X5 wheels and I though, 'Ooh they look nice' and that's the way I'm gonna hopefully start going with my next set of wheels'.

W: Do you think then the internet has helped the international element of the car culture?

D: yeah it's got to have helped the international element yeah ...but its also sort of stopped or blocked others rather with regards to rare parts...coz obviously a rare part comes over here and people know how much they've gone for before [been sold for on online marketplaces such as eBay] in the past. I mean there's the perfect example of you remember Phil Eccles on the polo page, he had a set of X5 wheels [for sale] on the polo page and they were rare as hen's teeth...

W: they were

D: And then there's another lad that's come on the polo page who has another set but they're kerbed to buggery and they've got massive tyres on them off the X5 [a BMW SUV], no adaptors to bring to them to 5x100 [the VW Polo 9n stud pattern, different to BMW's 5x112] and he still wants six hundred quid for them. And I mean me being the rare sort of parts collector that I am or that I am trying to be now sort of (laughs) I've kept an eye on them and its currently got three days and twenty hours on them [left on the eBay auction] and no watchers and not a single bid!

W: Don't tell me that mate...

D: (laughs) do it, do it man seriously...I mean I would snap them up but I can't...justify five hundred and fifty pound for just alloys

W: That is a lot yeah

D: I mean I wouldn't mind spending five hundred and fifty pound on alloys, tyres and adapters but just alloys it just...not a chance...I don't know what that lad that bought Phil's alloys [paid in the end] but he must have had more money than sense

W: yeah, well you know how much wheels go for these days, some sets

D: Well I'm happy to say that them, the wheels that currently sit on my car cost me thrity two pound and I've done myself and I painted them purple myself and that cost me sixty pounds so ninety in total...so you know...

W: Do you think you go to meets for the same reason you go to shows?

D: Erm I think meets are more to see who's in your area I think

W: Right yeah

D: I mean coz I've...obviously having the Polo on purple wheels in Hull as its sort of been dubbed erm...you go to car meets and people say oh is that the one that's parked up in Cottingham and I say yeah yeah it is and like [they say] "oh yeah yeah I've seen it has a few bits [modified parts]". And then the next time you know what I mean you're driving along and somebody will flash you [flash the headlights as a greeting] and its like oh yeah its that guy that liked my car, "Hi mate" (laughs)

W: yeah I know what you mean like you become known by the car almost?

D: yeah

W: Erm so do you do the same in terms of preparation for a meet as you do for a show?

D: erm ...sort of I mean I'll always go to the jet wash about an hour before and just chuck a couple of quid in, give the car a quick rinse, get to wherever the meet is and just chuck a bit of glass cleaner on, tyre shine and leave it sitting there

W: Do you like to have the car clean then? Is that for you or for others to see it?

D: Well I think its got to be more to do with my OCD than anything, I mean I say that and...erm any sort of public face of me has gotta be clean sort of thing, I can't do what all my uni mates do and trawl into lectures with greasy hair and stinking of BO and it's the same with the car, the cars gotta be clean. I mean it killed me over Christmas when the car got smashed into and I just lost all hope, I thought the car was going so I thought I can't be bothered to clean you and then when I finally got round to cleaning it I think I nearly burst into tears when I went down the passenger door and had to actually go went in through the crevice [the door was bent due to an accident] to clean it (laughs)

W: Ah right that's interesting. Have you ever attended shows with a club?

D: Erm attended shows with a club? Sort of...I mean I know there's been shows where there's been some of the members of a club that's met up, for example at Ultimate Stance we had a few of the members of Club 9n/3 erm...and I went to the meet in Sheffield with Modified Genius but its I don't know...I don't think its been went to it with them its more just went we're going and do you want to come along sort of thing

W: Sort of do you think it makes a difference? Have you ever been to a show on your own?

D: Erm yeah although not so much shows I wouldn't say I mean more meets err I went to on my own more recently than not because obviously I've come up to Hull and I wanted to get to know people ...erm so a few of them I was that guy...you know that Brian O'Connor-esque guy [the lead character in the original Fast & Furious films] who's sat at the corner of the carpark, I mean lent on his bonnet waiting for someone else to come up and say hi but to be *fair* it didn't take me long... I mean I went to speak to I spoke to a couple of lads from Modified Genius and they're all serious sort of car-heads and they've all you know serious money gone into the cars that they've got...I mean its not just your typical Polo's and that its more Japanese like Skylines, GTR's, Evo tens, running sort of silly power but its you do get to know them and all that sort of stuff so....

W: Changing tack slightly back to the role of the internet in the culture do you think that the internet has been beneficial?

D: Erm yeah I would say they were beneficial, I mean most of the things I've ever found out about my car have been through the internet I mean mmm whether it be mechanical help or finding new bits erm but yeah most of it has been through the internet, I think we could get on without it in terms of finding car parts and stuff like that coz we still have magazines, but it would be a lot more difficult and I wouldn't like to have gone through that whole process.

W: Yeah so with the internet then do you think there are negative of it being increasingly online?

D: Erm I think it can be sort of a playground for taking the piss [trolling] I mean I know myself with a few people, people have tried taking the piss out of me, I think one of the funnier ones was my sub[woofer] box got called a wardrobe, that was quite funny.

W: yeah sometimes people say things that they wouldn't dream of saying to your face

D: Oh Yeah , me being me I said to them you live an hour away from me if you're gonna say it, come and say it to my face and he went, "Nah I don't really want to come and embarrass you" and I was like, "yeah you'd *definitely* embarrass me" (laughs)

W: So we're more or less at the end now, is there anything that you want to add about the internet

or VW culture or wider car culture in general really?

D: Hmm....No not really I think we've covered all the bases (laughs)

W: Well that's it then Dan thanks for that

D: Nah its ok man don't worry about it

W: Thanks, see you mate, speak to you soon on the page or at Ultimate Dubs next week

D: Okay see you mate

## IV.IV John Interview Transcript

7/3/2015 conducted via Skype

**Before the recording began the interviewee agreed with statements about use and protection of data and gave informed consent verbally and by signing the informed consent form earlier in the day via email correspondence.**

W: Hi

J: Hello, how's it going?

W: yeah good thanks, thanks for agreeing to do this.

J: No worries

W: Firstly I should point out that I will probably ask about things that we both know the answers to but could you try to explain things clearly as if the listener didn't know them sort of thing?

J: yeah yeah that's fine

W: Cool, ok. You read and signed the stuff I sent over didn't you?

J: Yeah yeah that's all good, all signed. All good

W: That's cool ok, lets begin. Do you identify yourself as a car enthusiast?

J: Erm yes, yeah I do

W: Why?

J: erm I er I attend car shows and I quite enjoy looking at modified cars and the process of car modification

W: Ok, how long have you been interested in Volkswagens?

J: Erm well since, since I had my first car so when I was 17...

W: What was your first car? [we both knew]

J: VW Beetle, 1968

W: Erm so that's how it all sort of started for you?

J: Yeah

W: What cars or projects do you own at the moment?

J: Err I've got a VW Camper [T25] and a Daimler at the moment

W: Erm why would you choose to modify a car rather than driving a standard one?

J: Erm its different from...something that you see...you see a thousand different cars that go passed you and there's maybe only one or two that you remember but if you see something that's crazy or out of the ordinary then its...its interesting isn't it.

W: Yeah, something that sort of stands out, do you think its sort of about personalising it [the car]?

J: That's it yeah yeah...making it your own isn't it...putting your own stamp on the car

W: Erm in terms of like style how do you choose what style you're gonna go with? If at all

J: you can take a look at other cars and take bits that you do like from others cars, not literally...but take their style and build your own really

W: Err so how would you decide what project car to buy next? Or How have you decided?

J: Erm its whatever's come up in the price range really so erm you kinda take a look at cars that you like the look of, go and have a sit in them go for a drive and see what you think

W: What about when you bought the camper? How did that come about?

J: I was going to Glastonbury and doing VW shows and doing it in a tent just didn't seem appealing so having a VW camper has just made it so much easier than putting up your tent and taking it back

down

W: So are you a member of any clubs?

J: yeah erm I'm a member of an aircooled VW club and a watercooled VW club, so two different kinda kind of styles there so that's two VW clubs and theres a load of forums that I'm on too

W: How active are you as a member?

J: Erm I go to meets regularly, like every other week and go to VW shows with and the other one I just tend to see at VW shows so...

W: Erm Do you go to shows with a club then?

J: Yeah I go to probably about 6 or 7 shows a year

W: and have you ever been to a show on your own can you compare that to going with a club?

J: erm yeah going with a club it's a different experience because there's people there who know about stuff that you don't know about and they can explain what's like the process of what's happened on each car and they just tend to know a bit more about it so you can like pool your knowledge together basically and have a look at whats on show

W: So have you made friends through VW's? Obviously you have but...

J: yeah erm yeah I've made loadsa friends through it and yeah its been a positive experience

W: Yeah like it's a real social experience? Not just modifying the car but its also like a community?

J: Yeah and it goes beyond that because some people that I know who have had VW's in the past haven't got them any more but are still members of the club it goes beyond the cars to a certain point doesn't it.

W: Yeah. Ok well you've sort of already answered this but do you use interent forums? And if so what do you use them for?

J: Yeah sourcing parts and getting knowledge and information on the cars as well, so if you're looking for something that's a bit rare or that that you don't quite know enough about at err other peoples, how other people have solved problems...it's a great resource.

W: So how often do you use forums then?

J: Erm probably at least once a day, just for general taking a look at parts and yeah...

W: Erm this one's quite a subjective question, what makes a good and I mean personally what makes a good modified Volkswagen for you?

J: erm I think it has to be sort of tasteful and all fit in so it doesn't matter if its garish as long as the whole car is garish and it all fits in so if you've only put if you've only like...if you've kept it at a standard height but you've put small wheels on its gonna look a bit crazy and its not to my taste but the owner might like it so its...

W: yeah, so what is your taste then?

J: erm I quite like modified beetles and there's german look ones which have big wheels and are lowered a bit but also there's Cal [California] look which is quite minimalist as well so erm taking all the chrome off and bumpers and things and smoothing it off so its...I've got quite a varied taste actually its er...

W: yeah what's your favourite modified car you've ever seen?

J: Erm I quite like Targa Bug which is erm a red beetle that belonged to someone at the VW club that I attend, back in the day, which has a removable roof which is something which I haven't seen really before or since

W: So what about the worst modified car you've seen?

J: Well I've seen a few badly done ones but just putting a crazy exhaust on and wheels and keeping it at a standard height doesn't really do anything for me

W: Hmm ok so how did you learn what looks good and what doesn't and is that even important to you?

J: erm its its not very important to me unless I'm buying the car that's all I've got to say...coz as long as the owner likes it I'm not that bothered so

W: So the style, like you like the Cal look and the German look and things

J: yep

W: How did you sort of learn about those styles and find out about those styles

J: Erm its mostly through reading magazines as well that's how I learned about different styles as well as reading forums and taking a look around at different cars

W: So we're going to change tack a little bit now to talking about actually driving the car, do you think driving a modified car differs to driving a standard car?

J: Erm it can either be a great or an awful experience depending on how low it is erm and err various other engine modifications and that sort of thing as well

W: Ah yeah and in your experience?

J: I enjoy it because particularly when I had my beetle it was quite a bright gold colour and erm just the look of people as you went past and the thumbs you get driving down the motorway...it's a good experience

W: I was going to ask that next do you get more attention?

J: Yeah definitely its...people come up to you at petrol stations and things and say I had one of these in the 1970s and mine was orange or whatever and...

W: So have you ever driven in convoy?

J: Yeah often, often to shows and to meets and various, it happens quite often

W: Have you noticed that sort of attention you get when you're on your own that sort of increased when you drive in a convoy

J: yeah erm especially on the motorway and things, if you've got something slightly unusual on the motorway that head turns and things

W: Yeah...how do you feel when you see a nice modified car drive past?

J: Erm its...its intriguing...its intrigue, like how its been modified, whats happened to it and the story of the car really as well its quite an important thing to me

W: So you're interested in like the history how its got to be like that?

J: That's it yeah

W: Erm do you drive your car daily?

J: I...I don't drive it every day but I've got a car that I use regularly to commute

W: Like the practicality is it important to you that it's a daily and not a like a show car or?

J: Not really...it's important for me to have something thats usable as well as somethings that's err that you can drive anywhere you like.

W: So in terms of being an enthusiast, how important is actually driving the car to that experience of being an enthusiast?

J: Erm it's an important part but...it's not the main part so...if you can go to shows, enjoycars, you don't drive around at a show, a lot of them are quite static so it's camping and the whole experience really

W: Ah right so for you its not just about the driven aspect of it, erm do you...is it more about the car looking good and being low regardless of comfort or does it have to be practical?

J: Erm for me? I quite like a practical car I've gotta say something with a lot of gadgets is a nice thing to have...so while I do enjoy low cars I couldn't live with one all the time coz you have to like swerve

for drain covers and that doesn't appeal to me

W: Erm when you see your car, whichever, parked up, how does it make you feel?

J: Erm quite proud of that's the right word to use, like I enjoy looking at it

W: Do you have that problem when you're walking away after you've parked it up..

J: Not being able to stop looking back...yeah..you have to look back

W: Right so the next little bit is about garages and doing work on your car and that sorta thing

J: Yep

W: So would you say that you've got a project car?

J: Yep

W: Do you do work on the car yourself or have you done work?...

J: Yeah I've done pretty much everything from...taking the wheels off changing the brakes...on a beetle which is impressive and other things and err as well as taking out the fuel tank and stripping things down I've done the whole range really but err I've also paid garages to do bits that I haven't been able to do or that I haven't got the experience of doing

W: How important is it for you to get involved with the process yourself?

J: Erm for me I don't think it's that important as long as you've got the vision, then its your vision, it doesn't matter who builds it I don't think...whether you get a garage to do it or whether you do it yourself it's not as important as it being your car that's...

W: That's true yeah...So the bits that you have done yourself where did you pick up that knowledge and those skills?

J: Erm from both books and forums as well, erm the Haynes manual for example and one that's for the Beetle as well which is similar erm but its an old school one erm ....yeah and online as well...so you find the problem that you have, you Google it, and then you err you start looking at fixes or things that you need to do

W: So which garages do you take your car to for sort of modified work or any work really?

J: Erm there's a VW specialist in erm a VW Campervan specialist in Telford erm as well as...erm yeah just small local garages as well it doesn't particularly matter as long as they can do the work

W: So how did you hear about the specialist garage?

J: Through the VW club

W: That's sort of what I'm getting at, do you think with the modified cars and more specilaiesed cars that this knowledge sort of travels through the community

J: That's it yeah...so people pick up like knowledge and...you have experience of using different garages too...so for example there's an MOT garage that's quite fair on classic cars that is used quite often by the VW guys

W: Yeah..erm...so where do you buy your parts from?

J: Parts? quite difficult to source locally so its mostly done online through forums as well as reputable dealers

W: Yeah, do you use ebay?

J: Erm yeah I've used eBay in the past, I'd use it again if there were parts that I couldn't find online [on other websites and forums]

W: So would you only buy new parts or...?

J: I've bought used parts before and I've bought new ones and to be honest with you as long as the part works its not...

W: yeah, I sort of wanted to get into rare parts as well, have you had much experience of that?

J: Erm yeah...buying parts for the Daimler, everything's quite rare because there aren't so many of



them around but buying specific rare parts to modify cars is not something that I've had too much experience with.

W: Erm how do you decide what make of parts to buy sort of what brand?

J: Erm I err haven't had too much experience with that kind of thing but when picking it out its important to go for reputation of quality as well, so if they've got a reputation for quality such as Empi who have been making [Aircooled VW] parts for years and years and years and erm you can still buy New Old Stock [NOS] parts from them and they're still in their original packaging so its err important to go on the reputation as well

W: And do you get that reputation from clubs and that?

J: Erm yeah yeah and from just being around the scene

W: So I want to move on now to meets and shows, so do you go to car shows?

J: yeah I go to car shows like siz or seven times a year as well as some multi-day events as well

W: Would you say you go to a mix of air cooled and water cooled shows?

J: That's it yeah so different types of cars as well as different modification styles

W: What are the differences in experience do you think between aircooled and watercooled shows?

J: Aircooled shows are much more laid back and I think the scene's had more time to mature and mellow out so you haven't got youngsters who are angry and insulting everyones car as they go past and having very little respect for the cars

W: Yeah that's interesting, how long have you been going to shows?

J: Erm I've been going to shows for four or five years now possibly

W: Describe for me you usual preparation for a show?

J: Erm I err I usually make sure the campervans working still that's a good one erm as well as going out and shopping the night before at 24 hour Tesco which is a staple and erm just making sure that you've got everything you need for the weekend

W: That's interesting some people I've spoke to have said about washing the car before a show but you're the second person to say its important to make sure the car is working

J: Yeah (laughs) that's the important thing yeah!

W: Do you think the drive to the show is an important part of it? Like if you're in convoy and that...

J: If you've got someone else in the car with you I think it is but if you're just on your own in a convoy I don't think that's a highlight of the show I've got to say

W: What's it like then when you've got other people in the car and you're in a convoy then?

J: Its much more social, so you can have a chat with the people in the convoy, coz if you're driving you obviously can't make a phone call or tell everyone to pull over whereas if you're on your own then its not so much of a social experience its just driving behind the person in front of you really

W: Do you think when you stop at services along the way that they're sort of like meets? Or not really...

J: Erm yes...the closer you get to a show the more cars that there are...erm so the more VW's there are if you got a VW show for example, so the more rare and expensive cars that you see so...like older, Porsches for example, I've seen at services that haven't been at shows

W: Yeah

J: Yeah its interesting

W: It is, so have you got any experience with show n shine competitions?

J: Erm I've not entered any show n shine competitions but I've been to a fair few, I've been and seen a fair few

W: Have you noticed any patterns as to who wins trophies or at all?...

J: Yeah there's quite a...there's quite a small click of people which is what I'm gonna describe it as who tend to win quite a lot of the trophies and go around to all the shows and win the trophies. If you've had your paint done by X and your wheels done by Y then you tend to win a trophy more than...more often than other people...

W: Do you think that sort of click is quite hard to break into?

J: Erm unless you're paying lots of money for it then yeah, X and Y who do your paint and wheels tend to be quite expensive erm...

W: What sort of wheels are you thinking of?

J: Erm so if you buy a set of refurbished BBS wheels for example from X person then they'll pass your name on to recommend other people in the scene who might be really good but they're also quite expensive and so there's a financial barrier there and it makes it much more difficult as well for people who build their own cars to sort of to break through

W: Yeah, do you think if you put in the work yourself sort of evenings and weekends and then you came to a show you'd find it quite difficult to...?

J: Against like the chequebook restoration cars yeah...if you're paying someone else to do it then either the standard is gonna be much better or they're gonna have the connections in the scene and if everyone knows it as... if everyone knows that this car was painted by X then it's gonna add more prestige to your car

W: Yeah, but do you think that...and we sort of touched on this before...do you think that makes the owner any less involved?

J: Erm I don't think that...less involved yeah possibly but erm it's erm a completely different part of the scene than people who modify it themselves, they're really ought to be a separate category [in show n shine competitions] for people who build it themselves in their shed at the weekend and the people who send it away for 6 weeks, buy it from new out the factory and send it away for 6 weeks and have it completely modified and then rock up to a show in it

W: That's interesting, different categories...

J:...yeah....

W: So could you describe a typical show for you then? Like what you do when you go to a show?, if a typical show exists

J: Sure, ok so you head down on the Friday lunchtime or the Saturday morning or towards midday and erm you get there, you either put up[ your tent or you put the window blinds up in your campervan, you open a beer, you and you put on some tunes and have a relax for the afternoon...it's just chilling out really and going and taking a look at the cars

W: yeah it's almost as if the looking at the cars comes second to the chilling out and the social aspects

J: That's it yeah erm it's almost like that yeah

W: So what has been your favourite show? That you've ever been to

J: Erm I think it's got to be at Bugjam...Bugjam

W: Why was it your favourite?

J: Purely because it's so relaxed, it's an aircooled show, you get to sit on the bank watching some drag racing [at Santa Pod raceway], there's a monster truck arena behind you like behind you when you're sitting on the hill and there's so many trade stalls. The weather is always great as well, it's the end of June so it's err just creating some great memories yeah.

W: Have you got a least favourite show at all?

J: Possibly an All Types one year because erm it's an early show..

W: Early in the year you mean?

J: Yeah and it's not particularly...how should I say it...it's not a particularly well attended show, its quite a small one and the weather was awful one year, it was just tipping it down all weekend and the weather really makes a show

W: yeah, erm so ah ok what erm this is a question I've taken from PVW's [Performance VW Magazine] What are your views on the current Volkswagen culture?

J: Erm I think there are two separate cultures between the aircooled and the watercooled...erm and the aircooled one at the moment is very much split into separate areas as well of people who can afford a split screen [VW Camper] and people who've got other VW campers and Beetles and things and erm

W: Yeah and about the watercooled...?

J: The watercooled scene...erm needs to mature a little bit I think, its kind of stagnating a bit with the same cars being pulled out year after year after year and just being sold through clubs effectively

W: Yeah like the same car changes hands but doesn't really change that much?

J: Yeah if a cars finished and then it doesn't get sort of updated with the times it can look very samey year after year and if it does get changed after then people either get tired of it or it um it becomes it stagnates really.

W: yeah thats interesting, erm do you think there have been any change at shows in recent years?, just generally

J: erm I think there are more scene clothing retailers than there used to be for example, so people who sell snapbacks (hats) and t-shirts with their own designs on for example erm which there weren't before but its more of a general trend rather than just the VW scene

W: yeah like more apparel?

J: Yeah that's it and fewer car parts and swap meets and things like that as well

W: So its become more of a lifestyle thing would you say

J: Yeah, aircooled especially [shows], so there much fewer parts suppliers and much more stalls selling like cushions and other lifestyle items and splitty [splitscreen campervan] egg-cups and all the other things you receive at Christmas [referencing the kitsch VW branded items which are seemingly everywhere]

W: Yeah I was talking to Rob about this at Dubfreeze, they had this big stall that was selling splitty plant pots, massive ones and we were wondering who would buy those, they looked very odd but a man in front of us bought 3 of them (laughs)

J: (laughs) Bob...we had a swap meet at Deva [Deva Dubs n Rods VW show] and Bob sold a light which was in the shape of a VW camper, a split-screen camper, and he managed to get £10 for it, this solar light and it was the tackiest thing you have ever seen

W: But because its...

J: Yeah because it was shaped like a VW camper someone had to have it

W: Yeah that is interesting and I think it goes beyond the culture too obviously like the split screen and the beetle are iconic of a popular culture thing sort of beyond the cars aren't they

J: Yeah and they're becoming unobtainable as well...particularly the split screen which is going...is rocketing in price at the moment so...

W: Yeah

J: So it makes it quite an exclusive club...to own one...so I imagine the ten pound that you're spending on a solar light would go...[split screen campers cost tens of thousands so this would be a

relatively small outlay]

W: Yeah, how do you see that sort of developing in the future?

J: Erm the prices..ought to crash at some point but I don't think that it will because the investment is coming in from people who like the idea of the lifestyle, the surfer lifestyle [which is often packaged up with the camper in the commodification process] but erm...er... sort of especially money from London so if a trader comes in and fancies going on holiday to Cornwall they don't realise that they've got a 60 year old campervan which is slow as anything and struggles up hills and they've put loads of money into it

W: Yeah so people buying into that lifestyle regardless of cost is it?

J: yeah and not realising exactly what it entails, like driving in a slow campervan

W: yeah you have to love the camper to get...

J: You do yeah

W: Its not like a Winnebago [luxury campervan manufacturer]

J: (laughs) no... there are very few luxuries

W: This is an interesting one as well so try to answer it as best you can...

J: Yeah

W: What does the word 'scene' mean to you?

J: Er I think its the whole kind of culture of VW's as well. It can either mean...the entire the scene, like the entire culture and everything to do with it or its the clique of people who had their car painted by X and Y and go to shows to win trophies, it's not like...there's two different areas that...

W: yeah, what about that second one really so...if you were to say somebody was 'scene' what would be inferring?

J: Erm thinking that they've done a cheque book restoration on their car its on air ride, the most expensive air ride that you've ever seen and its got perfect paint and wheels and its all been done by someone else and not been done by the owner...

W: Yeah, that's cool...So what do you think the next big thing will be for 2015 2016?

J: erm I think the new new beetle will be making more of an appearance in the VW scene, are you thinking the VW scene or just modified cars in general?

W: Erm...well yeah do both if you want so in the VW scene and the wider what styles do you expect to come in....

J: Yeah well I can see the prices continuing to rise especially for older VW's especially like Beetles and things and Type 3's and Karmann Ghias and especially projects for like VW bays and things the prices for projects [incomplete campers] which have just been dug out of hedges and things and they go for three or four thousand pounds its err the price is gonna continue to rise

W: There was one we saw a while ago [a VW split screen] wasn't there that had been on fire?

J: yes

W: it was rusty and had been in a fire and it was like three grand

J: yes yeah erm....it had been a write off and it had been sold for a ridiculus amount of money but also in the general modified car world...

W: yeah

J: I can see...I can see a focus on smaller cars as the scene is getting younger and younger... I suppose at the start originally it was mid-twenties people who owned Beetles and things [aged people] like in the 70s and 80s towards 90s where it [the modified car scene] was like 17 year olds in their [Vauxhall] Corsas and [Citroen] Saxos and things and now the age is slowly rising again now so you've got like the older people who have just bought a split screen and brought it to a show or

who've just bought a T5 and spent..who've just bought it from a VW dealership...

W: Do you think you get more older people in the aircooled camp than in the watercooled?

J: Definitely yeah, 100%. We came to Volksworld [show] last year, we had three T25's, one of them had just been restored, we had mine which was looking a bit shoddy and in fact there wa John's T4 as well, so that's a newer style

W: Yeah

J: and there was a family who er who turned up in their brand new T5...with their kids and they opened the boot and pulled a set of deck chairs out from like inside the bootlid so it folded up an they got them out of there and then they set up...erm like a table and chairs and stuff and they had an awning that came out and everyone else was facing towards the main attraction area and they were facing away which was interesting...as if they were local and they didn't really have much like interest in the VW scene but they parked next to us and came to a VW show sort of thing...

W: Its interesting what sort of styles might become prevalent, someone else that I asked said neons [neon lights under the car, characteristic of late 90s/early 2000s- e.g. the cover of Lumsden 2013] and I was like oh

J: yeah I think there's like a throwback to the 90 sort of thing that's happening at the moment

W: Well Rob...I'll hopefully get to talk to Rob at some point and he'll say that's what is happening! [we have both known Rob for years and he has recently spent a lot recreating a 90s style VW Polo] Erm have you ever been to shows abroad?

J: Erm I have, I've been to a show in France called VW Days which was interesting, the language barrier was good fun, it was the first year any of us had been [2013- I went to VW Days in 2014 based in part on John's recommendation and experiences], so we didn't know the place we were staying in, we didn't know where the good restaurants were erm but the carpark that we parked at there were some American's there, this was at the hotel, there were Americans and British people and some Dutch people, it was great, it was great fun

W: So people who were there for the show as well?

J: yeah people who were all into modified VWs and the carpark was full of them [much like when I went in 2014- see Reflective Diary] and they were from all over Europe and the world so there was a Russian guy there as well as well the American and the Dutch people as well

W: Yeah its almost like it draws people in, like everyone they drive a long way...

J: Yeah everyone travels to...to this small town in France for the weekend

W: And so I guess why drive abroad to that show?

J: its a different experience because you don't know anything about it, you're gonna see what different people are doing with their cars, what the Germans are doing, what the French are doing, the Spanish...you can definitely see the different styles [from different countries] as you walk around

W: Are there any shows abroad which you would like to go to which you feel sort of draw people in?

J: Erm well we're going to Wörthersee later in the year [I will be going as a passenger in HJS's car with one other friend] which is gonna be good fun and is a draw for all of Europe as well as in the US I think its Beetle Bash or Bugjam, one of the two, there's one on Florida's Daytona beach which looks amazing but that one will have to wait a few years I think

W: Do you think that it almost acts as a sort of pilgrimage?

J: yeah it's like the Hajj where everyone meets in one place and meets up and see what everyone else has done its interesting

W: Do you think the drive to the show in that instance, where its much longer, becomes almost part of the event?

J: yeah...its all about the journey erm after a certain point because the journey is gonna take like a day or so to get to Wörthersee so it sort of becomes part of the holiday doesn't it

W: Yeah and there will be sort of other cars about and that presumably...

J: yeah

W: yeah like more cars the closer we get...erm... yeah I thats covered that about shows abroad

J: cool

W: Ok meets then, how do you think meets differ to shows?

J: erm like single day events is that what you're thinking?

W: well yeah and just sort of like...Flat Fours [a club which HJS goes to the evening meets of] and that sort of thing...

J: evening events?

W: Yeah

J: er yeah okay, it's a good get together and you get updates on the progress [of car projects] and they're definitely more social so you get new people coming to meets and then hanging around for a bit and then coming to shows, so its like a progression from meets to shows for new people

W: Do you thin as well sort of to go back to Wörthersee, its not the actual show so its like there's loads of little meets going on around the place?

J: yeah so if the shows big enough it will have the draw won't it so everyone comes in and not everyone gets to go to the show everyone just converges in the town as well... so for example if you're driving round Northampton when Bugjams on or Wellingborough erm you'll just be able to see a load of split-screens and beetles about and the locals come out to have a look as well, so I imagine it will just be like that...it was at VW Days as well

W: yeah through all the little French villages

J: Yeah a little French village with all the old people came out and had a look at the cars and things and saw the people going past and there was a big queue and the locals were coming around trying to sell fruit to the people that were there it was a bit wacky so yeah

W: Erm so you said like that there's a bit of a distinction to single day shows then?

J: Yeah single day shows erm they're more sort of in my opinion anyway sort of smaller and parts focused so its buying bits that you need and and meeting up with people and seeing what companies have brought out in the last year

W: yeah that's interesting then, erm just I should have asked this at the time, but to go back to Wörthersee, how do you hear about shows like that?

J: Yeah its kind of a reputation isn't it so everyone's heard of Wörthersee, and everyone knows what it is, its just got a mythical reputation really

W: So where did you...did you read about it? people talk about it?

J: Yeah so I've seen it in magazines and on forums as well as, online and people have talked about it as well

W: There's these sort of videos as well isn't there?

J: Yeah a lot of semi-professionally made car videos that people have made of the jounrey and what goes on as well which are and social media is affecting it quite a lot as well

W: So you think that adds to the desire to go?

J: Definitely yeah

W: It helps you get in the mindset...so why...you go to meets to socialise more?

J: Yeah in my opinion yeah thats a big draw for me

W: Do you do any of the same preparation, I mean obviously check the cars working...

J: What for meets?

W: yeah

J: yeah I don't tend to drive to the local VW meet coz its just down the road

W: and that makes no difference to...

J: No it doesn't no

W: Do you think that's similar to what you said about people who've no longer got Volkswagens but are still a member of the...

J: still a member of the club, yeah erm the erm yeah it doesn't really matter what you turn up in its more social than cars

W: Definitely and then sort of I said has there been any shows in recent years do you think there has been any change in meets in recent years?

J: erm I think there have been...the aircooled ones particularly...have been less well attended...so the aircooled scene is going a little bit quieter as the...the barrier to entry I guess is getting a little bit higher, so the cost of the cars gets higher and keeping them on the road like it makes it more expensive and they get quieter and quieter and is dropping off really but the watercooled one is picking up and is continuing to go strong

W: Have you noticed any sort of changes in watercooled clubs in your experience?

J: erm yeah its err round here its less about the location that you're in and more about the car that you drive, so there's gonna be a Polo 9n club for example rather than a Shropshire based VW club thats erm kind of died off a bit, its more about so Club Polo has gotten quite big and the Passat Club rather than in the aircooled scene particularly its like Shropshire VW's [club] and Bedfordshire VW's [club] and all that kind of thing

W: So the sort of regional clubs?

J: Yeah its all regional rather than vehicle based

W: In aircooled [scene] sorry?

J: In aircooled yeah, its more regional

W: That's quite handy as I want to move onto clubs now, so obviously you're a member of a few clubs

J: yep

W: Have you got a role within those clubs?

J: erm I...I look after the website for the aircooled club but other than that its just a free for all, so whoever is booking the tickets [for a clubstand at a show] just books the them and everyone puts their name down on a list and they get booked and they get paid for but there aren't any roles in the club really

W: Erm why did you choose that club?

J: It's a local club to me, its the first one that I joined as well, it was my entry into the VW scene

W: I see yeah so it helped that sort of step up

J: yeah that's it, it sort of enthused me to modify Volkswagens and to go shows that kind of thing

W: I see, erm do you always attend shows with a club or a certain group or do you go to any on your own?

J: I don't tend to go to shows on my own no it quite a lot of it is about the social aspect of it for me for the VW scene...erm just going to look at cars its not really my thing

W: Yeah that's interesting, I wonder if that's how many people that is really

J: That go to shows on their own?

W: Yeah

J: To be honest with you when you're going to shows there aren't that many people that are on their own full stop, its more sort of a group activity isn't it?

W: It is yeah...so you say you look after the website for your club [Fun Loving Flat Fours]

J: yep

W: How important is that online space for the club?

J: Erm for the Fun Loving Flat Fours not particularly, the aircooled club, its not particularly important, its we've got a forum but its quite quiet during the Winter months, during the Summer months its quite handy to have to get lists of people who are buying tickets for shows and things erm and keeping track of the [club owned] gazebo and things but its not as important as it is for Facebook pages for watercooled clubs, so Facebook pages have taken over a lot of forums, so Facebook groups have succeeded forums, like are the successor to websites

W: Erm do you think its with the aircooled scene thats partly because that sort of scene pre-dates the sort of mass social networking and that sort of thing?

J: yeah coz I think the biggest sort of VW forum, which has been going for about 10, 11 years, its called Volkszone, its got so many posts and so many posts from members, so like right now there's 833 people online taking a look at the website so...

W: yeah erm so what do you think forums are, are used for? Is it a sharing of knowledge? or showing off your car? or?

J: I think its less about showing off your car than Facebook is, Facebook is, in my opinion used more for showing off your car

W: yeah

J: its used more for selling things that you've collected and selling cars on forums as well as the chat and knowledge bases, because Facebook is so hard to *search* for example you can't go back and take a look at all the previous threads that you've, so the 'how to do this' and 'how to do that' threads, they're not as well organised as they would be on a forum.

W: And do you think access to forums and that sort of thing is quite easy?

J: It is yeah so you don't have to give away all your details to Facebook which is quite an appeal to some people

W: Do you get inspiration for your own project from...from online sources in general I suppose not just forums?

J: yeah, if you see a picture and you like it you tend to save it and share it with your friends is quite a popular thing to do as well as ask how people have done it as well and erm you can go and ask them specifically if its on a forum, so you can ask people how they did X or how they did Y, so how did you get your engine that shiny or how did you modify your exhaust, that sort of thing

W: Yeah and do you think thats, its probably easier to do that online than it is in person?

J: Hmm well erm you can be at the other end of the country and you can just as them online which is a handy thing rather than having to ring them up for example if there weren't any online sources

W: Erm do you think the internet has been benefical to the Volkswagen community? to the modified car community?

J: Erm I think it has yeah erm opened up sort of the scene to newcomers as well as having its sort of detrimental effects like pushing the price up for parts that are quite rare

W: Yeah

J: and increasing the price of split-screens as they just become a sort of lifestyle accessory

W: yeah do you think thats been helped along by the internet?

J: yeah they used to be just like an old builder's van back in the day and now, I don't know if its the



internet or just how its happened over time but they've just become more and more popular

W: Yeah that's interesting, I was gonna say have there been negatives to the sort of increase of an online sort of community but...do you think in terms of the way the communiyt interacts [online] there are more negatives?

J: erm I think its less personal so erm the insults get thrown around and there's no recourse for that which I don't think is necessarily a good or a bad thing its just something that happens

W: Yeah you get people who say things that they might not say to somebody's face

J: That's it yeah and being insulting other peoples' cars and modifications online seems to be quite a popular thing to do

W: Yeah it does seem to be...erm is there anything interesting that you'd like to add about forums or *blogs* and their affect on car culture?

J: yeah I don't think there are many blogs, I don't think blogging...car blogging has really taken off apart from like video-logging and that [Vlogs] and that kind of thing, I know there are people who video-log supercars and things that they see in London and they've done quite well out of it but in general I don't think that blogging has sort of taken off in the modified scene

W: No..do you I mean...do you consider things like Speedhunters to be a blog or is it more of a website?

J: Yeah yeah well its a blog, I didn't really think of Speedhunters specifically but in the aircooled world I've got to say there are basically no blogs, where there are a fair few forums and Facebook pages

W: Do you think thats something that might change with this increasing lifestyle element of it?

J: erm yeah...specifically with a lot of aircooled shows now, there's like a campervan cooking areas where they get someone who's like a semi famous chef and they get them to cook a meal like on the inside of a campervan that you can do with two hobs and fire basically, so that's something thats gained in popularity and I imagine people that go that would quite enjoy a campervan cookery blog for example but nothing seems to have happened

W: Do you think sort of just to move more back to the watercooled stuff...

J: yep

W: sort of... the scene, as in if someone is 'scene' or something, is that connected to an incrase in the online community do you think?

J: I definitely think Instagram [photo sharing social network/smartphone app] has helped to define what scene is so erm so the people that are getting all the likes [the way of showing that you like a photo] on Instagram are the 'scene' I suppose you could say, I mean its the people's cars who get reposted and reposted online

W: Do you thinks its...their cars wouldn't gain popularity so quickly without the internet?

J: er yeah magazine features help as well so if you see it on the cover of PVW or Volksworld magazine or whatever you...

W: Do you think that the magazine features, is that an important part of the scene to you? Would it be if you got a magazine feature?

J: Erm I don't think its that important to me, its interesting to see the cars that do get featured, because some of them are quite well done and some of them are chequebook restorations

W: yeah

J: So its quite a nice mixture really

W: Yeah so have you ever had a picture in a magazine?

J: Erm I don't think I have of my car, my car's been on a video, my beetle was on a video for Motors

TV [a car television channel on satellite TV] as well as a lot of our club cars were shot for this video at Bugjam or Motors TV

W: Ah right, how does that make you feel? To see your car on the TV or know that others can see it?

J: Yeah I thought it was good, it was quite well done and it sort of yeah makes you feel good doesn't it, if you've got your car on TV and I know it was all posted online and the video and that so yeah it was good

W: Erm just into the final bits now, have you ever helped to organise a meet?

J: erm have I helped to organise a meet? erm no, have I? I dunno (laughs)

W: (laughs) no I've not got something specific in mind I was just wondering, but you've done other club activities like buy tickets in bulk have you or?

J: err I'm trying to think if I've done that either...I haven't...no...I don't think I have, no I haven't it's something I ought to do but that I haven't got round to yet

W: No that's cool it's just I've got a list of questions around club things and for people who had organised meets and that sort of thing but it's not relevant really, so...yeah that's...oh there's a final one actually, how important do you think traders are to shows?

J: Err I think traders are important for people who run the shows as a good source of income but other than that I don't think they add or take away from a show so much that it would be awful without them or really good if there were more, so it doesn't really matter who's there

W: No

J: So Bugjam for example has got quite a lot of shoe places, like Rollersnake I think they're called and DC and that sort of shoe and clothing, apparel companies but if they weren't there I don't think it would be the end of the world or if they came to every show I don't think that would..

W: yeah that's interesting...well okay, we've covered everything that I wanted to cover really, have you got anything that you want to add about anything?

J: Erm I can't really think of anything but erm if you need anything else then let me know

W: Yeah ok well we'll probably do some more not so much interviews but informal discussion on the way to Wörthersee so is that alright?

J: (laughs) well we've got about 24 hours in the car so I'd hope we'll have a talk about something

W: (laughs) yeah I think that would be really good to sort of document that as it happens, that experience

J: Have you got a camera that does video have you?

W: I have yeah

J: Well you can use that then can't you, you can stick it out the window and do some interviews in the back with the tables and everything

W: That's true because we've literally got walnut tables in the back of the car

J: yeah (laughs)

W: yeah alright thanks mate this has been really helpful

J: No worries, thanks catch you later man

W: Later mate

