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The Planet, 1998, Winter

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the planet

winter 1998





"For all that has been written and said about the automobile, it is almost impossible to describe the magnitude and complexity of the role that it has played in shaping 20th century America. It is not just the visual poetry of tailfins and fenders, . . . it is much more than the parkways, expressways, freeways and Interstates, . . . it is the economy of Detroit, it is smog in the folds of the Rocky Mountains, it is 10,000 patches

of oil soaking into the parking lot at Jones Beach, it is the Golden Gate Bridge, it is tailgate parties, it is the Alaska pipeline, it is the underground garages used for a thousand TV shoots, it is an orgasm in the back of a Chevy, it is a serial killer burying a corpse by the side of the road and heading for the state line in search of more victims. It is the heartbeat of America."

— Christopher Finch
Highway to Heaven: The AUTO Biography of America

Finch says it all.

In the American way of life, automobiles have come to represent *us*: our freedom, our hustle and bustle, our convenience, our throw-away mentality. The automobile occupies such a central place in our society that it is almost impossible to fathom the magnitude of its impacts, both social and environmental. Our environment is a landscape forever changed by the arrival of Henry Ford's mass-produced Model T.

This issue of *The Planet* attempts to plumb the depths of our car culture, by documenting its negative environmental impacts as well as a myriad of other effects. The following articles address the stranglehold the automobile age has on our media and mentality, our air and water, our lives and deaths.

The car is an amazing invention – no other mode of transportation provides as much flexibility, punctuality and comfort. In a 1997 *Utne Reader* article, James Q. Wilson points out that on an individual basis, the automobile is by far the most desirable option, outdistancing other less convenient alternatives. Thus, the debate around the social and environmental costs of cars comes down to private benefit versus the public good. And sadly, people inevitably select modes of travel based on individual, not social, preferences.

But we should not cater only to the needs of ourselves.

As we confront our complicity in the automobile's destructive ways, we recognize the need to seek out alternatives. High-tech solutions are often touted – Western's own Vehicle Research Institute is on the cutting edge of developing electric and solar-powered cars. Although such alternatives will no doubt become necessary in the near future, for now, we need individual solutions.

Small, simple changes can make all the difference. The way out of our automobile dependence can begin with a daily decision to stow away the car keys and take the bus, bike or walk instead. *The Planet* does not need to explain these alternatives – we all know what they are. They are easy, affordable and open to all. But that first step needs to be taken, to stop before you turn that ignition switch and instead begin to break off our society's love affair with the automobile.

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- Percent of all humans who own a car: 8
- Percent of American households that own one or more car: 89
- Millions of acres we blacktop each year: 1.3
- Ratio of workers in downtown Portland that take trains and buses to work: 4 to 10
- Number of people killed by cars each year: 50,000
- Number of American soldiers killed in the Vietnam war: 58,000
- Number of pedestrians killed or injured by motor vehicles each year in Washington: 1,880
- Number of drivers killed or injured by pedestrians each year in Washington: 0
- Millions of gallons of gas and oil leaking from U.S. storage tanks annually: 20
- Number of leaking storage facilities estimated by the U.S. government: 500,000
- Percent of U.S. oil consumption by transportation: 66
- Percent of U.S. trade deficit due to oil imports: 60
- Number of times an average citizen in Washington is more likely to be killed by a stranger with a car than a stranger with a gun: 3.6
- Percent of annual federal highway safety funds dedicated to pedestrian safety: 1
- Number of junkyards in the United States: 12,000
- Number of abandoned cars found in New York in 1989: 146,880
- Number found in 1996: 17,218
- Percentage of steel recycled from automobiles in 1996: 97.9
- Percentage of a car's weight that is steel: 55
- Most popular car color: white
- Number of cars in use in the United States in 1995: 123,200,000
- Motor vehicle production the same year: 11,986,000
- Total outstanding public highway debt: \$64,158,000
- Percentage of Western students surveyed that own a bicycle: 71
- Percentage of same students that drive every day: 52.1
- Percentage of students surveyed that do not carpool: 50.4
- Percentage of same students that claim to be concerned about the environment: 88.8

1 "Ask How Much is Enough," Alan Durning, p. 158. 2 *The Green Lifestyle Handbook*, Jeremy Rifkin, Ed., p. 33. 3 "United States Carrying Capacity Overview," David Pimental, panelist. 4 *World Watch*, "Portland Bypasses Progress," Sept./Oct. 1991. 5 Mark Zepezauer, et al., *Take the Rich off Welfare*. 6 internet 7, 8 ALT-TRANS Newsletter 9, 10, 11, 12 *Green Streets: the 1991 Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act and the Greening of Transportation Policy in the United States*, Preston Schiller, et al. 13, 14 "Mean Streets: Pedestrian Safety and Reform of the Nation's Transportation Law," Surface Transportation Policy Project and Environmental Working Group 1997. 15, 18, 19 *Christian Science Monitor*, "Jump start your car," Feb. 3, 1998, 16, 17 New York Times, "Where have All the Dead Cars Gone?", Feb. 15, 1997. 20, 21, 22, 23 1998 Abstract 24, 25, 26, 27 Student survey conducted Winter quarter 1998.

Special thanks to Harper's Magazine



southern exposure

by Juniper Garver-Hume

"It's beyond absurd," fumes Happy Valley resident Tip Johnson. He is describing the roadway plan submitted with Western Washington University's view of the future, the Campus Master Plan.

The Master Plan would relocate parking lots and remove playing fields to make room for a loop road, forever changing the face of Western. "The original master plan would completely rip up South College Way and build a whole new loop. It looks like a LeMans-style race track," says Johnson.

The appearance of the Western Washington University (WWU) campus is going to change dramatically in the next six years. Driven by issues of traffic safety, ease of access to campus, parking limitations and the impacts of ever-increasing campus traffic on surrounding neighborhoods, WWU is being redesigned.

"This decision was made probably in the 1960s and it was made with the City [of Bellingham] and the

University. The campus probably wasn't going to go north. The campus was going to go south," says WWU Facilities Project Manager, Ed Simpson.

This decision sets up a heated debate between Western and the Happy Valley neighborhood to the south. The main point of contention: traffic.

"Cars are the problem," says Johnson. "I just don't think it's profitable to cloister yourself away from the problem." It is the neighborhoods near the school that are inundated with higher traffic flows and insufficient parking on campus. "For the University to wall the community off and to force those impacts off into the neighborhoods creates a situation where [the University] can just ignore the problem. I'm not sure that's beneficial in the long run."

"The transportation and parking elements of the 1997 Draft Comprehensive Master Plan have generated the majority of the public comment regarding the Master

Plan.” So begins the “Statement of Purpose” for the Campus Infrastructure Development Predesign Task Force.

The Task Force is a group of individuals that represent Western’s faculty, staff, the Associated Students (AS), Happy Valley, South Hill, and Sehome neighborhood residents, Whatcom Transportation Authority, City of Bellingham Public Works, and City of Bellingham Planning & Community Development. This Task Force is charged with recommending to the WWU administration design alternatives for the infrastructure development of south campus.

“This project seems straight-forward, but it’s complicated even though it’s small,” says Huxley professor and Task Force representative John Miles. “Struggles over transportation planning involving WWU are a microcosm of the larger world. The Task Force is a politically inspired process that departs from past practice. The University finally recognized the need to consult with neighbors, and transportation impacts them more than anything else.”

David Evans and Associates (DEA) was hired to do the predesign study of south campus. Michael Durbin, the Project Manager for DEA, explains that the University wants to bring representatives of the stakeholders together as a conduit for public input. Thus the Task Force was created.

Simpson said that the biggest difference between the 1997 Master Plan and preceding campus plans is the current emphasis on transit, whereas in the past infrastructure was designed exclusively for cars. But according to Claudia Scivanich, Transportation Planner for the consulting firm DEA, they “always design for cars.”

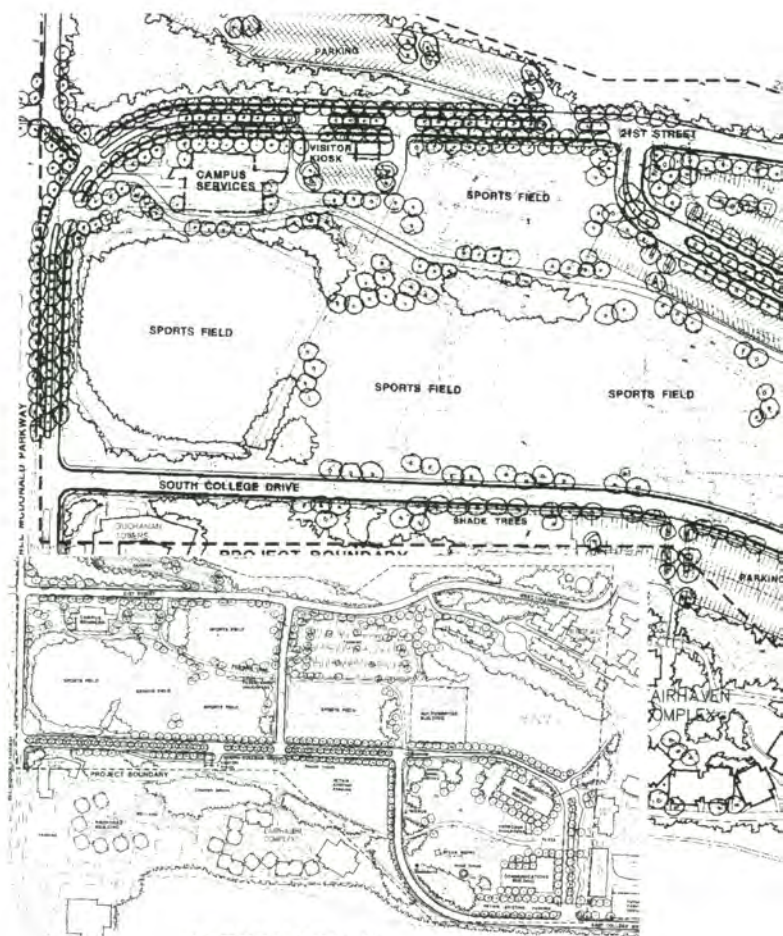
Predesign is the next step in making the Campus Master Plan a reality. Predesign is a standard process required by the Washington State Office of Financial Management for all projects with a cost greater than \$5 million. “Predesign money was requested and received by WWU in July of 1997,” explains Simpson. “From that time we have one year to complete the predesign.”

“This process is required, but in the past it has not been public,” says Miles. In the past, predesign of WWU projects has been carried out within the planning department of the University or by contracted consultants. But the Growth Management Act (GMA) was amended in

1991 to require state agencies, including WWU, to comply with development regulations under the GMA.

“The Task Force started with the Master Plan and developed alternatives from there,” says Durbin. One of the alternatives was derived directly from the Master Plan, and two were developed from ideas submitted by two Happy Valley residents.

The Task Force and DEA are under pressure to have one preferred alternative to recommend to the



ALTERNATE E

University administration this April. “If we don’t, we won’t have done our job,” says Durbin, referring to the funding deadline. If all goes smoothly, the University will have funding for design and construction in July of 1999. Construction would start in 2001 after detailed design and engineering, potentially being completed by 2003.

According to WWU Project Goals, the predesign study must maintain the present number of parking spaces within the project boundaries. To this end, all of

the considered alternatives create a parking lot on the currently forested northwest corner of the 21st Street and Bill McDonald intersection, near the 808 apartments. AS Task Force representative Jesse Salomon hopes that “Western sets aside a certain amount of forested area of their Trust lands that would otherwise be cut down - no net loss.”

None of the alternatives, however, maintain the current number of parking as they are currently laid out. “The Task Force is assuming that this goal will be met

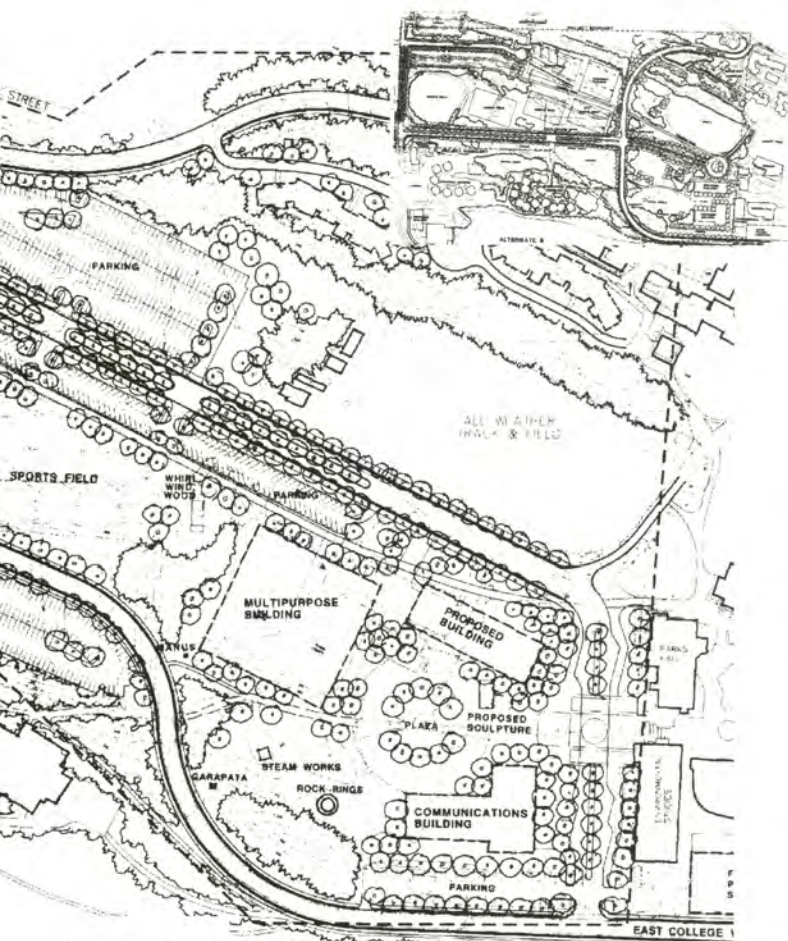
Mitigation measures were added to the alternatives under consideration after Salomon brought the Task Force a petition bearing 525 signatures against this Master Plan road design.

The Task Force has whittled the seven alternatives down to three. Among those to not make the cut was Alternative B, proposed by Happy Valley Task Force representative Jon Servais. This alternative was the only plan that closed the section of 21st Street between Bill McDonald and the track on campus. It was the favored plan of the Happy Valley residents, had the fewest intersections, the smallest amount of road and left most of the present infrastructure intact.

Unfortunately, the City of Bellingham saw the matter differently. “We consider 21st Street an important linkage in the City’s transportation network,” says Tom Rosenburg of the Public Works Department. “Public Works cannot support any alternative that proposes the elimination of 21st Street as a connection between Bill McDonald Parkway and Highland Drive.”

Look out a south-facing window of the Environmental Studies building and try to picture it. You are looking at the south end of the Western Washington University campus in 2003. Immediately below you is a transit hub. Busses are pulling in and out, delivering students to their classes. Students are streaming over the bricked road into the red brick plaza surrounded by three new buildings. The steam works and rock rings sculptures are out of view behind one of those buildings.

The main boulevard entrance to campus is off to your right angling up from 21st Street. Perhaps you can see over the new Multipurpose building that houses a new gymnasium to five play fields, continuous down to Bill McDonald Parkway. Cars are packed into parking lots lining 21st Street, but there are no more cars than in 1998. If alternative forms of transportation have not absorbed increasing student numbers, the next capital project will be multilevel parking structures next to the Environmental Studies and the Viking Union buildings.



ALTERNATE F

DAVID EVANS
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somehow, regardless of their recommended alternative,” says Miles.

Another concern that Salomon brought to the table related to the relocation of South College Drive closer to Fairhaven. The master plan shows South College Drive moved right up to Fairhaven College. “A lot of people felt that would cause a danger for the child care center as well as ruin the atmosphere of Fairhaven,” explains Salomon.

Juniper Garver-Hume is an Environmental Science student who wants to pursue a career in Nepal working on environmental conservation issues.



confessions of an auto addict

by Marnie Jackson

My roommate came home, minus one Thunderbird, in a police car the other night.

Outwardly my reaction to the news was appropriate – or so I would like to think. “A four-car pileup? The T-bird’s totaled? Was anyone hurt?”

Inwardly, my reaction was . . . appropriate, I suppose, in the way that cutting in front of someone during rush hour is appropriate. I find it difficult to keep the gears from turning when I am presented with such news: “Hmmm . . . my roommate totaled her car . . . guess she won’t be needing that parking permit.”

Life in modern times has taught drivers to fight for a place in the ferry line and to weasel through traffic if it gets them home faster. In the same vein, life at Western Washington University has taught me that a prime parking spot is the one thing I must cling to beyond all else.

Waiting list after waiting list had finally placed me in lot CR, about half a mile west of nowhere. My roommate, on the other hand, was parked – of all places – about 100 feet from our dormitory door. And I’m only slightly ashamed to admit that the green-eyed monster reared its ugly head, until the day that I heard the news. The parking permit had been salvaged from the wreckage, and would be mine for a measly third of my paycheck.

And such is the latest chapter in my story, a story starring a 1972 Mercedes. My pride and joy, my darling car, the bane of my financial and environmentally conscious existence.

At times I look fondly back on my pre-Mercedes days, days when a chip in the paint on any one of the Chevy LUVs and Dodge Omnis littering my driveway didn’t mean getting an appraisal, but instead whipping out the spray paint. There is a certain beautiful freedom granted the proud owners of dime-a-dozen junkyard clunkers – the freedom of disposability.

My attitude, like that of too many individuals, has always been to close my eyes to the landfill issue, ignor-



ing the tons and tons of permanent scar tissue on the face of our planet. The Styrofoam cups of the automotive industry have, until recently, been my vehicular mainstay. Junker after junker has trundled into, and eventually limped out of, my life.

Now that those days are nothing but a fond memory, I occasionally catch myself wishing that the Mercedes would have the decency to do the same: exit gracefully. The downward spiral of ever-present costs prohibits a quick and painless parting, however. "I can't sell my baby now," I tell myself, "I just had repairs done." I reassure myself time after time that the beast has done its worst to my wallet, yet I am dramatically proved wrong.

My pride and joy, my darling car, the bane of my financial and environmentally conscious existence.

For instance, I made a casual stop at a brake repair shop to have a noise checked out. I assumed that I would be spending about \$60 on new pads, but the figure at the bottom of the sheet sat like a lump in my throat. My negligence had come back around to \$797.35 . . . money that I just did not happen to have.


Monetary difficulties aside, my car causes more harm than it is worth. As someone who considers herself something of an environmental activist, I have an increasingly difficult time playing dumb when it comes to automobiles and the planet. Walking around in my Birkenstocks (synthetic, of course, no leather footwear for this vegan) and preaching Earth's cause is one thing, but driving my vehicle in the same sandals is quite another.

Pulling out of a parking lot has become a desperate game of hide-and-seek, as my ecologically minded friends never fail to observe the exceptionally putrid clouds of filth rising from my tailpipe in the morning. And to imagine that two minutes before pulling out of the parking lot, I was likely quoting statistics in defense of the atmosphere: "We can save more carbon dioxide from entering the atmosphere by not eating five pounds of

rainforest beef than by not driving for a year." It is ironic that I still choose the lesser of two evils when choosing neither seems best suited to my cause.

Fashion, I suppose, is what it's reduced to; fashion, of which I am a prime victim. Despite my frequent "save the world" soapbox ramblings, my transportation choices are a clear indicator that I am as socially malleable as anyone else. The looks I get as I roar through Bellingham in a classy status-symbol on wheels make me momentarily forget the damage caused to the environment by my driving habit; the "Cool car!" that I frequently hear the first time I invite a friend to go for a drive is a soothing balm for my guilty conscious.

Having tired of attempting to justify the gas-guzzling and pollutant-spewing tendencies of my faithful auto to myself and others, I have fallen back to avoiding the subject, and in fact the car itself, whenever possible. When I do stop to consider the irony of owning such a contraption, I all but spasmodically twitch in disgust at my ill consideration of the planet's needs. I, with my environmentally sound aspirations, my lofty goals for saving my little corner of the world, my frequent tirades for the sake of the planet, should be driving a Geo Metro, if driving a gas-powered vehicle at all. But my Mercedes, I argue to myself, is my pride and joy! It's a beautiful car, I think, gorgeous in all its wasteful glory.

Hard as it is to admit, I am usually fairly successful in ignoring the little voices in my head that whisper "12 miles per gallon, 12 miles per gallon." But each day the voices grow louder. As time rolls on, I find it less and less difficult to imagine that one day I'll be blasting Pink Floyd on a Discman as I wait for the bus to give me a lift. 

Marnie Jackson is a freshman who, to borrow a phrase from the illustrious Douglas Adams, is so hip she has trouble seeing over her pelvis.

taking it to the street

by Riley Morton

Yelled at. Screamed at. Given the finger. I had never before been under such fire in all my life, and for some reason, I loved every second of it.

"Get out of the fucking road!!" one motorist in a black Honda hatchback yelled. In response, I turned back toward the angry man, smiled broadly and gave a friendly wave.

"What the hell are you guys doing!?" yelled some pedestrians.

"Critical Mass!" we exclaimed, with as much detail as we had time for.

With every angry honk this crowd of cyclists receives, we cheer. With every happy wave from a stationary pedestrian, we cheer. With every pedal stroke, it seems, we cheer.

This diverse group of cyclists has only been riding together for the last two minutes, but it feels like two years. This evening we are part of a group called Critical Mass.

Taking place on the last Friday of every month, Critical Mass is an international, social and environmental movement which celebrates the bicycle as a mode of

transportation. The idea is simple – we meet in Westlake Center, in the heart of downtown Seattle, right in the middle of rush hour at 5:30 p.m. We gather as a group and begin to pedal down the road, blocking traffic purposefully. All we need is enough cyclists: a Critical Mass. And tonight, as always, we have more than enough people to produce a Critical Mass.

Critical Mass is not designed purely to piss people off (although it succeeds greatly in this endeavor), but rather to "take back the street" for cyclists at least one night of the month. Every "Mass" is full of cyclists who believe that we are too dependent on automobiles for transportation. "Massers" are environmentalists, social critics, recreational cyclists and normal people. Massers feel that to get their message across, they need to block traffic, even at the risk of angering motorists. All the Massers have to defend themselves are their bikes and good humor.

"[Critical Mass] is always celebratory, y'know?" says one Masser, who calls himself Bob. "Celebration of the bike. Celebration of people being out and breathing the air."



"I was pretty impressed the first couple of rides because I thought people were quite funny," notes David Current, who has been riding in Critical Mass since last summer. "The comments that happen along the way are pretty creative comments, . . . just kind of a sense of humor. Trying to humor some of the drivers who seem to get kind of upset."

Drivers do get upset regularly, sometimes even infecting the police with anger, as was the case during the January 1997 Critical Mass. "Oh, the 'Nasty Ride,'" remembers Nic Warmenhoven, a regular at Mass. "It was dark, and it was a dry night," he recalls, "and we were riding up Madison Street to Capitol Hill." The cyclists soon became aware of a police car behind them using its bullhorn to order the cyclists to ride two abreast. The police officer singled out a cyclist with a green bag and ordered him to pull over. When the cyclist did not, "the cop pulled his car ahead of the group, got out and tackled him off the bike," remembers Warmenhoven.

Warmenhoven and the other Massers became aware of the situation down the road, turned around and circled the area where the policeman was having the confrontation with the green-bagged cyclist. Warmenhoven remembers the policeman simultaneously calling for assistance and ordering the cyclist to get up. All the while,

the surrounding crowd pleaded with the officer to leave the cyclist alone. "All of the sudden, there were 11 other police cars there," Warmenhoven recalls. "The only thing I remember was one guy I saw running up a hill, and he was tackled to the ground."

When the smoke cleared, five cyclists had been arrested.

The local media had a field day with the story. *The Seattle Times* reported that cyclists were "attacking" police officers. The non-violent civil disobedience of Critical Mass became interpreted as a "riot." Anxious for high ratings, the three Seattle news shows reported Critical Mass as a violent uprising of a dangerous biker gang.

Sensationalist reporting aside, most of the time Critical Mass rides are peaceful experiences. "Violent" was one of the examples under the "Critical Mass is Not" heading on a flyer one of the riders handed out at a recent ride. Under the same "Critical Mass is Not" heading: "a time for pointless, angry confrontations with car drivers," reiterating the peaceful nature of the rides. And the word "illegal" also appears under the same heading, emphasizing the "coincidence" nature of Mass.

Critical Mass has been successful as a counterculture revolution partly because of its "Organized Coincidence" philosophy. No single person organizes the



Masses, instead they “materialize” every month seemingly out of thin air. This way, no person can be held responsible for organizing the movement, but everyone can take credit.

There are more reasons behind Critical Mass than there are riders. At first, most riders will cite environmental reasons as the main reason that they participate. But many of the same cyclists follow up with a slew of social reasons as to why Critical Mass can change behavior. “I’m interested in having more room on the road, more safe roads, and more people sharing a good time on their bikes,” says Bob. “The scale of the city should be open to bicyclists because we are a little more vulnerable.”


Masses’ screams of “Honk if you are a rat in a cage!” to honking cars reflect their attitudes about the negative social impacts cars make on our society. In the hustle and business of our everyday lives, many Americans seem to have become fundamentally alienated from one another and the surrounding community. We all sit in our little metal boxes and get where we need to go, without making any kind of contact with people besides the personas of radio morning shows.

One of the goals of Critical Mass is to help relieve this isolation afflicting many Americans these days. The cycling community is just that – a community. Critical Mass gives the cycling community a chance to gather and

let their voices be heard.

This community feeling becomes extremely evident as you pedal towards the growing Mass at the beginning of a ride. It is clear that all riders, whether they are cyclist aficionados or aging grandmothers, are welcome. The cause of Critical Mass serves as a unifying force.

Mass is far from being just a Seattle movement, or even a North American movement. Critical Mass is now a regular event on five of the six continents with cars. In addition to every major North American city, regular Masses are held in Sydney, Australia; Sao Paulo, Brazil; Edinburgh, Scotland; and even Tel Aviv, Israel. Riders get the feeling that they are part of something bigger, something worldwide. We feel as though we are riding for a reason, and we are.

This was my first Critical Mass, but it won’t be my last. I had an incredible time being a part of that epic ride. In a world where virtually every minority group is oppressed, even cyclists, it is important to stand up and participate in a little culture jamming. But you can’t do it entirely alone – you need a Critical Mass. 

Reborn Critical Masser Riley Morton is a Fairhaven senior whose studies focus on the place where outdoor recreation and media intersect. His interests include mountaineering, travel and donuts.



we have your number

by Gabriel Cruden

If you responded to our survey, chances are good you either own a car (64.2%) or you don't (35.8%).

Enough of you (71.6%) to cause a revolution on the road claimed to have a bicycle, but I haven't seen many of them around. Maybe it's because you seniors (38%) are trying to get your papers written and get out of here and you freshman (35.1%) just don't know where to go anyway. What the other's (26.9%) excuse is, I don't know.

People proclaim that if there were an alternative, they'd be the first to use it, but when asked straight up – you scored low (4.3%) in the “always choosing an alternative means of transportation instead” category. Surprising since you Huxley majors alone (53%) far outnumber the other majors surveyed.

If you have already read some of the articles in this issue, you may have noticed a trend to the commentary. We students seem to be feeling victimized, helpless to do anything about our environmentally damaging situation. You (88.8%) declared that you are somewhat-to-very concerned about the depletion of natural resources, yet a whopping half of you (52.1%) crank that engine over and drive your resource-depleting, environment-degrading, water-contaminating, air-clogging car one or more times *every single day!*

When it comes down to it you are rather fond of having a car (84%), although only a fraction of you actually came out and said you like to drive your car because it's cool (3.2%). Hmm, what are all those car advertisers thinking, spending millions of dollars each year just to make cars look cool?


Most of you jump in your car to go to work (53.2%), school (35.1%) and to do shopping or laundry (85.1%), so what about giving up the car idea altogether? Imagine what it would be like if you could go to school and live in a self-sustaining community where you could work and get the things you needed without having to drive. Wouldn't that just put the auto industry in a tizzy?

As Orion Morrison of the Vehicle Research Institute said in a Feb. 20, 1998 *Western Front* article, “Gas is not going to be around forever.” Maybe if we start showing the auto industry we are serious about looking for alternatives now, we won't have to wait until every last drop of gasoline has been pumped out of the earth and into our gas tanks, trashing the land that supports us in the process.

Since most of you driverless students (85.1%) drove at one time and then quit, not for ethical reasons (9.5%), but because of your wallet and the hassle, it seems you just want cars that are cheaper. What about making them solar-powered, and built out of low-impact, renewable-resource materials while we are at it? But since no one is putting them in our driveway just yet, I guess we are stuck with what we have got, right?

What is it going to take? Do we have to appeal to the pocket book? Western's Transportation Management Program Coordinator, Carl Root, voices the opinion that “If gas were two dollars [or more] a gallon, we would all think twice about driving our car.”

If you can't give up the idea of having a car, or if you're part of the mob (78.7%) who doesn't use public transportation to visit family, what about carpooling? About half of you (50.4%) must be anti-social since you never or infrequently carpool. And what about those of you (50%) who drive less than five miles each time? Some of you (71%) might consider using your bikes that are gathering dust somewhere. Or is that not cool?

My thanks to those of you who contributed to the survey. If there is anything to learn from this, it's that we're feeling stuck and it seems like too much effort to do what most of us know we should do: to begin living a little more lightly on this planet. 

Gabriel Cruden is a Fairhaven senior who is currently looking for environmental education opportunities in his old stomping grounds of northeastern Washington.

traffic calming in Bellingham

by Ben Sanders

In July of 1997, the population of Whatcom County passed a milestone by exceeding 150,000 people. Ironically, the effect of reaching that milestone may lead to a little less traffic and a little cleaner air. And we can thank Washington State's Commute Trip Reduction Law.

The law instructs Washington State counties with populations of 150,000 people or more to "direct large employers to create programs to reduce commuter-related pollution, traffic congestion, and fuel consumption."

So far, nine counties throughout the state – Spokane, Yakima, King, Clark, Pierce, Kitsap, Snohomish, Thurston and Whatcom – have set up organizations to aid major employers with the creation of their programs. The law affects employers who have 100 or more employees that are scheduled to arrive at the worksite between six and nine a.m., work full-time and work year-round.

By implementing the law, Whatcom County has taken on the role of providing assistance to larger employers throughout the county. The Commute Trip Reduction program (CTR) is state-funded and provides the County with financial aid to be used in connection with employer program development.

A major contributor to Whatcom County's CTR program is Susan Horst, Employer Outreach Coordinator. Susan is easily recognizable in the workplace from the click-clacking of her bicycle shoes as she strides down hallways. She rides her bicycle to and from work religiously each day, disregarding any meteorological challenge mother nature may put forth. She has found herself in an enviable position, where she can manifest her personal environmental conscience on a daily basis.

Her job is to help implement the CTR program at each worksite in the County by providing information, ideas and means of program development. Susan explains important aspects of CTR and how the city of Bellingham and greater Whatcom County have reacted to this recent legislative presentation of environmental action.

The Planet: Could you explain the Commute Trip Reduction Law?

Susan Horst: In 1991, the state legislature decided that they were going to be proactive in trying to reduce pollution, traffic congestion, and fuel consumption . . . and there is a national air quality standard guideline that says once you pass a certain threshold of bad air, then you are required to do something about it.

Getting around to Washington State, there wasn't an area in the state that really had that kind of a problem, so no pressure. But they decided, let's solve this problem on our own before the feds come in and make us do something. So they came up with this Commute Trip Reduction Act . . . the law is very flexible, it has very few specific requirements, it says 'design a program that fits your worksite and do your best.' The law sets goals, but it doesn't penalize anybody that doesn't meet those goals, it just says you have to try.

What are some of the goals of the law?

The way the law works is that you measure how people are actually getting to work, then you have to aim for reductions of single occupant vehicle trips. Employers are directed to aim for 15 percent two years later, 20 percent four years later, 25 percent six years later . . . your program is what you're using to achieve that and your program can be anything you want it to be. It may be something the employer is doing on their own, like subsidizing bus passes.

Why are areas such as Bellingham, that have such "no pressure" traffic and air pollution concerns, so adamant about CTR?

Besides the fact that it is state law, I think it's a whole lot easier to see potential problems arise down the road, seeing the problem of pollution and traffic congestion and saying 'what can we do to prevent this from hap-



pening?" In Whatcom County's case, there's no stress, nobody's outraged that it's taking them an hour to get someplace. Right now we're in a good situation, there's no pressure. We can educate ourselves, we can decide how we want to spend our money, we can think how we want our community to develop. We're in a great place right now to keep developing in a positive way to preserve the really great quality of life we have here. As the saying goes, an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. But I say, in this case, it's worth a ton of cure.

What are some employee benefits of CTR?


They are all completely realistic benefits, and there are many. For one, the use of CTR programs will reduce commuting costs like gas, maintenance. The lifetime of your car will extend. The time it takes to get to work can be used more enjoyably or productively. CTR programs even create social opportunities in the case of carpooling, vanpooling, or riding the bus. And to go along with those, walking or biking to work provides convenient exercise.

And what are the employer's benefits?

There's a good number of those as well. Congestion and employee parking problems at the work-site are reduced, and along with that goes lower costs for parking facilities. CTR programs improve an employer's

ability to recruit and retain skilled employees, and helps lower absentee and tardiness rates among employees. And besides all of the technical benefits, CTR improves employee moral. It helps give employees a sense that their employers actually care about them, and that's a rare thing in the case of a large-scale employer. If employers would show that they care about the employee's well-being as well as their time card, they would be amazed at the effect it would make on employee productivity.

How do CTR programs benefit the community?

That's the question most people are asking, too. Well, the programs help alleviate traffic congestion and reduce energy consumption. They also reduce the community's reliance on foreign oil. The programs decrease water and air pollution and also benefit the local economy's mobility. In another sense, they preserve the attractiveness of our cities and rural areas and, as a whole, improve the overall quality of life. We all have a role to play in protecting this beautiful corner of Washington. Even as Whatcom County grows, our cars don't have to dominate our environment. Drive when you have to, but ride the bus, carpool, vanpool, bicycle, or walk when you can. Let's use our cars wisely. 

Ben Sanders is a contemporary artist with a strong vision of universal equality.

the full pollu

BIRTH

Before the typical car has left the manufacturing plant, it has produced 29 tons of waste and 1,207 million cubic yards of polluted air



During the car it produces yards of air pollu 40 pounds of tire on the roadway



This first stage of a car's lifespan accounts for 33 percent of the car's total environmental cost, equivalent to driving 35,000 miles



The second stage accounts for 60 percent of environmental

other impacts:

- mine tailings, run-off and groundwater pollution from metals mining for auto parts
- acid rain and air pollution from manufacturing processes
- release of heavy metals, sulfur and nitrogen compounds during industrial processes
- dependence on natural resources

other impacts:

- run-off from fuel
- acid rain from
- chronic low-level
- landscape scarring streams and associated with
- increased urban

tion package

FE

lifetime of a typical
1,330 million cubic
tion and scatters
es and brake debris



ge of a car's lifespan
ent of the car's total
cost



vehicle exhaust
el exposure to toxins
ng and disruption of
nimal pathways
road building
sprawl



DEATH

The final stage of a car's lifespan
accounts for 7 percent of the car's total
environmental cost



There are over 12,000 automobile
junkyards in the United States



other impacts:

- PCBs and hydrocarbons released
- dumping of engine oil
- air pollution and fumes from burning tires and battery cases
- CFCs released from air-conditioning units

Sources: Environment and Forecasting Institute and Worldwatch Institute

CAR ART:

vehicles for cultural criticism

by Margo Wixsom

Cars have long been a vehicle for playing out the daily routines and dreams of American life. From toys to ads and art, cars have become the icon for our consumer culture: slick, fast-paced and prolific. A growing number of artists integrate cultural icons into their artistic visions as a form of cultural criticism. Designers, sculptors and graphic artists use car-as-image to examine the effects of the car on our cultural and global environments. These artists explore the destructive driving force that the automobile exerts on our consciousness and our cultures.

In 1993, Finnish artist Maija Ekosaari began a series of fabric art pieces titled "Postcards From America" while studying at Western. The intent of her artwork is to joke with often silly, even bizarre attitudes that Americans have toward nature and their surroundings: trash, disposable items, recycling, cars versus public transportation, parking problems on campus.

As a foreign student and avid traveler, she relates that her role as a visitor inspired her use of the postcard as an image for cultural criticism. "Postcards usually present glossy, colorful images that depict the nice, the ideal," she says. "My postcard images reflect the hidden reality that is not so colorful." She selected the quintessential American fabric for her wearable art, the white crew-neck T-shirt, and chose car culture as her initial topic of examination.

The title, "postcard from america : public transportation" is printed on the back of one T-shirt in generic

black text. The front swarms with black, stacked images of cars piled around single-word signs pointing in various directions: "food, job, fun, stuff, beer, fuck." In the center of the chaotic pile of black-and-white cars is a small, glossy postcard image that is a color enlargement of a Whatcom Transit Authority bus map. The colorful, wishful world of public transportation is imprisoned within the black and white reality of American car culture.

Using contradictory words and images,

Ekosaari and other artists chal-

lenge our attractive

illusions and

expose the

toxic reality

about cars.

Subversive images

revealing the waste,

pollution, urban

crowding and environmental

destruction caused by our car-

centered culture make us take

a look at our obsession with

the automobile in disturbing,

comical and powerful ways.

Several of the sculp-

tures of San Francisco artist

Ron Garrigues expose the

deadly drama of the near-

sighted vision of American

car culture. Garrigues answers the

phone in a soft, yet urgent voice to talk about the bronze

images that he has become famous for in exhibitions

nationwide. He has created a powerful array of sculptures

integrating his trademark image of a skull with images of

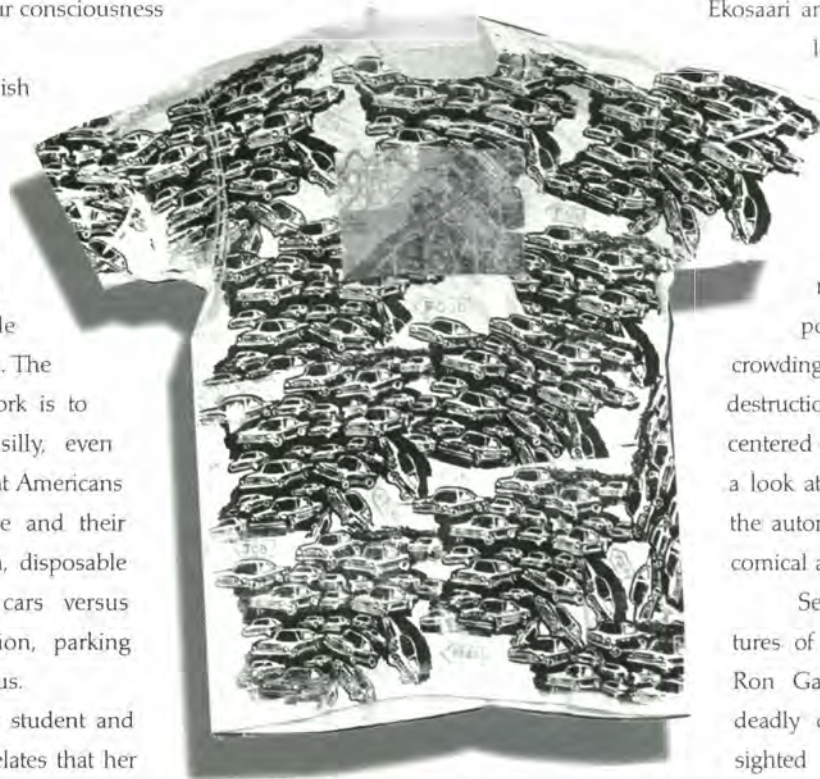
American cultural icons, including the car.

"My images came from a study of a series of skulls

from endangered animals, including man," he says. "In the

last 200 years, man has done irreparable damage to the

earth, destroying habits and species in astounding num-

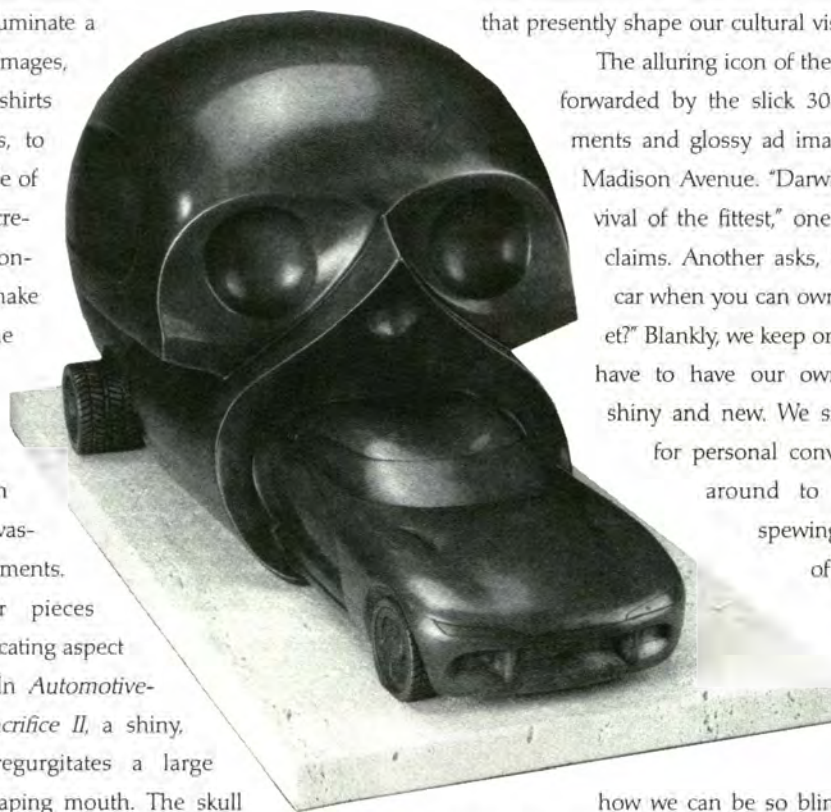


bers and recently at an accelerating pace." He cites the fact that the 550 million operating cars and the several million cars in constant production are major contributors to global warming, air pollution and the ruination of community life across the planet. "I believe we are a species that is fouling our own nest and I feel strongly about these things and want to address them in my art."

His bronze sculptures are insightful fusions of deadly consumer images. The haunting combinations illuminate a variety of cultural images, like the postcard T-shirts that Ekosaari creates, to examine the ugly side of the worlds that we create. His artwork conveys his passion to make people aware of the implications of our cultural attitudes toward the car and consumerism that promote the devastation of our environments.

His skull-car pieces underscore the suffocating aspect of our car culture. In *Automotive-Age Man - Self Sacrifice II*, a shiny, blank-eyed skull regurgitates a large sports car from its gaping mouth. The skull has the slick sense of a Nazi helmet and the futuristic contours of Darth Vader's visionless headgear. "The skull is a signpost on the road we travel. I am an appalled witness to the rampant destruction wrought by man's presence on our fragile planet," he explains. "No one with eyes can miss it, yet it continues unabated and accelerated. It is denied, dismissed or simply excused by most of Earth's six billion humans."

His commentary makes us look at the bulging,



empty eye sockets of his sculptures in a very personal way. How is it that we can be so continually and pervasively blind? Why do we continue to resist mass transit? Why do we ignore the mounting ecological evidence about automotive disaster? How do sports utility vehicles, with their gas-guzzling, off-road destruction, become the adult toy of our supposedly earth-conscious generations? The blank-eyed images of Ron Garrigues' skull sculptures are a powerful indictment of the enticing commercial car images that presently shape our cultural vision.

The alluring icon of the car is fueled and forwarded by the slick 30-second TV segments and glossy ad images produced by Madison Avenue. "Darwin was right: survival of the fittest," one ad proudly proclaims. Another asks, "Why just own a car when you can own the whole planet?" Blankly, we keep on buying it. We all have to have our own car, preferably shiny and new. We snub mass transit for personal convenience, rushing around to save time and spewing billions of tons of toxic gases into the atmosphere every year.

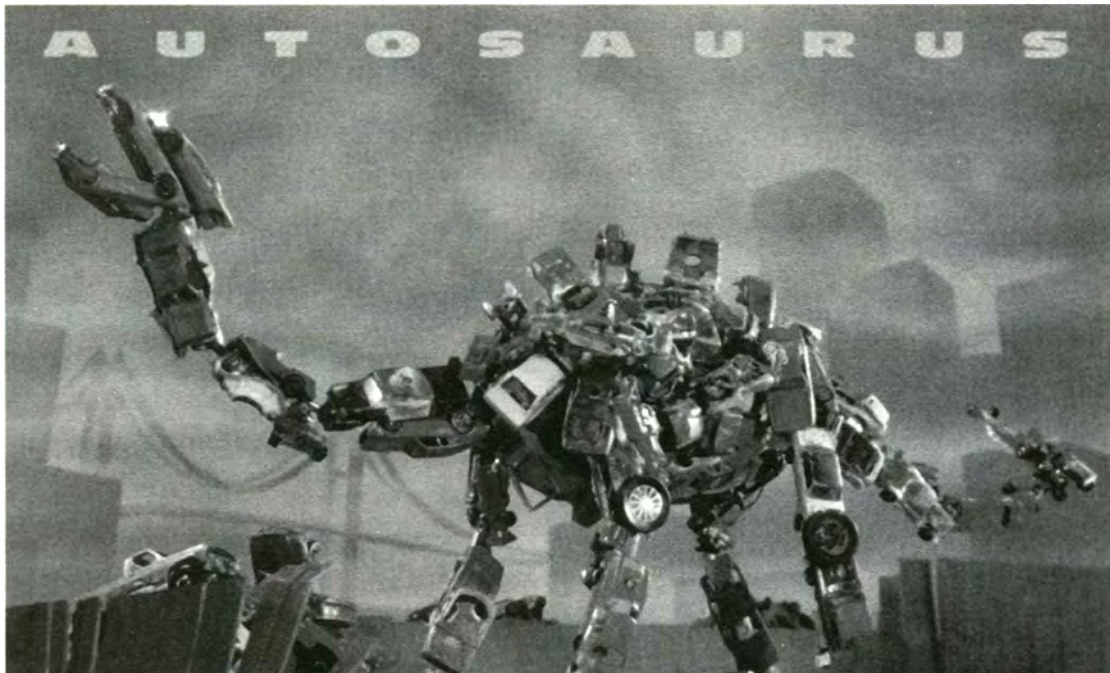
Part of the answer to how we can be so blind lies in the fact that from an early age, we see cars framed as innocent and enjoyable toys. Kalle Lasn, director of The Adbusters Media Foundation, has spent several years studying and exposing the impact and implications of consumer products and advertising messages that constantly indoctrinate us, particularly our children.

In the basement of a compact Vancouver, B.C. office, Lasn is surrounded by a halo of anti-consumer postcards tacked to the wall behind him. He grins and

launches into an articulate and animated conversation about his Foundation's counter-culture philosophy. "We publish uncommercials as a form of social marketing to deconstruct the practices and messages of product marketing."

Their *uncommercials* or *subvertisements* use the images of popular ads and change the words to expose the destructive messages and practices of consumer advertising. *Adbusters* subverts images of consumer ads with embarrassingly honest messages that expose the con-job that ads try to pull off. An image of a popular sport utility

Lasn is gravely concerned that the roughly \$15 billion global automotive advertising budget completely monopolizes the images and messages about cars created today - a deceptive and deadly view that completely ignores the impacts of global warming, petroleum pollution and exploitation of the Third World for energy resources. He describes the Foundation's mission: "It is essential to create a presence on TV, radio and in magazines that can counter and diminish the monopolizing vision that corporations create through the most powerful social communication media of our time."



vehicle (SUV) tearing up a mountain trail is captioned: "Nature, it'll grow back.. From the makers of Damage Automotive."

"From the moment children start watching TV, they get the message that cars are sexy and good, the only way to get around," Lasn points out. From the Barbie-mobile to miniature four-wheel drivable toys, boys and girls are sold on the seductive image of the car. The image of car-as-toy continues into adulthood as adolescents clamor for learning permits and the *big toy*. Adults clamor to buy the sexy-looking sportscar or the new king of the road, the gas-guzzling SUV.

The Foundation's 30-second *Autosaurus* ad aired on a session of the Canadian Broadcast Corporation's popular TV show "Driver's Seat." Lasn chuckles as he delightfully recounts the *Adbusters'* single TV success story. "As people were sitting down to a nice little dose of automotive propaganda, they got the shock of their quiet Saturday afternoon." Amid the slick and happy promises of car manufacturers, viewers were also greeted with the roaring dinosaur image of the *Adbusters'* uncommercial. "The most significant event in automotive history - the end of the Age of the Automobile," heralded this uncommercial. The image of the auto-dino, with its crumbling

toy-car parts collapsing into a junkyard, jarred many of the viewers into some critical thinking. People were roused from the illusion that car-culture is a harmless game. Corporate sponsors responded with media blackmail – pull the Adbusters’ spot or they’d pull their money from the station. It worked.

Adbusters wants to “Jam commercial ad images and break the monopoly that corporations and their commercials have on our cultural space,” explains Lasn. Ad culture presently monopolizes our view of reality – the cosmetically distorted view presented by corporations to sell products and consumerism. Subvertisements pose a powerful challenge to our ideology of acceptance. Adbusters invites everyone to subvert and expose deceptive commercial images and messages: pick up a pen or a pair of scissors and alter those ads with embarrassingly honest messages. “Calvin Klone.” “Bacardi Barf.” “Fraud Motor Company.”

People tend to shrug off modern art and graphic design with notions that they’re weird, trite or too intellectual. Possibly this attitude comes from the permission that people need, as artist Ron Garrigus notes, “to deny, dismiss and excuse the rampant destruction of our planet that continues unabated and accelerated.” The fabric art of Maija Ekosaari, the sculp-

tures of Ron Garrigus and the graphic design of Adbusters are powerful vehicles for cultural criticism. Their images expose the car as a toxic toy, a lethal cultural plaything that we can no longer afford. These artists unmask car culture for what it really is: a practice that

serves the wealthy minority of the planet while destroying and depleting the global majority.

It’s easy for us to watch documentaries about the destruction of the rain forests or Third World poverty, wring our hands, collect money for charitable donations and carry on with First-World business-as-usual. We continue to drive our cars to the corner store for a video, motor up to the mall every weekend to acquire more stuff, or buy a gas-guzzling SUV for maybe one annual ski weekend in the mountains. We continue to write off public transportation with derogatory attitudes and trivial legislation. It’s all so easy because we don’t have to turn around and take a look at our own tailpipe. Counter-culture

artists are committed to making us turn our heads, not away from the problems, but toward the sources.




Margo Wixsom is an artist, writer and teacher who seeks to integrate the visual, textual and cultural worlds that we live in.



Quantity is Job 1

The Continuing Quest for Cleaner Cars

text, design and photos by
Ryan Hooser



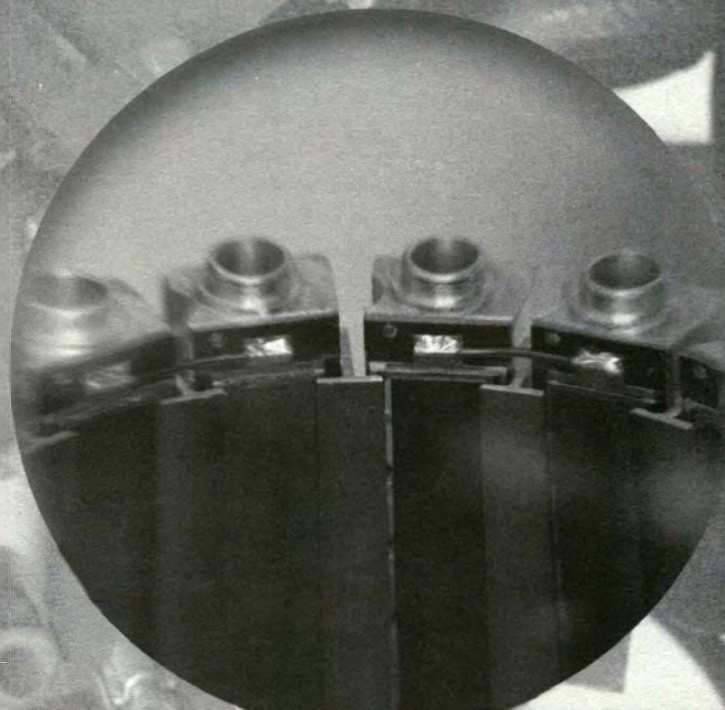
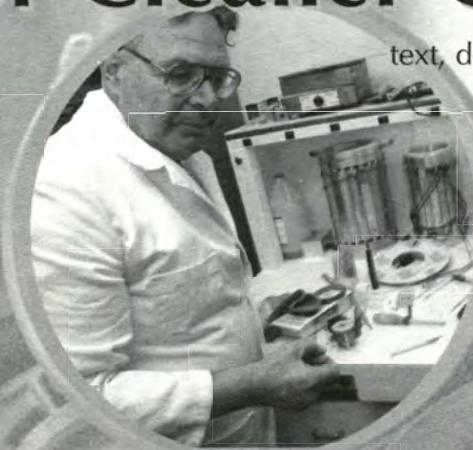
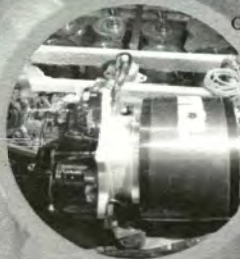
The staff and students at the Vehicle Research Institute of Western Washington University are headed down a fresh avenue in their search for a cleaner car. The department's progress with their new thermophotovoltaic generators is winning grants of about one million dollars a year to fund their research.

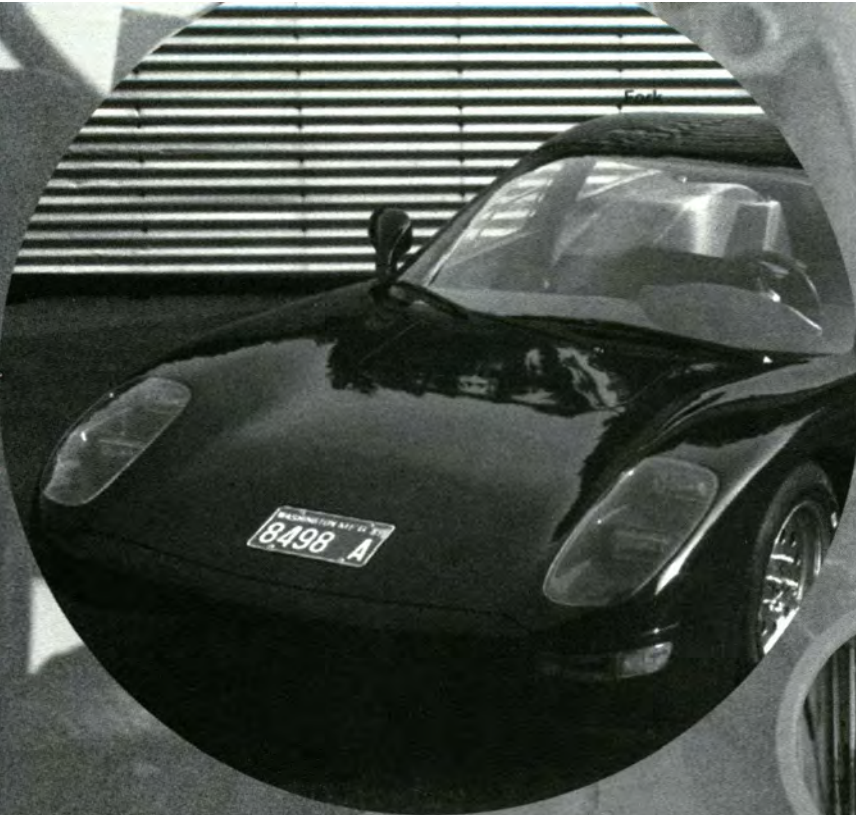
The generator is a clean-burning producer of electricity which uses compressed natural gas for fuel. The gas is burned in a ceramic cylinder that glows a bright red when hot, sending out waves of infrared light. A ring of "solar cells" are put around the glowing element just one inch away to soak up the light and convert it into electricity.

Eight of these generators will power the electric motor that runs the prototype clean-car, the Viking 29.

The advantages of this technology not only include a cleaner car but a quieter one as well. Department Director, Doctor Seal said, "Running at full capacity the car should be about as loud as a desktop computer, and with virtually no emissions."

Despite the many advantages that the car has, some obstacles stand in the way of mass producing the car. "The efficiency of a standard gasoline burning car is about 13%," Swan said. "Our efficiency rating is well below that."

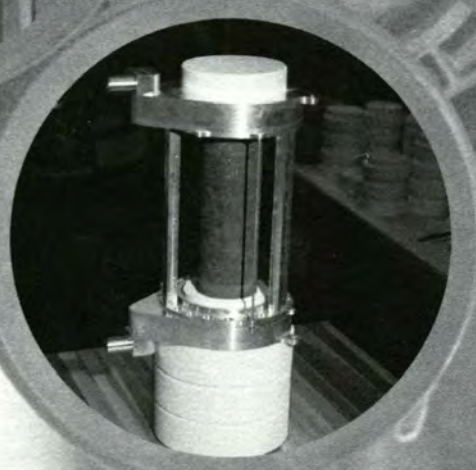
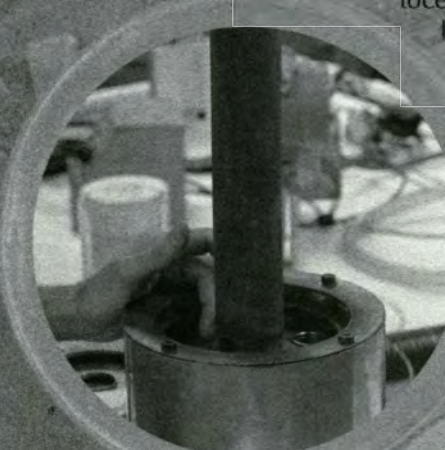
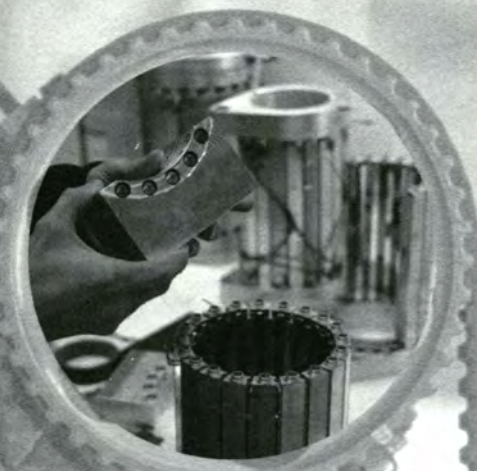




The struggle to squeeze every drop of energy out of the fuel has led the department to experiment with filters that correct the wavelengths of red light for maximum absorption by the photo cells.

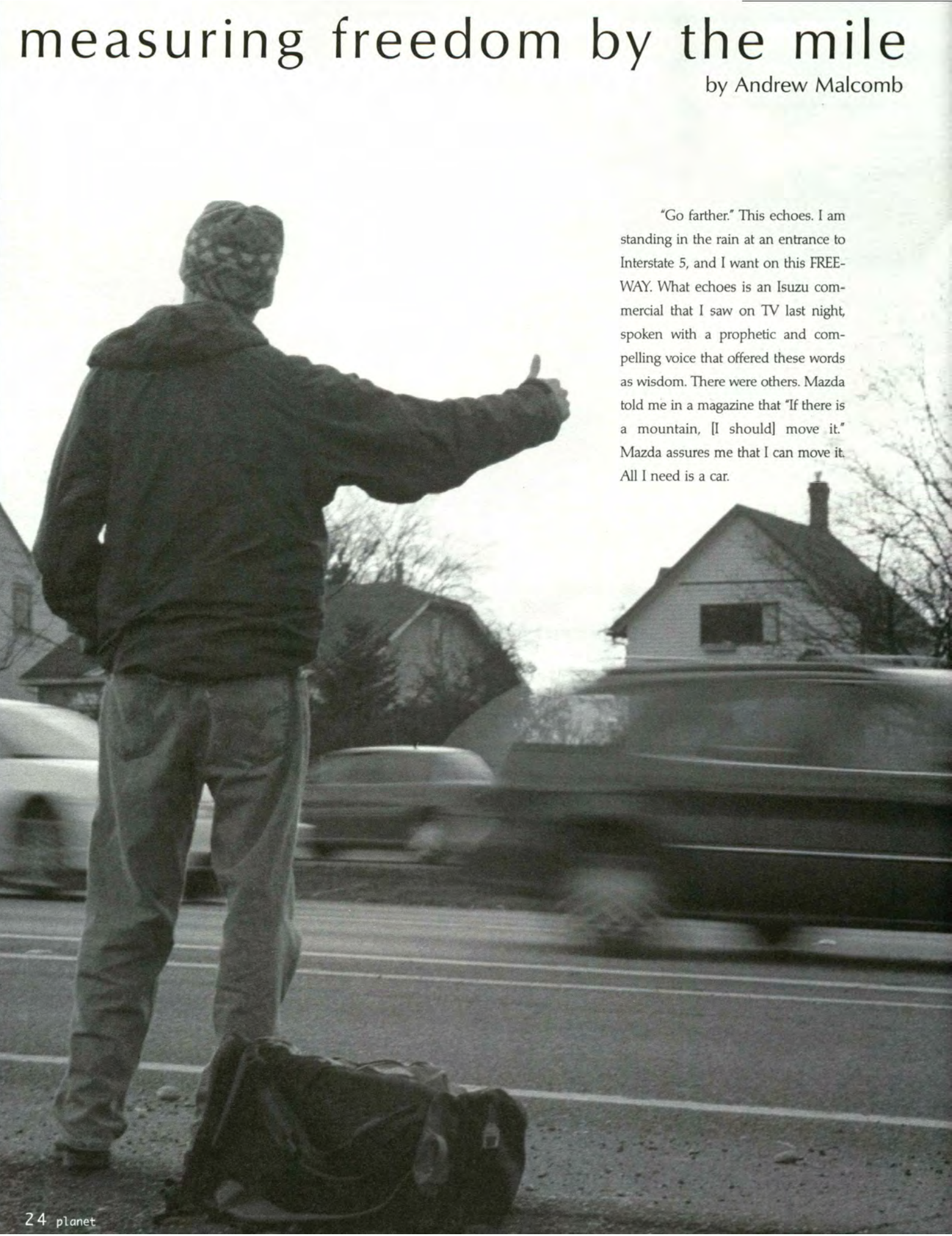
Another efficiency-increasing method they use is gold plating the mirrors that reflect the light inside the ring of photocells. "Gold is the ultimate reflector of infrared light," Seal said. "But there isn't much gold in these, the coating on the mirrors is only about one molecule thick."

The gold, filters and other methods the VRI is experimenting with to increase efficiency in these cars is proof of the infancy of this technology. The VRI's quest for the practical, efficient, clean car isn't over, but it has taken an interesting turn down a promising path.



measuring freedom by the mile

by Andrew Malcomb



"Go farther." This echoes. I am standing in the rain at an entrance to Interstate 5, and I want on this FREEWAY. What echoes is an Isuzu commercial that I saw on TV last night, spoken with a prophetic and compelling voice that offered these words as wisdom. There were others. Mazda told me in a magazine that "If there is a mountain, [I should] move it." Mazda assures me that I can move it. All I need is a car.

But right now, I am hitching. I don't have my own chariot. I am just breathing exhaust and pushing cigarette butts and bits of tar around with my foot, waiting. Here and now, at least, I don't belong to the club. Without my car, I am stuck. With my car, I could just drive right onto this FREEWAY. I could drive right onto this FREEWAY and be on my way: mobile, moving, and free.

The automobile is a modern symbol of freedom. The truth be known, I own two. I am a long-time subscribing member of the club; that pack of us whose choices and lifestyles are functions of the freedom that the automobile affords. I have spent months, maybe even years, of my life driving and riding around in these little steel cages: 70,000 miles in my own cars; maybe 100,000 or more in others.

In a straight line this journey would have taken me around this planet almost seven times. Many of us do this just getting to the grocery store and back. The automobile has secured a vital role in our lives, and it maintains its position by being a peerless tool for transportation.

The automobile is more than just the wrench that turns the bolt, however. It is not simply a tool. That automobile in your driveway is a machine, and as a machine of travel, it makes distances easier and movements faster.

Automobiles are defining forces in our lives. Now, today, they serve as an extension of our everyday reality, and an extension of ourselves. The automobile offers us power. The equation is brutally simple: pump in fuel that, when burned, converts to power that pushes the wheels. And then go.

This machine gives us the power to leave. Sitting in the driver's seat, we have the power to, according to SAAB, "Enjoy the sun longer." What is Volkswagen's mission? Its mission is to "Spread out the driving wealth. Put real power in the hands of the many."

And when I drive, too, I feel like I am in control. I require the remote and the away. Yes, I drive to K-Mart to buy cleaning products or underwear, but I don't actualize

myself in the housewares aisle. I do that in the mountains, through climbing. The automobile affords me this access. The far away places that I need to get to are not so far away when 70 mph are possible. Distances are not restricted to the stride of my step and how far I can see, but to how long I can keep my eyes open and my foot on the gas pedal. I have driven so far in one day (1270 miles) that I swore that I could feel the curve of the planet.

Am I a climber because the getting there is relatively easy? Would I climb if there were no roads or cars? Maybe. All I know is that I have convinced myself that the higher consciousness I seek is out there, in the wild, and the getting there is possible with the automobile at my disposal.

I am a modern man, though. I have responsibilities: family, career, consumer. I am a student. When I go out there, into the wilderness, I need to get back in time for class on Monday. That is why the car fits so perfectly: it holds appointments.

I tried what I thought would be a viable alternative to driving myself by hitchhiking. This alternative, I realized, is not viable for someone trapped (like most of us) in the dualistic battle between schedule and spirit, for two reasons. The first is that hitching is inconsistent, if not entirely unreliable. The second is that hitching, intrinsically, is not an alternative at all. It requires the car and the road; it is helpless without either. The real alternative to driving is walking, or staying home.

But driving is fun. With fast curves and smooth suspension, you can feel the road beneath your wheels. Jump in and feel the pulse, of human and machine melded into the desirous motion of movement. You both want velocity, and soon, you've got velocity. Driving is exhilarating, like dangerous play and its adrenaline. Driving is transformative and other-worldly.

Writer William Carlos Williams cultivated his improvisational form in harmony with driving in the early 1900s. For Williams, movements of his imagination were

revealed while driving. Driving hit a creative nerve for him. Why? "Write driving, look to steer," he wrote in *Kora in Hell: Improvisations*. In our hectic ways, driving for some offers a release and a new place for otherwise (perhaps) inaccessible perception. Some would argue that driving itself is a form of meditation.

Close the door tight. Turn up the heater and turn up the radio and you can create your environment. Step on the gas to move. You don't get wet when it rains. Your windshield feels the wind, and your tires the ground. Are you now as synthetic as your surroundings? Maybe.

Driving, I fall into a trance. Am I part of this thing flinging me straight into the darkness? Aside from falling, I don't know of any way to go 70 mph without a mechanical advantage. The auto is the baby of mechanical advantage. Turn the wheel. Go where I want to go. The world is immediately huge when I pull out of my driveway, and I imagine room to roam. I (the automobile) have now the wide, open road, and, sometimes, I can feel my mind stretching all the way to Nebraska.

The problem is that I can't smell the rain inside this shelter, and I am not in Nebraska. I am in Washington State. But when I drive my car, I could be anywhere, because inside is a new reality and a new place.

Where am I really? What am I connected to? My nylon seat belt straps across my chest, and my hands are touching fake leather, turning plastic knobs and dials. I am in a new, separate space, and I have built a new me. We manufacture these automobile machines that then manufacture us. Inside, we are now the ultimate consumers.

Like all good consumers, even those in Nebraska, I like a good sale. Red tags work well. And thanks to global mass-media, I get to see lots of red tags, everywhere I

look (or hear, or think.) And what are we selling today? I think it is myth. We are selling (and buying) the myth that technology will magically transform our lives. And why do our collective lives need to be magically transformed? Because somehow, in some way, we are not okay. This breeding of discontent is the backbone of advertising, and the flagship of the "sale of the century" is your car.

I say to Toyota, "I'm not doing well today, Toyota. My life is a drag, I hate my job, I don't look right, I don't feel right. I am miserable." Toyota says, "But (Andrew) you can dream, man, you can dream." I can buy this dream up. I can buy a better way because mine isn't working. I can buy a shining, new car that will take me away. Technology provides the answer and solution to my discontent, beckoning me to explore, change, start my life and drive.

How much does that cost? The sport utility vehicle craze is fueled by the image of no boundaries. Infiniti's Q4 ad says, "Careful, you may run out of planet." I don't think they realize how true that is. Those red tags should be red flags.

I crept around a well-lit car lot when it got dark, entertaining fantasies in the fancy shine of rows of brand new cars. I had watched the sun set across Bellingham Bay from near I-5, not on it. In three hours, four cars had stopped and offered me rides. "Where are you headed?" More than two exits was my answer, so they joined the swift stream on the raging FREEWAY without me.

I feel like I am in the belly of the beast. I want to go home, get in my truck and drive north, because I can. Should I? Should you? I don't know. I am simply asking. If the automobile equals a kind of freedom, what does that freedom then equal? Do we need to drive, or do we need to drive our machines into a deep ditch and bury these things for good?



Andrew Malcomb is an animal called human, currently grappling with consciousness and the natural self.

the story behind the statistics

by Heather Spaulding

Tessa learned the term "human vegetable" when she was only five years old. There was not a cloud in the sky that day. Wind waltzed with the trees, bending and swaying their limbs. "Thanks mom!" April grinned at the thought of being free from her pestering younger sister Tessa. April and her friend Emma took the kite and ran. Tessa followed as far as the driveway, then turned her back and cried.

"I'm sorry Tessa, but you're not old enough to go all the way to the meadow without me," said her mother, trying to soothe Tessa's sobs of self-pity as she sat in the driveway.

Emma's eyes shone with the anticipation of running with the wind in her long blonde hair and watching the kite soar. She bolted from the curb. Despite April's sharp reflexes, she could not pull Emma back in time. The car did not stop when it hit her. It dragged Emma for an entire block. In an instant, she became a statistic.

According to the U.S. Department of Fatal Traffic Accident Reports, nearly 60,000 pedestrians were killed in the U.S. in 1995. One-third of these accidents, a staggering 20,000, include children under 10 years old. Emma was only six when she fatally bolted into the street. The 17-year-old driver had bounded from her vehicle, eyes wide, visibly shaking. She had fallen asleep at the wheel.

Tessa saw Emma being loaded into the ambulance. She recognized the green corduroy pants and white blouse. She could not make sense of the body inside the clothes. Confused, she asked, "Who is it?"

"Emma," April murmured.

Tessa told herself that doctors would make Emma all better, insisting, "She'll be okay. Doctors can fix her." April did not respond. With tears fresh upon her cheeks, Tessa watched as the ambulance screamed away.

"If she survives, Emma will not be the same. She will be a vegetable," said Tessa's mother. "Her brain is damaged to the point she will not be able to feed or dress herself . . . No honey, she will not be able to play again."

When April and Tessa slept, they dreamt that the accident had never happened. In their dreams, Emma always came home safely, and they danced in celebration. The three of them teased Emma's brothers and played tricks on her sisters, just like before. But morning soon came, and with it, reality.

One morning the sisters, dressed in red flannel pajamas, were sitting in the living room working on a jigsaw puzzle when Emma's older sister knocked on the door. Her usually curly red hair looked matted and tasseled. Her face turned so white that her freckles appeared pale as she sputtered the words "Emma's dead" before breaking down.

The young driver's insurance had paid the medical bills, for a time. With some additional government insurance assistance, Emma's mother was able to sit beside her daughter, holding her tiny hand and clinging to hope. Altogether, Emma was on life support for only a week.

While automobiles contribute to environmental problems such as global warming, natural resource depletion and landscape blight, the harsh fact remains that cars can kill. They are dangerous machines, sometimes murderous, and can severely impact people's lives forever.

It makes sense to seek out alternative forms of transportation, if not for environmental reasons, then simply out of safety and respect for other human beings.

After the funeral, Tessa sat beside Emma's younger sister Kim, who was too young to truly comprehend what had happened. From the church steps, Kim asked in three-year-old vocabulary, "where's Emma?" Tessa peered skyward. Imagining Emma's face in the clouds, she was unable to muster an answer.



Heather Spaulding is a "happy-go-lucky" student, majoring in Environmental Studies.

Seattle is raiiling for tra

It is five in the afternoon when you leave the office. As the sun sets over Puget Sound, you realize you have left too late. Too late to escape Seattle's bumper-to-bumper commute and endless plumes of exhaust. As the sky darkens, you approach I-5, a transportation nightmare.

With the passing of Initiative 41 last November, such horrendous commutes may decrease. Initiative 41 instructs the city of Seattle to form a public development authority to build, maintain, and operate an elevated, rubber-tired, electric transportation system. The proposed system, a monorail, plans to offer relief to King County's growing population. Drivers stuck in trails of oil, frustration and brakelights could abandon their daily commutes by car, opting instead to travel by monorail.

Today, Seattle has more registered vehicles than residents, and with a 20 percent increase in population by 2014, the trend can only continue. Each day nearly 2 million people commute in, out and about Seattle causing

traffic mayhem. By 2020, the total number of commuter trips is estimated to be in excess of 5 million round trips. In hopes of reducing current traffic congestion and establishing long-term solutions, Seattle voters have already passed some key initiatives including Initiative 41 and the Regional Transit Authority Initiative of 1996, as well as exploring other possible options. The initiatives propose Monorail extensions, Commuter Rail, Light Rail and more High Occupancy Vehicle (HOV) lanes on freeways. In trying to find solutions, Seattle has confronted intense controversy surrounding the implementation of its passed initiatives. It seems there are no clear answers and many debated pros and cons.

Creating a financially operational, well-traveled system of public transportation is challenging. Seattle has its own unique set of problems due to its many hills, numerous lakes and Puget Sound. Along with these topographic difficulties, the Seattle Metropolitan area struggles with



ffic solutions

by Miriam McCallum

the growth of urban sprawl. Population density matters. Less people per square mile, as in the suburbs, cause public transportation systems to become less financially viable because routes serve fewer riders. With the millions of people living in Seattle's growing suburbs, this creates a problem of profitability for public transportation.

Initiative 41 and Regional Transit Authority are trying to establish systems which alleviate commuters' dependency on their cars. But both are riddled with numerous questions and serious drawbacks. The combined cost for both plans is upwards of \$5 billion, leaving many residents to worry that the cost will not match benefits. Emory Bundy, a prominent local environmental leader, testified to the King County Council, "RTA's plan amounts to a surrender to worsening congestion. Its consequences will try the peoples' patience, pollute the air and choke economic activity. Prodigious expenditures will be devoted to attracting 18,500 new train riders - six-

tenths of one percent of the region's population - while the population growth will exceed 600,000, more than thirty times that amount. Meanwhile, a plethora of more effective measures will be starved."

Personal Rapid Transit, SkyTrains, and Mag-Lev are a few alternatives being debated alongside the implementation of the initiatives. Jerry Schneider, a professor of civil engineering at the University of Washington and specialist in alternative transportation, told the Seattle Daily Journal of Commerce, "My feeling is both the X Route design of the Monorail and RTA have quite a basic problem. They don't provide much access. You have to walk to a bus stop, get on a bus, go to a train station, and the same at the other end. If it were up to me, I think we need 200 stations rather than 20, so people can get around in the city."

Schneider favors small, light, "personal rapid transit" vehicles. He supports the idea of small cars running



on rubber tires on an elevated guideway. These cars carry a small amount of people and are able to go directly point to point without stopping at intervening stations. They are also more expensive than the monorail.

Personal Rapid Transit is only one alternative. Systems in operation elsewhere around the world have been used such as the SkyTrain in Vancouver, B.C. It is an elevated, driverless, light-rail train. It avoids, as does the monorail, the expensive cost of drivers and causing or encountering traffic congestion.

Another suggestion is Mag-Lev trains that are magnetically levitated and will soon go into operation in Japan. Mag-Lev, more cutting edge than the dated monorail system, is perhaps more fitting for Seattle, a city known for outstanding achievements in the technological revolution. Despite alternatives and the general controversy surrounding Seattle's proposals, the fact remains that the initiatives have passed and they are in the process of being carried out. Adding additional urgency to the matter, Initiative 41 states that if the Seattle City Council does not get construction underway they will not be paid their salaries.

Both Initiative 41 drafters and RTA have plans for 1998. This year, RTA plans to complete its first projects: two park-and-ride lots, added Lakewood-Tacoma-Seattle Express Bus Service, a transit center, and Commuter Rail station property acquisition. RTA is also forming extensive partnerships to ensure effective coordination and establishing a program of community involvement. RTA is moving along with its agenda as scheduled and many argue that the commuter rail, which travels from Tacoma to Lakewood with stops in Everett and Seattle, is not useful. The route only provides a few stops, limiting its convenience and ridership.

Criticism of RTA's \$1.8 billion Light Rail plan exceeds that of its Commuter Rail plans. Light Rail travels on surface streets and encounters traffic congestion. Congestion may also result if the Light Rail crowds into the Seattle bus tunnel, forcing buses above ground and into traffic.

On February 17, 1998 an Electric Transportation Company (ETC) was formed to carry out Initiative 41. ETC is facing huge financial challenges. Garnering private support for the monorail may prove more challenging than expected. According to Initiative 41 drafters, ETC must first seek out funding from the private sector. They hope that monorail stations will fill with businesses to meet travellers' needs and that these businesses will contribute money towards the construction of the system. But, if the private sector doesn't fully fund the project, ETC must apply for grants, pass bonds, and successfully raise the business and occupation tax. All of this takes time and more money. It is possible, that in two years, if little progress has been made, Initiative 41 could be revoked.

Another challenging issue facing ETC is deciphering Initiative 41's wording. The initiative is commonly known to call for the construction of a monorail, but technically it only states the establishment of an elevated, rubber-tired, electric transportation system. Technically, ETC can consider alternatives to the monorail as long as they meet the stated criteria. Ideas such as Personal Rapid Transit meet the criteria. Of course, even the alternatives present large lists of pros and cons.

Will Seattlites ride or drive? If nothing is done about congestion, traffic and commute times can only increase. Desperate drivers have passed initiatives in hopes of gaining relief from their daily freeway trek. Yet plans to combat the growing traffic crisis will not greatly affect congestion, though they will affect pocketbooks. Have voters passed the wrong initiatives? Alternatives to proposed plans do not escape controversy either.

Seattle and its surrounding counties need direction and leadership if they hold any chance of finding solutions. Assuming transportation officials resolve important questions, commuters may enjoy the coming sunsets from a monorail, train or



Miriam McCallum plans to retire from WWU next year and use her social security to travel the world.

Take it or Leave it

Often, we read about and see things we want to change. And some of us do just that – actively make changes.

Here are some organizations inspired by cars, pollution and lifestyles for people challenging themselves to change.

Alliance for a Paving Moratorium

Grassroots community organization of individuals, groups and businesses advocating a moratorium on road-building.

P.O. Box 4347

Arcata, CA 95518

alliance@timepool.com

www.bikeroute.com

Center for Appropriate Transportation

Manufacturers of human-powered vehicles.

Auto Relief

455 W. First Avenue

Eugene, OR 97401

(800) 343-5568

Town Without Automobiles

HC74 Box 4136-Amayer, AZ 86333

(520) 632-7135

www.arcosanti.org

Alternatives Journal

The Winter, 1998 issue features the article

“Car vs. Transit.”

alternat@fes.uwaterloo.ca

www.fes.uwaterloo.ca/alternatives/

Highways to Heaven:

The AUTO Biography of America

by Christopher Finch. A historical and cultural overview of the automotive industry that has shaped our experience with the car.

Asphalt Nation

by Jane Holtz Kay

The architecture editor for *The Nation* Magazine takes a hard look at the environmental and social impacts of the automobile, by documenting its glorious past as well as modern anti-car movements.

Getting There: The Epic Struggle Between Road and Rail in the 20th Century

by Stephen Goddard. This book recounts a little known aspect of the history of road and rail development, revealing a conspiracy by automotive and oil interests and government RR legislation that promoted car culture to the detriment of the mass transit options in America.

Bike Cult: The Ultimate Guide to Human-Powered Vehicles

by David Perry. The bicyclist's bible.

Limiting Automobile Use

A collection of local, national, international groups that offer alternatives to current car culture.

www.preservenet.com/politics/AltTrans.html

Car Art

A variety of artists and enthusiasts from around the country display cars as works of art, comedy and cultural criticism.

www.artcars.com

Carhenge

Carhenge is a full-scale replica of Britain's Stonehenge made out of cars.

<http://foggy.cc.utexas.edu/carhenge.html>

Adbusters

The culture jammer's headquarters.

www.adbusters.org



run over planet courtesy of Adbusters

“The archaeology of the road is a discipline available to everyone. The automobile age is far from over. It has reached a stagnant phase, but only because the pressures of saving the environment have put it in a position where great changes must be expected but cannot be forced. The Automobile has remade America in its own image, and that formidable work will not easily be undone.” – Christopher Finch

